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An Effort Toward Collaborative Problem Solving in Teacher Candidates' Practicum:  
Reflection in Action

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores my role as the clinical educator of a university practicum field experience at a public elementary and middle school. Nine teacher candidates participated in this action research that focused on changes implemented over the course of a semester to improve collaborative problem-solving inquiry and discussion. The primary data sources included audio-taped transcripts of purposely selected seminars, pre and post observation conferences, online student discussion board posts on the Learning Management System (LMS) and researcher's field notes. Findings reveal that, through integration of multiple sources of student input, a clinical educator may develop a more complete feedback loop to facilitate development of student pedagogical perspectives and integration into the host school culture. Overall, there was a greater level of collaboration among teacher candidates and myself, as a co-participant and collaborator in their emerging practice.

*Keywords* : action research, teacher education, collaborative inquiry, practicum

## **Introduction**

Andrea burst into the conference room, red in the face, declaring, “I don’t know what I’m doing” while dropping her load of papers onto the table. She looked at me and began excitedly retelling stories of student misbehavior and misunderstanding, “I ask for volunteers and no one seems to hear my question and many of the students don’t understand anything I’m sayin.” Andrea, a new teacher candidate (TC), had spent her first week teaching solo as part of an “intensive” phase of teacher training when each TC is in charge of their respective classroom. In Andrea’s case, it was a class of predominantly immigrant English language learners (ELLs) who presented ongoing pedagogical and behavioral challenges that she shared weekly during our practicum meeting. Although not all TCs taught ELLs, Andrea shared a common problem when she sheepishly confided that “I am not getting much direction from my cooperating teacher (CT), she just assumes I will figure it out.” Andrea and her teacher candidate peers wanted to discuss classroom issues in our weekly seminar based directly on their own experiences. I spoke with the TCs about how we might change the seminar and they unanimously agreed that our discussions should collectively attempt to resolve problematic aspects of their emerging practice. This began a series of significant changes to what I discovered to be an outdated set of supervisory practices that focused too much on presentation and direct instruction rather than a more collaborative approach initiated in the action research study described here. This study involved an ongoing effort to restructure and improve the practicum experience focusing on our weekly seminar as the intervention.

### **Problem of Practice**

This particular episode occurred early in my role as a clinical educator (CE) for an undergraduate TC practicum during the 2014-15 academic year. Far from being an isolated case, Andrea's frustration revealed problems with our practicum meeting process that primarily failed to provide candidates with opportunities to discuss common classroom challenges through a collaborative, problem-based approach (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; National Research Council, 2010). The seminars were part of my existing responsibilities as a CE of a university based practicum course. In this role, I sought to make changes that integrated more systematic, self-critical inquiry through modified protocols and student generated discussion topics that emerged from their day-to-day classroom experiences.

### **My Role and Responsibilities within Setting**

I accepted a position as a CE for teacher candidate practicum soon after beginning an Ed.D. program for the study of language, literacy and culture. The job as CE began in the fall of 2013 after having earned a Masters in secondary education and certification in social studies and English with a TESOL endorsement. I am hoping to better prepare prospective teachers by drawing on my own experience as a social studies and English as a second language (ESL) instructor. As a CE, I am intrigued by the possibilities of the practicum "seminar" serving as a dialogic space for problem-based discussion. My personal experience as a classroom teacher and discussions with teacher candidates revealed a need within the practicum for a more effective, participant led forum for candidates to explore and discuss shared concerns with their peers. There are two key assumptions that guide the study: 1) teacher

candidate learning is socially constructed through language and interaction (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978); and 2) guided, inquiry-based conversations can serve as a vehicle for professional development and problem-solving (Cochran-Smith, 2009).

My responsibilities as a CE included facilitating weekly meetings, observing the TC, providing feedback and helping to manage the relationship with the host school. I received periodic professional development training but no formal coursework to prepare for the practicum CE job. I was surprised by the challenges facing me as a CE and soon after starting, I realized that my pedagogical knowledge and limited training would not suffice to effectively supervise the practicum students. Nevertheless, I was willing to make the seminar a safe place of dialogic inquiry to support my teacher candidates in their journeys.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In the early weeks of the Fall 2014 practicum, I identified and presented seminar discussion topics based on recommendations from the university's clinical office and through advice from CE peers with multiple years of experience. In part, these topics included literacy strategies, classroom management and differentiation. However, there was little input from the participant TCs in my group. There were specific university guidelines about how to facilitate the seminars, so I initially thought that my teaching experience qualified me as the best arbiter of seminar discussion choices. My approach was top-down and resulted in a lecture based, direct instruction style that although topically relevant, was not of immediate concern to the TCs and generated minimal interaction among the students. The TCs had little input

so were not directly involved in setting the agenda, and as a result, there was little engagement. After audio recording and listening to a seminar in week two of the semester, I noticed that I talked more than half the time and only two out of the nine TCs spoke during the meeting. I had a tendency to over talk in past teaching experiences and found myself doing it again, perhaps in an effort to compensate for a lack of TC engagement. Regardless, this was a tipping point and prompted me to make changes starting in week three so that everyone had to speak about an issue most relevant to their experiences. This became an intentional effort to have everyone contribute and was the first of several changes to the seminar that would occur throughout the semester.

I had decided to conduct an action research study of the practicum that would examine my role as the CE, but the exact focus was unclear at first. I knew that our processes had to change, but was not sure how to implement reforms that would shift the seminar to more student led discourses. Our initial seminar meetings demonstrated that the TCs shared many of the same concerns no matter which grade they taught, such as classroom management, differentiation and how to address the needs of ELs. These reoccurring, ubiquitous concerns helped clarify the focus of the study as one that examined the evolution of the seminar. I began to recognize that my facilitation was crucial to coherent discussion and effective collaborative efforts. Our discursive practices within the group needed more direction with added intentionality and structure to the meetings. My interaction with TCs was limited to once a week so our seminar meetings had to compensate for my lack of day-to-day understanding of the TC concerns.

This limited contact led to efforts at a more collaborative approach in which TCs generated ideas using an online discussion board to post ideas and comments that were then discussed during the seminar. The seminar evolved slowly as a vehicle to collaboratively solve problems and share success stories. My role became more of that of a facilitator of problem-based discussion that reflected the immediate concerns of the student participants. By integrating the Learning Management System (LMS), I had made the first of several intentional modifications to strengthen the quality of feedback and help fuel our seminar discussions.

The semester long study embodies an effort to facilitate problem-based discussions based that more accurately reflected the weekly concerns of the TCs. My central goal was to create a forum so the TCs could construct new understandings of pedagogical concepts. I utilized data generated through dialogue topics created by the TCs in online discussion boards, pre- and post- observation meeting notes with individual candidates and weekly seminar transcripts. Going forward, these observation meetings will be referred to as semi-structured interviews. I recognized that the TCs needed more systematic guidance to develop more rigorous habits of inquiry into their practice that they then could share with peers during our seminars.

I documented the evolution of our seminar while seeking to identify moments of strength and possibilities for growth in my own practice. The lack of previous studies about practicum and collaborative learning communities (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; NCATE, 2010) demonstrates a need for such an investigation. This is a study that examined one aspect of my practice, the seminar, and the process of



identifying problems of practice and moves toward resolving them through our dialogic inquiry. The research question that guided this study was:

How does a clinical educator facilitate conversation through seminar dialogue that fosters collaborative exploration of practice?

### **Potential Impact of Research**

I hope to make a contribution to educator preparation by taking an in-depth look at the seminar and its evolution over the course of the 2015 Spring semester. My modifications to the seminar serve as the intervention for this action research. I also hope to share a supervisory approach that incorporates a more integrated, collaborative problem-based group discussion. The general idea was to coordinate the weekly seminars more closely with online discussion and classroom observations for a more holistic understanding of TC needs and thereby create a more effective feedback loop that included both peers and myself.

The potential impact of the study may be useful to practicum stakeholders as well. This study attempted to examine the ongoing constraints and the attempted remedies for the practicum that I can share with a wider audience. As an evolving set of practices, the study examined an evolving, more systematic approach to practicum supervision that other TCs may find useful. Other CEs and practicum stakeholders will hopefully have a better understanding of common classroom challenges that the TCs face during their clinical experience. Attempts to collaborate with university and host school faculty were a part of this study that will provide some ideas for those interested in teacher preparation. Through the narrative concerning my particular set

of TCs, others may find that our collaborative problem solving strategies were a useful approach to addressing student concerns.

### **Theoretical Framework Using a Sociocultural Approach**

This study builds on other existing empirical research (Ball, 2014; Levin & Rock, 2003; Schultz, 2005) that have examined and found a need for an expanded, more integrated role in schools for pre-service teachers that includes sharing common problems and insights through dialogue with peers and cooperating teachers. One of the primary goals of the TC practicum experience concerns learning how to connect and apply theoretical knowledge into practice (National Research Council, 2010). I found this to be true in my own experience as TCs struggled to implement university-based methods to student learning needs. The practicum primarily involves developing pedagogical practices, but also how to assimilate into the particular school context and its practices (Bruner, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Moussay, Flavier, Zimmermann, & Meard, 2011). The TCs attempt to apply theoretical pedagogical knowledge acquired at the university while concurrently developing an understanding about the cultural norms, techniques and expectations of the host school's professional community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fiene, Wehman, Brannon, Jares, Burke, & Young, 2009; Richards, 2010). A reoccurring problem during this study involved a lack of TCs understanding about the host school's expectations and how to navigate the day-to-day school practices. In traditional triadic practicum models, this community is often limited in scope to one classroom with a single CT, TC and the CE. Oftentimes, the TCs and CE have insufficient guidance or expertise in developing explicit habits of collaborative inquiry (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 2009; Schulz, 2005). In my group of TCs, we sought to enlarge this community to include peers. I strived to create a weekly seminar that provided a forum for this inquiry and what Nichols and Tobin (2000) described as an opportunity to articulate reasons for their teaching decisions and reflect on outcomes in discussion with peers.

### **Practicum Seminar**

The language of the university and practicum school site often differs because there are often two distinct discourses. The academic, university-based theoretical language often conflicts with field-based discourse that may confuse the teacher candidates (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). On reflection, the TCs feedback to me often reflected this disconnect, so in our seminars, we began discussing how a university learned teaching strategy had contradicted feedback from a CT. Soslau (2012) found that post-observation conferences with a CE can help the TC adapt theoretical knowledge to classroom decision making. University-based teaching strategies demanded modification to fit the specific classroom contexts. For example, one of the TCs, Jane, admitted to trying several methods acquired in her coursework but found them to be unsuccessful, “they’re often random, so they don't really go with what we're doing on that day”. Feedback from TCs such as Jane spurred, in part, this action research to help bridge an increasingly evident gap between theory and practice. I realized that my role had to change in order to facilitate more interaction and fewer lecture based, dyadic interactions.

The sociocultural perspective views language learning tasks and their contexts as situated activities that are part of an ongoing process of development in which

learners adapt to their learning environment and begin to take action (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gee, 2008). In the case of the practicum seminar, our language tasks or actions are the development of professional registers of emerging teaching practitioners who must learn how to articulate problems of practice during our efforts at collaborative inquiry. Our seminar should ideally be an influential forum for the TCs to develop their own professional orientations to classroom teaching and the acculturation process within the school community.

### **Dialogic Inquiry**

Vygotsky (1979), and Bakhtin (1986) are pillars of my theoretical framework because of their innovative research on the role of language discourses and the potential for collaborative learning. Teacher and peer-guided inquiry and interaction through language help us to mediate and understand new concepts (Wertsch, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Dialogic inquiry and interaction utilizes language as the medium for learning (Wells, 1999). The seminar dialogue and the topics we discussed didn't begin as such, but gradually became an effort towards the co-construction of understanding and a learning activity. We endeavored to solve problems of practice and adjust to the school culture and its particular practices. The formation of individual teacher identities, knowledge and values develops through their participation in what Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to as communities of practice. At the beginning of the school year, I didn't recognize the need for such a community, but after university supervisory training and further reading of relevant literature, I hoped to create such a community on a small scale through our seminar and the resulting discussions that occurred. As TCs internalize the teaching lexicon and

register, they become better able to express themselves through what evolved slowly as a collaborative discussion. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) and Ball (2009) supported the idea that as the TCs become more integrated into the school community and its particular practices, they begin to develop their ability to articulate the day-to-day issues and cultivate a shared understanding of relevant teaching issues. I attempted to give the TCs a forum to develop their knowledge through more effective problem solving discussions. Our interactions, both in seminars and online, are discursive, constructivist semiotic tools for learning (Bruner, 1962; Roth, & Tobin, 2004; Tarchi & Pinto, 2015).

To better understand the discursive patterns of the seminar, I read Bakhtin's (1986) discussion of utterances as a unit of meaning to inform this study in the sense they carry "dialogic overtones". Meanings are created through reflective interactions between interlocutors who build on earlier statements and reconsider existing understandings of a discussion topic. I embraced Bakhtin's (1986) idea that our dialogue itself was a tool for learning. I eventually sought to emphasize egalitarian dialogue among all group members by requiring each participant TC to contribute specific feedback to peers. To help formulate modifications to the seminar, I referred to Bakhtin (1986) and Gordon Wells (1999), who explained that "inquiry" is a habit of questioning rather than a method. As such, I encouraged the group members to formulate specific questions and observations focused on what their peers had shared during the discussion. As a group, the TCs and I were trying to understand challenging classroom scenarios and situations through collaboration. Wells (1999) further explained that "dialogic inquiry" is an approach that values the relationship

between the individual and the group with the goal of co-constructing knowledge through oral interactions. Successful dialogic inquiry and collaboration must flow from a learning environment that is conducive to a shared understanding of contextualized topics that allow for meaningful communication. It was my role to ensure that this forum existed within my facilitation and protocols of the seminar. According to Wells (1999), “dialogic inquiry not only enriches individuals' knowledge but also transforms it, ensuring the survival of different **cultures** and their capacity to transform themselves according to the requirements of every social moment” (p.68). For more practical guidance, I reviewed qualitative studies' methods and findings that directly concerned practicum experiences.

### **Effective Seminar Models**

Transformative learning is a constructivist theory by Mezirow (1991) that offers some support about using reflection as part of a group problem solving process. Mezirow's theory and subsequent findings from Cranton (1997) and Boyd (1991) suggest that reflection facilitates the transformation of ourselves to new understandings and learning. In this study, we used reflective writings and explicitly linked them with seminar discussion agendas to help the TCs articulate their understanding of classroom problems. Mezirow (1991) asserts that task oriented problem solving and reflection can lead students to challenge their assumptions. Our seminar was just such an attempt.

In connection with transformation through reflection, Ball (2009) proposed that generative change is necessary to successfully solve pedagogical problems that

emerge in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. According to Ball (2009), *generativity* refers to the (student) teacher's ability to connect their professional and personal knowledge with first hand interactions with students to create effective problem solving strategies. Generative change involves the development of professional practice by "increasing their knowledge of theory and best practices and their knowledge of students' cultural practices and values" (p. 46). Our weekly seminar provided a forum to do just as Ball (2009) suggests and allow the TCs to share their evolving understandings with one another and brainstorm solutions. Using first-hand classroom experiences and university acquired academic knowledge, the TCs attempted to co-constructed new interpretations of practice through seminar dialogue. As new teachers, they must be able to adapt their teaching strategies to meet cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diverse student needs (Ball, 2009;Valdes, Bunch, Snow, & Lee, 2005). Ball's (2009) idea of generativity is an eloquent call for a teacher's ability to "continually add to their understanding by connecting their personal and professional knowledge that they gain from their students to produce or originate knowledge that is useful to them in pedagogical problem solving" (p.47).

### **Problem-Based Discussion**

To facilitate TC development, I next turned to literature regarding peer-generated discussion to solve problems of practice. A study by Miller (2008), found that problem-based discussion of course readings and reflective journal writings helped teacher participants begin applying concepts to authentic classroom challenges. Participants began asking deeper questions about how to make changes in their pedagogical approaches for a diverse student body and developed a stronger

sense of agency in their practice. My own study aligns with the idea that dialogue should address shared problems that we attempted to solve during group discussion. Ball (2009) and Miller (2008) extended tenets of sociocultural theory and the value of dialogue discussed by Vygotsky (1978), Bakhtin (1981) and Bruner (1990) in which dialogue helps to develop new understandings and perspectives. Through the practicum seminar dialogue, we sought to resolve problems of practice and strengthen TC efficacy. By identifying the most prevalent student generated topics on the LMS, I presented multiple discussion topics to the TCs with the goal of acquiring new teaching strategies and knowledge.

### **Empirical Studies of Interest**

In the pursuit of contextually relevant teaching strategies, the use of reflective peer discussion and feedback was an effort to develop habits of self-assessment, collaboration and professional learning (McTighe & Emberger, 2006; Vidmar, 2005). In a relevant study on the effects of peer feedback during a practicum by Wilkins, Shin, and Ainsworth (2009), 82% of participants found it promoted more reflection and collaboration among TCs. However, 18% of TC participants did not value peer feedback citing a lack of supervision from the CE. The study demonstrated the need for careful management with explicit protocols during discussion.

The goals of the practicum focused on a collective effort to improve teaching strategies through a systematic inquiry ‘made public’ so it might become a knowledge base to be accessed by all within the community (Cherubini, 2008; Stenhouse, 1985). Systematic, intentional reflection during our seminar was meant to transform individual inquiry into what Cochran-Smith (2009) called “community property”. A



community of inquiry (COI) can be a catalyst for learning that is inclusive and collaborative in solving problems and building a shared body of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). A COI is a forum for sharing common challenges and subsequently implementing changes in the classroom. Through our seminar, I hoped to develop habits of inquiry that continue to evolve throughout the TCs teaching careers. Past research has found that peer feedback and problem-based discussion can promote reflection and serve as a valuable source of professional development for pre-service teachers (Harlin, 2000; Kiraz, 2004). The CE can lay the groundwork for a career long practice of shared inquiry that focuses on increasing peer interaction, developing habits of critical inquiry and reflecting on teaching decisions (Hyland & Noffke, 2005; Levin & Rock, 2003). For TCs, the seminar was an opportunity to do so with guidance from their peers and me. The nascent COI in this study strived to discuss and solve problems of practice through careful analysis and discussion of student learning issues and cultural assimilation into the school community.

There is also a coaching role for the CE who supports both technical and affective concerns of the TC during practicum (Bates, Ramirez, & Drita, 2009). As a coach, offering explicit feedback to the TC in a non-threatening atmosphere was shown to be an effective means of professional development (Duff, 2003; Heineke, 2013). I sought to reform the seminar to be such a non-threatening atmosphere where TCs took the lead in discussion. Research studies about TC perceptions have shown that effective coaches support four constructs: planning, giving feedback, discussion of strategies and nurturing self-efficacy (Beck & Kosik, 2002; Glenn, 2006;

LaBoskey & Richert, 2002; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Through the guidance of the CE as a dialogue partner, the individual or group of TC(s) attempt to make problems of practice visible through an ongoing process of dialogue and reflection. Related research supports the notion that effective TC/CE relationships move beyond technical assessment of performance to promotion of critical reflection and subsequent opportunities for improvement (Tillema, Smith, & Leshem, 2010).

Bates, Ramirez and Drits (2009) conducted a study of particular interest that concerns reforming our approach to practicum. The study cited a lack of explicit guidance from the supervisor and an unclear definition of what “critical reflection” involved (Ferraro, 2000; Walkington, Christensen, & Kock, 2001). Bates et al. (2009) defined it as a process of “transformation of the practices and stances of our student teachers and supervisors” (p.93). Their qualitative study found that TC participants developed teaching practices through reflection and collaborative dialogue (Bates et al., 2009).

Moussay et al. (2009) and Caires and Alameda (2007) provide valuable guidance about the role of the CE and student expectations. Their findings supported the assertion that the CE must consistently reinforce critical reflection with explicit feedback and encouragement. Although the teacher candidates became more autonomous in reflecting over time, participants commonly stated that explicit guidance from the CE helped them learn the skills of critical reflection (Bates et al., 2009). The authors also found that the use of group discussion about common school concerns during seminars was favorably received by TCs (Bates et al., 2009). In addition, Moussay et al. (2009) found that supervisors who carefully constructed and

modeled higher level thinking in dialogue during their meetings were those whose TCs embraced reflective behaviors most often. When the supervisor in the study gave explicit, scaffolded instruction about critical reflection, there were greater indicators of transformation in the teacher candidates under their supervision.

My action research is largely guided by sociocultural theory and its tenets that emphasize social interaction. The ideas of Vygotsky (1978) guided me in examining how student discussion in concert with my facilitation would lead to their development as novice teachers. Incorporating student led, problem-based discussion (Miller, 2008), I envisioned the seminar as a forum for professional growth. The review of literature helped me recognize existing problems and possible solutions to improve my own practice and provide a more engaging clinical experience for the TCs. Key findings include the work of Cochran-Smith (2009) who led me to a better understanding of collaborative inquiry while Miller (2008) demonstrated the value of problem-based dialogue. The work of Bates et al. (2009) contributed an understanding about the use of critical reflection to help generate student-led discussion topics.

## **Context and Participants**

### **Context**

This study took place in the Spring of 2015 at a local K-8 urban charter school of approximately 800 students. The student population was roughly 45% African American, 35% white and 20% foreign born, non-native speakers of English. The practicum clinical experience for this study is based on the studio school model developed by the university teacher education program to create long-term

collaborative relationships with partner schools in the community. As part of the model, a school that is considered a studio school has to be either a local or a charter K-12 public school. This was the third year of the university's studio model for the practicum and it was undergoing reforms to its organization and protocols that encouraged TCs to work with a variety of CTs in a more flexible, expanded role within the host school.

The university implemented a more comprehensive experience so the TC could interact with a variety of faculty and engage in a wider, more diverse set of school activities. The studio school allowed the TCs to become more involved as co-learners who constantly refined their teaching practices through collaboration and reflection. A key element of the studio school mission is to foster creative solutions that enrich the teacher learning process (Studio Schools section, 2016). Within the studio school process is the "inquiry into my practice (IIMP)" (Cordova, 2015) to help TCs in plan and reflect on their teaching performance. I recognized the need to implement collaborative strategies such as the IIMP that were presented by the university during CE training seminars, but was often unable to implement it, particularly on a one to one basis, due to time constraints. Strategies recommended by the university were not always practical within the context of my host site. The intervention for this study involved changes that resembled those suggested by the university, but modified to work under the constraints of my host school. They had to be changed to accommodate the specific needs of our group and fit within the time constraints of an extremely tight schedule. The focus of this study is not the

implementation of the Studio School model, but rather the seminar itself and how I facilitated collaborative problem-solving discussion among the TCs.

There were other procedural changes concerning reflection and pre-and post observation protocols, but the seminar changes and focus of this study were done independent of any university mandates. However, I was guided by the Studio School model in the sense that it stresses more reflection and increased collaboration with partner universities to host teacher candidates and share resources, often providing research sites for university researchers (Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran, 2011). I was the sole supervisor at the studio school that hosted my group of nine TCs. The middle school candidates were placed with CTs based on their content area (i.e. math, science) while placement for elementary level TCs was based on their preferred grade level. The TCs were assigned to one classroom as their primary placement for the entire time semester, but rotated to other classes for a week each month. The studio schools differ from traditional practicum host sites because, “there is a commitment to sharing of perspectives, capacities, and resources” (Butcher et al., 2011, p.31) between university and local schools. Studio schools seek to develop TC insights into teaching and allow them to co-teach with multiple CTs on a rotating basis rather than remain in one classroom the entire time. The studio school practicum embodies a more collegial model that facilitates “reciprocal professional learning” among the practicum stakeholders (Cartaut & Bertone, 2009; Charlies, Escalie, & Bertone; Clarke, 2011; Coffey, 2010). As such, I strived to expand the traditional triadic practicum model to include a wider network of stakeholders that include multiple CTs, school administrators, university faculty, TCs, TC peers, and supervisor.

## **Participants**

I supervised a group of nine TCs during the 2014-2015 school year. The participants included nine university students, six females and three males (see Appendix A). The teacher candidates were all white ranging in age from 24 to 45. They were all seniors at a suburban, four-year Midwestern university and enrolled in the teacher education program. The TCs were fulfilling their practicum clinical work at a local charter K-8 elementary and middle school. The candidates had various areas of focus including: four general elementary, three middle school (two math, one science) and two special education. I invited all nine students at the school site to participate in the study with the sole selection criteria of being enrolled in my practicum course. All nine agreed to participate knowing they could opt out at any time. Since all nine TCs agreed to participate, a separate seminar was not needed for non-participants. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

## **Research Design**

### **Action Research Study**

This was an action research study using a grounded theory approach and qualitative data sources to examine my supervisory work with TC practicum students (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using the recursive cycle of reflection, action and evaluation (Hendricks, 2013), I attempted to identify pedagogical practices within the seminar that hampered TC development and learning. The study was an ongoing effort to enhance engagement and collaboration. I collected student artifacts such as reflections to better understand their teaching concerns and integrate them into the weekly seminar. Field notes, taken over the span of the semester, provided a record of my observations and changes made to cultivate more collaborative inquiry practices.

The use of interventions occurred in response to feedback from the participant students and my own observation and reflections. As a participant researcher, I was positioned to be both an insider and outsider depending on the context of the setting. Herr and Anderson (2005) explain that, as researchers, we assume multiple positions that intersect and may concurrently be in both insider and outsider roles. While working with the teacher candidates during weekly seminars, I was an insider. When I observed classes and interacted with the general school community, my role was that of an outsider. I was also an outsider in terms of power relations as the instructor who assigns course grades.

This was an examination of my interactions with the TCs and how modifications to our seminar, online discussion board and pre/post observation briefings affected the dynamics of the practicum. This was a study of the changes to the processes and procedures over the course of the semester. Problems arose as the semester progressed and were largely unanticipated. So although there were problems identified at the outset, this study recounted an ongoing series of changes in response to a both previously identified as well as emerging practices that could be modified to promote more interactive dialogue to address shared classroom problems. Integrating data from online discussion boards and observation meetings with the seminar meetings, I drew from multiple sources of input to better understand reforms needed.

### **Seminar as an Action Research Intervention**

Acting as the CE, I visited the school once a week and facilitated two separate sections of a weekly seminar with middle and elementary school TCs in groups of four and five. We met either in an unused classroom or administrative office for 1-2

hours on Thursday afternoons. These meetings or seminars were part of my responsibilities that also included classroom observations and periodic meetings with school administrators. The seminar was my primary source of interaction with TCs during the practicum and became the setting for this study. Each week, the seminar goals were designed to help the candidates develop pedagogical and classroom management skills while also addressing administrative issues with the host school. The TCs spent Monday-Thursday at the school observing and co-teaching with an experienced classroom teacher from 7:30am-3:30pm. As part of the university coursework, the TCs attended our weekly seminar over a 16-week semester with their peers and myself. The agenda for our meetings was left to my discretion so for the first three weeks, I alone decided discussion topics for the seminar. This proved to be a problem though because the TCs did not contribute to the agenda, the topics were not of immediate concern to the candidates and the discussion consisted of dyadic interactions with limited participation from others in the group. The first of three modifications to our collaborative efforts began by week four. I came to realize that my lecture style presentations offered little opportunity for the TCs to interact and other source of student concerns such as online reflections and observation briefings were being underutilized. When we had seminar group discussion, two or three students dominated the dialogue that was not often of concern to other TCs. After reflection and advice from university practicum faculty, I began to understand that we were not leveraging our collective knowledge to build new understandings about teaching. I began to integrate online discussion board reflections and observation discussions to the seminar discussion. Although there were no readings included with



the changes, I began assigning questions for reflection and later discussion regarding topics such as differentiation, classroom management and accommodations for limited English speakers. These topics were first discussed online and then brought to the seminar for whole group discussion. I will outline the changes made over the course of the 16-week semester in subsequent sections. These are arranged chronologically by their initial implementation.

Week 3 – Each student was required to post a reflection on a classroom teaching challenge. The TC described the situation and aspects of the problem that most concerned them that week. Two peers then had to respond with explicit feedback about the stated problem. I monitored the online discussion board and also submitted feedback. This interaction took place in early in the week so that by our Thursday seminar, we could continue the discussion as a group.

Week 4 – During seminar, each TC took a turn to re-state their classroom concern and was expected to spend several minutes explaining it in detail. In response, the entire group focused on this one speaker's concern with ideas or suggestions. I asked that at least three of the group members respond with explicit feedback.

Week 6 – On three occasions over the course of the semester, I observed each of the nine TCs twice formally and once informally for 30-45 minutes . We tried to meet for 10-15 minutes before and after the lessons to discuss their goals and subsequent performance but this was not possible. To compensate for a lack of time for pre and post meetings, we usually continued the post brief with the entire group during the seminar. Using notes and recordings from these pre and post observations

meetings, we used the subject matter, if okay with TC, during that week's seminar as a topic of further discussion.

### **Data Sources**

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the midwestern university. After approval, all nine TCs signed consent forms and I began collecting data from the practicum (see Appendix B). Through triangulation I will attempt to answer my research questions about the ways a group of TCs address shared problems of practice through seminar dialogue. As part of this dialogue, I sought to improve my facilitation of conversation that promotes transformational learning and collaborative practices. To investigate these questions, I collected observational, inquiry and artifact data as described by Hendricks (2013).

**Observational Data.** Our seminar provided observational data through audio recorded transcripts and field notes. I recorded and took field notes for 14 seminars ranging from 1-2 hours that will be used for later analysis. The seminar transcripts were the primary source of data to help me examine the changes I made to the course in seminar, online and during observations. These changes were described in terms of the depth and breadth of the interaction among TCs that concerned shared problems of practice. I also examined the discursive moves made during seminar and how the TCs utilized my prompts to discuss and collaboratively solve problems of practice. During seminars, I offered feedback and prompts for elaboration in conjunction with at least three TCs in the discussion. Analysis of these recorded interactions provided a valuable source of insight into our collaborative activities. The transcripts allowed me to better understand how my integration of online and observational information with

the seminar discussions helped promote TCs collaborative efforts to address shared problems of practice.

**Artifact Data.** I collected 14 weeks of weekly online discussion board postings that provided written reflection artifact data. A partial list of reflection topics concerned teaching issues such as literacy, classroom management and differentiation, particularly for English language learners (ELLs). These topics were based on the previous weeks seminar discussion where TCs offered ideas about the online topics. The TC postings served as a bridge between seminars by connecting concerns from the previous and upcoming weeks. The discussion board became a place for retrospective reflection as well as a means for suggesting future discussion topics and sharing emerging or ongoing classroom challenges. Discussion ideas and reflections were integrated into the seminar agenda. As stated earlier, the students were also required to respond to at least three of their peers, which made this data a source of collaborative, problem-solving efforts.

**Inquiry Data.** Another source of data were three semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with individual TCs before and after I conducted classroom observations (see Appendix C for protocol). These meeting generally took about ten minutes each, if time allowed, to conduct and provided inquiry data about TC goals before the class (pre-observation) and reflections of their performance (post observation). The pre/post interviews questions were adapted from the Studio School model although they often were truncated or altered to fit the circumstances. The interviews focused on lesson goals (pre) and thoughts about their performance (post) in the classroom. These discussions offered valuable inquiry data that were utilized in

the seminar discussion as a learning tool. On these three occasions, the TC allowed me to audio-record and subsequently share elements of the observation conversation with the seminar group. These interviews address the research question by adding an authentic classroom challenge that would be discussed in the seminar. These meetings took place in various places (the teacher's lounge, cafeteria and hallway outside of the classroom).

The data sources allowed me to analyze our interactions that involved multiple interlocutors engaged in solving problems of practice. I looked for instances of collaborative inquiry and discussion in seminars that is driven by TCs concerns articulated in online exchanges and observation briefings. These interactions are not being quantified, but rather analyzed to identify themes that illuminate examples of collaboration and how they were made possible by my changes to the practicum.

Since I wish to share my study with colleagues and other teacher educators, the process validity had to be strengthened. I relied on the trustworthiness concept described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to better understand the findings and make insightful interpretation of the data. I used the following strategies as proposed by Hendricks (2013) and Creswell (2013): data triangulation, audit trail, data accuracy and thick description of the setting. Data triangulation of my field notes with seminar transcripts, online postings and pre/post briefings offers complimentary perspectives and insights about the ways that my facilitation changed the TCs collaborative inquiry and problem solving. Triangulation provided corroborating evidence of the validity of themes by looking for evidence of changes in multiple data sources. Data triangulation of my field notes with seminar transcripts, online postings and pre/post

briefings offers complimentary perspectives and insights about the ways that my facilitation affected the TCs collaborative inquiry and problem solving. Regarding an audit trail, I kept a record of all analyzed data. This included field notes, audio recordings and online postings that were organized to substantiate how the interpretations were made. Thick descriptions will offer a detailed description of the setting, participants, methods and intervention so that my audience is able to determine if this study is generalizable to their own setting (Creswell, 2013; Hendricks, 2013). I have provided my audience with a clear understanding of the context and modifications implemented during the study

### **Data Analysis**

This study used qualitative data analysis methods to code data into themes, then categories to interpret the emergent themes that reflect my attempts to enact changes. This grounded theory approach included constant comparative analysis and triangulation of sources to thoroughly investigate important themes that emerged during the study (Creswell, 2013). The analysis initially involved open and axial coding to organize data. I analyzed selected examples from the data by thematic categories. These categories led to inductive interpretations of the effects of both my own pedagogical moves and indicators of change among the TCs (Creswell, 2013).

I looked for the frequency and patterns of TC interaction while noting changes in the engagement levels during discussion. These sources provided an ongoing feedback loop that allowed me to reflect and modify structural aspects of the practicum coursework. I did not use teaching performance data because this study

involved an evolution of collaborative inquiry over time rather than a quantitative measurement of performance.

I compiled and sorted the data according to categories that related to my research questions. After compiling transcripts, artifacts and field notes, I organized them into categories that represented emerging themes. Using open coding categories, I identified central phenomena that best informed my research question. Once I determined the key themes from the data, I used axial coding to create specific categories that best corresponded to changes or modifications I made throughout the semester. A constant comparative analysis was done to develop understandings of emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1990). Analysis of categories and their interrelationships were used to make visible phenomena during the practicum experience.

### **Findings**

The data analysis procedures were guided by the research question of how a clinical educator might facilitate seminar dialogue that fosters collaborative exploration of practice. Based on the assumption that TC learning is a socially constructed dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981), our weekly seminar provided the primary source of data to examine how our group of nine TCs and myself addressed teaching challenges and corresponding issues at the host school site. In this effort, I examined observational, artifact and inquiry data with a grounded theory approach to identify themes related to problem solving efforts during our interactions. Themes that revealed instances of collaborative problem solving were organized and interpreted to

make more valid assertions about what occurred during my facilitation of the seminar.

Using an iterative process of data review, I initially coded twenty-one subcategories organized under four reoccurring seminar themes titled pedagogy, host school relations, logistics and seminar dynamics. This list of codes emerged after reviewing data sources weekly to identify the significant phenomena occurring across multiple data sources. During subsequent reviews of data, the logistics theme and its six subcategories were merged with host school relations while several subcategories were combined leaving a total of eighteen. I also combed through the data to identify and reflect on modifications and changes implemented over the course of a semester. Instances of collaboration during seminars were corroborated with complementary data sources including field notes, informal interviews and online interactions to increase the validity of interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The analysis process reflected a professional journey that sought to engage the TCs in problem solving discussions and continuous reflections about their teaching practices. It was an inconsistent, fitful start to the semester in terms of lacking a clear, integrated seminar approach that leveraged the value of collaboration and student-led discussion agendas.

As part of the action research cycle (Hendricks, 2013), I reflected and synthesized a long series of seemingly isolated interactions into a more coherent understanding of the telling moments during the study. In this action research study, the data illuminated some initial predictions while revealing some unexpected and rather uncomfortable aspects of my practice. Triangulated inquiry, artifact and

interview data showed both positive developments in terms of collaboration later in the semester as well as areas for future improvement.

The timeline below (Table 1) illustrates the seminar discussion topics, thematic coding and modifications made for the critical weeks sampled for the study. The discussion topics in Weeks 1,3, 6 and 12 were selected for analysis because they contained instrumental points during the study when I made modifications to the seminar protocols. The adjacent category section lists the major thematic code used during analysis. Lastly, the seminar modifications section summarizes changes made during the corresponding week. This is a preview of the seminar’s evolution that will be explained in further detail throughout this chapter.

*Table 1: Discussion Topics & Modifications*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Discussion Topics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Seminar Modification</b>
Week 1	Classroom Placement Roles & Responsibilities English as a Second Language (ESL)	- Host School Relations - Host School Relations - Pedagogy	
Week 3	- Classroom Management - Formative assessment - Pacing	- Host school relations - Pedagogy - Pedagogy	- Invite faculty - Online discussion - Student led agenda
Week 6	- Classroom Management - Differentiation	- Pedagogy - Host school relations - Pedagogy	- Observation feedback expanded to seminar discussion
Week	-Classroom management - University assignments	- Pedagogy - Pedagogy	None



12	-Student engagement -Technology (applications)	- Host school relations	
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In the chart above, the “seminar modifications” column were the significant turning points in the study in which I made changes to the facilitation of our weekly meetings. I included only Weeks 1,3,6 and 12 because they either contained a modification or revealed triangulated instances of progress towards a more collaborative, student-led dialogue. The “discussion topics” column lists the student chosen topics for the week while the category column represents coding theme and primary category used during my the analysis. The seminar topics and categories should help the reader understand the chronology and seminar dynamics described below in the analysis section.

The seminar dynamics theme, although a major category, was not represented in the chart because it was not aligned with one particular seminar. The seminar dynamics represented aspects of the seminar that included modifications and facilitation of the meetings in an ongoing attempt toward a more collaborative problem solving discourse. The modifications were implemented over time as I identified problems that constrained our dialogue and the learning potential during the seminars.

**Seminar Dynamics**

Borko, Whitcomb and Byrnes (2008) found that sociocultural context at host school sites demands an understanding of the unique day-to-day challenges facing the TCs. As their CE, I visited the host school once a week, which was not enough time to become familiar with their latest difficulties and immediate concerns. Not yet

understanding the potential for neither discussion nor the chronic time constraints, I began the semester with a top-down approach to the seminar in which I decided on and presented topics that I felt were needed. In Week 1, I told the TCs that were going to discuss ESL strategies and proceeded to present the topic for the majority of the seminar with little or no interaction with the TCs. It was a monologue-type approach rather than a collaborative dialogue. My supervisory style resembled research findings that described the discourse of supervision as often hierarchical, prescriptive and didactic (Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). This style hampered student input and eventually led in Week 3, to the creation of a shared decision-making process for choosing the seminar agenda. Initially, I gathered student input through informal inquiry but formalized the process with the university LMS or online discussion board (DB). My traditional style of direct presentation not only constrained dialogue among participants, but also did not promote the capacity for self-direction among the pre-service teachers (Zeichner, 2005). The goal was to give TCs a voice that allowed them to resolve problems of practice and gain more agency in their development (Cuenca, 2012). This lack of interactive dialogue lay at the heart of related challenges of helping TCs become more self-directed and start addressing issues of pedagogy. For example, seven out of nine TCs posted concerns and began a dialogue online about classroom management problems prior to the Week 3 seminar. When we sat down together during our meeting that week, the TCs continued sharing possible solutions with very little input from me. The seminar dynamics had begun to reflect a trend towards more self-driven attempts to address their problems of practice. The following sections provide a look

at the primary organizational and interpersonal challenges that I discovered and eventually attempted to fix.

**Discussion agenda and online feedback.** I began the semester with a prescriptive approach to the seminar with no student input into the topics for discussion. For both the elementary and middle school seminars, we met in an administrator's office and sat around a large rectangular table that is suitable space for discussion, but not utilized for the kind of dialogue it enabled. Instead, in the early meetings, I lectured with minimal effort to promote collaborative dialogue. The audio transcripts revealed that I spoke more than 50% of the time during Weeks 1 & 2, a decidedly non-collaborative trend that needed to change. Leading up to our meeting in Week 1, I posted an online question, "Using the attached Sheltered Instructional Protocol (SIOP) reading, please explain 2-3 ways you might support academic literacy and English language learners (ELLs) across content areas. Please respond to at least one other classmate." I had selected the SIOP reading as some background content, knowing the TCs had no previous coursework on the subject of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Knowing that approximately 20% of the host school students are non-native English speakers, this seemed to be a relevant topic, but was not yet aware that these students were clustered in a few select classes. I later learned through online reflection responses that seven out of nine TCs had no ELLs in their classrooms. My effort to present topics of practical value to the students in the first two weeks were of interest but did not promote much group discussion. It was a direct-teaching presentation style delivery with few questions and little interaction among the TCs.

In Week 1 seminar, the transcript showed that the majority of conversation was limited to two TCs and myself. James (elementary TC) and Andrea (elementary TC) contributed just over 50% of TC contributions while the principal and I spoke the rest of the time. Several participants dominated the discussion despite my efforts to re-direct conversation and encourage exchange. The reflection question was independent of the eventual seminar topic of classroom roles and responsibilities. Based on their feedback, the reflection question posted on the online university LMS was of immediate relevance to just two students. It was not explicitly connected to our weekly seminar and the topic did not reflect the actual classroom difficulties and confusion the TCs were facing. My presentation had concerned language acquisition strategies that were of limited value to a small portion of the TCs. As one TC, Jim, shared, “I have no ELLs and but see how these strategies might help” (Seminar transcript, Week 1). The Week 1 seminar transcript, online reflections and field notes all reveal that the students responded to questions based on supposition and the limited reading assignment rather than university study. After reviewing the seminar transcript and notes, it became clear there were little authentic connections to their limited experiences in the classroom. Donna (middle school math TC), who taught no ELLs, wrote on the discussion board, “I read something about ESL but would apply my understanding of academic language by using a word wall.” Corroborating postings and comments from the Week 1 seminar show an interest in language acquisition and academic literacy, but was a topic studied very little if at all in previous university coursework. So, the language acquisition strategies topic became more of a lecture from me and of not much interest to the TCs, regardless of its likely

long-term relevance. During seminar discussion that same week, the students who did have ELLs dominated the discussion leaving the others with little or nothing to share. This lack of engagement was related to an ill chosen discussion topic that I selected based on an incomplete understanding of the classroom demographics and not utilizing the online postings as a means to create the seminar agenda.

The seminar was meant to be a forum for problem solving in which all are encouraged to problematize their practice and provide feedback to peers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Miller, 2008). A major impediment to collaboration was a lack of participation and engagement among the participants. There was no explicit expectation or protocol for every TC to contribute to the discussion. Instead, there were a series of disjointed monologues by a two of nine participants who made little effort toward engaging their peers in dialogue although they seemed to be moving towards more collaboration in the online forum. Although my goal from the beginning was to choose topics relevant to TC concerns and classroom challenges, there was no initial connection between online reflection writing and discussion during seminars. I chose the discussion topics in the initial seminars based on what I thought the TCs needed rather than giving them the agency to take control of their own practice. This top-down approach was unproductive because my decisions did not align with TC learning needs that resulted in limited immediate relevance and low student engagement during the discussion.

Prompted by these apparent problems, I reviewed the Week 1 and 2 transcripts to confirm and decided to utilize the LMS forum as a source of student potential feedback loop. In Week 3 I tied the online forum directly to the seminar as a

means for generating future topics and reflection. Leading up to the Week 3 seminar, I posted the following: “Please post a problem of practice topic. It may be an extension of last week. Try to offer useful feedback to at least one peer and we will address 2-3 issues that you post during our seminar”. There was a corresponding increase in both student online responses with seven of the nine TCs responding to at least two peers. Liz (elementary TC) wrote, “I would like to talk about ideas for others ways to assess throughout the day”. Donna posted: “I have found that pacing is difficult at times, the time flies and I fall behind”. Responses to these posts showed widespread interest in pacing and formative assessment as discussion topics, so I created an agenda for the following Week seminars based on the feedback from the TCs. I continued this practice throughout the rest of the semester, as the TCs seemed to be moving towards more collaboration in the virtual forum. Integrating the LMS with the seminar was the first significant modification to the practicum and succeeded in extending problem solving peer-to-peer interactions to the seminar.

In consultation with the TCs during seminar in Week 2, we had agreed to use the discussion board to identify future topics and reflect on subjects of common interest. It should be noted that I had purposely decided not to include seminar agendas on the syllabus in the expectation that they would best be determined on a week to week basis through using my perception of classroom needs rather than feedback from the TCs. I created the agenda for the first two weeks (ESL and academic literacy) without student input, but five different TCs approached me with practical concerns about their responsibilities and teaching roles that changed these plans. These practical concerns included after school tutoring, lunch monitor duty and

how long to stay after school. This was the first indication that it was necessary to choose topics collaboratively. I added this logistical element at the last moment to my existing agenda and the transcript confirms this became the dominant topic of the Week 1 discussion. During the first week of the semester, my notes further revealed that the TCs asked me for clarification about their day-to-day responsibilities and role as a co-teacher. This became a topic of continual discussion over the course of the semester. They were confused about their role in the classroom because the host school was not clear and so they needed my intervention as the supervisor to clarify the expectations. I responded to the TCs' needs by meeting with the elementary and middle school principals to resolve these misunderstandings such as after school duties and teaching time in the classroom. I began to regularly visit with them and eventually decided to periodically invite administrators and faculty to join our seminar discussions to improve communication. This Week 1 discussion topic was the first indication of the importance of my duties as a liaison with the host school for logistical matters and gave me the idea of using the LMS for setting the seminar agenda.

Initially, the LMS was used solely for reflection on questions that I posted after the meetings, such as asking about existing knowledge of English for Speaker of Other Languages (ESL) during Week 1. The LMS or online forum became a vital tool in which the students were required to respond to at least three of their peers while I monitored and added my own feedback to the online interaction. After two or three days, I identified one or two of the most popular issues to use in the subsequent seminar discussion that were selected from the TC posts on the LMS. I made the

ultimate selection of topics, but these choices came directly from issues determined by at least three of the TCs. For the rest of the semester, TCs decided what the topics would be each week. Data from the LMS, seminar transcripts and observational conferences show that the top areas of concern were classroom management, differentiation, assessment, pacing and matters related to their CT.

Opening up the online forum to student input, was the first significant modification made to the practicum protocols that integrated the online component with our seminar. The initial instance, in Week 3, of students using the LMS to voice their concerns and brainstorm seminar topics elicited 40 responses from the nine TCs. The high volume resulted from multiple exchanges between TCs rather than solely a response to me, which was the trend in the first two weeks of the semester in which the volume of posts was around 20. The higher volume of online peer interaction continued for the remainder of the study. This integration of online topics became a regular practice with positive results evident throughout the study. Data from the online posts show that from Weeks 3-12, the topics the TCs initiated were continued during subsequent seminars. We were able to extend time spent on particularly vexing issues that were most problematic for TCs. The online posts gave students a chance to begin unraveling their understandings of teaching and then articulate their thoughts in seminar with peers through dialogue. It is not measured, but the increased interaction during seminars after connection to the online forum may have strengthened their ability to reflect and then co-construct new ideas and knowledge of their practice. Over the course of the semester, our discussions included pedagogical issues that did not always originate from the online forum, but rather through the



three classroom observations I conducted. What began as a problem with having enough time to conduct pre and post observation conferences eventually became the second significant change to our seminar structure.

**From observation to seminar.** All of the TCs had begun varying degrees of classroom teaching by Week 6, so their problems of practice had become an increasingly stressful topic of nervous discussion for them. The initial discussion of classroom management took place in Week 3 with dialogue about the TCs perceived challenges rather than authentic classroom experiences. So when the topic came up again in Week 6, it was based on real experiences they had begun encountering as the lead teacher instructing often without the support of their CT. A particular source of frustration found was the inability of the TCs to handle disruptive and inattentive students who felt that since their regular teacher was not in the room, they didn't have to listen or participate. A lack of engagement and disrespectful behaviors were a source of problems for all nine TCs based on their reflections and my classroom observations. Following an observation of Ron's (middle school math TC) class during Week 6, he turned to me after the lesson and said, "I hope it doesn't hurt my grade, but there are many students who don't listen to me". Another TC, Andrea, warned me that she has no direction from the CT so makes up the lesson the best she can. These comments were made in addition to the online responses that mirrored their concerns. The seminar topic for the week, classroom management again, was student-driven with their feedback to me coming through both observations and multiple postings to the online prompt for Week 6 that stated:

Please post again on a problem of practice topic. It may be an extension of last week or something new. (i.e. pacing, target vocabulary, classroom management etc.). Try to offer useful feedback to at least one peer and we will address 2-3 issues that you have posted during our seminar.

Kate (elementary TC) posted the comment: “We have students in our class too that don't do their work and don't seem to care. I feel like sometimes you can't motivate them”. This post along with similar comments about her concerns about unruly students prior to an observation led to our choice of classroom management as the seminar topic. In response, I assigned a reading from “Teach Like a Champ” that we later discussed and invited the principal of the elementary school to provide some strategies for the TCs to use. In addition, the principal agreed to communicate these problems to the CTs’. The CTs’ later spoke to their respective students about respecting the TCs who had full authority to discipline like the regular faculty. So, by Week 6, both the LMS and observations, formal and informal were being utilized in an integrated manner to maintain a feedback loop that gave students the opportunity to collaborate with one another while keep me abreast of ongoing issues in their practice. Although there were only three formal, summatively assessed observations, I usually visited a few classrooms each week for formative, informal visits.

The origin of the observation process modification concerned time constraints that often made pre and post observations conferences with the TCs difficult to conduct. Soslau (2012) in his study of the value of supervisory conferences found them to be critical to helping TCs learn adaptive reflective skills to address the changing needs in their classrooms. We had little time for this valuable dialogue, so

was often unable to provide adequate feedback during the briefing process. Often before and after classroom observations, I found myself meeting a student briefly in the hallway for a few minutes to ask questions about the TCs lesson goals and teaching performance. Field notes of classroom teaching observations from Weeks 1-5 showed that I only spent approximately five minutes talking with the TC before the lesson, twenty minutes observing and a few minutes to debrief following the observation. If the observed TC was able to do so, I asked them to meet with me fifteen minutes prior to and after the lesson. However, the TCs busy schedule prevented even this limited briefing time. In this excerpt from Week 4, I observed Andrea's 5<sup>th</sup> grade English class. She was the lead teacher and had no time to discuss the lesson goals prior to the class because her cooperating teacher was busy elsewhere. She managed to tell me it was a lesson on simile and metaphor but little else. After the class, an abbreviated post observation conference with Andrea typifies the problem.

Jerome (CE): How do you think the lesson went? You told me earlier the lesson goals were to teach metaphor and similes.

Andrea (elementary TC): I thought there were good and bad, so would love to talk but the kids are waiting for me. Could we talk later?

Andrea was visibly frustrated and was seeking some advice that was not being provided by her CT. This was a problem of not being able to provide feedback during conference and a lack of collaboration between the TC and myself to support her in these early independent teaching experiences.

The TC sent me a lesson plan before the observation and later wrote reflections on the LMS, but this was not a substitute for the one-to-one conference dialogue that provided a valuable opportunity to develop teaching expertise (Cuenca, 2011; Soslau, 2012). After the lesson, I provided notes to the TC using a university observation sheet, but most post lesson conferences were limited or not possible due to time constraints. Review of my observation notes confirmed that our conferences did not include extended discussion and little opportunity for the TC to reflect on their performance through dialogue. These hurried and incomplete observation conferences during the first round of observations caused me to reflect on possible solutions. I spoke with several of the CTs about allotting more time to conferences, but, they explained that the TCs were needed in the classroom because they were often the only instructor, having started independent teaching between Weeks 3-5. So, by the first round of formal observations, the CT was often not present for my observations. I encouraged the CTs to allow the TCs independent instructional time, but didn't realize that this also meant the CT might leave the room during class time, causing, what I soon discovered, a cause for classroom management problems that surfaced during seminar discussions. I realized the importance of feedback during these conferences but did not want to interrupt their teaching time. As this problem of became more acute, I decided to implement a modification to the process for the second and third rounds of observations.

The second round of observations occurred during Weeks 6 and 7. I contacted TCs prior to their observations and asked them if we could continue our conferences during the group seminar where we could leverage the collective knowledge of the

group to further discuss and attempt to collaboratively address perceived challenges. Group critique of their teaching performance was not the point and would not have been effective because the other TCs did not observe the lesson. This was designed as an opportunity for the observed TCs to articulate an aspect of their teaching with their peers in which they wanted feedback and complemented the chosen seminar topic. This modification served to offer the TCs additional feedback with both their peers and myself. This modification provided additional student input to the seminar agendas on topics that were of common interest, such as differentiation, with the other TCs. In most cases, the TCs agreed to share their post teaching reflections during our subsequent seminar. Here is a brief exchange from a Week 6 seminar in which the TC, Donna, agreed to share her thoughts. The TCs had chosen differentiation as the seminar topic for the week, so at the seminar later in the afternoon, I explained that during my observation of Donna we didn't have time for a post conference and would like to do so during our meeting. The students readily agreed and I prompted all attendees to try and give specific feedback to Donna.

Donna (middle school science TC): I seemed to have trouble distinguishing between differentiation and modification.

Chris (middle school math TC): Right, me too sometimes.

Jerome (CE): Differentiation is not an easy thing to implement.

Donna: I feel like they (university) glazed over it, it is hard to practice for real.

Ron (middle school math TC): Do you think about their learning styles when doing the lesson plan?

Jerome: Good point Ron. Donna, could you share how you tried to implement differentiated activities?

The dialogue continued for 10-15 minutes among middle school TCs who were able to give Donna some ideas for differentiating her next science lesson. Although I participated in the discussion and provided follow-up notes on the observation, the post observation conversation was largely a student led collaborative effort. Later in the same seminar, I re-directed our discussion to another TC, Ron (middle school math) who I had also asked if we could extend our post observation conference during the seminar. He agreed so when I prompted him, he explained his thoughts and reflection on his performance earlier in the day.

Jerome: So Ron, you mentioned to me that you have a question that you could share from your class.

Ron: Yes, I usually have small group activities that are specifically designed for different levels, but not sure about how to choose the groups. Can anyone tell me how you use small group work if at all and how you choose them?

Chris: I have mixed groups, but it's not a common practice in our class. My CT doesn't really think it's useful in math. If I did then it would be mixed ability.

Donna: Me too, mixed ability is the way to go. You need an anchor with higher ability to help those who are lagging.

Ron: I'm not so sure-I have done both and actually Ms. Smith (pseudonym) usually wants similar levels together.

Jerome: Thanks for that feedback. Ron, I noticed you worked with students who were having trouble with the lesson.

Ron: Yes, today, the CT asked me to work with them specifically to get them caught up with the others.

This interaction is emblematic of seminars with the elementary TCs during the third observation during Week 12. Notes and transcripts show that peers responded with possible solutions in each case that I introduced observation feedback. This was not something I coerced TCs to do. In every instance, I asked them to do so voluntarily and made it clear that it would not have an impact on their evaluation. The other TCs willingly engaged in tackling problems of practice that they themselves likely encountered. This modification was made to address the logistical problem of not having enough time. However, what initially was an attempt to compensate for a lack of conference time resulted in a more collaborative approach to giving TCs more feedback. The group feedback related to observations complemented my written field notes that contained the primary feedback to the TC. Based on conversations with TCs, incorporating individual observations into the seminar was well received. An elementary TC, Kate, commented, "It's good to know I am not alone in having problems with managing my kids". In response to my question about whether he would be embarrassed to share his teaching experience with the group, Don said, "I feel like I can trust these guys to give me good advice". Whether or not their peers gave them pedagogically sound advice is almost a moot point because these seminar dialogues allowed the TCs to begin examining and analyzing their own practice.

This modification for the observation addressed a problem with conference time while aligning with my overall goal of collaborative inquiry. As Cuenca (2012) noted in his study of clinical educators, “leveraging dialogue to develop voice, supervisors can help student teachers unravel some of the developing tacit understandings of the work of teaching, schooling and clarify the relationship between intention and practice” (p.23). In this aspect of the practicum, I utilized the observation notes to share problems of practice with a wider audience of peers to give the TCs better ideas for improvement. Although these extensions of the observation conference were not comprehensive, they did provide fifteen to twenty minutes for each TC to become the focus of attention and receive feedback from both peers and myself. The TCs decided which aspect of their teaching performance to share with the group, so were not subjected to unwanted scrutiny from peers unless they chose to do so. By bringing the lesson observations into the seminar, I facilitated the collaborative discussion of authentic teaching experiences. I encouraged the other TCs to treat the observational discussions as a means to help the TC in question reflect on their performance through nonjudgmental, yet critical and specific questions. This was not meant to test the TCs ability to transmit textbook knowledge of pedagogy, but an attempt to promote professional growth through engaged dialogue on commonly shared topics of interest. As the facilitator, my goal was to solve a problem of logistics as well as provide more robust feedback through the addition of peer - based input.

**Movement from teacher-led to collaborative discourse.** Dillon (1994) described discussion as a group interaction in which members collaborate on question



of shared concern by exchanging views and knowledge. The integration of the LMS forum was an effort towards this goal for the seminar. Our meetings were meant to be a group dialogue with each participant speaker taking turns to address shared classroom concerns. Participation in the seminars was not explicitly assessed, but rather a subjective overall evaluation of professionalism partially reflected in their engagement that was worth points in the final grade. The expectation was that group members offered feedback about specific concerns voiced by the speaker. There was no specific turn taking protocol following my initial presentation so often I filled lulls in the discussion with prompts such as, “Could someone share how this affects their teaching?” My prompts were vague and the TCs did not really understand how the discussion should proceed. Analysis of the transcript and field notes during the Weeks 1 and 2 revealed seminars with a series of monologues with little response to the stated problem or interaction among the TCs. Instead, each speaker told his or her own narrative directed to me rather than offering a remedy or possible solution to the concerns of a peer. There was a series of dyadic exchanges between me and the TC and no interaction among other students. These individual narratives represent a self-centered style to the discussion and a lack of collaborative, empathetic exchanges. At one point in Week 1 seminar, Andrea retold episodes from her class for twenty minutes with no input from her peers. The narratives were related to the stated discussion topic, in this case ESL, but interaction came mainly from me interjecting with probing questions or short acknowledgements. As a discussion facilitator, I failed to engage the TCs in a group dialogue with protocols necessary for problem-based discussion. By Week 6, after using the LMS (online forum) for three weeks, the

student driven agendas demonstrated a more equitable distribution of speaking time and interaction among the TCs.

Although there were no modifications to the seminar in Weeks 4 and 5, the field notes and transcripts reveal a higher level of interaction between the TCs in both weeks. The TCs chose the topics and by Week 6, I was able to identify multiple instances of increased peer-to-peer collaboration. An exchange between two TCs on the Week 6 discussion board thread illustrated the effectiveness of the LMS while also indicating a movement towards more collaboration. Kate (elementary TC) expressed her concerns about managing behaviors and leading the reading groups. Liz (elementary TC) responds with advice that illustrates a mutual effort to resolve a problem of practice. Below is their exchange that was just one excerpt among multiple responses to Kate's concern:

Kate: After a rocky beginning to last week (teaching), this week has gone by much better. I think my main concerns are in teaching Guided Reading and classroom management. I fell like even after all the classes we've taken to prepare for these two subjects, that I am still unsure about what I'm doing.

Liz: Hey there. I had a successful experience with classroom management that I thought I would share.

The two TCs, Kate and Liz, began a dialogue that grew with input from several other peers to examine classroom management strategies. This was a topic of great interest to them and included both pedagogical and affective elements of frustration that can be seen in Kate's statement about not knowing what she is doing. Frustration and doubts were evident in pre-conference observations as well. During the first round of

observations, seven out the nine TCs expressed concern with managing student behaviors or keeping them engaged. Prior to an observation of Chris (middle school math), he told me to expect some problems with students, “I hope you understand that there are some students who are difficult. My CT won’t be in the class so don’t know what to expect.” His statement and similar concerns from others were identified in the classroom observation, shared on the LMS and subsequently discussed in the seminar.

Overall, by expanding the use of the online discussion board as a platform for preliminary selection and discussion of seminar topics, participation levels and collaboration increased. Kate and Liz’s online exchange illustrated more collaborative dialogue and was corroborated by a separate middle school seminar. The elementary and middle school TCs shared the same online forum (LMS) so the discussion topics were the same. The Week 6 middle school seminar also continued the LMS topic of classroom management where the students share their views regarding how to best manage bad behaviors and keep the students engaged.

Donna: Guys, I have had it with students goofing off and would love to know how you guys handle difficult students.

Ron: My co-teacher asks me to take them out in the hallway to work one-on-one or in a small group.

Donna: Well that might work for you but I am alone in the class these days so that wouldn’t work for me.

Chris (middle school math): I suggest using a reward system for good behavior...

Donna: I understand and have tried that but some students just don't care about rewards.

The TCs controlled this conversation without my attempts to correct them with the common supervisor dominated discourse that Guyton and McIntyre (1990) called monologic, uncritical and prescriptive. This was a sustained dialogue where peers tried to give Donna practical suggestions for classroom management. I had used the threads from the LMS to extend the discussion into our seminar in an attempt to be more topically relevant to pedagogical problems and approach these issues in a more intentional, collaborative manner. In my opening address to the TCs for the Week 6 elementary seminar, I began with the following words:

I want to continue the idea that we initially identify (online) where we all share an interest or common challenges, not just John's or Ron's, but things we can all relate to and then try to come up with solutions or ideas for improving in that area of practice if that makes sense. I think we can find common ground that way no matter what grade. Whether it's about how to support ELLs with the ESL specialist or classroom management. Now that you're doing more teaching and have more independent leadership roles it is important we help each other. (Seminar Excerpt, Week 6)

My introductory remark was the longest statement I made during the whole seminar. What followed was a remarkably more dynamic, engaged discourse from a wider variety of participants. The integration of the discussion board into our meetings in combination with a student led agenda resulted in a more collaborative seminar.

Our subsequent discussion focused on classroom management and maintaining student engagement. This discussion was a continuation of the discussion board while evolving into related issues. I was able to step back and talk less while the TCs maintained more of the dialogue. This seminar served as a watershed moment when I realized that the seminar could effectively become what Roth and Tobin (2004) termed a “third space”. A third space is an environment where discourse for the TCs is not constrained by power relations with a CT or myself as the supervisor. The participants began cooperating to solve a problem of practice, in this case classroom management and pacing strategies that would increase student engagement. I provided an introductory prompt by asking someone to begin with a personal experience that the others might then respond to with possible solutions. Otherwise, my role was limited to politely reminding the TCs not to monopolize the discussion and offer solutions to peers. These gradually more collaborative discussions flowed when I integrated the discussion board to give the students more input into a more structured agenda setting process. As you can see in the following exchange, several of the TCs pooled their intellectual resources to address classroom management issues, first agreed upon in the discussion board and then discussed during the subsequent seminar without any direct involvement from me:

Andrea (elementary TC): They are aware that we are student teachers, as soon as she (TC) leaves the room it crazy, but as soon as she walks back in you could hear crickets, they are totally quiet.

James (elementary TC): It takes me like five or seven minute just to get them to quiet down.

Andrea: That's where all the time goes.

Liz (elementary TC): I don't know if this will work, but my teacher and I use tick marks. So every time they make her wait, she does a tick mark on the board. They take time off their recess if they get five marks.

Andrea: This past week, our class spent the whole time sitting out recess because of their bad behavior.

Don (elementary TC): This doesn't sound like it helps you.

Andrea: No, because they don't care, I've tried team points if their quiet.

Kate (elementary TC): If they are going to waste your time and others chance to learn, then you should send those ones out who cause the most problems.

Liz: This reminds me of an UMSL course; do you guys remember 'whole brain teaching'?

The trend of more collaborative discourse continued for the remainder of the seminar with less input from me. I did not fully disengage from the discussion but continued to acknowledge their statements with prompts for elaboration, redirected them when conversation veered off topic and add insights I might have based on observations or research literature on a subject. Overall, participation was becoming more evenly distributed with a sharp increase in engagement. As another indicative example, during Week 12 we discussed university practicum assignments. Leading up to the seminar, I received several email questions about problems fulfilling their final reports on a set of particular focus students. I helped these individual students by showing them previous case study examples and clarifying the assignment goals. I also asked them to post online for additional peer feedback that could be further

discussed during the subsequent seminar. Several of the TCs proceeded to post their questions and began a dialogue, In the following excerpt, we have continued the online discussion thread during the seminar. I am trying to provide guidance while allowing the TCs to continue their own strategies for the assignment.

Jerome: You guys have begun dealing with your questions on focus students and charting their progress.

Andrea: Yes, I posted my question and several people tried answering my questions.

Don: Yes, I hope my input helped, it may be wrong though, not sure.

Jerome: Well, I read your response and that was one way to graphically represent your data.

Kate: Did you see my response? I am going to use line graphs and group assignments by subject area.

Our conversation continued with me modeling some possible options for representing data and asking the other TCs to share their own choices for the assignment. They did so and helped those with questions to make decisions about their own work.

### **Host School Relations**

**Liaison role.** Topics of seminar discussion usually related to either pedagogical strategies or the roles and responsibilities of the TCs in the classroom. However, relations with the host school also encompass an ongoing series of administrative tasks and troubleshooting, so I found myself increasingly acting as a liaison between the university teacher education program and host school. In fact, transcripts show that every single seminar involved aspects of this topic. The findings

show that every seminar contained at least a few minutes of these duties. This finding is consistent with Cuenca (2012) who explained that in his role as CE, he often conveyed CT uncomfortable or negative feedback to the TCs particularly in the early weeks before relationships were developed.

The first two weeks of the semester were almost exclusively devoted to figuring out the details of their day-to-day roles and responsibilities, while also getting to know the routines of the school. Although my liaison role came as no surprise, I realized that instead of relaying information individually to the TCs, this communication could take place during the seminar. It is a delicate role fraught with uncomfortable conversations, so to reduce any misunderstandings, I decided to invite faculty and staff to our seminar for administrative and pedagogical purposes.

This role demands diplomacy and tact to clarify and communicate expectations to both the TCs and host school personnel such as the CT and administrators. I anticipated serving in this capacity, but did not realize the difficulties of handling the politically charged, sensitive issues that emerged. From the start, there were concerns about classroom placement, teaching opportunities and extracurricular duties. Our discussions regarding the TCs role and responsibilities were done privately when too sensitive, but in Week 3, I brought these issues into the seminar for group discussion. This included their teaching experiences, relationships with faculty and extracurricular activities. At times, the expectations were not clear and became a source of frustration. When the principal asked me to recruit TCs for lunch monitor duty, I brought it up in the seminar. The brief exchange below occurred when a TC resisted signing up for duty.



Don (middle school TC): She (CT) was like you can't leave and I told her I would talk to you about it and she said I'll also talk to Jerome about it if I have to, but she really doesn't want me to leave (for lunch duty).

Jerome: I am relaying the principal's request. Lunch duty is a part of school life.

Don: I agree, I'm not trying to get out of anything.

Jerome: Okay, that's cool. I'll deal with it.

In this excerpt, I am in a difficult position because Don's CT told him that he doesn't have to do lunch duty. However, the principal told me to handle this and that no one was exempt. This was a politically charged situation in which I did not know how to proceed. Field notes confirmed that situation such as this arose on multiple occasions. In this case, the misunderstanding about out of class responsibilities was eventually resolved through the intervention of the principal, but I was in the middle of a very uncomfortable situation. The seminar served as a venue where this type of sensitive situation initially could emerge and which was eventually resolved when the principal visited our meeting.

There were also problematic relationships between CTs and TCs that demanded my intervention. A particularly difficult situation arose between Ron (middle school math) and his placement with a particularly uncooperative CT. Previous research demonstrated that the relationship between the CT and TC is critical to successful teacher development (Cornell, 2003; Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2010a), so when problems arose, it was incumbent on me to help resolve the problem. In his study of CT/TC relationships, Hsien-Liu (2013) found that the most

common complaint voiced by interviewees concerned a lack of teaching opportunities. This is precisely the problem I encountered with Ron in his middle school math class.

Ron first approached me privately to explain his problem during Week 5 and asked if we could talk about it with his peers during the seminar. In our subsequent seminar, I introduced the topic and Ron explained the situation to his two middle school peers in attendance. He explained his placement in his math classroom and how difficult it was to develop a rapport and a functional working relationship with Ms. H. More importantly to him, she was not providing adequate teaching opportunities aside from small group tutoring. This was the second semester of a yearlong placement and it was time for the TCs whole class teaching sessions. In this case, the Ms. H not only severely limited his opportunities to teach, but also questioned his content knowledge and treated him like a “lost puppy”. I did not agree with this assessment of his content knowledge and felt him ready for whole class instructional opportunities. The seminar was a place for Ron to find empathy from his peers and express his frustration.

Ron (math middle school TC): I’ve tried to talk to her but she doesn’t listen to me a lot of times. She refuses to deviate from the book for a second. She is very protective of her class and doesn’t trust me.

Chris (math middle school TC): That’s too bad, have you talked to her about it?

Ron: Yes, but she only wants me to grade papers and tutor these two or three students in the hall.

Deanne (science middle school TC): Well, I think you should try to explain that teaching is part of the deal with being a CT.

JB: I will talk to her about this and we will talk again.

This exchange represents a severe case, but the transcript and field note data reveal weekly instances in which I served as an intermediary to help with problems and unclear expectations between the CT and TC. Usually the TC would raise their concern in the seminar and I would then approach the relevant host school person. For Ron, I spoke with Ms. H and then with the principal about the situation. With the consent of the principal and agreement from another math teacher, we moved Ron to another classroom. In my role, I respected the CT's prerogative to decide on teaching time for as long as possible, but it became a hindrance to Ron's learning and his ability to complete university assignments. These meetings with host school faculty took place in weeks 5-6 of the semester and led to my realization that every seminar led to some discussion of emotions and opinions about their relationships.

In addition to supporting pedagogical and administrative aspects of the clinical experience, the CE should be a personal confidante and advocate to the TC (Zimpher, deVoss, & Nott, 1980). In trying to understand my role as an advocate, I reviewed the observational notes and transcripts and found that the at least one TC used the seminar as a forum to air their frustrations with not just the teaching experience, but to discuss their interactions with the CT. During a post observation conversation that continued in the Week 8 seminar, Andrea told me, "I don't get much guidance with lessons from her (CT), and so I am not sure if this lesson was any good." This affective type of discussion to resolve interpersonal issues became a

regular occurrence during seminar. Another student Jim didn't agree his CT's constant criticism and he asked me if this was normal. I recognized this need and tried to be a source of support as well an intermediary with the faculty and administration. For Andrea, I spoke privately with her CT and asked if she could provide more explicit learning goals to follow, which she did the following day. In Jim's situation, I discovered that his CT was quite happy with his work and just wanted to be help him improve. I explained to her how Jim felt and the CT began giving him more positive feedback. They developed a better working relationship in subsequent weeks. Interacting with faculty and regular visits with each school principal became a regular part of my day by Week 6.

A visit to the middle school principal during Week 7 illustrates how being a conduit between the administration and TCs became part of my role. In this situation, Principal Jones (pseudonym) asked if I could remind the TCs that out of class duties are expected from faculty and that tutors were needed after school. Field notes reveal that none of the TCs had volunteered, so I was asked to recruit using my authority as their supervisor. I informed the principal that I could not force them to work into the evening but agreed that some extracurricular duties would be appropriate. In this case I advocated for their need to attend university classes and conduct other personal business.

Faculty and administrators occasionally participated in our seminars at my invitation to add local knowledge of host school practices and provide expert opinions. Realizing the limits of my pedagogical knowledge and the particular needs of the host schools, I invited teachers and the principals from the elementary and

middle schools to join us in Weeks 4,5,6 and 8 to offer insights into both pedagogical strategies as well as school practices that were best explained by those with intimate knowledge of the school culture and specific learning needs. Based on feedback from my prompt on the discussion board, students told me they wanted about differentiation and accommodation strategies, so in Week 6 case I invited a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. C. (elementary teacher) to join us and explain how she implements her strategies.

Ms. C: I'm going to show you some things I do in my classroom and give you some things. What do you view differentiation as?

Don: When you gotta make some kind of change depending on their needs I guess.

Kate: Like when a kid needs extra help when everyone else is doing independent work, you take a few (students) aside, mostly in a group. Like guided reading-isn't cooperative learning when everyone has a role?

Ms. C: Right, so differentiation should be meeting them where they are at and accommodation are things you put in place to help them be successful.

Liz: So could you define the difference between modification and differentiation again?

Ms. C: Sure...

Jerome: So Liz, during my observation today, I noticed you using some differentiation strategies. I think many of you are differentiating already but not sure how to articulate what you're doing.

Ms. C continued for 30 minutes with a mix of presenting strategies while asking an occasional question for the group. My role was minimal during this time, but in this excerpt and other faculty visits, I spoke when the visiting teacher was not allowing interaction. I also tried to encourage reticent TCs to contribute to the dialogue. In an effort to make the meeting more interactive, I interjected and used observation notes to relate individual examples to help demonstrate Ms. C's points. This faculty visit illustrated how we could integrate discussion board postings for setting the agenda while also expanding our collaboration beyond usual group of TCs and myself.

**Connecting theory to practice.** In their study of clinical experiences, Everston, Howley, and Zlotnik (1985) asserted that TCs often model their CT's practices and do not learn to apply university-learned theory to their classroom teaching. By inviting administrators and CTs to the seminar, I hoped to foster better stronger relationships with the host school and provide a means to bridge the gap between university based course knowledge and their current practical classroom challenges (Gravatt & Ramsaroop, 2015). During our seminars I asked TCs to share both positive and negative impression of their CTs teaching decisions in order to critique pedagogical decision-making. In Week 1, I unilaterally chose ESL and academic literacy with the goal to discuss understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2007) based on any relevant coursework at the university and my assigned homework reading concerning the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short; 2007). The discussion began and I discovered that none of the students had ever studied how to specifically teach ESL or how to address cross-cultural competence in teaching.

This was before transforming the seminar structure to let TCs choose the topics. Regardless, the findings are of interest because despite having ESL specialists to support them, the TCs reported having no ESL training and were unprepared to teach non-native speaker of English with appropriate strategies. The university policy has since added coursework in ESL as part of teacher preparation, but this illustrated a critical area of practical pedagogical that was not being met at university. English language learners (ELLs) comprised roughly 20% of the host school population so although an unusually high percentage, this was a learning need for the practicum students that was well chosen. There is a place for CEs to supplement pedagogical theory for the demands of the host school. The transcript demonstrated that the students either were not familiar or felt unprepared to teach using strategies for developing academic literacy and ESL. This gap between university based knowledge and existing classroom needs concerned me, so I began assigning readings to help address these areas of concern. Our subsequent discussion included learning from the ESL specialist who visited our seminar and encouraged me to later integrate faculty as a regular part of the agenda. In this seminar excerpt, I begin the discussion with perspective on the need for ESL.

Jerome: I think it would help you a lot now and in the future if you try to work with the ESL specialist to understand how they go about supporting the classroom teacher. You might discuss ways the ESL person could support your lesson.

Andrea: I found that all the stuff that we do for ELL modifications helps the low learners so much more with like all the visuals manipulatives.

The other TCs proceeded to explain literacy challenges for their students, regardless of their first languages. It proved to be an engaging and productive discussion, although a topic that held little immediate value to the TCs. After beginning to choose their own topics, I began to look for supplementary readings from *Teach Like a Champ* by Lemov (2010) to help TCs make the connection between theory and practice. This is a practical book with research-supported advice for various teaching issues.

In Week 6, the TCs had selected differentiation as our seminar topic, so I supplemented our discussion with a reading also from *Teach Like a Champion* by Lemov (2010) and invited a faculty member to join our seminar and share some of her strategies. She was a 5<sup>th</sup> grade veteran with 10 years of experience who offered practical advice to the students that accompanied the reading. In a total of five seminars, I added readings that pertained to the seminar topics. Chris (middle school math) told me that the readings were “helpful and offered a complementary research based understanding to the practical problems in the classroom.” This was not considered a major modification to the seminar but a change to the selection readings that I chose based on the emerging needs. The reading component of the course is an element that serves to supplement rather than initiate new knowledge, which is the role the limited selections played over the course of the semester.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Supervising TCs with an inquiry-based approach to problem solving is about connecting thought and action (Cochran-Smith, 2003). As a clinical educator for nine teacher candidates in this action research study, I attempted to improve structural and



communicative problems in order to facilitate a more collaborative dialogue during our weekly seminar. The findings demonstrate there was movement toward a group effort to address classroom challenges in our seminar. The goals of our weekly meetings initially included pedagogical topics of my choosing that I would present with some discussion, but led by me in more traditional teaching style. The TCs answered my questions related to the seminar presentation and shared some of their own experiences but not in an interactive manner. Usually the discussion such as it was occurred as a series of dyadic exchanges between the TC and myself. A significant discovery occurred when the TCs expressed their own ideas about our agenda and the topics of discussion. The seminar gradually became a collective decision making process that reflects previous researchers call for teacher preparation programs with a closer approximation to more authentic teaching responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009) Our discussion topics included expected teaching challenges such as differentiation and assessment but the surprise came in regard to issues with the host school such as classroom placement and scheduling that the TCs consistently questioned. Acting in response to feedback asking for changes, my original plans for the seminar evolved in order to accommodate these both pedagogical and the various administrative and host school relations issues.

A key lesson is having the flexibility to change in response to unforeseen developments whether they are structural elements of the coursework or teaching style. I investigated the seminar processes, procedures and my overall approach to the university supervisory role in order to identify specific areas of both teaching and out

of class host school relations that could be modified to accommodate a fluid situation. I steadily moved away from my initial approach to the seminar that was a top down, didactic style that constrained student interaction and an effective feedback loop. I listened to student feedback, reflected and implemented changes to increase TC engagement and address more salient issues. In this process, I discovered that participants were concerned with not just pedagogical challenges, but also logistical and relationship questions about the host school. Guided by the research of Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) and Bakhtin (1981), the seminar came to resemble a space where the TCs were actively responsive to one another in addressing their emerging problems of practice both in and out of the classroom. The seminar gave all students an opportunity to express their own concerns while eventually moving toward helping one another by offering solutions. The TCs began co-constructing answers to shared problems of practice and did so without always looking to me as the primary source of knowledge. Admittedly, there were multiple times when I was not prepared to help, especially in math and science, because of my limited background knowledge. It should be understood that CEs cannot be content experts nor claim intimate knowledge of the day-to-day classroom dynamics, so it makes practical sense to allow the TCs the latitude to lead discussions.

This study's research question addresses how a CE might better facilitate dialogue for pre-service teachers. The study began with the realization that changes were needed in response to unanticipated problems of organization and a misguided, teacher - centric approach to my role as the CE. However, through more structured protocols and authentic discussion topics based on real classroom scenarios, the TCs

identified topics that empowered them to take more control of their learning needs. My role transformed into that of a facilitator and advocate who served to guide the discussions rather than control them. By creating a more conducive forum through increased dialogue, the TCs took an active role in determining what was important to their practice and needed to be discussed during our meetings. Although some of our seminar time involved coursework requirements such as lesson plans, this was not the focus nor source of the initial problems. This study examined a series of changes that involved learning about how to help the TCs with both pedagogical problems as well as adjusting to the host school culture. My role as the CE became an attempt to create what has been referred to as a “third space” that provided a forum for TCs to integrate academic and practitioner knowledge (Roth & Tobin, 2004; Zeichner, 2010).

The TC choices of pedagogical discussion topics provided a lens through which I explored instances of facilitating dialogue. On a broader level, we attempted to bridge a gap between theory and practice through problem - oriented collaborative dialogue. This gap became relevant early in the study based on TC feedback, thus confirming research findings by the National Research Council (2010) who called for a closer connection between theoretical university coursework and real world contexts. This study supports the assertion that teacher education may be at times too theoretical, often lacking practical understandings of how to apply concepts to the classroom (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010). The participant TCs shared their confusion during our seminars regarding their university coursework knowledge and feedback from CTs who contradicted this knowledge. This appears to also confirm earlier research that found university

coursework that lacked authentic connections to what is actually changing and happening in the classroom (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Grossman, 2008). The transfer of university knowledge to classroom practice proved to be a significant challenge for TCs in the study. The dynamics of the host school culture and student population presented unique classroom challenges that often required an approach unfamiliar to the TCs. Examples in the study included classroom management and differentiating for linguistically diverse classrooms. The feedback from CTs was university coursework was insufficient and so felt unprepared at times. The clinical experience and seminar could serve to supplement existing pedagogical knowledge and teaching strategies when needed. Although limited in its scope, the seminar offers the forum to so.

Utilizing the action research cycle (Hendricks, 2013) to identify areas for improvement, I gave the TCs a voice in determining which pedagogical issues were most critical. Initially, my student observations and online discussion board were separate, disconnected elements of the practicum interactions with the TCs. However, after integrating them into the seminar, they played a critical role in strengthening my understanding of their learning needs. The discussion board became a critical element in providing not only reflection opportunities, but also a chance for the TCs to begin co-constructing solutions to problems that were often of common interest. To facilitate better communication, I integrated the online forum into the feedback process while extending pre and post observation conferences for further discussion in the seminar. The observation conferences were hampered by time constraints so something had to be done. After an initial success with Donna (Elementary TC),

continuing these incomplete conferences in the group seminar setting became an effective way to make our discussion more relevant to current TCs concerns.

By also integrating online reflections and peer-to-peer interactions with our physical meetings, we benefited from a more coordinated, interconnected space for TCs to talk about their experiences with one another and learn about the local school community. It became clear from the initial torpor of the seminar that teacher practicum should empower the TCs with a voice while the CE should step back to facilitate problem solving dialogue rather than dictating pedagogical solutions to teaching problems. I sought to facilitate a discussion forum (both physical and online) so the candidates could examine their burgeoning practice and take control of the classroom decision-making process. I also added readings to the LMS based on areas of pedagogy that TCs expressed having problems. These readings from works such as *Teach Like a Champion* by Lemov (2010) offered supplementary pedagogical knowledge conducive to subsequent seminar discussions. A more communicative, student led approach to classroom issues and questions concerning the host school were often best understood by the TCs, not me. I came to understand that they had a much more accurate view of the day-to-day problems. In my role, it was most effective to be a good listener who offered Socratic questioning for pedagogical issues while also serving as their advocate with the school administration and cooperating teachers.

To become a more effective advocate, I had to re-think my role as a liaison with the partner school. The greater than anticipated liaison role became an important finding in the study because it indicates the CE is a mediator of misunderstandings

that in my case, involved poor CT/TC pairings and unreasonable expectations from the host school. On multiple occasions, I helped lower tensions between the CT and TC by simply speaking to both parties separately and explaining the source of misunderstanding. In one case, a CT did not allow a TC to teach except in small groups outside the classroom. This was unacceptable, so negotiated a change with the principal. We successfully moved him to another class with a new CT and the problem was resolved. Host school interactions included consistently communicating university goals for the practicum as well as conveying the host school expectations back to the TCs. For those who serve as university CEs, they must actively and consistently engage partner school practicum stakeholders to develop a rapport with those faculty and administrators to develop and maintain mutual understandings of your respective goals. A CE should develop relationships that allow honest, clear communication of expectations and more importantly, areas of concern. An effective way to accomplish this is to invite cooperating teachers and principals to the seminar as part of the feedback loop critical to all involved. By doing so, you expand the seminar to include a wider community of inquiry.

The CE and CTs also play complimentary roles in offering theory and experience-based knowledge to the TCs (Koppich, 2000). We were able to explore different perspectives by having a series of guest participants to our seminars. The TCs could ask questions that I was unable to answer and clarify expectations in the classroom by learning about teaching strategies that were deemed effective within the context of the school culture. In addition to the importance of incorporating host

school personnel into the seminar, there was the equally important modification to the use of observational and online discussion board data.

University Educator Preparation program stakeholders, particularly clinical educators, may find the findings of this study useful as a resource to help examine their own practice and role as seminar facilitators. CEs are primarily evaluators of student teachers, but there is an equally important mission to nurture the development of their emerging practice. To do so, there must be explicit processes in place to facilitate dialogue during group seminars. In future studies of the CE role, there is a need to examine the teacher development when a TC is able to access an expanded community of peers and experts for an ongoing dialogue concerning their emerging practice. Guided by a CE, a cohort of TCs might consistently engage the host school community of faculty and administrators maintain clear lines of communication and a feedback loop that extends beyond the traditional triadic relationships of CE, CT and TC. Although clinical educators and teacher preparation programs are the primary audience for this study, the cooperating teacher faculty and administrators may also find it useful for improving their hosting partnerships with local universities. This study shares my experience examining, reflecting and implementing pedagogical and logistical changes to the seminar practicum over time while providing practical advice about facilitating practicum seminars. There are many unanswered questions concerning the transformative effect that CE's have on TC development. The analysis shows that structural aspects of the practicum that I could have better organized. In addition, if I had spent more time each week at the host school to develop a more in-depth understanding of day-to-day issues then the modifications would have occurred

sooner or anticipated from the start. There is also the subject of training for the CE that might be added as an orientation at the host school to learn about the institutional culture and organizational structure. Hopefully, others may benefit from this exploration of the CE role and the structural analysis of the seminar protocol itself.



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## Appendix A

## Participant Demographics

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Experience w/ ESL</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Lang</b>
Andrea	21	Female	White	None	Elem	None
Jim	44	Male	White	None	Elem	None
Kate	22	Female	White	None	Elem	None
Laura	22	Female	White	None	Elem	None
Jeremy	32	Male	White	None	Elem	None
Chris	23	Male	White	None	Middle (Math)	None
Ralph	23	Male	White	None	Spec Ed	None
Ron	22	Male	White	None	Middle (Math)	None
Donna	42	Femal	White	None	Middle (Science)	None
Jerome (JB)	46	Male	White	13 yrs		French/Korean



Appendix B

College of Education

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St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499  
Telephone: 314-516-5000  
[jcbollato@umsl.edu](mailto:jcbollato@umsl.edu)

**Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities**  
Building a Community of Inquiry

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ HSC Approval Number:  
Principal Investigator: Jerome Bollato PI's Phone Number: 314-494-9114

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You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jerome Bollato, M.Ed. under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Navarro. The purpose of this research is to describe the development of professional identity and practices, especially within the teaching practicum course (4989). This is a basic qualitative study that will document what happens when more dialogic and collaborative opportunities are integrated into a teacher candidate practicum. The researcher will take an active role as a participant observer and interactional ethnographer while serving as the clinical educator for the practicum students. Nine teacher candidates will be invited to participate in the study.

Your participation will involve

- Two in-depth interviews lasting for about 60 minutes each at a place and time convenient for you
  - The goal of the interviews is to understand how teacher candidates collaborate with each other, their respective cooperating teachers and clinical educator.
  - Interview question topics concern the value of collaborative approaches to issues of pedagogy, classroom management and integration into the host school community
  - Possible follow-up email for clarification
- Weekly audio-recorded seminars
  - Seminars involve group discussion of various topics involving pedagogy, classroom management and role as a teacher candidate. We will make collaborative efforts to investigate these topics and develop solutions to challenges that may arise
- Written reflections posted on MyGateway
  - Reflection topics will be based on seminar discussion and common topics of interest to the teacher candidates. Although there are no anticipated risks associated with this research, it is possible that people involved with the

practicum might be able to connect comments you make in the interview to a particular incident and then make a guess about your identity but no names or identifying information will be included.

There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation may contribute to understandings about how to effectively mentor teacher candidates in the future.

**Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw. Your course standing will not be affected in any way if you decline to participate or withdraw from the study.**

There are two seminar meetings each week and only one of which are recorded. If you decline to participate, then you will join the unrecorded seminar meeting. All recorded data from interview questions, seminar discussion or online postings will not be shared with anyone except the researcher's faculty advisor.

By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your identity will not be revealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. In addition, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Jerome Bollato, 314.494.9114 or at [jcbollato@umsl.edu](mailto:jcbollato@umsl.edu) or Dr. Virginia Navarro at 314.516.5871, [Virginia.navarro@umsl.edu](mailto:Virginia.navarro@umsl.edu).

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

<hr/>		<hr/>
Participant's Signature	Date	Participant's Printed Name
<hr/>		<hr/>
Signature of Investigator or Designee	Date	Investigator/Designee Printed Name

## Appendix C

### Pre & Post Observation Conference Protocol

#### Pre-Brief

- What is your objective?
- How are you introducing the lesson?
- What is the input?
- How are you concluding?
- Assessing them?
- What are you worried about or wanting to work on?

#### De-Brief

- How do you feel the lesson progressed?
- Do you feel they understood the concepts being taught?
- Did your assessment work?
- How did you keep all students engaged and on task?
- What would you do differently in the future?