

Chapter 92

Field–Based Learning for Minority Educators: Developing Situationally Relevant Self–Awareness Practices in the Field Experience

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ABSTRACT

While many researchers have emphasized the importance of preservice teacher candidates having the opportunity to engage in analysis, reflection, and critical thinking, a significant gap in the literature exists relevant to how these conversations are translated within the social construct of the field-based placement and experience. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the authors offer a model to explain how situationally responsive field-based learning experiences can be pedagogically transformational for minority preservice teacher candidates and the students they will eventually serve. Using key tasks embedded within the field experiences for this study are specifically designed to implement this situationally inquiry-based learning model to maximize the relationship between educational theory and actual classroom practice.

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INTRODUCTION

In order for preservice teacher candidates to become self-aware and situationally responsive pedagogues, college and university teacher preparation programs must be organized for preservice teachers to engage in socially constructed interactions through field-based experiences (Resta & Laferriere, 2007). Within most preservice teacher candidate programs, when conceptualized as a social construct, self-development expected as part of the overall candidate experience can potentially occur but is routinely obstructed among teacher candidate participants across the socially interactive instructional plane (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). These obstructions occur as a result of knowledge transfer failure as teacher candidates are unable to become self, rather than other, or object-regulated by the supervising professor and cooperating teacher (Luria, 1976; Smagorinsky, 1995).

Research in the area of teacher identity development suggests that there is a myriad of explanations for this disconnect including personal identity development, the social construct of the school, and institutional prescriptions of what teachers “think and do” (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Based on this supposition, upon successful completion of the teacher education program, preservice teacher candidates should be able to self-regulate their beliefs and practices when adapting to the multicultural changes that characterize the public school classroom in the United States today.

Literature relevant to how preservice teacher candidates bridge the gap between theory and practice specifically addresses the need for situationally relevant field-based field experiences (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvare-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; McGarr, O’Grady, & Guilfoyle, 2017). Current trends in the 21st century classroom have the potential to mitigate this gap. These trends lend to the notion of a more student-centered model in which the classroom teacher acts as a learning guide while utilizing an inquiry-based, Socratic approach to presenting content to students (Blessinger & Carfora, 2015). Denoted as a “flipped classroom,” the idea is for students to explore a concept through the use of higher order questions activated by real-world, participatory activities in real time. This model expects that lecture content be viewed/reviewed prior to class time to promote maximum collaboration during face-to-face interactions. (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015; Herried & Schiller, 2013; Educause, 2012). Adding a flipped approach strengthens the existing field-based learning model and accomplishes the following goals: (1) provides more opportunities for individualized learning; (2) provides more opportunities for collaborative learning; and (3) provides more opportunities for personal and pedagogic “risk-taking” through the application of theory to practice teaching prior to entering the field.

The objective, then, is to proactively address the potential cultural imbalance within the field-based setting by equipping minority preservice teacher candidates with best practice tools in order to prepare them for the potential of being placed in schools and with cooperating teachers not representative of their experiences as minority students. As noted in current literature on minority teacher placements, a cultural disconnect between the teacher candidate and school of placement can result in short- and long-term negative impacts on personal and pedagogic growth if the candidate feels culturally disconnected from the experience (Ronfeldt, 2012; Su, 1996). These negative impacts can include such things as failing to enter teaching after graduation or leaving the profession within a year or two after entering the field (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gordon, 1994; Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Field-based learning and flipped classrooms share similar instructional frameworks in the sense that students are actively engaged through socially constructed activities that take an individualized learner’s needs into account (Jinlei & Baohui, 2012; Smith, Shepard, Johnson, D. & Johnson, R., 2005). For the minority preservice teacher candidate, retooling the field-based experience within the flipped concept

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