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PROMISING PRACTICE

DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTEXT THROUGH ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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Teacher work samples are one tool for helping teacher candidates learn to systematically connect their actions to the learning of each student. To connect teaching and learning effectively, candidates must understand well the teaching and learning context. To deepen candidates' abilities to analyze the teaching and learning context and plan for working most effectively within it, candidates engaged in ethnographic analysis of their mentor teachers' classroom cultures. Using digital video technology, video ethnographies were produced to illustrate salient qualities of classroom culture including routines of action, shared beliefs and values, and patterns of interaction and engagement. Through stimulated recall sessions, preservice teachers described learning a great deal about research methods, classroom culture, and how to more effectively participate in these cultures to facilitate student learning. Vignettes and classroom anecdotes illustrate research results.

The Evidence Struggle in Teacher Education

Teacher education is in need of credibility. Critiques of teacher education come from state legislators (Education Commission of the States, 2000), parents (Educational Testing Service, 2002),

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alternative providers (Hess, 2001), as well as representatives of the federal government (Paige, 2002). The educational research community agrees that little research can be brought to bear on a systematic understanding of the value of university-based teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Addressing these issues is arguably a ''red alert'' for the education research community.

Schalock, Schalock, and Ayres (2006) described the challenges inherent in generating the kinds of evidence that might be useful in addressing the concerns of our critics. What remains, however, is the sheer complexity of our efforts (Berliner, 2002). Cochran-Smith (2005) captured the range of this complexity in teacher preparation in her description of research necessary for demonstration of its efficacy,

> To get from teacher education to impact on pupil's learning requires a chain of evidence with several critical links: empirical evidence demonstrating the link between teacher preparation programs and teacher candidates' learning, empirical evidence demonstrating the link between teacher candidates' learning and their practices in actual classrooms, and empirical evidence demonstrating the link between graduates' practices and what and how much their pupils learn. Individually, each of these links is complex and challenging to estimate. When they are combined, the challenges are multiplied. (p. 303)

The complexity of this inference chain stands as a barrier to our efforts to articulate sound theory, develop programs of research, and move forward toward empirically defensible practices in teacher preparation (Floden, 2001). Currently, very few teacher preparation practices systematically attend to the linkages outlined by Cochran-Smith. Although value-added modeling (Sanders & Horn, 1998; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997) is helping us to understand how some of these connections may have an impact on pupil learning three or five years after the fact, teacher work sampling seems to be one of the few tools or frameworks that attends to each of the linkages in what might be called the preparation-teaching-learning inference chain (Girod, 2002; Henning, & Robinson, 2004; Henning et al., 2005; Schalock et al., 2006).

Teacher Work Sampling and Ethnography

Linking Preparation, Teaching, and Student Learning

Teacher work sampling, endorsed by both the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), is a multilayered approach to assist teacher candidates in efforts to connect their teaching with student learning. A teacher work sample is the product of a demonstration activity in which candidates illustrate their proficiency in several areas of critical skillfulness, that when combined, tend to contribute to student learning (Schalock, & Myton, 2002). A work sample includes parts or components (description of the setting, assessments, lesson plans . . .) that are undergirded by conceptual skills (analysis of context, selection of content and pedagogy . . .) to be demonstrated by the candidate through preparation of the work sample. Together, when completed with fidelity, the work sample stands as defensible evidence of candidates' abilities to connect their actions as teachers to the learning of their students in field experiences that provide contextually relevant settings for demonstrating proficiencies (see Table 1). As such, a teacher work sample can be a vehicle to help teacher candidates articulate, document, investigate, and reflect on teacher actions and their impact on student learning and, in this way, is a methodology useful in tracing preparation through to effect on student learning.

Several institutions across the country have embedded work sampling within their teacher preparation programs (Denner, Salzman, & Bangert, 2001; Henning & Robinson, 2004; Henning et al., 2005). To date, most conversations appearing in the literature regarding the value of work sampling have focused on policy, measurement, and evaluative efforts (Fredman, 2004; McConney & Schalock, 1996; McConney & Ayres, 1998; Schalock, H. D., 1998; Schalock, M., 1998). However, there currently are limited resources available to help faculty teach work sample concepts and skills (Girod & Girod, 2006).

The goal of this article is not to educate readers about the details of teacher work sample methodology (see Girod, 2002 for discussion) but to describe an innovative approach for helping

TABLE 1 Conceptual Skills Underlying the Components of a Teacher Work Sample

Conceptual skill	Description	Work sample component	Description
Analysis of context	Candidates must be facile in analysis of the context in which teaching and learning will occur with a particular attention toward qualities, experiences, dispositions, circumstances or other factors that may have an impact on teaching and learning.	Setting description	Candidates write a thorough description of the setting at the community, school, and classroom levels. Opportunities abound for the kinds of data to include but the consequences on teaching and learning must always be considered.
Selection of content	Candidates must be facile in selection of content that is important, powerful, and useful in the lives and estimation of students, community, and state and national standards.	Rationale and goals/objectives	Candidates offer a discussion of content selection choices and demonstration of alignment between content selected and standards governing that content and context. This is commonly done in a table or listing of standards and goals/objectives.
Selection of pedagogy	Candidates must be facile in the selection of pedagogy that is best aligned with the context, content, and student prior knowledge making learning most likely to occur efficiently and deeply.	Lesson plans	Candidates design lessons as illustrations of these selection judgments.
Assessment	Candidates must be facile in the design of measures and experiences to collect information about student prior knowledge related to learning outcomes selected, ''in-flight'' learning, and learning at the conclusion of a unit of instruction.	Assessment plan including pre-, post-, and formative tests	Candidates must offer clear and compelling logic for structuring assessment procedures in the manner chosen, illustrate how assessment items are aligned with goals and objectives (commonly through a table of specifications), and defend the assessments themselves as valid and reliable measures of student learning.

(*continued*)

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Data analysis	Candidates must be facile in the analysis of many kinds of data including prior to, during, and after instruction. This analysis must examine data in aggregate as well as disaggregated across groups such as students with special needs, ELLs, students living in poverty, and minority students.	Data analysis	Candidates must represent various ''cuts'' on learning gain data, at the individual objective level, for both individuals and groups. These data should be clearly represented and discussed appropriately.
Reflective analysis	Candidates must be facile in reflecting on their work as teacher, the progress and engagement of their students, and the interaction and alignment between setting, content, pedagogy, and assessment. Reflection is a central element of the work sample and can be viewed as an illustration of reflective capacity.	Reflective essay	Although reflection is critical to the completion of an exemplary work sample, the clearest evidence of this reflection is found at the end of the work sample in the reflective essay. In this, candidates write in analysis of their effectiveness in helping all students reach the goals and objectives as defined. Additionally, candidates should reflect on their future professional needs.
Alignment	Likely the most critical concept of all, candidates must be facile in aligning assessment procedures, learning experiences, goals and objectives, and contextual factors in a way that is most conducive to learning. There ought to be clear and compelling logic for the decisions made by the candidate; this is the essence of evidence-based decision making.	No single representation	Alignment is something that must be inferred in a teacher work sample. There is no section in a work sample that describes alignment decisions although a thoughtfully constructed one might allude to alignment decisions made throughout all the components. For example, a well-constructed work sample would offer a description of the instructional strategies chosen and how they make best sense in light of the context, the content, and the goals and objectives pursued.

teacher candidates master the goal of a teacher work sample—to more systematically connect teaching with student learning. The path of emphasis here is through deepening understanding of the teaching and learning context—articulating an empirically validated pedagogy of work sampling. Through providing a clear description of practice and research demonstrating efficacy of this pedagogy, the intent is to provide a methodology that allows teacher education institutions to more systematically ''fill the gaps'' that currently exist in Cochran-Smith's chain of inference between preparation, practices, and student learning.

Understanding Contextual Demands for Teaching and Learning

In most cases, work samples begin with analysis of the context in which teaching and learning will occur (Girod, 2002). The intent of analysis of context is to evaluate the potential constraints and affordances that may impact teaching and learning (e.g., school population SES, available school resources, student strengths and needs). Each of these will play a role in affecting teaching and subsequent student learning, necessitating teacher candidates' mastery of this aspect of the work sample process.

A challenge facing teacher candidates in the process of defining the contextual demands in their work sample is providing information that has a meaningful connection to teaching and learning. As many faculty members have expressed, too often context analyses provide information relevant to the local Chamber of Commerce but miss discussion of the potential constraints and affordances of these on teaching and learning. Similarly, in analysis of classroom level context, candidates often offered a long list of variables including the various curricula packages, classroom rules, number and genre of books, bell schedules, availability of support staff, supplies, and contents of posters on the walls without connecting those resources to the teaching and learning process explicitly.

In an effort to structure analysis of context differently—to situate it and ground it in the teaching and learning milieu—I have adopted the process of using ethnography to provide the necessary lens for teacher candidates' review of the school context. Before describing the activity that was designed and data

collected and analyzed in determining its efficacy, it is necessary to briefly review the use of ethnography in teacher education.

Ethnography in Teacher Education

Although others have traced the origins of ethnography more thoroughly (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998), for the purposes of this discussion, it is sufficient to situate the origins or ethnography in the shift of social and cultural anthropologists at the turn of the 20th century toward those methods that included direct and participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Although occasionally mired in the ''paradigm debates'' (Donmoyer, 2001; Smith & Heshusius, 1986) and struggling for legitimacy within the field of educational research, ethnography has become a popular tool for trying to understand the cultural routines and practices of education. Recently, several strands of scholarship have emerged drawing on ethnography and ethnographic analysis in teacher education settings. In particular, the following themes have been aided through the employ of ethnography methods: (a) preparing teachers in diverse settings to be more effective foreign language teachers and multicultural educators (Allen, 2000; Byram, 1996; Cain & Zarate, 1996; Eisikovits, 1995); (b) critical pedagogy and post-structuralist approaches to critiquing school systems and sociopolitical connections to the school environments (Gordon, 2000; Toohey, 1995); (c) examining multiple forms of literacy in educational settings with ethnography and sociolinguistics (Frank & Uy, 2004; Grugeon, 2005); and (d) general applications of ethnography to inform the development of general education practices (Christensen, 1996; Flake, 1992; Masami & Arani, 2006). This article is aligned with this last thread of inquiry, with the goal of the project centered on how to support teacher candidates in most effectively interfacing with the teaching and learning context, in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of each.

The Classroom Ethnography Project

The Classroom Ethnography Project was prompted by the common tendency for teacher candidates to write long descriptions of

the teaching and learning context that were missing meaningful analyses and understanding of the routines of action, shared values and beliefs, and the roles of the various school, classroom, and community stakeholders so as to more effectively foster student learning. Ethnography was selected as a strategy to assist candidates in developing a more analytic examination of the schooling context.

Phase One: Immersion in the Teaching and Learning Culture

As with all ethnography, it is necessary to spend extended periods of time in the particular culture of interest. Just as professional ethnographers, my candidates were asked to become participant observers, to take field notes, to reserve judgment, and to focus, at first, on thick descriptions of the teaching and learning context in the classrooms in which they were completing student teaching. It was important that the ethnography started at the beginning of their field placements, because the candidates had few obligations to teach at the outset, providing them with sufficient time to engage in an involved ethnographic investigation.

It should be noted that although this project is titled *classroom* ethnography, discussion commonly considered the broader school and community cultures as well as the interactions between these cultural spheres (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To provide a bit of guidance during these early immersion experiences, candidates were provided guiding questions such as ''What are typical patterns of interaction between teacher and students that exist in this culture?'' ''What tools and resources are used frequently in this culture—and more importantly, to what end?'' and ''What kinds of actions and activities contribute to the overall emotional qualities of this culture?'' Candidates were encouraged to develop their own questions of interest but emphasis was always on thick description rather than making judgments or drawing assumptions based on these observations. This phase lasted three weeks and included at least 30 minutes of observation and note-taking daily. Most candidates recorded more than 25 pages of detailed field notes describing their initial observations.

Phase Two: Sense-Making through Personal Lenses

The emphasis during phase two of the classroom ethnography project was to surface the personal beliefs, values, and ideas about teaching and learning (our personal analytical lenses) that influence the judgments made in analysis of data in phase one. To articulate these lenses, candidates completed autobiographical analyses of their own school experiences to reveal predispositions to beliefs about teaching and learning. Many candidates in this group (all secondary education license majors) viewed data about curricula and content through lenses that were rooted in the disciplinary perspectives of their particular fields of study (e.g., biology, history; see Girod & Pardales, 2006 for additional discussion).

After class routines became more transparent to the teacher candidates and initial analytic lenses had been identified, candidates selected focal points important in understanding their classrooms. They spent several days capturing digital video footage in an effort to further explore, systematize, and critique these salient cultural elements most interesting and most strongly influencing teaching and learning in that setting. Digital video was chosen as the central medium as it afforded easy manipulation, analysis, and editing. Through prior experience I also observed that the analyses became richer and more nuanced if digital video was used as it allowed us to (a) view class data with or without sound, (b) view and re-view data, and (c) most importantly, easily annotate and organize video clips.

Phase Three: Linking to Teaching and Learning

As the final step of the classroom ethnography project, candidates created digital video ethnographies that illustrated central elements of their field placement classroom culture from the perspective of their personal analytic lenses. In the end, typical video ethnographies ran between 6 and 10 minutes in length, incorporated a mix of classroom footage, text, and narration to illustrate themes and new understandings of the teaching and learning context. All ethnographies were required to end with

clear action statements about how to interact effectively in this classroom culture for the goal of maximizing student learning.

Methods

Participants

Participants included 43 teacher candidates in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at a small, regional university in the northwestern United States. Candidates were almost exclusively Caucasian, between 22 and 44 years of age (median age = 27.2 years), and pursuing licensure at the middle- and high-school levels, in a wide variety of content areas. All were admitted to the program using a competitive application process that considers GPA, prior experience working with children and adolescents, letters of recommendation, scores on Praxis I and appropriate Praxis II tests, and an interview process that rated applicants interpersonal skills. Participants were enrolled in a research methods course during the third term of a four-term preparation program. The classroom ethnography project was a course requirement though all candidates were given the choice of opting out of participation in this study.

Data Collection and Analyses

Data were derived from stimulated recall sessions conducted with participants at the conclusion of the classroom ethnography project. Participants watched their video ethnographies with two researchers (lead author and a university faculty collaborator), and a semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide these stimulated recall sessions. The interview protocol focused on the cultural elements highlighted in the video ethnography, their potential constraints and affordances for teaching and learning, and the articulation of plans of action to most effectively participate in this culture for maximum student learning. Protocol questions included:

1. Describe the process by which you narrowed the range of possibilities for what to highlight in your video. In other words,

why are we going to see what we're about to see as opposed to a different analysis of your classroom culture?
2. As we watch your video ethnography describe what you were trying to illustrate. Describe the cultural elements of their potential impact on teaching and learning.
3. What can you point to as evidence of the impact of these cultural elements on the teaching and/or learning in the classroom?
4. What else would you like to add to your statements about working effectively within this teaching/learning context?

The sessions (lasting between 45 and 70 minutes) included discussion of the role of the setting, description of the work sample, and connecting teaching and learning generally.

Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Working independently to increase trustworthiness, two researchers wrote detailed analytic memos after each recall session focusing on understanding participants' experiences and outcomes of participation in the classroom ethnography project. After transcription, each researcher listened independently to the entire interview audio recording using the transcript to note key phrases, recurrent ideas, and emergent themes. Finally, the two researchers came together to review the audio data and transcription together and to share their notations regarding recurring ideas and themes. During almost 100 hours of total analysis, several themes were identified, collapsed, expanded, combined, and re-emerged following the procedures of the constant-comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As a final analytic procedure, participants were invited individually to a debriefing session with the two researchers during which the three themes were shared with participants using snippets of transcript to exemplify each theme. Additional adjustments were made following this member-checking procedure—the most significant being the collapsing of the classroom management theme and the curriculum and instruction theme into a single theme called learning how to function within classroom culture for the goal of student learning. This collapsing of themes seemed to better match the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of the participants and supports the assertion that this member-

checking has lent an additional sense of trustworthiness to the following interpretations (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

In the end, two major themes were identified including: (a) learning about classroom culture and (b) learning how to function within classroom culture for the goal of student learning. In addition, a minor theme was identified as learning about research and methodology. A discussion of the two major themes is included with extended examples from the video ethnographies and structured recall interviews, followed by a brief discussion of the third theme. Figure 1 illustrates the range of initial themes and their convergence across analytic procedures. All names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Results

Theme 1: Learning about Classroom Culture

Entering a classroom as a student teacher is one of the most challenging things we ask preservice teachers to do. Classrooms each have unique cultural characteristics including shared values, routines of action, myths and legends, and shared experiences. For example, Justin commented during the stimulated recall session, ''On my second day of teaching, I referred to Abraham Lincoln's 'seminal comments' and the kids absolutely erupted in laughter. I felt like a total fool because something very funny had happened and I didn't get it.'' Justin went on to explain that his mentor teacher had shared the origins of the word 'seminal' (derived from semen) with the students earlier in the year, ''I wish I would have picked a different word that day!''

Zoë described her experience of being unaware of a value that had been instilled by her mentor teacher in her high school English practicum classroom.

> My mentor teacher really values expression. He wants kids to write as much and as often as they can without regard to mechanics. I guess he and I never really talked about these kinds of things because when I started grading kids down for misspelling and poor punctuation it almost led to a revolt!

Both Justin and Zoë learned important elements of their classrooms' cultures. In the case of Justin, his class had shared

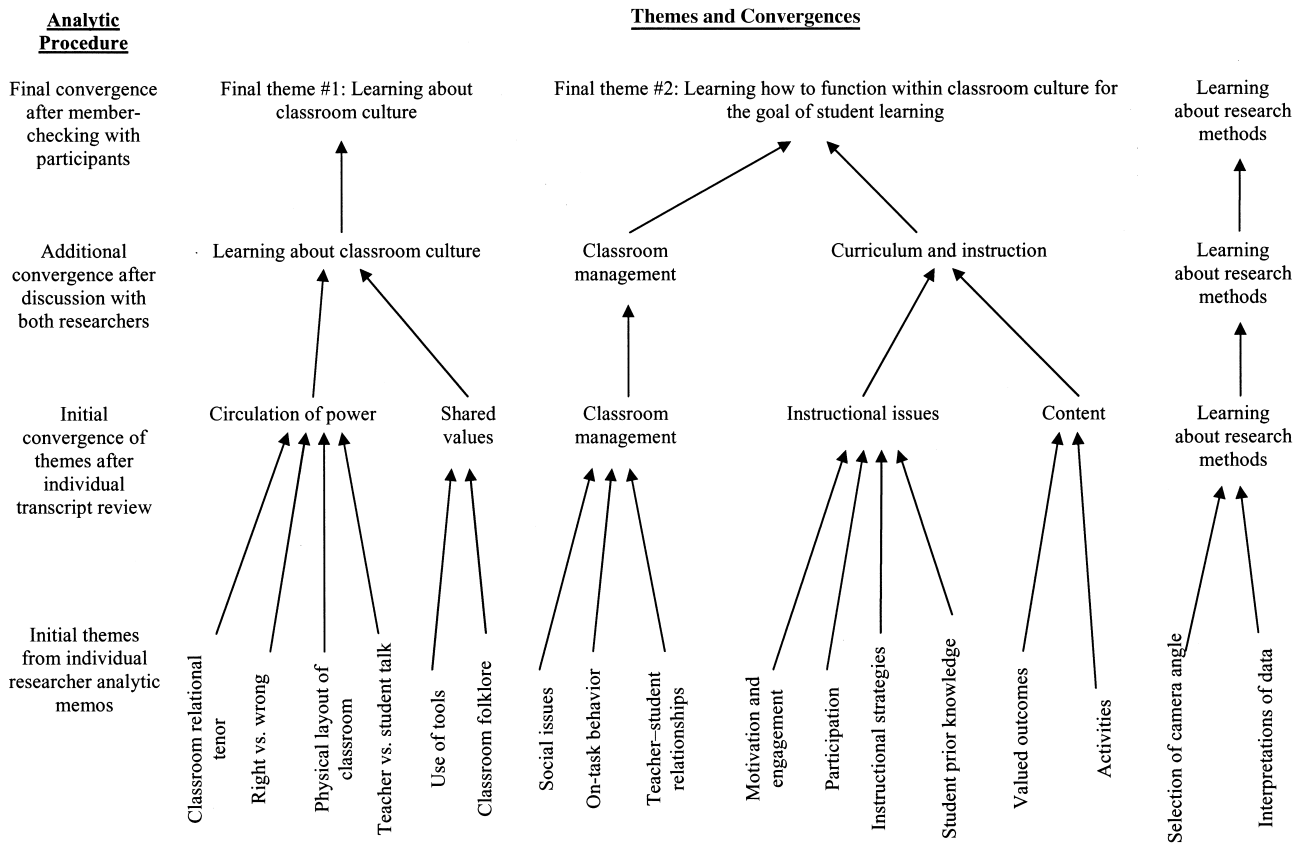

FIGURE 1 Initial themes, convergences, and final themes.

an experience without him, and this led to a few moments of embarrassment and the loss of momentum in his lesson. Although it is likely that studying his classroom as a culture would not have prevented this experience, it certainly demonstrates the power of shared experience between teacher and students. Zoë, on the other hand, may have learned about the existing classroom value regarding student expression had she more time, focus, or experience in ethnographic inquiry.

Finally, Tanna, a social studies student teacher, focused her ethnographic analysis on issues of power in her mentor teacher's classroom. Her mentor teacher gave long lectures, requested very little student input, and wanted students to understand history as represented in the class text or via his interpretations. Tanna commented, ''Although I didn't agree with how my mentor teacher taught—marginalizing alternative representations of history—I found myself teaching in a similar fashion, rather than working against the existing classroom structure.'' Although her understanding of the classroom culture did not help her be more faithful to her own pedagogical convictions it did inform her decision making in the classroom, ''I knew I wasn't going to be working in that classroom much longer so I decided to just deal with it.'' This highlights a powerful tension in student teaching—that of either conforming to existing norms or working to change them. As student teachers are often in tenuous positions of power, it is critical to make an informed and well-guided decision about which path to choose.

Theme 2: Learning How to Function within Classroom Culture for the Goal of Student Learning

During stimulated recall sessions, all 43 candidates reported feeling more knowledgeable about the nuance and unique demands of their classroom setting and the importance of this in connecting teaching and learning through the teacher work sample. For example, Kevin commented.

> In one of my first field experiences, I ran into trouble right away with kids not doing what I asked. This led to tension and I ended up getting really mad at them. Things just didn't go well. I see now that what I was probably doing was asking them to behave in ways that were outside of

> the existing norms of the class. I came in ''guns blazing'' believing that I needed to demonstrate my position of power. What I didn't take the time to realize was that my mentor teacher managed in much more subtle ways, based on relationships—not overt power.

Kevin's words are powerful as they illustrate the precise goal of the classroom ethnography project—to understand before taking action. Because this theme represents the ultimate goal of the project, it is expanded more completely using two vignettes illustrating common student experiences.

Larry

Investigating the culture of a physical education class, Larry struggled for an initial analytic lens through which to view his video footage. His initial analytic framework included a disposition toward elimination of unnecessary and negative competition in physical education. Unfortunately this lens provided little when employed in analysis. Upon repeated viewing, however, he began to understand that participation in his P.E. class had several unexpected elements. For example, the high-school football star, although active in class, was held to a different standard for participation than other students. Larry's final video ethnography showcased the football star not doing his calisthenics, sitting in a chair during a dodgeball game, and napping during another whole group activity. Larry stated, ''Because my filming didn't initially focus on the football star it took me a while to see what was going on. After more filming, however, and watching other students react to his lack of participation, I now realize that it was creating a problem in the class.'' After continued analysis, Larry did find that his sensitivity toward issues related to competition gained analytic utility. Larry noticed unusual patterns of interaction between English and non-English speaking students. In what he believed was an effort to avoid confrontation with English-speaking students, it seemed that second-language learners maintained a passive stance toward participation except among themselves during which times they competed fiercely. Larry stated, ''I have a better sense of the engagement in my field placement classroom and I know what I need to do to ensure more equity and participation from all my students.''

Larry came to understand two important cultural elements in his classroom, both involving student participation issues. His action statements at the conclusion of his video ethnography included a commitment to design activities and a reward system that would encourage participation from all students as well as hold the football star accountable to the same standards as the other students. He also allowed more flexibility in how teams and competition were designed to maximize participation from the second language learners. Larry ended the stimulation recall session with this hopeful claim, ''I can show you through my work sample that average participation grades improved after this.''

Chelsea

Beginning her project with strong feelings and an initial analytic lens of differential participation between boys and girls in science classrooms, Chelsea was surprised when her data led her to conclude something quite different. ''I entered my student teaching experience having read all about how boys dominate in science and I wanted to show that through my video ethnography.'' After much analysis Chelsea came to realize that although boys caused the majority of disruptions in class, girls frequently asked more thoughtful questions and appeared more engaged throughout class. By turning off the sound and just watching the actions of her classroom participants, Chelsea became more attuned to the dynamics in the room. ''Video allowed me to key in to facial expressions and body language in ways no other data would have. Plus being able to watch the same scenario over and over again really allowed me to 'get inside' the situation.''

In one telling scene in her video ethnography three boys and two girls worked together on a lab activity. The boys were seen shouting, using incorrect procedures, and generally goofing off while the two girls struggled to make sure the group followed correct procedures and achieved the desired outcome of the activity. It was not as though the boys were dominant in their efforts to control the situation or more assertive in their science efforts and interests. They were, rather, simply off-task. Rather than re-design her classroom to encourage more girls to participate, Chelsea focused more on managing boys' inappropriate behavior in her action statements that concluded her video. Chelsea stated, ''I was prepared to coax the girls in class into science but instead

all I had to do was better manage the boys and suddenly all students were more engaged and I began to have the kind of science classroom I've wanted all along!''

At the conclusion of the stimulated recall session, Chelsea went on to explain the results of this move on student learning, ''I can show you how a couple of my girls, in particular, have really seemed to blossom given my new classroom management plan. The two girls we looked at in my video—the one's trapped in the ineffective lab group with those three wild boys—their test scores went way up and the boys scores have come up a bit as well!''

Theme Three: Learning about Research and Methodology

One important minor theme also emerged as an outcome of the classroom ethnography project although it is not directly related to P–12 student learning. This minor theme emphasizes candidates' learning about issues of research and methodology. In articulation of this minor theme, candidates described the challenges of capturing high-quality video data and selecting camera angles and fields of view. These challenges seemed to dispel the myth of the ''all-seeing-camera'' and highlighted the ubiquitous subjectivity of all data gathering procedures. Although this is an important outcome as the project was situated in a research methods course, our primary analyses focused on data highlighting connections between teaching and learning.

Discussion

Arguably, the most critical element of teaching is responding to the unique classroom culture and the needs and challenges of the individual learners (Girod, 2002). Teacher work sample methodology holds this point tightly and the classroom ethnography project is designed to systematically engage teacher candidates in investigations of the culture of their teaching setting. Although classroom cultures are situated in school and community cultures, the emphasis of this project was on classroom culture as it is there where the teacher candidate might be in the best position to affect change.

As a result of the classroom ethnography project, teacher candidates wrote context descriptions for their work samples that focused more on classroom routines, values, and other qualities derived through ethnographic analysis as opposed to providing only surface demographics, class layouts, and rules. After the classroom ethnography project, work sample context descriptions included much more data, assertions about the meaning of those data, and plans of action for how the teacher candidate may interact more effectively in the setting. For example, both Larry and Chelsea discerned different cultural patterns in their classrooms than they had originally expected. As a result both redesigned their teaching actions to more effectively work inside the classroom culture.

It is clear from the experiences of Larry, Chelsea, and other candidates participating in the classroom ethnography project that they became more attuned to the unique challenges of their classroom setting. Without this clear articulation of the actual challenges, providing viable solutions to the situation would have been fruitless. It is in this way that ethnography and teacher work samples in conjunction are proposed to serve as a useful tool to help candidates connect their actions to P–12 student learning.

Suggestions for Effective Use of Ethnography and Teacher Work Samples

First, cultural analysis can be a useful tool for teacher candidates but only if it is the clear intent of the analysis to better understand how to work within the particular culture in ways that maximize teaching effectiveness and student learning. The goal of traditional ethnography is not usually so pragmatic (Hammersley, 1990; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), and clear articulation of the focus on working effectively within the culture must be central to all classroom instruction. Because this work was embedded in a class on research methods, these conversations were easy to initiate and the divergence from standard ethnographic strategies were easy to extricate.

Second, and related to the aforementioned issue that separates the classroom ethnography project from more traditional

ethnography, is the development of a plan for building a new instructional culture. It is important to remind candidates of this fact and to help them think through two activities in this regard: (a) to help them employ ethnographic analysis of the school and community context in which they will be employed and (b) to build classroom culture that seeks to maximize teaching and learning. Just as the skills learned in methods courses, classroom management, and instructional design coursework, the goal of ethnographic analysis is useful and urgent to the thoughtful and skillful new teacher.

Third, teacher candidates are often in a tenuous position as a student teacher or apprentice in the classroom and school of their mentor (Posner, 2000). Ethnographic analysis that surfaces discriminating, unfair, or unflattering practices may put candidates in awkward situations that may compel or even require candidates to disclose these issues. Teacher educators must monitor the classroom ethnography project carefully and assist candidates if they encounter these situations. In my experience, most candidates became aware of practices or issues that they wanted to change. This necessarily put them at odds with their mentor teacher or, at least, the current cultural environment in which they were learning to teach. Helping candidates weigh the pros and cons of trying to make changes is, at a minimum, a requirement for monitoring this project.

It is from within the highly politicized culture of 21st-century teacher education for accountable, standards-based systems of schooling that we must prepare teacher candidates. Perhaps through teacher work sampling, with its conceptual and methodological linkages between preparation, candidates' practices, and ultimately, student learning, we might begin to build an accountable system of teacher preparation and practices. Although the pedagogical story told here is embedded within the context of teacher work sampling, no necessary commitment to this methodology is demanded by the classroom ethnography project. My hope is that the classroom ethnography project, with emphasis on deepening understanding of the contexts in which teaching and learning occur, will assist candidates in effectively connecting teaching and learning, with or without a commitment to teacher work sampling.

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