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# **A Balancing Act:**

Using the case of one novice teacher to consider  
the nuances of teacher educators' pedagogy

Sarah Schneider Kavanagh, *University of Pennsylvania*



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# What' We'll Get Up To Today

01

Watch a New  
Teacher Teach

02

Consider Her  
Teaching

03

Discuss How She  
Learned To Teach

04

Consider the  
implications of her case

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# What We'll Get Up To Today

01

Watch a New  
Teacher Teach

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# *Butter*

by Akhil Sharma

The most important thing was loyalty. My older brother had been brain-damaged in a swimming accident and was unable to move or talk. We took him home from the hospital and started caring for him ourselves. This was awful, but loyalty required us to pretend that it was not.

My mother packed my school lunches in the white plastic bags in which my brother's medical supplies arrived. The bags were printed with the pharmacy's name and a list of items they might contain, such as urinary catheters, irrigation trays, liquid suppositories. Sitting in the cafeteria, I worried that someone would notice the bags and I would have to explain. I could have asked my mother to send my lunches in ordinary paper bags. But doing so would have lessened my misery and felt disloyal, because, if my brother and my parents were suffering, I should be, too.

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## *How does the narrator feel about carrying the bags?*

The most important thing was loyalty. My older brother had been brain-damaged in a swimming accident and was unable to move or talk. We took him home from the hospital and started caring for him ourselves. This was awful, but loyalty required us to pretend that it was not.

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# Who is this Teacher?

## Where is she Teaching?



### First Week

No education degree,  
No student teaching,  
First week in a  
classroom ever



### Average Performer

Within her cohort of  
100 new secondary  
ELA teachers



### Summer School

High poverty urban high  
school  
Rising 11<sup>th</sup> graders who failed  
ELA last year

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# Why We're Watching this Clip



In my opinion, it's pretty good for novice teaching



It helps illustrate how complex teaching is



It'll give us a shared context to talk about

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01

Watch a New Teacher Teach

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- For someone in their first week in a classroom, what do you notice her doing well?
- What's hard or complex about what she's trying to do?

02

Consider Her  
Teaching

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Can't be sure what will  
happen

Must make quick  
decisions

Must improvise

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I studied the **approximations of teaching** that this teacher and her cohort experienced through an **adaptive expertise** lens

To understand what I mean,  
let's take a quick detour

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# Routine vs. Adaptive Expertise



Routine Expertise



Adaptive Expertise



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# Routine vs. Adaptive Expertise



## Routine Expertise

The ability to enact professional routines with predictability and precision

(executing moves the same way every time)



## Adaptive Expertise

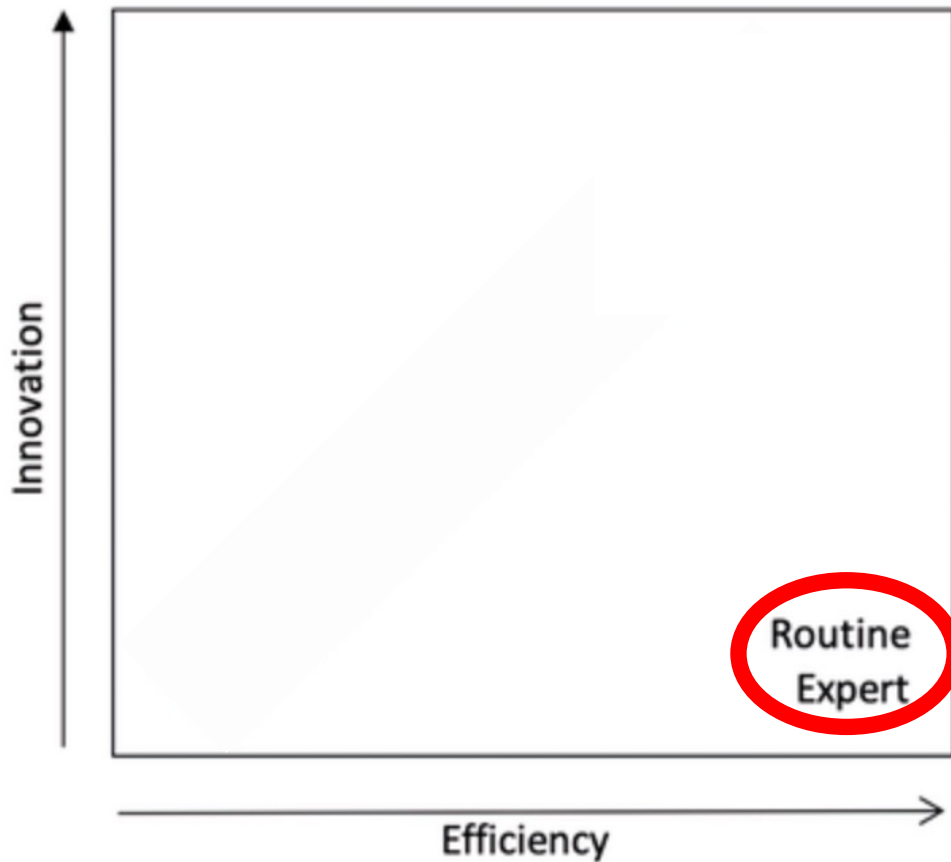




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# Routine vs. Adaptive Expertise



## Routine Expertise

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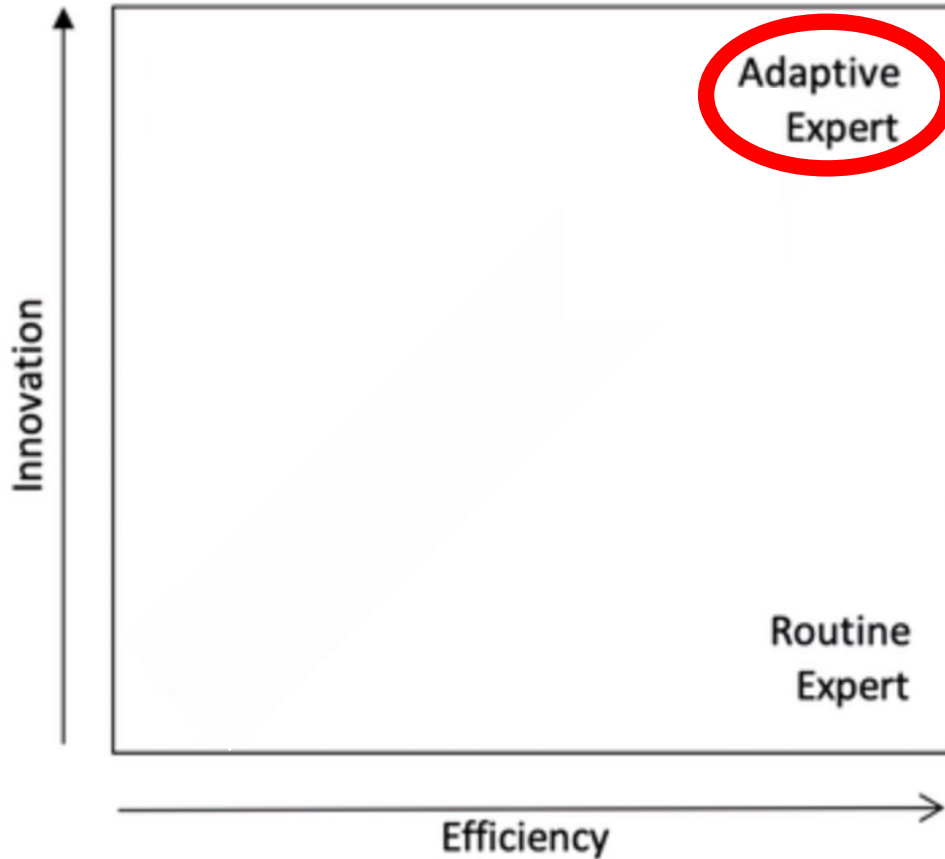
## Adaptive Expertise

The ability to effectively innovate in the face of novel problems and contexts

(exercising sound judgement in unpredictable contexts)

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A decorative black line graphic in the bottom right corner, starting from the bottom edge and curving upwards and to the left.

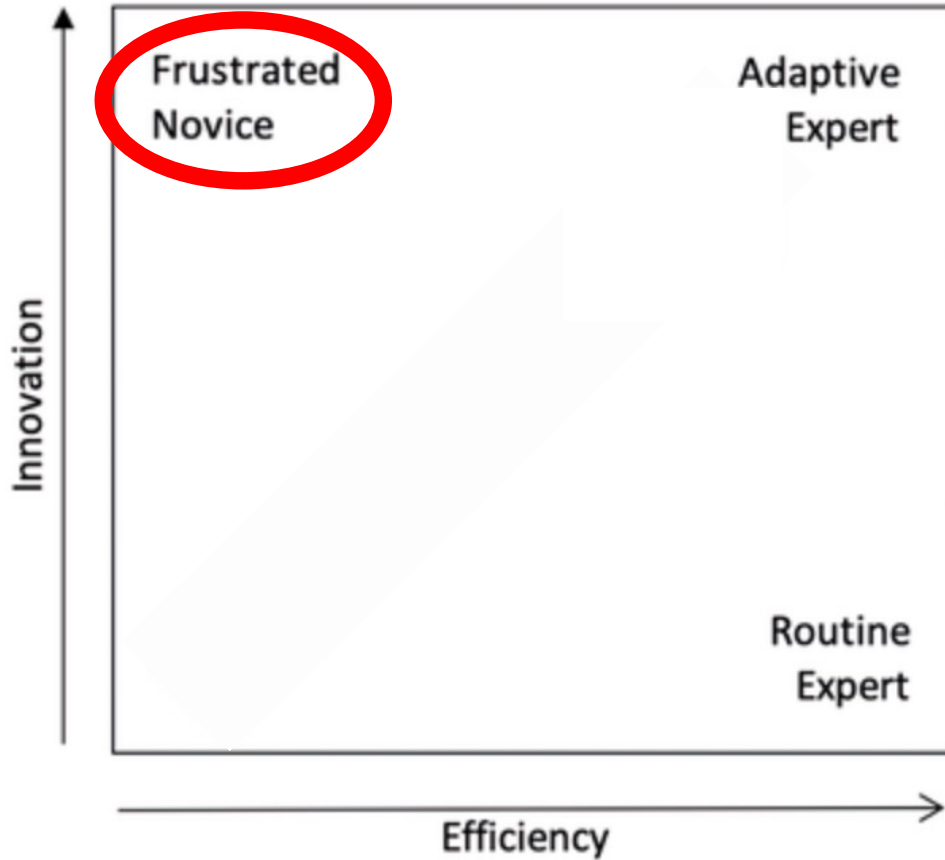


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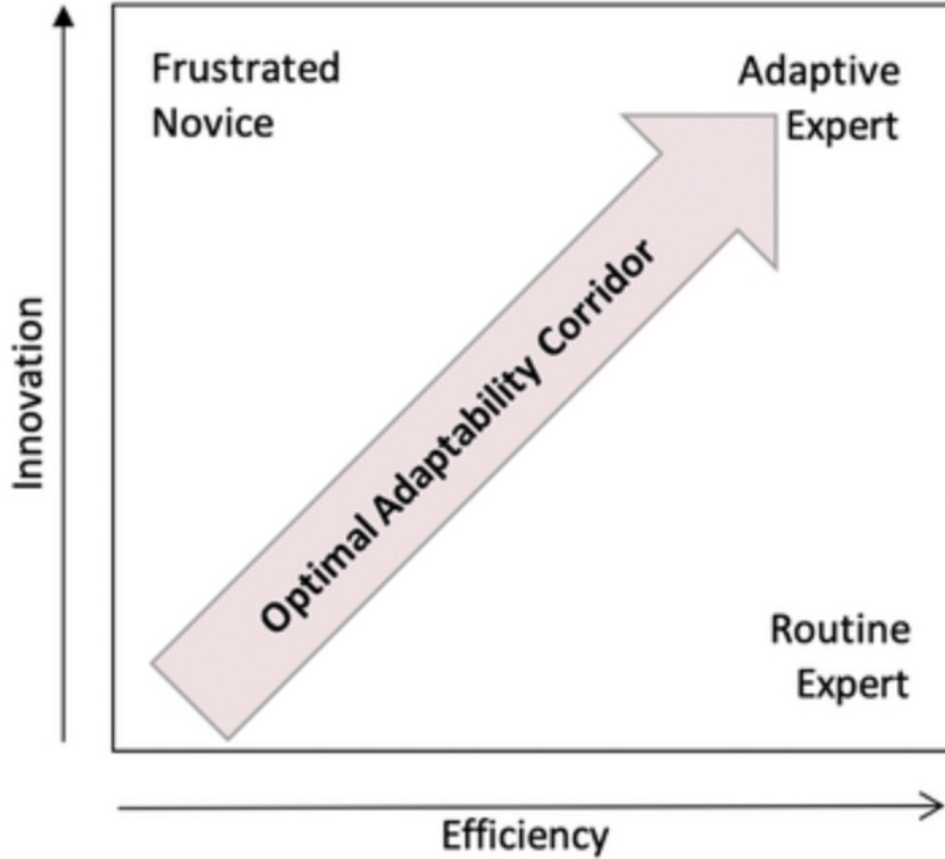




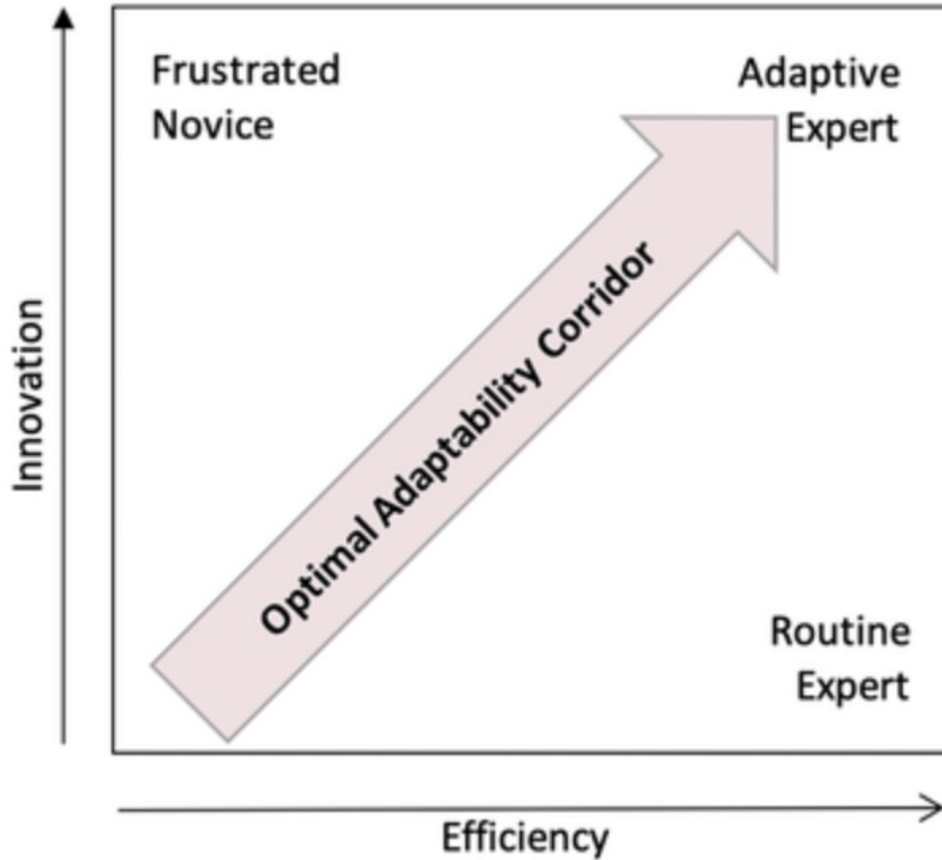
## Adaptive Expertise

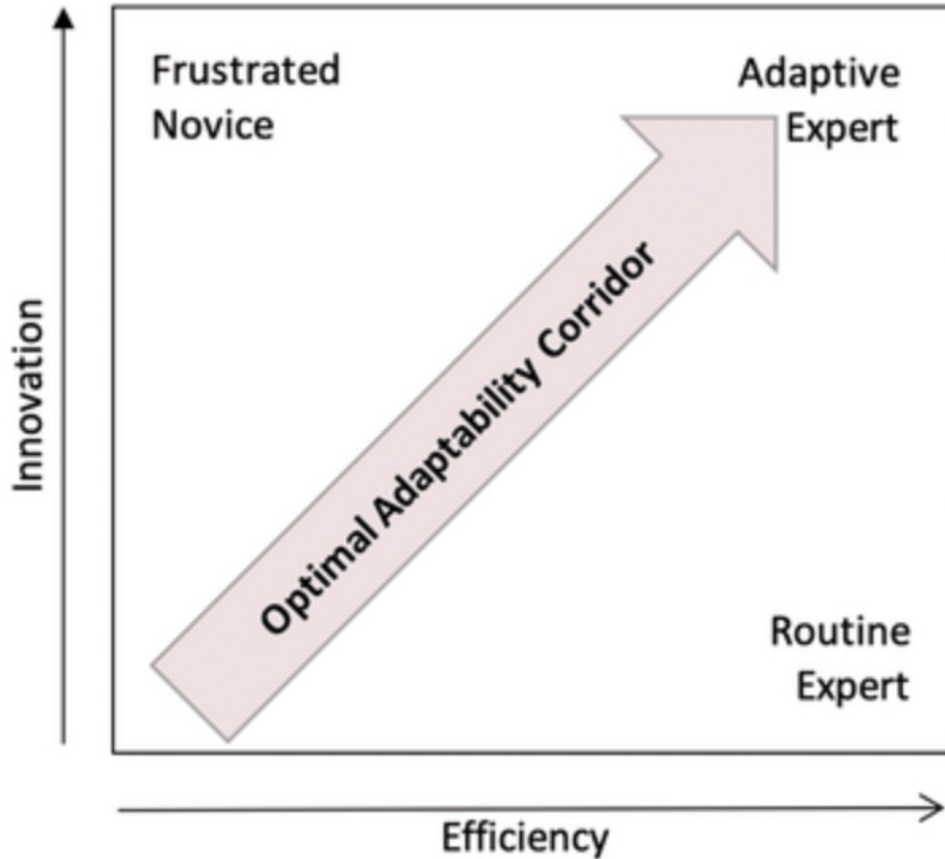
The ability to effectively innovate in the face of novel problems and contexts

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## The Punchline





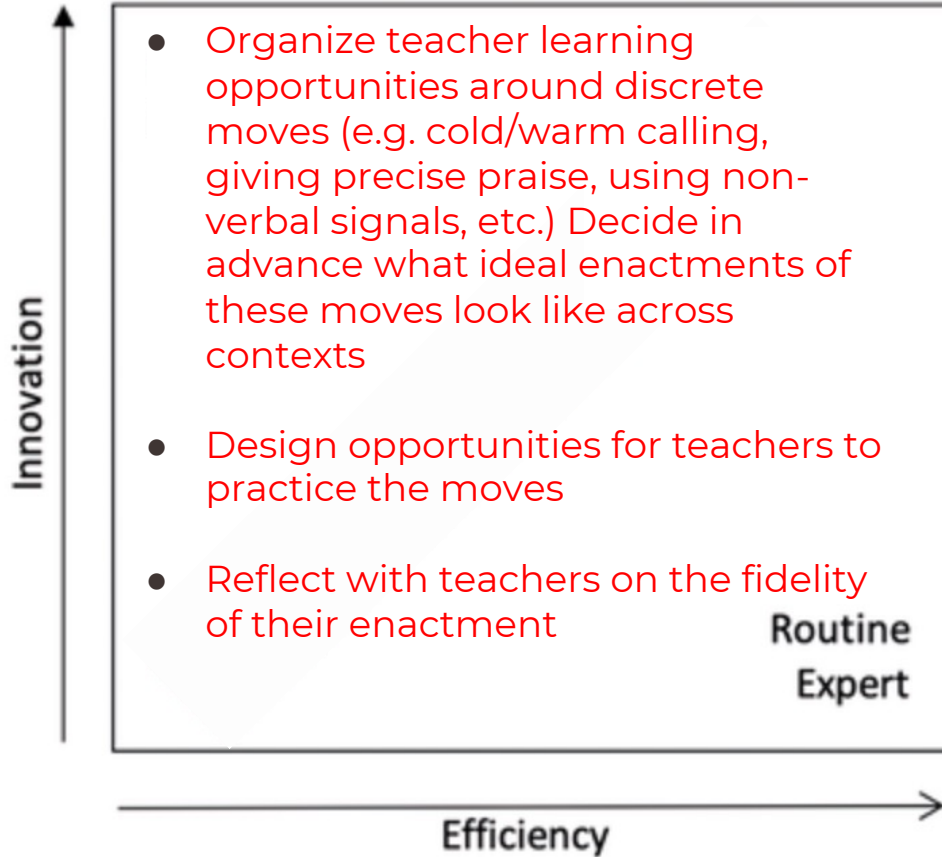
## The Punchline

Teaching requires adaptive expertise.

However, facilitating approximations of teaching in ways that balance innovation and efficiency is a complex skill.



What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as *routine* experts?



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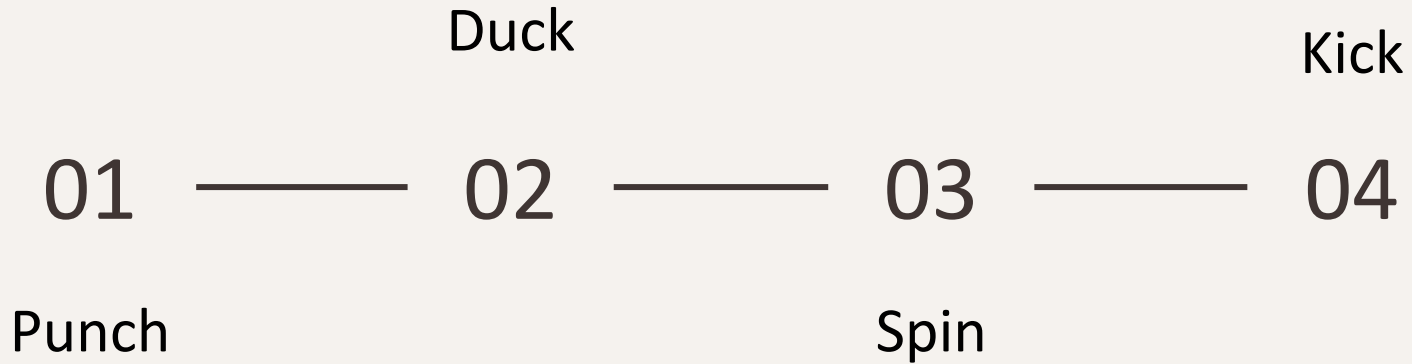
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# A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat

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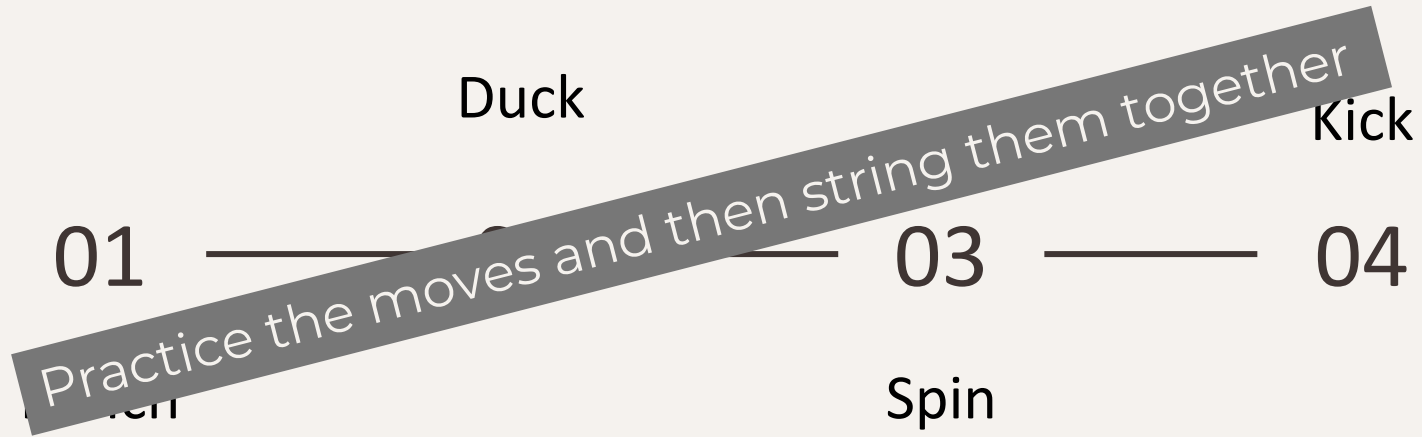
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# A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat





# A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat



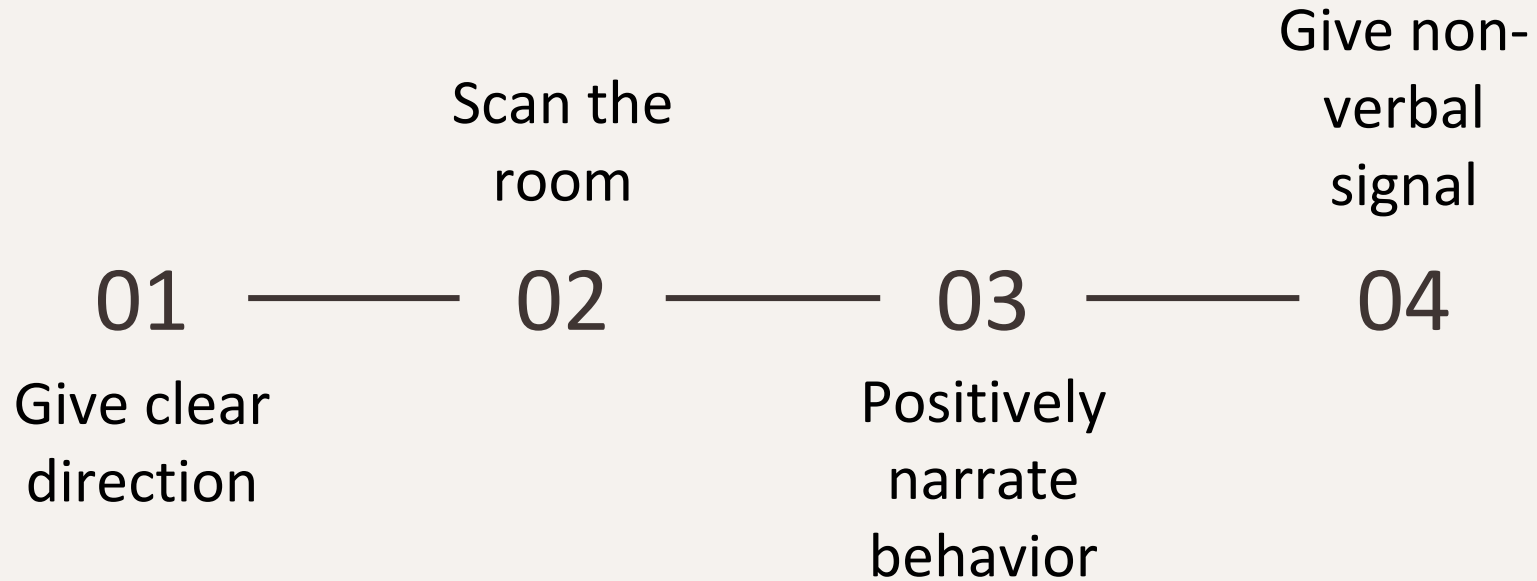
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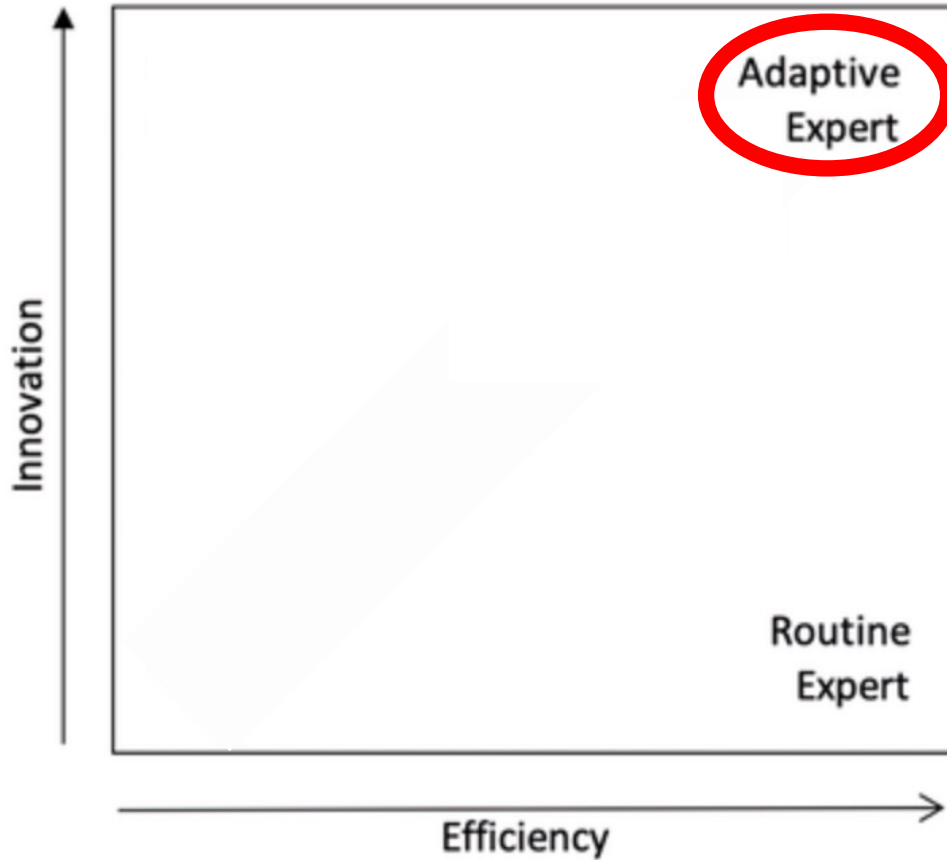
Now Imagine treating *Teaching* this way

Practice the moves and then string them together

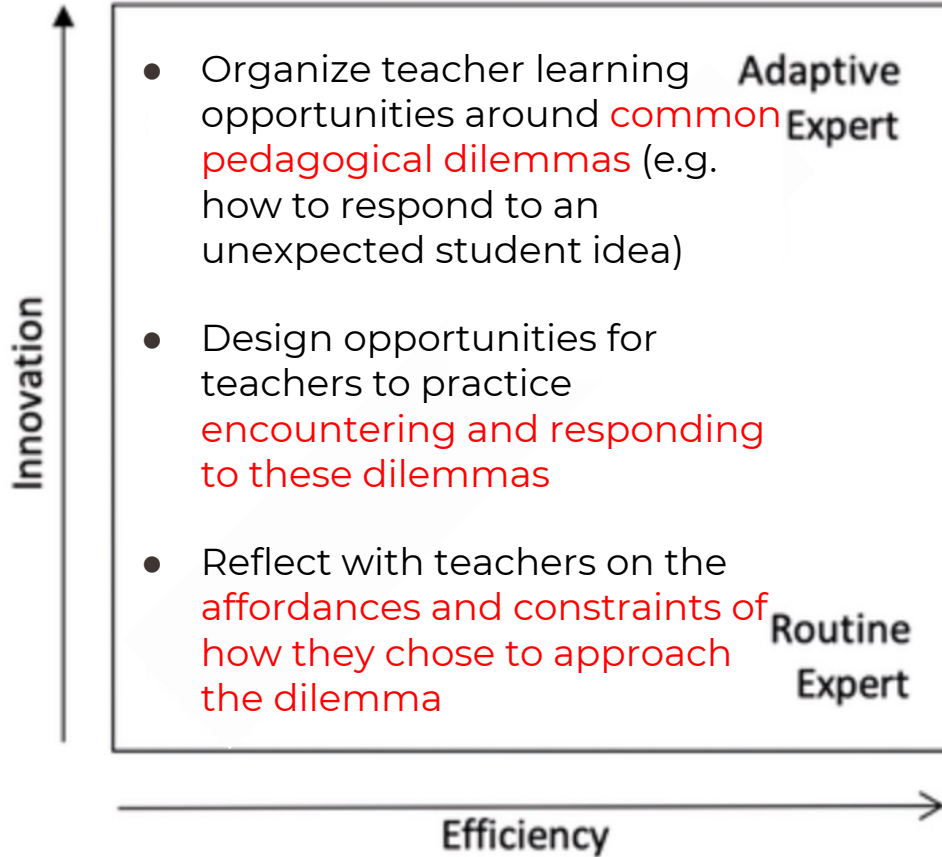
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# Teaching as Choreography





What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as *adaptive* experts?



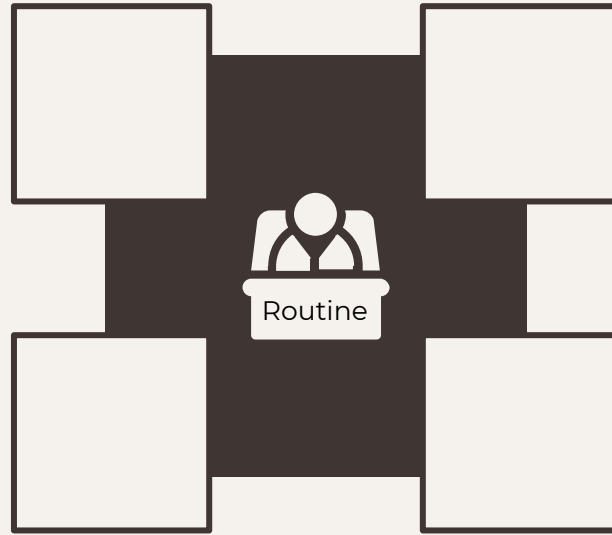
What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as *adaptive* experts?

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# A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy

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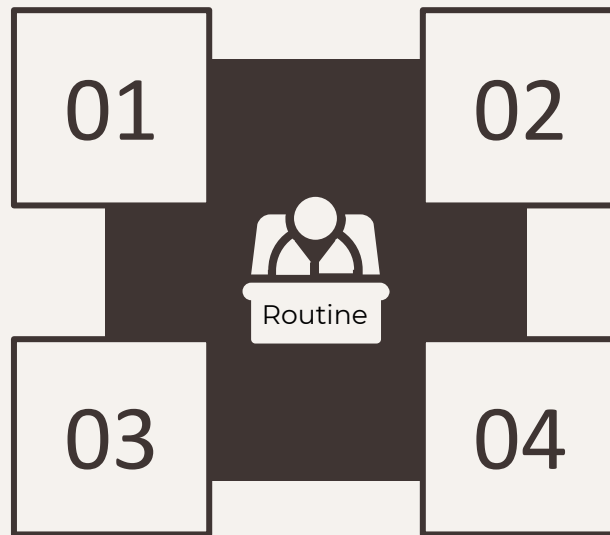
# A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy



# A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy

Say  
"Yes, and..."

Make your  
Partner look  
Good



Listen in the  
Present

Remember  
there are no  
mistakes



# A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy

Say  
"Yes, and..."

01

02

Listen in the

Make your  
Be  
Good

03

04

Routine

Remember  
there are no  
mistakes

Try Out Principled Practices within thoughtfully designed routines

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Now Imagine Treating Teaching This Way

Try Out Principled Practices within thoughtfully designed routines

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What you get is a vision of teaching as improvisation

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# What you get is a vision of teaching as improvisation

To be clear, this is definitely not a new idea.

Yinger, 1986

Towell, 1998

Sawyer, 2004, 2011

Lobman, 2006

Lampert & Graziani, 2009

Lampert et al., 2013

Forzani, 2014

Barker, 2016

Philip, 2019

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# What you get is a vision of teaching as improvisation

To be clear, this is definitely not a new idea.

Sawyer, 2004, 2011

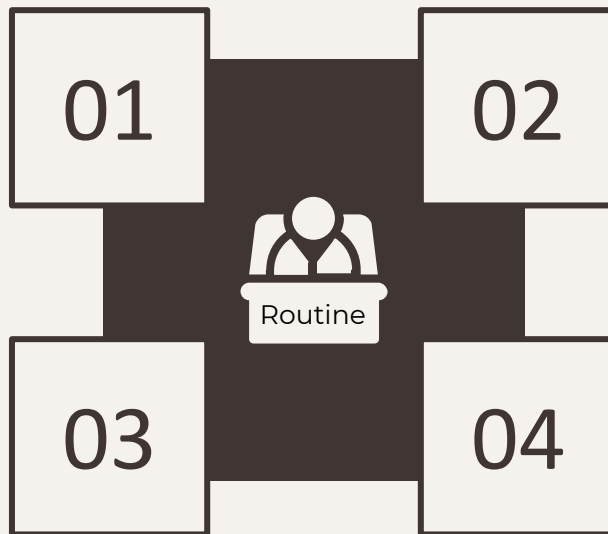
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Lampert et al., 2013

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# Teaching As Improvisation

Teach Towards  
an  
Instructional  
Goal



Position  
Students as  
Competent  
Sensemakers

Orient Students  
Towards Each  
Others' Ideas

Assess Student  
Understanding

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01

Watch a New  
Teacher Teach

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Consider Her  
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Discuss How She  
Learned To Teach

04

Apply Our Insights to  
Our Own Contexts

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*My Name*  
by Sandra Cisneros

*First paragraph:*

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

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# *My Name*

## by Sandra Cisneros

*First paragraph:*

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

How does the narrator feel about her name and what in the text makes you think so?

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# What Are We About to Watch?



## Second Day

Of working with these teachers, recorded just a few days before the last video we watched



## The Routine:

An Interactive First Read  
(a read aloud punctuated by pauses for discussion)



## Rehearsal

Involves enacting a routine and pausing frequently to discuss dilemmas




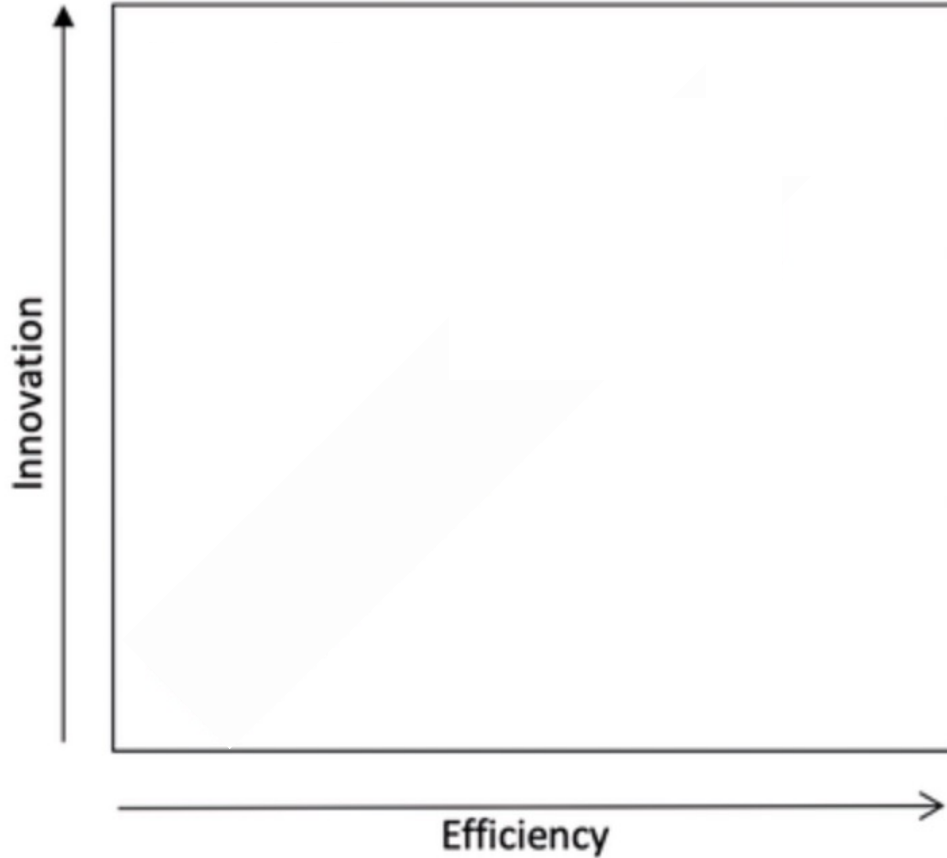
## The Principled Practices:

- (1) Positioning Students as Competent Sensemakers
  - (2) Orienting Students to Each Others' Ideas
-

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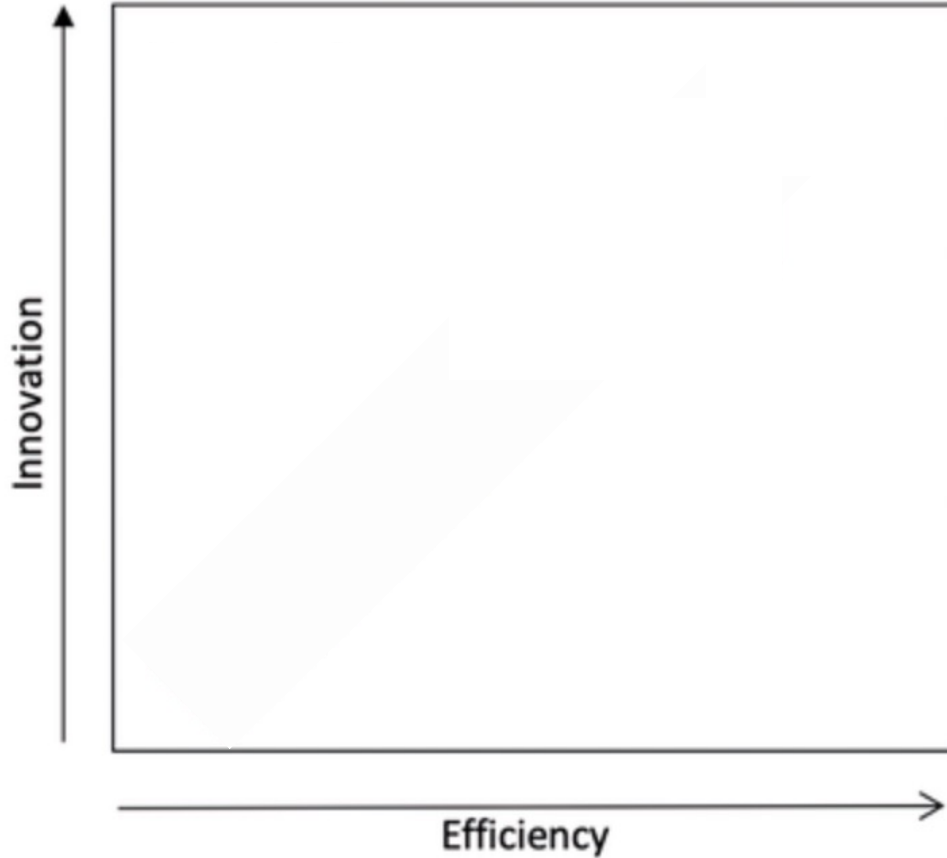
# Why are we about to watch it?

- So that we can compare her opportunity to approximate teaching with what she went on and did in the classroom with kids.
- 



## Why are we about to watch it?

- So that we can compare her opportunity to approximate teaching with what she went on and did in the classroom with kids.
- So we can think together about balancing innovation and efficiency in the facilitation of approximations of teaching.



## Why are we about to watch it?

- I don't offer this as an *exemplar* of approximation facilitation. Rather, I offer it as one real-world example of approximation facilitation to get us talking about the nuances of teacher educator pedagogy

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# Watch the New Teacher Rehearse a Routine

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What connections can we  
draw to the teaching we saw  
her do a few days later?

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Teacher playing student: We talked about the number nine in there 'cause we were a little confused about what that could mean. I thought maybe she was nine years old and wanting to know about it since

Teacher Educator: *[to rehearsing teacher]* What do you notice in this moment?

Rehearsing Teacher: I notice that she kind of... it since

Teacher Educator: What's an interesting question, like, "what..."

Rehearsing Teacher: Should I turn and talk?

Teacher Educator: You know what I might do, actually? I might say, "Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?"

A few things I notice in the clip and a few things I have questions about.



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**Teacher playing student:** We talked about the number nine in there ‘cause we were a little confused about what that could mean and we thought maybe she was nine years old and wanting to be ten.

**Teacher Educator:** *[to rehearsing teacher]* What are you thinking in this moment?

**Rehearsing Teacher:** I’m actually thinking maybe I’ll have her re-read it since she kind of, maybe, misinterpreted it... or... well... I don’t know.

**Teacher Educator:** She’s raised this kind of interesting question, like, “what is this number nine thing in there?”

**Rehearsing Teacher:** Right. Should I turn and talk?

**Teacher Educator:** You know what I might do, actually? I might say, “Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?”

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Teacher playing student  
we were a little confused  
maybe she was nine years old and wanting to be ten.

Treating teaching as  
decision-making in the face  
of novel problems

number nine in there 'cause  
mean and we thought

Teacher Educator: *[to rehearsing teacher]* What are you thinking in this moment?

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Teacher Educator: She's raised this kind of interesting question, like, "what is this number nine thing in there?"

Rehearsing Teacher: Right. Should I turn and talk?

Teacher Educator: You know what I might do, actually? I might say, "Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?"

**Teacher playing student:**

we were a little confused. I remember nine in there 'cause I mean and we thought maybe she was nine years old and wanting to be ten.

Treating teaching as decision-making in the face of novel problems

**Teacher Educator:** *[to rehearsing teacher]* What are you thinking in this moment?

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**Teacher Educator:** She's raised this kind of interesting question, like, "what is this number nine thing in there?"

**Rehearsing Teacher:** Right.

A Predictable Novice Teacher Orientation that Needs to Be Interrupted

**Teacher Educator:** You know what I might do, actually? I might say, "Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?"

**Teacher playing student**

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Treating teaching as  
decision-making in the face  
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**Teacher Educator:** She's raised this kind of interesting question, like, "What's the number nine thing in there?"

I feed her a line that she then goes on to mimic

**Rehearsing Teacher:** Right

A Predictable Novice  
Teacher Orientation that  
Needs to Be Interrupted

**Teacher Educator:** You know what I might do, actually? I might say, "Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?"

**Teacher playing student**

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Treating teaching as decision-making in the face of novel problems

**Teacher Educator:** [to rehearsing teacher] What are you thinking in this moment?

**Rehearsing Teacher:** I'm actually thinking maybe I'll have her re-read it since she kind of, maybe, misinterpreted it... or... well... I don't know.

**Teacher Educator:** She's raised this kind of interesting question, like, "what is this number doing in there?"

**Rehearsing Teacher:** Right. Should I turn and talk?

**Teacher Educator:** You know what I might do, actually? I might say, "Huh. Yeah – what is it about the number nine? Did anybody talk about it?"

Principled Practice #1:  
Positioning Students as  
Competent Sensemakers

Principled Practice #2:  
Orienting Students to Each  
Others' Ideas

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# Questions Our Consideration

- What does this teachers' case make us wonder about how to facilitate approximations of teaching



# Thanks

Do you have any questions?

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<https://www.gse.upenn.edu/academics/faculty-directory/kavanagh>



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