

## The Use and Utility of Video Representations in Early Social Studies Field Experiences

[Alexander Cuenca](#)  
Indiana University

[Jessica Zaker](#)  
Indiana University

The importance of the early field experience in the curriculum of teacher education is often underappreciated. Ostensibly, the early field experience provides teacher candidates with the first opportunity to look closely at teaching and learning from the perspective of a classroom educator. Yet, little is known about what kinds of early field experiences facilitate teacher learning. In this study, the authors examined the use of video representations during an early field experience to advance preservice social studies teachers' skills as careful observers of classroom practice. Findings suggest that video representations helped preservice teachers in an early field experience isolate elements of teaching and learning; contrast classroom practices with existing beliefs about classroom practice; and prime their situational and pedagogical imaginations.

Major reform efforts in teacher education over the last decade have focused on improving the quality of field experiences (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; National Research Council, 2010). In many cases, reform agendas featured attempts to increase the quantity of time candidates spent in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Merely accumulating more hours in the field, however, does not automatically result in high-quality learning-to-teach experiences.

Field experiences are complex ecosystems that require intentional and skilled navigation by teacher candidates and program personnel (Cuenca & Benko, 2017; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Consequently, a more productive reform route for teacher education might focus on surfacing the features of field experiences that yield greater opportunities to learn to teach.

This paper focuses on the aspects of field experiences that contribute to teacher learning. More specifically, we describe the perspectives of preservice teachers during an early field experience semester in a secondary social studies teacher education program. Ostensibly, as an introduction to teaching and learning, early field experiences have an important place within the curriculum of teacher education. Yet, research is sparse on how candidates' experiences in early field experiences promote (or fail to promote) learning to teach (Clift & Brady, 2005).

The study described here focused on the use of video representations as a tool to promote learning about teaching during an early field experience. We engaged in our inquiry by asking the following research question: How does the analysis of videos of exemplary teachers influence preservice social studies teachers' observations of social studies classrooms during early field experiences? This study not only provided insight into the operation of an early field experience but also, and perhaps more importantly, how a social studies teacher education program leveraged early field experiences to prepare teachers to observe and recognize how students learn.

### **Early Field Experiences and Video Representations in Teacher Education**

We relied on two distinct but overlapping bodies of literature to shape our inquiry: early field experiences and video representations in teacher education. Within the broad landscape of research on field experiences in teacher education, a persistent obstacle to teacher learning has been the bifurcation of the teacher education curriculum. In short, the design of most teacher education programs compartmentalizes "learning to think like a teacher" to university coursework and "learning to act like a teacher" to field experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Zeichner, 2010).

In many cases, these two learning experiences have different expectations for success and can provide preservice teachers with conflicting messages about professionalism, pedagogy, and relationships between knowledge and practice (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). The fundamental flaw in the common design of the teacher education curriculum is that the connections between university and school-based learning are perceived as self-evident. Because teaching is a complex act, teacher education programs must be intentional, not haphazard, about cultivating preservice teachers' understandings of the connections between teacher thinking and teacher actions (Korthagen, 2010).

Accordingly, the most successful preservice preparation programs leverage field experiences to help candidates situate theoretical learning in practice (Darling-Hammond, 2005). As Feiman-Nemser (2001) noted, purposeful and integrated field experiences are carefully sequenced placements "that make it possible for teacher candidates to see and practice the kind of teaching they are learning about in their courses as they move from observation to limited participation to full responsibility with appropriate modeling and supervision" (p. 1024). In particular, the early field experience within a teacher education program ideally serves as an opportunity to approach the classroom as an emerging professional, identify the professional intentions behind enactments of practices and routines, and engage in experiences that ground the discourse of teacher preparation.

Although research on early field experiences is scant (Clift & Brady, 2005), studies have revealed a variety of approaches. In some cases, early field experiences are designed to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in smaller scale pedagogical experiences, such as tutoring or working with small groups. Preservice teachers in these studies are allowed to “try on the role of teacher” (Catapano & Thompson, 2013; Washburn-Moses, Kopp, & Hetttersimer, 2012) before taking on greater classroom responsibilities.

Other studies reveal that early field experiences are structured similarly to the student teaching experience but feature more support from the university or school faculty (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010; Watson, Miller, & Patty, 2011). Yet, another category of studies reveals that early field experiences are used to cultivate the reflective and self-evaluative capacities of preservice teachers through scaffolding techniques such as reflection assignments (Welsh & Schaffer, 2017), peer-evaluation (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005), or self-analysis (Baecher, Kung, Jewkes, & Rosalia, 2013).

In this study, we recognized the critical role of early field experiences in learning to teach and the need for teacher education experiences to be intentional in cultivating preservice teachers’ understandings of the connections between teacher thinking and teacher actions. However, we also realized that without preparation to observe classroom settings, preservice teachers tend to “focus on superficial matters such as teacher and student characteristics, fleeting classroom management issues and global judgments of lesson effectiveness” (Castro, Clark, Jacobs, & Givvin, 2005, p. 11). Accordingly, we explored how a social studies teacher education program leveraged video analysis during early field experience to help preservice teachers explore the nuance, complexity, and interconnectedness of classroom practice.

Although video representations are common in teacher education programs (Grossman, 2005), we examined the unique contributions of video representations of exemplary teachers in broadening preservice teachers’ perspectives during live observations of classroom teachers. The research literature on the uses of video representations in teacher education demonstrates an array of benefits. Grossman et al. (2009) acknowledged that providing preservice teachers with opportunities to analyze videos of exemplary classroom practice helped them identify the visible and invisible facets of practice; learn to investigate practice; and reflect on their emerging identities as educators.

Other studies have illustrated how the analysis of video representations provide preservice teachers with greater access to a wider range of classroom experiences than traditional observations (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Bayram, 2012; Welsch & Devlin, 2006). For example, analysis of video representations helps preservice teachers slow down the teaching process (Santagata, Zannoni, & Stigler, 2007), allowing for more opportunities to unpack the interactive nature of practice (Cuthrell, Steadman, Stapleton, & Hodge, 2016).

Viewing video representations of teaching can also result in more in-depth observations. As Seidel, Stürmer, Blomberg, Kobarg, and Schwindt (2011) recognized, “Having teachers watch videotaped examples of classroom situations provides an opportunity to investigate the points at which teachers pause and comment and the aspects that attract their attention” (p. 260).

Other studies have documented additional positive attributes of video representations, such as serving as a bridge between theory and practice (Abell & Cennamo, 2004; Gomez, Sherin, Griesdorn, & Finn, 2008; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Llinares & Valls, 2009; Moreno & Ortegado-Layne, 2008), eliciting knowledge-based activation and reasoning (Santagata & Angelici, 2010; van Es & Sherin, 2002), and promoting a professional vision

based on noticing and selective attention (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008; Castro et al., 2005;).

Because video representations of exemplary teachers allow prospective teachers to learn about classroom dynamics without having to learn to process these dynamics in real time, video analysis can play an important role in shaping the opportunities to learn during early field experiences. Helping preservice teachers intentionally think about and notice the complexities of classroom life is important to cultivate critically minded educators capable of analyzing and reflecting upon teaching and learning.

Given our focus on the early field experience, however, this study contributes to the broad teacher education literature some insights into the utility of video representations for preservice teachers at the beginning of their learning trajectory. Ideally, understanding how video representations of practice serves preservice teacher learning during early field experiences can also lead to other inquiries about ways to further learning through video in other curricular and field experiences within the teacher education curriculum.

### **Research Methodology, Context, and Methods**

This research was informed by the theoretical perspective that teacher learning is shaped by the social and cultural influences constantly negotiated through social interaction. Sociocultural theory in teacher education research suggests that “learning to teach takes place in various ‘activity settings’ that contain tools, artifacts, and message systems” (Rosaen & Florio-Ruane, 2008, p. 709).

From this perspective, knowing and doing are reciprocal, as knowledge is situated in the physical and social contexts in which an activity takes place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Thus, focusing on the settings in which teacher education takes place, such as the early field experience, reveals “the kinds of social structures that promote the appropriation of pedagogical and conceptual tools that, in turn, result in particular kinds of teaching” (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999, p. 24). Moreover, because the early field experience in this sociocultural study asked students to move between university and school sites, it examined the conditions under which successful participation in activity in one type of situation facilitated successful participation in other types of similar situations (Peressini, Borko, Romagnano, Knuth, & Willis, 2004).

The course that served as the focus of our study was EDU 303: Early Field Experience in Social Studies Education, the first field experience in a three-semester sequence of a secondary social studies teacher education program at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. The course was offered during the spring semester and was designed to be taken in conjunction with the social studies foundations course. The following fall semester, students partook in a second, more intensive field experience along with a social studies methods course. The sequence then concluded with a semester-long student teaching experience.

EDU 303 required students to spend two class periods in social studies classrooms each week throughout the semester. Because it was the first sustained field experience in a social studies classroom, the first 8 weeks of the experience were focused on preparing students to observe the intricacies, idiosyncrasies, and nuances of teaching and learning in a social studies classroom. The remaining 7 weeks were focused on learning to design and execute classroom instruction.

Each of the first 8 weeks, students were given one observation protocol (see Figure 1 for “use of classroom space” protocol), and reflective assignments that focused them on one particular aspect of teaching and/or learning during the early field experience:

1. Use of classroom space;
2. Teacher/student interactions;
3. Learner interactions;
4. Planning lessons;
5. Classroom learning;
6. Using prior knowledge;
7. Assessment practices; and
8. Adaption of practice.

What is the physical layout of the classroom?

- What is the arrangement of the desks or workspace?
  - What kind of social studies learning is conducive through this arrangement?
- What is the location of the materials/which materials are visible?
- How are bulletin boards and/or room decorations used?
  - What messages do you think students are receiving through those decorations?
  - Who/What is excluded from the room decorations?

How is open space utilized?

Upload a map that charts the physical features of your classroom, and based on that upload, also include in the text box, a response to the following guiding question:

What kind of social studies is occurring in this space? What decisions about the nature of social studies teaching and learning has the teacher made through spatial decisions?

**Figure 1.** Sample observation protocol questions: *Observing classroom space.*

The observation protocols were developed by Conklin (2015) and adapted by the Cuenca, the instructor of the course, to help preservice teachers focus on specific dimensions of practice. To practice their observation skills, preservice teachers also participated in a weekly seminar where they watched and discussed a video representation of exemplary practice using the same protocol used during their field observations. After watching the videos, preservice teachers engaged in small group and whole class discussions of the video representations using the protocol questions as prompts.

The video representations were selected from the Accomplished Teaching, Learning, and Schools (ATLAS) library of cases of accomplished teaching (<https://www.nbpts.org/atlas>). Each case features a 15-minute unedited video clip of a nationally certified teacher delivering a classroom lesson; commentary by the teacher that addresses the context, planning, and an analysis of the teaching; and the instructional materials used during the lesson.

Because the ATLAS library features videos of educators who have passed a rigorous standards-based certification process, the recorded lessons are typically good examples of powerful instruction that demonstrate active student engagement and worthwhile learning. Each week, the instructor viewed several ATLAS middle or secondary social

studies lessons and determined which video case study would best position preservice teachers to analyze, unpack, and discuss the nuances of the weekly topic.

To study how the analysis of videos of exemplary teachers influenced preservice teacher learning, we designed an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). At the beginning of the spring 2018 semester, we purposefully recruited (Patton, 2014) four preservice teachers enrolled in EDU 303 – Carl, Ralph, Andrew, and Felicity – to serve as the “anchor points” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) for our study. Because the social studies teacher education program was designed as a cohort, all participants were second-semester juniors.

First author Cuenca was the instructor of EDU 303, but Zaker, the co-author of this study, was not affiliated with the course. In order to ensure the confidentiality of participants’ experiences and perceptions of the course, and the trustworthiness of the data collected, Zaker recruited participants, conducted interviews, captured field notes, and organized the collection of course documents for data analysis. Other than the participants’ assignments, none of the data collected were shared with Cuenca, nor did we begin the analysis process until after grades were submitted at the conclusion of the semester.

**Table 1**  
Participants’ Observation Site

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Observation Site</b>
Carl	10th-grade, Military History 10th grade, Economics
Ralph	8th-grade, US History
Andrew	8th-grade, US History
Felicity	8th-grade, US History

Three semistructured interviews were conducted by Zaker with each participant at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the early field experience. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. The interviews served to gauge participants’ reflections of the impact of the video representations on their observations in the field.

The first set of questions focused mostly on what the preservice teachers expected to learn from both the video representations and weekly sessions, as well as their early field placement. The second interview was designed more to examine the preservice teachers’ perceptions of the video representations and analysis sessions, as well as their understandings of teaching and learning thus far in the field. The final interview was meant to gain an overall sense of their learning during the morning video analysis sessions and how this translated to their experiences in live social studies classrooms.

During each of the eight field experience seminar sessions, Zaker engaged in direct observations of the session, writing field notes, with an emphasis on the four focal preservice teachers (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Finally, we collected all assignments related to the early field experience seminar.

The data analyzed and presented in this study relied exclusively on the interviews, although we utilized the other collected data to corroborate, verify, and substantiate claims made in the interviews. Data analysis was guided by an inductive approach following Creswell’s

(2007) “data analysis spiral” (p. 150), which consisted of organizing, reading, reflecting, and comparing the data we collected.

In the organization phase of the cycle, we grouped the data we collected by participant. We then openly coded the transcripts and compared and contrasted our codes. In total, we generated 21 initial codes that referenced 201 interview text segments. As each initial code was inductively generated, we maintained a codebook with descriptions of each code, thus helping us apply the codes consistently across the transcripts (see Table 2). These initial codes covered a range of perspectives found in the data, such as how participants were utilizing the video (e.g. “video prompts conscious thinking”; “video analysis as trial run”), how participants were learning to observe the classroom (e.g., “introspective observations”; “observation as stepping stone”), and beliefs about practice in general (e.g., “teacher as caring”; “countering negative social studies experiences”).

We then collapsed these initial codes into themes that would help us express a coherent narrative and answer our research question. The section that follows includes the findings from this analysis process.

**Table 2**  
Sample Initial Codes and Descriptions

<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
lack of control while viewing	Participant expresses that he/she does not have control of what he/she is observing while watching the video segments; he/she sees the video as limiting what he/she can observe.
observing teacher as passionate	Participant expresses an appreciation of past teachers’ passion. Participant sees passion as an integral and necessary requirement of teaching.
video prompting conscious thinking	Participant sees the video analysis portion as providing him/her an opportunity build a deeper understanding. It allows him/her to make more conscious observations in the field.
observations stepping stones	Participant views the observations and/or associated assignment as just something he/she must complete; it is something that must be checked off before the participant can complete or engage in activities they more prefer doing.

## Findings

Our analysis of the data revealed three distinct findings about the influence of analyzing the video representations of exemplary teachers on observing live social studies classrooms for preservice teachers in an early field experience. First, the videos helped isolate elements of teaching and learning that occur almost simultaneously within a live classroom setting. The video analysis process helped preservice teachers elucidate the unique significance of these elements of teaching and learning; created opportunities for reflection; and helped candidates reflect on the interconnectedness between the multitude of formal and informal decisions that teachers make on a daily basis.

The video analysis also created opportunities for preservice teachers to contrast classroom practice with their own experiences as social studies students and between the field experience and recorded classrooms. Finally, the video analysis primed the situational and

pedagogical imaginations of candidates who had little experience in live classroom settings. Taken together, these findings illustrate the prospective power of analyzing video representations of social studies practice prior to observing classrooms.

### **Isolated Elements Within A Complex Classroom Ecology**

One of the major contributions of the analysis of video representations during the early field experience was the opportunity to isolate specific elements about teaching and learning within the broader classroom ecology. All formal classrooms operate as educational environments that feature relationships between and among participants, processes, structures, and artifacts (van Lier, 2004). The contingent nature between these elements and the complexity of the classroom environment is typically difficult to discern for preservice teachers, because the teacher education curriculum often fails to provide intentional opportunities in classrooms for prospective teachers to deconstruct the elements of practice that lead to effective or ineffective learning. Prior to EDU 303, the preservice teachers in this study had limited experiences that focused on the ecosystem of classroom life. In these initial experiences, preservice teachers were either “helpers” or were using the classroom as a source to complete a course assignment. Ralph described his only previous experience in a school:

I just had to go in and sit there and help the teacher whenever they needed something, which wasn't too often. So that was kind of just it. Not even a learning experience; I was just kind of there in the classroom. (Interview 3)

Andrew recalled a service learning assignment in a prior course where he helped the teacher during lessons, but “was focused on what I was doing specifically, rather than what the teacher was doing” (Interview 1). These initial experiences provided little framing for preservice teachers to understand the dynamic elements associated with teaching and learning in a classroom.

In EDU 303, participants first analyzed videos of exemplary teachers using the same protocol that they were going to use later that day to observe a live social studies classroom. Accordingly, analyzing videos for certain elements of classroom practice helped participants learn how to isolate and target how teachers' decisions influenced student learning.

Carl said that learning to observe classrooms by first examining videos and then turning those observational skills toward a live classroom provided him with an opportunity to consider the series of actions and reactions between students and teachers that regularly occur in the classroom. It helped him “go deeper than I ever would into one aspect of the classroom, because I was usually just looking at the bigger picture” (Interview 1).

For some participants, isolating elements through video analysis created space for new lines of vision to consider the relationship between teaching and learning. Ralph noted that the analysis of video representations helped most “when we were observing [in the field] .... It helped me look at the class and understand where the learning was happening ... and to see which students were more likely to answer questions” (Interview 3). Ralph also said that, after carefully analyzing a video for student-teacher interactions, he was able to notice how the teacher he was observing responded to her students:

The impact that has on learning, I didn't necessarily think about that beforehand. How she very cautiously has to step around certain topics and how she responds to students and



how they are reacting to her, like the back and forth. I'm much more aware of how she interacts with students now. (Interview 2)

Likewise, Felicity recalled that one of the earliest video analysis sessions focused on teachers' use of classroom space, admitting she "had no concept of that." She credited the video analysis with focusing her on an aspect of classroom life that she previously did not consider. Felicity said, "While I was in the classroom, I was drawing a classroom map and thinking about what we learned in the video about how the teacher was able to make certain kinds of teaching possible" (Interview 2).

Isolating elements of the classroom ecology also created opportunities for reflection about teacher decision-making. Carl discussed how the video analysis of classroom space prompted a series of questions about his cooperating teacher:

I guess I want to be able to figure out, based on the style of my teacher, what are the most effective methods? You know, are you going to be able to use a poster? I'm sure there will be some teachers who are just as effective as [the teacher in the video] was, but don't use all of the materials in their room like that. (Interview 1)

Andrew also credited the video analysis with helping him focus more specifically on "certain moves" his teacher made "within the classroom." He said that the video analysis often led to conversations with his classroom observation partner about "how our cooperating teacher is teaching, why he's doing certain things, and even maybe things that we think he could be doing better" (Interview 2). By locating specific aspects of practice in videos, the participants in this study became more attuned during their early field experiences to the possible motives behind a teacher's action or inaction.

The participants in this study also shared how isolating aspects of practice in a video of exemplary teaching prior to a live observation influenced their understanding of the interconnectedness of a social studies classroom ecosystem. By focusing on discrete elements, such as the use of students' prior knowledge or the power dynamics between students, the preservice teachers in this study were not only able to see individual elements more clearly, but also the relationship between those elements. Ralph acknowledged that the videos

actively showed us what social studies is about .... The videos showed us how kids react to prompts and questions ... and across the semester, I just started thinking more about the social implications of history and how kids might not understand the importance of these questions in history, but it affects so much today. (Interview 2)

For Ralph, instructional interactions between students and teachers led to related questions during his school-based observations about educators' purposes and rationales for teaching and the utility of social studies as a contemporary school subject. Carl noted that analyzing the instruction of the teacher in the videos helped highlight the importance of engaging in multiple instructional modes. However, despite these powerful engaging instructional techniques, he recognized the power that circulated between the teacher and student:

Sometimes students aren't going to care about the things you want them to care about, regardless of the variation.... Sometimes they're just not going to want to be involved in that discussion. So that was hard for me to come to terms with, especially because I think of how important social studies is. (Interview 2)

The video analysis helped both Carl and Ralph isolate important elements of practice, such as the relevance of social studies education. When that same isolated observational gaze was brought into the live classroom, the interconnectedness between the elements of instruction, curriculum, purpose, and student agency were also raised.

### **Created Opportunities for Contrasts**

Like most preservice teachers, the participants in this study entered their preparation programs with thousands of hours of exposure to teachers and teaching (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) provided a sense of familiarity with the traditional routines and overall grammar of the social studies classroom (Evans, 2004). However, the opportunity to analyze videos of exemplary teaching prior to observing a live social studies classroom created important contrasts and influenced what participants understood from the live classroom observation.

One kind of contrast the video analysis created was between the preservice teachers' own implicit understandings of social studies education and the kinds of practices they observed in the video and, subsequently, at the school site. All of the candidates referred to their experiences as students in the social studies classroom and used these apprenticeship-based experiences as an initial lens to observe the video representations of practice.

Felicity referred multiple times to her experiences with terrible social studies teachers; Carl relied on his experiences of a strict classroom to make sense of teacher-student dynamics. Ralph anchored many of his initial thoughts about teaching and learning on his personal experiences, and Andrew often raised his recollections of his high school classroom to make sense of practice.

Felicity, for example, stated explicitly that she wanted to be a social studies teacher who was the inverse of her own social studies experience. She did not want to engage in the kinds of traditional practices that she experienced, such as straight rows in classrooms, pictures of presidents on the wall, and daily lectures (Interview 1). However, even though Felicity recognized her own problematic experiences with traditional social studies, those experiences also served to arrest her expectations. She noted that "in the typical social studies classroom in my head, I expect to see lectures" and believed that, while it was great for teachers to "try and teach critical thinking," lecture was the only way to deploy knowledge (Interview 1).

The video analysis of exemplary social studies teachers opened up possibilities for Felicity, who recognized as the semester progressed "that there are some really good models of social studies teaching out there" (Interview 2). By interrupting the apprenticeship understandings of social studies education, the video analysis, as an anticipatory step to observing a classroom, created an important contrast that opened up new possibilities for teaching and learning.

Ralph also had some deeply rooted apprenticeship expectations of social studies teaching and learning that the video analysis helped contrast. Ralph said in his second interview that he knew "from personal experience and just from general knowledge that social studies teachers just sit behind a desk and talk about history and not let students talk at all" (Interview 2). However, by the end of the semester, it was clear that the video representations provided Ralph with an opportunity to contrast the personal knowledge he held about the typical social studies classroom:

If you were paying attention to the videos and how the kids were interacting with one another, the teacher still had to kind of nudge students to be part of the conversation. I remember, specifically, there was one where they were all doing group projects, and there was a kid sitting there not really talking, and the teacher addressed him specifically and asked him a question. So yeah, I'd say that [the video analysis] portion of the class also opened my perspective to how kids can behave.... It's an insight into how the classroom works. (Ralph, Interview 3)

Because of the analysis of video representations, Ralph was then able to see how specific strategies were used in the live classroom he observed, where his teacher was letting students talk and make efforts to engage all students in learning.

Another way that video analysis influenced the observation of live classrooms was by creating contrasts between complementary practices that existed in video and live classrooms. For some participants, comparing practice led them to recognize and appreciate themes across examples of good practice. Carl stated that, by watching and analyzing the video representations, "it really sets me up to be able to see and compare ... two completely different ways to approach things and engage with students" (Interview 2).

Similarly, Andrew said that, after watching a video representation of teaching an election, he was able to contrast this lesson with the ways his cooperating teacher navigated discussions. He noted, "Seeing a teacher dealing with a very contemporary example of students maybe getting a little bit heated and being able to deal with that ... it was useful to then see a classroom live that you're able to think about" (Interview 2).

For other participants, the contrast created by video analysis was between dissimilarities that existed in video and live classrooms. After analyzing a video representation for student-to-student interactions, Felicity recalled that during her observation, she realized how little students were interacting in her placement site:

There was no notetaking going on, even though he was giving them a lot of information, so I was wondering, are they retaining any of this, kind of stuff.... I hadn't quite thought about before, which was good for me to see and kind of think about how to counteract that. (Interview 3)

Describing how she came to understand these dissimilarities, Felicity stated, "As I'm watching the video, I'm comparing it to my classroom, and I take the classroom I'm observing and compare it to the video" (Interview 3). In addition to complementary contrasts between the sites, Carl was also able to identify dissimilarities. In his second interview, he recalled a video where "the teacher barely said anything and just reiterated students' points" (Interview 2). He found this as an important distinction between the two sites, because it was a practice that he looked for, but could not find with his cooperating teacher's practice.

In creating contrasts, the video analysis followed by a live observation led to multiple provocations for participants in this study to assess themselves and the practices of the educators they were watching. However, as Felicity highlighted, the process of contrasting was also recursive between the two sites. As such, the video representations provided these preservice teachers with a critical tool to help them sharpen their observational skills and normative assessment of classroom practice.

### **Primed Imaginations**

The general purpose of early field experiences in teacher education is to provide candidates with an insider's look at teaching. However, with no previous experience as educators, early field experience students do not possess enough situated knowledge of teaching to help them make sense or theorize observations (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). What the video analysis of exemplary teachers provided preservice teachers was a way to prime their imaginations about the situational possibilities that exist within a social studies classroom.

Participants noted that the structural progression of video analysis then observation of the field site was instructive, as it helped prime their situational imaginations. Felicity noted, "I think the fact that we're having it right before we go into the classroom, and we're practicing in the classroom what we're going to be doing in our field placement — that connection is important" (Interview 1). Consequently, she deemed the structure as instructive:

Just learning what's expected of you so you don't feel unprepared when you go in. And you're not spending all your time in field placement reading the questions. You've already gone over them, you've already talked about them, you've already asked the questions about those questions, and clarified any language. (Felicity, Interview 1)

Felicity saw the video analysis sessions as a chance to create a list of possibilities that might occur during a live observation. In fact, Felicity believed that she would not have been prepared to observe if she had not first analyzed the video representations. "Look at classroom space. It would not have made as much sense without an explanation or like a toe-dipping in the morning session" (Felicity, Interview 3). Ralph also found the structure instructive, noting that the morning sessions helped him see practice "instead of just talking about it ... [the video analysis] helped me understand what was expected and what we were supposed to be looking for" (Interview 3).

The priming of carefully observing video recorded classrooms allowed students to enter the live classroom experience with a recognition of what was possible in the social studies classroom. More specifically, this priming helped build two important repertoires of knowledge for these early field experience teacher candidates. The first repertoire of knowledge was situational. For Ralph, the video analysis helped establish the "real-world" legitimacy of the particular aspect of classroom life being observed that day. As Ralph put it, "I guess just seeing how the topic of the day works in the real world ... put certain things into place and really incorporated them into our own knowledge and headspace" (Interview 1). Ralph referred to several aspects of teaching that he felt he was better able to see in his live observations due to the video representations:

It helped looking at student-teacher interaction and seeing good examples of that, so to make sure that you're monitoring — for the ones where they were doing projects or something like that — like monitoring students in groups and kind of checking in as you're going around... that type of stuff, [the videos] kind of showed us specific examples of what to do. (Interview 3)

The analysis of video representations provided Carl this same advantage in seeing certain aspects of teaching. He also credited the video analysis for helping him see the importance of "varied activities," since he was able to train his gaze on student learning during the weekly sessions and realize situations and scenarios where student learning was not happening. He stated,

Students learn the most when they get to have varied activities. This is something I saw especially in those videos, and partially the observations, too .... You have to change it up a bit, and you have to do lots of different activities to engage students. (Carl, Interview 3)

Carl noted that the video analysis helped him consider how he might approach situations in general or in his observation site. “Now, whenever I see something that’s new or different in the classroom, I try to make a mental note or a note if I can: What’s going on and why are students reacting the way that they are?” (Interview 2). More specifically, Carl credited the video analysis with priming him to recognize the conditions that lead to student learning and showing him “how kids reacted to prompts from the teacher, and the different ways in which students read and react to prompts they are give” (Interview 3). For both Carl and Ralph, the video analysis primed them to move beyond their superficial views of classroom teaching and recognize the situational and circumstantial nature of teaching and learning.

The second repertoire of knowledge that the video analysis helped prime students to develop was a practical repertoire. In the observation of classroom teachers (both live and recorded), the preservice teachers began to develop a store of specific effective strategies or routines. Unlike the situational repertoire which expanded participants’ imagination about the possible situations in the classroom, the practical repertoire represents how the video analysis prepared students to pick up the specific practical tools that led to learning.

Felicity said that a significant value of video analysis prior to the observations was learning how to break down “general teaching habits and techniques” and how “debates or instructional tasks were conducted.... It gives us an extra resource of ideas” (Interview 3). Carl saw the value of the video analysis prior to observation as helping him better understand the kinds of decisions teachers make, “how a teacher constructs their classroom, the delivery of material, and how they are differentiating instruction” (Interview 1). He recognized that the priming afforded by the video analysis helped him “become more attuned to the strategies a teacher will use specifically to get kids’ attention” (Interview 2).

For Andrew, analyzing video representations helped contribute to his understanding of certain “teacher moves” (Interview 1). Based on the priming in the video analysis, Andrew said that he enters classes looking for good and bad examples, looking to see for instance, “Ok, so they [the teacher] asked this question and that got the students going.... I’m seeing what works with students, what doesn’t work, and sort of what subjects or activities are they doing to really help facilitate that.” This observation then led Andrew to consider, “All right, so what are the assignments that I can do that can maybe snag a couple extra students into saying, ‘You know, this history thing is kind of interesting’” (Interview 1).

As the participants demonstrated, seeing the context around the effectiveness of instructional technique helped ground learning to teach in more meaningful ways. By priming the imaginations of the participants in this study, the video analysis served as a way to learn how to recognize the situational and practical realities of the social studies classroom.

### **The Opportunities and Challenges of Video Representations in Early Field Experiences**

According to Zeichner (2010), the research that can advance an understanding of the quality of field experiences is attuned to how field experiences operate and the ways in which field experiences relate to the central purpose of teaching — helping students learn.

In this study, we responded to Zeichner's call by for more research into the operation of field experiences by exploring an early field experience course in a secondary social studies teacher education program.

Our analysis revealed that the use of video representations positively influenced the ways in which preservice teachers approached their observations of live social studies classrooms and their notions about the dynamics of teaching. By unpacking video representations of exemplar teachers, the preservice teachers in this study were able to expand upon their understandings of the various elements of the complex milieu of a classroom, helping them to see that these elements are isolated *and* interconnected.

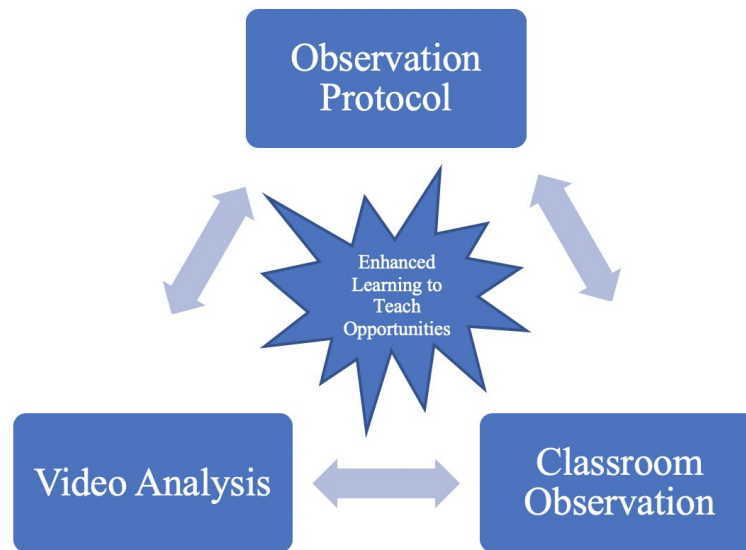
The video representations also illuminated the significance of such elements, signifying their importance while conducting live observations. Furthermore, the video representations provided preservice teachers opportunities to identify contrasts between their own understandings of social studies classrooms, the video representations, and actual situated classroom practices.

The structure of the early field experience — moving from a video analysis session straight into a social studies classroom — proved to support learning to teach, because it created for preservice teachers a way to bridge the video analysis sessions and their individual analysis of social studies teaching and learning. Through the video representations, the preservice teachers in this study were able to build both situational and practical repertoires of knowledge for their future teaching, demonstrating the impact of using the video representations in the process of learning to teach.

Based on our analysis, the opportunities for learning to teach within this particular early field experience in social studies education were advanced by the consistency of the observation protocol across settings. Having a similar observation protocol across the video analysis portion and the classroom observation positioned the participants in this study to isolate decisions, contrast practices, and prime imaginations. For teacher education programs looking to enhance opportunities to learn to teach during early field experiences, our study suggests that the consistency of the observation protocol is a critical component in that work (see Figure 2).

While our findings demonstrate that the use of video analysis positively influenced preservice teachers, participants also raised some challenges to consider. One challenge is the prospect of preservice teachers' simply engaging in the mechanics of observation because it is an assignment. EDU 303 was a graded course, and preservice teachers possibly could not fully separate the value of learning to teach in these settings from that of their graded assignments. In other words, the protocols could also serve as just a checklist to complete.

Andrew demonstrated this association in his explanation of how he completed some of his observations. Observing back-to-back class periods, Andrew said he would get the assignment done during his first class period, as "they [the course instructor] want you to focus on one class anyway" and that, "once you're done doing the assignment ... you can go into that second class — you know sort of what's being expected of the students and what you can do and sort of you can implement yourself more and do that" (Interview 1). For Andrew, the observation assignment was something that needed to be completed before he could really get involved or immerse himself in the classroom.



**Figure 2.** Reciprocal relationship between protocol and observation sites.

Another possible challenge raised by our participants was the lack of control they experienced when analyzing the video representations. While Ralph acknowledged that the videos were effective in promoting conscious thinking, he also noted that he could not interact with anyone in the video (Interview 1), which could be seen as a limitation in the learning process. Felicity said that while she saw the videos as beneficial in showing her “a real-time classroom” and what she is “going to be seeing as a teacher” (Interview 1), she also believed that it might be easier or more beneficial in person.

The video does not provide a full view of everything happening within the classroom. However, she also acknowledged the importance of including the videos in the early field experience: “It doesn’t do the job fully, but it gets us closer than just listening to [the instructor] tell us what we’re supposed to be seeing” (Interview 1). Future studies into the use of video representations during early field experiences should account for the ways in which video analysis of practice can be seen as an assignment and has certain limits for preservice teachers.

Although our data did not reveal social studies specific learning outcomes (e.g., recognizing how students engage in historical thinking; structuring inquiry into social studies phenomenon; or extending learning for civic life) it, nevertheless, revealed important implications for social studies teacher education programs. Foremost, the early field experience has been generally ignored within the broader social studies teacher education community. Our study attended to the unique experiences of learning to teach in an early social studies education field experience.

Based on the findings in this study, tailoring an observation protocol to examine the aspects unique to social studies education classrooms (recorded and live) during an early field experience would likely create the same kinds of learning to teach opportunities. In our particular program, the early field experience served as a scaffold for more intensive and social studies specific field experiences later in the program. However, for programs where

the social studies methods course and field experience are limited to one semester, our study encourages targeting the observation of social studies specific functions of practice.

Additionally, our study addressed the role of early field experiences in social studies teacher education in inoculating prospective teachers from learning to teach in less than ideal placement sites. For the social studies preservice teachers in this study, pairing video analysis with live observations raised important questions about practice, teacher decision-making, and personal K-12 experiences with social studies education. As such, even for preservice teachers placed in classrooms with traditional social studies instruction that lacked engaging instruction (Evans, 2004), the analysis of video representations provided a model of practice that helped sustain the lessons promulgated by the social studies teacher education program.

Certainly, the structure alone of an early field experience is not enough to isolate preservice teachers from the persistence of social studies classrooms dominated by teacher talk and textbooks. However, helping preservice teachers isolate elements of teaching, contrast practices, and imagine possibilities during an early social studies education field experience should serve formative benefits that will continue to mature throughout the rest of a coherent teacher education program.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this study reinforce the consensus in the research literature that the analysis of video representations of exemplary practices benefits preservice teacher learning. In particular, this study illustrated how pairing video analysis with observations of live social studies classrooms during early field experiences was a positive formative learning opportunity.

Learning to observe is an important step in preservice teachers' development of their practical wisdom (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996). Unfortunately, many preservice teachers are not explicitly prepared to notice or perceive classroom events (Orland-Barak & Leshem, 2009; Star & Strickland, 2008). Our hope is that these findings will inform the operation of early field experiences and encourage other teacher education programs to use video representations of practice as a pedagogical scaffold for classroom observations.

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