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Calls for Manuscripts

Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning provides a forum to explore issues related to teaching and learning at public and independent colleges and universities with programs in teacher preparation.

Excelsior solicits original, thought-provoking manuscripts of various formats, including papers presenting research on issues and practices important to teacher education and in-depth discussions of perspectives on issues and practices that contribute to the preparation and professional development of educators. A third format—Nota Bene—should contain brief, focused articles; book reviews; or website or technology recommendations.

Deadlines for submission:
June 1 for the fall/winter edition
December 1 for the spring/summer edition

Manuscript Preparation and Submission

To submit a manuscript to be considered for review

• Send an electronic file compatible with Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment to the editor, Cynthia Lassonde, at lassonc@oneonta.edu.
• Manuscripts must follow APA style as outlined in the most recent edition of the APA style manual.
• Research and Perspectives manuscripts should not exceed 25 pages, including references. Nota Bene manuscripts should not exceed 5 pages, including references.
• Include a 100-word abstract for Research and Perspectives manuscripts.
• The cover page should consist of the title of the manuscript, a suggested running head, as well as the authors’ names, affiliations, addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers.
• Omit headers and footers except for page numbers.
• Omit all identifiers of the authors and affiliations from the manuscript. Be sure computer software does not reveal author’s identity as well.
• Secure all permissions to quote copyrighted text or use graphics and/or figures of other non-original material. Include permissions with manuscript.
• Data-based manuscripts involving human subjects should be submitted with a statement or verification from the author that an Institutional Review Board certificate or letter approving the research and guaranteeing protection of human subjects has been obtained from the researcher’s institution.

Manuscripts will go through a blind review by peer reviewers and the editor. The review process will take approximately three months from time of submission. All manuscripts will be judged on their scholarship, contribution to the knowledge base, timeliness of topic, creative/thoughtful approach, clarity and cohesiveness, appropriateness to category, and adherence to preparation guidelines. Selections may also be affected by editorial decisions regarding the overall content of a particular edition.
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Message from the Presidents

It is with great pleasure that we introduce to you our new and revised journal from the New York State Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NYACTE). The current officers of the board have spent a great deal of time and energy in working with the current editor, Dr. Cynthia Lassonde, to develop this scholarly journal. We express our gratitude to all those individuals who, in the past, have established the foundation for our current efforts.

In the spring of 1985 the New York State Association of Colleges for Teacher Education published the first issue of its journal named The Journal of AACTE/NYS, later changed to The Journal of NYACTE. Helene Napolitano wrote her President’s Message in the initial volume noting that the publication project was first introduced by Tony Baratta during a previous executive board meeting. Tony Baratta served as journal editor from 1985 into the early 2000’s. During its many years of publication, the journal has included contributions from teacher educators throughout the state tapping, as Baratta has noted, “the richness of the environs of higher education institutional resources” and offering both novice and veteran writers opportunities to contribute to the profession through scholarly publication.

From 2003 to 2005, the journal has continued to grow, not only with published volumes but also with reflective planning, discussion, and reorganization by the members of the NYACTE Executive Board. The board’s intention was to broaden the journal’s mission, focus, and readership by taking it nationwide beyond the borders of New York State. A journal with such rich education resources should be refereed by a more varied review committee and have a wide readership as possible. Accordingly, the name of the journal also should reflect this expansion but still reflect its source of publication. Fittingly, the Executive Board has entitled this transformed journal, Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning.

The motto of New York State, Excelsior—Ever Upward, offers to us the challenge to strive for excellence in publishing and to you the contributors and readers the same challenge—to strive for excellence in your pursuit of the knowledge that will make you superior teacher educators.

Margaret Egan, Past President, NYACTE
College of Mount Saint Vincent

Robert J. Michael, President, NYACTE
State University of New York, New Paltz
Beginning the Conversation: Notes from the Editor

In this, our first issue of *Excelsior: Leadership in Teaching and Learning*, we hope to begin a conversation among our readers. In this issue a common theme has emerged from the manuscripts that were submitted by authors and groomed by the reviewers. As you read, you may note, as I did, that each article expresses the importance of opening conversations and the value of fostering dialogue among instructors, students, peers, and other stakeholders.

The conversation begins with Robert Nistler’s article on peer mentoring. Nistler created a partnership between junior- and senior-level undergraduate teacher candidates. The mentor/mentee relationships flourished and promoted growth because dialogues were cultivated among peers through oral and written reflections and feedback.

Next, Althier Lazar, Cathy Pinto, and Natalie Warren write about teachers’ views of children’s cultures and ways they described how their views influenced their instructional decision. Specifically, they analyzed the language teachers used to describe their perceptions. Documented interviews unlock a dialogue to prompt readers to reflect on their culture, cultural perceptions, and cultural sensitivities.

Wen Ma’s thoughts about Nystrand’s dialogic approach to instruction promote understanding of authentic question and uptake as well as related theoretical and pedagogical issues. He proposes that Nystrand’s approach leads to dynamic classroom discussions that engage learners in inquisitive dialogues about issues.

Additionally, Joanne Dowdy examines how graduate students in a Literacy Stories/Video Writing class participated in dialogue journals and video journals to make personal connections with the content they were learning. Graduates learned not only through their reading and reflections but also through their discussions about content that occurred in this video environment.

Finally, this issue’s Nota Bene section written by Abigail McNamee and Mia Mercurio is a Book Corner that provides resources for teacher educators to use with and make available to candidates during an undergraduate literacy methods block of coursework. This study describes benefits and difficulties encountered when two senior-level cohorts of undergraduates mentored junior-level undergraduates during their semester-long field experience. Findings address how mentors developed collegial relationships with peers, those they supervised, and other professionals in their field and how they developed coaching techniques. Findings in this study demonstrate that undergraduate mentors benefit personally and professionally from mentoring experiences.

Reports of Research

Peer Mentoring: Promoting Preservice Teachers’ Professional Development

Robert J. Nistler

Abstract

Senior-level undergraduates who had successfully completed their professional coursework and student teaching served as mentors for junior-level practicum students during an undergraduate literacy methods block of coursework. This study describes benefits and difficulties encountered when two senior-level cohorts of undergraduates mentored junior-level undergraduates during their semester-long field experience. Findings address how mentors developed collegial relationships with peers, those they supervised, and other professionals in their field and how they developed coaching techniques. Findings in this study demonstrate that undergraduate mentors benefit personally and professionally from mentoring experiences.
Mentoring, as a means of induction into the teaching profession and as a method for improving instruction, has been and continues to be effectively applied and documented in the field of education (Harris, 1998). Primarily, such research has focused on practicing teachers working with less knowledgeable peers, often new teachers. Although common in mentoring programs, mentoring relationships with fellow undergraduates are uncommon. The program described in this study includes two cohorts of senior and junior undergraduate students. The junior undergraduates function as mentors, the senior undergraduates function as mentees. The junior undergraduates were identified as experienced literacy undergraduates. The program described in this study includes two cohorts of senior and junior undergraduate students. The junior undergraduates function as mentors, the senior undergraduates function as mentees. The junior undergraduates were identified as experienced literacy undergraduates.

The first cohort of five mentors was advised into the program when they set up their education coursework plan that included student teaching during the Fall semester of their senior year. This enabled mentors to complete remaining coursework and to serve as mentors during their final Spring semester. In subsequent years, students wishing to be considered for mentoring opportunities were required to meet with the course instructor to discuss the lesson design prior to teaching. A post-instruction conference was held with all the mentors following their teaching to discuss the lesson and video taped sequence of each lesson was shared in pre- and post-teaching conferences with the course instructor. The structure of the mentoring process resembled cognitive coaching techniques (Costa & Garmston, 1994) in that each instructional cycle required students to meet with the course instructor to discuss the lesson design prior to their teaching, and videotaped. Students viewed their video and identified those areas where they needed feedback. A post-instruction conference was held with the course instructor to discuss the lesson and videotaped sequence of each lesson. The analysis, report, and written reports of lesson analyses were shared with the mentors.

The major questions for this study included: 1) What is the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship and that of mentor with other professionals; and 2) What are the major barriers to successful mentoring? The major questions for this study included: 1) What is the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship; and 2) What are the major barriers to successful mentoring?

To what degree are mentors able to learn, develop, and effectively apply coaching techniques to support their mentees? The impact of the program on junior-level undergraduates was the focus of study during the first two semesters of the study. This article describes the impact of the program on junior-level undergraduates. The impact of the program on junior-level undergraduates was the focus of study during the first two semesters of the study. This article describes the impact of the program on junior-level undergraduates.

Upon completion of their student-teaching semester, a growing number of preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching. The preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching. The preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching. The preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching. The preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching. The preservice teachers expressed frustration regarding the realities of teaching.
of a student she liked better to receive a special prize. I was anxious to distance myself from that toxic semester.

The mentoring program described herein was an elective experience open only to students who completed student teaching during the Fall semester. Too often, students who graduate and enter the workplace immediately after student teaching do not have formal opportunities to reflect and reconceptualize their understanding of what it means to teach. Exposure to various classroom environments and teaching philosophies during their education program and subsequent student-teaching assignment can leave students confused about their beliefs if not given further opportunities to reexamine them. Teacher education faculty observed that in the absence of such reflective opportunities, a number of promising teacher candidates were opting for nonteaching careers following what they considered less fulfilling student-teaching experiences.

In general, mentors offered several reasons for wishing to participate in this project. Mentors wished to challenge themselves by experiencing learning in a grade level in which they were less familiar. They hoped to share knowledge about content, teaching, and pedagogy they had developed since their field experience with less-experienced undergraduates. They expected to broaden and deepen their understanding of teaching and learning. Finally, they desired an opportunity to step back from the professional classroom and return to the academic classroom to clarify their professional directions.

Support for Mentoring

Research on mentoring documents its effectiveness in providing valuable professional development for both new and veteran teachers (Holloway, 2001). Wong (2002) identifies the critical role effective mentoring relationships can play in successful teacher-induction programs. Holloway (2002) cites statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics of 2001 indicating a growth in mentoring programs for beginning teachers and the benefit in improved instruction that teachers report from involvement in such programs. Rowley (1999) acknowledges the growth of mentoring programs and emphasizes the importance of careful selection and preparation for mentors. Rowley identifies six qualities of a good mentor. The good mentor is committed to the role of mentoring, is accepting of the beginning teacher, is skilled at providing instructional support, is effective in different interpersonal contexts, models continuous learning, and communicates hope and optimism.

Literature on mentoring also shows that various education groups have differing understandings of mentoring functions (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996) and that there are many approaches to the mentoring process (Williams, 1993). While mentoring is thoroughly explored for beginning teachers, there appears to be limited research on educational applications of mentoring in which undergraduates mentor fellow undergraduates during preservice development. Instead, studies generally describe experienced teachers who serve in the mentoring role (Holloway, 2001; Silva, 2000; Wong, 2002). Over several years, the author’s observations of professional interactions among undergraduate preservice teachers paired during their field experiences indicated potential for the benefits of a more formal mentoring process. Consequently, this mentoring program developed whereby preservice teachers formally mentored other preservice teachers as a means for both to develop more fully as professionals.

The Mentoring Program

During the mentoring semester, mentors were enrolled in a three- to six-credit graduate course devoted to the mentoring experience. Flexibility in credit assignment allowed mentors to best fit mentoring coursework into their credit load for the semester. In their prior role as students in the literacy field experience, mentors had experienced and become familiar with the four-lesson teaching cycle. Mentor responsibilities included the following:

1. Lesson plan review in which mentors discussed mentee lesson design accounting for content, objectives, management, learner special needs, and assessment.

2. Review/critique of videotaped lessons during which mentees shared with mentors segments of their videotaped lesson that they felt represented critical incidents in their learning about teaching. Mentees and mentor used each film session to collaboratively identify areas of strength and continued work.

3. Observations of mentees in the professional setting during their half-day field experience each week. Mentors focused on the interactions of mentees with cooperative teachers and elementary students.

4. Written dialogue and reflection regarding all aspects of the learning experiences for both mentors and mentees. Mentors also maintained a similar journal with the course instructor.

5. Attend weekly two-hour mentor seminars in which issues regarding effective mentoring were discussed.

Mentors worked with the course instructor to jointly complete one instructional cycle for each of their mentees prior to working with mentees on their own. During each weekly two-hour mentoring seminar, instructor and mentors discussed issues related to communications with mentees and strategies for providing effective feedback; explored literature related to supervisory/instructional coaching, assessment, and classroom management; and shared ideas for resolving conflicts encountered in mentoring relationships.

Methodology

Education Program

At the time of this study, education students at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, the site of this study, were required to complete methods coursework in science (3 credits), math (3 credits), literacy (6 credits), and social studies (3 credits). Generally, these courses were taken during a student’s junior and senior years with student teaching typically completed during the final semester of coursework. Literacy and math were taken concurrently during one semester while science and social studies were paired for another semester. The program’s most extensive field experiences occurred during the literacy block. This mentoring program grew out of that field experience.
Across two semesters, nine senior-level undergraduates (all female) served as mentors to thirty-two junior-level undergraduates enrolled in a literacy block of coursework. All nine mentors enrolled in a graduate course that explored issues regarding mentoring and that had been designed for this program. Three mentors in the first cohort enrolled for six credits in the course while the remaining six mentors took the course for three credits. The three mentors with a heavier credit load in cohort one each mentored four students while the remaining two mentors worked with two mentees each. The course instructor worked with the remaining ten students. In cohort two, each mentor worked with four mentees and the course instructor worked with twelve students. One mentor, from cohort two, had been a mentee during cohort one of this study, and six of the nine mentors had completed their undergraduate field experience at one of the sites at which they mentored.

Mentors attended two-hour weekly seminars to explore issues of mentoring in general and to discuss specific concerns related to their mentoring experiences. They were required to read Ayers (1993) To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher prior to the beginning of the first weekly seminar.

Mentors kept a journal documenting their interactions with mentees and others in the field experience and reflected on all they experienced. Weekly seminars were audiotaped and a different mentor served as participant-observer collecting written field notes of each seminar. Analysis based upon qualitative methods included review of mentors’ reflective journals documenting experiences for this project, field notes of the weekly mentor/professor seminars, mentee journals, and transcriptions of audiotapes of the weekly mentor seminars.

Qualitatively, and with a focus on the research questions, analysis of data sources by mentors and professor sought to induce, derive, compare, and enrich themes, categories, and conclusions from the data through the use of grounded theory, constant comparative method, and analytical induction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Collectively, each cohort of mentors and the professor reviewed data collected for a given semester of the program. Collaboratively, findings were categorized as they responded to the research questions.

What Was Learned?

Over the course of two semesters, this undergraduate mentoring project demonstrated that undergraduates who had already completed the literacy practicum and student teaching could effectively mentor fellow undergraduates. More importantly, for purposes of this article, it clearly illustrated that mentors grew in their understanding of the nature of collegial relationships and the role of coaching.

Benefits

Mentors displayed a commitment to personal and professional growth throughout each semester. Experiences with mentees helped mentors reflect on their educational beliefs and understandings. One mentor shared her thoughts on this development.

This mentoring is really helping me further define my own educational philosophy [regarding] classroom management, student/teacher relationships and interactions, the importance of reading and writing across the curriculum. My mentees ask me questions, too, that make me think and make me look at and talk about my beliefs and how I got to where I am.

Active engagement in mentoring provided an authentic setting for mentors to develop their supervisory techniques from a coaching perspective. Often, mentors’ prior experiences in the field came to bear on how they approached mentees. Mentors were sensitive to issues such as being nervous when observed while teaching. “I went to see Laura first and I knew she was sort of nervous so I decided to stand at the door for a minute to get a general feeling of what was going on in the room.” In addition, mentors learned that professional relationships gradually developed given requisite time and expertise. Toward the end of the semester, one mentor who struggled to develop a positive relationship with her mentees, acknowledged the evolving nature of building professional relationships.

I have had several occasions to plan and view [lessons] and I am feeling more comfortable with them and with asking questions. I think the more I do it, the better I will feel because we are developing a tie with each other.

In addition to their work with mentees, interactions with other mentors during seminars provided opportunities for mentors to address those issues most pressing to their work with mentees. As one mentor noted, the relevancy of these discussions was appreciated.

I felt like we went in a hundred different directions today [during mentor seminar]! It seemed as though we all had a bunch of things on our minds! I am really enjoying this time because we are discussing REAL issues. . .

Increasingly, seminar discussions further challenged mentors to reflect on what they were learning regarding content and pedagogy as noted in the following mentor’s comment.

The first thing that came to mind when I began to think what was useful for me was how everything is related. I had thought about it before during the Reading/Language Arts class last year, but it finally made sense now, in and outside of the classroom. What really made it click was each seminar. We would start talking about each of our experiences and the different issues that arise and they all seemed to fit together. We all shared some experiences, but each of our mentees gave us new issues to think about. I found it amazing how connected all of the experiences we were having [were] as well as how our research fit into our discussion of our mentees. By the end of the semester, I found that it came very easy to find connections between things.

Over the course of the semester, mentors’ knowledge and expertise were recognized by the university instructor, the classroom teachers, and in most cases, their mentees.
I really enjoy going to class on Wednesday and talking with Sue. She is very encouraging and loves to share ideas with me. It is almost as if she considers me to be a colleague of hers.

Several mentors also began to analyze the course professor's interactions with mentees in terms of their evolving beliefs regarding supervision. Their observations became more critical and informed. Journal reflections such as the following indicate one way mentors developed expertise as they assumed greater responsibility for teaching this past semester.

All mentors believed their participation during the mentoring semester was instrumental to their growth as individuals and that it strengthened their convictions about who they thought they were as future teachers. Although mentors were at times frustrated and concerned about this new, seemingly different and difficult role, they felt the mentoring experience helped them further solidify their understanding of teaching, researching, and working in collegial relationships. Concluding thoughts from two mentors represent the thoughts shared by all mentors regarding the value of the mentoring experience.

Looking back, it becomes difficult to express all that I have learned and what I am going to bring with me into my first job. I know that the issue of professionalism will forever remain ingrained in my brain. I have seen how actions and behaviors can influence the way that others perceive you. The realization that I can be a researcher is one thing that I never would have dreamed about when I came to this university four years ago. I have gone through the process and I am not afraid of it or the terms that are used about learning new things.

A continuation of what I took away with me from student teaching was how valuable a support system can be when made up of colleagues in a safe environment.

Challenges

At times, each mentor struggled with how to help mentees grow in their thinking about teaching. The number of mentors received opportunities through their journals from their professors' feedback, which allowed them to reflect on their teaching practices and how to improve their future teaching. They also had the opportunity to reflect on their own growth as teachers and how they could continue to develop as professionals.

In retrospect, all mentors reported that the mentoring experience helped them during interviews for teaching positions. They attributed this success to their perceived ability to "talk differently" than did other candidates in their interviews. Mentor's abilities to reflect upon their work during their learning went beyond their field experience and subsequent job interviews. The first cohort of five mentors co-wrote an accepted proposal to speak at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association (IRA) annual conference. Two members of the second cohort of four developed a manuscript for publication. A third member of that cohort used the special interest research topic for publication of a book on mentoring in a nearby school district.

I hope that I will be able to maintain the support I have now [as well as] into and throughout my first teaching position. I know that I have the issue of professionalism will forever remain ingrained in my brain. I have seen how actions and behaviors can influence the way that others perceive you. The realization that I can be a researcher is one thing that I never would have dreamed about when I came to this university four years ago. I have gone through the process and I am not afraid of it or the terms that are used about learning new things.

A combination of what I took away from student teaching was how a support system can be made up of colleagues in a safe environment.
Mentors also looked at their videotapes from their field experiences so they might better "know what to expect" from their mentees. They consciously worked at emulating types of open-ended questioning used in addressing them when they were practice teachers. The following mentor's comment captures that sentiment.

"I sat and watched Sarah during the seminar and she was trying so hard to do what she thinks is right and trying to be a great mentor, but sometimes, it just blows up in her face. I just hope that I can offer support without inflicting my strong beliefs on the people. That's what I'm trying to do. I hope that they make their own decision, but I also feel like I want them to learn from me."

Problems for mentors who were attempting to maximize observations during their site visits. The following incident represents the kinds of adjustments mentors often had to make.

"I thought I would visit T and C first, then zip up to see the ending of Annie's lesson. Instead, T and C had hardly been videotaped and I wanted to see some more of what they were doing. Around 10:00, I made the decision to stay with T and risk missing Annie's lesson. It seemed that T and C 'needed' my support..."
help them….This seemed like a logical expectation for any student to have and thus I could appreciate where these students were coming from. Then I got a little angry at being doubted. In all honesty, I did have more experience in the field than these students. I think that it will just take time for everyone to relax and begin to see that the mentor/mentee relationship can be very beneficial to both parties.

Those mentors who tended to devote considerably more time to their mentees seemed to address this issue more successfully than did others. By mid semester of each of the two semesters of this study, one mentee began contacting the university professor to plan her lessons and/or review the videotape because she felt she was getting insufficient guidance and feedback from her mentor. Two mentors (one each semester) had difficulty consistently attending the field setting while their mentees were teaching. Relative to the other mentors, these two were also available less often for lesson planning sessions and for reviewing and reflecting on videotapes of their mentees’ lessons. When confronted with these issues, these mentors cited lack of time or the fact that the mentees “do not trust me in the mentoring role.”

Mentors were under pressure in a variety of contexts to demonstrate expertise in pedagogy, content, and the classroom environment. As they helped mentees plan lessons, they had to draw on their knowledge base in literacy instruction, and on their related experiences. It was not uncommon for mentors to think back to what they may have been like at similar points in their education. Reflecting on a lesson review session with two mentees, one mentor demonstrated such efforts.

I think I asked the “right” questions. I saw their minds churning and in their eyes, a reflection or image of [me] just last spring. They hadn’t heard about PROCESSING!!! I briefly explained it. When did I learn about processing? Did I not know it then either?

Conclusions and Implications

Providing undergraduate education students with quality opportunities to experience the workings of actual classrooms through field experiences can greatly benefit preservice teachers in their professional development. Such experiences, however, require a great deal of support and supervision. A mentoring program such as described in this study offers a level of support for students in field experiences that may not be possible when one instructor is responsible for an entire class of students. For example, the teaching cycles and supervision required of students in the Literacy Methods field experience for this study required a minimum of eight hours per student for their lesson cycles and four hours per week on site for classroom observations. Adding qualified mentors to assume a measure of those supervisory responsibilities added to the feasibility and effectiveness of field experiences. Five mentors and one course instructor on site each week provided a much greater level of supervision for each field experience student.

Results of this project informed work at Drake University’s School of Education. The field work associated with the undergraduate literacy methods coursework incorporated the mentoring component in its design, and students interested in being mentors were able to plan their programs to include the mentoring course load. The findings of this mentoring program indicate the potential such programs may have for enriching teacher-education experiences at other institutions.

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Author Biography

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Perceptions of Children’s Culture in an Urban School

Althier Lazar, Cathy Pinto, and Natalie Warren

Abstract

This article addresses teachers’ views about children’s culture in one urban elementary school that serves African-American students. Teachers described their culture, their students’ culture, and how they integrated understandings about culture into their instructional practices. Deficit views of children’s culture were evident in teachers’ descriptions, especially among European-American teachers who did not live in the city. Almost all teachers described children’s language abilities as deviant. Our findings reveal the need for cultural sensitivity education for teachers and more comprehensive research in the area of teachers’ attitudes and understandings about culture.
About half of the children served by urban school districts, many of which are children of color, do not graduate from high school (Orfield, 2004). This problem is multifaceted and one that is shaped by a range of economic, political, social, and educational factors. In this article, we focus on one factor: teachers. This is not because we see teachers as the primary problem, but because the research suggests that teachers' cultural sensitivity has been linked to school success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2001). Presently, however, not enough is being done to help teachers and administrators acquire understandings about children and their cultural communities that would help them serve these children successfully.

Cultural sensitivity is the ability to understand the history, values, perceptions, and behaviors of members of particular groups of people, without judging these to be better or worse than those of any other group (Lazar, 2004). Cultural sensitivity is a defining characteristic of successful teachers of children of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is manifested when teachers respect students and their families, maintain high expectations of students, understand and validate children's heritage and culture, and weave these cultural understandings into their teaching.

Issues of cultural sensitivity have taken a backseat to concerns about preparing children for standardized tests in recent years. The No Child Left Behind Act, with its focus on universal achievement in reading and mathematics by the year 2014, has driven the professional development agenda toward raising standardized test scores. In Philadelphia, for instance, professional development sessions during the 2003-2004 academic year focused primarily on test preparation and instructional practices in reading and mathematics, such as building teachers' cultural sensitivity to issues surrounding the teaching of Black dialect and the teaching of Black culture. An emphasis on teaching test-taking strategies and other aspects of teaching in the context of the policy mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act is not without merit. However, the tension between preparing children to succeed on these tests and providing them with a curriculum that is meaningful and relevant to them is one that cannot be ignored.

The No Child Left Behind Act is not the only factor that marginalizes professional development in the area of cultural sensitivity. University programs that educate teachers are also complicit in the problem. During the 1990s, concerns about the low achievement rates of children of color in high-poverty communities led to an emphasis on helping teachers become more culturally sensitive. This was an attempt to address the generally recognized problem of a cultural disconnect between the largely mainstream population of teachers and a growing population of children of color. However, the shortage of qualified teachers who have the cultural background and understanding to motivate their students meant that most graduates left teacher preparation programs with very little understanding about what it means to be culturally sensitive. Teachers of color can hold negative views towards Black culture and those who are closest to him.

Over the last two decades, research in the areas of multiculturalism and cultural diversity has attempted to address these preconceptions. This research stressed the importance of validating the cultural heritage of children of color. It is manifested when teachers recognize the cultural contributions of others and incorporate these into their teaching. Successful teachers are those who accept the unique ways of children who speak BlackDialect rather than Standard English, which consequently leads to lower student achievement (Cecil, 1988).

In this study, we explore some of the perspectives teachers hold about the cultural lives of the children they teach. We study the ways in which teachers perceive students and relate to them. How do teachers' own cultural orientations shape their views about the cultural lives of the children who share a cultural heritage with their students, but may not be culturally sensitive. Teachers of color can hold negative views towards Black culture and those who are closest to him.
Children's Culture

Method

Of those we interviewed, three were African-American women, four were Euro-American women, and one teacher described herself as West-Indian-American. All but one of the European-Americans had less than three years of teaching experience, and each of the European-Americans said they had a very difficult time managing their classrooms and each of the African-American teachers who were interviewed lived in the city and had taught in the school for an average of several years. They reported being successful. The teacher who affiliated as a West-Indian-American had taken several graduate courses in the area of literacy instruction and said she had become very confident in teaching children to read and write over the last few years. We compared the interview statements with the survey statements, looking for consistencies and discrepancies between these data sets. Overall, there was a high degree of overlap between survey and interviews. Data was collected from five groups of teachers, and these groups were compared to the data we collected from the three groups of students.

Teachers of color are represented in the first three groups. The majority of these teachers, 76%, lived in Philadelphia. One-third of the European-American teachers lived in suburban communities surrounding the city. The teachers in Group 1 lived in the city; Group 2 lived in the same types of communities as their students and shared a cultural heritage that was as similar as to their students. Children's Culture

The teachers who participated in the study taught at a public elementary school in Philadelphia that served approximately 900 children. We decided to interview the teachers who were enrolled in a teaching methods course sponsored by a local university. Their responses indicated a need to strengthen cultural sensitivity programs for teachers at both the school district and university levels. The interviews allowed us to explore teachers' understandings of children's culture. The interviews also allowed us to explore teachers' reasons for describing children in specific ways. We also asked teachers to talk about the ways their students' culture was perceived by their students and how they shared or disputed these perceptions in the classroom. We also asked teachers to talk about the ways their students' culture was perceived by other students and teachers. We then asked teachers to talk about the ways their students' culture was perceived by other students and teachers. We then asked teachers to talk about the ways their students' culture was perceived by other students and teachers. We then asked teachers to talk about the ways their students' culture was perceived by other students and teachers.
Children's Culture

Findings

Describing Children's Culture

Teachers' descriptions of children's culture aligned with either a "deficit" emphasis or a "descriptive" emphasis. Teachers who affiliated with particular cultural groups tended to describe children's culture in terms of their specific cultural values and traditions. Generally, African-American teachers emphasized a "descriptive" view of culture, focusing on the unique characteristics and values of African-American culture. In contrast, European-American teachers emphasized a "deficit" view, focusing on the problems and challenges faced by children from various cultural backgrounds.

For instance, one African-American teacher described children's culture as being "urban, rough neighborhood, priorities not there fully for jobs/education, close families, lack of responsibility for some." This teacher emphasized the importance of urban and family culture in shaping children's behavior.

Another African-American teacher emphasized the influence of music on children's culture, describing it as "urban, Hip Hop. They love to socialize." This teacher noted that music was a key component of children's culture, reflecting their values and interests.

European-American teachers, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of family and social status. One teacher described children's culture as being "oppositional to school success primarily because parents' behaviors signaled they did not prioritize school." This teacher emphasized the role of family and social status in shaping children's behavior.

The majority of teachers described children's culture in terms of specific characteristics and values. This approach allowed them to focus on the unique aspects of each cultural group and to identify the ways in which these characteristics influenced children's behavior.

In conclusion, teachers' descriptions of children's culture were influenced by their affiliation with particular cultural groups. Those who aligned with African-American culture tended to describe children's culture in terms of their unique characteristics and values, while those who aligned with European-American culture emphasized the importance of family and social status in shaping children's behavior.
Children's Culture

Descriptions of Children's Oral and Written Language

Survey data indicated that most of the teachers, across the groups, framed children's language as deficient. Those of the teachers who were interviewed, however—one European-American and two African-Americans—described children's language using neutral terms. One of the teachers who described her students' culture in terms of students' languages focused on children's ways of expressing themselves and to guide children in their use of language:

Their language is more complex, it involves a wider range of words and phrases. It is a blend of different influences, including their home language, their local dialect, and the language they use in school. They are able to adapt their language to different situations and contexts. When they are in a more formal setting, they use more standard English. When they are in a more informal setting, they use more everyday language.

The European-American teacher who had taken the cultural diversity course commented that she had to be creative in helping children improve their language. She taught children how to use standard English in a variety of situations, such as in writing letters or in giving presentations. She also worked with children to understand the rules of standard English, such as grammar and punctuation, and helped them to apply these rules to their writing and speaking.

Ways of Helping Children Acquire Standard English

Responses to this final question suggest that teachers had very different teaching styles in the area of teaching children the standard English. Based on the teacher's comments, the ways in which they taught the standard English language varied. Some teachers focused on drilling and correcting errors, while others worked on helping children to understand the context and use of the language in a more natural way. The European-American teacher who had taken the cultural diversity course, for example, focused on helping children to understand the language as a whole and how it could be used in different situations. She taught children how to adapt their language to different contexts and situations, which helped them to improve their overall language proficiency.
Children’s Culture

indicated they modeled Standard English and corrected students in conversational situations. The following examples typify the approach used by these teachers:

Sometimes I correct them when they speak or ask a question. Speaking Standard English (modeling); exposing them to various examples of Standard English being spoken.

I help my students by modeling and making them feel comfortable. The results indicate that African-American teachers tended to help children acquire Standard English through spontaneous, informal, and verbal interactions. What is not revealed in these data (and... the classroom would more clearly reveal the impact of various approaches toward helping children acquire Standard English.

Discussion and Implications

The goal of the study was to determine teachers’ perceptions about children’s culture—specifically their language—and to explore links between these views and the teachers’ own cultural backgrounds.

What is not revealed in these data (and beyond this scope of the article) is the diversity of approaches teachers used to do this. And how children react to these approaches... When we can sort out the teacher’s influence from the child’s well-being, we begin to see that these two are not necessarily in conflict. One possibility is that deficit-oriented views about... who described themselves as “cultural outsiders” with respect to their students.

We cannot make assertions about teachers’ effectiveness in relation to their descriptions of children’s culture. Data on teachers’ practices and children’s achievement would need to be collected and analyzed to make any claims concerning teacher effectiveness.

We can, however, make assertions about the cultural environment of children’s schools. The findings of this study... culture. One obvious implication is the need to confront deficit-oriented perceptions of children’s cultures.... and the ways different people cross ethnic and language borders constantly and then are transformed by these experiences (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2000). Understanding the changing and transformative nature of culture is important for teachers if they are to build curriculum and instruction that reflect children’s experiences.

There are several avenues of inquiry that can help teachers interrogate the shifting and complex nature of culture and that particular cultures are not inherently better or worse than others. A good place to start is exploring one’s own culture and how

Deficit perspectives of children's culture persist even though it has been recognized for more than a decade that cultural sensitivity is a key attribute of successful teachers of children of color. In the current political and educational climate, issues of cultural diversity have been marginalized. Professional development programs need to focus on building teachers' understandings about culture and language, but this will not happen unless teachers, policymakers, and the public-at-large are convinced that cultural sensitivity matters in school achievement.

As part of an examination of one's culture, it is important to include an investigation of one's linguistic heritage. Many of European-American teachers we interviewed talked about their parents and grandparents' literacy practices and their role in shaping their own literacy practices. What is needed is an investigation of the cultural influences that have shaped how many African-American children perceive and use language. Another important area of study is the history and functions of African-American vernacular language, which is consistent across its speakers and is key to understanding and validating the language. Teachers also need to be aware of the language spoken by many African-American children, especially in the admission process to middle and high schools.

In the classroom, teachers need to invite students' out-of-school lives into the classroom. Avenues for inquiry include studying children's popular culture (Dyson, 2003), using literature that mirrors the students' own experiences (Cochran-Smith, 1995), and relating other content (history, mathematics, science) to real issues and problems that define their local community. The extant research supports making cultural sensitivity education a priority for educators (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999), but the current emphasis is on helping children prepare for standardized tests, rather than on making curriculum responsive to their cultural backgrounds.

The dominant society (Nieto, 1999) often excludes children of color from the classroom, and teachers are often unprepared to teach cultural diversity. As a result, students may feel alienated in the classroom, with the result that they may withdraw from learning. This is a necessary starting point from which to explore the perspectives, values, and lifestyles of others.

References


Sharing Perspectives and Practices

Open Discussion: Revisiting Nystrand’s Dialogic Approach

Wen Ma

Abstract

In this essay Nystrand’s dialogic approach for teaching and learning English language and literature is revisited. This approach emphasizes the use of authentic question and uptake for the students to make substantive discussion and for developing their literate thinking. Then, some theoretical and pedagogical implications of this approach are discussed in light of a sociocultural view of learning.

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In recent years, numerous discussion-based programs (e.g., Daniels, 2001; Langer, 1995; McMahon & Raphael, 1997) have been developed to tap the dialogic potential for learning literacy and English. These programs, such as the “Writing to Learn” (Guralnick, 1992), have been designed to encourage students to engage in meaningful discussions and to be exposed to multiple interpretations and voices of others.

Among the varied classroom discussion models, Nystrand (1997) conducted important research on classroom discourse and advocated a dialogic approach for teaching English language and literature. Nystrand’s work has been influential in developing an understanding of how dialogic interactions can facilitate learning.

In the following, I attempt to analyze the important components of this dialogic approach based on Nystrand’s (1997) seminal work on classroom discourse. Then, I discuss its theoretical and pedagogical implications, focusing on some instructional considerations in implementing this model.

**Authentic Question and Uptake**

Why is student-centered discussion educationally so valuable? How is discussion used as an instructional tool for extending the students’ literate thinking and understanding? Let us begin by taking a look at how Nystrand arrived at one of his central claims: that the authentic question and uptake are central to the success of classroom discussions.

Nystrand drew on Baldwin (1981), Vygotsky (1978), and a number of other scholars to develop his theoretical framework for his dialogic approach. Nystrand found that authentic questions and uptake were central to classroom discussions, facilitating the students’ learning and understanding.

Nystrand (1997, p. 39) provided the following example of uptake:

*Teacher:* What do they have to do to Polyphemus?

*Student:* Blind him.

*Teacher:* How come the plan is for blinding Cyclops?

In contrast to the sociocultural view of learning described by Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, and Miller (2003) and Lee and Smagorinsky (2000), the monologic model that Nystrand (1997) found to dominate in the classroom discourse was characterized by an emphasis on compliance and a lack of genuine engagement. Nystrand’s approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of authentic questions and uptake in engaging students in meaningful discussions and facilitating their learning.

**A Sociocultural View of Learning**

Nystrand drew on Bakhtin (1981), Vygotsky (1978), and a number of other scholars to develop the theoretical foundation for his dialogic approach. He suggested an emergent framework about how dialogic interactions, centering around the two key concepts of authentic question and uptake, facilitate the student’s learning and thinking through dynamic and engaging discussions in the classroom. This framework makes a number of important theoretical assumptions about dialogic interactions for learning literacy and literature.

First, dialogic interaction in the classroom provides the needed context for one to engage with the literary text. Furthermore, the dialogic interaction draws the participants’ attention to the specific content or issues the students have been discussing. In this way, the students’ thinking is further explored by hearing the alternative views of others. Perspectives become clear through expressing their ideas and discussing options with others. When given appropriate opportunities to engage in collaborative conversations, learners are facilitated to make meaning out of the texts they read and, through dialogic interaction, develop their thinking about the text and beyond (Britton, 1990, 1993).

Nevertheless, just as discussion-oriented research and theory have illuminated that discussions can spur one’s thinking about the text, reflective reading and writing as well as reflection on one’s intellectual engagement are crucial to the learning process.
Open Discussion
with the text, as research and theory about reading-writing relationships have clearly shown (e.g., Olson, 1994). Martin, D'Arcy, Newton, and Parker's (1976) work further suggested strong connections between adolescent reading and writing and the possibility of using these connections as well as talking methods to help students improve their reading and writing. However, it is unclear whether students can achieve high quality outcomes with these methods.

Recent research has indicated the importance of active listening and engagement in the learning process. Ross (1994) suggests that active listening and engagement can improve student learning outcomes. In addition, Lewis (2002) argues that students who engage in active listening and engagement are more likely to develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities.

Moreover, previous research has shown that discussion in the classroom is not a neutral medium with all learners, nor does it necessarily lead to equal engagement and participation for all students. Lewis (2001) found that discussion is often controlled by teacher and student expectations, and that learners may not feel comfortable expressing their own ideas in the classroom.

Focusing on employing dialogue as an instructional tool to engage students and to overcome their passivity in the learning process, Nystrand advocated the use of open-ended questions, genuine inquiry, and uptake for substantive engagement by the teacher and other fellow learners. These underpinnings have theoretical and pedagogical implications for research and practice to move from the IRE discourse pattern to more dynamic discussions.

Consistent with findings from other research studies on classroom discussions (cf. Lewis, 2001; Miller, 1992), Nystrand's dialogic approach to facilitate meaningful learning was extended to study the underpinnings for engaging and empowering all learners with socially defined learning, whether it is literacy or literature.

Student Talk and Diversified Methods of Engagement

Focusing on employing dialogue as an instructional tool to engage students and to overcome their passivity in the learning process, Nystrand advocated the use of open-ended questions, genuine inquiry, and uptake for substantive engagement by the teacher and other fellow learners. These underpinnings have theoretical and pedagogical implications for research and practice to move from the IRE discourse pattern to more dynamic discussions. While recognizing the dialogic potential of Nystrand's dialogic approach, I raise a few instructional considerations, even pointing out potential risks, involved in adopting such a discussion approach with learners from diverse backgrounds.

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Journaling in a Video Environment: What Teachers Have Learned from the Process

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy

Abstract

Graduate students in a literacy course were engaged in learning interview skills for video, writing an edit script, and editing their first video presentations. They also posted responses on a listserv, as members of a dialogue journal community, to three books that were required reading for the course. Their growth as teachers, writers, and video producers is presented in the ways they talked about writing and teaching.
Video Journaling

Journaling as a form of learning and reflecting has been with us since the time of Julius Caesar, St. Augustine, and Samuel Pepys (Conhaim & Page, 2003). The journal is most commonly defined as writing that centers on personal thoughts and events as it allows the writer to focus his or her individual responses on experiences (Kandt, 1994). We now use many forms of journaling at the college level to coax students into the habitual cycle of (a) reading, (b) writing, (c) reflecting, (d) writing, and (e) reading. This writing process facilitates students' confidence in their ability to communicate through the written word (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 2002). Journal writing operates as a window through which teachers observe students' progress, strengths, and needs of students' understandings of a topic under study (Stanton, Shuy, Kreeft, & Reed, 1982).

As early as 1985, Carole Cox wrote about the importance of the composing process that filmmaking facilitated. The production process of filmmaking is also documented as a means to assess content knowledge, writing skills, and research skills (Doig & Sargent, 1996) and can, therefore, be seen as a way to enhance the language arts. In other contexts, like the filmmaking projects of the students who collaborated on youth videos (Dowdy, Reedus, Anderson-Thompkins, & Heim, 2004), participants also commented about the life skills they learned through the collaborations. Language facility, which was enhanced by the images that the students created in their video interviews.

Encouraging writing habits in the classroom can be a difficult and sometimes overwhelming task when a teacher is also working to impart content material to students. Using any one of the arts, however, including painting, video production, music, and acting, helps to increase students' interest in the content being studied and expand students' knowledge of the many ways in which the message can be articulated (Atwell, 1998; Harste, 1994; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). Considering the importance of multiple literacies (Kist, 2002) for the development of students' best chance of success in our technologically savvy world, it makes sense to include video literacy in the list of subjects that we encourage them to study.

Experiential Learning

Dewey (1938) wrote that experience is the basis of learning, and that the best way to learn is to do. He also believed that education should be a process of personal growth. In this context, the article represents the experience of a group of students in a graduate literacy course. The course, Video Writing, was designed to provide students with the opportunity to learn about the role of video in education and to develop skills in video production and use. Students were divided into groups and given the task of creating a video to address a specific educational issue of their choice. The course emphasized the importance of experiential learning and the role of technology in education.

The objective of the course was to have the students experience the process of learning as a form of representation (i.e., writing, reflecting, and video production). The students were encouraged to explore their own learning experiences, and to reflect on how these experiences could be shared with others. The course was designed to be flexible, allowing students to choose their own topics and to work in groups to develop their ideas. The course also emphasized the importance of sharing and discussing the results of the students' work with each other and with the larger community.
Journal Activities

Students were asked to write entries on a listserv in response to the chapters from the books; make transcripts of the video interviews and post them to the listserv so they could be discussed in class, and bring in the footage with video interviews for review.

The first journal activity involved commenting each week on selected chapters in three books:

- *Lives on the Boundary* (Rose, 1990), Delpit and Dowdy's *The Skin that We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Learning in the Classroom* (2003), and *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (Purcell-Gates, 1995). The graduate students, one a student in a master's program and all the others in a doctoral program for literacy studies or educational foundations, were asked to post their journal entries on the listserv by a certain date before the class met. In this type of journal (Ross, 1998) students ask questions about the chapters they have read. The participants were allowed to share their personal stories, theories, or recommendations with information about their own experiences. The journal activity also allowed the students to reflect on their own experiences and the ways in which they have learned from others.

At the start of the semester students were inclined to review the assigned chapters in a formal tone, as if they were submitting their writing to an academic journal. I have indicated the date of the entry on the listserv at the end of each quote from the graduate students. The names used are pseudonyms.

Tim's first journal entry states:

Unlike *Hunger for Memory*, *Lives on the Boundary* deviates from the hackneyed model of the educational Horatio Alger story, where the subject's will to learn takes center stage. Rose never forgets how narrowly he missed the fate of his Voc Ed buddies, and the real heroes of the story are folks like Jack McFarland, Frank Carothers, and Ted Erlandson: educators who helped stimulate his mind while offering alternatives to the quiet despair of a working-class neighborhood. (2.03.03)

The second level of journal entries required took the form of a three-part series of video and audio-taped interviews completed by each of the participants. The interviews were part of the process of unveiling Lillian’s personal philosophy about teaching and the role of the African-American teacher in classrooms. Lillian’s responses to the questions posed to her indicated that the students felt more comfortable expressing their views through the medium of video and audio interviews. She suggested that they could indicate that the students accepted each other as learners experiencing the journey as collaborators not competitors.

As time moved on, there were more anecdotes in the responses and the writers began to refer to each other’s comments when they made a point in their journal entries. Lillian, one of the two African-American women and the most experienced public school teachers, shared her experiences about teaching high school in Journal 3:

The last ten years of my career I taught English, Grade 9, and Grade 11. While I agree with Rose’s position on the need for more African-American students to have a chance to read Shakespeare, I felt it important to keep it real in the classroom. I have included examples of what is happening in the halls, in the classrooms, and in the community. I have included quotes from students and colleagues, my wonderful “junior generals.” While I feel that Rose is correct in pointing out the need for more African-American students to have a chance to read Shakespeare, I believe that they should also have the opportunity to read the works of other playwrights, such as Sophocles and Euripides. Besides, how many of their students would have to learn how to write formal essays and other academic writing as part of their graduation requirements? I have suggested that the students put their skills to work in learning information and finding out how they can enhance their understandings of the literature they are reading. The studio process, much like the art studio of a painter or musician, is based on improvisation. Experience proves that the best creative products come out of a setting in which people are free to make discoveries and learn from the interactions with others.

This deliberate resistance to swallowing the ideas presented in the text by Rose is part of the process of unveiling Lillian’s personal philosophy about teaching and the role of the African-American teacher in classrooms. Lillian’s responses to the questions posed to her indicated that the students felt more comfortable expressing their views through the medium of video and audio interviews. She suggested that they could indicate that the students accepted each other as learners experiencing the journey as collaborators not competitors.

This writing style is in direct contrast to Judy’s tone when she opens her response in Journal 4:

The Skin That We Speak is one of the most powerful reads I’ve had the pleasure to experience and the most powerful I’ve ever had the pleasure to experience. I am so glad that I took this class and had the opportunity to share these chapters and responses with all of you. I think the commentaries on the students’ writing are excellent and I’ll seek your feedback up front. (4.07.03)
Video Journaling

parts included a first interview that asked the interviewees to talk about their background and how they came to be in the job they presently held. The second interview was based on a question about what it was like to be in the position the interviewees held (i.e., a teacher, an engineer, or the director of a literacy initiative). The third part of the series was an interview with the interviewees asking them to talk about the meaning of their present position or accomplishment in the context of their whole life.

The adventure that the veteran teachers encountered along the way to creating an edited video presentation included, among other issues, the challenge of making and keeping appointments with their participants; getting permission from the college’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in a timely way; reviewing and editing their video footage into a ten-minute product that told a story; and writing as a class about the best “moves” or follow-up questions they used (i.e., questions they used as prompts for more detailed answers from the participants during each of the three interviews). The students were asked to look at these transcripts with the whole class so we could discuss the follow-up questions each person used in the interview assignment. We looked for video clips that had engaging opening questions, follow-up questions that helped the interviewee to extend his or her descriptions of important points, and clear examples of the interviewer having a comfortable rapport with the interviewee, such as not interrupting the interviewee unnecessarily but listening closely to the story.

According to the interviewers’ understanding of the way in which the interviews proceeded to a successful conclusion, the “good questions” showed the interviewer (a) “creating rapport” at the beginning of an interview; (b) seeing the “potential in the emerging story and knowing how and what to ask in order to reach a deeper level,” and (c) avoiding the “missed opportunity” in which “the interviewer failed to follow up on the participant’s answer leaving what was implied but not extracted nor excavated” from the comment. These were descriptions the students included in the final edit script for their video presentation.

A “pitfall” in video interviewing skills, according to the students, would show the interviewer was not impartial to the person or information offered by the interviewee. The class decided, to avoid influencing the data, the qualitative interviewer should maintain an impartial stance during the interview process. Another technique the students agreed was useful in reaching this goal of the interview was named “broad brush-stroke” questions. In this form of questioning, the interviewer finds students often lead to uninterrupted, focused answers to an open-ended question. In another form of interaction with the participant that the students labeled “fill in the blanks,” the interviewer could ask questions that allowed the participant to focus and complete the story that begins with a prompt about some aspect of their journey. For instance, the interview might ask the person to complete the statement “for six years...” and wait to hear the response. The students found there was also a form of question that allowed the interviewer to “sustain the story.” This type of questioning encouraged the participant to reflect and elaborate upon their answer to a question.

The final step in the interview protocol involves closing the interview. The students found in their journey with the interview series that there are several ways to bring the interview to a close. These strategies include (a) restating information and seeking clarification at the end of the interview; (b) inviting the participant to provide new or additional information especially in areas that have not been discussed; and (c) offering the interviewer’s thanks for the participant’s time and asking permission to follow up with another interview if it is needed to clarify any information provided in the previous three interviews.

The Video Script

Video clips from several of the interviews that the teachers conducted were then selected to represent each kind of question, prompt, or follow-up strategy the interviewer used to elicit information from the participant. Negotiation about the language and form of the comments to be used in the voice-over on the video presentation of these selected video clips led the students to find ways to communicate effectively about what they needed to say and show on the television screen. This process, as we all experienced it, was a form of journaling that adapted itself well to the video composition environment. The teachers used their experience as viewers of television to make decisions about video images, script writing, and the creation of a writing community.

Discussion

In this class of experienced teachers, the process of creating interview protocols, video and tape recording interviews, writing an edit script as a group, and then editing the video interviews to create a final video presentation, led to an understanding of the way in which video recording can facilitate reflection and enhanced learning. Reading, writing, reflecting, writing, and reading became lived experiences that influenced the choices that the teachers made in the class.

As with the research reported by Banks-Wallace (1998), the graduate students also found that participants in an interview are more willing to tell stories about themselves if they felt comfortable with the interviewer. Because each of the students interviewed someone with whom they had a relationship from school, work, or their family circle, they could draw upon prior knowledge to create a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews. An example of the prior knowledge affecting the interview process was recognized in Tom’s interview with his aunt, who is a nun. He was able to ask about her mother’s response to her decision to join a religious order because it had been part of an ongoing conversation before the video interview took place.

The class chose a clip from Dee’s video script as an example of an interviewer establishing “good rapport” based on a relationship with the interviewee depending on the use of prior knowledge. From the interview with a young writer who was being home schooled, we heard Dee coaxing the interviewee with her comments: “if you want to stop at any time, just tell me. Okay. How are you feeling?” To his response that he felt “a little bit” nervous, Dee responded, “Okay. That’s all right. That’s normal. Just forget the camera is up there, just that we would be having a discussion and talking about your life and your experiences because you have an important story to tell. Let’s start from the beginning. You are in seventh grade right now?” Dee was able to make the participant comfortable in front of the video.
Responses to Learning Video Writing

A few weeks into the studies, the class agreed on a script for the video presentation. The students worked on the script, discussing the steps involved in doing video interviews. The following is an excerpt from the video exit script the class produced:

Voice-over: Like a work of art, the qualitative interview begins with an idea. And, like an artist, the qualitative researcher must be willing to trust the process as the work, the participant's story, unfolds. During this time, the work of eight individuals will illustrate the qualitative interviewing process. The process is divided into three major steps:

Step 1: Beginning the interview, which includes creating rapport, and grand tour questions.

Step 2: Conducting the interview, which includes probing, two interviewing pitfalls, the missed opportunity, the journalistic style, sustaining the story, broad brush-strokes, and filling in the blanks.

Step 3: Ending the interview, which includes restating information and seeking clarification; inviting the participant to provide new or additional information; asking the participant's advice and counsel; and, finally, allowing the participant to evaluate the story experience.

Much like the cycle of meaning that Pierce and Gilles (1990) discuss in their work, the qualitative interview moves toward self-determination and self-assessment. The process involves creating a voice-over script for each part of the video presentation, and appointing a classmate as the editor rather than seeking outside help with the final video production. By talking through their reactions to transcripts, building a voice-over script for each part of the video presentation, and appointing a classmate as the editor in a collaborative way to make the journey their own, the teachers found a safe space to tell their literacy story in the listserv as well.
Lessons Learned

Journaling helps students connect their personal experiences to the content they are learning (Conhaim & Page, 2003). The learning that evolved from this class did not only take place through the readings and creation of a video presentation. Learning also occurred in the discussions about the readings and reflections on the video interviewing journey. The time students took to write about their feelings and reactions to the three books and video transcripts, downloading from the listserv, and viewing film footage allowed them to step back from their emotions and begin to analyze their understandings on the material they were learning. When we looked at video clips from the interviews done outside of class, we were, in essence, reviewing the journal entries of the interviewers and witnessing the learning process from each individual's perspective. The video interviews gave us a chance to learn of each other's research interests. Pam interviewed her friend who had surgery to help her lose weight; Lillian interviewed a colleague who was the director of a research unit that focused on General Educational Diploma graduates at the university; and Dee interviewed children in her neighborhood who were being home-schooled. The class learned to appreciate the styles each person represented as they developed relationships with their interviewees. Val was quoted in a video edit on the final presentation as saying, "Talk a little bit about your experiences with education. Like take me from Christ the King, through Regina, through Perdue, and just talk about those big things that stand out in your mind about your education." Also, the group took note and learned from the kinds of experiences that shaped the interviewers' responses to the information that was being shared by the interviewees. Val was quoted in the final edit script as asking, "Looking back, is there anything that you feel that you missed out on, or that you would want to do over or change about your education?" We understand that she was basing this question on her friend's dissatisfaction with her life as an engineer.

In this process of creating and then reviewing journals we learned to listen closely to the writer's voice and develop our observation skills. The writer's voice reflects the person's style of communication and the kind of life they are living. We use the technique of "exposing" the story—that is, by hearing Celia's voice, we can hear Celia's personality. She uses two prompts to get her friend to talk about the different reactions that she had to the events in her life: "What was your emotional response after surgery?" and "During the last weeks that you were at home before you had to go back to work, what was your reaction to what you were experiencing? No surgery?""
In this process of turning over the reins of control to the students, they learned a valuable lesson about what it means to have control over their own learning. They also learned the importance of collaboration and communication, as they worked together to produce the final product. Finally, they learned the importance of taking risks and experimenting with new ideas. The process was not without its challenges, as the students had to navigate the complexities of working on a project together. However, they rose to the occasion and produced a video that was well-received by all who saw it.


References

Future Directions

The implications for future use of this journal approach in classrooms point to the importance of teacher education and professional development. Without the adequate support of technology, video production will remain an afterthought. The idea of video production for a writing assignment or a journal article is one that needs to be explored more extensively. In the future, we hope to see more classrooms adopt this approach and further expand the use of video production in the classroom.


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**Nota Bene: Book Corner**

**World-Event Trauma Enters the Classroom: Can Teachers Support Students When Madmen Are Running the World?**

Abigail McNamee and Mia Mercurio

The way we think about life and our own safety changed after September 11, 2001. Although the attacks occurred five years ago, the incidents of terrorism that have followed allow for no possibility of returning to an earlier illusion of safety. The events of September 11 and the post-September 11 world have heightened fears in all of us: children, adolescents, college students, and teacher educators. They have heightened our sense of vulnerability as we see and imagine details of the current war on terror and recognize the potential for future acts of violence. These events should have affected how we educate teachers.

Teachers, and the students we teach, need help as we try to make sense of, and function in, a world that seems to be run by madmen: a world where “the sky can fall, thousands die, war is proclaimed, and our sense of safety and security disappears in a day” (Greenman, 2001, p. 6). Unfortunately, we cannot create environments in which safety is guaranteed. What we can do is create environments that are physically and psychologically as safe as we can make them. Children and adolescents need the illusion that they are safe—they need to feel safe—they can develop in a healthy way (McNamee & Mercurio, in press). But it is an “illusion” because in reality safety is never guaranteed for anyone. Traumatic events are often experienced vicariously in students’ lives, but they are also sometimes experienced first-hand. Teachers need help in coping with each type of event.

Janoff-Buhlman (1992) describes the “shattering of illusions”—one of them being the illusion of safety—that takes place when we experience trauma. Mudlaff (2000) writes that when children experience violence their belief system is called into question:
Such children’s sense of security and safety has been threatened, which cannot help but change their view of the world. This is a very real loss for a child and should be viewed as an experience that causes grief, much like the death of someone they love. (p. 30)

When children and adolescents become vicariously aware of war, large-scale violence, and terrorism, their illusion of safety may become bruised. When they experience these events first-hand, their illusion of safety may be much more seriously damaged. The bruising may take the form of worrying about whether the adults in their life, whom they have assumed to be powerful enough to guarantee their safety, may not be able to keep them safe; more serious damage may take the form of fear of loss, or actual loss, of family members, friends. When either happens, the illusion of safety needs to be re-established. Teachers need to be able to respond when students experience vicarious traumatic events. As on September 11, they sometimes experience the traumatic event first-hand themselves while being the first-responders for their students.

We cannot avoid integrating, into our teacher-education programs, help for teachers in creating or recreating an illusion of safety. Such help does exist in the form of literature focused on trauma produced before and after 2001 and written for adult- and child-readers. Texts focused on trauma existed previously for professionals; children’s books also existed, focusing primarily on war. What follows, however, is a small sampling of what has become available after the traumatic attacks of September 11, 2001. These resources offer specific information on how children, adolescents, and adults react to traumatic events and information on what is needed. Some resources offer a model that can be adapted to new traumatic events of how teachers and others responded.

For Teachers

What Happened to the World? Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times
Written by Jim Greenman
BrightHorizons.com (2001)
Available as a download at no charge at http://www.brighthorizons.com/talk to children/docs/whatapp.pdf

Written soon after September 11, this small book begins:

Children’s lives have always been marked by change. Each day brings new revelations that life is filled with storms as well as sunshine. No child ultimately escapes from the experience of fear, loss, grief, and trauma. But extraordinary events that shatter the sense of security of everyone they know and love put a particular pressure on the adult in their lives to be at their best as parents and caregivers (p. 6).

Greenman beautifully organizes the information contained in this book addressing how we feel when children need our help, common emotional reactions to trauma, common changes in behavior, taking care of yourself while understanding and supporting children...and these topics are just the beginning, a preparation for what teachers need to be effective. The balance of the book is divided by the particular needs of children according to age: children under three, preschool children, elementary school-age children, and junior and high-school children. It concludes with changes we can implement to help children cope with stress, how to answer children’s questions, issues of military service and respect for others, tips for teachers, and websites on children and stress.

Forever After: New York City Teachers on 9/11
Anthology Collected by Teachers College Press
Forward by Michelle Fine and Maxine Greene

This collection of essays, just released in July, is written by teachers in the New York City public schools. It documents the experiences many teachers in New York City faced in caring for their students on September 11, 2001, and for many days, months, and years after.

For Students

September 12th: We Knew Everything Would Be All Right
Written by students of Masterson Elementary School in Kennett, Missouri
New York: Scholastic (2002)
Recommended for ages 5 and up

With the help of their teacher, the 18 children in Robertson’s first-grade class tell the story of September 11 and 12 in their words. They also created all the artwork presented in the story. The book begins with a description of the events of September 11. The following pages, however, concentrate on the next day: “September 12 was a new day. We knew everything would be all right, because...the sun came up and the birds started to sing again.” The book ends with the sun coming up yet again, one day later. The last page is a strong reminder of the book’s message: “NOT the end.”

The first-graders are candid with the reader not only in their words but in their drawings. The vocabulary is uniquely a first-grader’s lexicon. The child-authors are the narrators, and readers learn about their feelings through the children’s words and drawings. A child-reader could easily identify with the children who wrote this story knowing that other children experienced what they experienced and felt as they did. Many children experienced September 11 in much the same way as did the authors themselves.

This book does a remarkable job of helping the child-reader understand it is acceptable to feel frightened, because writers—their peers—have expressed the same feeling. The refrain “everything would be all right” is repeated throughout the book. Common experiences, such as going back to school, seeing a teacher’s smiling face, reading stories, and singing the National Anthem, have helped children across America feel safe again.
On That Day
Written by Andrea Patel
Recommended for ages 3 and up

On That Day responds to the violent events of September 11. The book’s message suggests that even though bad things happen in the world, individual people always have a choice to do good things. The author uses language young children can understand, explaining that “sometimes bad things happen because people act in mean ways and hurt each other on purpose.” Although there are no specific characters in this book, the author draws the child-reader into a shared experience. She writes, “Whether you’re three years old, or thirteen years old, or thirty years old, or one-hundred and three years old, you can help.” The book goes on to list all the things a child-reader can do, such as sharing, playing, laughing, and being kind to others. The story reassures the child that “when bad things happen, only a small piece of the world breaks. Not the whole world.” The author takes the position that ultimately the goodness of people will win over badness.

Children are encouraged to feel they are not alone, that many people felt fearful, sad, or angry when the United States was attacked on September 11. The book attempts to reassure readers and help them feel it is appropriate for them to experience fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety about violent events.

Additional Titles

Here are other books teachers and their students may find helpful:

Understanding September 11th: The Right Questions about the Attacks on America
Written by Mitch Frank
Recommended for ages 8 and up

Written by a Time magazine reporter, this book is organized in the format of questions that young people may ask about the events. Frank answers the questions in an honest and easy-to-understand fashion.

The Day That Was Different: September 11, 2001: When Terrorists Attacked America (It’s Happening to U.S.)
Written by Carole Marsh
Chicago, IL: Gallopade International Press (2001)
Recommended for ages 4 through 8

This is a factual, yet sensitive, book that provides information for children to understand in an easy-to-read manner. Topics include:
- Other Days That Were Different
- The Government in Charge: What Happens When America Suffers an Attack?
- The Geography of Terrorism (map activity of pertinent locations)
- What Is the World Trade Center?
- What Is the Pentagon? Why Did the Terrorists Pick on It?
- What Is Islam? Who Are Muslims?
- Land of the Free: How a Democratic Country Is Different
- Home of the Brave: They Came to Help—Firefighters, Police, the Military, Civilian Volunteers
- I Want to Help!: What Kids, Families, and Schools Can Do to Help
- What Good Can Come From this Experience?
- Tolerance and Your Role as a Student
- Dear Diary: A Page to Record Your Feelings
- Dear Friend: A Letter to Write
- My Questions for Further Discussion (Marsh, 2001)

The New York Times: A Nation Challenged, Young Reader’s Edition
Written by the staff of The New York Times
NY: Scholastic (2002)
Recommended for ages 9 through 14

Created on the first anniversary of September 11, the editors and staff of The New York Times published pictures and text that had run originally in The Times over the previous year. They succeeded in finding age-appropriate material for the recommended age group.

With Their Eyes: September 11th—The View from a High School at Ground Zero
Written by Annie Thomas
Recommended for ages 12 and up

This book was written by an English teacher at Stuyvesant High School, which was located four blocks from the World Trade Center. The collection of ten student interviews allows the reader to understand a unique perspective of that day from a group of unlikely observers.

Dog Heroes of September 11th: A Tribute to America’s Search-and-Rescue Dogs
Written by Nona Kilgore Bauer
Recommended for ages 10 and up

Although it took five years after September 11 for this book to be written, it was worth the wait. This book tells the courageous stories of many search-and-rescue dogs and their handlers at Ground Zero, the Pentagon, and the Fresh Kills Landfill. Readers will learn about the heroic efforts of man and animals alike.
Final Thoughts

The title of this Book Corner is taken from Charles Simic’s (2006) poem entitled “Madmen Are Running the World” that recently appeared in The New Yorker. While the poem itself is somewhat oblique and probably meant to be a metaphor of a world gone mad, run by mad…well, persons, the title captures the time in which we live and teach. Our world, now, is not only difficult to understand but dangerous. Our illusion of safety is vulnerable as we experience vicariously and first-hand a world that has seemingly gone mad. Teachers and their students are left coping with this new reality. We believe these resources may help.

References


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