Teacher Mentoring Sessions and Its Discursive Practices

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Introduction

This study explores discursive practices of teacher mentoring sessions in the pre-service teacher education program at a U.S. government agency through examining lesson planning mentoring sessions between teacher educators and new teachers.

Research on teacher development identified the beginning years of teaching as particularly formative for continuing professional growth.

Pedagogical content knowledge, intersection of subject-specific knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of the teaching context, (Shulman, 1987)forms during this period.

Teachers' knowledge and beliefs influence teachers' interpretations of classroom practices.

Freeman & Johnson (1998)

- Successful programs of foreign language teacher education are ones in which graduated teachers realize high levels of student achievement through a learned pedagogical content knowledge.

- The next step toward improving professional development might benefit from content-specific professional support and mentoring.

Watzke (2007)

Research Questions

- What are the dynamics of discursive practices between teacher educators and new teachers during one-on-one lesson planning mentoring sessions?

- What kind of learning patterns occur during interactions between teacher educators and new teachers?

Setting in Context

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) provides pre-service teacher education, Instructor Certification Course (ICC), for new teachers in accordance with institutional mission and goals.

The institution provides high technology-supported, intense language curriculum to produce linguists for the national security.

The curriculum focuses on training students to apply language use in real-life situations.

ICC (160 hours) covers a variety of topics including DLIFLC mission & requirements, student composition, learning concepts, various language teaching methodologies, learning styles, testing, technology, lesson planning and practicum.

Setting in Context

- Within ICC, new teacher mentoring takes place through one-on-one tailored lesson planning sessions between teacher educators and new teachers prior to practicum. New teachers should design for 50-minute lesson.

- This study examines tailored lesson planning sessions between ICC instructors (a.k.a., facilitators) and novice teachers, and examine how the zone of proximal development (ZPD) occurs through institutionally designed teacher education program.

- Three teacher educators (Arabic, Korean, and French; one male & two females) audio-recorded lesson planning mentoring sessions. Pseudonyms were used.

- Collection of lesson plans before and after lesson planning sessions.

- Transcription of three tailored lesson planning sessions.

- Content and discourse analysis of the lesson planning discursive practices.

- Despite three teacher educators individual differences in lesson planning mentoring, facilitators overall had a similar approach in interacting with new teachers during one-on-one lesson planning sessions.

- Teacher educators exercised more authoritative role. Nevertheless, new teachers did not stay as passive recipients. Negotiation of meaning constantly occurred. New teachers voiced out their stances and justified their groundings.

Teacher Educators' Discursive Practices

The prominent speech pattern emerging across facilitators were checking the work status and providing guidance.

1. **Checking the Work Status**

-   Identify the goal and objectives, topic of the lesson, students' level, level of activities, materials to be covered, and the content of the lesson.

    [Examples]
    H: "So you're at the end of first semester or beginning of second semester."

-   Check the number of students, time allotment, teachers' ideas of activity design, allocation of different stages of activity in accordance with lesson plan format, and implementation of activities.

    [Examples]
    V: "Teacher asks each student in a new group- when did you form new group?"

    P: "how long do you plan to do that?"

Teacher Educators' Discursive Practices

- Seeking available resources for teachers, clarifications, and checking teachers' understanding of facilitators' feedback.

[Example]
H: "are we on the same page?"

2. Guidance
-Suggest ideas for activity design, organization of the sequence of activities, modifying and/or supplementing activities, material preparation

[Example]
H: "you can provide pictures in association with that. Then by doing that, you can check how much they know related to their vocab, if you're talking about directions and shopping items here and then you can lead-in to train traveling."

Teacher Educators' Discursive Practices

2. Guidance

-guiding the underlying concept of Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) lesson plan format and how to allocate different activities accordingly in a 50-minute lesson.

[Example]

P: "would you think that what's the Presentation could be the Lead-in, introduction of your lesson?"

-guidance on underlying principles of activity design that influence students' learning and promote foreign language acquisition.

Teacher Educators' Discursive Practices

3. Assessment
- "it seems great," "pretty good, alright,"etc.
- Diagnose teachers' current work status.
- Positions facilitators in a higher power role.

4. Acknowledgement and Acceptance
- "yeah," "okay"
- Signals to novice teachers that facilitators are listening to the teachers on an equal stance when teachers explain their plans, share rationale for activity design, and/or defend ideas.

Teacher Educators' Discursive Practices

5. Miscellaneous

- Teacher educator sharing personal experience to assist teachers' understanding of the connection between the topic and activity design.

[Example]

(The topic was on train travel in China)

H: "have you ever had bagpacking trip to Europe?"

Novice Teachers' Discursive Practices

While seeking guidance from facilitators, acknowledging and confirming their comments, novice teachers also defended their ideas and activity plan and asked for clarifications of facilitators' comments.

1. Seeking Guidance

- Novice teachers situated themselves as subordinates, having lower expertise and power.

- Seek approval and guidance of facilitators' ideas on activity design, organization of activities in 50-minute lesson, elements to be included in a lesson plan, and facilitators' professional opinion of the lesson overall.

[Example]
T: "It's kind of like applying the vocabulary that they have to the pictures. Does that make sense?"

T: "so then what's Presentation?"

Novice Teachers' Discursive Practices

2. Explanation

- As the principle designer of the lesson, novice teachers provide explanations of their reasoning underlying sequencing of activities, adoption of certain materials based on existing curriculum.

- Teacher explanations of their lesson act as starting point of communication between teacher educators and novice teachers. Facilitators start to understand teachers' reasoning and provide them with guidance when necessary.

Novice Teachers' Discursive Practices

2. Explanation

- Teacher explanations include descriptions of lesson content, their language curriculum, rationale of activity design and implementation, time allotment of activities, grouping of students, and ideas for planning. Teachers also provide clarifications of lesson planning and expected learning outcomes from students.

[Examples]

T: "I have various slides from Google, images used on Smartboard, and I'll show some of these pictures on SmartBoard and ask them to generate vocab to describe the pictures, as basic as person, dress, food that kind of stuff. Then I'll share with them some of the new vocab that will be included in the lesson."

N: "I have six students, I'm going to put them in three groups to pair them up."

Novice Teachers' Discursive Practices

3. Reflective Practices

- Novice teachers engage in reflective practices while co-participating and negotiating meaning with teacher educators.
- Upon reflection, novice teachers modify/reorganize the sequence of activities, allocation of time, activity design and implementation.
- Novice teachers also gained deeper understanding of the relationship between lesson plan format and activity design.

  [Example]
  B: "oh yeah, that was the purpose of the introduction. The warm-up kind of assess where they know all the vocab is gone over"

Novice Teachers' Discursive Practices

4. Self-assessment

- Teachers also made self-assessment of their lesson plan.

Findings

- Comparison of lesson plans before and after mentoring reveals that lesson plans overall were modified/revised to reflect expected teaching practices within DLIFLC, i.e., designing a lesson following Presentation-Practice-Production in 50-minute lesson, implementing task-based instruction.

Conclusion

- Successful interaction presupposes a shared knowledge of the world and a shared internal context "intersubjectivity" built between interactional partners. (Wells,1981)

- One-on-one lesson planning sessions at DLIFLC was a "collaborative activity." Teacher educators and novice teachers had different expertise and knowledge base. Teacher educators had more resource on institutional resources and constraints, institutional expectations, and theoretical concepts underlying activity design. Novice teachers had expertise in foreign language and what materials to cover.

- The final product (i.e., revised lesson plan) was a result of the collaboration of shared knowledge.
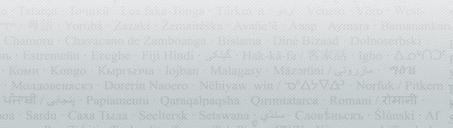
Conclusion

- Collaborative and supportive environment are more important factors of teacher learning   (Mann & Tang, 2012)

- Interaction patterns co-constructed by participants have greater impact on providing learning opportunities than individual capability of co-participants (Watanabe, 2008).

- The true impact of professional development comes about when efforts are sustained over time, and when support structures exist that allow participants to receive modeling and advice from more experienced peers (Diaz Maggioli, 2003).

Conclusion

- Collaborative and supportive learning environment during DLIFLC pre-service teacher education program generated ZPD conducive to effective teacher learning and cognitive development.

- Rather than treating novice teachers as tabla rasa and generating hierarchical situation, regarding new teachers as peers with expertise in different types of knowledge can promote better learning and development.

Thank You!

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