



Tackling Inequity by Teaching to Teach: Focusing on High-Leverage Practices

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Kristof, NYT, September 13, 2012

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/13/opinion/kristof-students-over-unions.html?ref=opinion

"The most important civil rights battleground today is education, and, likewise, the most crucial struggle against poverty is the one fought in schools."

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Our problem

1. Evidence of teaching effects → increased interest in importance of *teaching*
2. Broad skepticism about the efficacy of teacher education and professional development
3. → focus on recruitment, outcomes, identification instead of training → does not augur well for redressing educational inequity and uneven quality
4. But we are often not effective advocates for teacher education, either

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What great teachers often say about teaching

"Teaching has always come naturally to me."

"I have learned what I do from experience; I like to pass on what I know to student teachers."

"I can't explain what I do. Teaching is really an art and you have to follow your intuition a lot."

"I like what she does, but it wouldn't work for me. I have developed my way of doing things that works for me and my style."

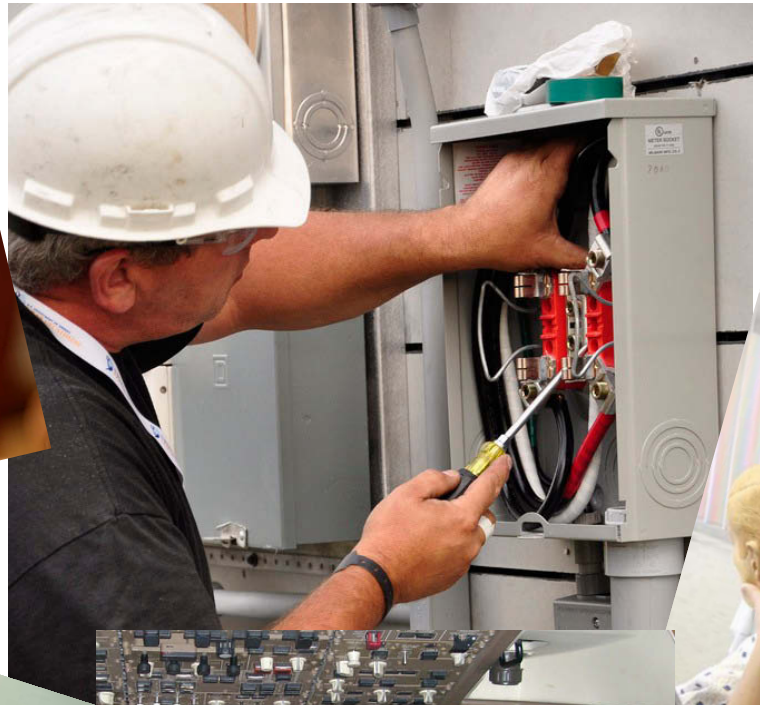
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What's wrong with this?

1. Undermines the idea that teaching is a profession that can be developed through careful unpacking of the practice and a common technical language
2. Perpetuates the belief that teaching is individual
3. Reinforces the predominance of "style" over skill

If teaching is individual and must be figured out by each person on the job, then there is little hope of ensuring that all young people receive skillful instruction.

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Features of strong training for responsible practice

1. Clear **specification of skills, capabilities, and qualities of performance** necessary for independent practice
2. Detailed **developmental clinical training**, progressing from observing to simulations to supervised apprenticeship to supervised independent practice
3. **Performance assessment** of individual competence before allowing independent practice

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Important moment of opportunity for building a true system of professional training for teaching practice



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Crucial next steps for the profession

1. *Build on basic agreements about domains of teaching and evidence about content knowledge for teaching:* Identify **key practices of teaching** and **high-leverage content** essential for responsible beginning practice
2. *Build on commitment to clinical preparation:* Develop **specific approaches to training** beginners to carry out those practices, along a **continuum of contexts** for learning and practicing practice
3. *Build on commitment to performance assessment:* Develop performance assessments of specific practices and content and make them required for entry.

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Teachers should use data to inform instruction.

Teachers should use a variety of instructional strategies to engage all students.

Teachers should know their subjects deeply.

Teachers should care about all students and create a positive culture in the classroom.

Teachers should hold high expectations for all students.

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CENTRAL PROPOSITION

It is possible to identify a **common core for teaching**, comprising a set of teaching practices that are:

① crucial for responsible teaching across contexts

② specific enough to be named, identified, and taught and assessed

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Key considerations for today

1. Three challenges that make teaching difficult to teach
2. Toward a profession of teaching

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Three challenges that make teaching difficult to teach

① Underdeveloped professional language

② Particularity and context

③ Unpacking: The unnatural way of knowing content

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① Underdeveloped professional language

A. Many different terms in use for the same (or similar) elements of the work:
   - Cooperative learning, small group work
   - Warm up, "do now," sponge
   - Discussion, dialogue, whole group lesson

B. Inadequate discrimination for critical elements of the work: e.g., questions, explaining, review

C. Confounding of evaluative and other labels for teaching overall with straight description of specific aspects of the work: e.g., student-centered, constructivist, direct, teacher-centered, inquiry-oriented, reform-oriented

D. Other parts of the work lack terms altogether

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EXPLORATION #1
Do we have a language of practice?

- Watch two short (1:20 min.) video clips, each from an upper elementary math class
- Try to name specific elements of the work
- How much common language do we have?

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Mercedes



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Lauren



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How much common language do we share? Why does this matter?

- Teaching anything depends on being able to unpack and name the work (compare with teaching mathematics)
- Imprecise terminology can obscure important elements of the work of teaching
- Difficult to make the practice visible and to make important distinctions without common technical language

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② The particularity of teaching

Subject matters

Context matters

Teaching is about teaching something in particular to someone(s) in particular

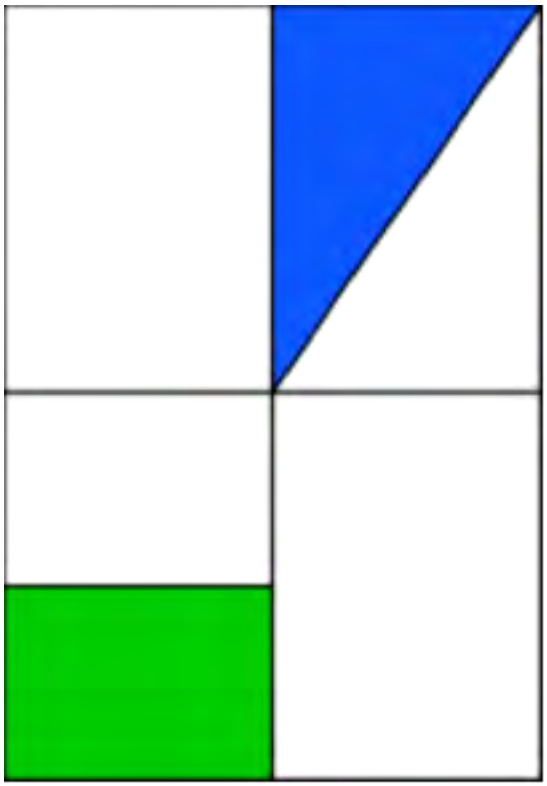
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EXPLORATION #2
How particular is teaching?

- Consider the two short video clips again
- Watch a third video clip
- Three different contexts, different topics, different teachers
- Try to name specific elements of the work across the three segments
- Is anything here part of what you could call general professional practice across the differences in style, topic, students, contexts?

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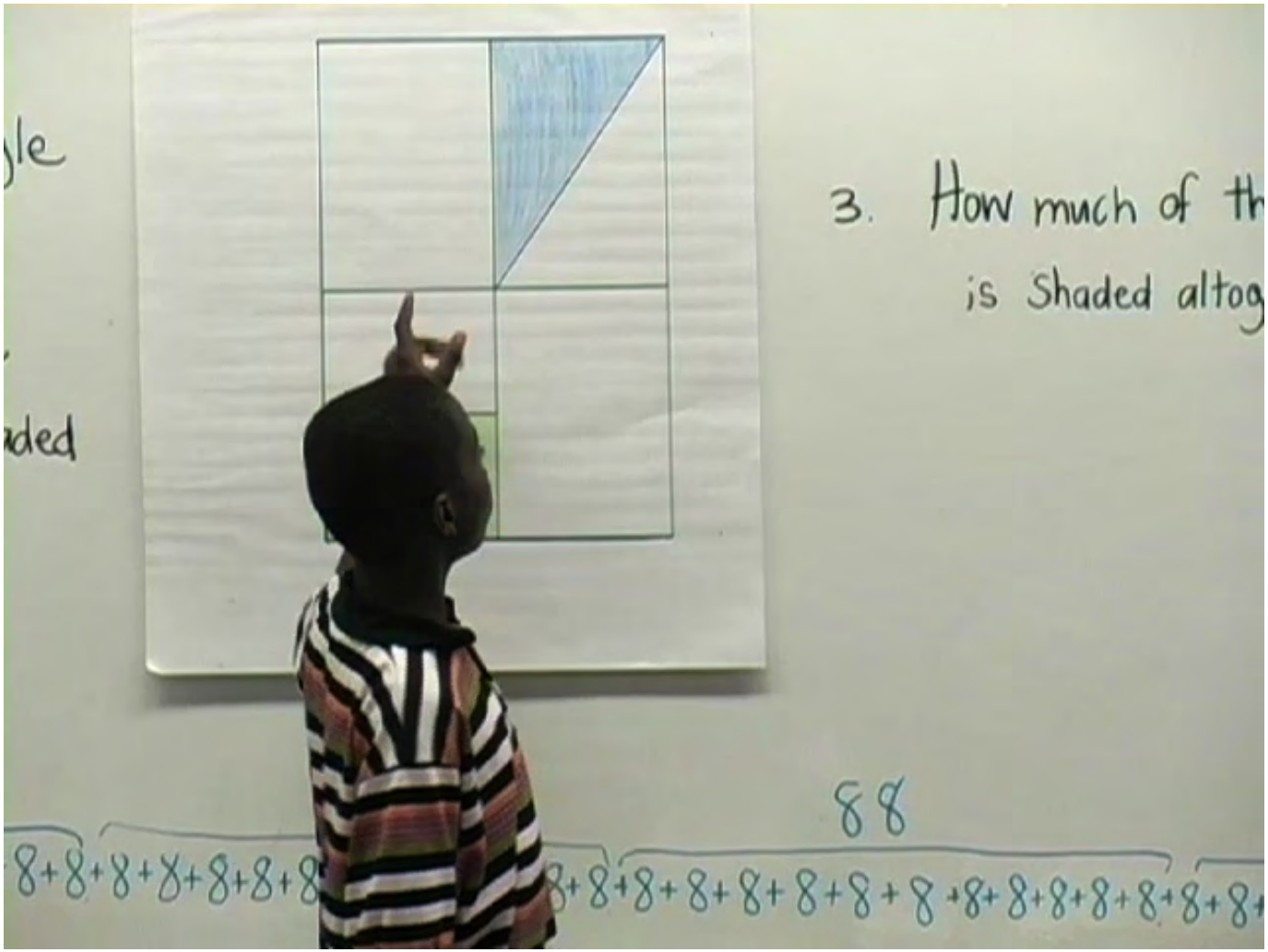
Mathematical task, grade 4-5



- What fraction of the big rectangle is shaded blue?
- What fraction of the big rectangle is shaded green?
- What fraction of the big rectangle is shaded altogether?

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Deborah



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Some common instructional practices

1. Managing whole group discourse equitably and in support of all students' learning
   - Allocating turns to speak
   - Supporting practices of listening and speaking
   - Using public writing surfaces
2. Designing and posing questions for specific instructional purposes
3. Establishing norms and routines for classroom discourse and work that are central to content
4. Making content (e.g., specific problems, ideas, processes) explicit through explanation, modeling, representations, and examples
5. Recognizing particular common patterns of student thinking and development in a specific domain
6. Implementing organizational routines, procedures, and strategies to support a respectful and equitable learning environment

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How particular is teaching? Why does this matter?

- If it is all contextual and personal, then the common comprises mostly principles and values
- Leaves much to the individual practitioner to develop his or her own practice
- Is this a blueprint for responsive and responsible teaching for all students? Or is this a risky proposition in the interest of all students?

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③ "Unpacking"

A paradox of teaching: In order to teach, must know content very well oneself; in order to teach, must think, know, and keep learning it from learners' perspectives

What is it to *unpack* content with an ear to someone else's mind?

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An example: Analyzing errors

What mathematical steps could have produced this answer?

(a)

$$\begin{array}{r} 49 \\ \times\ 25 \\ \hline 405 \\ 108 \\ \hline 1485 \end{array}$$

(b)

$$\begin{array}{r} 49 \\ \times\ 25 \\ \hline 225 \\ 100 \\ \hline 325 \end{array}$$

(c)

$$\begin{array}{r} 49 \\ \times\ 25 \\ \hline 1250 \\ 25 \\ \hline 1275 \end{array}$$

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EXPLORATION #3
What is involved in knowing someone else's perspective?

How would you explain to a young student what it means to "summarize" a short text?

Work with 1-2 other people and actually produce explanations. Analyze the strengths and problems of each one, imagining how an 8-year old would understand.

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Listening to learners' ideas



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What is involved in unpacking? Why does this matter?

- Unlearning what is tacit
- Relearning into multiple forms
- Putting one's own thinking on the back burner, and being genuinely attentive to someone else's thinking
- Much more than a special kind of academic task: Doing this in real time, interactively

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Toward a profession of teaching

What do we need to make the practice of teaching broadly learnable in ways that are reliable, equitable, and responsible?

What challenges will we face?

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Common resources for building professional practice

1. Develop a common technical and professional language for critical elements of the work (e.g., questions)
2. Build broadly shared and accessible collections from practice (student thinking, classroom episodes, "textbook cases," unpacking of common core content ideas and practices) from a wide and representative set of contexts and communities
3. Develop ways to work on practice collectively that help to define what is common, what is contextual, what is personal/ stylistic

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Common professional standards for practice

1. Agreements about the specific high-leverage capabilities necessary for independent responsible practice
2. Direct assessments of those capabilities

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It won't be easy.

1. It will take a movement to build a rigorous system of professional training for the responsibility of teaching our nation's youth, in order to achieve fairness in common access to skilled teaching.
2. It is not the "American way" — it is detailed (even prescriptive), not individually discretionary, common.
3. It focuses on **teaching**, not **teachers.** It focuses on building capacity, not finding talent and firing.

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TeachingWorks

What *is* TeachingWorks?

- A national organization housed at the University of Michigan School of Education
- Based on work done at the University of Michigan in our own programs and also in partnership with other programs and organizations
- Focused on ensuring that every child gets skillful teaching every single year by building strong professional infrastructure for the training, development, and assessment of teaching practice

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TeachingWorks

Four main arenas of work

① Advancing the development of a common curriculum for teaching

② Developing performance assessments of specific high-leverage practices that appraise a teacher's readiness for independent practice

③ Providing training for those who work with teachers

④ Making available trustworthy information and data about teaching

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THANK YOU!

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Slides will be available on my website
("Google" Deborah Ball)

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