

Rethinking Clinical Experiences for Social Studies Teacher Education

Tina Heafner

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Michelle Plaisance

Greensboro College

Abstract

Windows into Teaching and Learning (WiTL), developed to provide relevant and meaningful technology-mediated clinical experiences in an online social studies methods course, engaged participants in purposefully designed synchronous and asynchronous field experiences to address a lack of summer clinical teaching opportunities. Following a discussion of the challenges of providing clinical experiences, the authors describe the outcomes of a study involving remote partnerships in learning between candidates enrolled in a distance education social studies methods course and mentor teachers employed in middle and secondary schools. Findings illustrated that WiTL exceeded expectations by opening unanticipated opportunities into the profession of teaching, both for candidates and teacher mentors who participated in the study. Participants provided rich descriptions of these experiences, as well as the potential within WiTL, as it progressed beyond being a substitute to a means of transforming observations in both distance education and teacher preparation programs in a traditional university setting.

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

—American Journalist, Sydney J. Harris (1978)

Clinical experiences provide preservice social studies teachers a fundamental source of pedagogical knowledge designed to allow teacher education candidates to develop professional dispositions and begin to use their teaching skills and content knowledge to engage students effectively in social studies education (Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation, 2013; National Council for the Social Studies, 2002).

Scholars have noted that well-integrated clinical work taught in the context of schools needs to create field-based learning environments that challenge candidates to rethink deep-seated pedagogical and content orientations, to bridge methods course content with practice through aligned school–university partnerships, and to emphasize a more in-depth understanding of teaching and learning (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2010a, 2010b; Darling-Hammond et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). However, clinical experiences are not always actuated in a manner conducive to achieving these objectives (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

The integration of meaningful clinical experiences into teacher preparation programs presents unique challenges and opportunities when coursework takes place online in distance education programs or in alternative placements occurring outside of the traditional academic school year. A large volume of literature supports the idea that online teacher preparation programs are “at least as good” as their traditional counterparts (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). Studies have also documented the online format’s unique potential to improve the experience of preservice teachers and future student outcomes (Harrell & Harris, 2006; Sherin & van Es, 2005).

This study reports on the program Windows into Teaching and Learning (WiTL). WiTL was conceived of and developed by researchers at a large, urban university located in the southeastern United States to provide candidates enrolled in a summer online social studies methods course with meaningful clinical experiences that leverage the unique capabilities of digital media.

During the spring semester prior to the delivery of the summer social studies methods course, we recorded three to four lessons taught by veteran mentor teachers. Lessons purposefully included examples of applications of pedagogy that would be taught within the methods course. Technology-enhanced observation guides were created to help candidates make important content pedagogical connections relevant to the methods course. We integrated voice overlays and text observation notes into the observation guides and uploaded media to Moodle, the online course delivery platform, for candidate-required viewing during the summer methods course. After completing asynchronous observations, candidates engaged in a threaded discussion with the veteran middle and secondary social studies teachers to unpack their collective experiences.

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which WiTL could produce meaningful clinical experiences for preservice teacher candidates and to examine the potential differences between WiTL and what is understood about clinical experiences in traditional teacher preparation programs. Study results illustrate the potential for content-area clinical experiences, like those conducted in WiTL, to create a shared partnership in learning that achieves field-based outcomes.

The study was framed around three expectations of clinical experiences: (a) clinicals should facilitate candidates’ learning, (b) clinicals are designed to

promote professional growth, and (c) clinicals are learning tools to engage teacher candidates in interactive and critical discourse about pedagogical issues.

The next section is a review of literature on clinical experiences in teacher preparation within online and traditional modalities. Then, the qualitative methods used in data collection and analysis are described, followed by the results of the study and a discussion. By examining the extent to which a particular online teacher prep program (WiTL) was able to produce meaningful clinical experiences in social studies teacher education, this study sought to (a) draw contrasts between WiTL and what is understood about traditional clinical experiences in teacher preparation and (b) analyze the potential of WiTL and similar online programs to mediate the various dilemmas that continue to face those who train the teachers of tomorrow.

Literature Review

Scholarship has explored a number of longstanding challenges that constrain the effectiveness of clinical experiences in traditional teacher preparation (Applegate, 1985; Passe, 1994). A meta-analysis of preservice teacher training research outlined five distinct benefits of technology in candidate field experiences: “a) exposure to various teaching/learning environments, b) creation of shared experiences, c) promoting reflectivity, d) preparing candidates cognitively, and e) learning about technology integration” (Hixon & So, 2009, p. 296). Therefore, to the extent that dilemmas in teacher preparation can be addressed by online teacher preparation and clinical experiences, computer-mediated teacher training can become an increasingly viable method for postsecondary institutions.

Indeed, a significant amount of literature has examined the potential merger of technology and field experience clinicals for improving educational preparation and praxis (Chiero & Beare, 2010; Harrell & Harris, 2006; Hilburn & Maguth, 2012; Weschke & Barclay, 2011). This review is organized into three broad areas in which technology-mediated learning has potential power: (a) learning facilitated through practical and authentic field experiences, (b) professional growth through active and engaging clinical experiences, and (c) learning to notice effective practice as a bridge to theory. These three potential areas represent a loose conceptual structure for this study and the WiTL program it is based on.

Facilitate Learning Through Practical and Authentic Field Experiences

While inarguably a valuable component of teacher preparation programs, clinical field experiences pose many challenges for candidates, cooperating school systems, and university personnel. Applegate (1985) defined what have seemingly become perennial dilemmas within teacher preparation programs as they strive to maintain high standards, such as the need to provide candidates with relevant and meaningful early field experiences. Among these obstacles are what the author terms “institutional dilemmas” (p. 61), where university personnel grapple with complex logistical issues, such as travel costs and availability of appropriate settings for clinical experience placements.

These dilemmas result in a lack of time for reflection, discourse, and interaction between the teacher-mentor and candidates based on fixed schedules and excessive time demands on the part of both parties. The responsibility for deciphering what has been observed in the classroom is left with the novice

candidate, who ultimately remains uncertain as to why the clinical experiences were assigned in the first place (Applegate, 1985).

Research into the potential benefits of online teaching and learning has indicated that computer-mediated environments can help resolve the challenges of logistics and access, particularly in institutions serving large geographical areas that struggle to fill teaching positions in high-needs areas and that have historically served relatively uniform student populations in terms of age and race/ethnicity (Collins, 1999; Dell, Hobbs, & Miller, 2008). In a study that examined a postsecondary online teacher preparation program, Harrell and Harris (2006) concluded, "Going online provided a way to offer a flexible program that maintained quality while increasing access and affordability to post baccalaureate candidates, and especially to career changers and candidates in high need teaching fields" (p. 759).

Sherin and van Es (2005) suggested that technology, in the form of asynchronous video, held the potential to improve preservice teachers' observation skills and overcome logistical challenges

because technology integration freed candidates from the limitations of memory inherent in onsite classroom observations. However, other scholars have warned that the online modality cannot replace the real-world interactions between teacher and student (Young, 2012).

In addition, Applegate (1985), described "individual dilemmas" (p. 62), where in many cases the participants involved in the clinical experience find that it falls short of their expectations. Because traditional clinical observations occur in isolation, where a single candidate is assigned to a single classroom, a disconnection often arises between what is being taught in the university and what is experienced in the classroom. Studies have explored how computer-mediated coursework infused with technology can address these individual dilemmas as well, particularly when technology is presented and modeled in ways that help candidates enhance teaching methods and transfer those methods to their own classrooms (Bolick, Berson, Friedman, & Porfeli, 2007; Halpin, 1999; Molebash, 2004). Brush and Saye (2009) called for teacher preparation that can "align technology with discipline-specific pedagogy" (p. 46). Similarly, Percy (2013) emphasized the need to address candidates' beliefs, motivations, and self-efficacy related to technology in preservice training programs.

Chiero and Beare (2010) administered a 110-item Likert-scale survey to a large sample of K–12 teachers who were recent graduates of teacher preparation programs. Graduates of online programs provided consistently higher ratings than their campus-based counterparts on the "perceived effectiveness of their preparation for important teaching responsibilities, and the extent to which their program coursework and fieldwork were professionally valuable and helpful to them during their initial year of teaching" (pp. 784-785). A follow-up study using a similar instrument found online graduates indicating they felt more prepared for the teaching profession; however, no significant differences were found in principals' ratings of the teachers' preparation between online and face-to-face (F2F) modalities (Chiero et al., 2012).

In 2013, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) emphasized the centrality of clinical experiences in teacher preparation as a means of teacher candidates demonstrating their ability to impact student learning. The

expectations of CAEP clearly articulated that clinical experiences should be designed of “sufficient depth, breadth, diversity, coherence, and duration to ensure that candidates demonstrate their developing effectiveness and positive impact on all students’ learning and development” (CAEP, 2015, p. 6).

Evidence suggests that graduates of online teacher training can produce higher achievement outcomes in their students than similar graduates of F2F programs. Weschke and Barclay (2011) used matched pairs of online and F2F graduates to examine the teachers’ differential impact on reading achievement in a large urban public school system. Conducted over 3 years in Grades 1–5, findings showed that the students of online graduates outperformed those of F2F graduates on a standardized literacy test in all but one grade level (third) by an average of 4.6%. The authors also found that online graduates served a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minority students than did the matched comparison group teachers.

Professional Growth Through an Active Role in Clinical Experiences

CAEP’s vision of clinically based learning elevates the importance of clinical educators as partners in the preparation, evaluation, and support of teacher education candidates. Clinical experiences are guided by strong partnerships in which all stakeholders share responsibility for candidate preparation. These coconstructed, shared clinical experiences create a learning cycle centered on clinical practice, with an emphasis given to strategies for positively affecting all candidates’ development and learning.

The findings of Pryor and Kuhn’s (2004) study comparing the outcomes of field experiences across two semesters for 61 candidates enrolled in social studies methods courses suggest university personnel must be closely involved in the implementation of field experiences for candidates conducting early field experiences. The authors asserted that without the direct guidance of the methods course instructor, candidates simply do not know what to observe. In the discussion of results, they strongly argued for the integration of field observations into methods courses to enhance understanding and improve reflectivity for candidates.

Peer interaction within collaborative learning communities supports teachers’ professional development (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000). Likewise, peer interaction in online environments is essential to learning (Shea, 2006). CAEP suggests integrative field-based experiences within teacher education programs to ensure that all teachers have the capacity and dispositions to work closely with colleagues, students, and school communities. In this sense, technology can play a role in facilitating participant interaction as a form of professional growth.

Garrison and Anderson (2003) argued that technology supports collaboration, yet collective learning will not occur without appropriate intervention of the online instructor and active engagement of all participants (Palloff & Pratt, 2003). To create successful online communities, a shared community of inquiry is essential (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). In an online learning environment, the community of inquiry becomes a composite of social, teaching, and cognitive presence. To the extent that online environments enhance each of these facets, candidates experience higher levels of satisfaction, learning, and professional growth (Shea, 2006).

Learning to Notice Effective Clinical Practice as a Bridge to Theory

Technology provides a way of addressing how effective clinical practices can enable candidates to connect theory to their nascent teaching practice. Kopcha and Alger (2011, 2014) have studied how preservice candidates who participated in a technology-supported clinical program compared with those who did not. Experimental results indicated that candidates in the tech-centric program showed significantly higher levels of teaching self-efficacy and higher scores on evaluations of candidates' field experience. Elevated levels of efficacy and performance may suggest that tech-enhanced clinical experience facilitated the observation, assimilation, and implementation of effective pedagogical methods and attendant theoretical foundations.

Sherin and van Es (2005) studied the use of video in teacher education and noted the impact of video on the way in which teachers or students noticed phenomena within the classroom. The authors suggested that video helped candidates develop the ability to conceptualize large concepts from small details and to apply increased logic and reason to their teaching contexts.

The studies employed video as a tool in a teacher-education program with six preservice teachers, requiring them to write reflections of the types of things they noticed when watching themselves teach. Over time, when compared with other preservice teachers not utilizing this tool, those who used video were able to hone their noticing skills and discern significant from insignificant events in the classroom. In addition, they found that the content of their analysis advanced from being simply evaluative to interpretive in nature. These findings are consistent with the use of video by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2014), affirm the use of video as a tool for systematic reflection in ongoing professional growth, and align clinical learning outcomes with those advocated by CAEP (2013).

Research focused on teacher preparation in social studies teachers has also addressed how technology can help bridge theory and "discipline-specific content and pedagogy" (Waring & Torrez, 2010, p. 303). Social studies as a discipline is fertile ground for technology-enhanced innovations, given its historical emphasis on more traditional pedagogies (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Hammond & Manfra, 2009). As such, Hilburn and Maguth (2012) advocated for changes in methods course curricula, including "microteaching opportunities, digitally mediated student reflection, and a synchronous technology that would allow all students...to discuss issues central to the field" (p. 309). Such reforms can enhance collaboration between student teachers in their social studies methods courses to further link the theoretical concerns on university curricula to practice in the field.

Summary

This literature has framed a number of dilemmas facing clinically based teacher preparation programs and has indicated how technology and computer mediated teaching and learning holds the potential to mitigate many of these dilemmas. As Percy (2013) summarized, "The value of technology should be found in its ability to promote such change" (para. 72), "to supplement and improve our best practices" (para. 77), "and thus, our preservice program's curricula should be adjusted toward that end" (para. 72).

Taken together, the ability of online, technology-enhanced teacher preparation programs to (a) facilitate learning through access to practical and authentic field experiences, (b) promote professional growth through active and engaging clinical experiences, and (c) develop skills for learning to notice effective practice as a bridge to theory constitutes a conceptual framework of WiTL.

The initial implementation of WiTL explored ways of improving clinical experiences for university students enrolled in a distance education program offering year-round coursework to candidates seeking licensure for teaching middle or secondary social studies. Specifically, we sought to document the experiences of social studies methods students, mentor teachers, and course instructors who engaged in a common online clinical experience in a web-based content methods course. Our research focused on two questions:

1. To what extent, if any, does this online clinical facilitate learning, professional growth, and interactive and critical discourse?
2. To what extent does this online clinical experience promote learning, professional growth, and interactive and critical discourse in a different way than traditional programs?

Method

To address the research question, we employed an exploratory case study (Yin, 2002). Case study research allows researchers to describe, understand, and explain systems, situations, or phenomena within real-world contexts (Tellis, 1997) through the study of a single case (Merriam, 1998). According to Tellis (1997), case studies are often used to answer research questions that investigate how or why phenomena work or occur. In this instance, the case, a distance education content methods course, provided the learning context for examining the use of shared online clinical experiences.

Furthermore, we used a qualitative design with a constructivist paradigm to examine the outcomes of a clinically based, online social studies methods course. We were interested in the views held by all participants about online field experiences as well as about social studies teaching and learning. In accordance with Patton's (2002) recommendations for appropriate uses of a constructivist perspective, we sought participants' reported perceptions, explanations, and beliefs, as well as documented learning outcomes identified in candidates' work.

In addition, we explored how online clinicals mediated candidates' thinking and experiences. We observed online interaction in its unrefined form of a naturally occurring dialog (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where participants engaged in a shared online clinical experience. We sought to describe outcomes of shared online experiences from the perspective of participants. Additionally, we wanted to determine the feasibility of replicating online clinicals in distance education coursework and to identify attributes associated with these experiences. We examined candidate work to determine what, if any, evidence existed that might explain what participants transferred from clinical experiences to pedagogical applications and practice, among the concepts they had learned within the social studies methods course.

Program Context

The content methods course was offered over the summer to accommodate working professionals and lateral entry teachers enrolled in the graduate certificate in teaching (GCT) program. The methods course falls in the program sequence as the next to last semester. This certificate program allows second career professionals with undergraduate degrees in related content area fields (e.g., history, geography, and political science) to become licensed middle grades and secondary teachers.

The GCT program is designed to attract experienced professionals with a bachelor's degree in fields other than education. It is offered as a 100% online distance education program. It requires the successful completion of 18 hours of pedagogical coursework, including a semester-long graduate teaching internship. The GCT also counts toward the master of arts in teaching (MAT), a 39-hour graduate degree. The GCT was moved from a face-to-face licensure-only program to an online graduate certificate program in 2008 to address statewide teacher shortages. It was also expanded to include a graduate degree (i.e., MAT) to broaden program outreach and to serve more remote locations across the state.

Despite economic cutbacks across the state, the university has continued to offer the distance education program as a cost-cutting measure. Online courses offered during the summer significantly reduce (by over half) the overhead expenses incurred by the university. Trends at this institution demonstrated increased online course offerings and led to the elimination of all face-to-face summer classes within this college in the year of this study.

Participants

The participants in this study included six purposefully selected social studies mentor teachers, three who taught in a middle school and three who were employed in a high school. The selection of the two schools was based on university faculty connections to community partnerships and work in these schools. These schools represented two distinctive and remote geographic regions representing suburban and rural settings. Mentor teachers were chosen for inclusion in the study based on identification as teacher leaders by their principal, their experience and content expertise, and their recognized success in supporting economically and culturally diverse adolescent learners.

University faculty members were familiar with the selected teachers' qualifications due to 8 years of professional development work in the selected schools. The range of teaching experience was 6 to 24 years. Mentor teachers held a masters degree in social studies or were Nationally Board Certified or both.

Preservice teacher candidates were selected due to their enrollment in the distance education summer social studies methods course ($n = 6$). The participating six candidates were graduate students seeking initial licensure in Grades 6-12 social studies. These candidates ranged in age from 24 to 38. Two of the candidates were male and four were female. All had received their undergraduate degrees in history.

Additional project participants included members of the research team, including the methods course instructor (first author Tina Heafner), an international

teaching assistant, and a graduate assistant (second author Michelle Plaisance). The instructor is the lead social studies methodologist with 21 years of social studies teaching experience, and has taught at this institution for 10 years. The methods instructor has been teaching online courses, including social studies methods, for over eight years. The international teaching assistant is a doctoral candidate at a northeastern US university, has completed two semesters of co-teaching with the course instructor, and is a social studies methodologist with expertise in culturally responsive curriculum and global education. The graduate assistant is an urban education doctoral student. The graduate assistant is an experienced K–12 teacher in the largest urban district in the state and specializes in differentiating instruction for English language learners (ELLs).

Procedure

To triangulate data, we examined multiple sources using content analysis methods. For this study we attempted to understand the perceptions of all participants who engaged in online clinical observation experiences. We collected data from the following sources: candidates' summative written course clinical reflections, candidates' work samples (including content module tasks), the culminating instructional unit plan assignment ([Appendix C](#)), researchers' observation notes (see [Appendix E](#)), and researchers' journals.

Archives of synchronous and asynchronous observations, mentor teacher lesson debriefings, and text-chat transcripts constituted additional data sources. Transcripts of asynchronous threaded discussions in NiceNet, a free web-based resource available to mentor teachers and candidates, provided yet another stratum of information (see [Appendix D](#)). Furthermore, in-depth recorded and transcribed interviews with mentor teachers ([Appendix B](#)) and postproject focus groups with candidates ([Appendix A](#)) added descriptive layers to participants' perceptions of their experiences (as recommended in Glesne, 2006). Two focus groups were conducted for 1 hour each and occurred at the end of the course. Interviews with individual candidates occurred at the midpoint and end of the course. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Analysis occurred in four phases. In Phase I, informal analysis, the research team analyzed the data sources informally through writing methodological and analytic memos based on our field notes, archived teaching observations, and interview and focus group transcriptions. Within this phase, we used content analysis (Silverman, 1999), in which inductive coding and sorting allowed themes to emerge. We read and listened to data sources individually three times to identify data patterns.

In Phase II, initial category creation, we determined the emergent themes that aligned with the guiding research questions. In weekly meetings occurring over the course of 4 months, we discussed data patterns and agreed to overarching themes. Themes were compared across data sources to determine if differences in experiences emerged based on the data source.

In Phase III, qualitative content analysis (Patton, 2002), we confirmed the categories that emerged from the data by triangulating the data, searching for negative and positive cases, and revising and discarding categories that were not present in the majority of data sources. Evidence from multiple data sources confirmed thematic categorization and alignment with the guiding research questions. Subsequent review of data was conducted both individually and

collectively to further define and describe these emergent themes using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis.

In Phase IV, thematic mapping, we compared the three categories that emerged from our analysis with the principles gleaned from the literature. We sought to determine how categories aligned with literature and how data results extended current research. The final stage of analysis included weekly meetings for 2 months to compare and cross-validate findings with literature.

The WiTL Project

During the spring semester prior to the delivery of the summer social studies methods course, three or four lessons were taped for each of the mentor teachers using a laptop, webcam, and wireless headset. The lessons were mutually agreed upon by the university instructor and the mentor teachers. Pedagogical content knowledge within lessons purposefully included examples of applications of pedagogy that would be taught within the methods course. For example, social studies content lessons included a Socratic seminar, discussion of controversial issues, modeling of technologies, mnemonic devices, and vocabulary and reading strategies.

The methods instructor or graduate assistant observed each lesson in person for the purpose of serving as the camera operator. Guided observation notes were created to describe what was observed and to help candidates identify and understand important content pedagogical connections relevant to the methods course. The objective was for candidates to recognize the intuitive steps in implementing instructional methods, such as how and why a teacher would group students by gender to conduct a jigsaw reading or how and why a teacher used a deliberative discussion format instead of a fishbowl or Socratic seminar.

For asynchronous lessons, the university instructor developed voice overlays and integrated text observation notes using Camtasia (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia>). Videos were uploaded to Moodle, the online course delivery platform, for candidate-required viewing during the summer methods course. Capitalizing on the flexibility afforded with the use of technology, candidates then watched observations at their convenience during the second and third weeks of the course.

After completing all asynchronous observations, candidates engaged in a threaded discussion with all middle and secondary social studies teachers using NiceNet (<http://www.nicenet.org/>). Participants discussed content methods, resources, classroom and behavioral management, assessment practices, and student learning. They explored teaching philosophies as they collectively unpacked the purposeful decision-making employed by veteran teachers.

In the first week of the social studies methods course, synchronous observations were held with each of the six middle and secondary teacher mentors using Wimba, a web-conferencing tool compatible with Moodle, a webcam, and wireless headset with microphone. Tools within Wimba simultaneously offered participants an adjustable video window for classroom observations, PowerPoint capabilities for instructional resource sharing, whiteboard and text chat features, and video/audio exchanges among participants.

For university students to engage in the Wimba synchronous observations, they each had Internet access as well as a computer, webcam, and headset. During the synchronous observations, the university instructor, international teaching assistant, and graduate assistant engaged in dialog with the candidates through the chat feature. Again, their purpose was to help make explicit connections to course content and to help candidates notice important attributes of good social studies teaching and learning.

The ways WiTL impacted participants is presented through the experiences, perceptions, and learning outcomes of those who engaged in this summer online clinically based methods course. The next section describes the extent to which, if any, online clinicals facilitated learning, professional growth, and interactive and critical discourse.

Results

The data-based themes that emerged align with the categories described in the literature review. The goals of facilitating learning, professional growth, and interactive and critical discourse for bridging theory to practice in clinically based experiences are documented as positive outcomes of WiTL. The emergent themes opened windows, an analogy we used to describe the manner in which technology created new spaces for learning in ways that address gaps found in traditional field experiences. These themes are representative of both the expectations for clinical experiences and the potential of technology-mediated learning to enhance pedagogical understanding.

Facilitating Learning

The first part of the research question explored to what extent, if any, our online clinical facilitated learning. A theme that emerged from the data was that WiTL provided practical and authentic field experiences. We describe this theme as A Window of Opportunity. We define A Window of Opportunity based on subcategories derived from patterns in the data. Participants described WiTL and online clinicals as “a logical blessing.” They noted the unique chance to observe “a variety of teaching contexts.” Participants highlighted “access to work with skilled professionals and mentors” as an important attribute of WiTL. These subthemes emerged from participant descriptions of experiences when comparing prior experiences to that of WiTL, as well as their observations about the clinical settings and mentor teachers.

A Logistical Blessing. During the final focus group, participants reflected on prior experiences where they conducted observations of day camps or irrelevant summer school programs simply because they were compelled to meet the course clinical licensure requirements. Many were thankful not to be required to take time off of work or neglect the demands of family life, with one candidate calling the WiTL clinical experiences a “logistical blessing” (Focus Group 1: Candidate 1). When asked how online clinicals compared to the face-to-face experiences, one participant responded that she was, “appreciative of the fact that all of the lessons observed during the methods course were, indeed, some form of social studies.” She reported, “In prior field experiences, I had been forced to compromise by attending observations in other content areas [e.g., mathematics or (English language arts) ELA] because middle school social studies classes were simply not available.”

All of the candidates in the focus groups referenced convenience, flexibility, and time saved as explanations for believing the online clinicals benefited their learning. Candidate 2 commented, "It's easier to view the classroom than us having to set up an observation and go into the classroom." Candidate 4 explained that "the flexibility of these clinicals was key" and represented "telecommuting at its best."

Candidates 3 and 5 noted a strong preference for face-to-face clinicals, but they both added that the scheduling flexibility enabled them to balance the pace of a summer graduate course, a full time job, and their family lives. These two candidates acknowledged the time saved as an acceptable tradeoff to being in the classroom.

Convenience was also described as a benefit to observing without interruption, to "really be there and to see teaching" (Candidate 5). Candidate 1 explained synchronous observations as like being a "fly on the wall in the online setting." This candidate credited the value of distance as a way "to experience in real-time the classroom and the mindset of a teacher." She expressed, along with classmates, the benefit of "seeing without being seen."

Many candidates felt that the "fly on the wall" approach to classroom observations allowed them to observe students and teachers without interrupting the natural flow of classroom instruction and learning. They noted that this experience was distinctly different from their prior experiences and an attribute of virtual convenience.

A Variety of Teaching Contexts. In addition to the opportunity to see relevant teaching, respondents felt that WiTL afforded candidates the chance to view a wide variety of teaching styles and strategies. Evidence from synchronous text chat documents how differences translated into meaningful learning experiences. For example, while observing Mentor Teacher 1 leading a Readers Theater application, the instructor brought to the attention of the class a comparison of how Mentor Teacher 6 had approached in-class text analysis using Important Questions (as described in Heafner & Plaisance, 2014). The discourse that followed helped candidates unravel why these teachers chose to use specific methods and how instructional choices support student learning.

Candidate 2 began with a general observation: "There is a great difference in the levels of classrooms we have seen today....I'm not sure that's a fair comparison." Another candidate continued, "We are comparing middle school versus high school seniors. There are significant cognitive differences in these age groups." The instructor then responded,

Yes, there are differences in ages but both methodological approaches to reading can be applied at each level. Each method is modified to be developmentally appropriate for the students. Middle school students can respond to a before reading, read in small groups, and then act out the meaning of the reading. Readers Theater is an effective method for teaching students the text's meaning and author's argument. Even in this reading strategy, students have to answer Important Questions to demonstrate understanding. The key to instruction is to know your students to recognize what methods align well with the content you are teaching. Think about the observation of [Mentor Teacher 4's] class yesterday, what differences do you remember from lessons today?

The graduate student added,

You can reenact the text to add more detail or use guided discussion as the teacher did to draw attention to the evidence in the text. You'll read journal articles in Module 7 that will describe how other middle and secondary teachers scaffold student reading.

The primary aim of the observation and the discourse among candidates and instructor was to help candidates recognize that, in the instructor's words, "instructional choices lead to differences in how students interact and engage with text."

Diversity of experiences also provided opportunities to examine grade level curriculum differences not traditionally observed. Typical observations that accompany a methods course assign candidates to a single teacher. Unless the teacher's assignment includes multiple grade levels, candidates are limited in their exposure to curricula.

Of greater importance, candidates are not exposed to observations across multiple licensure levels, for example, grade bands of 6–12. The WiTL clinical experience broadened candidates understanding beyond what is accessible with traditional observations. Examples from postproject focus groups, designed to assess participant satisfaction with the program, identified candidates' expressed appreciation for the ability to view both middle and high school social studies classes.

Most candidates (all but Candidate 5) had never seen a classroom outside of their licensure level. Providing a lateral perspective of social studies teaching allowed candidates to draw conclusions about developmental skills differences, such as historical thinking, among adolescent learners. Candidate 2 said, "I gained an understanding for the need to infuse more skill-based lessons in middle school, versus more concept-driven instruction in secondary classes" (Focus Group 1). Furthermore, candidates noted distinct content differences across grade levels that mirrored standards-based curriculum expectations. These cross-licensure-level observations increased candidate awareness of state and national curriculum. Evidence from synchronous observation text chats follows:

Instructor: How do these map-reading skills connect to geographic curriculum concepts? Make connections to NCSS [National Council for the Social Studies] C3 [College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies Standards] Dimension 2. Geography and NCSS Strand 3: People, Places and Environments? In Module 2 I asked you to read the state mandated standards for social studies and the C3 Framework as well as the NCSS 10 Thematic Strands. Make specific links from your observations of how [Mentor Teacher 5] is addressing these curricula.

Candidate 2: Is this not 8th grade??

Instructor: Beginning with prior knowledge of the concept of place (where students are positioned on the map) is a starting point for understanding how to read maps. Remember the unit of study is "Geography" which is an essential component of the middle school social studies curriculum. In general, each middle grade level of social studies

curriculum is informed by the National Geography Standards.
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/standards/matrix.html>

Graduate Assistant: Going back to [Instructor's] question, we can think about how the teacher is making connections among place, people, and environment (C3 Dimension 2 and NCSS Strand 3)?

Candidate 3: Students are able to place geographical areas in perspective

Instructor: What is the purpose of reading/studying map? To what extent is learning geography important? How is it related to our lives? How can teachers make strong connections among geography and our lives?

Candidate 4: as [state] residents, these students are obviously going to need familiarity with the main points in their state, and how to get to them. There's a real life application to be sure

Candidate 3: the students already have some familiarity with the roads and places; she is discussing connections from another history class. She is trying to help students make connections between world history (6th and 7th grade) to their state and local history in 8th grade. Isn't this the spiraling of curriculum that we read about in our module tasks?

Not only did candidates become more familiar with curriculum across grade bands, but they also began to develop a broader understanding of how curriculum is purposefully sequenced. Moreover, through diverse classroom observations, candidates were able to identify alignment between state and national standards. Rather than seeing standards as mandated content, candidates began to see standards as the articulation of shared expectations for foundational social studies knowledge.

Similarly, analyses of the text chat revealed that candidates took note of the diverse demographics that were present as a result of utilizing schools in distinctly different districts. In one secondary classroom, candidates watched ELLs in a world history course and were able to discuss specific strategies that might be helpful as they collectively viewed the teacher mentor meeting the needs of these students during a synchronous observation. The university instructor, present as the session facilitator in the classroom, was able to draw attention via typed communications-specific literature to be read in the course that would support the candidates' understanding of the unique needs of these students (e.g., Cruz & Thornton, 2009). Candidate dialog recognized patterns in Grades 6–12 student demographics in the schools they observed, for example,

As preservice teachers, we need to get to know our students. For example, one of the high schools we observed had experienced a significant increase in immigrant students. As [Mentor Teacher 3] stated, we should explore and celebrate cultural dynamics of the surrounding Hispanic communities. (Candidate 4)

Candidate 1 continued with curricular ideas: "Our cultural identity project, My America, would be a great way to start a conversation in our class." Candidate 2 followed, "The history that a teacher may have taught a generation ago is now going

to be interpreted and perceived differently by the diverse ethnic population [in] each school.” The instructor directed candidates to course readings:

As Cruz and Thornton (2009, p. 3), suggest, “The number of ELL students continues to grow both in terms of numbers and the percentage of the total student population in the United States....Meeting the needs of such students can be particularly challenging for social studies teachers given the often text-dependent nature of the content.” That’s why is it so important that we include vocabulary instruction and language skills development (e.g., oratory skills as well as writing) in social studies.

The conversation that ensued identified specific strategies for ELLs and brought to light the cultural sharing opportunities to be gained in world history curriculum. Additional references to course readings were made by candidates. As Candidate 3 commented, “Stearns suggests in *World History: The Basics*, connecting time periods and advancements in human achievement to the students’ lives as an effective approach to teach world history.” The explicit links between observations and readings revealed in the text chat suggest the value in real-time discussions of clinical experiences. Focus group interviews revealed that these experiences created “greater relevance of course content” and offered credence to the theory (Focus Group 2).

Later in that same week, these candidates observed classrooms in a completely different district under the same circumstances, and the transcriptions of dialog between the candidates revealed that they capitalized on this opportunity by making comparisons and inferences about the ways a school’s setting might impact the student demographics and subsequent teaching styles being observed and linking learning to course readings (e.g., Epstein, 2009; Parker, 2010).

Candidates noted in the text chat that the middle school had and continued to experience an increasing Hispanic student population. Discussion of where the school was located ensued. Candidate 2 observed that the middle school was “in the middle of nowhere.” The candidate then used this point as a contextual remark to articulate the importance of a map reading lesson being observed. She explained that the purpose of the lesson is to provide rural students an opportunity to learn about places beyond those familiar.

Furthermore, on the following day, Candidate 4 commented in the synchronous text chat that the seventh-grade class in the same school was “a culturally inclusive unit/class where students can safely discuss the differences in their respective cultures of study.”

As a follow-up to the synchronous observations, candidates and mentor teachers engaged in an asynchronous text chat. The topic of teaching diverse students again surfaced as candidates asked for guidance and practical applications for how to address specific needs. Candidates were able to explore their questions, such as, “When working with ELLs, how do you make sure they acquire the English skills they need and help them they understand the course material?” and “What about tests? How do you accommodate their needs fairly and equitably?”

Mentor teachers responded with specific strategies, such as, “One of the biggest challenges is vocabulary in our course content. I give my students a vocabulary list for each unit and teach ELLs how to use visual and dual-language vocabulary

journals.” Moreover, mentor teachers offered realistic perspectives revealing issues they encountered when differentiating instruction:

- “The hardest part of teaching ELLs is helping them to make the connections with the content, how to understand the cause/effect, or significance of the events” (Mentor Teacher 5)
- “Unless they have a specific modifications [sic] where the test is given in another language, our students all have to take the same standardized common exam. This doesn’t seem fair but it is a state requirement” (Mentor Teacher 3).

Access to Skilled Professionals and Mentors. Beyond making diverse classrooms accessible to candidates, the window of opportunity created by WiTL afforded an opportunity to hand-select teacher mentors and classes that modeled the type of teaching appropriate and beneficial for novice observers. Candidates overwhelmingly noted a higher quality of teaching than had been observed in prior early field experiences. Many referred to the excellent level of student engagement in the classes they watched, as well as social studies teacher mentors who possessed obvious enthusiasm and adept skill for working with adolescent learners. For example,

Not once throughout our observations did the teachers ever hand out worksheets for their students to do and go sit down at their desks and wait for the bell to ring. Unfortunately, in my previous observations, I have seen a 30+ year veteran teacher who did nothing but lecture and give out worksheets. There was no differentiation of instruction anywhere in his classroom and when I asked him why this was he said something to the effect of “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Well, obviously this isn’t true because each of our mentor teachers has been teaching for many years, [Mentor Teachers 1 and 5] said for 25 years, and their instruction methods were extremely differentiated. (Summative Clinical Reflection: Candidate 4)

Several other candidates made reference during the focus groups to cooperating teachers who were either not aware of their scheduled observations or seemed to resent the intrusion into their classrooms. Additional evidence supports the infrequent exposure to effective instructional practice in prior clinical experiences was present in candidate reflective writing tasks for asynchronous observations. For example,

The greatest strength of [Mentor Teacher 1’s] classroom is the constant variance of methods that she employs....This fast paced methodology with constant preparation for any given moment in the classroom engages students, employs multiple intelligences, and creates an atmosphere the likes of I not seen previously. (Candidate 1)

Without exception, candidates capitalized on the high level of expertise and knowledge possessed by the teacher mentors, as well as the dedicated and structured opportunities to interact, evidenced by the thoughtful and constructive questions found throughout the transcriptions of the postobservation debriefing sessions and threaded discussions. The sentiments of candidates are embodied in the following journal post:

Of all six teachers that we have observed, the one thing that I can say for all of them is that their body language is very welcoming to their students as are their tones of voice. If I had had teachers like this all throughout school, I would have gone into teaching at a much younger age. (Candidate 2)

For candidates, observing mentor teachers brought to life the methods they were learning from their course texts: “As we discussed yesterday, teachers are gatekeepers to curriculum (Thornton, 2005) and they purposefully make instructional strategy choices” (Candidate 4). Candidates were able to dissect why a teacher selected an individual map reading as compared to a collaborative activity:

- “[Mentor Teacher 3] wanted to informally assess students’ map geographic skills. If she had put students into groups she would not have been able to discern what students were learning” (Candidate 1)
- “If she was introducing map skills, she would have structured learning differently. For example, she could have used a think-pair-share or a collaborative scavenger hunt” (Candidate 6).

Additional evidence was present in candidate reflective writing analyses of asynchronous lessons. One such example follows:

[Mentor Teacher 3] introduced some vocabulary and reinforced key concepts through a very interesting use of words. He discussed justice, relationships, and work ethics in a relevant way for students. When discussing key issues that are broad social studies questions that reoccur, such as “What is justice?,” he used the first and second person voice. He made comments like “you are trying to decide what is right and what is wrong.” Comments like this helped students to begin to think about experiences of the past within its own time. He was trying to get his students to think outside of their own present-day perspectives—presentism. (Candidate 6)

Facilitating Professional Growth

In exploring the research question, to what extent, if any, does an online clinical facilitate professional growth, a common theme emerged: an active role in collective experiences. Evidence of professional growth seemed to be linked consistently with the unique and transformative role of active versus passive participation in clinical observations. As a community of observers, participants were able to subsume an active role in a collective learning community. Traditional, isolated field experiences were redefined by the creation of a collective viewing space for shared observations of social studies classrooms. This finding sets WiTL apart from other clinical experiences.

Furthermore, this notion of a shared learning experience emerged as an outcome of active engagement in a collective, synchronous discourse during online observations. As a community of observers, participants were able to see beyond the scope of their knowledge and experiences by drawing upon the collective voice and the expertise of mentor teachers and course facilitators, resulting in a collective interpretation of classroom experiences.

We describe these subthemes as Widening the Aperture. By aperture, we infer from the data that WiTL opened the scope of what was seen within the classroom and participant understanding of content-specific methodology through a collective process of interpreting social studies teaching and learning in action. To explain our interpretations, we present descriptions and examples of the two subthemes that define how WiTL broadened clinically based learning experiences.

A Community of Observers. Responses from participants in the WiTL study indicated that a multitiered and interwoven theme of collectiveness existed on the part of all participants that resided within the opening that the project created between the observer and the observed. This sense of collaboration and sodality was expressed among participants of all levels, teacher mentors and candidates alike, permeating the mullioned roles that are assumed in traditional clinical experiences.

Analysis of the synchronous and asynchronous debriefings showed that in many instances, the university supervisor was able to contextualize the observations within the course discussions and readings. The instructor frequently directed candidate attention during text chats to examples of “student focused, constructivist learning,” “teacher as facilitator of learning,” and “culturally relevant pedagogy.” Examples of specific reference to pedagogy, such as “how the teacher guided students in annotated text to gather evidence and formulate interpretations,” were also noted to prompt collaborative connections. The collective dialog and shared observations created a unique community of learners not present in typical methods clinical experiences.

An onsite methods instructor or graduate assistant was able to guide conversation in the debriefings to ensure its relevancy to the university coursework. For example, during one observation of a high school history teacher, the university instructor requested that the teacher mentor discuss interactive notebooks he used in his class as a means of supporting students in organizing class materials, notes, and assignments and as a model for methods text readings. In addition, instructors were able to direct candidates to the types of instructional approaches they were observing. For example,

Hilda Taba, a leading researcher in the social studies, concluded that students learn social studies in a categorical or organizational manner. The Taba Method is referred to as List, Group, Label. [Mentor Teacher 1] is using a variation of this strategy to help students learn concepts and theories in a strategic manner.

In a subsequent observation of a geography teacher in an entirely different school, the methods instructor was able to identify a specific inquiry writing method used for assessing student understanding and focusing student thinking. She made the suggestion that these exercises could be completed within the interactive notebooks they had previously observed, thus connecting the two observations and creating a more complete understanding of how to enact the method for the candidates.

Furthermore, connections to relevant content such as geographic thinking (“a map can reveal what no amount of description can”; de Blij, 2005, p. 23) and spatial learning (“Why did this event happen here and not elsewhere?”; Alibrandi & Sarnoff, 2006, p. 138) linked clinical observations of practice to course theory in an immediate and transparent manner. This type of overarching understanding of what is observed during early field experiences is simply not possible in

traditional settings. Furthermore, the collective experience ensured that all candidates had a common observational and methodological understanding.

Collective Interpretation. Candidates were given clear guidance in what to look for and asked to draw conclusions and make inferences about what they were seeing. On several occasions, the university instructor used the text chat feature in Wimba to draw attention to and elaborate upon various elements of classroom instruction. For example, in a social studies elective class focused on a historical study of the Bible, and candidates questioned the controversial nature of the curriculum. The methods instructor explained the political forces behind the locally funded curriculum available to all high school students in the county. University students examined differences in local and state curriculum as well as variations in surrounding counties. Additionally, candidates were able to discuss curricular concerns about "teaching the Bible" with the mentor teacher in both the debriefing synchronous session and the asynchronous text chat.

The conversation was extended by the mentor teacher, who articulated the value of a locally funded curriculum as the impetus for a student-led service learning project to offer,

students' opportunity to give back to their class and give back to the community that supports themThe benefits of doing this are numerous and well worth the time and effort: ...It gives them ownership of their class...students become quite close and develop the relationships with other students that greatly improve the overall dynamics of class...and they become skilled at being in front of people, performing, and speaking.

The candidates also recognized the relational attributes of the mentor teacher: "I really loved how you build upon the idea of rapport with your students. It is nice to hear from a voice of experience that even with the most hardened of students, consistent kindness and respect often pays off" (Candidate 1). The mentor teacher responded, "Kids are just more motivated when they have a connection with you and the other students and the class. And as a side benefit of well-established learning partnerships, they develop confidence in themselves and each other." The strong relationships established in meaningful instructional activities, such as the service learning experience, according to the candidate interpretations, "makes working together with people you did not know before or had no contact with before so much easier and better." The mentor teacher then offered this advice:

One more thought about this, sometimes the time you spend doing something fun that the kids enjoy makes the time you spend on the academic part more effective and you can accomplish more with less time because of their motivation level.

This dialog in the threaded discussion led to a broader collective discourse of *why* controversial issues need to be included in the social studies curriculum and *how* this inclusion might be achieved. In the formation of written assignments, candidates made explicit references to both research-based theory (Hess, 2009) and to a U.S. history lesson they had synchronously observed that modeled an effective class discussion of several controversial topics. Evidence from an asynchronous response to another lesson taught by this mentor teacher also noted connections in student learning:

The use of the newspaper articles appeared to be a great way to make the content and lesson relevant to the student's [sic] and to their daily lives. [Mentor Teacher 2] placed her students in groups of her choosing, perhaps in order to facilitate discussions amongst students who would otherwise not socialize with one another or perhaps because she simply knows which one's [sic] will work best together. This appeared to be a very successful activity for addressing controversial topics. (Asynchronous Written Reflection: Candidate 3)

Facilitating Critical Discourse

In examining the third part of our research question, we found that interactive, critical discourse was associated closely with the thinking process of connecting theory to practice. Connecting theory to practice, a consistent goal of content methods courses, emerged in the analyses of the data gathered during the postproject candidate focus group. We describe this theme within the context of WiTL as learning to notice effective clinical practice as a bridge to theory. We use the analogy of *From Mirrors to Windows Into the World of Teaching* to describe these results. The term *mirror* refers to a reflection of oneself. When candidates observed classrooms, they saw what they wanted to see and they could not see what they did not know. Moreover, their reflections on learning were superficial observations of what can be seen through a novice's perspective. By guiding candidates to notice and linking what was observed to theory, candidates could begin to see into the complex world of teaching.

From the perspective of Candidate 3, the observations "laid the groundwork" for future course readings and helped her to "critically think about course topics" (Focus Group Interview). She attributed this phenomenon to the fact that the university instructor indicated specific pedagogical elements on which to focus. In this sense, the instructor scaffolded the process of learning to notice effective, content-specific practice in clinical observations. This subtheme was the first that emerged as we sought to understand participant perceptions of their experiences.

Others said that the dialog among the university instructors during the observations "foreshadowed" material that had yet to be introduced in the coursework. This foreshadowing of course content initiated thinking about pedagogy as observed in practice and served as a subsequent cue in referencing observed practice as an example when theory was explored more in-depth during course readings. Furthermore, a bridge between theory and practice integrated the clinical experience into course content. This subtheme illustrates the second emergent pattern that connected the outcomes of noticing to the products of student learning. Data from candidate work samples serve as examples.

Learning to Notice. In a civics and economics class, candidates observed a mentor teacher pass back scored benchmark assessments that were administered during a prior class. While the candidates watched, the instructor gave a detailed explanation of current testing practices and policies within the local district: "The General Assembly passed House Bill 48 (HB48 now GA48) which changed state-wide assessment policies. Civics and Economics (10th grade) and U.S. History (11th grade) testing have been eliminated beginning next year."

She engaged candidates in critically thinking about this topic by asking them to consider what ramifications there might be for recent policy and legislative changes: "How will this policy change affect the status of social studies in this

state? What might the outcomes be for student access to social studies in grades K–12?”

The conversation continued with other policy changes to curriculum: “The General Assembly passed legislation this year that increased graduation requirements for social studies from 3 high school units to 4 high school units (courses). These now include American History I and American History II, Civics and Economics, and World History (9th grade).” The candidates then wondered if curriculum alone, without accountability through testing, would be enough to ensure the importance of social studies among core content. They also noted the potential benefit in fewer mandated constraints on teaching.

As the participants offered their various conjectures and ideas, instruction within the classroom commenced. The university instructor quickly shifted focus to the differentiated reading strategies being employed in the class by the teacher mentor in order to make her lesson more comprehensible to all learners. She drew the attention to pedagogy: “Purpose for reading is being articulated...‘what I want you to do with the reading [article]’...listen closely to [Mentor Teacher 2’s] instructions.” The instructor made instruction more transparent and connected to course content:

[Mentor Teacher 2] is introducing a during-reading strategy to students so the purpose for reading will be clear. She also just stated, “When you are done, you are going to present these 3–4 points.” These latter instructions are [Mentor Teacher 2’s] introduction of the after-reading strategy that students will be using to articulate their interpretations. This models the B–D–A reading strategy.”

The transitions modeled by the mentor teacher and university instructor were also highlighted within the guided observations. Scaffolded viewing helped candidates notice pedagogical strategies and focus on relevant course content in addition to exploring contemporary social studies issues. One such example from the synchronous text chat follows:

Notice how the teacher uses hand signals. This method draws upon kinesthetic and auditory learning styles. These are also successful mnemonic devices. Readings from *Bringing Learning Alive!* will help explain these learning styles and the readings on Mnemonics will explain memory strategies. I also have created resources in Module 9 that describe the research behind various mnemonic devices that you will find helpful when teaching social studies vocabulary.

Yet another example from a narrated asynchronous lesson that was recorded in April included this comment: “Notice how [Mentor Teacher 4] asks students to create a visual image of this word. She then asks students to sketch their image as a way to help students make personal connections and analogies.” The instructor consistently used the language of “notice” to draw candidates’ attention to important aspects of the lessons to observe. Noticing became an important attribute of the shared observation experience and also led to connections between observations and methods course content.

A Bridge Between Theory and Practice. In reviewing the transcripts of text chats that occurred throughout various observations, we discovered several

instances where direct connections between theory and practice were supported by the observation facilitator's similar interaction with candidates. For example, in the observation of one middle school world history class, candidates were asked by the observation facilitator to identify other supports for student comprehension of expository text about which they had recently finished reading in their course textbook. In a subsequent observation, candidates viewed a lesson on the Middle Ages, where students in the classroom were assigned various roles and asked to think historically.

Direct connections were made between this activity and a discussion that had transpired in the social studies methods course the prior evening, where candidates were encouraged to do history in order to connect social studies to the lives of young students. The methods instructor subsequently made links to additional course readings (Parker, 2010; VanSledright, 2010; Wineburg, 2001). Perhaps the most powerful testimony to the bridge created by WiTL was the complete absence of reference, in any of the hundreds of pages of data gathered, to incongruence of any kind between what was observed in the classroom and what was read about and discussed in the methods coursework.

Evidence of this bridge created by WiTL could be clearly seen in the candidates' evolving understandings of course concepts, as demonstrated through their responses to assigned readings and their comments pertaining to the classroom observations. For example, one of the course texts, *Bringing Learning Alive!: Methods to Transform Middle and High School* (Teachers' Curriculum Institute, 2010) details specific strategies for enhancing students' comprehension of social studies concepts. Transcriptions of the text chat show that candidates used the observations as a chance to identify these methods, such as preview assignments and focused writing tasks, as they occurred in an authentic classroom setting. They further explored these methods by asking questions regarding their development and implementation.

One such example follows from a synchronous observation of Mentor Teacher 6: "Think about B–D–A [before-during-after] reading strategies, specifically the *Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy* article, which provides three points of intervention in content area reading. The authors use a scaffold approach [to] reading comprehension in social studies." The course instructor continued with a specific explanation of each intervention step and asked candidates to recall instructional examples. Responses of candidates included the following:

- "ERT: Everybody Reads To (a) find out (facts) and (b) to figure out (inferences)."
- "5 Post-It Notes, 5 W's & H, and I-Charts."
- "Reciprocal Questioning, discussion of ERTs, Socratic Seminar, and ABC Graffiti."

Evidence of candidates' increased understanding of these methods was seen in the accurate and appropriate application of these concepts in the capstone project for the course: the Instructional Unit Plan (IUP). One specific application of a B–D–A reading strategy is provided in [Appendix C](#) as an example of documented alignment of candidate learning with observed clinical practice and course content. What was unique for candidates is that the connections were made in real time—they emerged in a shared observation experience.

In sum, all of the candidates made some reference to the positive impact of the observations on their thinking about teaching social studies in both the focus group interview and summative course reflections. Several candidates identified specific methods they would borrow or significant statements they would remember within their IUP reflection. Although learning such as this is present in any methods course, the distinct attributes of WiTL helped candidates move from applications of pedagogy to confidence in applied practice.

Furthermore, from a deeper understanding of teacher decision-making they were more able to select methods that aligned effectively with the content they planned to teach. For a summer methods course in which clinical experiences typically lack relevance, WiTL served to bridge theory to practice in meaningful and practical ways. Candidate 6 reported in his summative reflection,

If I had made my IUP without watching the synchronous observations, I would be very hesitant as to whether or not the methods I was putting forward would actually work in a real life classroom. Yet after seeing these teachers use the TCI approach, discussion methods, and reading strategies we explored so effectively, I now have no doubt. (IUP Reflection)

Candidate 2 reflected,

To see teaching, then to talk to teachers, and to explore together with my peers how and why pedagogical decisions are made really helped me understand curriculum and instructional methods. Teaching social studies is much more complicated than what can be read or observed alone. (IUP Reflection)

Candidate 5 reported that these purposeful, direct, and overt “theory to practice connections” between what was being read about and discussed in class and what they were actually witnessing through the virtual window really “married the two” for the observation participants.

Discussion

In the words of Dewey (1938), “It ought not be necessary to state that experience does not occur in a vacuum” (p. 40). He argued that every genuine experience has an active side and a person’s dynamic reaction to the experience further shapes subsequent experiences for this individual and for others. Educators, according to Dewey, are entrusted with the responsibility of sculpting formative experiences, as well as recognizing the settings in which they are most likely to occur and spark growth. The intrinsic capacity to influence these experiences, “places upon him [or her] the duty of determining that environment which will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those being taught to create a worth-while experience” (p. 43).

The design and implementation of the WiTL project takes a significant step in meeting the challenge expressed through Dewey’s comments. From our data analyses three themes describe the extent to which online clinicals facilitated learning, professional growth, and interactive and critical discourse: A Window of Opportunity, Widening the Aperture, and From Mirrors to Windows Into the World of Teaching.

A Window of Opportunity

WiTL as a window of opportunity provided practical and authentic field experiences as a means for facilitating participant learning. Data analyses reveal that the field experiences facilitated through the WiTL study directly addressed many of the shortcomings described by Applegate (1985). Candidates responded overwhelmingly that they were grateful for the relevance of the field experiences provided through WiTL to their specific course of study. For the study participants, WiTL was perceived as a "logistical blessing" and served to address "institutional dilemmas" (p. 61) in creating practical, meaningful, and unique clinical experiences.

In addition, the opportunity to see relevant teaching in a variety of contexts enabled participants to engage in atypical clinical observations. By atypical, we refer not only to the quality of teaching, but also the unique opportunity to see six teachers with various pedagogical practices in two different school settings spanning seven grade levels. Across all data sources, candidates demonstrated evidence of learning related to diverse student populations, differentiated methods, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The quality of the structured clinical experiences enhanced the overall experience for participants.

Although, researchers (e.g., Dumas, Weible, & Evans, 1990) and guiding national organizations (CAEP, 2013; NCSS, 2002) have touted the importance of time in schools, our experiences with WiTL and the types of clinicals that candidates engage in may be a better indicator of success as a teacher. A large quantity of time in unrelated clinical experiences, like previous online summer methods courses, does not serve the instructional purpose of field-based learning. The quality of time spent in mentored and scaffold observations such as WiTL can translate into a meaningful learning experience that supports the goals of teacher preparation (as delineated in CAEP, 2013).

Similarly, candidates noted the benefit of diverse expert perspectives when they received multiple answers to the questions they posed. In addition, in the postproject debriefing each candidate was able easily to define a method or strategy they had observed with a specific mentor teacher that they hoped to incorporate into their own classrooms in the future.

Beyond making diverse classrooms accessible to candidates, WiTL opened access to skilled professionals and teacher mentors. The purposeful selection of lessons that showcased these teachers' expertise as they modeled integrative teaching approaches was beneficial for novice observers. Furthermore, the curricular alignment of observations was strategically woven within the methods course, which resulted in distinctly different clinical experiences. Teacher candidates were able to translate learning into practice, as evidenced in their collective discourse and course assignments. The role of the course instructor in the interactive dialog is to connect and support student learning. Our results affirm the importance of the course instructor in early field experiences (as also found in Pryor & Kuhn, 2004).

Widening the Aperture

WiTL opened the scope of what was viewed in clinical experiences through the creation of an active and collective learning experience. WiTL widened the

aperture of what was observed and learned in this online methods course. Participants took an active role in shared clinical experiences. Becoming an active participant in a collective learning community is a unique attribute of the online methods course. Affirming earlier research, peer interaction within collaborative learning communities supported teachers' professional growth (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Putnam & Borko, 1997, 2000).

Participants noted professional growth through a collective interpretation of social studies teaching and student learning. As a community of observers, participants were able to see beyond the scope of their knowledge and experiences by drawing upon the collective voice and the expertise of mentor teachers and course facilitators. Peer interaction is a central aspect in online learning and works to avoid isolation that can occur in asynchronous-only learning platforms (Shea, 2006). Likewise, WiTL's synchronous learning environment overcame isolation, albeit one type that occurs in face-to-face clinicals. Traditional isolated field experiences were redefined by the creation of a collective viewing space for shared observations of social studies classrooms. Overall, all candidates expressed a heightened sense of community as a result of both the structured and unstructured opportunities to interact with one another.

Additionally, the transformation from passive to active observer was viewed as both a unique and an important attribute of the WiTL project. A significant byproduct of the collective nature of the field experiences facilitated throughout the study was what one participant called "active observations." In a postproject focus group, she asserted that the WiTL field experience, when juxtaposed with other school-based experiences attended in prior coursework, which she described as "passive," required her to become more engaged and assume a role of active participant.

Other candidates echoed her sentiments by expressing appreciation for the ongoing text dialog between their peers. Similarly, candidates reported that reading the comments and questions of their peers caused them to feel more engaged and to think more deeply about what was being asked.

While technology-supported collaboration has been employed in other studies (e.g., Garrison & Anderson, 2003), appropriate interventions by instructors and interactions with teaching assistants and graduate assistants may be necessary for active engagement of all participants (e.g., Palloff & Pratt, 2003). Candidates in this study were given clear guidance in what to look for and asked to draw conclusions and make inferences about what they were seeing. This collective process sets WiTL apart for traditional clinical experiences. A shared community of inquiry is essential in online learning environments (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Shea, 2006).

Furthermore, the collective interpretation led candidates to see beyond the typically observed behavioral and classroom management skills to a richer understanding of content-specific pedagogy. These findings support prior research that advocates the utility of online clinicals (Freese, 2006; Frey, 2008; Heafner, Petty, & Hartshorne, 2011).

From Mirrors to Windows Into the World of Teaching

Learning to notice effective clinical practice served as a bridge to understanding research-based methodology. In order to be effective and beneficial to participants, the observations of early field experiences must align with the theory candidates are reading and discussing in their university coursework (Myers, 1996). Connecting theory to practice, a consistent goal of content methods courses, emerged as a recurring theme in the data analyses. The learning bridge created was an outcome of the instructors' guided direction in helping candidates notice pedagogical practices and unravel in meaningful increments how these methods facilitated student learning of social studies. Being able to notice the intricate layers of the craft of teaching is not a skill possessed by novice observers (Passe, 1994; Sherin & van Es, 2005) and one that must be directed by university personnel (Palloff & Pratt, 2003).

If early field experiences are to be productive and meaningful learning experiences, teacher education programs must take steps to ensure the quality and relevance of the teaching being observed by candidates (Zeichner, 2010). Guiding candidates in the process of learning to notice effective pedagogical practices allowed teacher candidates to see beyond what they were looking for (e.g., a reflection in the mirror) to theoretical and research-based pedagogy unknown to the novice observer.

Initial observations made by candidates focused on familiar attributes of teaching, such as classroom management, that could easily be identified. Moreover, when candidates encounter theory they process it through a personal lens. They either relate to prior observations of teaching or to personal educational experiences. Creating a bridge between theory and practice requires learners to broaden their perspectives. The active observations, shared viewing, and interactive discourse of WiTL opened opportunities to explore social studies teaching that enabled participants to look beyond themselves (e.g., what they see in a mirror) and to develop a collective understanding based on diverse curricular and classroom contexts.

By this analogy, we infer that this online format for clinical experiences, as presented in the WiTL project, made theory understandable as tangible ideas that could be directly observed in authentic classrooms. As further evidence, in the summative interview several candidates noted that they had gone back and watched archived synchronous clinical observations when they encountered pedagogical methods in module readings that they remembered as having been foreshadowed. The ability to notice had drawn their attention to instructional approaches beneficial to successful social studies teaching.

From an analogous interpretation of results, we conclude that WiTL created windows for learning rather than mirrors, which are typically present in teacher preparation. Many claimed to notice specific pedagogical acts that they otherwise would have ignored or disregarded if other candidates in the class had not drawn attention to them. By providing the ability to ask and answer questions with immediate feedback, participants responded that they were able to explore points they would not have in traditional settings. As one candidate stated in the focus group interview, "We started very pedagogical and moved into the very functional with our IUP plan—the course and the online clinicals married the two for me. As far as instructional practice—you connected it."

Limitations

WiTL was a pilot study, and for that reason complications and limitations were anticipated and documented so as to improve on future replications and adaptations of the project. As with all things technological, there were unexpected complications in the implementation of WiTL, such as classrooms that had only one Internet portal, sessions recorded without audio, imperfect picture quality, and candidates who did not return an authorization to be videotaped. All of these obstacles are easily overcome with the foresight and advanced planning that comes with repetition. Selecting the most appropriate software was also a challenge, as issues of file size and privacy were constant concerns throughout the study.

One limitation that cannot be addressed through adjustments to project procedures is the lack of interaction between candidates and students. While this distance of online learning afforded the candidates the opportunity to strongly focus on the content pedagogy being observed, candidates inarguably need the opportunity to work with young learners directly at some point in their licensure program (Young, 2012). Additionally, the timing of synchronous sessions for summer school classes presents formidable conflicts with assessments and end-of-year preparation in the PK–12 setting.

Suggestions that will be taken into consideration in future expansions of the project include the distribution of lessons plans and hardcopies of class handouts to candidates, as well as the exploration of software that will enable observers to view what is occurring on classroom SMART® Boards during videotaped sessions. In addition, through analyzing results, a preconference debriefing between teacher mentors and candidates, facilitated by the university instructor, provides enhanced overall observation and was added to synchronous sessions. Finally, accountability measures, such as observation guides or response assignments, must be put in place to ensure that candidates take the time to view and review each asynchronous session in its entirety.

Last, the project was limited by course enrollments. While only six candidates enrolled in this methods course, enrollment for this summer course usually ranges from 15 to 30 candidates. The ability to replicate this project on a larger scale is a future goal that is being explored. The teachers who participated in the pilot project have agreed to continue with the second year's implementation. They are motivated by their interest in supporting teacher education, pleasure gained by becoming a mentor, and passion for teaching social studies. Additionally, the new statewide teacher evaluation tool includes the expectation of contributions to the profession beyond the scope of school-based teaching assignments. Combined, these are viable incentives to continue project participation.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, WiTL created an innovative, interactive platform for examining social studies teaching and learning. By creating new learning spaces, WiTL enabled participants to make critical connections between what candidates have learned or come to believe and what actually occurs in the classroom. While we cannot address whether or not this online experience is more effective than traditional methods, we can infer that when posed with the ever-increasing demands of online learning and associated limitations, WiTL offers a viable option for building upon what we know to be high quality, clinically based learning experiences.

Although we acknowledge benefits of online clinicals, we do not advocate for the elimination of face-to-face engagement in schools. The lack of direct interaction with candidates poses a new gap in learning as a byproduct of distance education. As a result, we recommend that in designing teacher preparation coursework, especially social studies methods courses, teacher educators seek ways to enhance current practice. The ways the forms of technology (such as synchronous text chat) used within this course could be used to rethink clinical experiences and improve teacher education practices are worth considering. Future research is recommended to evaluate new communicative forms (e.g., educationally based texting), digitally based learning, and shared viewing of clinical experiences. These technology tools could be useful in training teachers in 21st-century skills through experiential models and may open new spaces for learning.

Looking ahead, much is yet to be explored within the framework of WiTL, both as it was originally conceived (a tool for transforming summer clinical observations) as well as what it became (a powerful instrument that holds the constructive potential to cultivate extended, mutually beneficially relationships between those who aspire to teach and those who already do). These professional learning communities would present flexible, dynamic, and viable solutions to bridging the distance between university coursework and classroom teaching and might stand to promote active and continuous reflection.

Work must be done to create partnerships between universities and the community that will foster this type of collaboration. Additionally, research will be needed to examine the effectiveness of broader uses of technology-mediated shared learning experiences. Finally, as technology advances, so do educational opportunities for rethinking how social studies teachers are engaged and prepared.

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Author Notes

Tina Heafner
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Email: Tina.Heafner@uncc.edu

Michelle Plaisance
Greensboro College
Email: michelle.plaisance@greensboro.edu

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Appendix A

Protocol for University Student Focus Groups

Focus Group Questions

Building from your frame of reference experiences with face to face clinicals:

1. What do you consider the advantages and limitations of face to face clinicals?
2. How did the online clinical experience compare?
3. What similarities and differences did you note?

This semester you experienced synchronous and asynchronous clinical experiences. Can you describe your experiences? Do you feel there were notable differences in these processes? Please explain your impressions of these differences?

Transferability

- Think back to your face to face experiences, would you say that your online clinical experiences align more or less with the content you were studying in your methods course?
- Do you feel that the experiences that you had in the online clinical observations modeled teaching in a manner in which you could apply it? In comparison with face to face, while clinical experiences to you feel were more applicable? Why?
- Do you think that the online clinical experience is a realistic representation of teaching, student behavior, content learning?
- Did you feel that you were more, less, or equally intrusive when you were observing face to face? In comparison, when you were observing online? Did you feel more, less, equally connected in face to face, synchronous, and asynchronous?
- What do you feel that you are gaining (or losing) in the online clinical experience?
- What do you see as the biggest benefits and drawbacks of each clinical process?
- Which process do you think was more impactful on your teaching practice? Or understanding context specific methods of instruction? Which process did you prefer and why?

Do you have any additional comments that you wish to share?

Appendix B

Protocol for Mentor Teacher Interviews

Individual Questions

Technology:

- Were you familiar with any of the technologies used in this project? Yes or no. If so, which ones?
- What new technology skills did you gain as an outcome from participating in this project?
- Will you use any of these technologies in your teaching? Explain.

Building from your frame of reference of professional experiences with preservice teachers in face to face clinicals:

- What do you consider the advantages and limitations of face to face clinicals?
- How did the online clinical experience compare?
- What differences did you note?

This semester you experienced synchronous and asynchronous clinical experiences in which you served as a mentor teacher to novice graduate teacher candidates. Can you describe notable differences and your impressions of these differences?

- What were your feelings and reactions to the synchronous lessons? What did you learn from this experience? What do you think the teacher candidates learned?
- What were your feelings and reactions to the synchronous debriefing lesson? What did you learn from this experience? What do you think the teacher candidates learned?
- What were your feelings and reactions to the asynchronous lessons? What did you learn from this experience? What do you think the teacher candidates learned?
- What were your feelings and reactions to the asynchronous threaded discussions? What did you learn from this experience? What do you think the teacher candidates learned?

Transferability:

- Do you feel that the experiences in the online clinical observations modeled effective teaching in a manner in which teacher candidates could apply it? In comparison with face to face, which clinical experiences do you feel were more applicable? Why?
- Do you think that the online clinical experience is a realistic representation of teaching, student behavior, content learning?
- Did you feel that you were more, less, or equally connected to teacher candidates in face to face, synchronous, and asynchronous observations?
- What do you feel that you are gaining (or losing) in the online clinical experience?
- What do you see as the biggest benefits and drawbacks of each clinical process?
- Which process do you think was more impactful on your teaching practice? Or understanding context specific methods of instruction? Which process did you prefer and why?

Professional Development:

- What is your general impression of your experiences in taping lessons this spring?
- Did you view any of your asynchronous lessons in Moodle/Wimba? Yes or No. If yes, what did you learn about your teaching? If no, why not?
- Overall, what did you learn about your teaching from these combined experiences?
- Do you think this project caused you to think more critically about your teaching? Yes or No. Please explain.

Do you have any additional comments that you wish to share?

Appendix C

Student Example of Learning as Demonstrated in Instructional Unit Plan (IUP)

Before Reading Exercise (10 minutes)

Teacher will institute a “List-Group-Label” Activity. Although students are working in groups, *each group member* is to make their own copy of this exercise. This activity is designed to engage the prior knowledge of students concerning the material and also get a feel for what they know about the war material that we have not yet visited. Teacher will state the following phrase to the class (I know the instructions suggest to limiting it to one or two words, but I felt it needed to be broadened to get the appropriate amount of 25 responses, or something close to it.) “War for Independence” The floor will be open for students to voice terms and phrases having to do with “War for Independence” back to the teacher.

Some possible responses:

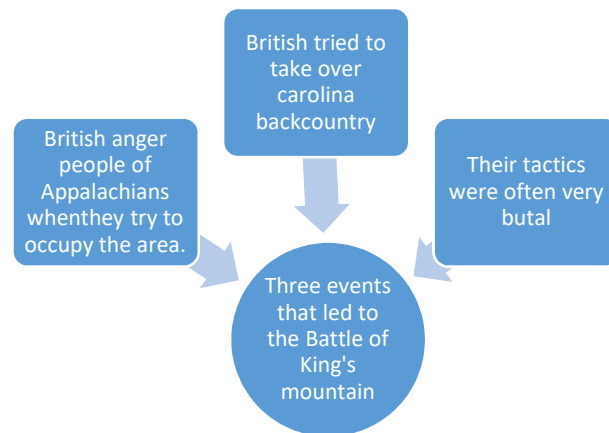
Americans on home ground
France
King George III
British people tired of war
George Washington
Yorktown

Minutemen
Boston
Spain
Cornwallis
Nathanael Greene

War means more to the
Americans
Guerilla Warfare
British troops worn down by
long war
Lafayette

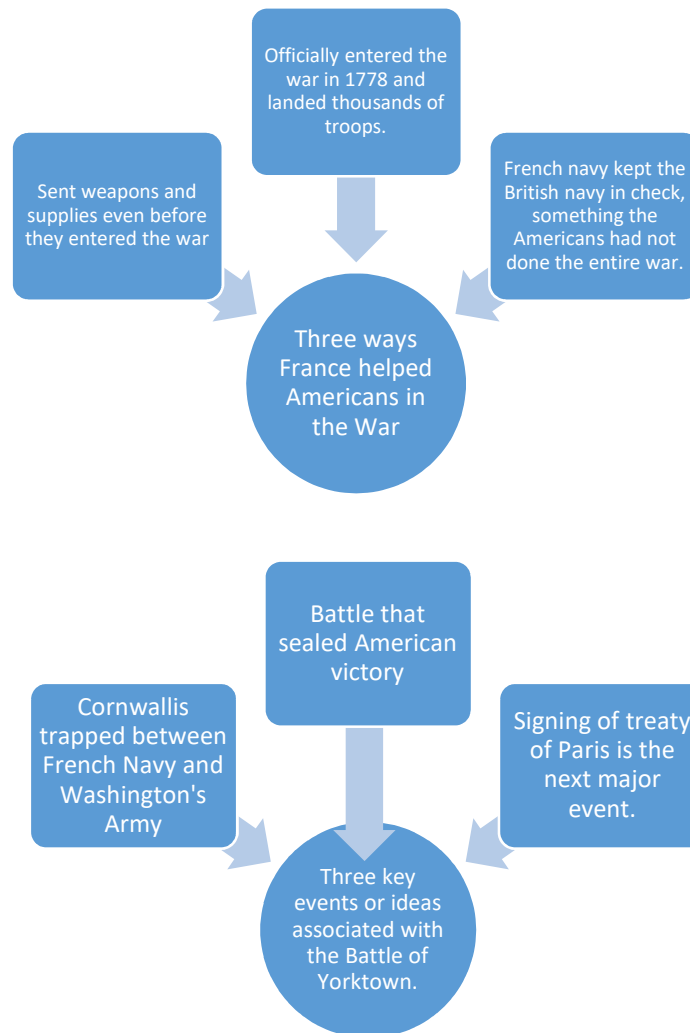
Students are then instructed, in their groups, to organize the terms teacher has been listing on the board into three categories. These categories should contain terms that have something in common with one another. Each group must contain three words, if not more.

Students then give each group a term that tells what their each group of terms has in common with one another. For example, the groups in our situation could be: people, places and circumstances.



During Reading Phase (15 minutes)

Students will read textbook pages 141-45 in their groups, taking turns reading aloud to one another as they were doing before. Students will be presented with three flow charts for students to fill in as they read. As you can see, one asks students to fill in three events that led to the Battle of King’s mountain, one asks students to name three ways France helped the Americans in the war., and one asks for three events or ideas associated with the Battle of Yorktown. The students would fill in the three blanks on each flow chart, but I filled them in just to give you an idea of how it would look.



After Reading Phase (10 minutes) - Each student will be given a handout for an ABC graffiti activity. Students will continue to work in the groups they are in. In their groups, students will be asked to brainstorm concepts that associate not only with today's reading, but with all the material they have seen thus far in the unit. They are to come up with one word or phrase for each letter of the alphabet. The letters X and Z are to be left off the list. After 5 minutes, each group will be able to send a "spy" to the table of another group to get answers they could not come up with while the other two group members continue working. The goal for each group is to have their Alphabet chart as full as they possibly can after ten minutes.

Appendix D

Asynchronous Discussions in NiceNet and Except from One Discussion Thread

Join the Discussion!

Threaded discussions between mentor teachers and class members will occur between June 2nd and June 9th. These discussions will focus on the asynchronous observations that will be viewed at your convenience prior the beginning of the discussion period. It became necessary to move away from Moodle in order to facilitate these discussions, however, www.nicenet.org provides an adequate alternative.



Instructions to access ~~nice.net~~ **nice.net**:

1. Go to www.nicenet.org
2. On the right side of the screen click "Join a Class".
3. Enter the correct key below (you may copy and paste from this document):
 - a. Social Studies: [code]
4. Complete the information requested, be sure to include your email address in case we need to send you an off-line message.
5. Once you get to the course homepage (Social Studies Observations), you will see "Conferencing" as an option on the left side of the screen. Select Conferencing and you will see two threads- you may choose either high school or middle school.
6. Read the comments and questions posted by your peers and mentor teachers, join the dialogue!

Take advantage of this opportunity to get to know these teachers, their teaching style, what they believe is pedagogically important, how they use to teach specific topics, and to tap into their overall expertise as experienced social studies teachers to tap into their overall expertise as experienced social studies teachers.



Asynchronous Threaded Discussion Excerpt

FROM: [Graduate Assistant]

SUBJECT: Teaching Bible

[Mentor Teacher 1]

I really liked your class and learned a lot from how you interacted with students. Have you had students who do not believe Christianity while you teach Bible? Have you had any difficulty to teach them? If you have, how did you handle the difficulties?

FROM: [Mentor Teacher1]

SUBJECT: RE: Teaching Bible

Thanks I do love teenagers and so enjoy teaching them! Yes...I have had a variety of students take Bible from Jewish to Buddhist to Muslim to atheists (this would be the group I have had the most). Since the class is not taught from a religious point of view but more from a historical and cultural view with an emphasis on how the Bible has impacted western culture it really has not been an issue. I have been through quite a bit of legal "training" because of the subject I teach and so am more aware and sensitive to the legal constraints that high school teachers have. No matter what subject you teach you are allowed to EXPOSE but not IMPOSE. For example, I can expose my students to what is in the Bible, to different viewpoints concerning the text but I cannot impose my beliefs or a certain belief on them. I will not share my opinion with a student even if they ask me a question about it. And this is not just a Bible thing it applies to all teachers. Back in the last presidential election there were teachers who got in big trouble for sharing their political views with their classes.

So to get back to your question about difficulties teaching students with diverse beliefs, to be honest with you it is not an issue because of the way I teach it and the opportunity I give the students to ask questions, share their ideas and do research....hard to explain but perhaps this example will help. A couple of years ago at the beginning of the semester when I was explaining to the students how our class would be set up and how I would be teaching the Bible academically and not religiously or devotionally, I had a student say..."So, what you are saying is you are not going to try to cram something down our throats because I hate it when adults try to cram something down your throat. I am only taking the class because my parents made me take it." I told her that I did not like that approach either and that I would be presenting multiple views of things and she could decide for herself what she did with the information. She was happy and so was I! This is truly what we hope for as educators... that students will learn to think for themselves based on the knowledge that they acquire. Hope this helps to answer your question...the bottom line for me as a teacher is respect. It is the key to building a relationship with a student that fosters learning and creates the open and safe environment where people feel comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas and learn from each other.

FROM: [Student 4]

SUBJECT: Signing- Hand Signals

[Mentor Teacher 1],

Have you always used hand signals? Did you and your class create your own signals or are you using a guide of some sort?

FROM: [Mentor Teacher 1]

SUBJECT: RE: Signing- Hand Signals

[Student 4]

I cannot remember when I have not used hand signals. When I was first getting started teaching there was a teacher who used this as a way of teaching her students key information and things that she wanted them to remember and I saw how effective it was in not only helping them retain information but also in their enjoyment of the learning process. And so I began to add different hand signals to my lessons.

Admittedly, it is a little "scary" to begin using in class at first because you have to put yourself out there a bit as a teacher but as the students realize that it works and they get over worrying about their "image" they come to love learning this way.

Most of the hand motions I use I have created but there are times in which I let the students come up with their own and teach them to the class.

In my classes, I have such a variety of learning levels from EC to the top students in their class and I find that this is one method that reaches both ends of the spectrum and in between and pulls us all together as a class. I had an OCS student in my New Testament class this fall that I had 2 years earlier in Old Testament. When we started reviewing the books of the Bible and key outlines from that Old Testament class this young man could recite all of this information as if he had just learned it. He was flawless with his recollection and I was blown away and convinced that this is an effective way to teach all my students!

My philosophy in teaching has always been that I will try anything in class to help my students learn....if it doesn't work the worst that happened is that I "lost" a day. Most of the time it does work and they enjoy it and even if it doesn't students appreciate your trying to mix it up....they really appreciate a teacher who wants them to learn and be successful. Sometimes my believing in them turns into their believing in themselves! Hand signals is just one way I seek to accomplish this.

Interactive Notebook teaches efficiency in note taking and how useful good notes can be to their individual successes on their reading quizzes. This was something new to me and after [Mentor Teacher 3] and [Instructor] both elaborated on it, I can see the usefulness of it.

In my observation, I also noticed that [Mentor Teacher 3] was not a teacher that was put off by noise. His classroom has been the loudest thus far, but one could clearly see that it was 'controlled chaos,' if you will. He appears to have a laid back approach to teaching and from watching his body language; he constantly made himself available and open to his students. He said in the initial debriefing that while your classroom can be a comfortable and fun place, his students also know that there is a time and place for everything, especially work. This to me shows a teacher that is comfortable in his skin, with his students, and he obviously has no problem enjoying them, but is able to keep them in line as well.

I also appreciated [Mentor Teacher 3]'s use of the Smartboard in implementing the lesson, his use of it in writing definitions where everyone could see them, and having the students use the Smartboard. Allowing the students to use the Smartboard appeared to be a great way to make the activity technologically interactive and more engaging to his class. [Mentor Teacher 3]'s students showed a very apparent respect and just general like for him and were more than willing to tell this class why they felt so. As he said in the beginning, be a part of the school; make it more than just a job and your students will respond to that. Obviously [Mentor Teacher 3] knows what he's talking about! His bottomless well of enthusiasm that he showed his students on this day was a rare thing, I think. Too many times I have seen a teacher who didn't want to be at school and his students knew this. It was very refreshing and encouraging for me to see that [Mentor Teacher 3] was so enthusiastic towards his students. They knew that he was happy to see them and they responded accordingly.

If I could ask him one question it would be:

- 1.) He appears to use many varied teaching styles ranging from the lecture, to the visual Smartboard, to group work, and individual time. Does he do this every day in his classroom? Does he try and differentiate every lesson in as many ways or are there days when he only uses one method of instruction?
- 2.) What advice would he give a beginning teacher on lesson differentiation?