



The Work of Teaching and the Challenge for Teacher Education

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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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Overview of today's argument

1. Reframing the problem of "teacher quality" and educational inequity
2. Three challenges to solving the problem
3. What it would take to build a professional system of training for teaching practice

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Our problem

1. Evidence of teaching effects has spurred increased interest in importance of *teaching*.
2. Broad skepticism exists about the efficacy of teacher education and professional development
3. Education professionals are often not effective advocates for teacher education.
4. The result: A predominant focus on recruitment, outcomes, and sorting — instead of training. This does not augur well for redressing educational inequity and uneven quality.

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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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No professionally grounded system for teachers' training

1. No common curriculum for the professional training of teachers for new or practicing teachers — i.e., specific practices and skills that are professionally agreed upon
2. Over 2,000 independent providers of initial teacher training, and a vast array of professional development providers
3. No common standard of performance for entry to independent practice with (on) young people

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



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Today's focus

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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Three challenges to specifying a common, detailed professional core

① Broad faith in teaching as "natural"

② Underdeveloped professional language

③ Particularity of teaching practice

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① Broad faith in teaching as "natural"

Everyone teaches

Many professional teachers without professional training (e.g., university faculty)

Extensive familiarity makes it seem commonplace and dependent on common sense

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EXPLORATION #1: How natural is teaching?

- Two examples of common tasks of teaching elementary mathematics
- How simple are these for you if you lack professional training?

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Knowing how to do multi-digit multiplication

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

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Seeing multiplication from the learner's perspective

(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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② 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 #2
Is there a common technical language for teaching 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 technical language do we have?

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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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③ The particularity of teaching

Subject matters

Context matters

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

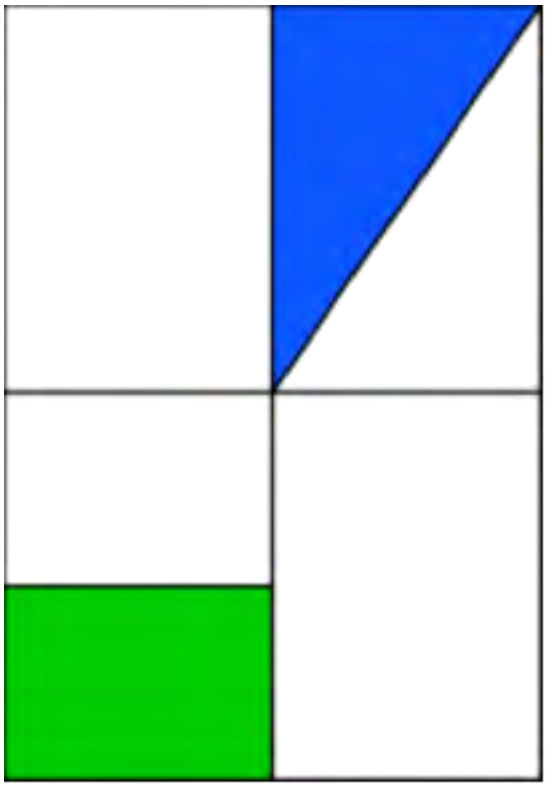
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EXPLORATION #3
How particular is teaching?

- 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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Teaching fractions

View video:
http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/78024

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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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Toward a professional system of training for teaching practice

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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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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$$9\frac{2}{10}$$

$$-\ 6\frac{7}{10}$$

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Does this student understand?

$$\begin{array}{r} 9\frac{2}{10} \\ -\ 6\frac{7}{10} \\ \hline 2\frac{5}{10} \end{array}$$

POSSIBILITIES?

1. The student does understand the underlying concepts.
2. The student subtracted "up" and made a basic calculational error.
3. The student overgeneralized from base 10 whole number subtraction.

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ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Diagnosis: Eliciting and interpreting children's thinking

1. Analyze students' work on fraction tasks
2. Prepare for an interaction with a standardized student about one piece of student work
3. Probe the standardized student's thinking to understand the steps she took as well as why she performed the particular steps
4. Respond to questions about the diagnosis

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Building new assessments of teaching practice

- Designed for licensure and advanced certification
- Improvement-oriented: Useful also for diagnosis and continuous improvement of teaching
- Linked to teaching specific academic content (the Common Core State Standards)
- Based on actual performance of teaching
- Conducted in a variety of settings for practice, depending on what is being assessed
- Rooted in deliberate evidence base for the substance and validity of the assessment

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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) 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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It won't be easy.

1. The scale of the enterprise is vast and the U.S. has weak educational infrastructure.
2. 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.
3. It focuses on **teaching**, not **teachers.** It focuses on building capacity, not finding talent and firing.
4. It is not the "American way" — it is detailed (even prescriptive), not individually discretionary, common.

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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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Four main arenas of work

① Supporting the development of a common curriculum for teaching

② Building resources for teaching practice, and 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 Advancing the case for the importance of effective professional training

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THANK YOU!

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

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