Chapter 28
Attempting to Bridge Theory to Practice:
Preparing for Moving Day with Tele-Observation in Social Studies Methods

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ABSTRACT

Preparing teacher candidates to move from the methods course to K-12 classrooms is not an easy task. Educational methods instructors desire to provide a common experience with exemplars of powerful instruction for their teacher candidates. This project builds on previous research related to tele-observation by presenting an observation scheme while capturing a "live case" of social studies instruction prior to the practicum experience with the help of videoconference capabilities. The research questions guiding this study include: (a) In what way (s) could videoconference be part of the process of bridging theory to practice? (b) In what way (s) will teacher candidates pack up the concepts from the methods course and take them to their own practicum experience? Data sources include a three part tele-observation survey and the context of the live case is shared. Teacher candidates report teaching strategies and management strategies they will use in the classroom following the tele-observation experience.

INTRODUCTION

Think about your first moving day. Anyone who has ever moved knows it can be a stressful day. There is confusion as to where things go; some boxes can be labeled, some are not, some boxes are strong and sturdy, while some fall apart and end up in the trash. Some things are left behind on moving day and some things are given away. Most people have had a stressful moving day while others have a stress free time where a moving company moved everything for them. Regardless, they will still have to decide where certain things will be placed in their new home. In a sense, new

teachers and preservice teachers are in a constant moving day, because they are always trying to "pack and unpack" the content of their methods classes, so that one day, they can move into their own classroom. What do they do with what they see in the practicums and what they learn in all of their methods courses, assigned readings, and interactions with other professionals? Ultimately, teacher candidates should be able to transfer their knowledge from what Snow (2005) calls declarative knowledge to reflective knowledge with their methods instructors facilitating the move.

Methods professors want to help bridge theory to practice for the teacher candidates and want to make "moving day" from methods courses to classroom instruction a smooth transition (O'Connor, Good, & Greene, 2006). This is difficult to do in any content area, especially social studies methods. First, it is difficult to find social studies taught in the elementary classroom since it is not a tested subject in some states (Rock, Heafner, Oldendorf, Passe, O'Connor, Good, & Byrd, 2006). It is difficult for teacher candidates to connect university learning to classroom practice when they are not seeing the subject taught in the classroom (Schrum, 1999). The purpose of this study is to build on previous tele-observation projects in social studies methods classes and to examine two research questions: a) In what way (s) could videoconference be part of the process of bridging theory to practice? And b) In what way (s) will teacher candidates pack up the methods course and take it with them to their own practicum experience?

BACKGROUND

A review of the literature reveals various projects where methods instructors in various subject areas try to bridge theory to practice with various techniques; including the use of closed circuit television, case studies, digital video, videocases, videotaped lesson samples, and interactive video-conference experiences have been used in practice

(Bjerstedt, 1967; Bronack, Kilbane, Herbert, & McNergney, 1999; Harris, 1999; Hoy & Merkley, 1989; Mason, 2001; and Karran, Berson & Mason, 2001) Institutions of higher education have used videoconferencing as a central tool for linking theory to practice and collaboration for undergraduate teachers in social studies methods (Bell & Unger, 2003; Good, O'Connor, & Greene, 2005; Kent, 2007; Vannatta & Reinhart, 1999; Venn, Moore & Gunter, 2001).

The focus of student teaching and other field experiences should be on placing candidates in exemplary classrooms with exemplary teachers (Backes & Backes, 1999), where observation of instruction matches closely to what is learned in the methods course. Observation is only part of the field experience. Teacher candidates need experience actually teaching. You can't learn to play a sport only by *watching* a game; however, observing the techniques of an Olympic athlete may help. Unfortunately, observing best practices in the classroom is not always as easy as buying a ticket to a game or turning on ESPN. In social studies, it is possible the classroom teacher will not welcome a social studies methods field placement because of the marginalization of the subject. Field experiences can provide a connection between theory and practice. Yet, Bednar, Ryan, and Sweeder (1994) point out that even when clinical teachers mentor teacher candidates, they often do so without meaningful communication with the institution of higher education sponsoring the teacher candidate. Progressively, teacher educators are turning to technology and technologically mediated assistance to address the limitations of traditional observation experiences.

Videoconferencing

There is importance in "being there" to learn, but when being there is intrusive or may impact student's behavior it is better to find another way. Videoconference allows you to "be there" through non- intrusive technology connection (Goldman,

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