Mapping the Teacher Education Terrain for Novices

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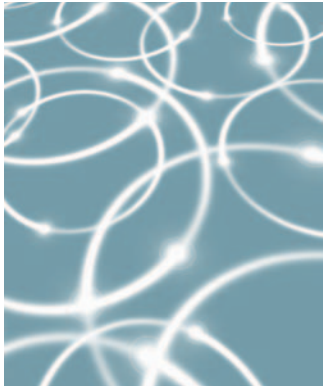**75** PUBLICATIONS **3,168** CITATIONS

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Mapping the teacher education terrain for novices

A teacher education program patterned after the rounds and rotations of medical training seeks to close gaps and fault lines between schools of education, liberal arts, and classrooms.

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Teacher education in the U.S. suffers from a form of continental drift with deep fault lines. Most teachers learn to teach in three disconnected "lands" — colleges of arts and science, schools of education, and K-12 classrooms. Each of these instructional continents offers settings for preservice teachers to develop important resources. However, there is little to help preservice travelers navigate within and bridge across these spaces.

Consider, for example, learning to teach secondary history or social studies. The required sequence comprises ill-organized sets of educational experiences in different spaces (e.g., history seminars, education classes, high school classrooms), for different purposes (i.e., to learn history, to learn to teach history, to observe classrooms), and led by people who don't work with one another (history professors, education professors, and cooperating teacher mentors) and may never even have met.

These divisions in the preparation of history teachers are widely recognized. But, there is also disconnection *within* each of those spaces. For example, most preservice history teachers take more than four-fifths of their courses in arts and sciences. Yet, they often meander through a maze of history electives, using personal interests, classmates'

recommendations, professors' reputations, and course availability to shape their courses of study. However strong particular courses or instructors may be, whether prospective educators acquire the content knowledge they need to be effective teachers depends on whether they took a

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particular course in a particular space at a particular time. Further, the absence of defined pathways or roadblocks among subject-matter courses will make it difficult and less likely that preservice teachers will assemble a coherent and suitable body of knowledge and skills.

Prospective history teachers experience something similar in their education courses. Scholars have long recognized the gaps between colleges of arts and sciences and schools of education. But many teacher education programs have their own mini-

fault lines dividing courses in psychology from those in education foundations, or literacy, or methods.

Preservice learning also is a hodgepodge outside university classrooms. Prospective teachers spend time in the field observing, practicing teaching, and eventually taking responsibility for one or more classes during "student teaching." The practicing teachers in whose classrooms they student teach often lack detailed knowledge about the preservice teachers' training program. Their teaching practice is typically framed by their own interests and goals, the orientations of their departments, and the imperatives of the local community and policy environments.

Thus, there are as many hidden fault lines within each of these settings as there are among the three continents of teacher education. These compartmentalized and loosely coupled field experiences, liberal arts classes, and professional education courses are typical (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Labaree, 2004; Weick, 1976). Although each space contributes to learning, each does so in episodic ways that essentially require the preservice teacher to construct the connections. In short, the person least equipped to navigate among and across these different sites has the

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task of coordinating disparate experiences, concepts, and discourses into a meaningful and useful whole.

Since 2005, we've been engaged in the Rounds Project, which has been driven by the recognition that, like the earth's continents, the continents of teacher education cannot be fully joined. We are trying to build a navigational system that connects these spaces for novice teachers.

Reconnecting the continents

The Rounds Project required restructuring our secondary program and entailed seven key reforms. The brief description that follows illustrates the various dimensions of the project. Interested readers can learn more at www.sitemaker.umich.edu/roundsproject/home.

1. Revising the course sequence.

We began our work six years ago within the University of Michigan's secondary teacher education program. At that time, preservice teachers, whom we now call teaching interns (TIs), took four education courses, accompanied by relatively un-

structured field experiences across three semesters. Although students could make connections among courses within and across semesters, those connections depended on how much a particular faculty member chose to bring together instructors of multiple sections or across semesters.

2. Developing disciplinary cohorts.

Before this project, we required all secondary content majors to take the same "content literacy" course. We have since changed the program and now require interns to take a course specifically focused on literacy instruction in their disciplines — for example, historical/social literacy, scientific literacy, and mathematical literacy. This change helps students develop a deeper understanding of and practices in disciplinary subject matter and literacy theory and instruction, their arts and science courses, and their school-based field experiences. The disciplinary literacy course and the subsequent disciplinary methods course are tightly connected. Disciplinary literacy is the common touchstone as instructors and TIs moved across and through the program.

3. Assessing and tracking interns' development.

We have developed assessment tools to evaluate the growth of TI learning over the three semesters in the program. These tools include an attitudinal and dispositions inventory, performance assessments, videos of TIs teaching, and a series of in-depth interviews with some TIs. With these assessments, we can see the TIs' understandings of disciplinary literacy instruction and assess the TIs on core practices of planning for instruction, ana-

lyzing instructional texts, and assessing student learning. In short, the assessments helped us develop markers of preservice and beginning teacher knowledge and skill. On these assessments, most TIs moved from vague to specific

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responses, especially with respect to the kinds of teaching practices they would consider using. They also shifted from a focus on mechanics of writing to content and argument structure. Our analysis of our students' performance data helped identify areas where we could improve instruction in individual courses, across the program, and in field experiences.

4. Focusing on coherence.

The main focus of our ongoing effort is on increasing the *curricular coherence* across courses and semesters, and between the university and the field. Early in our work, we shared the central concepts and assignments of our respective courses — the disciplinary literacy course in the first semester (Moje) and content methods course (Bain) during the second semester — using them to plan the entire range of courses

and field experiences in the program. Furthermore, we explicitly referred to each other's assignments so the prospective teachers could see connections across semesters. Building such connections necessitated our attending each other's courses so we could understand and refer to what our students had or would learn. We also redeveloped course assignments, repurposed readings, and even combined course web sites. Working across semesters and working with data from assessments helped us construct coherent pathways to develop TIs' skill in designing and enacting instruction.

To establish a stronger connection among the three semesters of the program, we have also created "handovers" that will prepare new instructors to work with teaching interns. Hospitals use hand-overs to inform new shifts of physicians and nurses about the status of patients with whom they will be working. Building on that model, instructors create documents that will be handed over to the next instructor elaborating upon the progress, strengths, and weaknesses of the TIs. The hand-over allows new instructors to prepare for the needs and strengths of the incoming cohort.

5. Focusing on graduate students as prospective teacher educators.

The hand-overs help provide a cohesive experience for TIs, but because our instructional work is part of a larger program of professional education, we attend equally to the education of future teacher educators and education researchers (our graduate students), classroom teachers, and public school administrators. Thus our innovation expanded to include work with

graduate student instructors (GSIs) and cooperating teachers in area schools. We organized weekly meetings with instructors — GSIs, lecturers, and clinical faculty — who teach different courses across the three semesters in the program. These meetings help attendees understand the program's sequencing and progressions and also prepare GSIs to do the work of teacher education.

6. Applying rotations and rounds to the program.

Three years ago, we began experimenting with teaching rotations by moving TIs through multiple school sites, classrooms, and focused tasks of teaching. Groups of TIs move across three to four field sites to work on high-leverage instructional practices with veteran teachers who we carefully selected to model a particular aspect of effective teaching. In first-semester rotations, TIs focused on selecting and using texts of instruction, planning for instruction, assessing and learning from students, and developing student writing. In the second-semester rotations, TIs integrate these components around teaching concepts using multiple texts, and constructing and using different tools to assess secondary students' learning. Over two terms, we guide TIs' movement across public and independent schools in urban, exurban, and suburban school settings, enabling them to work on these teaching tasks with a range of middle and high school students. TIs work on important instructional practices in five different classrooms in five different school settings over two semesters followed by a full semester of student teaching in one site.

During their rotations, field instructors and lead faculty in the Rounds Project

engage in teaching rounds with the TIs in classrooms. As we conduct rounds, we model text selection, lesson planning, and teaching practices. We also intervene in ways that enable interns to engage in practice on the spot. Rather than wait until the end of a lesson to debrief its strengths and challenges, we intervene to allow the intern to pick up on our practice. This just-in-time intervention is similar to the experience that medical interns have when working with patients. Thus, the Rounds Project enables us to focus on both context-specific features of quality instruction and those that cross socioeconomic contexts.

7. Changing the discourse.

As a result of visiting multiple classrooms to work with TIs, we saw how rarely "cooperating teachers" were providing on-the-spot interventions. We wanted these veteran teachers to intervene, much as an attending physician would intervene with a medical intern. Attending physicians would never let an intern perform a medical procedure incorrectly and debrief *after* the harm had been done. To help signal and readjust expectations, we shifted to using the phrase "attending teacher" to emphasize the expert-novice relationship and to underscore that protecting the educational experience of the secondary students remains everyone's paramount goal. We also changed the phrase "preservice teacher" to "teaching intern" to signal that TIs should see their role in the field as analogous to that of medical interns in a clinic. This highlights everyone's professional obligations and responsibilities of working with children and youth, while reminding interns that they are engaged in an apprenticeship experience. These simple changes to the discourse signal radical changes in our approach and, we hope, in the way people will begin to think about the work of educating teachers.
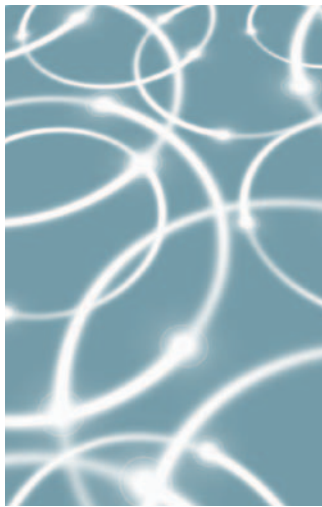
Reconnecting the spaces

Systemic reform of teacher education requires bringing together participants, concepts, and spaces in which teaching and learning occur. This work involves something more than tinkering, but less than whole-scale restructuring or reinvention (Kennedy, 2010). As we have analyzed our work, we have searched for ways to describe the nature of our attempts to build bridges and forge new pathways in the program. Words such as iterative, incremental, and dialogic have floated around our team meetings, but, in the end, the work seems best described via Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the spiral relationship of tool use and consciousness, wherein each new move enabled by a particular tool or, in our case, a reform, allows for or reveals new issues, new possibilities, and new ways of thinking about and engaging in the education of teachers. Each change we make either triggers a new possibility for enhancing our practice or reveals a disconnected fragment that was invisible before the change. Each innovation thus inspired a host of new innovations, making the Rounds Project a dynamic and evolving teacher education program that responds to opportunities and to changes in the surrounding contexts.

What makes the Rounds Project appealing is not simply the rotations and the rounds. Most important is building coherence among participants (interns, attendings, field instructors, and faculty members), spaces (subject-area major courses, education courses, and K-12 school settings), and concepts (disciplinary substance, practices, and literacies). The rotations and rounds are useful because they help participants circulate through the "continents" of teacher education. Still, a more important tool in our work is institutionalizing the bridging and communication tools to cross physical, social, and discursive spaces of teacher education. For example, using disciplinary literacy has allowed us to navigate across disciplinary boundaries, physical and social spaces, and discourse communities as we talk with historians, history teachers, literacy teachers, history educators, and literacy educators.

The role of lead faculty members who work routinely in school spaces, while attending teachers routinely lead discussions of teaching in university spaces, cannot be overestimated. Our newest innovation is a series of Grand Rounds sessions at the university where attending teachers, teaching interns, and faculty and graduate student instructors come together to analyze problems of practice. Just as society seeks to enhance the ability of children and youth to navigate multiple disciplinary and linguistic domains (Moje, 2007), teacher educators must also navigate multiple domains to help reduce the fragmentation their students experience as they learn to be professional educators. We cannot leave the work of learning to navigate the multiple contexts of teaching and learning to the novices; the Rounds Project, which could be replicated in many forms and contexts, is a good first step toward drawing the maps teaching interns need.   **K**

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