Classroom Materials as Spheres of Influence: Examining Institutional Influences on a Novice High School English Teacher

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A BIT OF BACKGROUND

PREVIOUS RESEARCH LEADS TO A QUESTION:
A great deal of research indicates that early-career high school English teachers are strongly influenced by their colleagues and school environment; often the influence of the school community is significantly greater than the influence of their preparation programs. (Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000; Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky, & Fry, 2003; Smagorinsky, Wright, Murphy Augustine, O’Donnell-Allen, & Konopak, 2007; Smagorinsky, Wilson, & Moore, 2011).

FINDINGS: INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

CO-CREATED TEXTS:
Of the 44 mentions of instructional strategies in 9th-grade professional learning community (PLC) meetings, 55 percent (n=24) related to creation and use of classroom materials. From the shared strategies, fifteen categories of strategies emerged, and of these categories, 60 percent (n=9) were cross-coded with the institutional ethnographic category of influential texts. This data is represented in the chart at right.

FINDINGS: CASE STUDY

TEXTS CREATE INSTRUCTION
In the observations of Gordon’s classroom practices, it was obvious that texts of various types drive his instruction: slide decks display the agenda daily, necessary materials are shared digitally through Google Classroom and referenced in the slide decks, worksheets and graphic organizers guide student activity, and instructions and examples are often written as well as spoken throughout class. Although Gordon’s use of guiding questions, circulation, and conferencing (among several other strategies) do not experience the same cross-coding with texts, the classroom materials are at the core of nearly all of the instruction.

THE COMMUNITY CO-CREATES TEXTS
It is clear that the strong community-based institutional forces influencing Gordon’s classroom practices revolve around the creation and use of texts for use in class based on three related findings:
• Much of the discussions in PLC meetings regarding instructional strategies revolves around the creation and use of classroom materials.
• Gordon’s classroom is deeply influenced by the texts he creates and uses.
• The interview tracing the processes Gordon uses for creating those texts indicates that the most significant influence on his process is his school community.

THE ORGANIZATION OF TEXTS
-texts as strategies
-texts as resources
-texts as community

METHODS & METHODOLOGY

METHODS:
This study begins with an institutional ethnography to determine generalized effects of the community on the practices within that community and then narrows to a case study of an early-career English teacher to determine the extent to which that influence affects his emerging classroom practices.

CONCLUSION

The initial findings of this study indicate that the strong influence by the school community on Gordon’s instructional practices derives from community generation of texts for and discussion of their use in the classroom.

References: