Multiple Texts, Teacher Craft Knowledge, and Principled Practices in High School Economics

A Case Study of Kenneth

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This article considers the current state of teacher discourse and reflection, situated in daily practice, craft knowledge, multiliteracies and new literacies. Based on studies of content area teachers' use of multiple texts in social studies fields like economics, the authors profile Kenneth, an experienced teacher whose practice is grounded in craft knowledge and ideas about principled practices. In addition, Kenneth is an active proponent of new and digital literacy practices in his classroom simulations. The case example of Kenneth is then used to suggest how the process of practical argument might offer other content area teachers a useful framework for teacher reflection based on teachers' craft knowledge and principled practices.

Introduction

Content area literacy practices have received increased attention lately, in part, due to the alarming statistics advanced in the Carnegie Corporation national report, Reading Next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The report notes that as many as eight million students between fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level and 70% of older readers need some form of remediation. In addition, nearly seven thousand students drop out of high school each day (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006) and eight million struggling readers in grades 4-12 can be found in schools across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The importance of understanding highly skilled, engaging content area teaching and teachers’ beliefs seems crucial (Walker, Bean, & Dillard, 2005; Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2008). Over the past seven years we have been engaged in conducting multiple case studies of beginning and veteran content area teachers' use of multiple texts in English, history, economics, physics, and other content classrooms at middle and secondary levels (Walker & Bean, 2004; Walker, Bean, & Dillard, 2005). These studies span urban school settings in the western United States. This line of inquiry grew out of two reviews of research suggesting that, to a large degree, content area teachers in the core areas of science, history, and English relied on single texts in their classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Bean, 2000; Bean, 2001).

Timothy Shanahan and Cyndi Shanahan (2008) call for reading instruction in the content areas “to be increasingly disciplinary, reinforcing and supporting student performance with the kinds of texts and interpretative standards needed in various disciplines (p. 57). In Reading Next, Gina Biancarosa and Catherine Snow, along with others contributing to the report, recommend a number of key elements that characterize effective adolescent content
area literacy programs. Among the 15 elements, and relevant to the teacher profiled in this article, is the principle that students should encounter “diverse texts which are at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics” (2006, p. 4). In summary comments on this research, Thomas Bean (2000) noted: “The continuing dominant use of single textbooks serves to further center instruction on the teacher. Thus, in many ways, we have not shifted away from the textbook as a source of authority, a recurring theme in Donna Alvermann and David Moore’s review” (p.639).

In multiple interviews and analyses of conversations with veteran teachers about their use of multiple texts, these teachers offer an insider’s look at the daily practice of content area teaching. The teachers we have been fortunate enough to work with are highly creative and articulate about their praxis (Walker et al, 2005; Walker & Bean, 2004). In this article we argue that accomplished content area teaching lends itself to a language of practice that builds on the localized, yet important elements of craft knowledge and principled practices. Any number of theoretical orientations might be useful in the quest to develop a shared language of practice in teaching, but these two concepts seem most closely suited to the nature of classroom learning with its well documented sociocultural features. These features include lessons and units centered on inquiry, project completion, group member rules and roles, and recognition that human interaction always involves negotiation and some dialectical contradictions and tensions if learning is to occur. In addition, a student making intertextual connections across multiple forms of texts (e.g. films, simulation games, textbooks, the Internet, and so on) is a desirable feature of classrooms involving the use of multiple texts.

In this article, we profile a veteran content area teacher and point to the potential contributions of craft knowledge and principled practices in expanding our understanding of accomplished teaching and content area literacy. Accomplished teaching is a complex activity that often includes extensive preparation to engage secondary students in hands-on simulations, knowledge construction, follow-up discussion, and debate. Craft knowledge refers to teacher experiences in the classroom that informs practice (Eisenhart & DeHaan, 2005; Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001; Tom & Valli, 1990).

Teacher Craft Knowledge and Principled Reflective Practice

Teacher craft knowledge is related to work aimed at understanding and improving teachers’ reflective practices (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Britzman, 1991; Fendler, 2003.; Risko, Roskos, & Vukelich, 1999). Thomas Bean and Lisa Stevens (2002), for example, noted that without adequate guidance in reflection and a shared professional focus, teachers “may see the process as yet another classroom ritual and treat it in a cursory fashion (p. 206). Pre-service teachers’ double-entry journal discourse centered on factual reflections and the use of strategies in findings reported by Victoria Risko, Kathleen Roskos, and Carol Vukelich (1999). These researchers found no instances of what Ken Zeichner and Daniel Liston (1985) termed “critical discourse.”

In a study of preservice and inservice teachers’ scaffolded journal reflection, Bean and Stevens (2002) found that inservice teachers adhered to principled practices about teaching largely rooted in craft knowledge. Lynn Fendler’s (2003) critique of teacher reflection points to the limitations of individual reflection versus collaborative discussion. Furthermore, Lynn Fendler noted that reflective practices often serve to reinforce existing beliefs rather than challenge assumptions. Lynn Fendler (2003) argued: “To overcome the conservative tendencies of reflection, one remedy is to introduce a social dimension to reflective practices, making reflection public and available to critique among peers or critical friends (p. 17).” Craft knowledge offers a vehicle for
teachers to reflect on their practices, and use this procedural and content-based pedagogical knowledge to modify their teaching.

Principled practices link with teachers’ craft knowledge and refers to teachers’ underlying beliefs about instruction and student learning in their respective content areas (Smagorinsky, 2002; Sturtevant, Boyd, Brozo, Hinchman, Moore, & Alvermann, 2006). The concepts of craft knowledge and principled practices stand in contrast to more simplistic notions of best practices to be imposed on teachers. Rather, craft knowledge and principled practices take into account the unique nature of any classroom and content area, acknowledging teacher expertise in fashioning appropriate lessons for students.

In a consideration of key principles underpinning adolescent literacy practices in content area classrooms, Elizabeth Sturtevant, Fenice Boyd, William Brozo, Kathleen Hinchman, David Moore and Donna Alvermann (2006) noted that: “Adolescents need opportunities to engage with print and non-print texts for a variety of purposes” (p. 42).

In practice, this means that content teachers must become adept at using multiple texts and guiding students’ development of intertextual connections across print and non-print media. Similarly, the National Council for the Social Studies charged teachers with the use of multiple print and non-print texts including textbooks, films, maps, photographs, literary selections, cartoons, and computer-based material including data tables and data bases. Simply deciding to use multiple texts in content teaching will not be well received without careful planning and scaffolding by the teacher.

Teaching with multiple texts requires more preparation and planning than conventional single textbook instruction, but is more engaging and consistent with contemporary reading demands (McNabb, 2006). And, contemporary high school students actually are well versed in multiple text use given the vast array of non-print media they manipulate on a daily basis (O’Brien, 2006). The Pew Internet & American Life Project found “that 64% of online teens ages 12-17 have participated in one or more content-creating activities on the internet, up from 57% of online teens at the end of 2004” (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007, p. 1).

During our studies of teachers’ multiple text use, the role of multiliteracies became increasingly important, and this work overlaps with social studies teachers’ use of multiple texts. To further investigate the occurrence of new literacies in the classroom, for example, William Kist (2000) set forth to define and characterize multiliteracies classrooms across the United States and Canada. William Kist’s (2005) monograph contains multiple case studies describing classrooms and practices.

In order to define this construct, William Kist looked for the following classroom characteristics: (a) daily work in multiple forms of representation, (b) explicit discussions of the merits of using certain symbol systems, (c) metadialogues by the teacher who models problem solving, (d) mixture of individual and collaborative activities, and (e) engaging contexts where students achieve flow state. Using these characteristics, William Kist was able to identify and observe classrooms where teachers drew upon students’ knowledge of technology and extending their learning through collaboration, higher level thinking skills, and creativity.

Clearly, this form of teaching is much more complex and multifaceted than the more traditional reliance on a single textbook. Most importantly, it models for students the process of making intertextual connections and analyses across a range of text forms including print and non-print media.

**Content Area Teaching and Multiple Text Use**

Past research in content area literacy pointed to the historical dominance of single text use in many content area classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991). Recent studies reveal
the diverse nature of texts teachers bring into the classroom to expand students' learning (Behrman, 2003). These texts now include Internet-based material, young adult novels, magazines, newspapers, and a host of other print and non-print related material to support content area concept learning. Our research explores teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to multiple text use. Other researchers currently are looking at ways to help students make intertextual connections in their reading of multiple texts in history, with an eye toward critical reading dimensions aimed at evaluating the reliability of source documents (e.g. Hynd-Shanahan, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004).

What has piqued our interest in our interviews and analyses of conversations with veteran teachers about their use of multiple texts is the degree to which their discourse embraced highly localized, individualistic craft knowledge. We offer an example of Kenneth’s experienced talk about multiple text use and argue that, as a profession, our use of craft knowledge and principled practices helps capture and unpack the complexity of teaching. Toward that end, we profile Kenneth, an experienced economics teacher and his related discourse about teaching with multiple texts. While we realize that this is just one teacher's voice, it is representative of the discourse of many other accomplished teachers we have interviewed.

Kenneth’s commentary on his teaching sheds light on the power of craft knowledge and principled practices to inform us about how content area teachers reflect on their practice. We provide a biographical sketch of Kenneth along with his interview comments on the use of multiple texts. We connect these comments to the work on teacher craft knowledge and recent reviews of reflective practice. We then propose that teacher craft knowledge and principled practices offer an overarching framework for critical reflection on teaching using a process called practical argument (Bean & Harper, 2004; Fenstermacher, 1994; Tidwell, 1995) that we believe other educators can use to reflect on their own units and lessons in social studies.

Kenneth: His Views of Teaching and The Discourse of Craft Knowledge

Kenneth was a veteran teacher with over 21 years of experience across a number of fields. At various points in his career he taught math, computer science ceramics, civil law, government, geography, and U.S. history. During our classroom observations and interviews with Kenneth he was teaching world history and economics at Arroyo High School (a pseudonym) in Southern California. According to Hiebert, Gallimore, and Steigler (2002), this extensive array of experience can be viewed as practitioner craft knowledge that guides Kenneth's practice.

Kenneth majored in social sciences in college and earned a Master’s of Arts degree as well as endorsements to his credentials including computer science and arts and crafts. Kenneth was involved in our ongoing studies of content area teacher's use of multiple texts (Walker & Bean, 2004), and noted that the most interesting economic conundrums are not in the textbook. Kenneth used newspaper and news magazine articles to develop simulations related to economic principles such as scarcity.

I want them to think of what we did in simulations, what they wrote in their journals....but they seem to want to go to the text and they’ll say ‘but this question isn’t in the book,’ and I say you are right, it wasn’t.”

Kenneth believed that if students experienced simulations they would make the connections for state exams.

Kenneth described his teaching beliefs and practices as eclectic. He used frequent simulations or case-based scenarios presenting students with various economic dilemmas related to scarcity, opportunity cost, and so on. Kenneth stated that he embraced student learning
that included “hands on, simulations, group work, and cooperative learning.” Like many experienced teachers, Kenneth used the discourse of teacher craft knowledge to explain the origin of many of his instructional techniques. As a practitioner, he pulled from his own experiences as a student. “I had some real good role models as teachers and I have taken things from them that I use today.” Kenneth used these experiences to guide his classroom beliefs and practices. Simulations emerged from Kenneth's reflections on these concrete teaching models and experiences. “Hopefully, I am drawing on past knowledge, prior knowledge to have this [content] make sense.”

Kenneth linked his past experiences and craft knowledge to his practice in the hopes of encouraging connections amongst his students. In accordance to Howard Gardner’s (1999) work in multiple intelligences, Kenneth’s knowledge of student learning was reflected in the hands on, simulations, and group work that prevailed in his classroom.

Attending curriculum trainings in Economics and Literature allowed Kenneth to solve problems in the classroom. Outside training provided Kenneth with a glimpse of a lesson that can test theory about students’ learning. A lesson becomes a unit of analysis that allows Kenneth to “simplify teaching for study” (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002, p. 8). “Whenever I start a new class like teaching computers, I would go in and watch the computer teacher presents a lesson and I would almost copy it. I can still draw things from those classes and use them in my class.”

One simulation in particular occurred during the reading about the Industrial Revolution. Kenneth had the students work through six rounds of making books in order to understand the principles of scarcity and productivity. The simulation allowed the students to interact with each level of production in industry and then discuss the impact on different economic systems.

I want them to experience what it is like to want more, more, and more, and the resources stay the same. I’m trying to look at how we deal with basic economic problems such as scarcity...some of the ways we address things in an industrial society.

Kenneth’s teaching, having students think like economists, embodies a disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2008) framework without naming it as such. In addition to the simulation, students read and discussed magazine and newspaper articles that addressed economic issues. In Kenneth's words, “Economics is the study of choices by individuals, economies, governments, businesses, communities etc.”

In terms of Kenneth's commentary in interviews on his teaching, he used a combination of discipline-based knowledge in economics combined with pedagogical craft knowledge from his many years of teaching. Kenneth noted that: "Bringing in sources from outside is just one of those eclectic things that teachers do to get kids to meet those standards and suck them in accidentally into liking it." He describes the core text, *Economics In Our Times* (Arnold, 1999) as "one tool," preferring to augment this book with other materials and activities. Despite declaring, like many accomplished teachers that: "I don't know that I have a philosophy. I'm just eclectic," Many of Kenneth's simulations, however, like the book production, come from other fields (e.g. law and medicine) and he adapts them to fit his needs. Again, his discourse closely aligns with craft knowledge and principled practices:

If I can get the kids to kinesthetically do it. If they can read it, hear it, and once they do it, it seems to stick with them. Then they might remember that. They might remember yelling and screaming in class and then connect it back. When I ask questions on the text I will ask them to think back to something or a simulation to respond to the
questions. I have the kids evaluate me and you might want to look at them at some point to get a feel.

While Kenneth demonstrates ongoing analysis of his own teaching, nicely tied to many years of experience in the classroom, practical argument can be used by educators earlier in their career experiences than Kenneth. This process offers a means for practica and student teachers in social studies to analytically critique their teaching praxis.

Practical Argument and Teacher Reflection

We see the nature of professional teacher discourse connected to craft knowledge an important element that others have attempted to address from various angles. Hiebert et al. (2002), for example, proposed the development of a widely available bank of video cases depicting daily lessons. However, social studies educators and teachers can use the process of practical argument to advance teacher reflection on lessons without relying on a bank of case studies (Bean & Harper, 2004; Tidwell, 1995; Fenstermacher, 1994).

Practical argument moves beyond a traditional reflection of what did or did not go well in a lesson, and requires teachers to critically reflect on their practice with a specific emphasis on the beliefs that undergird their practice. Through various life experiences teachers enter the field of education with strong held beliefs about teaching. Gary Fenstermacher (1994) stated that "these beliefs are often formed without much consideration; they may begin as impressions and, over time, solidify into major beliefs about teaching. As such, they may serve as impediments or enhancers to improvement" (p. 37). Therefore in order for change or growth to occur, it becomes a necessity for teachers to reflect not only on what they did, but why. The connection between beliefs and practices "is an important one because it underscores the need for recognizing one's own beliefs as an initial step in the active process of changing one's practice" (Tidwell, 1995, p. 368).

Practical argument provides a means for critical reflection on lessons that flow from a principled practices framework like those orchestrated by Kenneth in economics. The practical argument is developed through the dynamic relationship between the teacher and the "Other". The Other serves as a critical friend, observing, critiquing, and reflecting on the lesson. While the Other may be a teacher colleague, it can also in fact be an imaginary Other. "Using video, audio, or field notes on a lesson as a point of reference, the teacher and the Other engage in a dialogue. The role of the Other is to question, prompt, and elicit information from the teacher. During the dialogue, the role of the teacher is not only to answer questions but to begin to ask the questions as well. Practical argument provides teachers with the tools necessary to not only reflect on their practices, but also to act on them in a way that will improve the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. Gary Fenstermacher (1994) stated that engaging in practical arguments was beneficial because it encourages us to critically examine the beliefs that affect our practice; it presses us to connect our actions to our own plans, deliberations, and decisions; and, it is hoped, it engenders openness to reconsideration and change (p. 40).

What is important in our view is the nature of the discourse used to critique one's teaching. We have been arguing that craft knowledge and principled practices offer a useful framework for teacher reflection and commentary. Thomas Bean and Helen Harper (2004) noted "By using practical argument as a means to analyze positive and negative features of daily lessons in an activity system framework, ongoing reform of teaching and teacher education is centered on deepening classroom inquiry and reflection" (p. 406). The practical argument framework offers a useful lens for better understanding how teachers, such as Kenneth, make sense of their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions in regards to the teach-
ing and learning in their content area classrooms.

Rather than following a prescribed curriculum that relies on a single textbook, teachers just like Kenneth are using their craft knowledge, principled practices, and reflection in an effort to best educate their students. Through the use of these three constructs, teachers are able to refine their practices and enhance both their instruction and student learning. Gary Fenstermacher (1994) argued “one of the most powerful ways to prevent our images of teaching and our teaching practices from being captured by the systems where we work is to stand away from our experience and reflect on it” (p. 28).

Characterizing accomplished teaching in terms of craft knowledge and principled practices, acknowledges and values the depth of knowledge teachers like Kenneth have to offer. Our research into content area teachers’ use of multiple texts suggests that the combination of craft knowledge, principled practices, and practical argument could offer useful data in our quest to deepen our understanding of content area teaching.

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Web-based


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