Title: Authoring video inquiries as a reflective process for English student teachers

Abstract: Reflection is a central activity of teacher education and development. While written reflection may provide teachers with the space to create distance between practice and theory, writing as a tool for reflection also limits the opportunity to closely interpret experience. New digital technologies now provide simple and quick ways to turn classroom video into edited documentaries in which teachers can thoroughly analyze primary sequences of their own classroom experience. The difficulty of writing long accounts describing classroom events, then writing how those events are significant can now be replaced with a video excerpt of the class event juxtaposed with a voice-over analysis. This presentation will share many such video documentaries completed by teacher education students in English classrooms over the last 3 years.

It is a generally accepted belief that reflection is central to the act of teaching, supporting many activities within programs of teacher education that require students to write extensively about experiences in order to become reflective practitioners (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). This focus on writing has extended itself even into the professional development of teachers through efforts to create action research and classroom inquiry communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Frank, 2001). Yet, the over-reliance on writing as the primary tool beyond face-to-face discussion about classroom practice, may restrict the types of thinking that can be engaged by new and practicing teachers.

Writing presents specific challenges to fully describe a classroom event and connect it to all of the divergent ideas that may be used to interpret the experience. Good analysis of an experiential event always require a full or “thick” description of the experience, sufficient for readers to experience it vicariously. Otherwise, the reflection on a classroom event jumps too quickly to generalizations about the value of the event, skipping perhaps the most important process in the thinking, and the moment which must be lodged open if alternative interpretations of the experience are to be made possible by the teacher educator.

The critical moment in interpretation is the leap between the naming of experience, it’s full description or representation, and the projection of value on that representation. The demands of writing a close description that (re)presents the experience as close to the moment of perception as possible is typical of the novelist craft, but is not typical of the teacher education student. This limitation of writing for reflective growth requires the teacher educator to divest the classroom story of value judgments through a series of questions that attempt to get back to the moment of experience. This attempt is not always well received because the teacher or student teacher remembers more about their valued judgment of the experience than details of the experience that might support multiple examinations of possible frames for understanding the human event.

Over the past three years, teacher education students working in the classroom as full year interns have video taped classroom events, then created iMovie documentaries by editing the events, and adding a voice-over that analyzes the event. In order to increase the application of theory to classroom experience, student teachers have also re-edited
completed documentaries and created new voice-overs that provide alternative analyses of the classroom events. This presentation will share different forms of thinking that have been characteristic of approximately 75 video inquiry projects completed since 2003. In some cases, very close analyses of the classroom activity can be noted. Still, in other cases, the voice over analysis enacts advertising techniques with generalized educational goals loosely connected to the juxtaposed images and sounds. Technical aspects of this activity will be shared in response to questions and a website for audience review of all iMovie projects will be shared.

References:

