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Book Review

Grossman, P. (Ed.). (2018). Teaching core practices in teacher education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. 224 pages.

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Introduction

The book, *Teaching Core Practices in Teacher Education*, edited by Grossman, is a must-read and an excellent resource for teacher educators who are interested in a practice-based teacher education model (PBT). The tightly structured, 224-page book reminds me of a sandwich. The beginning and last chapters are the bread, providing a clear framework and synthesis of PBT. The middle chapters are the meat and ingredients nicely layered on top of each other to give readers a taste of different ways to implement PBT at various teacher education programs.

In 2012, I encountered Grossman's work for the first time through two of her articles: "Teaching Practice: A Cross-Professional Perspective" (Grossman et al., 2009) and "Framework for Teaching Practice: A Brief History of an Idea" (Grossman, 2011). These articles introduce the authors' cross-professional study on practices and propose a framework for thinking about the teaching of practice in the context of teacher education programs. They identified "three key concepts for understanding the pedagogies of practice in professional education: representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice" (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 2058).

In as little as 6 years, their burgeoning work has germinated into a Core Practice Consortium (CPC) comprised of teacher educators from across disciplines and institutions. The goal of the CPC is to identify practices and teacher education pedagogies aligned with the PBT framework to support novices in learning and hone in on the practices of teaching. This book is a timely addition to their work and a practical guide for the design and implementation of practice-based teaching.
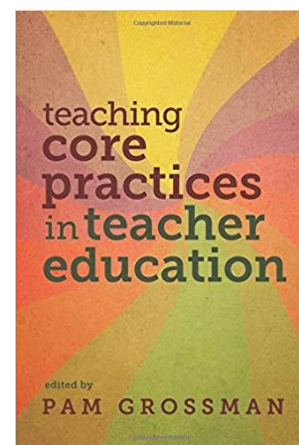
The book answers three key questions:

- What are characteristics of core practices of teaching, and how can they be used to organize a teacher education program?

- What are examples of representations of practice in teacher education, and how can they be made visible and accessible to novices through decompositions of practice?

- Why is approximation of practices important, and how can we develop approximations for novices?

The book is packed with examples and vignettes of how teacher educators made decisions in the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating the pedagogies involved in PBT. These stories provide readers with an insider's view of how they took up core practices in their programs, whether traditional programs or residence programs, and supported their teacher candidates in learning core practices.

One important message this book emphasizes is that successful implementation of PBT entails the collective and collaborative construction of a shared understanding of core practices as well as the continual sustaining of that understanding as a community.

> Using core practices to center one's teaching education practice is a collective activity. It is collective in terms of how we work within our classroom space with our students; it is collective in how we work across elements of our programs; it is collective in how we consider the communities in which we teach and learn. (p. 132)

In the following spaces, I will provide my highlights and interpretations of the three key questions addressed in the book.

Core Practices of Teaching and Use of Core Practices to Organize Teacher Education

Chapter 1 distinguishes between the competency-based teacher education reform movement in the 1970s, which exemplifies a "reductive conception of teaching" (p. 3), and practice-based teacher education. The former movement tended to result in long checklists of competencies and practicing of discrete skills devoid of simultaneous support in developing the knowledge and pedagogical thinking behind the effective use of those skills.

By contrast, the PBT model represents an innovative structure to design student-centered teacher preparation and organize the entire teacher education program.

In the book, core practices are defined as being "identifiable components (fundamental to teaching and grounded in disciplinary goals) that teachers enact to support learning. Core practices consist of research-based strategies, routines, and moves that can be unpacked and learned by teachers" (Grossman, 2018, p. 4) and occur with high frequency in teaching.

Thoughtful decisions must be made while identifying core practices and as the practices are decomposed and learned through enactment in approximate or authentic settings. Decisions also need to be made regarding what visible elements in some of the complex core practices need to be introduced and practiced at any particular juncture before integrating all of the different elements at once.

A key term associated with the concept of core practice is variation in "grain size." For example, core practices being targeted can be wait time, eliciting student thinking, modeling in writing instruction, providing student feedback, establishing a learning environment, facilitating discussion, or providing explicit instruction. Even though this book provides examples of how teacher educators planned for and implemented core practices of different grain sizes, the meaning of this term is still vague. Too small a grain size, a core practice might be reduced to a behavioral competency without adequate attention to the contextual aspects of teaching, while core practices that are too broad "serve as dispositional guides that do not give novice teachers clear enough practices to direct their learning and mastery" (Abramo, 2016, p. 8).

The book provides many examples to illustrate how different programs make multidimensional decisions about high-leverage core practices grounded in specific disciplines. These decisions are a result of a creative, collective, and collaborative processes about what core practices to focus on, when in the program to focus on them, and how to support novice teachers to develop these practices through a continuum of approximations ranging from university courses to K–12 classrooms.

Examples of Representation of Practice and Decompositions of Practice

Chapter 2 gives an overview of using representation of practice in teacher education. Chapter 3 features the pedagogy of modeling as an example of representation. Representation of practice refers to the different ways we as teacher educators use to represent teaching practices to novices. Common tools found in teacher education classrooms include "videos, teacher educator modeling, case studies, planning templates, classroom transcripts, and classroom observations" (p. 16). As I write this book review, I can see there are probably as many ways of representing practice as there are teacher educators. In our special education coursework, for instance, one resource that my colleagues and I have found useful is the set of IRIS modules and case studies developed by Vanderbilt University.

This book has offered me new ideas on how to use these common tools by aligning them to the pedagogy of practice-based teaching. For instance, I have used lesson transcriptions in my teaching, but mostly as just another text to show candidates an example of how to teach. When I teach think-aloud as a strategy for teaching reading comprehension, I have shared with the teacher candidates a three-page lesson transcript that captures how a teacher uses think-aloud throughout her lesson with two sixth-grade boys identified as having learning disabilities. In the PBT model, I will be more up-front with teacher candidates about the core practice of think-alouds examined through videos and transcripts before showing them these tools. I will do more modeling to make the core practice more visible to them. I will also make sure I provide activities to help candidates decompose the practice by engaging an in-depth analysis of the teacher moves related to think-alouds embedded in the resources. Last but not least, I will create opportunities for candidates to approximate the core practice by enacting and re-enacting some segments of the lessons in the videos and transcripts.

The authors in the two chapters offer valuable ideas for using video as a form of representation of practice. What I found particularly useful is the strategic selection of videos and the development of activities before and after the viewing of videos to support candidates' identification and decomposition of core practices, discussion, and reflection. Videos and video extension activities also serve as a springboard for approximations of practice.

Each representation form has its affordances and constraints. No one representation stands alone in providing candidates the best representation of the selected core practice. Teacher educators should "consider the suite of representations used in the course" (p. 33) that complement one another in showing candidates different aspects of the targeted practice.

Chapter 3 explains in detail the use of modeling as an example of representation. Although teaching modeling is a well-researched practice in K–12 education, modeling as a form of representation for teacher educators involves representing and decomposing "disciplinary thinking and pedagogical choices in ways that make the underlying reasoning and values visible" (p. 37).

The authors further unpack the components of modeling: purposeful framing and debriefing. These two components are the bookends of modeling. Before modeling, teacher educators need to define, frame, and contextualize the selected core practice. This includes any background and contextual information that would be helpful for candidates in decision-making and reasoning about the practice. Teacher educators also need to define the roles candidates would assume during the modeling. Typically, they would assume both the roles of K–12 students and the roles of teachers learning the practice.

Debriefing, the other key component in modeling, often follows after modeling. This is when the teacher educator engages candidates in reflecting on their experiences during the modeling lesson as students and as teachers. The goal is to delve into the decision-making and other aspects such as adaptations necessary for the enactment of the core practice.

Another highlighting feature of modeling is the strategy of stepping out—the pedagogical act of pausing, or temporarily leaving one's role as the facilitator or teacher, in order to make visible to K–12 students or candidates the thinking and decision making that goes into an instructional move related to the core practice.

One of the things I really like about the structure of the chapters in this book is that they offer clear explanations of a method to do practice-based teaching and some real-life vignettes to illustrate variations of the enactment. And yet, what makes it exciting to read is that after going through the examples, you begin to see many possible ways to put these strategies to use in your own teaching.

Approximation of Practices and Design of Approximation to Support Novices

I consider approximation of practice to be the hallmark of practice-based teaching. This terms means opportunities to "engage in aspects of practice with additional support and under conditions that are designed for optimal learning" (p. 57).

Traditionally, learning to teach is completed in two divided settings. The university "provides the theory, skills, and knowledge about teaching through coursework" (Lampert, 2010, p. 24), which culminates in candidates applying and integrating this knowledge in schools toward the end of the teacher training.

The book places a strong emphasis on the role of practice in teacher training. Chapter 4 explains approximation of practice and considerations in developing approximations. Video extensions as approximations is a focal strategy in this chapter. Chapter 5 is devoted to using rehearsals as a pedagogy nested in instructional cycles that progress through a process of planning, rehearsing, enacting, and debriefing. The authors recommend that rehearsals lead to "authentic experiences that allow novices to enact the instructional practices in actual classrooms" (p. 100).

Candidates benefit from approximation of practice in multiple ways. First, they can plan for and practice teaching a core practice by enacting the role of teacher in a low-stakes environment. Second, they receive immediate feedback from teacher educators and peers who role-play as students. Third, during the enactment, the teacher educator can intervene, through the intentional use of pauses, for example, to provide useful feedback for the candidates.

Chapter 6 further provides three case stories of practice-based teaching implementation in three different teacher education programs across the country. We soon learn that the implementation of practice-based teaching is inextricably connected to program-specific contexts, goals and commitment levels.

In our view, core practice work is both situational and relational; using core practices and instructional activities is less about simply identifying core practices and more about reimagining teacher education practice in ways that acknowledge and take advantage of the relational and situated nature of teaching and learning. (p. 132)

As discussed earlier, one goal of the practice-based teacher education model is to break the division between university and school settings and to bridge between theory and practice. Chapter 7 explores ways to take teacher education core practices to the field. On one hand, the demands of the field influence what core practices are modeled, rehearsed, and approximated in the university coursework. On the other hand, actual classrooms provide teacher candidates with richer and more authentic learning opportunities.

Conclusion

This book has expanded the horizon for teacher education and offered a clear vision and suite of pedagogies that can make teacher education less about lecturing on tools for practice, but more about practicing the tools of the trade. It can be read, examined, discussed, and acted upon by faculty members across disciplines in teacher education programs. This is in fact how I started reading the book, as a faculty member in my teacher education unit.

You are likely a prime audience for this book if you are seeking ways to:

- make your teaching more student centered

- engage candidates in in-depth learning and practicing of high-leverage core practices

- Structure teacher education programs via a continuum of practice-based teaching opportunities from university settings to the field

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