

Chapter 15

Developing a Disposition for Reflective Practice That Sustains Continuous Professional Learning

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Exploring attitudes and personal values or “dispositions” expected in the teaching profession is a crucial component of any comprehensive teacher preparation program. Much has been written on the dispositions of teachers and teacher candidates. The National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (currently part of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) defined professional dispositions as, “[The] attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors as educators interact with students,



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families, colleagues, and communities” (2001).

This organization further suggests that “. . . these positive behaviors support student learning and development” and as such are embraced by general education and specialty preparation alike. That said, it is often challenging to gauge teacher candidates’ development in this arena. One must look

at the behaviors of aspiring professionals to determine if they possess the attitudinal “it” factor that supports a successful teaching career. It has been suggested that among the dispositions that are foundational to teachers

are integrity, respect, commitment, self-awareness, and perhaps most importantly a positive outlook. Three essential adverbial modifiers have been offered to qualify the how and how often teacher behaviors representative of deeper dispositions are demonstrated “frequently,” “willingly,” and “consciously.”

Associated with the exploration of teacher dispositions is the ongoing development of teacher identity, an acknowledged factor in motivation, satisfaction, and a commitment to the work of teaching (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). Teacher identity delineates who we are as teachers and our readiness to assume the teacher role. This complex concept has been defined in many different ways, but the essence of teacher identity suggests a developing understanding of the self in relationship to the professional educational community in which one interacts. While identity forms over time, it is especially supported at the preservice level when teacher candidates have interactions with mentors/cooperating teachers that instill “confidence, power and agency” (Izadinia, 2014).

Not surprisingly, long-term retention in the workplace is correlated to positive teacher education experiences (see discussion related to retention in Izadinia, 2014); that this same observation holds true for teachers preparing to work with children who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) and their families is not a far stretch. It might be suggested then that teacher identity is the flip side of the coin of teacher dispositions. If this is true, how do aspiring teachers manifest the professional identity that embodies the frequent, willing, and conscious practice of foundational beliefs of education? One surefire way to support and induct aspiring professionals with the dispositions that will sustain them in their teaching careers is to locate a community of professionals (who possess the very dispositions under discussion) with whom candidates can interact.

Reflective Practice

As a teacher candidate preparing to work with children who are D/HH, it is essential to develop

the teaching skills as well as the dispositions that lead to the best possible child outcomes. Reflection is one of these essential skills. In 1933, John Dewey described reflection as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Since then, educators have commonly used the term “reflective practice” defined more comprehensively by Schon (1983) who described a reflective practitioner as someone who ruminates on a teaching experience to gain knowledge about how their actions impact students. Valli (1997) delved deeper, describing a reflective teacher as someone who “can look back on events; make judgments about them; and alter their teaching behaviors in light of craft, research, and ethical knowledge” (p. 70).

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Once practicing independently, new teachers report struggling to apply what was learned in preparation programs if they have not had ample experience applying pedagogy to practice in their preservice experiences (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2006; Whitaker, 2000). Deliberately analyzing specific aspects of a lesson through reflective practice is one of the most effective ways to address this dilemma (Britton & Anderson, 2010). The ability to view teaching practices through an analytical lens is the hallmark of a skilled educator. Imperative to developing this skill is being guided to identify teaching strategies that effectively promote optimal learning, strategies that do not, and how to make strategy modifications when necessary. If reflection is not a formal component (i.e., required) of teacher preparation,

it is unlikely to happen. If, however, a teacher candidate habitually reflects on every teaching/learning exchange from early to late field experiences, then as a teacher, she is more likely to engage in reflection as a lifelong practice. Teacher preparation programs that use guided reflection at the beginning of a teacher preparation program and continue the process through graduation and beyond provide varied, multiple opportunities for development of highly qualified teachers (Anderson & Radencich, 2001).

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So does that mean that thinking about teaching makes a reflective practitioner? No. While a crucial component, being a reflective practitioner requires more than thought. Action is requisite. Procedures must be modeled, practiced, and formalized by an expert practitioner/mentor, particularly during the preparation phase (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009).

Although novice practitioners, including teachers in training,

have some theoretical knowledge of their desired craft, they have little-to-no experience using that pedagogical knowledge to make practice-based decisions. In short, they don't know what they don't know. Critical for the success of reflective skill development are mentor partners (university faculty, cooperating teacher, or both) who initially demonstrate teaching strategies to teacher candidates while working with a child in a practicum setting—later guiding teacher candidates to identify their own strengths and areas of growth in teaching. These early partnerships help to build trust and collegiality as the mentor evaluates his/her teaching performance and encourages the teacher candidate to do likewise. In turn, they learn the importance of reflective practice as a mechanism for setting continued professional growth goals (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

Partnerships can be dyadic or triadic. A dyadic partnership includes an expert and novice, while the triadic partnership can take one of two forms:

- 1 An expert (e.g., either university supervisor or cooperating teacher) and two novices.
- 2 Two experts (e.g., university supervisor and cooperating teacher) and one novice.

Regardless of the partnership composition, it is incumbent upon the expert to instill a value for reflective practice.

Through the thoughtful review of teaching/learning exchanges, teacher candidates discover how instructional activities influence children's outcomes. This presupposes an acknowledged and inseparable link between child progress and the teacher actions that led to them. Notice the primacy of focus on child

outcomes—for the reflective practitioner, all review and evaluation of engagement and learning is child oriented. Thus a healthy disposition to planning and executing lessons begins with child- (or family) focused objectives and the instructional experiences that will lead to their attainment. With this orientation to teaching and learning, analysis and review of post-instructional activities is elevated, as is the language that describes it.

Instead of simplistic statements, such as . . .

I did [].
They did [].
It was (good/bad).

One would more likely hear . . .

When I did [], the children did [].
The children did [], because I did [].
Next time I will [], so that the children will [].

Notice too the complexity of linguistic structure that accompanies deep reflection in post-lesson/session analysis. And consider that the first group of statements closes with an evaluation, whereas the second group of statements is analytical.

In a similar manner, the cooperating teacher can use post-lesson language that either discourages or encourages reflective practice. Consider a teacher candidate's possible responses to the following question posed by the cooperating teacher:

"How do you think that went?"

What response first comes to mind when trying to conceptualize an answer to this inquiry? Is a single word sufficient? Or perhaps only a stream of consciousness recall of the highlights (and lowlights) of the lesson necessary?

Now consider a cooperating teacher who asks the following series of questions:

"What goals were reached by the children in today's lesson, and what was your role?"

"If you had to do this lesson over again, what would it look like and why?"

"How will you plan for your next lesson based on today's outcomes?"

Again, the syntactic complexity in this second set of questions reveals the link between language and reaching the depth of thinking that reflective practice requires. These questions prompt consideration of the children (or family), the activity, *and* the role of the teacher. They require substantive responses as guided by the probing questions of the cooperating teacher. Reprising a quote from our introduction, analysis of success (or lack thereof) is accomplished by “looking back on events, making judgments about them, and [planning for] altering them . . .” (Valli, 1997).

In addition to a face-to-face, oral debriefing, reflective practice can readily be supported through journaling. Because writing is not just putting down on paper (or on screen) what one already knows, the very act of writing calls for “puzzling through what is happening in our work” (Boud, 2001). When this work is the development of teaching skills for educating children who are D/HH, journaling early and often as a formal component of a teacher preparation program is highly valued.

Video-Enhanced Reflective Practice

Yet another vehicle for the development of reflective practice skills is the consistent use of video technology. In the same way that video viewing helps athletes improve their skills, so too can watching recorded teaching sessions improve one’s instructional techniques. Current discussion on the role of video in educational settings includes its merits for supervision, coaching, and mentoring. For the teacher candidate, video technology may be the best tool in the toolkit to assist in the development of reflective

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practice as the cornerstone of the teaching craft. According to Knight (2014), the micro camera—as housed in tablets and smartphones—is a “disruptive” technology for professional learning (i.e., changing the status quo in standard practice) in education and is poised to revolutionize the ease with which aspiring educators can harness the power of video to enhance teaching. Simply stated, video recording and reviewing lessons captures an objective

rather than subjective view of a teaching/learning exchange. More specifically, Knight has identified three powerful reasons for using video to heighten the practitioner’s awareness of what is actually happening during an instructional interaction/lesson.

Overcoming the “Busyness” of the Classroom

Whether teaching a general education class of 26 students or a small instruction class of 5 children who are D/HH, there are numerous tasks and decisions for which the teacher is responsible. While managing content, engaging learners, and providing quality turns, it is virtually impossible for the teacher to see it all in real-time. Capturing an objective representation of the lesson ensures that attention can be focused on each of these elements in isolation—thereby identifying strengths and challenges of any particular instructional period and an individual child’s responses to instruction.

Habituation

As a concept, habituation refers to insensitivity to a behavior that occurs with regularity over time. That is, becoming so used to an event or pattern or responsiveness that it is essentially disregarded. This is especially a concern when a teacher overlooks signals that a child needs encouragement to participate or is essentially disengaged from the lesson. It is easy to give attention to the child/children who are fully engaged. Video evidence of failure to notice nonparticipation often creates the dissonance from which strategy revision is launched.

Confirmational Bias

Quoting Chip and Dan Heath (2013), Knight further explores the possibility that without an objective reality, one may only see what is expected to be seen. That is, as teachers, we place a “filter” through which we observe our real-time reality. In so doing, we may inadvertently overlook evidence that is contrary to our expectations. For example, we may expect that a particular child understands the newly introduced concept of “habitat.” Yet upon a review of the exact response, we may see that her comprehension of the term has not generalized beyond “farm” and “jungle” to include “forest, desert, and ocean.”

It might be suggested then that the adoption of video technology is essential to the preparation of strong teacher candidates who routinely engage in rigorous reflective practice. Objective evidence of a teacher candidate’s skill acquisition contributes

[A video artifact] has the potential to remove bias (both positive and negative) by either the cooperating teacher or the university liaison, as well as the teacher candidate.

to the process and adds to the observation/comment/debrief protocol practiced in many personnel preparation programs. Instead of relying only on the supervisor’s eyes and commentary, an objective account of the lesson is available for viewing by each member of the triadic team—teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor/liaison. With a video artifact as the “truth” of the teacher candidate’s developing craft, the coaching conversation can begin with the identification of the strengths and challenges in any teaching-learning exchange as evidenced by the video capture.

This has the potential to remove bias (both positive and negative) by either the cooperating teacher or the university liaison, as well as the teacher candidate.

deaf education program affiliated with a listening and spoken language (LSL) center of excellence. While it can be adjusted to fit the structure of any preservice program, it is vital that certain tenets of the process be maintained. In other words, to effectively develop strong reflective skills, they must be modeled, deconstructed, and evaluated throughout all practical experiences.

Observation

As indicated in *Table 1*, in the first semester of preparation, teacher candidates observe individual and group lessons taught by a teacher or university instructor. Prior to a one-on-one session, language targets are identified, and anticipated LSL strategies are noted. During the session, the instructor narrates an inner monologue related to diagnostic teaching decisions. Sample narration might include:

“I didn’t give Sam enough wait time just then. He might have been able to respond with five more seconds.”

“Because Sam omitted ‘a,’ I acoustically highlighted it when I recasted his utterance.”

Because a thorough reflection cannot be accomplished during the session, the lesson is further analyzed after the child returns to the classroom. At first the instructor explicates strategies used that successfully elicited intended language from the child and suggests what might be done differently in relation to targets not achieved. As the semester progresses, the teacher

One Model of Reflective Practice Development

To illustrate the scope and sequence of a systematic protocol for the development of reflective practice, the timeline in *Table 1* is offered, which is used in a graduate

Table 1
Teacher Candidate Reflection Development Timeline

Semester 1	Teacher candidates observe individual lessons taught by a university instructor and group lessons taught by classroom teachers. Reflection is modeled during and after sessions.
Semesters 2 & 3	Paired teacher candidates and a university instructor provide language therapy to a child who is D/HH. The instructor plans for and leads the first several sessions. Reflection is modeled during the session, immediately afterwards, and in an online journal. Teacher candidates slowly assume teaching responsibility. Real-time coaching, teacher candidate reflection, and peer coaching is facilitated by the university instructor.
Semester 4	Teacher candidates provide feedback to peers regarding lesson plans as part of an advanced curriculum course. Teacher candidates reflect on and modify plans—explicating rationale for change.
Semesters 5 & 6	Teacher candidates develop relationships with cooperating teachers and complete two student-teaching placements. Letters of introduction (see <i>Appendix B</i>) are sent prior to placements. Cooperating teachers model reflection. Teacher candidates are required to question cooperating teachers regarding strategy use. Once teaching, teacher candidates must show evidence of reflection through meetings with the cooperating teacher and university instructor, as well as written reflections.

candidates analyze the lesson and give data-based suggestions regarding practices that should be repeated and those that should be reconsidered. When teacher candidates observe group lessons, an additional instructor is present to identify the LSL strategies being implemented in the classroom. Following the lesson, the classroom teacher joins the discussion—reflecting on the practices that were successful and what might be changed.

Co-Teaching Individual Intervention

In the second and third semesters, teacher candidates participate in a weekly language therapy session in which two candidates are paired with a university instructor and a child who is D/HH. All sessions are video recorded. The instructor plans for and conducts the first several sessions with incrementally increasing teacher candidate input. For example, by the fourth session, the instructor would have all activities and materials ready but may ask the teacher candidates to help script sample language to be used to elicit child goals. Similarly the instructor models reflection *during* the session and thoroughly analyzes teaching practices afterwards. As the weeks progress, the instructor raises expectations for teacher candidate input through continued probing:

Why do you think I hid all the items at the beginning of the lesson?

I didn't hear Sam say any articles during the lesson. Did you? What could I do differently next time to increase his use of articles?

As teacher candidates assume full teaching responsibility in this field experience—alternating turns as the lead teacher—it is important to tie child success to teaching behavior. When evaluating a lesson, novices tend to focus on child success—or lack thereof—but forget to attribute child behavior to strategies used by the teacher. Each weekly language therapy session is followed by an online journal entry in which the lead teacher evaluates how well the child used each language target and what he did—or should have done—to elicit that language. The teacher candidate peer and university supervisor contribute as well. Video footage is essential during this process. Accurately recalling teaching behaviors is particularly difficult for graduate students who are new to lesson planning and implementation. Video capture allows the teacher candidates to review the lesson and objectively reflect on what strategies were used well and which need to be focused on in subsequent sessions.

When teacher candidates first assume the lead teacher role, the supervisor will likely need to ask many questions to elicit reflection:

Which targets that you planned to elicit did Sam use?

What did you do that successfully elicited targets?

What would you do differently next time and why?

In successive weeks, the teacher candidates assume increasingly greater responsibility for leading the post-session reflection conversation. This two-semester experience lays the foundation for teacher candidates to habituate reflection. In addition, they gain experience in observing and identifying strategies in others. This is essential for coaching strategy development, which will be readily transferable to working with families of children who are D/HH.

Student Teaching

The systematic development of reflective practice continues during student teaching rotations, except the triad shifts to include the teacher candidate, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher. Ideally the cooperating teacher is skilled at explaining rationale for teaching strategies. The teacher candidate is ultimately responsible for observing strategies implementation by the cooperating teacher and asking about their use, rationale, and timing. Once teaching, the teacher candidate reflects daily on each lesson and shares those notes with both the cooperating teacher and university instructor. While video recording is still valuable and should be used, it is not feasible to review an entire day's worth of footage. Writing brief notes during and after each lesson is vital. This stepwise protocol—beginning with observation in the first semester and culminating in full-time student teaching in the final semester—promotes the gradual release of responsibility that empowers teacher candidates, as adult learners, to become accountable for monitoring their own skill acquisition.

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Reflective Practice in the Workplace

In the same way that “healthy lifestyle” habits can be adopted for lifelong commitment to physical well-being, so too can reflective practice be promoted for sustaining commitment to this evidenced-based practice throughout the career journey. Keep in mind that the cocoon of the teacher education program expects and values the reflective practices that lead to effective and outcomes-based intervention/instruction. There are high expectations for exemplary performance and continued knowledge and skill growth. But what happens when the teacher candidate becomes a teacher, moves away from the university environment, and joins a workplace that has a culture that does not include reflective practice? It may be hypothesized that even the strongest proponent of reflective practice may be subject to a kind of “professional drift” that occurs without a teaching community that supports the importance of reflective practice as a mechanism for setting continued professional growth goals (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

To circumvent this possibility, the novice teacher is encouraged to keep in touch with the university as a “professional home,” while at the same time engaging a colleague who might consider joining forces for job-embedded, professional learning regarding reflective practice. Embracing a commitment to “preach what you practice” in the workplace is in fact a first step in building a school community that not only supports teacher induction but also influences child outcomes. Sharing knowledge of and enthusiasm for reflective practice is one way for entry-level professionals to contribute positively to established culture. With the support of a learning community over time, new professionals gain sufficient experience and expertise, such that they may be tapped as cooperating teachers themselves. It is then an opportunity for the circle to be completed as one’s own positive experiences with mentoring and reflective practice are shared with the next “generation” of teacher candidates. Thus the question “what does it take to be a mentor teacher?” may be appropriate to explore.

In addition to being a highly skilled and effective teacher, an ideal cooperating teacher/mentor teacher is one who can remember what it was like to NOT know what is currently known. Sometimes referred to as “the curse of knowledge” (Heath & Heath, 2006) anyone skilled at any task may find it difficult to enumerate the essential skills, procedures, and thought processes that lead to successful task execution. When something becomes automatic, it is challenging to describe step-by-step performance to someone who does not yet possess the knowledge and skill of the expert. Thus in order to be an excellent mentor or coach, one must possess conscious, unconscious competence (Pike, 2002)—that is the ability to perform with high skill and able to narrate the strategy selection in use and the thought processes that are necessary for deep reflection on child performance.

Embracing a commitment to “preach what you practice” in the workplace is in fact a first step in building a school community that not only supports teacher induction but also influences child outcomes.

Additionally this requires finely honed communication skills that include thinking aloud and capturing the decision-making processes that drive teaching/learning exchanges. For any mentor teacher, this behind-the-scenes reveal is foundational for developing reflective practice and moving beyond a simplistic “do as I do” approach of modeling for the teacher candidate. When mentor teachers not only demonstrate reflective practice with the children in their classrooms but also employ reflection regarding the outcomes of the teacher candidates they mentor, there is a greater likelihood that

more children who are D/HH will receive high-quality instruction from the teachers who have been excellently prepared in their preservice programs. This is a lofty but attainable goal.

Summary

It is human nature to associate competence with confidence, and in an ever-expanding cycle of positive experiences, “the rich get richer.” With a disposition to and skill set for reflective practice, the teacher candidate begins a practicum experience that places child outcomes as the centerpiece of this final learning opportunity.

Teacher candidates who arrive with “presence” (Cuddy, 2015) and display confidence and passionate enthusiasm are poised for success. Having systematically

participated in increasingly challenging practicum assignments, the teacher candidate embraces a teacher identity and establishes a unique “voice” that articulates the underlying beliefs and premises for curricular and instructional choices made in the classroom. As teacher identity and teacher voice intersect and continue to be shaped by successive experiences in the career journey, outcomes for children who are D/HH and their families track an upward trajectory in systems that value the skill set of reflective practitioners as essential to the advancement of all learners.

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Photo courtesy of Sound Beginnings/Utah State University

Resources

- *Appendix A* is an evaluation protocol that can be used by preservice teachers to enhance reflection.
- *Appendix B* is a guide for preservice teachers to write an introductory letter to cooperating teachers.

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Appendix A

Evaluation Protocol That Can Be Used by Preservice Teachers to Enhance Reflection

Student Teaching Practicum Reflective Practice Protocol Evaluation Form

Teacher Candidate Name:	Term:
Cooperating Teacher:	Apprenticeship Dates:
Educational Placement:	

Range: From 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Reflective Practice Protocol Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Pre- & Post-Session Reflection (reflection on action)						
1. Teacher candidate provides thoughtful information concerning own teaching, including:						
(a) Recognizes teaching practices that produced desired child outcome.						
(b) Identifies teaching practices that were not effective in producing desired child outcomes.						
(c) Identifies teaching practices that should have been used to result in better child outcomes.						
(d) Recognizes changes made in instruction that resulted in improved child outcomes.						
(e) Assumes increased responsibility for leading reflective conversations (relies less and less on supervisor to ask prompting questions).						
(f) Identifies teaching/reflection goals for self and provides rationale for goals.						
(g) Plans means for demonstrating progress towards teaching goals.						
Performance (reflection in action)						
2. Shows evidence of active reflection while teaching, including:						
(a) Narrating to supervisor(s) and/or peer child observations and rationale for changing procedure and/or using specific strategies.						
(b) Changes procedures and/or strategies based on child performance (i.e., does not continue with procedures or strategies that do not produce desired child outcome).						
(c) Implements real-time suggestions made by supervisors.						
(d) Means for demonstrating progress toward teaching goals is evident.						

Strengths	Areas of Improvement	
Date: <input data-bbox="293 1541 802 1587" type="text"/>		
Teacher Candidate:	<input data-bbox="396 1627 891 1675" type="text"/> <small>Name</small>	<input data-bbox="914 1627 1406 1675" type="text"/> <small>Signature</small>
Cooperating Teacher:	<input data-bbox="396 1719 891 1768" type="text"/> <small>Name</small>	<input data-bbox="914 1719 1406 1768" type="text"/> <small>Signature</small>
University Supervisor:	<input data-bbox="396 1812 891 1860" type="text"/> <small>Name</small>	<input data-bbox="914 1812 1406 1860" type="text"/> <small>Signature</small>

Appendix B **Tips on Writing a Letter of Introduction to Your Cooperating Teacher**

Sending a professional letter of introduction to your cooperating teacher can show the cooperating teacher that you are enthusiastic and excited to learn from him/her. The letter will oftentimes be the cooperating teacher's first impression of you, so it is important to write a professionally formatted letter (MLA or APA) that uses proper grammar and is devoid of colloquial language and misspellings.

In the body of the letter, discuss your strengths, abilities, and goals—highlighting your desire to become a more reflective practitioner. Include at a minimum the following:

- A brief introduction, including your name, undergraduate major and minor, and why you want to be a teacher of the D/HH—focusing on listening and spoken language.
- Prior experiences working with children and/or families, including field experiences.
- Your strengths working with children. If you have experiences in a similar setting (classroom, itinerant), be sure to include those details.
- What are you most looking forward to during your student teaching experience with this cooperating teacher? Be as specific as possible and be sure to include your desire to further develop your reflective skills. Do you want to refine your use of wait time, differentiating instruction, and behavior management? What about planning for and simultaneously implementing academic, auditory, speech, and language goals? Let the teacher know you are eager to use reflection and feedback to improve subsequent teaching.
- List your contact information, including email address and phone number.
- Offer to meet with the cooperating teacher prior to the placement.
- Thank the cooperating teacher for his/her willingness to have you in his/her classroom.

Draft the letter as early as possible—ideally as soon as the placement is confirmed. Have a university instructor review the letter prior to sending. Send the letter to the cooperating teacher as an attachment to preserve the business letter format.