A Balancing Act: Using the case of one novice teacher to consider the nuances of teacher educators’ pedagogy

Sarah Schneider Kavanagh, University of Pennsylvania
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
What We’ll Get Up To Today

01
Watch a New Teacher Teach
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.
How does the narrator feel about carrying the bags?

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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 11th graders who failed ELA last year
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
01
Watch a New Teacher Teach
Consider Her Teaching

- 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?
Can’t be sure what will happen

Must make quick decisions

Must improvise
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.
Routine vs. Adaptive Expertise

Routine Expertise

Adaptive Expertise
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**Routine Expertise**

The ability to enact professional routines with predictability and precision

(executing moves the same way every time)
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Adapted from “Theories of learning and their roles in teaching” by J.D. Bransford et al., in Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do (pp. 40–87). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2007 by John Wiley and Sons.
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The Punchline

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The Punchline

Teaching requires adaptive expertise.

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

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What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as *routine* experts?
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- Organize teacher learning opportunities around discrete moves (e.g. cold/warm calling, giving precise praise, using non-verbal signals, etc.) Decide in advance what ideal enactments of these moves look like across contexts.
- Design opportunities for teachers to practice the moves.
- Reflect with teachers on the fidelity of their enactment.
A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat
A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat

01  02  03  04

Punch  Duck  Spin  Kick
A Little Like Actors Learning Stage Combat

Practice the moves and then string them together.
Now imagine treating *Teaching* this way.

Practice the moves and then string them together.
Teaching as Choreography

01  Give clear direction
02  Scan the room
03  Positively narrate behavior
04  Give non-verbal signal
What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as adaptive experts?
What does it look like to prepare teachers purely as *adaptive* experts?

- Organize teacher learning opportunities around **common pedagogical dilemmas** (e.g., how to respond to an unexpected student idea)
- Design opportunities for teachers to practice encountering and responding to these dilemmas
- Reflect with teachers on the affordances and constraints of how they chose to approach the dilemma
A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy
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- Say "Yes, and…"
- Make your Partner look Good
- Listen in the Present
- Remember there are no mistakes
A Little Like Actors Learning Sketch Comedy

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Try Out Principled Practices within thoughtfully designed routines

Routine

01
02
03
04
Now Imagine Treating Teaching This Way

Try Out Principled Practices within thoughtfully designed routines
What you get is a vision of teaching as improvisation
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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
What you get is a vision of teaching as improvisation

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Teaching As Improvisation

Teach Towards an Instructional Goal

Orient Students Towards Each Others’ Ideas

Position Students as Competent Sensemakers

Assess Student Understanding
01 Watch a New Teacher Teach

02 Consider Her Teaching

03 Discuss How She Learned To Teach

04 Apply Our Insights to Our Own Contexts
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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What Are We About to Watch?

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

Rehearsal
Involves enacting a routine and pausing frequently to discuss dilemmas

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

The Principled Practices:
(1) Positioning Students as Competent Sensemakers
(2) Orienting Students to Each Others’ Ideas
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.
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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.
Watch the New Teacher
Rehearse a Routine
What connections can we draw to the teaching we saw her do a few days later?
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 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?


A few things I notice in the clip and a few things I have questions about.
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I feed her a line that she then goes on to mimic.

A Predictable Novice Teacher Orientation that Needs to Be Interrupted
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Principled Practice #1: Positioning Students as Competent Sensemakers

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