Chapter 7
Improving Coherence in Teacher Education:
Features of a Field-Based Methods Course Partnership

Tracy L. Weston
Middlebury College, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the author's work as a teacher educator to establish, sustain, and improve a methods course partnership with a local K-6 school using an integrated school-situated, practice-based model. The model was designed with an aim of improving the coherence of teacher candidates' experiences and learning to better prepare them for the complicated work of equitable teaching. Coherent field-based components in teacher education offer opportunities to mitigate divisions between 1) theory and practice and 2) coursework and fieldwork. The chapter begins with a definition of coherence, describes how this definition of coherence was used to design an elementary literacy/social studies methods course, shares data to evaluate the course from the perspective of the teacher candidates, and describes what candidates learned by participating in the course.

INTRODUCTION

Coherent experiences are a necessary, yet often missing, characteristic of high quality teacher preparation (Weston & Henderson, 2015). Candidates' experiences in teacher education programs are often characterized as incoherent, fragmented, or haphazard (Bain & Moje, 2012; Hammerness, 2013; Hoban, 2005; Weston, 2018; Weston & Henderson, 2015), both between courses within the teacher preparation program, as well as between the activities and experiences implemented in campus-based and school-based classrooms. It is possible for candidates to experience significant learning from carefully designed and monitored field work (Florio Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Grisham, Laguardia & Brink, 2000; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000; Lazar, 1998; Wilson, 1996), yet the problems associated with field work and the need for improved quality have been extensively documented for

quite some time (Clift, 1991; Eisenhart, Behm & Romagnano, 1991; Goodman, 1985; Griffin, 1989; Tabachnick, Popkewitz & Zeichner, 1981). Strengthening coherence within teacher education programs by improving theory/practice harmony of philosophies, ideas, and practices as well as campus/field convergence of experiences, activities, and assignments in both settings is one way to improve opportunities for candidates so that they more reliably develop the knowledge and skills required to effectively and equitably teach all learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Building upon previous work to develop a school-situated approach to teacher preparation in literacy (Henderson, 2013) and a cross-disciplinary approach for mathematics and literacy teacher preparation (Weston & Henderson, 2015), in this work **coherence** indicates the relative quality of congruence across ideas, experiences, people, roles, components and settings and the relationship between theory and practice. Coherence is both a quality and a process, but it is not an "end" (Bateman, Taylor, Janik, & Logan, 2008; Canrinus, Klette, & Hammerness, 2017; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Nixon, 1991). Rather, it is a frame for dialogue and reflection, with an end goal of improving candidates' professional readiness for equitable, ambitious teaching (Lambert, 2001; Tatoo, 1996). In this chapter, coherence is conceptualized as having three necessary aspects:

1. Coherence requires a **shared vision** (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald, & Ronfeldt, 2008; Tatto, 1996) across people and roles (e.g., multiple faculty members, mentor teachers, supervisors).
2. Coherence requires **consistent, intentional experiences** (Buchmann & Floden, 1991; Canrinus, Klette, & Hammerness, 2017; Weston & Henderson, 2015) across settings (e.g., multiple courses, various field placements) that are designed to reflect and reinforce the shared vision (Grossman, Hammerness, McDonald, & Ronfeldt, 2008).
3. Coherence must be **evaluated from the perspective of the teacher candidates** (Broad, Stewart Rose, Lopez, & Baxan, 2013; Canrinus, Klette, & Hammerness, 2017).

The relationship between theory and practice, campus and field, from the point of view of candidates (Broad, Stewart Rose, Lopez, & Baxan, 2013; Canrinus, Klette & Hammerness, 2017), is a generative way to think about the interconnection between the constituent elements within a teacher education program, and can be used to design or evaluate a program or its more specific components, such as courses or assignments. In this chapter, the author describes how the aforementioned three aspects of coherence were used to design and evaluate a field-based methods course that was developed with the explicit aim of improving the coherence between theory and practice and course work and field work. The objective of this undertaking was to develop teacher candidates' capacities to teach interdisciplinary, concept-based literacy and social studies lessons that center content about identity, racism, and inequality. In this chapter, the author reviews previous research that informed the aforementioned definition of coherence, describes how this definition of coherence was used in the course design for an elementary literacy/social studies methods course, shares data to evaluate the course from the perspective of the teacher candidates, and describes what candidates learned by participating in the course.

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