

BEING AND BECOMING AN EXPERT TEACHER

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It is naïve to think that a finished teaching product can be created in four semesters of any teacher preparation program. These programs instead provide the knowledge and skills for preservice teachers to begin their journey toward being and becoming skillful professionals and eventually, expert teachers. Toward this end, there are two necessary elements: developing knowledge and engaging in reflective analyses.

Knowledge

A body of knowledge is an essential component of being and becoming an expert in any domain (Sternberg & Williams, 2010). There are four kinds of knowledge necessary for teaching expertise: pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge, and knowledge of learners and learning (Bruer, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Eggen & Kauchak, 2007; Sternberg & Williams, 2010).

- **Pedagogical knowledge.** This is knowledge of general teaching strategies used to impart information, teach skills, or enhance learning in all subject areas. This include strategies such as cooperative learning, expository teaching, discovery learning, problem-based learning, inquiry, universal design for learning, and various forms of multi-level instruction. Expert teachers have a toolbox filled with an assortment of these strategies that can be used with a variety of students in a variety of situations.

- **Pedagogical content knowledge.** This is knowledge of teaching strategies used to teach specific content or skills. For example, expert teachers know the best strategies for teaching reading, science, math, writing, or other content areas.

- **Content knowledge.** This is a body of knowledge related to the subject matter that is to be taught. Expert teachers have subject area expertise. For example, math teachers know a lot about math, social studies teachers know a lot about social studies, etc. This body of knowledge guides the expert teacher in deciding what is taught and in what order. Expert elementary and special education teachers often are required to have expertise in a variety of areas.

- **Knowledge of learners and learning.** This is knowledge of the learning process, learning theories, and human development as it relates to social, emotional, intellectual, moral, and personal development. Expert teachers know about their students and how these students best learn.

Reflection

Being and becoming an expert teacher also requires reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Noormohammad, 2014; Sternberg & Williams, 2010; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Reflection occurs during the teaching episode in what is called formative reflection. It also occurs after the teaching episode in what is called summative reflection. Reflective thinking occurs on four levels. Each level is described here.

Level 1: Teaching effectiveness. Effective teachers reflect to assess learning outcomes (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001; Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2008). They examine the teaching episode in order identify those things that worked well and those things that could have

been done differently. The following types of questions are asked: How did it go? Was I effective in getting ideas across? Did learning take place? Were students able to take away something of importance? Were students able to construct new knowledge? Is there anything I could change or do better? What worked? Did students learn? Did I achieve my purpose or learning objective? What could I have done differently to make the lesson better or more interesting? Was I successful in differentiating the lesson?

Level 2: Research, research-based practices, or research-based theories. Decisions made by accomplished teachers are grounded in established theory and research-based practices (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). Reflective teachers pause to examine their teaching practice to see if what they are doing aligns with a body of research and research-based theory related to teaching and learning. They ask questions such as: Does this align with research-based theory? Can it be supported by one of the learning theories? Does it reflect best practice? Can I find research or research-based theory to support what I am doing? What does the professional literature say about this practice?

It is hard, at this level, to reflect if you have nothing upon which to reflect. Thus, the importance of having a sufficient amount of knowledge in each of the four areas above.

Level 3: Values and philosophy. Teaching at the highest level requires teachers pause to consider if what they are doing is in harmony with their personal and professional values and their philosophy (Dewey, 1934). Teacher reflection at this level is based on the premise that you can identify a set of values and a teaching philosophy. A philosophy is a set of principles based on one's values and beliefs that are used to guide one's behavior. Questions here include things such as: Does this practice reflect what I value? Am I practicing what I preach regarding what I believe to be the purpose of education? Is what I am doing consistent with my teaching philosophy? Is this the type of teacher I am or want to be? Do I value what I am doing? These types of questions are not asked nearly enough.

Level 4: Interpersonal and transpersonal connections. This fourth level tends to be somewhat esoteric and may not be appropriate for all teachers. Reflection at this level is often tied in with one's metaphysical paradigm (Johnson, 2011). Here you seek meaning as well as a larger purpose for what you do and your daily lessons. Questions to ask include the following: What does the experience mean? Where does it bring you? How are you connecting with something beyond yourself? What is the lesson beyond the lesson? What is the larger human dimension? What is the emotional and intuitive impact? Who am I? What am I learning?

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