• How do we develop mindfulness and thinking dispositions to learn?

Exploring the Use of Children’s Artwork and Writing as Provocation Toward Developing Dispositional Thinking in Pre-Service Teachers

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While some may argue that anyone can teach or that teaching is a matter of delivering scripted curriculum, most people familiar with classroom life would agree that teaching is demanding work that requires teachers to know something and to think. Indeed, educational scholars have drawn clear lines between subject matter expertise and good teaching (Shulman, L. 1986; Wilson, S. M., Shulman, L. S., & Richert, A, 1987). It can be presumed, for example, that if you are going to teach math well you should have a deep understanding of mathematics (Lampert, M. 1985; Perkins, D. 2001).

But what about thinking? What, besides subject matter, might we want teachers to think about? More specifically, what kinds of thinking might we want teachers to do? It may seem obvious that if we want teachers to teach critical thinking, for example, they ought to be critical thinkers. Yet those who have studied thinking in the classroom suggest that the question is less obvious, that it is multi-layered with much to consider. Some researchers have argued for the development of intellectual character which features dispositional thinking -- a tendency toward thinking in particular ways, an understanding of when a particular kind of thinking is needed, as well as the will to follow through with that thinking (Perkins, D., Tishman, S., Ritchhart, R., Donis, K., & Andrade, A. 2000; Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. 2008; Ritchhart 2002).

While questions regarding thinking and how we might develop it in children are well described by these and other researchers, questions regarding the development of dispositional thinking in pre-service teachers are less well understood. For example, how might dispositional thinking be used by teachers as they reflect on their teaching, as they assess children, as they plan lessons? How can dispositional thinking be developed in preservice teachers? Participants in this interactive session will be invited to ponder the specific question: How can dispositional thinking be developed in a method courses designed to teach pedagogy? The session highlights provocations that focus on developing the disposition to dig deeper, or the disposition to seek truth and understand (Ritchhart, 2002) taken from a reading and writing method course in a mid-size regional, public university in Michigan.

Participants will be offered a brief overview laying out definitions and examples of dispositional thinking followed by information about the context. Participants will be invited to engage in a provocation designed for preservice teachers, specifically aimed at developing the disposition to
seek truth and understand. Finally, there will be time for reflective discussion and an opportunity to imagine how the ideas discussed could be applied in different contexts