Shifting Schemas: Perspectives and Practice in a Learner-Centered Course

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As a profession, we must have a shift in both perspective and practice to transform teaching at all levels. Are pre-service education classrooms preparing students to be flexible, adapt to new situations, and rely on their own expertise and understanding while seeking support when needed? Lieberman and Miller (2004) identify the following shifts for transforming the social realities of teaching: from individualism to professional community; from teaching at the center to learning at the center and from technical and managed work to inquiry and leadership (p. 11). The authors seek to critically examine the perspectives of pre-service teachers participating in a social studies methods course using constructivist practices.

Because of the demands on today's classroom teachers, pre-service teachers need to be exposed to instructional strategies that will assist them in the future (Van-Tassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). Strong understanding and application of general pedagogical knowledge is the foundation upon which all other types of content and pedagogical content knowledge rest (Ball & Bass, 2000). As a profession, we must have a shift in both perspective and practice to transform teaching at all levels. Are pre-service education classrooms preparing students to be flexible, adapt to new situations, and rely on their own expertise and understanding while seeking support when needed? The following is an excerpt taken from a final reflection for a student enrolled in a learner-centered, constructivist course:

> As a student I have organized my life with lists, lots and lots of lists. Lists give me a sense of control and accomplishment, but on day one of our class I was thrown for a loop. This is my sixteenth year as a student, so I've come to expect a syllabus explaining what I'm going to learn, how I'm going to learn, and what I need to do to pass the class; however, this was not the case with this class, and it made me a little anxious. With that being said I can honestly say I have learned far more in this class than I have in any other class I have taken in the past sixteen years of my schooling.

This perspective indicates a revelation in the learning process and common expectations of college students (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Based on this and similar responses, the author wanted to delve more into why the student felt she learned "far more in this class" than others taken in her schooling experience. What components of the course were beneficial, and in what ways could it be improved?

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the perspectives of the university instructor and pre-service teachers participating in a social studies methods course using constructivist practices. Students are provided a syllabus outlining course topics and learning goals devised by the instructor based on the National Social Studies Standards. With the help of the instructor, students develop a learning contract outlining products, rubrics, and reflections that demonstrate their mastery and understanding of the course objectives. In lieu of a final exam, students must also complete a final reflection paper which outlines their experience in this learner-centered course. There are no attendance requirements or other formal assessments used to calculate their final grade. There is a pre-assessment given on the first day of class which is used to develop the learning contract. The same assessment is given as a post-assessment on the last day of class to provide evidence of growth and aid in writing the final reflection.

Theoretical Perspective

The shifts and reform in the field of education require students to take more responsibility for their learning (Moran & Gardner, 2007). As such, the development of one's executive function can serve as a component of the learning process. Moran and Gardner (2007) define executive function as "a cognitive process involved in controlling behavior and readying the person for situations" (p. 22). The ability to be mentally and behaviorally flexible in real-life decision making and everyday reasoning is part of the development of this process (Moran & Gardner, 2007). Two stages of executive function are apprentice, relying on an ideological and cognitive control system, and master, developing an idiosyncratic control system. At the apprentice level, one keeps in line with expectations, specifically cultural norms and institutions, establishing appropriately cultural goals with the ability to "delay gratification, inhibit his or her automatic responses, and adapt to rules" (Moran & Gardner, 2007, p. 27). In contrast, at the master level, one's culture is an important point of reference, but masters "increasingly demonstrate

the ability to posit and pursue individually conceived goals" (p. 29). In essence, the master takes initiative to make personal change.

Framework of Instruction and Practice

Piaget and Vygotsky, semiotic interactionists, believed that because humans continually transform and reconstruct reality as well as ourselves, then we cannot have an objective view of reality (Fosnot, 1996). As a result of his study of reasoning processes, Piaget "defined intelligence as an individual's ability to cope with the changing world through continuous organization and reorganization of experience" (Singer & Revinson, 1996, p. 13). Through these experiences cognitive development is amassed as one begins to understand a new experience based on what was learned previously (Singer & Revinson, 1996). Schema combines knowledge with the process of acquiring knowledge, thereby developing new schemas and modifying or changing existing schemas (Piaget, 1951).

According to Weimer (2002), students do not have to possess mastery of a subject, but instead are "encouraged to explore it, handle it, relate it to their own experience, and challenge it whatever their level of expertise" (p. 13). The *Principles of Engagement* (Cambourne, 2002) framework supports this task whereby learners are more likely to deeply engage with demonstrations if they believe they are capable of doing what is demonstrated, it is authentic and applicable, the task is not anxiety provoking, and the demonstration is given by someone they respect. Teachers are persons whose confidence is trusted as mentors and counselors (Ericksen, 1984).

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional framework which coincides with many of the principles of constructivism. The problem-based learning model originated and was primarily utilized in medical schools. Barrows (1986) outlines six characteristics for the problem-based model: learning is student centered, it occurs in small student groups, teachers serve as facilitators, problems serve as both the original focus and learning stimulus, problems lead to the development of problem solving skills, and new knowledge is attained through self-directed learning. In their research exploring theoretical principles of constructivism, instructional design and the practice of teaching, Savery and Duffy (2001) identify self-directed learning, absorbing content knowledge, and problem solving as explicit learning goals related to problem-based learning.

Method

Utilizing an interpretive epistemology, this study used qualitative measures to consider the perspectives of undergraduate students enrolled in a social studies

methods course. Data include observations by the instructor, focus group responses, final reflections, and course evaluations. Data was analyzed using document analysis (Bowen, 2009).

Data Sources

Participants

Students enrolled in the social studies methods course were sophomores, juniors, or seniors and may or may not have been formally accepted into the Teacher Education program. The course has one pre-requisite: students were required to create their own independent learning contract to demonstrate ways they would demonstrate mastery of ten course objectives based on the National Social Studies Standards. Each product was submitted with a student designed rubric which the instructor would use for evaluation of the product and self-reflection. This process of self-selected learning requires students to "generate useful schemes for organizing knowledge in their own heads" (Ericksen, 1984, p. 91), establish meaning, and consider their individual aptitudes, interests, and learning styles. This period of processing information provides students experiences, cognitive and affective, with learning how to learn independently (Ericksen, 1984).

Course Design

Based on the constructivist frameworks of Weimer (2002) and Cambourne (2002), the course was intentionally designed to include opportunities for students to explore, engage, and connect with new information related to the pedagogy of social studies in the elementary school. Knowledge, understanding, and application of the ten course objectives were the focus of the learning contract, products, rubrics, and material being delivered each week during class. The syllabus provided an outline of topics to be discussed (Appendix A), but it was flexible in its design. There was a statement on the syllabus in the assessment strategies column, "Teach/Practice Challenge," which referred to what students needed based on the results of their pre-assessment given on the first day of class. This allowed the instructor to tailor the class to specific student needs based on their prior knowledge, as well as to employ methods related to problem-based learning.

Students were expected to have completed prepared readings in advance, as well as any questions related to the product design, which was to be created to demonstrate their mastery of the course objective. These readings may have been provided by the instructor or other members of the class. During the scheduled class time, the instructor presented information in the form of articles, videos, presentations through direct instruction,

and/or class discussions. Class time was also devoted to sharing ideas and presentations of products in order to receive feedback if changes were necessary. The instructor served as a guide rather than the expert. Students were encouraged to bring in their own supplementary materials to aid in their learning and understanding of the course material. There was no set structure to how the class time was spent as it depended on the topic of discussion, the needs of the students, and the feedback from the instructor based on student performance. In this way, the course was collaborative with everyone contributing to the presentation and exploration of the course topics.

Data Collection

This study collected data from Fall 2011 through Spring 2015. Data collection included focus group responses, final reflections, and course evaluations.

Focus group responses. At the conclusion of each semester, students were invited to participate in a focus group conducted by another member of the education department. This was optional for students to participate and not associated with grading for the course. The facilitator posed questions and recorded the responses anonymously. The information was shared via electronic file with the instructor of the course.

Final reflections. Students were required to complete a written reflection as their final component of the course in lieu of a traditional course exam. Guiding questions and prompts were provided to students, but they could include additional personal experiences, suggestions, or comments.

Course evaluations. The institution sends course evaluations to students at the conclusion of each semester. Data were collected from the narrative section of the course evaluations.

Results

Students enrolled in the course are faced with a period of change and uncertainty from the first day of the course. Through his experiences, Johnson (2011) identified three types of responses to uncertainty: being comfortable, being uncomfortable, or being irritated with uncertainty. Usually students enrolled in this course have responded in one of these three manners, with very few of them expressing comfort. Through the analysis of the data, the following themes emerged.

Schema

Typically, the first day of a college course is dedicated to reviewing the syllabus, answering questions, participating in "getting to know you" activities, and possibly an introductory lecture on the topic. Over many years of school, students have expected to find on a syllabus the rules and regulations of the classroom teacher, the attendance policy, and the due dates of each assignment; in essence, "what I'm going to learn, how I'm going to learn, and what I need to do to pass the class." Students are comfortable with this design because of its familiarity and predictability with what to do next in order to be successful in the course. However, the syllabus used in this course consistently caused the majority of the students to initially feel either uncertain or uncomfortable with the course design.

The syllabus only listed the course objectives without reference to how and/or when they would be assessed. The syllabus also stated that there was no attendance policy, which is very uncommon within the institution. The course best reflects the flipped classroom as a constructivist teaching method. Flipped Learning Network (2014) defines this method as the following:

> [A] pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter (p. 1).

Therefore, if a student does not need help with the content she is working on with the resources the teacher has already provided, then she need not come to class. This is not only beneficial for the student's time, but the teacher's as well. The constructivist method of flipping the classroom allows the student to self-assess her own learning and decide when and where she needs guidance with the content. This also ensures that the teacher is not wasting time by re-teaching the content in which the students feel confident. No attendance policy also releases responsibility onto the student because she is in charge of coming to class when she finds herself confused or unclear of content, replicating decision making skills to be used in the future.

In the student's current schema, the teachers are responsible for choosing how the content will be learned, assessed, and completed. Students often struggled in the beginning with scheduling and long term planning. For example, a student's early reflection lamented, "I have been used to having deadlines and having a set day for things due so it is a little difficult for me to come up with a date for an assignment to be turned in." Being immersed in a traditional learning style of direct instruction has caused students to experience anxiety when introduced to any other teaching method. Most of the student reflections of the course mentioned that clarity of the course structure came with time, and the purpose of the course structure was to "make it a learner centered course."

The first assignment of the course, given on the first day of class, was a pre-assessment of K-6 social studies content knowledge. This pre-assessment was not for a grade, but it was used instead as a baseline for students to be aware of their knowledge on the subject and course objectives prior to designing the learning contract. Additionally, if students were successful on the pre-assessment and demonstrated proficiency of the objective, then she could place out of that objective without completing a product. This opportunity for differentiation reflects best instructional practices and demonstrates the importance of using pre-assessments in the classroom (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013, p. 1). If students are knowledgeable in a certain content area, then there should be opportunities for enrichment and challenge. Every student reflection referenced feelings of nervousness over taking this test. The pre-service teachers were appalled at how little they remembered about K-6 social studies, reinforcing the idea there is not enough emphasis in today's schools on social studies content (Ahrari et al. 2013, p. 1).

At the conclusion of the semester, students were given the identical test as a post-assessment. Nearly all of the students were eager to take the final assessment as most were excited to show how much they had learned through creating and constructing their own learning. The post-assessment was not graded, so the motivation to do their best on the test was determined by the pre-service teachers' actions throughout the course. Whether it was an immense improvement between tests, or a miniscule growth, each pre-service teacher experienced personal growth. For example as one student shared, "This pre and post assessment allowed my professor and me to see growth, strengths, and weaknesses." This success in the course was more rewarding to the pre-service teachers because the learning was autonomous, meaningful, and effective. Everything they learned in this course, academically or psychologically, prepared them to educate their students using constructivist methods in the classroom.

In the pre-service teachers' reflections, there was an overwhelming trend on how beneficial the power of choice was in their learning. The power of choice was to decide when a product was due, how they would present that they knew the content, and how they would be graded. This put the pre-service teachers in full control of their learning, allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge while exploring their strengths and strengthening their weaknesses in social studies content. The instructor found that the freedom provided to students in their product of choice resulted in more creative and meaningful submissions. Sample products included bulletin board designs, interviews with teachers and experts in the field, development of integrated units and lesson plans, poems, story books, songs, brochures, and presentations. Furthermore, there was in increase in the exploration of technology tools such as podcasts, Google docs, livebinders, Prezi, blogs, website design, and the incorporation of social media, which could all be utilized in the future classroom.

The majority of pre-service teachers who took this course believed that they were achieving mastery of the course objectives through the products they were creating because they were able to work at their own pace and create products that enhanced their own personal growth. The main aspect of this course, that success or failure is determined upon them and their actions, was not realized by most of the pre-service teachers until the end of the course. The sense of control was an important component as well: "I felt in charge of my own grade because I was creating my own activities, and basically I am deciding my own grade for the course."

Motivation

Gillard (2015) discusses that teachers can no longer be dispensers of knowledge nor can they solely serve as facilitators. She states, "[T]eachers must become motivators of purpose," meaning that they are no longer in control of "what or how a student learns. Control must be given…to the student so that he/she is freely able to master that knowledge important to his/her own purpose" (p. 4). In general, students are motivated by the calendar. They have planned their learning contracts and set dates according to when they can complete the product. Because this is a learner-centered course, students are allowed to revise contracts as much as needed. Some students create one contract and follow it through the entire semester, while others change their contract nearly every other week. Often class discussions revolve around priorities and how that can impact where this class falls on their list of priorities and the level of importance it receives. If students make their learning purposeful, then their intrinsic motivation is stimulated (Gillard, 2015, p. 2). No two students have the same learning patterns or intelligences, so educators must motivate students toward personal growth. The mental goal to do better today than yesterday is a great intrinsic motivation for students to have not just toward academics, but in everything they do.

Constructivism is active learning in which the learner is the constructor or creator of his/her own learning (Weimer, 2002). The motivation to complete a task, academic or other, is usually extrinsic; there is a reward or grade earned for completing the task proficiently (Gillard, 2015, p. 2). The assignments in the course being studied were self-rewarded and intrinsically motivated. The student constructs the rubric for each assignment, and the teacher grades each product based on the student's rubric (Appendix B). Therefore, it is up to the student to decide if she will complete each assignment to decide how she will demonstrate that she knows the content. In the student

reflections there was no mention of grades being the motivation for completing the assignments. Students mentioned that they felt motivated to complete the products because they wanted to reach their full potential and get as much out of the learning experience as possible. For example, one student wrote, "The classroom setting is very relaxed, and I feel very comfortable, which makes me more motivated to learn." With this intrinsic motivation driving the student's learning, the exploration into the academic topics was deeper and more thorough, and students "became more self-motivated" in their learning. This course has also motivated these pre-service teachers to explore how to use constructivist methods in other content areas to benefit their future students; "I hope that one day in my own classroom I can reinforce this constructivist attitude so that my students will feel confident in the face of uncertainty, and feel prepared."

While some students did thrive through intrinsic motivation, others struggled with motivation as a result of what they perceived as extrinsic motivation in the form of direction and expectation from the professor. One student stated, "There definitely should be some type of consequence for not turning in products on time. I feel this is why I didn't always turn them in on time." It can be assumed that because there were no penalties for a late submission that the responsibility for her procrastination in completing the assignments at the end of the semester is on the instructor rather than herself. Furthermore, this student expressed her frustration with the course design at the conclusion of the semester:

> I believe I have not changed as a learner. I found the particular teaching style extremely hard to navigate through. The learning style that was used just does not work for me. I need to have a structured classroom with set rules, directions, and due dates. This class provided none of these things for me.

When responding to whether the class experience was positive or negative, one student stated, "[T]his was a very negative experience for me because I had very little structure. I feel that I should have had more guidance at the beginning of the semester." Each semester the instructor reviews the course evaluations and reflections and has continued to make changes in the facilitation of the class in order to scaffold students who struggle with the perceived lack of structure when they are ultimately in control of the learning process. Constructivism lends itself well to the principles of differentiation to allow for all students to be successful.

Collaboration

Friend and Cook (2013) contend that, in order to ensure high quality education occurs, teachers need to work together now more than ever before to create a school culture of collaboration. According to the researchers, "Interpersonal collaboration is a style for direct instruction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 6). We must aid our students in developing an understanding of working together for the benefit of all students, not only of their individual class of students. This process of development was highlighted through this reflective response:

> After experiencing this course in the future I will approach challenges with an open mind. Challenges are oftentimes a great chance for collaboration and growth, and it is always interesting to hear how several different people come up with numerous solutions to one issue. This course has also shown me that keeping an open mind is important and that thinking creatively is rewarded. A solution that may work best for one person may not work for another, so having the opportunity to expand and grow is one that should be explored.

Liberman and Miller (2004) identify the following shifts for transforming the social realities of teaching: from individualism to professional community, from teaching at the center to learning at the center, from technical and managed work to inquiry and leadership (p. 11). Through these transformative shifts, teachers can begin participating in an authentic professional community where their work takes place both within and beyond their own classrooms (Liberman & Miller, 2004). Moreover, teachers look collaboratively at student work and curriculum design to co-construct alternatives to standardization (Liberman & Miller, 2004). According to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), "developing skills in working effectively on teams, carrying out various roles in groups, and working together with others to solve classroom problems to improve instruction" (p. 50) are prerequisite to working successfully in school cultures where collective inquiry should be the norm.

Students may work on their submissions individually, with partners, and/or with the larger group. They are responsible for making this decision and are encouraged to collaborate with one another to show their understanding of course content (Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012). Again, teachers regularly co-teach and plan together on grade level teams, so pre-service teachers in this course have experiences which replicate their future. As one student reflected, "When working with a group, it allowed me to see how I work with others and take in consideration others' ideas and opinions." Students share their products each week and are encouraged to provide feedback, both positive and constructively, for ways to strengthen connections to

the standards and/or more clearly articulate an idea. In this design, peer feedback has both encouraged and challenged the students to consider their products more deeply and reflectively. This was one student's response: "It was valuable to create my own lessons and present it to the class to receive feedback without judgment." This response highlights the safety of the classroom environment when taking a risk with a new product design.

Elementary teachers possessing this foundational and strong knowledge of general pedagogy have "knowledge and skill beyond what is visible from an examination of the curriculum" (Ball & Bass, 2000, p. 2). Pre-service teachers must move beyond individualism and embrace the spirit of collegiality to effectively "guide their practice toward working collaboratively with others" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 49). The role that students play in their own learning through developing products, lesson plans, and reflections about their personal growth is an important component to gaining confidence in the classroom.

Connection to the Profession

Gillard (2015) states that we need to make the education of pre-service teachers "meaningful by relating them to applications in a typical classroom and to develop an appreciation for the value of reflection in the teaching/ learning process" (p. 2). So much of the education career is reflecting on past work and deciding on what was done well and what needs to be improved. In the course being studied, after each product was completed the students were asked to write a reflection on whether their method for learning the content was productive and effective, and if not, what could have been changed in the future. Having each pre-service teacher construct how he would learn the content and then reflecting on those methods to evaluate his effectiveness is exactly what educators do for their students every single day in the classroom. Students in classrooms today are "learning differently, and are accessing information differently" (Gillard, 2015, p. 3) and teachers must be able to adapt to their students' learning every day. One student elaborated:

> This class prepared me to teach elementary social studies, because even though I will have the guidelines, ultimately it is up to me the way I teach my students. This class allowed me to be in full control, similar to a classroom setting. Through social studies methods I was able to research resources for social studies, locate the standards, and develop lesson plans. The product I created in this course will be able to benefit my future class, parents of students, and future colleagues.

The open-ended freedom to design products and the rubric used for evaluation is overwhelming for many students. As they discover their metacognitive skills and preferences as learners over the course of the semester, a newfound freedom to design lesson plans and units related to their future careers begins to emerge. One goal of the instructor is to scaffold them through this process since this replicates what teachers do in the classroom on a daily basis. A student reflected, "This class was a great experience for me to learn and understand how other styles of teaching other than lectures can be successful." It is also a way to ensure the course objectives are meaningful and relevant with each assignment submission, as shared by one student: "Looking back over the semester, completing the products has helped me to remember and learn the objectives. When thinking of the five themes of geography, I think back to the Prezi that I created and the information then quickly comes to me." Meaningful connections allow for improved recall.

There are curriculum standards set forth by the state and pacing guides provided by the district, but the administration will not be there to write plans for future teachers. They have spent years of academic schooling waiting to be given the rules to follow and tasks to complete. This constructivist learning style sparks the initiative for them to begin making the decisions about their own mastery of content, thus shifting their role from learner to teacher. For example, one student commented, "A major plus of this course is that I felt that I was able to start thinking in more teacher mode instead of student mode." The following are excerpts from final reflections which speak to the strong connections students are making between the course design and their careers:

> I feel that I have changed as a teacher. At first, I thought I would teach the same way my teachers taught. Now, after experiencing this class, I feel that student choice and student directed learning is a great way to structure a classroom. I feel that this class has in a sense changed my philosophy of teaching.

> I have learned a lot more than just Social Studies in this class, such as how to conduct myself as a teacher and some of the more important ideas (respect, diversity) that should be incorporated into every classroom.

> I think more than anything, this course design is preparing us for our roles as a teacher in the classroom. As a teacher, we will choose (for the most part) what our students learn, how they are going to learn it, and how they are going to prove

to me that they have learned it. Is this the method behind your madness?

Specific teaching strategies that enhance executive function processes include "goal-setting, planning, organizing, prioritizing, shifting strategies flexibly, and self-checking" (Meltzer, Pollica, & Barzillai, 2007, p. 166). Going through the learning process allows students to develop an understanding of how to learn as they begin to recognize their own personal strengths and the impact the executive function process has on their academic success. The process can also highlight areas of improvement which may have not been as prominent. For example, this student who struggled greatly with the course design stated, "I still feel confused, and the class was extremely frustrating and stressful for me due to how it was set up and run. This class made me question whether or not teaching elementary school is the right fit for me." A similar response from another student regarding the class structure: "This class structure is not my forte and nothing I will bring into my [future] classroom, no offense. I don't know too many people who are not extremely stressed in a classroom that is structured like this one". While the intention is not to bring students to the point of abandonment through constructivist learning, the course structure does replicate what will be expected of them as first year teachers. They will not have someone to tell them how to design lesson plans, manage their classrooms of young learners, and navigate the curriculum. Over the years the course has helped students identify with the realities of teaching elementary school and evaluate whether or not this is the career path they would like to continue to take.

Scholarly Significance

The role that students play in their own learning through developing products, lesson plans, and reflections about their personal growth is an important component to gaining confidence in the classroom. The teacher's responsibility is to "help students advance from dependent memorizing to independent thinking and problem solving" (Ericksen, 1984, p. 83). The ideas presented by Ericksen are not limited to the field of education and could be replicated in other fields of study. The premise is to find ways to present course content in such a way that the responsibility of learning and control shifts from the instructor to the students. The following is an excerpt from a student's final reflection and captures this personal growth perspective:

…[A]s a result of feeling uneasy and vulnerable I was opened up to an enlightening experience. I hope that one day in my own classroom I can reinforce this constructivist attitude so that my students will feel confident in the face of uncertainty…

However, not all students will embrace this idea of shifting the responsibility of learning from the teacher to themselves. Because most students experience years of traditional education through direct instruction and teacher designed learning, they continue to remain uncertain of what they have learned, or not learned, from this course. The following are student excerpts from course evaluations which all feature similar themes on the focus of responsibility for learning:

I would like more structure. I like being able to choose what we wanted to due but I think some structure should have been given. I think a timeline of what you are going to teach is something that would have been useful.

More guidance with the contract and meeting each objective. You need to provide this without expecting people to ask because I did not know how to ask for assistance with this. It would have been good to provide examples from past students on how they met the objectives and possibly limiting our options for a few of them just so that we have somewhere to start from. I have a much better idea of how to approach this class now, but unfortunately the class is nearly over.

There is one MAJOR improvement that needs to be made to this course. There needs to be a structured syllabus. I am not a fan of the student-made syllabus. I feel that I did not learn anything in this class that I will carry on with me into my teaching career. If I did learn anything, I taught myself. I feel that this is no way to teach an undergraduate class; The learning contract idea needs to be improved. I do not particularly like this idea. I think there needs to be more guidance and actual teaching in the classroom. I do not feel that I have learned anything in this class. I don't like standard syllabi, but I feel that this class needs to go back to a traditional one. I think the students would learn more with a traditional syllabus.

As an instructor, it is not easy to read such criticisms of a course, particularly when students feel that they did not learn anything over a 16-week period. However, taking their critiques and making changes each semester allows for professional growth and opportunities for change to ensure more students have a positive learning experience which is meaningful and relevant to their future career in education.

Modeling constructivist teaching practices and allowing pre-service teachers to experience this type of learning environment is imperative in order to give them the confidence to be advocates and leaders in the field upon graduation (Barth, 2001; Kosnik, 2009).

Building teachers' skills to become highly qualified leaders is not an easy task; it requires, "complex approaches that will increase their knowledge that will, in turn, alter their teaching" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 46). In order to meet this challenge, there is a need for increasing opportunities for teaching and learning from the beginning of their career to the end (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Pre-service teachers need to be prepared to deal positively with the freedom and professional autonomy involved in teaching in the classroom (Kosnik, 2009).

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Appendix A
Sample Syllabus Outline

Class (Date)	Course Objective	Content	Assessment Strategies
1 8/21/14	4. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in art, dance, theater, and music. 5. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as, K-6 North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) goals and objectives.	Setting and Achieving Social Studies Standards Reviewing Social Studies Standards Learning Contracts	**Ch. 4** Introduction/Goal Setting Pre-Assessment
2 8/28/14	1. Understand the benefits of interdisciplinary instruction. 4. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in art, dance, theater, and music. 5. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as, K-6 North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) goals and objectives.	Social Studies: Definitions and Rationale Social Studies and the Literacy Connection	**Ch. 13** **Formal Learning Contract DRAFT DUE/Product Decisions** Meet w/ Dr. Duncan SMARTBoard
3 9/4/14	1. Understand the benefits and describe key features of interdisciplinary instruction and learning experiences. 5. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in art, dance, theater, and music. 6. Describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as, K-6 North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) goals and objectives.	What is Social Studies? Constructivist Teaching Practices Differentiation Rubric Design	**Ch. 1; Rubistar; teachnology** Teach/Practice/Challenge Create rubrics for products

Appendix B
Sample Rubrics

Objective 5: To describe key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as K-6 North Carolina Standard Course of Study goals and objectives.
Comments:

TOTAL SCORE: ___/10

Objective 6: Learn to make and read various types of maps
Map bulletin Board and Reflection Rubric

Category	Exemplary (2.5)	Proficient (1.5)	Developing (0)

Category	Exemplary (2)	Proficient (1.5)	Developing (1)
Content (Objective 5)	Demonstrated full understanding of the key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as the K-6 NC Standard Course of Study goals and objectives.	Demonstrated vague understanding of key ideas from the K-6 national standards in social studies, as well as the K-6 NC Standard Course of Study goals and objectives.	Demonstrated a number of misunderstandings of the K-6 national standards of social studies and the K-6 NC Standard goals and objectives.
Mechanics/Grammar	There are one or less mechanical and/or grammatical mistakes.	There are few mechanical and/or grammatical mistakes.	There are more than four mechanical and/or grammatical mistakes.
Product	My detailed knowledge on both aspects of this objective is shown in a PowerPoint presentation.	My small amount of knowledge on both aspects of this objective is shown in a PowerPoint presentation.	My lack of knowledge on both aspects of this objective is shown in a PowerPoint presentation.
Standards	Deep connections are shown between the NC essential standards and the NCSS Standards and the content of the lesson plan, presentation, and/or reflection.	Some connections are shown between the NC essential standards and NCSS Standards.	No relationship between the standards and the content of the lesson plan.
Reflection	Thorough reflection of the process and product, and expansion on any information that was no included in the product but is essential to fulfill the objective. Sources are cited when applicable.	Brief reflection on the process and product, and little expansion on information no included in the product. Some sources are cited.	Reflection incomplete or inaccurate to objective 1. No sources are cited if applicable.
Learn to make and read various types of maps	Through participating in this bulletin board, students are able to show they can make and read various types of maps.	Through participating in this bulletin board, students are only somewhat able to show that they can make and read various types of maps.	Through participating in this bulletin board, students are not able to show that they can make and read various types of maps.
Product	The bulletin board is neatly presented, is interactive and	The bulletin board is neat, but is only somewhat	The bulletin board is not neatly presented, is not interactive or

	appropriate for elementary students, and the questions included reflect the objective.	interactive for the students. The questions included somewhat reflect the objective.	appropriate for elementary students. The questions included on the bulletin board do not reflect the objective.
Mechanical/ Grammar	The learner had 0-1 grammatical errors on the bulletin board and in her reflection paper. If needed, proper APA 6th edition citation is used appropriately and correctly	The learner had 2-3 grammatical errors on the bulletin board and in her reflection paper. If needed, 2-3 incorrect APA 6th edition citations.	The learner had 4-5 grammatical errors in her paper. If needed, 4-5 incorrect APA 6th edition citations.
Reflection	The reflection showed student's full consideration of the project. The student discussed why the product selected was chosen, how course objectives were met, what was learned while completing the product, and included classroom implications.	Reflection showed some of the student's thought process. All of the components of the reflection are present but several do not show thoughtful consideration.	Little to no consideration was given to the project. Little consideration was given to the different components of the reflection.

Total: _____/10

Comments: