

Expert Student to Novice Teacher: Identity Shifts in Literacy Teacher Education

Karen J. Kindle, Ed.D.

School of Education

University of South Dakota

Abstract

Teacher candidates need to enter today's increasingly diverse classrooms with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to be effective educators. Part of the process includes candidates making an identity shift from student to teacher. This study explores the use of Dialogic Inquiry Groups in a reading methods course as a vehicle for identifying candidates' current identity stance as well as in facilitating further development. Qualitative methods are used to describe candidates' characteristics along a continuum from expert student to novice teacher. Findings suggest that while some candidates resist the shift to the teacher identity, careful scaffolding by the instructor can influence change. Implications for teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: teacher preparation, teacher identity, dispositions

Children attending high-needs schools are arguably in great need of highly skilled teachers, yet often are taught by novices who are seldom equipped to face the challenges of teaching in high-needs contexts (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Duncan, 2009). New teachers are often found not to have the “essential knowledge and clinical training that would prepare them for success in the classroom” (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007, p. 111). Teacher candidates need to enter the professions with the knowledge and skills required to meet students' needs in increasingly diverse classrooms. They need to feel competent and confident as they face the inevitable challenges of teaching. Additionally, they need to make a shift in self-identity and begin to see themselves as teachers rather than as students.

Methods courses, thus, must not only build expertise with content and pedagogy, but also

support candidates in the development of their teacher identities. Identifying oneself as a teacher takes more than being placed in charge of a classroom or other teaching situation. It involves assuming the responsibility for teaching and learning in that situation. It requires taking the initiative for creative problem-solving when students are not successful. Some candidates make this shift early in their programs, while others seem to resist the change, having developed a level of expertise with the student role.

Like many literacy instructors, I utilize case study assignments in my reading methods courses. In my iteration of this assignment, candidates each tutor a struggling student for a semester, documenting their work in a case study portfolio. I had a growing concern that the case study assignment was not fulfilling its potential in developing candidates' competency and identity. Many demonstrated difficulty in analyzing children's work, resulting in superficial interpretations of literacy behaviors. They often seemed more focused on their own actions and fulfilling the requirements of the assignment than with the progress of the children they were tutoring.

I posited that meeting with candidates in small groups regularly throughout the semester would simulate the type of problem-solving, reflection, and discussions practiced by inservice teachers. The groups, named Dialogic Inquiry Groups (DIGs), were structured to develop candidates in four areas; pedagogical knowledge and skills, analysis and interpretation of assessment, collaboration, and teacher dispositions and identity. I believed that participation in the DIGs would develop candidates' ability to describe literacy behaviors in professional language, increase their competence in teaching diverse learners with the support of the instructor and peers in a small group setting, and increase their confidence in facing the

challenges of struggling readers in high-needs settings.

Related Literature

The case study assignment is typically a solitary experience, used as a summative assessment. The DIG framework transformed the assignment into a semester-long learning experience by giving candidates the opportunity to learn with and from each other, carefully supported and scaffolded by the instructor.

Situated Cognition

The use of DIGs is grounded in the understanding that learning occurs through social interactions and participation in the activities of a learning community (Wenger, 1998). The case study assignment engages candidates in a cycle of assessment and instruction, immersing them “in the activity of a sociocultural practice” and increasing their competence through their participation (Driscoll, 2005, p. 165). By engaging in the authentic work of teachers, the “ordinary practices of the culture” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 34) at this early stage in the preparation program, candidates engage in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through participation in the DIGs, candidates engaged in the kind of collaborative discussion that occurs among practicing teachers, when a group of peers meet to talk about concerns, seek new ideas, and draw on the experience of others to promote student learning. This type of interaction is consistent with what Lawrence and Snow (2011) term the appropriation perspective with the DIGs serving as a venue to practice teacher behaviors.

The positive effects of participation in the *teacher community* are heightened through the discussions in the DIGs. In contrast to the predominantly monologic mode of discourse of a whole class setting, DIGs provide increased opportunities for dialogic discourse, which is associated with improved student learning (Gamoran & Nystrand, 1991). The instructor becomes a member of the community rather than the authority, treating students “as potential sources of knowledge and opinion” (Nystrand, et al., 2003,

p. 140) and creating a context in which expert and novice work together in authentic tasks of teaching (Smith, 2007). Learning occurs in the course of dialogic discourse based on “a dynamic transformation of understandings through interaction” (Nystrand, et al., 2003, p. 140) and the knowledge base and practice of the group is refined (Driscoll, 2005). Moran (2007) studied collaborative inquiry in pre-service early childhood teachers and found that “teachers’ competencies at engaging in collective reflection developed throughout the semester as they questioned, negotiated, analyzed and documented with each other through cycles of inquiry” (p. 429).

Candidates are learning new ways of thinking and acting as they simultaneously learn content and pedagogy. Most still think of themselves as students and are only beginning to think of themselves as teachers. They must learn new ways of talking and behaving that may differ substantially from their daily language and behavior. Peer-support groups, when accompanied by skilled coaching, can provide support in this process (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). As candidates share their tutoring experiences, they learn with and from each other, as well as from the guiding and probing questions of the instructor. Over time as their competence and confidence increases, the nature of their participation and identity within the community changes (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They begin to make the transformation from students to teachers, moving further along the novice-expert continuum.

Through the course of the semester, candidates build a community of practice within their group based on three dimensions: mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). They mutually engaged in problem-solving the reading difficulties of their case study child and create a shared repertoire of understandings, terminology, and instructional strategies. The case study becomes, in essence, a joint enterprise as all group members contribute to the process.

Case Studies in Teacher Education

Case studies are used in variety ways and for various purposes in teacher education (Carter, 1999). It is often difficult for candidates to take the content learned in class and translate it into practice (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Case studies serve a valuable role in meeting this challenge, leading candidates to apply what they have learned in real teaching situations. In doing so, they make vital connections between theory and practice (Lundeberg, Levin, & Harrington, 1999) and “develop skills of reflection and close analysis” (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007, p. 127). Case studies also serve a very pragmatic purpose by providing “structured opportunities to practice particular strategies and to use specific tools in the classroom setting” (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007, p. 123). Additionally, case study assignments help students to appreciate the complexity of the teaching process and provide a structure for thinking about assessment and instruction in a systematic way. The ability to think systematically about complex teaching issues is an important skill to develop in novice teachers (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were teacher candidates enrolled in an elementary reading methods course at a mid-western university. Approval was obtained from the university’s IRB. While all students participated in the DIGs, a total of 12 students agreed to participate in the study. As is typical of elementary education teachers, the majority of participants were female (11 female; 1 male) and white (9 white; 2 African American; 1 Asian American).

Context for the Study

The case study assignment occurs in the second of three reading methods courses. In the previous course, candidates complete 60 practicum hours in a high-needs school and develop content knowledge in reading including the reading process, the developmental stages of reading acquisition, and

instructional literacy routines. They put that knowledge into practice by designing and teaching a variety of literacy lessons.

The second course builds on those competencies by focusing on the administration and interpretation of literacy assessments and using those data to differentiate instruction. Candidates continue their practicum placement to complete the case study. With the classroom teacher’s support, they identify a struggling reader to be their focus child. They administer and interpret a variety of assessments and then develop a series of tutoring lessons to target specific instructional objectives based on identified student needs.

The DIG Framework

In the DIG framework, candidates were placed in groups based on the grade level of the focus children, with four to six candidates in each group. The groups met biweekly at the university for thirty to forty-five minutes (roughly 7 times during the semester). Prior to each group meeting, the instructor identified specific topics for discussion and artifacts to bring to the session (e.g., assessments, tutoring objectives, lesson plans). Each candidate kept a log to document learning outcomes and gathered artifacts to provide evidence of student learning. They shared this documentation with the group, along with assessment results and their developing interpretations of the literacy artifacts. They discussed the rationales for their teaching decisions and sought suggestions from their peers. The researcher served as a participant observer, encouraging all group members to ask questions of each other, as well as offering alternate interpretations and posing questions to encourage deeper reflection. The goal for these group sessions was to move the PSTs along the novice to expert continuum by developing their abilities to interpret students’ learning based on assessment and observations, communicate their findings using professional language, and use their interpretations to plan effective instruction.

Data sources and analysis.

DIG meetings were recorded using a digital-recording device, transcribed by a graduate

assistant, and checked for accuracy by the researcher. Data analysis was recursive. Transcripts were coded for initial categories using open coding (Creswell, 2007), and reviewed with a colleague during peer debriefing, at which time codes were compared and refined, and additional themes identified. The researcher then returned to the data to explore these additional themes, meeting again for peer debriefing.

At the conclusion of the course, candidates completed a survey in which they were asked to comment on perceived benefits and challenges to participation in the DIGs. Although these surveys were anonymous and thus specific comments cannot be linked to individual participants, the comments served as a source for the formulation of initial themes as well as triangulation for the interpretation of the DIG transcripts. For example, many candidates indicated on the survey that hearing about their peers' experiences gave them ideas of how to work with their own child. Thus *collaboration* was identified as a preliminary code. Similarly, codes that indicated candidates were seeking advice from one another were confirmed by comments stating they valued peers' opinions and ideas.

Candidates were also asked to respond to the following question in a discussion posting at the end of the semester: *What are the three most effective ideas about teaching or teaching strategies you learned from this [case study] experience?* Responses varied, but the need to differentiate instruction and to understand the specific needs of the child were dominant themes. These data further served to confirm the interpretations of the transcripts regarding candidates' growth in understanding in these key areas.

Students Becoming Teachers

In the course of teacher education, candidates must change their self-identification from *student* to *teacher*. Attitudes and beliefs that have served them well in the role of *student* are not sufficient in the new role as *teacher*. They must develop new dispositions to be effective in their chosen profession. While some students seem to make this transition effortlessly, others struggle, and

even resist the change. The data in this study revealed profiles of students at various stages in this process of becoming and provide evidence that suggest it is indeed "possible to develop a disposition to inquire, reflect, collaborate, and participate in teaching and research" (Moran, 2007, p. 430).

Analysis of the transcripts indicated that candidates could be categorized into three groups. At one end of the continuum were those in the *expert student group*, who held fast to their student identity throughout the semester and appeared to resist efforts to position them as teachers. At the other end were the *novice teachers* who demonstrated the desired dispositions at the onset and continued to refine them. In between, the third group experienced a significant shift in stance through the semester, starting out as students, but developing teacher attributes as they engaged in authentic teacher practices of inquiry and dialogue. The following section describes students who exemplify these groups. All names that appear in the following discussion are pseudonyms.

The Expert Student - Tonya

By the time students are formally admitted into the teacher preparation program, they are accomplished students. They are not always successful in the traditional sense of academic excellence, but they have acquired habits of mind and default strategies for dealing with the academic process. Tonya typifies the *expert student*. She is comfortable in her role as a student and approaches the case study project as one more task to be completed in her quest to graduate. She participates in the DIG as a student, asking questions of the instructor as the authority.

Expert students have a task-oriented approach to the case study. Questions within the group meetings are about procedures rather than content. Tonya maintains her focus on fulfilling the requirements of the case study across all DIG sessions as seen in comments such as "Now, are you going to give us some kind of format for the case study?" and "just to make sure that I'm on the same page.... Do you have a particular format that you're wanting those in?".

Her focus on the task is also evident in her interactions with peers within the group. As she listens to another student discussing the work she is doing with her student, Tonya's questions and comments center on the activity and procedure. She expresses more interest in *what* was done rather than on why or the outcomes of the lesson.

Tonya: So what kind of lesson did you do? (Session 2)

Tonya: So you're – is that considered your tutoring lesson? (Session 2)

Tonya: So, you integrated two lessons into one. (Session 2)

Keeping a safe distance.

Expert students exhibit little personal interest or involvement with their focus child. Tonya talked about her tutee in very general terms. Although she met with the child weekly during the semester, she did not appear to build a relationship with her. Her observations and interpretations lacked specificity, stating that the child was "pretty fluent" and that her writing was "pretty good". Her comments suggest a lack of initiative in that she opted to use the sight word assessment completed by the teacher instead of conducting her own. Because she approaches the assessments as tasks to be completed instead of tools of inquiry, she does not ever see the child as a person, but merely a means to an end.

Flying under the radar. When sharing their progress with the group, expert students try to sound professional, quickly adopting the language of their peers and the instructor. In real time discussions, it can be very difficult for the instructor to identify these patterns. However, in closer analysis their comments demonstrate a lack of reflection, inquiry, and problem-solving.

At times, by following the lead of others, they contradict themselves without seeming to notice. In the following two excerpts, both from Session 1, Tonya first states that the identification of lower case letters is a problem for the child, and then later in the session states that the problem is really sound-letter correspondence.

*Tonya: I think that she, she's got most of her upper case letters down, it's her **lower case letters that are really throwing her.** (Session 1)*

*Tonya: And in the writing process, I know she knows the letters, but then again, she's sitting there going, "well, I don't know". So it's one of those situations where like, it's hard to tell if she does know it or if she doesn't know it. And I guess that's where these letters will come in. **But, I think her problem is more of the sounds that they make than the letter recognition.** (Session 1)*

In the second session, Tonya provided more information about the child's abilities, stating that "she's got all her letters down", that "she knows all of her letter sounds", and that "her biggest problem is sight words". She did not present this as a new discovery, which could indicate that she didn't realize this was quite different from what she had previously reported. Because these comments came at various points during the group meeting, the discrepancies were not evident until analysis of the transcripts. Tonya was able to avoid "detection".

It's not my fault.

Expert students were quick to make excuses and ascribe blame during the case study process. Responsibility for interpretations and decision-making were ceded to the classroom teacher and even to the child. For example, Tonya invoked the teacher's role as authority on several occasions. "*I took on a different little girl that is kind of in the middle according to my teacher.*" "*Well, and this is what her teacher gave me, um, as the assessment she uses for sight words.*" In the first case, she used the teacher's evaluation of the child's abilities to categorize the child. In the second, Tonya justified her use of an alternate sight word assessment. It is quite interesting that this student, so focused on procedures, did not ask if that is acceptable, but seemed to assume that the classroom teacher's authority was sufficient.

Expert students are quick to offer explanations and excuses for why they cannot

complete an assignment, but seldom seem to accept responsibility for the situation. Illness (of student, child, or classroom teacher) and inclement weather were frequent culprits. In only a few cases did the expert student follow up the excuse with a plan of action. The classroom teacher was also “blamed” for the student’s lack of progress in Tonya’s work. In Session 1, Tonya explained that she had not yet started her assessments because the teacher was absent.

The most egregious instances of blaming occur when the focus child for the case study is seen as the source of the problem. Although the candidate may not ascribe blame intentionally, the net result is the same. The following comments illustrate of this type of thinking from another “expert student” in one of the groups. In the first example, when asked to describe the child’s strengths and weaknesses, the candidate suggested that the child is capable of doing the work, but is choosing not to. Her interpretation of assessment data thus becomes an indictment of the child. This student persisted in her belief as evidenced by the second example. The student attributed the lack of progress to the child’s attitudes rather than possible inadequacies in her own teaching.

Candidate: I know she’s got like a lot of family issues and so I think that she’s just- she chooses not to.
(Session 2)

Candidate: I haven’t seen a whole lot of progress with her. I mean, she’s- I still think it has a lot to do with her attitude more than her skills. (Session 3)

Tonya took a slightly different tact with a similar outcome. In the final session, participants were asked to talk about their focus child’s growth over the course of the semester. Other group members described the progress they had seen in great detail, citing evidence of growth from their observations and assessments. Although at first glance Tonya’s comment seems complimentary, she is blaming the child for not providing her with an interesting and successful case study.

Tonya: I’m learning that she’s not as struggling as everybody thought she was. (Session 3)

Tonya: Um, she was a um, she was more of a student that just kind of kept to herself and did her own thing. And I think that they took that as being a struggling reader, but she’s I mean she still is right on up the trail of DAR [sic]. (Session 3)

Shifting Stances – Anna and Jason

One of the most exciting aspects of the study was the evidence of shifts in stance from the student identity to the teacher identity. Candidates who initially exhibited characteristics of the expert student began showing traits that were consistent with a self-identity as a teacher through their participation in the groups. The degree and type of change was quite individualized, and so two students, Anna and Jason, are discussed as examples of this category.

The focus child becomes *my* child.

For both Anna and Jason, connection with the focus child appears to have been one of the significant catalysts for change in stance. During the initial meeting, they both showed little engagement with their children. Jason was unable to provide specific information about his child, speaking instead in generalities. He wanted credit for doing the work, but had clearly not thought much beyond that. He suggests some possible areas for further inquiry, but stops short of proposing a plan to gain the information he is seeking.

Jason: I haven’t gotten my permission slip back from him yet, so I just, I kind of did a couple assessments two weeks ago. But last week I just observed and I kind of – I have like some alternate kids in case I don’t get the permission slip back.
(Session 1)

Jason: And I don’t know – I’m still not sure on specifics with him. Like, I don’t, like, he is kind of distractible,

but I think it might be more like there's some, I don't know if he's on medication. I don't really know anything about like his medical history or anything like that. (Session 1)

Anna tells a great deal about her focus child in the first meeting, but seems to have developed an unproductive relationship. She adopts an “it’s all about me” attitude when describing her initial struggles with the child. This attitude is consistent with the student stance and its focus on completion of assignments. In that respect, she is concerned about her ability to get her work done, and the child is an inconvenience at best.

Anna: Um. Well, he won't do anything. Like, he won't even read the word "a". He said, "I don't know." So that was really hard for me. (Session 1)

Through the course of the semester, both Anna and Jason developed connections with the children that made the assignment personal and relevant, although Anna to a lesser extent. She was given an opportunity to work with a child who would likely be more compliant, but Anna resisted, stating that she really thought she could help the child. She remained focused on the child’s negative behaviors, but was still able to identify an instructional goal. Gradually, she became more sensitive to the child’s needs and invested energy into making personal connections.

Anna: So, I actually just bought him – like I went to the dollar store and got him, like Valentine Day cards. And we, like he wrote his name, and then he's like, "can I write everybody else's name on one?" and I was like, "well, if you want to." So, he practiced some writing with that. (Session 2)

Jason started out the semester by seeing the child as a “normal” child who was in a classroom with unreasonably high expectations. He considers the possibility that the child is not motivated in this atmosphere and forms a connection that changes the way he views his work with the child.

Jason: Um, I'm just like – it's just really exciting when I go there now because he actually is wanting to read and he likes it when I come and help him. (Session 4)

Jason: and it's just really cool because at the beginning when I was observing him and like after the first couple of sessions I just figured that he would be very difficult to get to be interested in it. (Session 4)

As he became more engaged in the process, he began looking more closely at the child and moved from superficial comments seen in the first session to carefully considered interpretations of the child’s behavior in response to different assessments. In the following quotes, there is evidence that Jason is using the assessments as tools to understand and help the child, rather than simply reporting results of the assessments as ends in themselves.

Jason: And ah, he just, he really surprised me. I mean I thought that he had, ah, phonemic awareness. I thought that was where. I didn't think that he knew the sounds of letters. But once I did the – that assessment, he flew through it. He knew every single sound like it was nothing. (Session 3)

Jason: But he had troubles once he got to blending and segmenting. And even with initial sounds and onset and rime. (Session 3)

Overcoming resistance.

One indicator that candidates were making the shift toward a teacher identity was a willingness to consider alternative interpretations of a child’s behaviors. Expert students were often quick to form judgments and stay with them. Early attempts by the instructor or other group members to suggest alternate interpretations or action were met by resistance. For example, in one session, Anna described her difficulties with the child, including his frequent crying. The instructor asked for his birth date, indirectly suggesting that immaturity

might be part of the problem. A second student caught the significant of the question suggesting the child might be young for his grade, but Anna quickly discounts this line of inquiry.

She had clearly made a good connection with the classroom teacher and pushed back against suggestions that might put the teacher in a bad light. The relationship she had with the classroom teacher was not a collaborative peer relationship. Anna deferred to the teacher's judgment and defended her actions.

Instructor: But [the class is] very structured, isn't it? Very high academic expectations?

Anna: Not necessarily. I mean, she expects them all to be at a certain spot, but she's very um – differentiates her instruction. I mean she's for that child.

Anna: And it's halfway through the semester now and it's still going on. So she's having a hard, I mean, she's struggling with it too, just because she can't always give him his turn. (Session 1)

Jason's resistance takes on a different tone. Once he determines that the problem is that the classroom teacher's expectations are too high, he dismisses alternate interpretations, even though he had not yet done all of the assessments.

Jason: I don't even think that he would really be considered behind, but just with everybody else, even though he's developmentally, typically, he's still behind the rest of the class kind of deal. (Session 1)

In the next exchange, Jason resists the instructor's suggestion that maturation may be part of the problem, by suggesting an alternate interpretation in line with his original hypothesis.

Jason: Or he didn't go to preschool.

Instructor: Yeah, that's possible.

Jason: I know most of the children did go to two or three years [of preschool]. (Session 1)

Collaboration with curiosity.

Both Anna and Jason demonstrated a high level of interest in the work that their peers were doing. They asked frequent questions and posed alternate explanations. In essence, they were able to do for others what they were unable yet to do for themselves – to step back and see other possibilities. In the following excerpt, a group member had just shared her concerns about her child's spelling and the group was brainstorming solutions. Anna offers a suggestion from her own experience.

Anna: I wonder if like, I don't know, spelling with - another child that I was working with last semester couldn't do the tests, but he did it informally. It's no big deal. Kind of like a little bit of test anxiety.

Jason exhibited higher levels of critical thought, demonstrating an ability to evaluate what he was hearing. After the instructor explained the importance of careful observation and interpretation of the child during assessments, Jason synthesized the information, understanding that the purpose of the assessments was to understand, not rate, the child.

Jason: It's kinda what's going to help us assess the child more than, not relating it to standards, but kinda, what is going to help us. (Session 1)

The Novice Teacher – Jackie

Candidates in this category seem to enter the program with the dispositions needed to be effective teachers. They are diligent in their studies, master the content with ease, and are able to engage in observation, interpretation, and inquiry with minimal scaffolding. They actively engage in problem-solving and take their role as teacher in the case study very seriously. They demonstrate their ability to bridge theory and practice by making the critical connections between what they learn in class and what they see in the classroom. In this study, Jackie exemplifies the *novice teacher*.

Careful observation and insightful interpretation.

Jackie understands that careful observation and thoughtful interpretation are critical components of effective teaching. She enters into the assessment phase of the assignment as an explorer, eager to learn all she can about the child. She is able to talk about the assessments with great specificity and draws tentative conclusions about their meaning.

Jackie: Yeah, but I mean, even that – when she sees “children” she was able to do the /ch/ on the word list then, but any – and that’s what I noticed as I – I started with a preprimer, and ah, she was 14 out of 20. 12 were automatic, 2 with delay, but the ones that she couldn’t delay, or couldn’t identify, were digraphs with like the right, um, I’m trying to remember what the words were. I should have written those out. Um, she said what for with. Um, other was too hard. Um, and then she just couldn’t do any of the two silent e’s – were mack and plack instead of make and place. (Session 1).

High expectations.

Jackie sets high standards for herself and is frustrated when she doesn’t feel that she has done a good job. She is concerned with quality, not just whether she has met the requirements of the assignment. She uses the reflection component of the case study to critique her performance resulting in an upward spiral of improvement in her teaching.

Jackie: You know, after I did it, I looked back and oh man, and I see so many different things I should have done or wished I’d done. And I know that’s the whole reflection piece, but still it’s frustrating because I obviously can’t revisit the same thing, so I just have to use it once I, and incorporate it is the future. But it’s just frustrating. I think that whole perfectionist kind of thing where you just go – but I just

want you to do it right the first time.

(Session 2)

Inquiry and problem-solving.

The novice teacher is able to look deeper into the issues facing the focus child and actively engage in inquiry and problem-solving. Jackie did not expect a solution to her focus child’s resistance to reading to materialize and nor did she use the child’s avoidance behavior as an excuse. She sought to understand the issues underlying the behaviors and find creative solutions to the problems. Jackie’s focus child was a struggling first grader who had developed a repertoire of avoidance behaviors. In the first session, Jackie tells the group that Sarah didn’t want to read, didn’t like to read, and didn’t like school. She saw these attitudes as impediments to her assessment, and realized that she would have to really think about how to solve the problem.

Jackie: Yeah. Exactly. And she’s such a smart kid. I’m trying to think of ways I can make everything – I don’t want to have everything have to be a game, but I really – I’m a little concerned with doing all these assessments, then if I go in again on Thursday with another assessment, that – I need to figure out a way to do it in a game kind of way. And I think that I’m gonna go to phonemic awareness. (Session 1)

Collaboration.

Jackie knew that she did not have all the answers, and actively sought advice from group members, including the instructor. Her questions differed substantially in tone and purpose from those of the expert student in that she framed her request for collaboration as confirmation rather than supplication. When she had an idea for an activity that she thought would be good for her focus child, she solicited feedback from the group. She framed her query using professional language that demonstrates her understanding that the activity could prompt different types of cueing systems.

Jackie: I was going to ask you guys what you think about this. I was thinking about creating some

magnets, like you know the poetry, magnetic poetry kind of thing, but using student names, words that she already knows or are easy to decode, the three letter words, the mat, fat, cat, all those kinds of things. And then having her create rhyming sentences, or I mean, is that going far enough to get her to do what I need her to do?

Knowing the child.

Jackie was energized by the successes of her focus child. As she saw increasing evidence of growth, she took pride in her role in the child's learning. Her inquiry-based approach led her to experiment and try new instructional strategies. Words like *fun* and *exciting* appeared frequently as she described lessons she has done with the child.

Jackie: I discovered something really exciting that a couple of other kids really enjoyed too and I did a Go Fish game with sight words and high frequency words we're working on. And it was really exciting to see her excel and how much she enjoyed and they wanted to keep playing, keep playing, keep playing. (Session 3)

Jackie really came to know her child through the course of the case study. She established a relationship with the Sarah, and was attuned to her needs and interests. She looked at the experiences through the child's eyes and used this knowledge to inform her instruction.

Through trial and error and she learned that it was possible to design her activities with Sarah in ways that were both engaging to the child and instructionally powerful.

Jackie: So the key was putting her name in there. She thought that was just like, "Oh, why did you have Sarah in here?" It was just kind of cute to watch her reaction. (Session 3)

This type of knowledge is critical to being able to appropriately differentiate instruction. Because Jackie had taken the time to really

understand her child, she was able to adapt activities to meet her needs. She realized that the child will not be successful without adjustments of this type and was willing to do what was needed to ensure success.

Conclusions

This study began with the recognition the full instructional potential of the case study assignment was not being realized. Some candidates were doing a wonderful job, but many others turned in work that exhibited superficial analysis of assessment data and mediocre teaching. Adding the DIG framework had a positive impact on candidates' learning through careful scaffolding and modeling by the instructor, the opportunity to collaborate with peers, and engaging in authentic activities of teaching. Perhaps more importantly, the DIG groups allowed the instructor to gain insights about candidates' development of the teacher identity.

Analysis of the data suggests that identity stance was a significant factor in the ultimate quality of the case study experience for the candidate as well as the focus child. Candidates who remained in a *student stance* were task-oriented regarding the assignment and exhibited little evidence of engagement with the child. Their participation in the group focused on obtaining answers to procedural questions and reporting on tasks completed. These reports detailed the actions of the candidate, but often were laden with excuses and blaming. The instructor was positioned as an authority figure to tell them what to do and provide answers to their questions. There was a tendency for candidates in the *student stance* to talk about the focus child in deficit terms – what he/she could not do. This stance was the most prevalent at the beginning of the semester, with 10 of the 12 participants exhibiting these characteristics.

In contrast, two students exhibited a *teacher stance* from the beginning. They entered into the case study with a desire to make a difference for the child. They accepted the responsibility, not just for completing the assignment, but for ensuring that the child made progress. They viewed the instructor as an expert peer, a resource to provide guidance and

advice. Instead of asking *what do I do*, these candidates sought confirmation and additional suggestions.

For teacher educators, it is the third group that is most exciting. Of the ten students who began the semester with characteristics of the expert student stance, seven exhibited significant shifts through their work with the case study and the DIGs. Thus the combination of the case study and the DIG framework appears to facilitate the development of the teacher identity more the case study alone. Through participation in the group, use of professional language, ways of thinking deeply about children when analyzing data, and problem-solving were modeled not only by the instructor, but by more capable peers.

Continued Exploration

The findings of this study raise new questions and guide continued revisions of the case study assignment and DIG framework. Are interactions with more able peers more or less of a factor than interactions with the instructor? Is it significant that two of the students who remained expert students were in the group that did not have a novice teacher at the outset?

One of the important factors to consider in this study is the role of the instructor in facilitating identity development. Over the course of the sessions, there was a conscious effort on the instructor's part to become "one of the group" and to increase interactions among students by turning questions back to the group and referring to the work of other students.

Additionally, the instructor made a conscious effort to downplay the role of professor by changing the nature of interactions, in essence shifting stance from authority to expert peer. As group members asked questions, the instructor shifted the responsibility back to the student.

Instructor: You're the teacher of this child. And so, as long as you have a rationale for why you're making that decision, I'm fine with that. (Group 2, session 1)

In addition to actions taken by the instructor, the dynamics of the groups and the structure of the

assignment need further exploration to identify what aspects are critical to change. Possible factors identified in the data are collaboration and increased competencies. During the course of the semester, there was an increase in student-to-student interactions during the DIGs. Early interactions were more teacher-student in nature. Over time, students began talking more to each other and relied less on the instructor, building community through collaboration. As they learned the discourse of the profession, they were able to practice thinking, talking, and acting like teachers.

An important part of developing competency in teaching is the ability to connect theory and content knowledge with pedagogy and practice. Although candidates learn content from the classroom, the knowledge they take away tends to be declarative and procedural, but not conditional. In other words, they know *what* and *how* – but may not be sure about *why* and *when*. For example, in this study, candidates working with young children often suggested using sound boxes as an instructional tool. They knew what the boxes were (declarative knowledge) and how to use them in a lesson (procedural knowledge) but exhibited confusions about why you would use them and when that type of instruction would be appropriate. The discussions surrounding the use of sound boxes helped students to develop conditional knowledge of this important early literacy instructional tool.

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) state that the analysis of videotapes develops competence by facilitating the "shift from a focus on the teacher and what she is doing to a focus on student thinking and learning and how to support it" (p. 127). It is possible that the DIGs serve much the same function as videotapes with the reports of group members serving as the unit of analysis. Since the cases being discussed are from their peers rather than an unknown person, students are more easily able to see the connections to their own work.

Final Thoughts

Developing the teacher identity is sometimes captured in the elusive idea of dispositions – those qualities or characteristics that teachers should demonstrate. The development of

many of the standard dispositions occurs as students begin to shed their lifelong identity as students, and begin to develop their identities as teachers. Dispositions typically include things such as ways of thinking about children, instruction, and the role of the teacher (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Through the sharing of their practice, participation in the DIGs appears to have the potential to exert a positive influence on the learning of all (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007) as the students work together to achieve their common goal of student achievement.

Ladson-Billings (1995) found that a hallmark of excellent teachers of children in high-needs settings was that they identified strongly with teaching. Truly excellent teachers view teaching as part of their identities, not just how they earn a paycheck. Part of this identity involved a commitment to ensuring that all students are successful (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As we continue our important work of preparing the next generation of teachers, we must be ever alert for ways of facilitating their transition from student to teacher.

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