

Shared Viewing as an Approach to Transforming Early Field Experiences

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Abstract

Although early field experiences are touted as vital for providing a hands-on preview of how teaching unfolds in the classroom, these essential components of teacher preparation programs have consistently fallen short of the desired outcomes. In the spirit of Dewey, candidates need substantive experiences that transform their theoretical learning into pedagogical knowledge. Likewise, Darling-Hammond (2006a) asserted that these experiences are strengthened when a collective team embarks on a mutual commitment, comprised of the candidate, university faculty, and talented teachers from cooperating schools. This article describes a project that sought to create technology-mediated early field experiences that maximized candidate learning in online content methods courses. The Windows into Teaching and Learning (WiTL) project was conceived and actualized by researchers in a large, urban university in the southeastern region of the United States. The initial objective of the project was to explore a means by which technology might facilitate meaningful field experiences for candidates enrolled in distance education classes. Several other potential outcomes arose from the project, allowing researchers to expand the initial scope to encompass potential benefits for all university teacher candidates conducting early field experiences as a part of their path to licensure.

For decades, researchers have identified myriad ways in which early field experiences, essential components of teacher preparation programs, have consistently fallen short of their desired objectives (c.f., Applegate, 1985; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Myers, 1996; Ziechner, 2010). However, early field experiences continue to maintain their foothold in teacher preparation programs, often providing teacher candidates with their only hands-on preview of how teaching unfolds in the classroom.

In the spirit of Dewey (1916), learners should participate in substantive experiences that transform their theoretical learning into pedagogical knowledge. Likewise, Darling-Hammond (2006a) asserted that these experiences are strengthened when a collective team, comprised of the candidate, university faculty, and talented teachers from cooperating schools, are mutually committed. She argued that “the enterprise of teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda” (p. 302).

This article describes a project that did just what Darling-Hammond (2006) prescribed. In addition, it explores ways in which the corollary outcomes of this pilot study, which sought to provide meaningful remote early field experiences for teacher candidates enrolled in distance teacher education courses, exemplify the type of symbiotic experiences researchers have called for (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

Following a review of literature related to the problematic nature of field experiences in teacher preparation programs, we describe the Windows Into Teaching and Learning project and the manner by which it facilitated communal and meaningful field experiences. Through the collective quality of these early field experiences, many of the shortcomings highlighted were directly addressed, enhancing learning outcomes and providing a deeper level of pedagogical understanding for all participants.

Review of Relevant Literature

The most obvious predicaments related to early field experiences are logistical in nature. Applegate (1985) defined these as institutional dilemmas, including travel costs, administrative tasks, and communication responsibilities between the university and the host school. In some cases, the overwhelming managerial tasks involved in supporting and overseeing candidates (Zeichner, 2010) coupled with the low status associated with field experiences within the university culture (Goodman, 1988) results in this responsibility being cast off to untrained personnel or novice graduate assistants who may provide little to no supervision.

According to Goodman, university conditions factor heavily into the logistical problems resulting from early field experiences, asserting that “creating field experiences that promote serious reflection, experimentation, and responsible decision making among preservice teachers will most likely require significant changes from current practice” (p. 47). He further argued that the hiring of additional personnel and the provision of time necessary to prepare candidates fully for early field experiences is unlikely given the budgetary priorities of most universities. Furthermore, expansion of field experiences into more distant and remote settings away from higher education institutions places financial and time burdens on an already constricted operating budget and workforce (Knight, Pedersen, & Peters, 2004).

Cruickshank and Armaline (1986) included within their list of eight problematic considerations for field experiences in teacher education a need to control the quality and content of the experience. Traditionally structured experiences do not allow for this control; thus, chance plays a major role in what benefit (or harm) the candidate is able to derive from the experience. They also contended that teachers engaged in the art of coaching future teachers should be masterful and hand-selected by university faculty to ensure that solid pedagogical thinking is incorporated in the teaching that is viewed by candidates.

Mentor teachers must be able to encourage candidates to think deeply about what they are seeing and experiencing. Interestingly, Cruickshank and Armaline called for teacher mentors to be made a part of the team responsible for educating future teachers, affording them “membership in a community” with the mutual objective of equipping the candidate with the necessary tools to be successful.

Ziechner (2010) detailed the dubious nature of early field experiences by describing the chasm between what is learned in the university setting and what is experienced in the classroom. He explained that in addition to the mentor teachers' lack of understanding regarding what candidates experience throughout their coursework, there is generally a lack of guidance on the part of university instructors as to what should be accomplished during the field placement.

The work of Erdman (1983) supported Zeichner's conclusions that there is a general failure to attend to the connection between what is occurring in university coursework and the assignment of field observations. Even when course assignments require reflection on these experiences, outcomes are unclear. Erdman attributed this gap to a fundamental flaw in how these experiences are perceived as one of apprenticeship, oversimplifying the art of teaching to a craft that can be learned through mere observation and practice. Erdman asserted that the true objective of early field experiences, reflection of action, can only be achieved when these experiences are transformed into partnerships that require the depth in dialog necessary to understand the complexities of teaching.

Perhaps the most disadvantageous characteristic of early field experiences in teacher education programs is that they occur in isolation (Green, 2005; Heafner & Plaisance, 2013; Hixon & So, 2009; Simpson, 2006). Hannah and Abate (1992-1993) found that the unique nature of each candidate's experience in the field within traditional programs makes it difficult for university faculty to promote the type of critical reflection necessary to achieve growth in understanding from the experience.

Far too often, candidates are not cognitively prepared to decipher early field observations beyond a superficial description of classroom and behavior management (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Goodman, 1988; Hannah, 1995). Gaps in understanding of pedagogy and content inhibit candidates from recognizing what to look for and how to interpret intricate and complex instructional practice. Candidates fail to recognize the merit of field-based learning as real teaching experiences (Aiken & Day, 1999).

In response, Greene (2005) argued that candidates should be gradually incorporated into a professional community that allows them to safely explore what they are experiencing, both in the classroom and in their coursework. The earlier work of Hannah (1995) affirmed these claims that a "safe environment where candidates can explore their beliefs about teaching" is an important precursor to applied learning (p. 276).

The rising number of teacher preparation programs providing distance education alternatives to preservice teachers presents unique challenges to providing meaningful and beneficial early field experiences. Simpson (2006) detailed several of these challenges, including the additional cost involved in travel, a lack of control over quality, and the difficulty in establishing a relationship between the cooperating teachers and the university instructor. In addition, she said that, although a variety of exposures may be beneficial to the preservice teacher, the unique nature of each field experience prohibits a shared dialog that assists the preservice teachers in interpreting what they have seen during their field observations.

Research clearly has unearthed many of the shortcomings of field experiences in teacher education, exposing issues that must be addressed if these experiences are to be meaningful and beneficial to the preparation of future teachers. Thus, it is important to seek innovative and creative means of transforming these experiences while also reconceptualizing how they have been historically enacted in traditional settings (Baker, 2005; Brophy, 2004; Santagata, Zannoni, & Stigler, 2007; Sherin & van Es, 2005; Zibit & Gibson, 2005).

In many cases these explorations involved video. For instance, Sherin (2004) described ways in which video can be used to enhance learning outcomes, providing a visual point of reference for collective discussion. Among many other current practices involving video and education, she shared how it is utilized as a tool for recording field experiences that can be used to illustrate pedagogical principles. Additionally, Sherin described video clubs where groups of teachers found benefit in viewing and discussing teaching episodes collectively to explore alternative perspectives to what they observed.

This article describes one such project, specifically exploring the way in which the creation of shared field experiences enhanced outcomes for all participants and helped overcome some of the aforementioned drawbacks associated with early field experiences.

Windows Into Teaching and Learning: Redefining Early Field Experiences

Project Description

Researchers in a large, urban university in the southeastern United States conceived and implemented the Windows Into Teaching and Learning (WiTL) project. The project was supported through a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grant funded by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Its initial objective was to explore how technology might facilitate meaningful field experiences for candidates enrolled in distance education program designed toward earning a Graduate Certificate in Teaching (GCT). This online certificate program is the initial licensure phase of a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree and is comprised of five pedagogical courses and an internship semester.

The second phase of the MAT includes advanced pedagogical training and additional content preparation. Expectations are that candidates enrolled in GCT courses will complete 30 hours of fieldwork. The courses used in this study were two required content methods courses, one in mathematics and the other in social studies. Because of program sequencing and funding limitations, the content area methods classes are delivered only online during summer sessions.

Finding meaningful and relevant opportunities during the summer proved problematic for university faculty. A major premise of the WiTL project was that the mentor teachers were hand-selected based upon criteria that ensured that candidates were viewing excellent teaching. In addition, the university instructor's participation in each field experience as a contributing presence allowed for added guidance in terms of quality assurance and cognitive preparedness.

Throughout both the asynchronous and synchronous observations, the instructor or a graduate assistant was on hand to narrate the teaching episode, pointing out both strengths and weaknesses that were unfolding in the classroom. The recorded observations held promise as a solution to the aforementioned logistical difficulties of providing meaningful field experiences during the summer. Quickly, however, several

other potential outcomes arose from the project, allowing researchers to expand the initial scope to encompass potential benefits for all university teacher candidates conducting early field experiences as a part of their path to licensure.

In light of this consideration, researchers reexamined the data to explore the following research question: How does shared viewing impact candidates' experiences with early, online field experiences?

Methodology

The project occurred throughout the spring semester and a 6-week summer session. The research team was comprised of two methods instructors and a graduate assistant. One methods instructor taught the social studies methods course, while the other was the mathematics methods instructor. Researchers focused on two online content area methods courses taught during the summer session with a total of 30 ($n = 30$) teacher candidates.

Purposeful sampling was used, with the criteria for inclusion being enrollment in an online methods course at the targeted university and willingness to participate in the study. As a result, the sample population is somewhat limited in size. Participation in the study was voluntary and no additional course credit was awarded; however, all members of both classes elected to enroll and signed the informed consent provided by the researchers. Six participants were social studies candidates, and 24 were mathematics candidates. The focus of this study was not to examine differences in content areas, but rather to examine how candidates experienced the online field component, which was consistently structured for both methods courses. All data sources were coded by course and were compiled for data analyses.

The selection of two cooperating schools in two distinct districts was based on university faculty connections to community partnerships and work in these schools. Twelve middle and secondary teaching professionals were recruited due to their educational background, content expertise, teaching experience and commitment to serve as mentor teachers. Of the 12 teachers, 6 were math teachers and 6 were social studies teachers with equal representation from high school and middle school. The teachers were also purposefully selected to include observational experiences representative of the various courses taught in each content area and spanning grades 6-12.

Prior to the commencement of the methods courses, the teacher mentors selected exemplary lessons in their classrooms to be videotaped and archived over several months. Course instructors conducted asynchronous sessions utilizing a laptop, wireless headset, and webcam. The instructors narrated the sessions through written comments, captured on screen by [Camtasia Screen Recording Software](#) (*Editor's Note*: For website URLs, see the [Resources](#) section at the end of this paper).

At the beginning of the methods courses, a synchronous session was facilitated through [Wimba](#), allowing class members to observe the teacher mentors teaching real-time for one academic block. During this session, text chat was made available to the observers and comments were posted by the course instructor, who facilitated the session from within the classroom using a desktop computer with an Internet connection, Logitech webcam, and wireless headset.

Immediately following the lesson, each teacher mentor conducted a live debriefing with the candidates via the Wimba platform, during which candidates were encouraged to

explore the pedagogical methods they had just observed through questioning and dialog with the mentor teachers. Subsequently, the candidates viewed the previously recorded asynchronous lessons and then engaged in an online threaded discussion with the teacher mentors utilizing a password-protected forum that had been established in [NiceNet](#). The threaded discussions occurred over several days and provided the candidates an opportunity to capitalize on the teacher mentors' expertise as it related to the lessons they had viewed, as well as general questions concerning instructional methods and pedagogical thinking.

Data Analyses

Data were collected from several distinct components. First, mentor teachers were interviewed individually for an hour at the end of the project. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary, and the groups were purposefully scheduled following the final posting of grades. Second, upon the conclusion of the methods course, candidates were equally divided into six focus groups to facilitate 2-hour interviews conducted by the graduate assistant. These interviews and focus groups were in accordance with Patton's (2002) recommendations for appropriate uses of a constructivist perspective, allowing the researchers to include participants' reported perceptions of experiences.

Additional data sources included transcriptions of the asynchronous threaded discussion, recordings of the synchronous debriefings, archived text chat logs, candidates' summative written field reflections, and candidates' work samples, including content module tasks and the culminating instructional unit plan assignment. Audio recordings from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy.

Data were analyzed using content analysis (Silverman, 1999), in which inductive coding and sorting allowed themes to emerge. Three researchers read and listened to data sources to identify data patterns, first independently, then collaboratively to triangulate interpretations. In weekly meetings over the course of 6 months, the researcher team discussed data patterns and agreed on major overarching themes, including the benefit of shared field experiences. Subsequent review of data was conducted both individually and collectively to further define and describe emergent themes using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis method. Representative examples from all data sources were selected by researchers to describe participant experiences.

Bailing Out Early Field Experiences

Due to the varied roles of participants, as well as multiple and rich data sources within the study, a multitude of themes emerged. For example, the question of candidate preference for synchronous versus asynchronous observations merits consideration. In addition, the experiences of the mentor teachers and the potential of the WiTL project to create reflective opportunities for professional development deserve further investigation. However, navigating within the scope of this article, we focused solely on the benefits of shared field experiences for teacher candidates, as evidenced by three themes that emerged throughout data analysis. These themes include shared viewing that enhanced field experiences by making them more meaningful and relevant, created opportunities for social learning and reflection, and served as a bridge between classroom learning and experiences in the field.

Meaningful and Relevant

Ballantyne and Mylonas (2001) viewed remote field experiences as an opportunity to gain knowledge of diverse settings. However, they pointed out that a compromise is often made in terms of university participation in and supervision of these opportunities that typically occur in substantially diverse geographical settings. Thus, much of the experience is left in the hands of the mentor teacher, who is rarely trained in formal mentoring or privy to the university experiences or course work of the candidates. They found that advanced preparation of both parties and an overt focus on the relationship between the university and the hosting school enhanced outcomes for candidates.

Furthermore, for candidates to be cognitively prepared for field experiences, they needed the guidance of faculty members who observed (Hannah, 1995; Lehman & Richardson, 2007). In the spirit of these findings, in one social studies elective class at the secondary level, the university instructor drew candidates' attention to specific techniques, such as the use of hand gestures that aided in student understanding of content. The instructor noted the research-based effectiveness of mnemonic devices to scaffold student learning.

Similarly, in a high school geometry class, a graduate assistant noted that students had become disengaged from the lesson and probed candidates to consider ways they might address this problem. In yet another example, the attending instructor drew attention to the manner in which one teacher used the design of collaborative groups to empower a group of female students in the class to speak openly about women's rights, a subtle but impactful pedagogical act that would have surely gone unnoticed by novice observers.

Candidates responded positively to this attribute of the project, with nearly all of the candidates including some reference to the quality of teaching and relevance of the field experiences in their summative reflections. One candidate from the math methods course expressed appreciation for observations that were designed specifically to support course content, in contrast to previous traditional observations that had little or no relevance to the course in which they were assigned. Similarly, a social studies candidate was delighted that each of the classes she observed was related to her field of study, citing prior difficulties in locating classrooms where social studies was taught on a consistent basis. Many candidates also reflected on instances when they arrived at a clinical setting only to discover that students were being assessed or the cooperating teacher had changed plans for the day.

In the observations facilitated through WiTL the relevance of each field experience was guaranteed because the content of each class was mutually agreed upon between the university instructor and mentor teacher, leaving nothing to chance.

Not only was learning meaningful, but candidate confidence in personal applications of methods was affirmed by summative reflections on the final unit plan assignment. All math and social studies candidates ($n = 30$) in their written reflections acknowledged a link between their pedagogical decisions to include a method as a result of having observed the strategy within the course field experiences. For example, candidates' writing included descriptions such as, "knowing that these methods work" since they were able to "see them in practice."

Social Learning and Reflective Practice

In the postproject focus groups, WiTL participants reported that they benefitted from the text chat feature that was an integral part of the shared observation experience. One

candidate stated that reading the questions posed by her peers made her think about things she would have otherwise missed. Many candidates agreed with this statement, adding that they found it helpful to share their own knowledge about methods, standards, and classroom procedures while the observation was occurring.

Some participants reported that the combination of both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to interact with the team of mentor teachers resulted in the ability to ask different types of questions and explore various aspects of teaching. For example, one candidate reported that he found the threaded discussion on NiceNet to be more general in nature, allowing him to explore elements of the profession of teaching that fall outside of typical dialog following an observation. Similarly, another candidate perceived the live debriefings immediately after the synchronous observations to be excellent opportunities to reflect on what he had just seen, while it was still fresh on his mind.

For learning to occur, students must feel they are in a safe environment and are comfortable taking risks. Hannah (1995) emphasized that a "safe environment where students can explore their beliefs about teaching" is an important precursor to applied learning (p. 276).

Likewise, teacher candidates (Kaufman & Moss, 2010) and novice teachers (Canniff, 2003) find comfort in professional communities in which they can safely examine personal notions of teaching, student development, classroom management, and curriculum. Many of WiTL's candidate participants cited the asynchronous threaded discussions and the synchronous text chat that occurred throughout the field experiences as being pivotal in developing a sense of community within the course. One math candidate said the following during a postproject focus group interview:

We had the little box off to the side where we could type as the class was going on. I think there were about 11 of us in there at the same time. We had questions, made comments back and forth, and it really made me observe or see things that I might not have taken note of otherwise. So it wasn't necessarily even so much the questions for the teacher afterwards, it was other peers of mine [that enriched the experience]. [It was] things they were observing; questions they may have had that we answered back and forth [that] made the whole experience that much richer. I got so much more out of it. As I said, someone would mention [something] and I noticed this or blah, blah, blah. I might not have noticed that, or taken note of that. This [synchronous text chat] added so much more to it. So I felt that it was probably the best way [to conduct observations].

With each observation, more evidence was observed in the text chat logs of candidates supporting one another's learning and arriving at a communal understanding through the shared exchange of ideas and suggestions. At one point during the observation of a World History course, candidates assisted one another in making sense of a mentor teacher's approach to demonstrating the hierarchy of societal roles during the Renaissance period. This instance represents only one of many in which candidates collaborated amongst themselves during the shared field experience to enhance their collective understanding.

When candidates were asked for suggestions for improvements to the program during postproject interviews, they said they wished we had made text chat available during the asynchronous observations:

[It would be good if] we could comment throughout maybe as other people watch it at a different time. Maybe they could see your comments or something. I don't

know, but definitely the feedback during [the viewing] with the peers was what I thought was exceptional. (Focus group)

Access to the asynchronous threaded discussion board enhanced candidate learning during the courses associated with the WiTL project. The presence of a team of mentor teachers, united for the purpose of supporting candidate learning, was most evident at this point. Because the discussion board was open to all of the candidates and mentor teachers, the questions and replies could be viewed by everyone, providing the opportunity for communal discussions on topics ranging from student behavior to advice on how to behave during a professional interview.

One example surfaced around the topic of curving grades when a secondary math candidate asked about the practice. Several mentor teachers replied to this single question, providing sound and diverse reasoning for their opinions and providing the candidate with a variety of perspectives to consider. Similarly, a conversation about the importance of building strong relationships with students and learning about their personal lives surfaced on the social studies discussion board.

Several mentor teachers offered insights and responded to additional questions by multiple candidates, creating a forum for open discussion of a fundamental aspect of cogent teaching. Postproject focus groups with candidate participants revealed a positive reaction to reading their peers' questions, admitting that there were questions they would liked to have asked. One benefit was the relationship established among the mentor teachers, many of whom reported that they gained knowledge and insight into their colleagues' philosophical perspectives by reading their responses. They unilaterally agreed they would not have been able to do this if they had not acted as collective mentors for this group of teacher candidates.

Bridging Two Worlds

Blurring the Distinction Between the Experience and the Class. When candidates are left to participate in field experiences in isolation, little opportunity exists to incorporate these experiences into university methods courses. Baker (2005), in a study examining the use of technology-supported case studies, found that candidates who shared in the viewing of a single teaching episode attributed their readiness to teach with the ability to garner more productive knowledge from field experiences. The participants in Baker's study identified the common, shared experience that served as a source for reflective discussion as a key factor in their sense of preparedness. Likewise, Santagata et al. (2007) found positive connections between focused observations using virtual field experiences and candidates' abilities to translate teacher-student interactions into practice.

The collective field experiences were a constant presence within the methods courses taught as a part of the WiTL project. Often, traditional early field experiences remain at the periphery of course design and serve as ancillary assignments that must be checked off before the course requirements can be considered complete. In contrast, the communal field experiences permeated the framework of the associated courses and provided an exemplar to which candidates and instructors alike could refer in discourse relating to course content. Likewise, class activities, texts, and discussions found their way into the field setting.

Unlike in traditional settings, these two essential components of teacher preparation did not occur as independent elements of teacher preparation, but rather emerged as an

interwoven architect of candidate understanding. Prior to one synchronous observation, for example, a university instructor previewed the upcoming lesson for candidates while they waited for the class to begin, providing direct references to relevant text passages the candidates had read, as well as supplying supplemental, suggested readings based on what the candidates would see. Similarly, the social studies course instructor referred to the method of planning that had been used by the mentor teacher, specifically referencing a course that occurred earlier in the candidates' program, demonstrating relevance of the observation to all coursework.

From Theory to Practice. In a project examining field experiences of 34 preservice reading teachers via interactive video conferencing, Kent (2007) found that enacting common field experiences assisted candidates in closing the gap between theory and practice. Responses from the candidate participants in WiTL and analyses of the text chat logs generated during the synchronous observations support these findings.

Some of the statements that support the bridge between theory and practice were not so subtle, with one social studies candidate stating in the focus group interview that the field experiences moved the course from "functional to pedagogical, and then married the two" for her.

This type of learning is evident by tracing another candidate's progress within the course. During a synchronous observation of a seventh-grade social studies class, she asked questions and text chatted with peers regarding writing activities the mentor teacher was using to activate students' prior knowledge about communities and maps. Through the text chat, the university instructor present in the classroom being observed provided supplemental material that supported the candidate's understanding of the specific strategy that was being used. The instructor referenced an assigned reading within the course textbook and outlined the benefits of using this approach to prepare students for a classroom lesson.

In all likelihood, without the presence of the instructor and her peers, this candidate would not have had the opportunity to pursue this line of questioning. In other words, she would have seen this practice, but would have lacked sufficient pedagogical theory (e.g., cognitive preparedness) to understand why it was being used.

This same candidate referenced warm-up activities or "bell ringers" in her postproject interview, citing them as one of the key strategies she acquired through the field observations. She also incorporated these activities into the culminating assignment for the course, the development of a comprehensive unit plan.

Shared viewing is a more meaningful way to direct what *should* be noticed by pedagogical novices. It builds a community of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991) who feel safe and free to discuss ideas and explore new ways of teaching in safe and nurturing environment. Several candidates included in their reflections the idea that traditional observations replicated their own schooling experiences, whereas, the shared viewing facilitated through WiTL enabled them to see and realize how innovative methods are effective.

They said frequently that they felt comfortable and safe in addressing controversial issues as a result of having seen these teachers engage students in complex and uncomfortable discussions. Learning is uncomfortable, especially when candidates are challenged to move beyond what they know. As candidates confront new ways of thinking, they are likely to take risks and enact methods that hold the potential to be transformative.

The shared experience of collectively viewing this type of teaching provided the backbone candidates needed to have tough discussions and explore new ideas. Courageous teaching was no longer something they only read about in textbooks, but rather a strategy they had all witnessed. Furthermore, because they were required to acknowledge the possibility of powerful pedagogy collectively, they were pushed to consider the use of the same type of complex strategies in their own teaching. In candidates' final projects they replicated many of the mentor teachers' methods. One social studies candidate describes participants' experiences when he acknowledged the following:

This course has certainly given me a new perspective on the entire teaching profession. In addition, if I had made my IUP [instructional unit plan] without watching the synchronous and asynchronous observations, I would be very hesitant as to whether or not the methods I was putting forward in the IUP would actually work in a real life classroom. Yet after seeing these teachers use the methods we explored so effectively, I now have no doubt.

Looking Toward the Future

Study without reflection is a waste of time, reflection without study is dangerous.
-Confucius

Beginning teachers are most likely to emulate what they see and experience in the course work comprising their teacher preparation programs (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). For this reason, demonstrating the benefits of collaboration and participation in a community of practice early in a teacher's journey is exceptionally important. Collaboration may be the key to survival in an age where economic conditions find teachers competing for positions and evaluated based on their ability to function as a leader within professional learning communities. In addition, a collective approach to learning improves the odds that teacher candidates will take from the experience the intended knowledge.

Although learning can take place with the individual in an independent setting, group or organizational learning in a social context provides a richer format in which information is processed; ideas are challenged; concepts are debated; and higher intellectual activity, based on the capacities of the individuals involved, is the result (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. viii).

Trends in early field experiences in teacher preparation programs should logically follow those in the field of education into a more collaborative arena. The types of field experiences enacted through the WiTL project are a step in this direction—providing future educators the opportunity to collaborate and appreciate diverse perspectives early in their careers. We would never recommend that traditional field experiences be removed from teacher preparation programs. Candidates need to sit in a classroom to experience teaching through all of their senses. Also, site-based field experiences enable greater candidate interaction and capitalized on the personalization of learning afforded by being in the classroom physically.

However, the shared exposure provided by the WiTL project has important implications for new and innovative directions for early field experiences in teacher education. Programs such as the WiTL project have the potential to model scaffolded, collaborative learning experiences that enhance teacher preparation and make the most of field observations.

More research pilots are necessary to determine which conditions produce the best learning outcomes. However, the WiTL project demonstrates the benefits in affording candidates with opportunities for developing a collective understanding of excellence in teaching early in their careers as educators. When such early experiences are carefully constructed and monitored to ensure high-quality outcomes, candidates are provided with a multidimensional foundation upon which to reflect and build as their university coursework progresses and as they prepare to enter the field of teaching.

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Resources

Camtasia Screen Recording Software - <http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia>

NiceNet - www.nicenet.org

Wimba- http://www.wimba.com/solutions/higher-education/wimba_classroom_for_higher_education/

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