From Know How to Do Now: Instructional Applications of Simulated Interactions Within Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT: The induction years of teaching challenge novice educators to quickly transition from what they learned as teacher candidates into what they can do as emerging professionals. This article outlines a simulated interaction methodology to help bridge teacher preparation and practice. Building from examples of simulated interactions between teacher candidates and standardized individuals, it focuses on four distinct research and instructional applications of the simulated interaction methodology within broader teacher education contexts.

Transitioning from preparation to practice challenges novice teachers to transfer what they know about teaching and learning into what they can do. Citing the traditional reliance on field practica as the primary mechanism for transitioning knowledge into action, scholars suggest embedding pedagogies of enactment within teacher preparation (Grossman et al., 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Lampert, 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009). The objective of this article is to illustrate four distinct instructional applications of a simulated interaction pedagogy, where preservice teachers practice enacting knowledge and skills learned within teacher preparation before they enter the field as licensed professionals.

From Knowing to Doing

Calling for a deliberate shift in teacher preparation curricula, Grossman and McDonald (2008) emphasized pedagogies of enactment that focus on the core practices of teaching. Consider the core practices in which in-service teachers engage on a daily basis: having instructional and problem-solving conversations with students, assessing student work and communicating that assessment to students and parents, cooperating with colleagues to develop educational plans for students, enacting lesson plans, reflecting with a colleague, and communicating expectations to parents, students, and administrators. Although these common practices are addressed through most teacher prepa-
ration coursework, preservice teachers often view them as abstract, distant concepts that do not yet apply (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). The impetus for mastery of these practices does occur later, though, in the form of dis-equilibrating events. Sour conversations with students and parents, failed lesson plans, and the legal considerations of individual education plans capture the attention of novice teachers during their induction years of instruction. The sense of immediacy and anxiety felt on the part of induction-stage teachers represents a ripe opportunity for learning and growth, but these novice teachers operate within a daily instructional schedule not conducive to systematic analysis and subsequent improvements on their teaching actions.

A call to embed pedagogies of enactment within teacher preparation suggests a number of opportunities. For example, consider a pedagogy that challenges preservice teachers to explain to parents how they will implement students' individual education plans within classroom contexts. Similarly, imagine a pedagogy that challenges preservice science or mathematics teachers to guide a student through a conversion of meters to kilometers, addressing the student’s questions on conversion steps and scale (Lampert, 2001, 2009). Finally, picture a pedagogy that challenges preservice teachers to convey academic and behavioral expectations to a new transfer student. These challenges encourage preservice teachers to apply their knowledge of differentiation strategies, articulate problem-solving rationales and steps, and enact invitational positive classroom expectations. Across all three examples, these opportunities involve another person—a parent or student—with whom the preservice teacher must professionally interact.

**From Medicine to Teaching**

Medical education institutions commonly employ the pedagogy of standardized patients to help their future physicians, nurses, and physical therapists practice their diagnostic techniques (Barrows, 1987, 2000). Standardized patients are healthy individuals who are carefully trained to simulate distinct physical ailments in a standard consistent manner. Consequently, multiple physicians in training can practice diagnosing and communicating with multiple individuals who are all portraying the same “Mr. Jones with a herniated disk.”

Since 2007, I have worked to diffuse the medical education pedagogy of standardized patients to teacher education. These efforts initially occurred within the context of parent-teacher communications, an area of teacher preparation woefully underserved (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Using the established roster of standardized patients from the State University of New York’s Upstate Medical University, I designed the parent caregiver conferencing model (PCM), a semester-length elective course where preservice teachers engage in multiple
simulated interactions with six different standardized parents (SPs). Through the PCM, multiple individuals are recruited and carefully trained to simulate a parent who presents distinct questions, concerns, thoughts, and information to teacher candidates. Specifically, I subcontract with the Upstate Medical University to use the established roster of standardized patients, retraining them to instead serve as SPs. These former standardized patients are trained to portray the same parent—a Ms. Wilson—in a standard consistent manner. The goal is to provide many preservice teachers the opportunity to interact with the same parent, giving them subsequent instructional opportunities with peers and faculty to not only discuss how they engaged with that parent but also reflect on their approaches to the social/scholastic issue presented by Ms. Wilson during the simulated interaction.

Simulated interactions within teacher education rest on the theoretical tenets of situated cognition and symbolic interactionism, including (1) the recognition that knowledge is constructed by individuals through negotiated interactive experiences; (2) an emphasis on gradual skill development as teachers’ organizing principles, interpretations, and reasoning become more complex and integrated over time; and (3) the acknowledgment that growth is not automatic but instead occurs as a result of positive interactions within a supportive yet progressively challenging environment (Blumer, 1969; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1959; von Glaserfeld, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). The PCM situates teachers in many different simulated interactions that introduce combinations of scholastic and sociocultural contexts—grades, behavior, curriculum choice, abuse/mandatory reporting, inclusive classroom practice, bullying, race/ethnicity, gender, belief systems, socioeconomic status, and ability/disability. To best illustrate how these contexts manifest within a simulated interaction, we transition to the PCM simulation of Lori Danson. Following this example, we more closely examine the instructional applications of simulated interactions across the professional contexts of teacher preparation and practice.

The Positive Parent Advocate: Lori Danson

Howard Barrows’s (1987) work with problem-based learning in medical education contexts led to four design tenets for medical simulations—prevalence, clinical importance/impact, social impact, and instructional importance. One of these design tenets—clinical importance—focuses on simulations that may be less prevalent in daily practice but present variables of importance or high impact. Representing this design tenet within teacher education is the PCM simulation of Lori Danson, a positive parent who routinely advocates for her son with autism. PCM simulations are typically crafted from the input of veteran teachers, where their responses offer common problems of practice
(Lampert & Graziani, 2009) that, when simulated, offer significant learning opportunities to novice teachers (Dotger, Harris, & Hansel, 2008). In contrast, the Lori Danson simulation was crafted at the request of a female standardized patient who helps train future physicians. Responding to the emergence of SP simulations within the same medical school clinical facility, this patient sought me out and recounted that, as a mother, she frequently advocates for her son. She noted conversations with teachers and school leaders in advocacy for, and in defense of, her son with autism. I conducted two taped interviews with this mother, prompting her to outline how she has advocated for her son in communication with teachers and school leaders. Her responses focused on her annual practice of conducting a “getting acquainted” conference with her son’s teacher before the school year begins, in an effort to establish communication and convey to the teacher her positive expectations for her son. She recounted her self-established list of topics that she addresses with each teacher, outlining his general characteristics, strengths and challenges. From these taped interviews, the Lori Danson simulation was crafted to present PCM teacher participants with a positive parent advocate with whom they would speak.

**General Procedures**

The Lori Danson simulation is the sixth and final simulation for preservice teachers participating in the 15-week PCM. Before Lori Danson, teachers interact with SPs to address student academic progress, student emotional concerns, parental inquiries on instructional practice, parental critiques of curricula, and concerns about bullying. Within each simulation, the unscripted participating teacher is challenged to not only communicate with a carefully trained and scripted SP sitting across the table but also speak professionally, for example, to the complex integration of instructional and management techniques in an academically diverse classroom. Microphones and multiangle cameras within the Upstate Medical University’s Clinical Skills Center capture, in QuickTime format, both the verbal and nonverbal interactions that occur between each teacher and SP, allowing the teacher to later carefully review his or her approaches to that parent and the content of the conversation. Following each simulation, teachers are guided through careful self-analysis of their resulting QuickTime videos, accompanied by whole-group instructional sessions. Within these sessions, teachers share their video examples of interactions with the SPs, construct professional improvement plans, and prepare for the next simulation.

In accordance with the procedures for prior simulations, the teachers receive a teacher interaction protocol 1 week before the Lori Danson simulation. This teacher interaction protocol provides a detailed outline of what the teacher knew ahead of this parent–teacher conference. Note that
some PCM simulations are teacher initiated. Therefore, the participating teachers are provided extensive detail and evidence on the student in question, leading to why they initiated a parent–teacher conference. The Lori Danson simulation, however, represents a parent-initiated conference. Consequently, this teacher interaction protocol explains that Lori Danson initially e-mailed a request to meet with the teacher. The protocol provides little additional information, though, because this parent–teacher conference is situated, such that it occurs before the teacher would have met the student in question, Brian Danson.

Teacher interaction protocols vary in their level of detail and explanation, depending on the parent- or teacher-initiated orientation of the simulation. Regardless, the protocols in no way script what the teachers should say or how they should say it when engaging with SPs. Instead, teachers are instructed to approach each simulated interaction from their “best professional judgment and any prior professional training.” In contrast, the SPs are carefully trained to offer specific verbal statements (i.e., verbal triggers) and non-verbal mannerisms during a simulated conference. Each time that the Lori Danson simulation is implemented, four to six females are recruited to take part in 2 hours of training as facilitated by myself. All individuals portraying Lori Danson are between the ages of 35 and 50 and are selected from the Upstate Medical University’s established database of standardized patients. For this simulation only, the standardized patient on whom the simulation is based serves as one of the SPs. One week before the scheduled Lori Danson simulation, the individuals portraying Lori Danson take part in training based strictly on an SP interaction protocol and conducted by myself. In cooperation with me, the real Lori Danson helps coach the other SPs on the examples and questions in the SP interaction protocol that she uses in her real interactions with her son’s teacher.

The Lori Danson simulation includes an early verbal trigger, where each SP portraying Danson says, “My son will soon be joining your class, and he is autistic. I was hoping I could give you a little background on my son and we could collaborate to support him.” Such an opening provides the teachers with an initial understanding of Lori Danson’s intentions, and it allows the SP to transition into an early description of her son, Brian. Operating from the stance of a parent-initiated conference, each SP is trained to gently assume control of the conversation early on and to speak to Brian’s past successes and struggles in academic and social interactions at school. Per the SP interaction protocol, such an introduction typically accounts for the first 5 minutes of the interaction. Following this early description of Brian, each SP is trained to transition to a series of gentle inquiries of the teacher. These five verbal triggers include:

> gently questioning what the teacher knows about students with special needs, using the phrase “Could you tell me what you know about children with autism?”;
inquiring how the teacher might help Brian if he exhibits unwanted contact with his peers, physical (e.g., hugging) or verbal (e.g., loud, repetitive talking);

> questioning the teacher on how he or she plans to communicate Brian's academic and social progress;

> inquiring about how the teacher attends to students' social behaviors as well as their academic progress, particularly with regard to ensuring Brian's inclusion in all classroom activities; and

> concluding the conference by reemphasizing that she is trying to advocate for her son in recognizing his successes and struggles in past classrooms.

The SPs and the teachers have 1 week to review their respective interaction protocols before the scheduled simulations. On the day of their simulations, the teachers are guided to individual conference rooms within the Upstate Medical University's Clinical Skills Center. They enter their assigned conference rooms and sit down, at which time they are told that Lori Danson will join them in a moment. When all four teachers are seated, the cameras are activated, and the four Lori Dansons are cued to knock, enter, and engage with the teacher in each room. From this point, the SPs operate from their defined verbal triggers, but the teachers are free to engage however they deem professionally responsible. Consequently, a variety of conversations unfold, yielding data on how teachers interpret and operate from the professional challenges and contexts presented by the SPs.

The objective of this article is to illustrate four distinct instructional applications of the simulated interaction pedagogy. The data that follow are not offered for subsequent analysis. Instead, this example of dialogue between Lori Danson and one preservice teacher—Kate—illustrates the most common outcome of the simulated interaction pedagogy within teacher education.

### Data Excerpts

Each simulated interaction between a preservice teacher and an SP yields four strands of data: presimulation teacher written reflections, QuickTime recordings of the simulation, postsimulation recorded teacher debriefings with me, and (4) postsimulation video-informed teacher written reflections with noted strengths and areas for improvement. For the teacher participants and myself, the crux of the data is the QuickTime recording of each simulated interaction. To illustrate this strand of data, I provide one excerpt from the Lori Danson simulation, which focuses on the first verbal trigger—where the SP gently questions the teacher on his or her knowledge of students with autism—and the subsequent teacher response.

The excerpt is between Lori Danson and Kate, a teacher candidate working toward professional licensure (Grades 1–6) in inclusive elementary education.
This excerpt stems from earlier conversation, during which Lori Danson discusses Brian’s past strengths and challenges. Here, Danson presents the concept of high expectations before leading to the first verbal trigger:

(10:48)

DANSON: I don’t want you to feel like you have to do this, this, and this for Brian, but I want you to have the same high expectations for him as you do the other kids. . . .

KATE: Yes.

DANSON: Um, he’s just gonna need that little extra help with some of these things like organization and stuff to make sure he can meet those expectations. And then, his father and I will do everything we can at home to make sure that he meets your expectations as well, so. Um, but I’ve been babbling a lot, I should ask you, what do you know about autism?

KATE: Well, let me say that I’m thrilled that you came in to introduce yourself and to let me get an introduction to Brian. Um, I am thrilled that you have high expectations for him too. As you probably know, my classroom is an inclusive classroom, so we have many different students, we have some students with some labeled disabilities, it’s a huge class with many needs, so I assure you that I really try to format my entire classroom to meet the needs of every kid and it sounds like he is a very high-achieving, bright, sweet kid. . . . (11:56)

(13:32)

KATE: I am familiar with autism, and although this is only my first year of teaching, I’ve had student teaching experiences and a lot of experiences with children with autism, and all kinds of disabilities, so, and of course, you learn every kid is different—

DANSON: [Interrupting] That is so true.

KATE: —so I think getting acquainted with Brian will help both of us figure out what we can do to support him in the classroom.

DANSON: Yes, definitely, definitely. And I’d be interested in finding out in the future how he and his classmates interact.

(13:49)

This excerpt illustrates the primary type of data that result from recorded simulations between SPs and teacher candidates. This excerpt does not represent the data set resulting from the larger sample of teacher participants \((n = 80)\) for the Lori Danson simulation. Additionally, it does not illustrate the full range of a single simulated interaction, because only one of the five triggers is represented in this transcription. It does, however, illustrate three important aspects of simulated interactions within teacher education. First, the SP portraying Lori Danson issues the same verbal triggers to all the teacher candidates, asking each of them—as she did with Kate—what they know about autism. Presenting teacher candidates with the same professional question provides them the opportunity to practice their individual, unscripted approaches to such a question. Second, this single verbal trigger
prompts the teacher candidates to immediately synthesize tenets of teacher preparation. For example, Kate emphasizes her inclusive philosophy and references a classroom management format that is supportive of students’ diverse needs. Third, QuickTime recordings allow teacher candidates to review and constructively critique their individual responses to this verbal trigger. For example, Kate does not immediately respond to Danson’s query about her knowledge of autism, but she does return to the question with a response.

To illustrate the data resulting from simulated interactions, the presented excerpt was intentionally decontextualized from the broader conversation that unfolded between Kate and Lori Danson. Within their exchange, the other four verbal triggers prompted more extensive conversation on Brian Danson’s social and academic needs and on plans for future teacher–parent communications. Grossman and McDonald (2008) emphasized the necessity of pedagogies within teacher preparation that allow teacher candidates to develop and assess “discrete components of complex practice in settings of reduced complexity” (p. 190). Recorded simulated interactions provide teacher candidates, teacher educators, and researchers the opportunity to examine any professional statement, communication pattern, pedagogy, or explanation of content on the part of the teacher candidate. For example, with the guidance of a teacher educator, Kate might more closely examine her early responses in comparison to Danson’s later trigger on including Brian in daily classroom activities. Comparing her responses across the broader conversation allows Kate (and teacher education faculty) to search for specificity and practicality. That is, Kate initially emphasizes an inclusive classroom environment but provides examples of inclusive practice only when questioned later. In consideration of Grossman and McDonald, Kate has the opportunity to examine any or all components of a complex conversation with a knowledgeable parent advocate. In particular, subsequent review of the QuickTime recording allows Kate to assess her examples of inclusive practice, receive formative feedback, and construct plans for improvement within a supportive teacher preparation environment.

**Instructional Applications**

The simulated interaction pedagogy emerged within teacher education through an initial focus on parent–teacher interactions in an independent elective course on school–family partnerships. As outlined by Dotger, Dotger, and Maher (2010), teacher education simulations have been extended to more broadly examine how novice teachers enact pedagogy and content knowledge. These efforts now include a variety of standardized individuals—students, parents, paraprofessionals, and school leaders—providing teacher candidates with opportunities to practice addressing common problems of practice. Across the past 3 years, 526 preservice and in-service teachers have
engaged in 14 different simulated interactions. Typically, simulated interactions are infused within established methods courses or seminars that support student teachers. Infusing a single simulated interaction into an established course typically requires a time allotment of 3 hours, allowing opportunity for the preservice teachers to engage with the SPs and carefully debrief their approaches to a common (simulated) set of professional circumstances. Of note, I structure the debriefing such that it builds on participants’ self-assessments of their respective QuickTime videos. Based on their self-assessments, broader discussions of practice emerge when participants convene to discuss their individual approaches to the same set of verbal triggers.

Each of the 14 simulations yields discussions of the problems of practice targeted within that simulation. In addition to the rich exploration of individual problems presented within a single simulation, there is value in instructional explorations across series of simulations. We now turn to more closely examine four instructional applications of simulated interactions within teacher education.

**Explorations of Teacher Identity**

After preservice teachers conclude their simulated interactions with standardized individuals, they immediately engage in individual recorded debriefings with me. One striking theme commonly surfaces during these postsimulation debriefings. Teachers frequently inquire, “How do I handle it if...?” “What should I do when...?” “What is my responsibility as the teacher when...?” and they very tellingly state, “I had no idea...!” Their often-empatic inquiries suggest their attentiveness to teacher identity. For example, one simulation challenges preservice teachers to outline academic and behavioral expectations for a standardized student. During postsimulation debriefings, teachers frequently ask how to outline expectations while trying to foster an invitational rapport with a student transferring into the classroom. In their self-assessments of this simulation, teachers often refer to their emerging professional voices and identities, focusing on basic comparisons of how much they talk with how much they listen. Without prompt from myself, they question how to balance a discussion of expectations—and the necessary amount of teacher talk it requires—with appropriate questions to help them learn more about that new student. Across the broader PCM, preservice teachers spoke with parents on topics that extended beyond academics—including discussions of student emotional well being, the socioeconomic challenges of single-parent households, and the ramifications of verbal violence in the home. These complex interactions often sparked postsimulation questions on teacher responsibilities (beyond academics) and how to negotiate nebulous boundaries between homes and schools (Dotger & Smith, 2009).

Like Kate, teachers can carefully review their discourse with a standardized individual in a simulated context, assessing what was said and how it was
said. Multiple simulations and subsequent assessments and reflections help teachers begin constructing a novice teacher identity by deconstructing how they enacted their professional training within simulated contexts. Using simulated interactions to examine professional identity is one instructional application that will potentially differ for preservice teachers in comparison to induction-stage novice teachers: If these two groups of novice teachers—separated by no more than 3 years of teaching practice—differ in how they engage with standardized individuals, how do the interaction patterns of the preservice and induction-stage teacher samples inform preservice teacher preparation? If induction-stage teachers frequently comment after a simulation that they “had no idea” or question “What should I do when . . . ?” then how might these reflections affect the structure or content of teacher preparation curricula?

**Exploration of Content-Specific Problems of Practice**

Discussions of the practices of teaching (Lampert, 2001) and approximations of practice (Grossman et al., 2009) suggest attention to content-specific activities, tasks, and interactions associated with classroom instruction. Simulated instructional activities situate teachers within content-specific problems of practice (Lampert, 2001, 2009). For example, consider a simulation that positions a preservice mathematics teacher in front of a standardized student who has questions about converting meters to kilometers. The preservice mathematics teacher may initially experience the instructional task of guiding the standardized student through the use of the factor–label conversion method (e.g., 450 meters / x = 1 kilometer / 1,000 meters). How does this preservice teacher respond, though, when the standardized student asks which is larger—meter or kilometer? How does the preservice teacher explain the concept of scale? What images or illustrations does the teacher rely on to ground the student’s understanding of the seemingly nebulous mathematics prefixes *deca*, *becta*, and *kilo*? This basic mathematics simulation with a standardized student represents an approximation of practice, where preservice teachers can practice with a common instructional task (Grossman et al., 2009).

The simulation of content-specific problems of practice represents the second instructional application of teacher education simulations. When simulations are designed for specific content areas, it allows both the teachers and the facilitating researchers to examine what content and pedagogies individual teachers apply to a given problem of practice. For example, do teachers synthesize and enact tenets of social justice as they engage with a standardized paraprofessional on including students with disabilities in the classroom? How do preservice teachers’ written reflections on inclusion and social justice compare or contrast with their actions in a simulation that holds undercurrents of exclusion and injustice? Do the outcomes of
simulated interactions link to earlier teacher preparation coursework? If so, how might those outcomes inform traditional teacher preparation content and methods courses?

Exploration of Affect

The Lori Danson simulation was crafted at the request of a proactive mother who frequently advocates for her autistic son. During postsimulation debriefings, preservice teachers often report feeling encouraged by the alignment of their teacher preparation in inclusive special education with the professional context that Lori Danson presents (Dotger, Maher, Harris, & Hansel, in press). Within the original six-simulation PCM, though, teacher participants engage with a variety of parents and express a much wider array of emotions. For example, the fourth PCM simulation situates teachers in conversation with Jim Smithers, a condescending angry father who questions the relevancy and morality of a schoolwide reading. Although certainly not all parents display anger as they engage with teachers, the Jim Smithers simulation was crafted to provide teachers the opportunity to practice calm professionalism within tense interactions. Interacting with Jim Smithers is a challenge, and novice teachers—at both the preservice stage and the induction stage—frequently emerge frustrated and defensive. Like the affirmation that typically results from the Lori Danson simulations, the emotions that teachers express after engaging with Jim Smithers often become the focal point for intense postsimulation reflections. Hargreaves’s (1998) work on the emotional practices of teaching suggests a variety of emotional geographies that professionals must navigate as they interact with others in school contexts. For example, the Danson and Smithers simulations tie directly to Hargreaves’s political geography, where hierarchical power structures and shared decision making between parents and teachers—between Danson or Smithers and each teacher participant—results in distinct emotional responses (Hargreaves, 2000). Lasky (2000) and Hargreaves (2001) reported that in-service teachers struggle with emotional geographies as they engage with parents and caregivers. Similarly, preservice teachers show patterns of emotional responses as they engage in multiple interactions with SPs (Dotger et al., in press).

Korthagen and Kessels (1999) emphasized that one of the fundamental problems of transferring teacher preparation into practice is that many young teachers do not feel an impetus—a disequilibrating concern—that drives them to learn as they progress through teacher preparation programs. Lack of disequilibrating practice within teacher preparation suggests that preservice teachers fully invest themselves later, when their full-time instructional responsibilities present enough disequilibrating experiences to capture their attention. Preservice teachers’ emotional responses to simulated interactions suggest additional instructional possibilities for teacher educators and teacher preparation programs. One instructional application would focus on
the investment and affective preparation of future teachers through the use of simulations. If teacher candidates experience moral geographies through a simulation—where a teacher and an SP may have convergent or divergent ideas of what is best for the student—how might this experience more effectively prepare them for such interactions during their novice years of teaching? Similarly, how might simulated interactions help prepare novice teachers to identify and navigate physical geographies, such as the perception of boundaries between homes and schools? How do teacher candidates navigate parent–teacher interactions that stretch perceived boundaries—where discussions of divorce, socioeconomics, and abuse unfold? Ultimately, I suggest that simulated interactions within teacher preparation represent a pedagogy of uncertainty (Shulman, 2005) that offers instructional opportunities for helping preservice teachers navigate the affective complexities of teaching.

Exploration of Teacher Dispositions

The public school classroom is inherently ill-structured. There is no distinct comprehensive method for facilitating student learning or fostering an inclusive environment. As a result, teachers enact their own beliefs, attitudes, and judgments as they take action within their classroom contexts. Teacher dispositions—“trends in judgment or action within ill-structured contexts” (Johnson & Reiman, 2007, p. 677)—continue to garner widespread attention throughout teacher preparation and institutional accreditation efforts (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, n.d.).

Simulated interactions hold the potential to illuminate teachers’ dispositions toward parents, students, teaching, and the purposes of school. At times, a teacher’s postsimulation debriefing suggests additional exploration of this potential. For example, a preservice mathematics teacher engaged with a standardized paraprofessional to discuss each person’s responsibilities in a shared classroom. In the subsequent debriefing, the preservice teacher verbalized her hesitation to include the paraprofessional in any form of coteaching, questioning whether paraprofessionals were capable of teaching mathematics. That response alone suggests a much broader examination of preservice teacher dispositions toward collaborating with colleagues. However, simulations typically yield broader illustrations of teacher dispositions. For example, one simulation presents teachers with a father who is concerned for the emotional well-being of his daughter. Although resulting videos show teachers demonstrating empathy and perspective taking, this simulated context typically illuminates teachers’ beliefs on which school professionals are—and are not—responsible for students’ nonacademic needs. To hear in-service teachers say during simulation debriefings, “I’m a [content area] teacher; emotional concerns are not my job,” raises serious considerations about how the dispositions of all school professionals—teachers, counselors, administrators, and so on—affect the responsibilities they take on within schools.
Early assessments of the impact of simulated interactions on teacher dispositions warrant more extensive attention. My examination of preservice teachers' dispositions showed statistically significant advances in ethical sensitivity across the six-simulation PCM (Dotger, 2010). These advances suggest that as teachers engaged in and reflected on multiple simulated interactions, they grew in their capacity to identify and show sensitivity toward scholastic situations related to race or ethnicity. Although this work focused on a specific dispositional construct, it suggests greater attention toward dispositional awareness and development through simulated interactions. As teachers engage with standardized individuals who represent different demographics—racial, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and socioeconomic—do they demonstrate increased awareness of and sensitivity toward broader sociocultural perspectives? If preservice teachers are trained within institutions that focus on social justice tenets, do teachers enact these tenets as they engage with standardized students, parents, and colleagues? Similarly, do simulated interactions expose and help teachers reflect on their dispositions toward economic or sociolinguistic contexts? In short, how do preservice teachers respond to a SP who struggles to communicate in English? Importantly, how might their response patterns inform teacher preparation curricula for English-language learners? How do preservice teachers interact with a parent who, as a result of working three jobs, admits to having limited time for her son and his homework needs? Do multiple simulated interactions—coupled with careful debriefings and formative critiques—help teachers develop more empathetic and principled dispositions toward students, parents, and colleagues? Ultimately, I posit that the potential development of teacher dispositions through the use of simulated interactions offers a unique instructional advantage in that such interactions require action on the part of preservice teachers. Thus, teacher educators, researchers, and teacher candidates are uniquely positioned to examine how a teacher's dispositions do or do not translate into action.

Toward a Pedagogical Bridge

This article illustrates the use of simulated interactions within teacher education, focusing on the instructional applications of this pedagogy of enactment. Questions of this pedagogical approach commonly center on scalability, generalizability, and technology—topics fully addressed in related work (Dotger et al., 2008; Dotger et al., in press; Dotger & Smith, 2009). Questions of generalizability scrutinize the transfer of this pedagogy beyond its clinical setting within a nearby medical institution. Similarly, questions of scale frequently reference how teacher preparation institutions can implement this pedagogy with large numbers of teacher candidates. Embedded within these questions of generalizability and scale are common references to the advanced record-
ing technologies housed within the Upstate Medical University’s Clinical Skills Center. In short, the heart of this pedagogy is the dialogue that occurs between a teacher candidate and a standardized individual. To implement this pedagogy, teacher preparation institutions need to train standardized individuals to accurately issue verbal triggers to teacher candidates (see Dotger et al., 2008). Additionally, basic recording equipment (e.g., laptop and webcam) is needed to capture the resulting dialogue and make it available for postsimulation analysis and reflection. Although more than 500 teachers have engaged in simulated interactions, a series of simulations typically involves only 15 to 40 teachers at any given time. In recognition of medical simulation procedures (Barrows, 2000), simulations with small groups of teacher participants allows for careful monitoring of standardized individuals and for efficient data collection and disbursement. For teacher preparation institutions seeking to implement this pedagogy with large numbers of teacher candidates, the task is twofold: (1) to coordinate the training of standardized individuals for each scheduled simulation and (2) to provide time for the teachers to review their recorded simulations before large-group instructional sessions on how they approached the common problem of practice.

When preservice teachers engage with Lori Danson, they speak face-to-face with a person carefully trained to approximate a positive parent advocate. Lori presents information on her son with autism and questions each teacher with inquisitive but collaborative intent. Lori expresses concern and regret for miscommunications with past teachers and exhibits attention to her son’s academic and social progressions. By design, Lori Danson challenges preservice teachers to synthesize and enact some of the pedagogies and prosocial understandings learned within teacher preparation coursework. Teachers who interact with Lori Danson do not have the luxury of pausing the conversation to construct detailed reflections on including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Instead, they must immediately speak to the topic with specificity and genuineness. When interacting with Lori Danson, preservice teachers are challenged to extend well beyond the general axiom that it is important to communicate with parents. Instead, they must verbalize plans for clear and regular communication. Preservice teachers who interact with Lori Danson cannot focus solely on academics. Instead, they must address how they support students as they grow academically and socially within a diverse classroom community. Most important, each preservice teacher has a video of the interaction, a cohort of peers who experienced the same professional context, and the opportunity to deconstruct the interaction with the input and guidance of teacher education faculty.

Carefully crafted simulated interactions hold the potential to help teacher candidates bridge teacher preparation and practice. Through postsimulation video analysis and feedback, simulated interactions help teacher candidates more closely examine what they said and how they said it, what they did and how they did it, as they engaged in immediate and demanding problems of
practice. This pedagogy combines the core components of teaching practice—content knowledge, pedagogical understanding, and thoughtful responsive interaction skills (Ball & Forzani, 2009)—with common sociocultural contexts. Simulations do not supplant fully contextualized teaching in active classrooms. Instead, simulated interactions serve as discrete experiences designed to approximate teaching practices, thereby melding the authenticity of instruction with the formative capacity of teacher preparation coursework and faculty.

Without question, no two parents or parent–teacher conversations are identical. Furthermore, teachers approach their practices differently—whether leading literature discussions, conducting one-to-one science or mathematics problem solving, or discussing academic or behavioral expectations with their students. The proposed use of simulated interactions within teacher preparation is not meant to suggest that there is one distinct formulaic manner in which teachers should interact with students, parents, or colleagues around problems of practice. Instead, simulated interactions simply provide teacher candidates exposure to the same problems of practice, as well as opportunities to enact their own individual approaches to those problems. Simulated interactions hold potential as a pedagogical bridge, connecting the theories and methodologies of teacher preparation coursework with the intensity, affect, and actions of teacher practice. As teacher candidates engage in simulated interactions, teacher educators and researchers can closely examine how they approach problems of practice, transferring what they know into what they can do.

Notes

1. Note that Dotger, Harris, and Hansel (2008) address in depth the recruitment, training, and debriefing of standardized parents.
2. I recognize the connotation of the term standardized in current educational research, literature, and professional conversations but emphasize the different connotation in medical education and in this research endeavor.
3. Pseudonym.
4. Discussions of cost for simulated interactions within teacher education are addressed elsewhere (Dotger et al., 2010).

References


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