TE 943 Seminar in Professional Development
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Introduction

Professional development represents a large and amorphous collection of ideas, practices, and perspectives. It exists as a field of work for many in the U.S. and other countries, and that work is informed by policies, programs, and tools that are sometimes very local and other times widespread, even global. Yet as a field of inquiry, professional development tends to draw on very different constructs and tools, as it has come to be seen as part of the field of teacher learning. This course is an attempt to bring together what are often two very different discourses—the practice of professional development and the research of it. Throughout the term, we will explore what happens as we try to have each of these different discourses speak to the other. As policies and reforms continue to place teacher change at the heart of larger educational transformation, the need to examine teacher development—what it is and how one understands it—is especially important.

Within the research on teachers' professional development, there has been much attention to structures of professional development. We find, for example, much policy and practical interest in mentoring and induction programs as solutions to the problems of teacher quality and teacher retention. Yet much of the literature on these topics, as in much of the research on professional development more generally, has left unexamined the content and nature of professional development activity. These will be central concerns for our course.

One goal for our class is to develop rich conceptual lenses for understanding professional development. We begin with the claim that professional development is a kind of teacher learning. Much of this class
will focus on conceptualizing teacher learning, and how teacher learning at
different points in the teacher’s professional continuum, and in different
contexts. We will draw heavily on sociohistorical and social practice
approaches to understanding teacher development. We start with the
assumption that teaching is a situated practice, and that teacher learning is
likewise a situated practice. We will explore what it means that this
phenomenon is situated, as well as a practice. Three key ideas from
sociocultural theoretical work will serve as focal points for different chunks
of the term: activity, community of practice, and tool.

Another goal for the class will be to explore different practices of
professional development and to inquire about what is going on within the
activity and how and where learning occurs. It is that set of questions that
orients our attention to activity. We will be reading about and discussing a
range of diverse activities undertaken in the interest of teacher
development and we will try to get inside them, to understand what they are,
what they are attempting, and how they work. But we recognize that
activities only occur within contexts and communities, and our attention to
how teachers learn in communities of practice will allow us to explore in more
depth some of the contextual factors that shape teacher development.

Finally, we will use as texts in the course not only scholarly research—
on theories of learning, teacher learning, or the practice of professional
development—but also popular texts that are the tools of widely used
professional development. Here we will seek to use constructs from new
work in sociocultural approaches to examine the tools of professional
development.

Course activities: reading, writing, projects

This course is intended to support you in your development as a teacher
educator and as a researcher. To that end, our writing and analysis will
center on three different kinds of activities:

- Literature review
- Observation
- Tool analysis
As doctoral students, it is important to have the opportunity not only to acquaint oneself with a body of work, but to develop sufficient critical understanding of that work that you can see patterns within it, examine issues and disagreements in it, and surface questions that you believe warrant further study. We will read several literature reviews as a way to develop some familiarity with the genre, and one major writing task will be to develop a literature review on some sub-topic of important to your own learning about professional development and teacher learning. I welcome your working with colleagues to develop your literature review, just as more established colleagues work and write together.

I also invite you, as beginning researchers, to explore what it means to try to study a phenomenon in the field. In classes we often emphasize building new conceptual frameworks or learning how others have described, analyzed or explained some phenomenon. We then tend to draw on our prior experience to make sense of these analyses and constructs. In this class, although we will indeed be doing those things, we also need to see what it means—as researchers—to try to make sense of the activity of teacher learning by attempting to observe some such activity. A major assignment therefore will involve your selecting some professional development activity and conducting and writing up an observation of it. We will work together as a class to develop a framework for this observation.

A final major assignment will allow you to examine in depth a tool that is used as part of some professional development program. Here you will have the chance to see how the conceptual frameworks we develop in class can help you gain insight into the processes, goals, and norms of some practices in teacher learning. You will have the opportunity to work with a colleague on this task, should you choose to do so.

Throughout the term, we will want to make sure that this class reflects and builds on the questions and interests you bring to it. To that end, we will begin a conversation on Blackboard about each week's readings. While I will not provide detailed feedback on your commentaries, I will try to write a response—either to you individually, groups of you, or the class as a whole—so that we can begin a genuine dialogue that supports and runs alongside our class. As you write, use this as an opportunity to raise
questions, make critiques of issues you see in the research, draw connections
to other things you and we have been considering, or use this to explore and
reflect on your own experience.

In addition, as a way of ensuring your ability to shape the direction of
this course, each of you will work as co-instructor with me one week of the
term. This is a chance for you to get more deeply into readings, to think
about the big issues, their connections to other weeks’ conversations, and
how we engage others around those ideas.

Grading

This course will work as a seminar, and your regular and thoughtful
participation is an essential part of its success. We will want to develop
class expectations about writing, and I will provide guidance on particular
assignments throughout the term. You will need to meet with me a week in
advance of the class we are co-teaching so that we can plan together how we
want to lead or facilitate that session.

I would welcome the chance for us as a class, or for you individually
with me, to think about how you would like to be assessed in the class. I
propose the following breakdown or weighting, but would be open to your
making a case for choosing some different percentages. My only
requirements are that you engage in all parts or activities, and that each
part represents some significant effort (that is, not smaller than 15%).

Participation (including shared responsibility for teaching): 15%
Blackboard commentary: 15%
Literature review: 25%
Observation: 25%
Tool analysis: 25%

Required reading

We have required books available at Student Bookstore (351-4210).
These are:

Dewey, Experience and Education
Tharp and Gallimore, Rousing Minds to Life
Lave and Wenger, Situated Learning
Wenger, Communities of Practice

We also have a coursepack (available as a CD or hard copy from the Copy Center) as well as downloadable articles, available either through MSU libraries or a website listed in the syllabus. For those materials you will download from MSU libraries: click Electronic Resources and type in name of journal, or

http://er.lib.msu.edu/subject.cfm?cat=0&type=Electronic%20journal&subject=Educ
Course schedule

Week 1. Jan. 13 Introduction to the course

Week 2. Jan. 20 What constitutes professional development: Considering goals and definitions


Dewey, J. Experience and Education, particularly chapters 1-3.


I. Activity in teacher development
Week 3. Jan. 27  What does it mean to examine activities of/activity in professional development?


Week 4. Feb. 3  Theorizing teacher learning


Week 5. Feb. 10  Surveying the field of research on teachers’ professional development


**Week 6. Feb. 17  Theorizing teacher development as situated learning**


**Propose focus for your literature review**

**II. Community and context in teacher learning**

**Week 7. Feb. 24  Professional development in communities, collaboration, and networks**


Spring break

**Week 8. March 9 Theorizing communities of practice**


**Complete observation**

**Week 9. March 17 Working in and building community**


Week 10. March 23. Challenges to learning in community and to transporting professional development across contexts


**submit observation write-up

III. Tools in teacher learning

Week 11. March 30. Conceptualizing tools in teacher learning


Begin examining selected tools, such as:

ADEA (Association for Development of Education in Africa) CD for the Biennial Meeting.


**Week 12. April 6. Views of mentoring and induction**


**Week 13. April 13. Examining tools for mentoring and induction.**

**Complete tool analysis, present in class**

**Week 14. April 20. The challenge of transforming professional development through professional developers**


**Week 15. April 27. Sharing our learning about teacher learning.**

**Turn in literature reviews, present in class in poster session**