

Leveraging the Power of Collaborative Reflection to Promote Learning Through Clinical Practice

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Abstract: Clinical fieldwork is increasingly central to teacher education programs. This poster reports on the development of a new teacher education program, in which collaborative structures are being incorporated to support teacher candidates' reflection on and learning from their clinical experiences. Preliminary findings from the first two iterations of the program suggest that collaborative reflection is fostering more connections between theory and practice as well as the development of new understandings about problems of practice.

Introduction

For the past decade, there has been a movement to center teacher education on clinical practice (i.e. work in authentic educational settings; Zeichner, 2010). While teacher candidates are spending more time than ever in K-12 classrooms, this should not be equated with improved preparation. Reflection in and on clinical experiences is necessary for teacher candidates to recognize competent practice, self-assess, and figure out a path towards increased competence (Schön, 1987). However, effective reflective practice is unlikely when teacher candidates are isolated in their clinical settings, separated from peers, and paired with mentor teachers who have limited time to engage in reflective discourse. Without the benefit of multiple perspectives, teacher candidates are likely to rationalize problematic practices rather than reflecting critically (Loughran, 2002). This poster reports on the development of a clinical program in a new teacher education program, in which collaborative structures are being designed to foster peer-to-peer reflection, ultimately leading to individual and collaborative learning.

Theory and design of clinical program structures

We view collaborative reflection as a form of knowledge building discourse (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2014). As a group discusses a situation, group members offer multiple perspectives, leading to a deeper understanding of the situation and ultimately the development of new knowledge about how to respond. In the development of our clinical program, we are intentionally seeking to embed ongoing opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect collaboratively with peers and teacher educators about the situations that they encounter in their clinical experiences. In this poster, we describe the development of two structures that are designed to work synergistically to promote cycles of collaborative reflection and enactment, as depicted in Figure 1. First, collaborative reflection begins in the clinical setting through paired clinical placements, in which two teacher candidates are placed in the same secondary classroom. Clinical partners have daily opportunities to frame their shared experience dialogically as they seek to make meaning and decide on future actions. Second, several teacher candidates and a teacher educator reflect collaboratively outside of the clinical setting during weekly clinical debriefs. These group reflective sessions offer the potential for radical reframing of clinical experiences. Ultimately, the clinical debrief feeds back into clinical practice, as teacher candidates return to the field with collaboratively constructed new knowledge and plans.

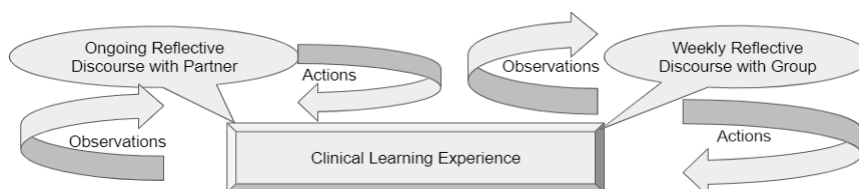


Figure 1. Structures for collaborative reflection in the clinical program.

Methodology

We are developing the clinical program through a design-based research approach (Barab & Squire, 2004) that employs iterative cycles of design, implementation, and evaluation. Designed by teacher educators in

collaboration with veteran teachers and teacher candidates, and informed by a review of teacher education literature, the clinical program is currently in its second iteration. The first iteration involved ten teacher candidates who attended clinical placements in schools weekly on Tuesdays and in afterschool programs on Wednesdays from October 2017 through June 2018. Surveys and interviews with teacher candidates were used to understand how the clinical program was supporting their learning and to identify areas for improvement. Initial findings were incorporated into the second iteration, which is scheduled to run from September 2018 through June 2019 with 20 teacher candidates. We are collecting data including teacher candidates' written reflections, records from clinical debrief conversations, interviews, and focus groups to enable evaluation of the collaborative structures and inform further iterations.

Preliminary findings

Preliminary findings from the first iteration of the clinical program suggest that both structures for collaborative reflection fostered teacher candidate learning. The paired clinical placement model enhanced teacher candidate learning in two main ways. First, shared knowledge of both the teacher education program context and the secondary classroom fostered teacher candidates' ability to bridge theory and practice as they engaged in activities including collaborative planning, observations of practice, and feedback conversations. Second, partners were able to develop a fuller picture of problems that they encountered in their clinical settings through reflective discussions in which they pooled their observations. Our initial findings suggest that although clinical partners were able to learn together, these novices needed more support to process their feelings. To scaffold daily reflection during the second iteration, we developed a phone-based reflection tool called CatBot (Clinical After Thought Bot), which sends a reminder to reflect and generates reflection prompts based on a teacher candidate's self-reported emotions.

Clinical debrief also fostered a deeper understanding of problems of practice, through the use of conversational protocols designed for unpacking the context of a problem. While this structure helped teacher candidates to see problems in new ways, some expressed a desire for more action-oriented conversations. Therefore, clinical debrief was redesigned in the second iteration to help the group move from reflection to action. Debrief conversations now use a protocol based on the innovator's compass (Ben-Ur, 2016), to understand a problem from the perspective of the person/group at the center of the problem and ultimately design an experiment that the teacher candidate who brought the problem can try out. We expect that these changes will foster more effective reflection, and will share results from the second iteration at the poster session.

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