

## Abstract

This study investigates the following question: *How does the use of the rehearsal cycle in the first semester of a teacher education program contribute to a novice teacher's acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and judgment necessary to engage in ambitious literacy instruction?* This innovative pedagogy, used in a literacy methods course for prospective elementary teachers, integrates theory with practice. It rearranges the content ordinarily covered in a course so that it is treated in the midst of work on problems of practice, rather than in a topic-by-topic sequence. To investigate the lasting effects of the rehearsal cycle on teacher education (TE) students' learning, we conducted interviews with TE students who had taken the literacy course. Our findings suggest that the rehearsal cycle aided in these TE students' long-term understanding of key instructional activities as well as some other aspects of teaching.

## Methods

Of the 21 TE students in the course, 17 volunteered to be interviewed. The hour-long interviews probed TE students' experiences in the literacy course as well as how the course connected with their subsequent teacher education program experiences in courses and with teaching in classrooms. Questions addressed the following categories: instructional activities, elementary school context, rehearsal cycles, and the use of video.

We took a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyzing the interview data, identifying themes that emerged across the TE students' experiences in the summer literacy course and the ways these experiences influenced their learning throughout the teacher education program. With the course instructor, we worked to develop a rich description of the course, using course documentation as well as her recollections. This rich description provided a background against which we interpreted themes from the interview data.

## Course Description

### Overview:

- Course title: Developmental Reading and Writing in the Elementary School
- 3-credit required course for TE students in one-year master's with certification program
- First methods/field experience course for the cohort
- Held on-site at an elementary summer school program

### Design features:

- Focus on learning "ambitious teaching" with five literacy-focused instructional activities: storybook read aloud, running record, small group reading lesson, morning meeting, word study
- Focus on "rehearsal cycle" (see graphic): observing, planning, performing with coaching, teaching, and reflecting on the teaching experience
- Use of video to capture and share TE students' performance

## Results

We categorized our findings as follows:

### Benefits of the Rehearsal Cycle

- TE students valued the feedback on teaching that was provided through the rehearsal cycle. Two features were most helpful: 10 described the focused, immediate feedback of public rehearsals and 10 described the instructor's focus on specific points in short video clips.
- 8 noted that viewing videos of themselves raised their awareness of their physical presence, i.e., "body language" and "mannerisms."
- 4 identified their use of language and word choice as areas they learned about through the study of videos of their teaching.
- 7 described the value of seeing others' teaching; this served the purposes of providing a "model," illustrating alternative approaches, and providing a stimulus for discussion of alternatives.
- 6 indicated that they were able to begin teaching right away in their fall field placements because they knew how to do the literacy activities.

### The "Public" Nature of the Rehearsal Cycle

- 11 expressed feelings of self-consciousness, nervousness, and embarrassment about having their teaching video recorded.
- 7 expressed anxiety about coached rehearsal because they were insecure about being the focus of their peers' scrutiny and critique.
- 3 noted that the presence of the video camera changed the instructional dynamic, feeling that they and/or the children behaved differently because of its presence.

### Content of the Course

- All TE students recognized the five instructional activities as key components of the course "content."
- 8 indicated that the literacy course influenced their confidence or self-awareness as teachers.
- 7 emphasized the theory or philosophy of literacy instruction that they learned in the course.
- 6 described the applicability of course ideas to other areas of their teaching, including how to manage particular situations with students, how to manage small group work, and how to plan lessons.
- 5 described how the course raised awareness of the complexity of teaching and the challenge of simultaneously managing multiple aspects of the work.

## Discussion

Our results indicate that the TE students experienced the summer literacy course as a different kind of teacher education. Actual teaching, both observed and experienced through the rehearsal cycle, was the primary "text" for the course, allowing TE students to feel that they learned to *do* teaching. The primary focus was on teaching literacy, but some TE students saw applicability to other areas, indicating that the literacy activities used within the rehearsal cycle were to some degree generative of their learning in other areas of teaching. The work was not only practical; the TE students' feedback indicates that the course had some success in building their confidence as teachers and raising their awareness of the complexity of "ambitious" teaching. The TE students' feedback also indicates that, having taught in a school setting before their school year fieldwork, they may have had a shortened period of adjustment to the elementary school classroom.

Use of the rehearsal cycle in teacher education has a social dimension that should not be overlooked. Months after the course had ended, numerous TE students recalled feelings of self-consciousness, nervousness, and embarrassment related to the use of coached rehearsal and video recordings of their teaching. Most acknowledged the instructor's efforts to make them feel comfortable as well as the benefits of their experiences with the rehearsal cycle; but it is likely that TE students' anxiety influenced the extent to which those benefits were realized.

## Conclusion

This is one of few studies that investigate the use of the rehearsal cycle pedagogy for novices' learning of professional practice (see also Grossman, Compton, Igra, Ronfeldt, Shahan & Williamson, 2005; Lampert & Graziani, 2005). This study contributes to our understanding of what these TE students learned as a result of the rehearsal cycle and how they felt about the process. Our analysis suggests that the rehearsal cycle had a lasting effect on these TE students' understanding of the literacy-based activities emphasized in the course and that they applied some course ideas to other aspects of their teaching. Future studies might address two areas: 1) ways of managing the TE students' anxiety as their teaching is made public through the rehearsal cycle and 2) the ways and degree to which the TE students used the instructional activities and ideas learned through the rehearsal cycle in their own teaching practice.

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