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When the Plan Fails – Teachers' Reflections About What and Why the Plan Doesn't Work

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Teachers' planning processes are regarded as a way of interpreting and transferring the curriculum into concrete activities in the classroom and as important for good quality teaching. Planning is understood not simply as a script for instruction but as a form of professional reasoning in which teachers attempt to anticipate students' understandings, select and sequence tasks, and distribute materials, time, and classroom interactions (Clark & Peterson, 1986). However, classroom life is inherently unpredictable. Even carefully designed lesson plans may fail when confronted with the complexity of real learners, real materials, and real settings. Teaching involves a constant negotiation between what was intended in planning and what becomes possible in practice (Doyle, 1983; Schoenfeld, 2010).

The empirical material for the present study - three rounds of video stimulated teacher reflections on a mathematics module about fractions - exemplifies this tension. Across all three rounds, the teachers identify and describe ways in which their planning did not function as expected when enacted. They note, for instance, that the overall module

became "too complicated," with too many goals and too many activities, that the materials and representations included in the plan behaved differently in the classroom than anticipated and they raised concerns regarding group dynamics. These findings support the argument that planning often occurs "at a distance" from the actual classroom ecology and that this distance can create fragility in enacted lessons (Doyle, 1983). Taken together, these findings illustrate why moments when planning "does not work" are not simply incidental but constitute a productive lens for understanding the nature of teaching itself. They reveal the limits of foresight, the centrality of student interpretation, and the ways instructional designs are reshaped by interactions, materials, and classroom conditions. By examining teachers' reflections on such breakdowns, the current study sheds light on how educators make sense of discrepancies between plan and enactment, and how these reflections inform subsequent revisions, pedagogical decisions, and their broader professional judgment. The teachers' reflections varied between outward observations of design flaws and inward self-evaluation of planning

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decisions. Through video-stimulated recall, teachers advanced to deep, critical reflection where they questioned the structural logic of the entire module and began articulating principles for redesign. The

breakdowns in planning thus became productive triggers for professional learning and module development.