AN AFFINITY FOR LEARNING

Teacher Identity and Powerful Professional Development

James Noonan, Ed.D.

Research Affiliate, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Project Director, Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment

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MOTIVATION & BACKGROUND

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING

Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 728

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: IDENTITY

➤ A contested concept, but with some common elements:

  ➤ Continuous, formed and re-formed across career arc

  ➤ Socially situated

  ➤ Layered, centered on harmonizing divergent "subidentities"

  ➤ Related to teacher agency

  (Beijaard et al., 2004; see also Akkerman & Meijer, 2011;
  Mockler, 2011, Sachs, 2001)

➤ Reciprocally related to experience: it both *emerges from* and *contributes to* experience. (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013)

➤ Identity used to analyze teachers' varied perspectives and actions
(e.g., Buchanan, 2015; Day et al., 2005; Sloan, 2006)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do teachers' accounts of professional learning reflect or contradict the "anchoring beliefs" of their professional identities?

2. What implications for professional development design and policy can be drawn from such alignment or misalignment?

METHODS & ANALYTIC APPROACH

METHODS: OVERVIEW

➤ A phenomenological inquiry

➤ Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 public school teachers across five adjacent districts in northeastern US

  ➤ Pre-K through 12th grade (ages 4-18)

  ➤ Between 4 and 30 years of experience

➤ Interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes

➤ Focused on two professional learning experiences: (1) their "most powerful," and (2) one they would like "never to have again"

➤ Multiple rounds of descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013)

➤ Thematic memos used to identify patterns for more focused analysis (Maxwell, 2005)

@_jmnoonan

IDENTITY: ANALYTIC APPROACH

➤ Adopted comparative case study approach for "explanation building" (Yin, 2014)

  ➤ Specifically, posited that "anchoring beliefs" about teaching and learning — which varied at the individual level — would be well reflected in positively assessed learning experiences

➤ "Anchoring beliefs" defined as a durable but permeable filter through which individuals viewed and made sense of the world

➤ Surfaced anchoring beliefs through *participant identity memos*

FINDINGS & THE FUTURE

IDENTITY: FINDINGS

➤ 23 of 25 cases with sufficient data to determine alignment

  ➤ 18 aligned cases

  ➤ 5 misaligned cases

➤ Selected three aligned cases for detailed comparison:

  ➤ Represented distinct *learning affinities*

  ➤ Defined as a unique disposition toward learning that either contributes to or emerges from one's professional identity

LEARNING AFFINITY FRAMEWORK

➤ **The** *what*
  (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Hiebert et al., 2002, Shulman, 1987)

➤ **The** *who*
  (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Sarason, 1998; Sawyer, 2004)

➤ **The** *with whom*
  (Bryk et al., 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Papay et al., 2016)

IDENTITY FRAMEWORK: THE WHAT

➤ Brynn, 7-8th grade math, 5th year teacher

➤ Motivated to get into teaching, in part, by her convictions about math as a discipline and a determination to allay widespread "fear" of math

➤ Brynn's anchoring belief:
Teaching math required a depth and mastery of content knowledge

➤ Brynn's powerful learning experience:
A series of intensive "pure math" content-focused courses led by Andrew Chen, a consultant and former MIT professor, in which teachers focused on doing math and sharing their thinking

"

I think it's really hard to explain math to kids if you don't have a really, really good understanding of it. Not just like, 'I can do the problem and I can go through the motions and show you the steps over and over again.' But you have to understand it enough that you can anticipate the mistakes the students are going to make, that you can address the mistakes, that you can clarify the information in a way that makes sense to them."

"
Often math has the stigma of, 'Well, I need to teach middle school math, so I don't need to know calculus.' But you really should, to see all the connections. So I think **one of the main goals of this course is really just getting people who are responsible for teaching kids math *better at math*.** And I think that is a big key in math teaching."

IDENTITY FINDINGS: THE WHAT

➤ Brynn's anchoring belief is well-supported in empirical literature, both generally (Bransford et al., 2000; Shulman, 1986) and pertaining to math specifically (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Hill & Ball, 2009; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Lampert, 1990, 2001)

➤ Other teachers talked about the need for content knowledge — 13 of 25 powerful learning experiences were focused on content — but none spoke about their content with the same granularity or passion as Brynn.

IDENTITY FINDINGS: THE WHAT

➤ Just as notable as Brynn's enthusiasm for *the what* was her mix of ambivalence and antagonism toward *the with whom* and *the who*.

  ➤ A belief that group reflection was often superficial and a distraction — "this kind of meaningless process"

  ➤ An observation that while the pedagogy was good and the strategies helpful, the presenters could be condescending and reinforcing negative stereotypes about math teachers

IDENTITY FINDINGS: THE WHAT

➤ Some takeaways for Brynn from her aligned PD experience:

  ➤ An opportunity to identify and connect with like-minded colleagues in her district

  ➤ A new repertoire of "low threshold, high ceiling" problems she could use with her students

  ➤ Sustained, joyful intellectual engagement

IDENTITY FINDINGS: THE FRAMEWORK

➤ Illuminates and explains wide variation in teachers' perceptions of PD

➤ Represents an important challenge to the assumption of "one best way" to design PD

➤ May help explain null findings of PD designed to be consistent with consensus "best practice" features

IDENTITY FINDINGS: FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

If the identity frame for interpreting PD were taken seriously:

1. Greater self-knowledge by teachers.

2. More thorough awareness of teachers' learning needs.

3. A more nimble and responsive approach to PD, including:

   ➤ greater flexibility (Calvert, 2016)

   ➤ greater personalization (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Sawchuk, 2016)

   ➤ greater alignment

4. A demonstration of professional respect and caring

For professional development, you want to like that person… [The presenter] was able to make us like him – by honoring us and being funny and interesting and not dogmatic, you know? 'Oh, that doesn't work? Let's try this,' rather than, 'No, you do it this way,' you see what I mean? That little thing there means *everything* to me… Don't we all wanna be special? Isn't that the way it works? …I mean, I know when he goes home he forgets I exist. I don't care about that. I'm not trying to be special on that level, but at that moment I want him to be like, **I want him to *regard* me** …I always say to teachers when they first work here, the kids here wanna feel like you love them to the point that you will jump out of a building for them. You *won't,* but people want to feel cared for at a certain level."

— *Wayne, high school English teacher, 25+ years*

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@_jmnoonan | #ISATT2017

QUESTIONS

James Noonan, Ed.D.

james_noonan@mail.harvard.edu

@_jmnoonan | #ISATT2017

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	District A	District B	District C	District D	District E
female (n=20)	8	5	2	3	2
male (n=5)	3	0	0	1	1
K-5 (n=11)	5	4	0	2	0
6-8 (n=9)	1	1	2	2	3
9-12 (n=5)	5	0	0	0	0
3-5 yrs (n=6)	2	2	1	0	1
6+ yrs (n=19)	9	3	1	4	2
Total	11	5	2	4	3

APPENDIX B: DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS (SY 2014–2015)

	District A	District B	District C	District D	District E
% African American	33.6	28.0	4.7	5.9	10.7
% Latinx	40.9	13.5	48.2	10.0	17.9
% White	13.8	39.0	39.2	56.3	36.0
% ELL	29.8	8.2	16.0	9.7	17.4
% Econ Disadvantaged	49.3	27.7	37.4	7.5	35.5
State Accountability Level	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 2	Level 3

APPENDIX C: ENGAGEMENT & AGENCY

➤ Engagement (Paper 1)

  ➤ Noted omission from consensus PD frameworks of learner engagement

  ➤ Applied Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) to make sense of patterns in participant perceptions and behavior related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness

  ➤ Each evident throughout powerful learning experiences, in line with SDT hypotheses

➤ Agency (Paper 3)

  ➤ Elaborated multi-dimensional conception of agency (over, during, emerging from)

  ➤ Helped to sharpen contrast between powerful and negative learning

  ➤ More opportunities for agentive behavior in powerful learning

POWERFUL LEARNING

- Programs
  - Reading Recovery
  - Making Learning Visible
  - Developmental Designs
  - Wilson Reading System
  - School Reform Initiative/CFGs
  - Self-directed independent study
  - School turnaround
  - Mentoring relationship
- Topic
  - Content knowledge
  - Instructional strategies
  - Program implementation
  - Self-study
- Pedagogical Style
  - Self-directed learning
  - Open-ended inquiry
  - Peer observation

NEGATIVE LEARNING

- Programs
  - Everyday Economics
  - Olweus Antibullying
  - Preservice coursework
  - District orientations
  - State- and district courses on ELLs
  - Teaching For Understanding
  - Small group consulting
  - Teacher inquiry
- Topic
  - Content knowledge
  - Instructional strategies
  - Program implementation
  - Self-study
- Pedagogical Style
  - Lecture
  - Group inquiry
  - Coaching
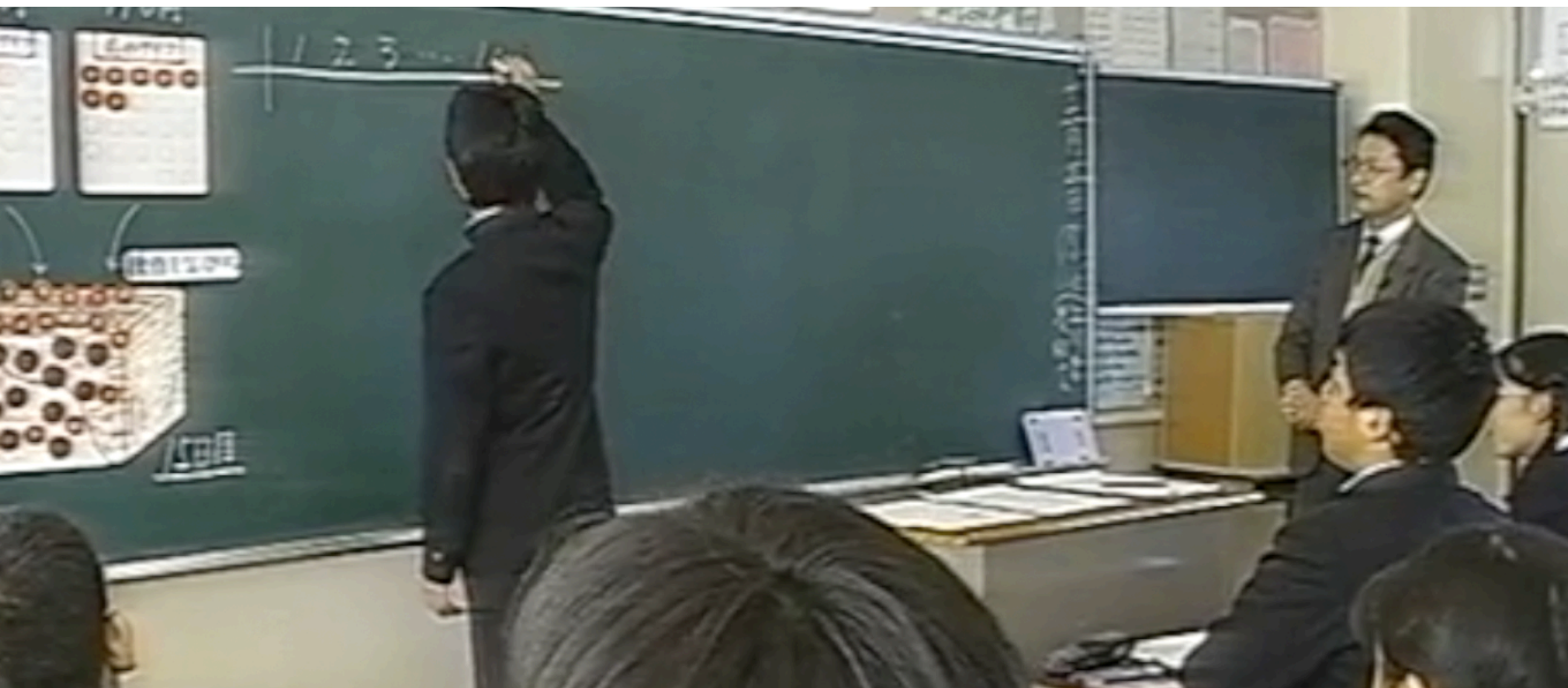
Source: www.timssvideo.com/49; see Hiebert et al., 2003