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**Literacy Teachers’ Learning through a Recursive Coaching Cycle**

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Literacy Teachers’ Learning through a Recursive Coaching Cycle

Yang Hu and Jennifer Tuten

Abstract

This study investigates teachers’ self identification of their literacy professional development needs, the relationship of those needs to their specific classroom contexts, and their insights into their learning at the end of a recursive coaching cycle. The work is grounded in studies of effective professional development and coaching practices that increase teacher knowledge and self-efficacy. Participants were 44 teachers in a graduate literacy practicum course as part of their Masters in Literacy Education Program. Most of these teachers worked in the public schools of a large urban school system. An inductive analysis of data revealed three themes in teachers’ self-identified professional development needs. Further micro and macro analysis, and double coding led to the discovery of varying degrees to which teachers describe their changed practice and learning during the coaching cycle. The study demonstrates that contextualized thinking is at the heart of instructional change and professional growth.

From a sociocultural perspective, effective teacher learning must be contextualized. Improved instruction hinges upon not only attention to curriculum content and practices, but more importantly, an understanding of the learners and contexts involved in the knowledge construction. A review of studies focused on the learning experiences of teachers and how these experiences led to better understanding and more frequent implementation of effective practices (Hall, 2005) suggests that it is through guided practices that teachers gain new ways of thinking. Based on sociocultural learning theory, our Literacy Practicum course is designed for teachers to take action, including taking ownership of their learning, receiving feedback after observations of teaching and video analysis, and reflecting. We hypothesize that using a recursive model of mentoring: setting intention—observation—feedback—video practice—feedback—reflection, can lead to strengthened teacher self-efficacy and growth in literacy education. In this study we investigated the following a priori questions.

1. How do teachers initially describe their professional development (PD) needs in literacy education?

2. What factors contribute to the way in which teachers describe their PD needs in literacy education?

3. In what ways do teachers describe their learning and growth at the end of a coaching cycle?

Review of Related Research

The course that is the context for this study is grounded in research in effective practices in PD that increases teacher knowledge and skills as well as studies of coaching and its relationship to teacher growth and self-efficacy. Effective Models of Literacy Professional Development

Over the last 20 years there has been a growing shift from PD models that are imposed upon teachers to ones that are inclusive and collaborative (Webster-Wright, 2009). Putman and Borko (2000) argue that teacher learning takes place in authentic contexts, meaningful to themselves and their current practice. This learning is distributed across the multiple contexts of their work that includes their classroom, community of peers, and school contexts. Other researchers look at the importance of embedded PD within teachers’ practice (Borko, 2004; Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, & Miratrix, 2012; Henry, Tryjankowski, DiCamillo, & Bailey 2010; Kuipers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009) to support the shift to school and classroom based PD. For effective and sustained teacher change, PD needs to focus on specific outcomes for students, embed the learning experience in teachers’ own daily practice, be sustained over time, provide time for teachers to work together on issues important for them and their students, and provide specific content knowledge that is coherent with other activities (Dillon, O’Brien, Sato, & Kelly 2010).

Emergent research demonstrates the impact PD has on student achievement. School-wide PD cycles have been shown to influence students’ literacy performance (Fisher, Frey & Nelson, 2012; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Porche, Pallante, & Snow, 2012). Research also suggests that PD impacts student achievement when it is focused on increasing content knowledge and on supporting students thinking (Boyle, While, & Boyle, 2004; McCutchen et al., 2003; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008) argue for an inquiry model of PD that identifies student learning needs aligned with teacher learning needs to support identifying effective actions or practices to support learning outcomes. Kraft and Papay (2014) investigated the role of a school’s professional environment on teachers’ growth and found that professional context of a school supported or hindered teachers’ growth.

One element of PD is coaching. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found that teachers valued how coaches supported the creation of space for discussion and collaboration, sustained support, and concrete, research-based instructional strategies. As a result of the coaching cycles, teachers were willing to try new practices, explored a wider range of assessments, changed practices as a result of deepening their content knowledge, and shifted to more student-centered practices and curriculum. Other work (Hoffman et al., 2014; McAndrews and Msengi, 2013) addressed the role of coaching in supporting teachers to develop different kinds of reflection.

Coaching to Support Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, one’s sense of confidence and belief that one can exert control over situations (Bandura, 2001) plays an important role in teacher professional...
development. Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek (2013) describe the interconnections among teachers’ beliefs, skills, and self-efficacy about literacy instruction. Cantrell and Hughes (2008) found that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy at the beginning of a yearlong coaching experience were more successful in implementing effective changes in their instruction. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) examined the possible contributing factors for teachers’ self-efficacy in literacy instruction and concluded that strong pre-service experiences, PD, and resources were correlated to strong self-efficacy. Guo, Plasta, Justic, & Kaderavek (2010) examined preschool teachers’ assessments of their self-efficacy in literacy instruction. They asserted,

Taken together, the findings presented in this study established the importance of preschool teachers’ self-efficacy and classroom quality in understanding children’s language and literacy gains in the context of preschool, which are consistent with findings obtained from the studies in elementary and secondary schools. (p.1101)

Tschannen-Moran & McMaster (2009) examined the impact of different types of PD and the relative impact on teachers’ self-efficacy and implementation of new teaching and found that PD that focused on understanding content and followed up with coaching had the strongest effect on teachers’ ability to enact new practices with confidence. In a different vein, Timperley and Phillips (2003) investigated the need for teachers to be pushed out of their comfort zone to develop greater knowledge and self-efficacy. In PD sessions, teachers were shown a video of students similar to their own making progress with a different instructional model. This provided a catalyst to new thinking and willingness to adapt a different approach to teaching.

Methods

Literacy Practicum Context

This study was conducted over a three-semester period from 2014 to 2015 in the context of the Literacy Practicum course in a graduate program in Literacy Education in a large urban public university. The practicum is designed to integrate course work with opportunities for teachers to make connections with their own practice. The course meets once a week for 50 minutes in a seminar format. A minimum of 50 hours of fieldwork is completed in each teachers’ own classrooms.

Central to this course is an invitation to teachers to take ownership of their professional learning through a teacher-focused inquiry process that involves two phases of the teaching/observation cycle, as seen in Table 1. Teachers begin the first phase by identifying an area of practice for their professional development. They select an area of focus, each teacher composes a letter inviting the instructor to observe her at her school. The instructor observes the teacher and debriefs. Taking time to reflect and integrate the conference points, the teacher writes back to the instructor with her reflections and next steps. The second phase consists of the teacher video-taping a follow-up lesson, which incorporates suggestions from the first phase, as well as new resources. This time the teacher writes a letter to a peer in the practicum, and they exchange videos and letters. The teacher is also asked, in a letter to the peer, to provide feedback on her partner’s video. At the end of the cycle, we ask teachers to reflect upon the experiences of the two phases as well as implications on their professional practice, and on their students’ learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1: Site Visit</td>
<td>Survey of literacy practices</td>
<td>Determine (dis)comfort zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter of invitation to instructor</td>
<td>Describe context and area of practice for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site visit and discussion</td>
<td>Explore the teaching; integrating feedback on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-visit letter to instructor</td>
<td>Articulate reflections on visit; identify areas for further work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor feedback on letters and visit</td>
<td>Provide targeted questions, suggestions as catalyst for change in understanding &amp; practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Video Exchange</td>
<td>Videotaping a lesson</td>
<td>Capture a lesson/ conference for detailed review; consider if action meets expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open letter to peer</td>
<td>Analyze own video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response letter to peer’s open letter and video</td>
<td>Sharpen ability to observe another’s practice and provide appropriate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Reflection</td>
<td>Final reflection</td>
<td>Examine own growth as well as impact of own learning on practice and children’s learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Phases of the Mentoring Cycle

Participants

Participants were 44 in-service teachers, studying towards a master’s degree and a state professional certification in Literacy Education. Their teaching experiences range from 0 to 13 years. Besides one participant who hadn’t begun teaching, and two who had been teaching for 13 years at pre-K levels, the majority were in their mid 20’s and had been teaching for 1-3 years. Most were employed by the city’s public schools. Two were unemployed at the time, but

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they were able to find classrooms to complete the fieldwork requirements. All but one were female. Table 1 illustrates the participants’ teaching experiences and grade levels they taught at the time of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Experiences</th>
<th>Grade Level Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Year N=1</td>
<td>PreK N=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year N=10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Years N=14</td>
<td>Kindergarten N=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Years N=8</td>
<td>1st Grade N=5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Years N=4</td>
<td>2nd Grade N=8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Years N=3</td>
<td>3rd Grade N=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Years N=2</td>
<td>4th Grade N=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Years N=2</td>
<td>5th Grade N=3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participants’ Teaching Experiences and Grade Level Assignments

Data Collection and Analysis
The primary data sources consisted of the following. The secondary data sources were our field notes and our written feedback to participants.

a. The letter of invitation: written by participants to the practicum instructor, providing the contextual information, as well as identifying their learning focus in literacy education

b. The post-visit letter: written by participants to the practicum instructor, reflecting on the site visit and the conference with the practicum instructor

c. Video of a teaching practice: captured by participants incorporating suggestions from the practicum instructor and new resources

d. The open letter to a peer: written by participants to a self-selected peer in the practicum to describe their teaching video and ask for advice

e. The response letter to a peer: written by participants to their self-selected peer to provide feedback to the peer’s video

f. Final reflection: written by participants at the end of the course to reflect on their own growth and impact of their work on their students’ learning

Both authors have taught the Literacy Practicum course multiple times. The first author was the instructor of the course during the three semesters of data collection. Her role in this study was both mentor and researcher. She collected and analyzed the data inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) noting patterns and themes. Using the same inductive method, the second author coded the data independently, so that our double-coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984) could establish reliability. When comparing our results, we agreed over 90% of the time. Disagreements were discussed and resolved. We began analyzing the letters of invitation at a micro-level, by highlighting how teachers described their PD needs, and the factors that influenced their needs. Then we examined the highlighted data and came up with broad themes to categorize teachers’ self-perceived PD needs.

Once the categories were identified, we examined the data in each category to see if there was any correlation between teachers’ self-perceived PD needs and the length of their teaching experience or the contexts in which they teach.

We then analyzed the rest of the primary data to investigate how the teachers had worked to meet their PD needs. We used the same inductive methods and double coding. Specifically, we looked to see if the teachers’ reflections suggest new/changed practice and new/changed thinking about their practice. We crosschecked coding by examining their video-captured practice to look for evidence of changed or new practice.

Findings

A. Teachers’ Initial Description of their Professional Development Needs

Writing a letter to invite the practicum instructor for a visit of their classroom allowed our teachers to examine their PD needs. In our guidelines for the letter of invitation, we asked them to consider their school and classroom contexts, as well as their students’ needs. We encouraged them to move to the edge of their comfort zone as they identified an area of literacy practice to focus on. We also gave them a survey, asking them to rate their confidence level of various areas of literacy practice. Data analysis of the 44 letters of invitation yielded three categories in which teachers described their own PD needs—Context-Specific, Practice-Specific, Non-Specific.

1. Context-Specific

17 of the 44 participants (39%) fell into this category. The primary theme in these letters was a focus on providing detailed description of their classroom contexts. These contexts include: the background of their school or classroom literacy culture or curriculum, their students’ needs, and the expectation that the chosen area of practice could address these needs. For example, Ariel, in describing her challenges in teaching close reading in her current guided reading groups, discussed the need in her school to align curriculum to the Common Core Standards, her students’ lack of experience in non-fiction reading, and how close reading strategies could help her struggling readers. Most of these teachers’ descriptions show varying degrees of recognition of their chosen areas of focus as a way to respond to their students’ learning needs.

2. Practice-Specific

16 of the participants (36%) described their PD areas by focusing almost exclusively on an instructional practice, with very little mention of their school and classroom literacy contexts or the needs of their students. There was an overwhelming expression of wanting to become better at the practice. Half of the teachers in this group focused on guided reading as their chosen area. The rationale for this focus included: (1) lack of confidence or PD; (2) lack of experience; and (3) never tried it before. Gina wrote,

I would like to have a better understanding on how to lead...
an effective guided reading lesson. I have never received PD on this practice. I would like to know how I am doing, and how I can improve my practice.

It is not clear, at least from these letters of invitation, how their chosen areas of practice relate to the literacy practice of their school or classroom, or to the needs of their students.

3. Non-Specific

Among 44 participants, 11 (25%) described their PD needs by focusing neither on the context of their classroom or students, nor specific literacy practice. Instead, their description is broad and general. For example, Sandy didn't include any description of the literacy practices that she currently used or description of her students' needs. She wrote,

What I need most help with is how to scaffold for students individually and help them to work by themselves. I already have tried to implement systems in the room to help them to achieve this success. However, I know there are more effective ways to help them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of PD Needs</th>
<th>Teaching Experiences</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context Specific (n=17, 39%)</td>
<td>1-2 Years n=7 &gt;3 Years n=10 (59%)</td>
<td>n=14: Elementary (82%) n=2: Pre-K n=1: Not Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Specific (n=16, 36%)</td>
<td>1-2 Years n=12 &gt;3 Years n=4</td>
<td>n=12: Elementary (75%) n=2: Pre-K n=2: Assistant Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Specific (n=11, 25%)</td>
<td>0-2 Years n=7 &gt;3 Years n=4</td>
<td>n=8: Pre-K (73%) n=1: Assistant Teachers n=1: Substitute Teacher n=1: ESL Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Correlations of Descriptions of Professional Development Needs to Teaching Experiences and Grade Levels

B. What Led to such Differing Levels of Descriptions of PD Needs?

In determining the factors that led to these different articulations of PD needs, we first ruled out instruction and course content in the three semesters of data collection because the same instructor taught all three semesters, using the same syllabus and assignments. We then were able to ascertain that the length of teaching experiences is a factor (Table 3).

A close examination of the three groups shows that 59% of the teachers in the Context-Specific group, in fact, have more than 3-year teaching experiences. 75% in the Practice-Specific group have 1 or 2 years of teaching experiences. In the Non-Specific group, 63% have zero to 2 years of teaching experiences. It appears that the tendency to consider contexts and learners' needs decreases with fewer teaching experiences. Those who are still in their first two years of teaching tend to focus largely on their own teaching practice.

We also analyzed the relationship between the contexts and grade levels that our teachers were teaching at the time of data collection. Their teaching contexts, including the roles they held (i.e. assistant or head teacher) had the greatest impact on how teachers described their PD needs, as is illustrated in Table 3. For example, for those whose letters are context specific, the majority of them (82%) were teaching at the elementary levels. 75% of those who focused exclusively on a practice also taught at this level. However, an interesting finding is that in the non-specific group, 73% of the teachers were teaching at pre-kindergarten levels; and the remaining did not have responsibilities as head-teacher—they were working as assistant teacher, substitute teacher or pull-out teachers. This finding led to a speculation that, perhaps, the pre-K settings do not usually lend themselves to clear literacy specific curriculum guides or requirements. But it is clear that the level of specificity in how teachers describe their PD needs is greatly influenced by the grade levels they teach and their teaching responsibilities.

C. Teachers' Descriptions of Their Learning and Growth at the End of the Coaching Cycle

Our area of investigation was to look at what kinds of learning took place as a result of the coaching cycle in the Literacy Practicum course. What was the relationship between different ways of describing the PD needs and descriptions of learning at the end of the cycle?

According to McAndrews and Msengi (2013), transformative learning happens when adult learners not only act in new ways but also think in new ways. All of our teachers acted in new ways after the initial site visit and debriefing. They revised their practice by incorporating suggestions from the practicum instructor and new resources. This was clearly demonstrated in their video-recorded lessons. The revisions varied from refocusing the lesson to trying new practices. In order to ascertain to what degree revising teaching practice would lead to new ways of thinking, we examined our teachers' reflections in their post-visit letters to the instructor, their letter exchanges with their partner around their videos, and their final reflections. Our content analysis of the data and double coding reveal three trends in the learning outcomes: Practice-Focused Learning, Learner-Focused Learning and Context-Focused Learning. See Figure 1.
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Figure 1: Three Learning Outcomes

1. Practice-Focused Learning

Teachers with this learning outcome focused on reflecting on their own practices. They compared and contrasted their old practice with revised practice, and described what they learned in revising their practice as a result of incorporating their instructor's suggestions. Many shared that their revised practice allowed them to experience classroom success leading to increased confidence and self-efficacy. For example, Adia implemented guided reading for the first time in her 3rd grade classroom during the semester she was in the Literacy Practicum. In fact, she had planned to launch guided reading while taking the practicum course in order to gain support from her peers and the instructor. She had never attended any PD in guided reading nor had she ever been observed teaching guided reading. During the site visit, her instructor reaffirmed her execution in setting up guided reading groups, as well as the routines and procedures she had put in place to lead the guided reading groups. The debriefing focused more on how to make the teaching in the guided reading groups more responsive to the needs of her students. In reflection, Adia wrote,

"I am proud that I was able to put what I have learned into practice. It took so much preparation but in the end, it was completely worth it. I went from having so much uncertainties (sic) to knowing that I have set up all the groups correctly. More importantly, I realized that having all the groups in place is just the first step. I have to be thoughtful and teach each group by focusing on what they need as readers, rather than teaching the text the same way with each group."

However, teachers in this group stopped short of discussing student learning in their reflections. Even though two teachers in this group did mention that their students responded well to their revised practice, there was no evidence of any further description of how their students responded or why they responded well.

2. Learner-Focused Learning

Teachers in this group went beyond reflecting on their own practice. As they described their revised practice, their line of vision broadened to include descriptions of how their students reacted or responded to their new practice. They incorporated description and analysis of their students' responses to gauge the effectiveness of their revised practice. Hence, to illustrate their learning, we use two concentric circles (see Figure 1) that includes student learning. Having a video-recorded lesson allowed the teachers to pay close attention to their students' learning. Some of our teachers were pleasantly surprised at seeing what students were capable of during guided practice, and the evidence that their students were applying what they learned from their revised teaching practice. Close examination of the videos also led many teachers to the realization that students' reactions and responses to their lessons are the best barometers for measuring the effectiveness of their teaching.

Both novice and more experienced teachers fell into this group. As novice teacher Hathai watched how her students responded to her teaching, she realized that children actually had better sense of ownership and were more likely to write with their own voices if given the opportunity. She wrote, "It was more effective to let kids wrestle with telling their stories and then provide feedback than leading children in a step-by-step fashion. The opportunity to watch the students through video, as well as watching it through the critical eye of a peer as the teachers exchanged their videos, allowed many of our teachers to see how children reacted to their revised practice thereby deepening their understanding of why their revised practice was effective. In addition, there were shifts in their perspectives about their students. For example, our pre-school teacher, Candace, in her initial letter of invitation, referred to her preschoolers as struggling readers. After engaging her students in a shared reading of Eric Carle's I Can Do It, she invited children to act out both as a group and then individually how animals in the book act. She was very pleased to see that all of her students were engaged, despite their learning differences. More importantly, she began to call her students emergent readers, instead of struggling readers, in her subsequent letters to the instructor and peer as well as in her reflection.

3. Context-Focused Learning

The context-focused learning can be described as having the largest diameter in their learning focus, as is illustrated in Figure 1. The teachers' learning is represented by three concentric circles. Not only did these teachers describe their old and new practice, they also discussed their students' learning and lessons they had learned as they observed their students. More importantly, they critically reflected on the implications of their revised practice, and their students' learning on the larger context—their literacy curriculum, the classroom context, and demonstrating a better understanding of what makes teaching and learning more effective. Table 4 illustrates characteristics of this learning outcome.
Better Understanding of Responsive Teaching and How Children Learn

- Creating time and space for discovery learning
- Making learning more accessible and appropriate to meet the needs of students
- Teaching according to what students need to learn rather than the rubric criteria
- Designing one-size-fits-one approaches to better respond to students’ needs
- Asking more open-ended questions to gauge students’ comprehension of the text before skills instruction
- Negotiating the prescribed curriculum to teach more responsively to the needs of the children

Broadened Vision of Implications for Improved Practice

- Becoming advocates for students
- Adopting literacy intervention program, rather than stick to one-size-fits all programs
- Raising expectations for students’ literacy learning outcomes
- Making changes in the classroom to facilitate more effective practice, such as setting up centers to encourage student-centered practices
- Recognizing the importance of peer-led small group discussions
- Better understanding of culturally and developmentally appropriate practices and materials

Table 4: Characteristics of Context-Focused Learning

Ruth, a special Education teacher, wrote in her initial letter of invitation,

I am interested in exploring if the differentiation I am providing adequately supports my students in meeting the learning target—using text details to answer questions. I would like to try other options without losing sight of the third grade reading standards.

Indeed, during the semester she was in Literacy Practicum, she tried simplifying the text, color-coding the text to match the comprehension questions, all in the hopes to help her students who were reading at a first grade level. Her practicum instructor suggested that she augment her practice by using a leveled literacy intervention program, and asked her to join a small group during the seminar in which three other teachers were working with struggling readers. Through the small group work and video analysis with peers, Ruth decided that just focusing on differentiation was not enough. She needed to adopt an intervention program to document and foster students’ growth. Moreover, she went to her principal to negotiate using one of the three periods dedicated to literacy for leveled literacy intervention, and it was approved. Ruth’s stance, at the end of the practicum, changed from that of a teacher focused on improving practice to that of an advocate for her students. She wrote in her final reflection, “I need to focus on teaching the students, not teaching the curriculum.”

An emphasis in the practicum is for teachers to examine children’s learning so that we can learn from them what we need to teach them. There were many cases in which our teachers moved their gaze from their own practice to the learning of children, and learned profound lessons that led to not only changed practice but also new insights into the nature of teaching and learning.

After discovering and delineating these three trends in learning outcomes, we ascertained how these trends correlated to the ways teachers initially describe their PD needs. As illustrated in Figure 5, the Context-Specific group experienced most of the Context-Focused Learning, as 70% of the teachers in this group demonstrated growth and critical stances in practice as well as in their ways of thinking. 25% of the teachers in the Practice-Specific group described their growth in practice by including students’ learning, while the majority of them, 62%, focused on their own practice as they discussed their learning. Similarly, in the case of the Non-Specific group, 27% included evidence of watching their students’ learning. The majority of the group, 54%, described their growth only in terms of their own practice.

Figure 5: Correlations of Descriptions of Professional Development Needs to Learning Outcomes

Discussion and Implication

The teachers in our study drew upon their immediate school and classroom challenges as they identified their specific need for PD. Teachers identified Practice-Specific, Context-Specific or Non-Specific areas for feedback and development. As research in effective PD (Webster-Wright, 2009; Putman and Borko, 2000) suggest, teachers learn best when they are able to shape and put into direct action newly gained information. Our study also suggests that while novice teachers typically ask for support to clarify and confirm particular instructional practices, more experienced teachers expand their focus to include student learning. From our findings we argue that significant teacher growth is stronger when teachers are able to participate in identifying their own needs and provided opportunities to develop contextualized thinking rather than a focus on improving particular practices.

Our study also demonstrates the importance of the coaching cycle that includes time for revised practice. Too often PD initiatives, including coaching, cast a wide net and don't allow for in-depth grappling with a particular issue. Our findings show that continued focus in a particular dimension of literacy instruction leads to change. Video analysis is a critical component of this cycle. It provides teachers an opportunity to widen their focus on students as well as focus on areas of instruction such as language (Hu & Tuten, 2015).

As a result of participating in this coaching cycle, teachers learned in varying ways. Our analysis supports a
view of learning outcomes with increased understanding of the interrelationships between teaching, student learning, and school context. Newer teachers, who focused on practice-specific learning, primarily learned a new practice. Teachers who embedded their professional development questions within a school context were able to achieve new insights about the relationships between their own practices, student learning, and their particular school curriculum. In some cases this learning became a catalyst for continued focus and advocacy.

In the final analysis, it is contextualized thinking that has the strongest potential for transformation. The result of our study demonstrates how teacher education programs can intentionally bridge graduate studies with teaching and learning in the schools. It shows significant promise in contextualized coaching in teacher education, in that teachers themselves have ownership of their learning, their learning is embedded in their own daily practice, and their focus includes student learning and implications for the larger classroom and school contexts. In addition, effective coaching cycles usually begin with teachers problematizing their own teaching and learning, followed by observation/feedback, guided practice, video analysis, and peer critique. We believe that the coaching cycle described in this study has significant implications for both pre-service teacher education and in-service staff development.

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About the Authors

Yang Hu and Jenny Tuten are associate professors of Literacy Education at Hunter College, City University of New York. They teach primarily in the graduate literacy program. They share several research interests in literacy teacher education, and using video-mediated mentoring cycles to facilitate teacher learning. Led by Jenny Tuten, project director of Read East Harlem, they provide staff development to elementary school teachers in East Harlem using the same principles of mentoring cycles described in this article.