

researchsnapshot

Inside Teacher Community: Representations of Classroom Practice



Source of Research: Little, J. W. (2003). Inside Teacher Community: Representations of Classroom Practice. *Teachers College Record*, 105(6), 913-945.

What is this research about?

This research explored how teachers learn by examining how teaching practice comes to be known, shared, and developed among teachers through their *out-of-classroom* interactions.

What did the researchers do?

Using fine-grained discourse analysis, Little examined audio and videotape recorded during three professional learning community sessions. The notion of ‘*affordance*’ was used to consider professional development activities in terms of what *enabled* or did *not enable* teachers’ collective inquiry into practice.

The following broad questions framed the analysis:

- 1) What facets of classroom practice are made visible in *out-of-classroom* talk and with what degree of transparency?
- 2) How does interaction open up or close down teachers’ opportunity to learn?

What you need to know...

Upon interpreting the evidence, a number of problems surfaced. *Accounts* of classroom practice:

- ◆ fell short by comparison to lived or observed practice;
- ◆ relied heavily on specialized and/or localized terminology;
- ◆ arose in relation to the work “immediately at hand” among the group rather than in regard to their relevance in the classroom;
- ◆ were limited due to time constraints.

What did the researchers find?

Although *situated* classroom practices arose in *out-of-classroom* talk as “discrete, condensed, and desituated”, they formed the basis for important, pervasive, and meaningful talk among teachers.

Each professional learning session displayed:

- a) “something in the nature of *affordances*” – in other words, Little identified ways in which the team’s interactions opened up and/or constrained opportunities for learning;
- b) representations of practice that were co-constructed by the way team members ‘interrupted’ each other’s language (e.g., drawing out language of fixed and growth mindsets).

Upon conclusion, Little noted, “the force of tradition and the lure of innovation seem simultaneously and complexly at play in the teachers’ everyday talk. Habitual ways of thinking or acting coincide closely with moments of surprise (“aha”); the impulse to question practice resonates against the press simply to get one with it”. Little offered one final consideration: “if we are to understand more fully what distinguishes particularly robust professional communities, we may have to understand the interplay of the conventional and the creative in all of them”.