A conversation with Jessica: A dialogic inquiry into the developing literacy practices of a beginning teacher and a reading specialist
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Abstract

The foundation of a teacher's identity is formed through the experiences, beliefs, and interactions she shares with others. Dialogue allows educators to reflect on, interpret, and negotiate the reality that they construct through these encounters. Beginning teachers need ongoing support as they develop their teaching selves and their instructional practices. This study utilized a method of narrative portraiture to create a portrait of the relationship between one beginning teacher and a reading specialist as they constructed meaning about their teaching identities through the interactions and conversations they had with each other.

One first-grade teacher worked with the researcher, a reading specialist, over the course of one school year. Data collection in the form of dialogue journals, transcribed conversations, interviews, field notes, journals, document review, student work samples, and pictures were collected and placed into a binder, sequentially documenting the events from September 2006 through May 2007.

Three interrelated conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study. They focused on: (1) the role of identity in teacher development, (2) dialogic coaching as a form of support, and (3) a comprehensive model of staff development that supports dialogic coaching.

Through collaborating, reflecting, coaching, and linking theory to practice in the context of the classroom, professional identities were developed that empowered the participants to make decisions, demonstrate greater confidence in their abilities, and balance their need to control the learning situation with the need of learners to become more independent. Dialogic coaching, based on the beliefs and practices of the teacher, is proposed as a component of a comprehensive system of support that facilitates change and growth in a teacher's practice over time.

This study suggests that change in a teacher's literacy beliefs and practice can occur when she takes an active role in goal setting, is given explicit instruction, is provided time to discuss changes, is provided opportunities to see the process and practice under a watchful eye, and is guided in understanding why changes are necessary.