Schools as Clinics

The seminar leader provides structure, order, and consistency to the various interactions and encourages students to probe the intricacies of professional issues together.

The fall seminar focuses on the scope and spectrum of schooling with a special emphasis on the diversity found in schools (i.e. disabilities, cultural, learning differences, poverty, urban and suburban issues). The twelve democratic conditions outlined by Soder (2001) are used as a basis for an Art in Democracy project and a culminating mini movie, in which students must identify the operationalization of one of the democratic conditions in the clinical setting.

Another important strand found in the seminar course is the attention paid to the moral dimensions of teaching (Srotnik, 2001): enculturating the young to participate in a democracy; accessing knowledge about teaching and learning; nurturing pedagogy, and preparing teachers to act as stewards of schools. Through observation and reflection, teacher candidates take field notes and become familiar with the early stages of data collection, inquiry and research as well as engage in literature related to education and more specifically, to the moral dimensions of teaching. They are expected to connect their theoretical coursework to their clinical experiences through the process of reflective writing and dialogue.

Course activities have been carefully tailored to ensure teacher candidates become as embedded in the school and community culture as possible. Pre-constructed observation forms assist the IB/M student in a pointed investigation of students, schools and learning. This sets the foundation for understanding the professional knowledge base of education. The teacher candidates are also expected to look, from a variety of perspectives, at the school communities in which they are placed and the K-12 students with whom they are working as they begin to explore the concept of critical pedagogy.

Overall, the learning activities students encounter during the fall semester of their junior
year have been intentionally designed to confront misconceptions, stereotypes and deficit thinking and to instill a desire to explore more deeply the complexities of the communities in which teacher candidates are placed through honest and open dialogue, observation and reflection.

**Spring Semester Junior Year: Student in the School Context**

The over-arching objective during the second semester of the junior year is to learn about the *Student in the School Context*. In order to facilitate understanding in this area, both the clinic placement and the weekly seminar focus on the observation of, interaction with, and discussion about students in the school context, including the integration of concepts of social and community issues, and exceptionalities. During both the clinical component and the seminar, relationships to core coursework, such as, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum development and the use of technology in education are emphasized. Teacher candidates begin their path toward becoming professional educators as they explore the importance of inquiry, the moral obligations of the profession and how the foundations, philosophies and issues in education continue to have an impact on the practice of teaching, as both reflective and analytical processes. Once again, teacher candidates spend one day per week in a Professional Development School (at least six hours). The role of the teacher candidate is to be a participant and an observer. Observing carefully, listening actively, and interacting with students in the setting in which they are placed are the primary foci of the semester.

Teacher candidates are exposed to a variety of educational philosophies (Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism and Existentialism) and the impact each continues to have on educational trends and issues. Instead of explicitly teaching one philosophy or theory, teacher candidates are introduced to myriad ways of thinking about teaching, which allows them to critically reach their
own conclusions and apply what they have learned to the process of developing their own philosophies of education. They also engage in a small-group activity, using what they know about educational philosophy, curriculum development, policy and structure, pedagogy, methodology and behavior management to create a “perfect school.” A current-issues paper is required of candidates, and subsequently, they must design and teach a lesson to their peers that focuses on the issue, but is based on constructivist learning theory principles.

**The Case Study.**

The Case Study is the culminating project for the course and requires teacher candidates to take an in-depth look at one or two students with whom they interact and about whom they gather data for six weeks. Candidates are asked to think holistically about one student and to explore the contexts in which the student lives and learns, both in and out of school. Teacher candidates must identify and discuss issues from a sociocultural perspective and explain how those issues influence the student's participation in schooling and other learning activities. They are asked to apply theory and concepts (from prior and current courses) to the realities and complexity of schools and students. In so doing, teacher candidates could broaden their own perspectives and push their thinking about various issues, including examinations of their own prior beliefs and experiences.

**Promising Practices Observation Tool.**

In order to support teacher candidates in careful data collection, they are given a document titled, *Promising Practices Observation Tool*. This is a formative assessment tool and observation protocol that identifies twenty-four professional practices necessary for competent teachers to exhibit. Juniors use the *Promising Practices Observation Tool* to observe their clinic teacher and then reflect on what they see and hear. They are then asked to write a paper
regarding one practice that they observed in their clinic setting and one that was not employed. Teacher candidates must provide observational data to explain what they saw and heard, research to support the importance of the practices and a written reflection about how they plan to implement these practices in their own teaching.

**Responsibility, Relationships, and Reflection.**

Teacher candidates are given a dispositions self-assessment to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses in this important area. The tenets based on responsibility, relationships and reflection (Hands, 2010) are woven throughout the junior year experience, in the fall and spring seminar settings and in the clinic settings. Exploring what taking responsibility looks like in a school setting entails an examination of professional ethics. Teacher candidates are encouraged to observe how a professional should look and act within a learning community. They are also encouraged to explore the significance of holding high expectations for all students, while offering the support and accommodations that are necessary for each student to succeed. Regarding the importance of relationships, it is stressed that teaching is as much about relationships as it is about anything else. K-12 students need to know the teacher is invested in their well being in order to develop the trust necessary to effectively learn. Reflective practice is also encouraged, as teaching requires a willingness to accept and respond to constructive feedback in order to change and improve upon practices, behaviors and attitudes.

The practice of promoting compassionate and just learning environments is a special trait throughout the IB/M program. Classroom management is explored in the context of relationships and it is emphasized that K-12 students really want to learn appropriate behavior. Thus it is the job of every professional educator to hold this belief about each student even when the evidence may not suggest it is true (Smith, 2004). Junior seminar leaders model passionate
and enthusiastic teaching for teacher candidates and encourage them to fully invest themselves in their content area so that they will feel confident and passionate about facilitating the learning of content knowledge for their K-12 students.

**Assessment Literacy.**

Assessment is another significant aspect of teaching and learning, which is why the basic principles of assessment are woven into all of the coursework and clinical experiences offered to teacher candidates. However, there is a special emphasis offered during the spring semester of the junior year and the fall semester of the senior year. The IB/M program highlights the importance of using assessment data to inform instructional decisions and practices, and teacher candidates are introduced to the significance and appropriateness of using performance-based, standardized and criterion referenced assessments, among other forms of assessment.

Performance-based assessments are modeled for teacher candidates in each of the seminar classes they take in the junior year. For example, teacher candidates are asked to write lesson plans based on a children’s book and to design performance assessments that will indicate whether or not specified learning objectives were met by P-12 students. A junior, in the fall of the year, designed a sequencing lesson based on a children’s story and in order to assess her third graders’ understanding of sequencing, she asked each of the students to write their own stories, cut them up and give them to partners to properly sequence.

The Connecticut Academic Mastery Test (2006) is used in the spring of the junior year in order to examine how and why standardized test data help to inform educators and parents by comparing student-to-student results that have been elicited with the application of consistent administration and scoring protocols. Criterion referenced tests, such as the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (2000), are used to highlight a different way to assess students; instead of
comparing student-to-student results as the standardized test does, a criterion-referenced test compares individual student growth to a set of criteria in order to show growth over time. Teacher candidates are encouraged to think about when and why it would appropriate to apply these various methods of assessment.

**Fall Semester Senior Year: Methods Courses**

During the fall semester of the senior year, teacher candidates begin to focus on content and pedagogical knowledge, which is woven into the six hour per week clinical experience. Methods courses promote unit and lesson planning, introducing teacher candidates to a variety of assessment tools and strategies while offering them practice in the thoughtful alignment of assessments with learning objectives and content standards. Clinical placements are consistent with the students' chosen certification area. Although the teacher candidates’ clinical experiences begin as a six-hour per week placement in the fall semester, the same placements evolve into fulltime student teaching experiences for the spring semester.

In addition, the clinical experiences become more demanding, including more clinical opportunities for students to design lessons and teach classes. The seminar continues to serve the purpose of assisting students in their efforts to be analytic and reflective and to make explicit connections between what they are learning in their university course work and what they are undertaking in their clinical experiences.

**Spring Semester Senior Year: Student Teaching**

Kierkegaard (1938) states that “Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner; put yourself in his place so that you may understand… what he learns and the way he understands it.” Over the course of the spring semester, teacher candidates are given the occasion to take calculated learning risks, to put pedagogy into practice, to seek answers to educational
questions, to demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge, to solve problems creatively in a professional context, to plan effective student-centered instruction, to collaborate with peers and colleagues, to receive guidance and feedback from experienced professionals, and to shine. Each teacher candidate is placed in one of the seven Professional Development Centers (partnership school districts) and assigned to a TEAM trained cooperating teacher at a grade level and in a content area in which s/he is pursuing professional certification. Teacher candidates are also paired with a university supervisor, who conducts four formal observations, facilitates evaluations and provides a bridge between the university and the public school classroom in which teacher candidates are placed.

**TEAM and the Common Core of Teaching.**

The acronym, TEAM, stands for *Teacher Education and Mentoring Program: Bridging the Journey from Preparation through Professional Practice*. The Connecticut State Department of Education has created a systematic induction program, using this model in an effort to mentor new teachers. This model is also used to prepare cooperating teachers who will be mentoring teacher candidates. The TEAM model is based on Connecticut’s Common Core of Teaching, which emphasizes both the art and the science of teaching by focusing on knowledge, skills and qualities. Six domains have been identified (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010): content and essential skills; classroom environment, student engagement and commitment to learning; planning for active learning; instruction for active learning; assessment of learning; and professional responsibilities and teacher leadership. Cooperating teachers assume their role as mentor teachers, working in the significant capacity of creating the next generation of educators, with a solid foundation of what the state of Connecticut considers best educational practices (see [www.ctteam.org](http://www.ctteam.org)).
The university supervisor plays a significant role in the student teaching process in that they provide observational data and feedback to the teacher candidate, facilitate the three-way evaluation meetings that take place at the mid-term and end of the semester, assign the final grade, and provide letters of recommendation to teacher candidates.

**Requirements for Teacher Candidates.**

Teacher candidates must develop and utilize a system for planning and scheduling that is personally useful, consistent with the requirements of the cooperating teacher, and one that meets individual school requirements. Long and short term planning, as well as assessments, must be presented by the teacher candidate to the cooperating teacher in a format that is clear, specific, and easily understood. Prior to implementation, the cooperating teacher and/or university supervisor must approve instructional plans and assessments. Throughout the student teaching experience, candidates receive regular feedback from university supervisors, cooperating teachers and seminar leaders with regard to the efficacy of the assessments they are developing and how to use those data to inform their instruction. Issues related to standardized testing and criterion-referenced assessments are also explored in seminar classes, as are various systems of documentation and the importance of making assessment audit trails, such as formative and summative assessment scores, transparent to students and their families.

**Reflection.**

Academic responsibilities include the study of teaching through analysis and self-evaluation as ongoing processes. Evidence of this study includes discussing teaching practices regularly with seminar leaders, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, school colleagues, and teacher candidate peers. Often, this information is processed in the weekly seminar where teacher candidates are expected to complete readings and assignments as well as participate in
Seminars and seminar activities. Seminar assignments are designed to support teaching experiences and help teacher candidates make sense of what they are experiencing. Some essential questions explored in the seminar include: What does it mean to be a highly effective teacher? How does one develop inner authority? How might one best take advantage of the opportunities presented in student teaching to build professional expertise?

**Intentional Placements.**

Teacher candidate placements are highly intentional, although ensuring quality is a challenge and will be addressed in a later section of this paper that speaks to the infrastructure required to sustain partnerships. State data on strategic school profiles and student achievement trends are used to decide with whom the Neag School of Education will partner on behalf of teacher candidates. The goal is to create diverse field placements in which educational competence and best educational practices are being employed. The program endeavors to tailor field experiences to capitalize on individual teacher candidate strengths, while also offering challenges so that candidates will build confidence and begin to develop a sense of their own teaching styles and preferences.

**Student Teaching Assessments.**

The IB/M program has developed a variety of ways to assess the progress that teacher candidates make over the course of the spring semester. The program has developed sustained relationships with clinic and cooperating teachers that facilitate candid dialogue. In addition to this informal progress monitoring, the program has built in formal processes such as mandatory three-way evaluation meetings with teacher candidates, cooperating teachers and university supervisors. The faculty has developed a variety of survey instruments that are used to collect data regarding the efficacy of our teacher candidates’ experiences in the field, including their
perspectives on the experiences and feedback regarding ways the overall program could be enhanced. These data are analyzed each year and the outcomes are considered in redesigning various program elements.

A self-assessment occurs during the sustained student teaching experience, when teacher candidates videotape themselves teaching a formally designed lesson. They edit the lesson and write a three to five page reflection on their own practices. Segments of each video are chosen by the teacher candidate to share with peers in the seminar class in order to elicit feedback and support. Seminar leaders review each video, along with the lesson plan, the support materials used, P-12 artifacts collected and the reflection, in order to offer extensive feedback. The entire assignment is uploaded into the TaskStream electronic portfolio that each teacher candidate maintains in an effort to document growth throughout his or her IB/M program tenure.

The *Professional Practices Observation Tool* is an observation protocol that includes twenty-four teaching practices, which teacher candidates must demonstrate at a level of acceptable proficiency during the student teaching experience. This is the same assessment tool used in the spring of the junior year when teacher candidates have their six-hour per week clinic experiences and are expected to keep a journal of classroom observations in the learning setting in which they have been placed.

The purpose of the *Professional Practices Observation Tool* is twofold. One, the protocol provides a formative and ongoing assessment of the teacher candidate’s progress and allows all stakeholders a transparent view of the process. The second purpose is to prevent observers from focusing on a pervasive issue or challenge that is present for the teacher candidate and to take a more holistic look at the application of practices. If a pervasive issue
exists, the observer can document it in the generic comments section of the observation in order to maintain an audit trail of the teacher candidate’s progress in this area.

By the end of the student teaching experience, all twenty-four practices should have been observed, with the cooperating teacher having done four formal observations, and the university supervisor having done four formal observations while observing three professional practices each time. If a teacher candidate does not do well on one or more of the practices, they may ask their observers if they can teach again in another lesson. At the end of the semester, in order for teacher candidates to graduate, this document must be uploaded into their electronic portfolios.

**Formal Assessments.**

Formal assessments of teacher candidates include a mid-term and final evaluation. The same rubric is used for both; however, at the mid-term, a letter grade is not issued, and there is an additional column of “Not Applicable” added to the evaluation in order not to penalize teacher candidates for not having the time to address all of the standards. The rubric used includes content-specific standards embedded for all subject areas. The development of this form is based on the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching and standards promoted by the national specialty professional associations in various content areas. Therefore, each subject area has its own content-based rubric. The rubric is broken into two major categories including how teacher candidates apply knowledge through planning, instructing, assessing and adjusting, and how teacher candidates demonstrate professional responsibility through professional and ethical practice, reflection and continuous learning, and leadership and collaboration.

Two three-way meetings are held as part of the evaluation process. The teacher candidate, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor all meet in order to discuss the various standards on the rubric and to come to consensus regarding the teacher candidate’s
progress. The teacher candidate is encouraged to complete a hard copy of the rubric prior to the three-way meeting as an exercise in reflective practice and self-assessment. Likewise, the cooperating teacher is asked to come to the meeting with a scored draft in order to facilitate a thorough conversation regarding the teacher candidate’s progress and areas that require improvement. The university supervisor oversees the conversation in the meeting, shaping the process by adding his or her observations of the student’s progress and assisting the group to come to consensus.

**The Fifth Year: Teacher as Leader**

The fifth year is a distinguishing feature of the program and the capstone of the experience. It affords fifth year students the opportunity to work within a community of fellow educators and to challenge themselves as leaders and learners through the completion of an inquiry project. The inquiry project is based on an action research model, whereby fifth year interns are expected to collect data in their internship placements, collate data, analyze them and interpret them in an effort to respond to a research question that they design in tandem with the school in which they are placed.

In the corresponding seminar course, interns engage in dialogue and reflect with peers on scholarly articles, education in the news, educational theories and theorists, and experiences at school sites with the ultimate goal of expanding their awareness of key issues like diversity, equity, and social justice. The course is designed to support fifth year teacher candidates as they work in schools in an internship setting and continue to develop teaching expertise through graduate coursework and professional reflection. The broad goals of the seminar course are to support an exploration of what it means to be a professional educator and leader in the diverse school community of the 21st century. In this course, interns explore their questions related to
best practices by engaging school personnel, reviewing the current literature on research in education, and developing an inquiry project based on their interests and questions.

Fifth year candidates actively engage in discussions about a variety of issues in education including the roles of teachers in the educational community—particularly teachers as leaders—and current issues in education and teaching, as well as, considering the effects of poverty on students and the importance of resiliency in the context of all educational settings. The small seminar format allows for participants to delve deeply into educational issues and provides an opportunity for individual attention and responsibility.

The expectation is that interns will devote eighteen hours each week to professional responsibilities at the internship site. Interns are encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunity to develop a relationship with the internship supervisor or coordinator. The internship supervisor can be a district superintendent, a building administrator, a department head, a curriculum coordinator or a classroom teacher. These educators typically manifest vast amounts of experience and expertise that they are willing to share with interns.

Each internship has its own unique features and expectations. The internships are generated out of an identified need at the school level and then proposed to Professional Development Center (PDC) coordinators (the liaisons between the university and the public schools), who help the school communities shape the proposals in ways that will appeal to fifth year interns and provide them with leadership, teaching and growth opportunities. During the spring semester of the senior year, teacher candidates choose three internships (two of them must be in urban districts) and then a committee of faculty members convenes in order to place students in one of their three choices. Unlike student teaching or other clinic placements, it is the responsibility of the fifth year teacher candidates to collaborate with school personnel in order to
give shape to the internship. Because candidates are neither a classroom aide nor a substitute teacher, they must work with the internship supervisor to clearly define roles and responsibilities; in so doing, they experience what it is like to be a *Teacher as Leader* and to acquire a mile high view of the public school community.

**Conclusion**

The heart and soul of any comprehensive teacher preparation program is the fieldwork that supports the theory being learned in coursework and offers an opportunity to operationalize best educational practices. Graduates of the IB/M program took an exit survey that included the following question: What aspects of your preparation at UConn do you think will be most valuable to your career as a teacher? Overwhelmingly, graduates responded that their clinical experiences have best prepared them for a teaching career. One student said, “*The clinical experiences I had, working closely with students and teachers is something you can't recreate in a University classroom.*” Another student indicated, “*I believe the number and variety of field experiences has contributed most to my preparation.*” A third student wrote, “*I believe our clinic placements in both urban and suburban settings will be most valuable. These experiences cannot be taught in the classroom and I believe everyone should see both types of districts.*” These data provide evidence for the importance of integrating a coursework-clinic-seminar structure whereby teacher candidates are offered a broad and deep perspective on the art and science of teaching. The clinical experiences are particularly enriched when they occur within the context of partnership settings. The Professional Development School model fosters the potential to engage in simultaneous renewal, to choose quality placements for teacher candidates.
and to maintain trusting and sustained relationships that help to create an enduring teacher preparation program that promotes learning about practice in practice.
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