

What Teaching PreK-12 Classroom Teachers Can Do for Teaching College Students:  
An Ethnography of Professors Leading Seminars in the Charlotte Teachers Institute

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&

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## Abstract

Recent program evaluation data on PreK-12 classroom teachers who completed the Charlotte Teachers Institute seminars indicates that program usefulness and empowerment levels for teachers is statistically significantly related to developing higher expectations for their students, increasing subject mastery, and creating materials to motivate their students. Little research has been done to understand the impact of CTI on those leading the professional development seminars: the college professors. This study proposes an ethnographic approach to evaluate the impact of CTI on professors over the course of 12 months. Furthermore, the question of how leading a CTI seminar is related to teaching an undergraduate course will be addressed. Given the inherent complexity of supporting curriculum development in the CTI program the theoretical foundation will draw upon work from Problem-Based Learning in an attempt to illustrate similarities and differences between teaching classroom teachers and college students. Through a series of direct observations and ethnographic interviews, three professors from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will be at the center of this 12-month project. Additionally, their students and teachers will take part in focus group interviews. This project intends (a) to illuminate a holistic picture of the processes and roles of professors in their effort to support the curriculum development writing process, (b) to determine how facilitating learning among teachers is related to teaching undergraduates, and (c) to document the evolution of professors in CTI over the course of 12 months.



926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		\$ - 1040

		<b>Year Two</b>
<b>Account #</b>	<b>Award</b>	<b>July to June</b>
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	\$4,000
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	\$900
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	\$1,500
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	\$720
925000	Travel - Domestic	
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	\$500
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		\$ - 7,620

**Budget Narrative (\$8,660 total requested)****Graduate Student Salaries (\$1,200)**

A total of \$1,200 is requested for graduate student salaries. In Year One, the investigators request \$300 for a graduate student to transcribe 11 hours of audio recordings, at a rate of \$9/hour. This estimate is based on 3 hours for every 1 hour of recorded audio so the total hours in Year One will be 33 hours. In Year Two, the investigators request \$900 for a graduate student to transcribe 33 hours of audio recordings, at a rate of \$9/hour. This estimate is based on 3 hours for every 1 hour of recorded audio so the total hours in Year Two will be 99 hours. The total hours will be 132 hours.

**Faculty Stipend (\$4,500)**

The investigators request \$4,500 for faculty stipends. One of the investigators will receive \$500 for data collection and analysis in Year One and \$1,500 for data collection and analysis in Year Two. In Year Two, the other investigator will receive \$2,500 for data analysis and writing.

**Special Pay (\$1,500)**

The investigators request \$1,500 for the three participating professors. These professors will contribute over the course of a full year through four separate observation sessions each, and three separate interview sessions. Each professor will receive a \$500 stipend in Year Two.

**Participant Stipends (\$960)**

The investigators request \$480 for undergraduate student participation. In Year One, each student will receive a \$40 gift card for participating in a two-hour focus group meeting for a total

of \$240. There will be a total of six students. In Year Two, each student will receive a \$40 gift card for participating in a two-hour focus group meeting for a total of \$240. There will be a total of six students. In Year Two, each teacher participating in one of two focus groups will receive a \$40 gift card. There will be 6 teachers in each focus group, so a total of 12 teachers. Total requested for the teachers is \$480.

**Printing (\$500)**

The investigators request \$500 for printing in Year Two. This will go to cover expenses related to producing materials that will be part of the final teaching guide and corresponding recommendations.



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Committee

FROM: Dr. Ellen McIntyre, Dean

DATE: October 31, 2016

RE: Support for SoTL proposal from Dr. Adriana Medina and Scott Gartlan

I am pleased to offer my support for the SoTL grant proposal, “What Teaching PreK-12 Classroom Teachers Can Do for Teaching College Students: An Ethnography of Professors Leading Seminars in the Charlotte Teachers Institute” proposed by Dr. Adriana Medina and Scott Gartlan from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. We know that teaching adults can be different from teaching children, and that these different audiences often demand slightly different practices or approaches. This project is excited because it takes a deep dive into three critical areas to the College of Education: professors, classroom teachers, and college students.

The project is focused on a rather simple premise: Professors who lead seminars of PreK-12 classroom teaching from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in the Charlotte Teachers Institute (CTI) will develop in such a way that they will transform their approach to teaching college students. The use of an ethnographic methodology makes sense in light of the cultural conventions for professors in the process of teaching and learning that exist in both (a) teaching adults as separate from teaching children, and (b) teaching practicing teachers as separate from teaching undergraduate students. By devoting time to talk with and observe professors in the environment of leading a CTI seminar for teachers and a required course for undergraduate students at UNC Charlotte, this project will unpack important assumptions about these two different teaching and learning environments. I suspect that these professors will walk away learning a great deal from the teachers.

The proposed project has been informed by Dr. Medina’s program evaluation work of the CTI. She was lead evaluator on a 3-year evaluation project from 2010-2013 that focused on examining core programmatic assumptions. This project not only builds on Dr. Medina’s strengths as a program evaluator but extends CTI work by focusing on outcomes related to college professors’



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professional development in the program. Additionally, the project is well served by having Mr. Gartlan's contributions as CTI Executive Director. He brings extensive knowledge of the specific CTI culture to bear on this project, as well as research on teachers using narrative theory and professional development.

I enthusiastically endorse this project for SoTL funding and can't wait to see what we learn.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen McIntyre".

Dean Ellen McIntyre





**Office of the Dean**

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November 1, 2016

Banita W. Brown  
704.687.0074  
bwbrown@uncc.edu

SOTL Grants Committee  
Center for Teaching and Learning  
ctl@uncc.edu

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Dean Nancy Gutierrez in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, I am writing this letter in support of the SOTL proposal submitted by Scott Gartlan, Executive Director of the Charlotte Teachers Institute and Adriana Medina from the Department of Reading and Elementary Education entitled, "What Teaching PreK-12 Classroom Teachers Can Do for Teaching College Students: An Ethnography of Professors Leading Seminars in the Charlotte Teachers Institute." Established in 2009, the Charlotte Teachers Institute is a program that provides content-based professional development to K-12 public school teachers in Charlotte's schools. The program is grounded on a strong educational partnership between UNC Charlotte, Davidson College, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

UNC Charlotte and Davidson College faculty develop the content knowledge on which the professional development is based. The material is usually presented in a small group seminar setting. Previous research studies show that the diverse group of teachers not only gain an in-depth understanding of the content, but they also gain skills such as creativity, leadership, and collaboration. The impact of CTI on teachers is well-known. However, the impact of the instructional approaches used by the faculty leaders on their own university-level classroom instruction has not been measured. This study will use ethnographic research to evaluate this impact. The findings from the study have the potential to provide best practices for UNC Charlotte faculty that can be applied to their classroom instruction.

I recommend this proposal for your consideration. Please let me know if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Banita W. Brown  
Associate Dean for Academic and Student Success  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Associate Professor of Chemistry



## **A. Specific Aims**

Since 2009, Charlotte Teachers Institute has offered 60 professional development seminars for more than 350 classroom teachers led by 46 professors at Davidson College and UNC Charlotte. These teachers have, in turn, taught more than 76,600 students in grades PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grades. This amounts to over 15,000 hours of professional development. Past program evaluation research has indicated that CTI is effective at promoting values such as content knowledge, creativity, leadership, and collaboration in its seminars among teachers (Medina & Scott, 2013). Even more recent research indicates that CTI is providing meaningful professional development for teachers and might be contributing to the retention of teachers in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Ellis, 2016). However, less is known about the transformation process of professors who lead these seminars for teachers. Some evidence suggests that professors recognize the seminars are different from their college courses, potentially more meaningful in some ways, however there has not been a systematic study of this difference, or how it might act to influence the growth of the professor as teacher (Scott and Medina, 2012).

The primary mechanism that this study seeks to address is how the multiple roles of the professor both influence, and are shaped by the teachers and students. These roles include, but are not limited to, content expert, teacher, academic resource, colleague, leader, scholar, professor and learner. These roles exist within a particular context that is the learning environment. Generally speaking, the learning environments for both CTI and the college course are similar in that they are framed by a mixture of learners in the group and academic expectations of the experience. For example, in CTI seminars are made up of PreK-12 teachers from different schools, grade levels and subjects. Each teacher must research, write and submit a series of drafts which ultimately become a curriculum unit. In college coursework, although this

varies by professor, classes are made up of various learners with different characteristics – major of study, age, educational background, etc. Typically, each student is required to produce a measure of scholarly work that utilizes their knowledge and skills to execute a relatively long-term assignment. Drawing heavily on the educational theory of Problem-Based Learning, the methodology of ethnography and the methods of direct observation and ethnographic interview, the purpose of this project is to examine the process of teaching and learning of professors as they navigate their multiple roles working with teachers and working with students. In particular, it is important to understand how their role of leader of teachers through a process of research and writing relates to their role of teacher of college students. This study will examine the following research questions:

- What are the professors' experiences of learning in CTI?
- How do the professors' experiences of learning in CTI relate to teaching college students?
- How do professors support teachers through the curriculum unit research and writing process?
- How do professors support college students through a long-term process of problem-solving and inquiry?
- In what ways does leading a CTI seminar resemble teaching college students for professors? In what ways are they not similar?

Analysis of the data and interpretation of the results will lead to a final product that will function as a practical teaching guide for professors. This guide will be benefit for professors interested in leading a seminar for teachers as well as those professors interested in engaging students in applied thinking and practice.

## **B. Literature Review**

### *CTI: Collaborative Teacher Education*

Charlotte Teachers Institute is an educational partnership among UNC Charlotte, Davidson College and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) to strengthen teaching and learning. CTI presents 7-month, intensive, and collaborative seminars in a wide range of disciplines, led by faculty members from UNC Charlotte and Davidson College. Teachers and professors in Charlotte Teachers Institute (CTI) collaborate over seven months to develop curricula aimed at increasing students' motivation to learn and mastery of subject knowledge. The format of these collaborations is organized in seminars made up of PreK-12 classroom teachers. Each seminar is led by a professor and includes thirteen classroom teachers. Each teacher is responsible for identifying a curriculum topic, conducting research on themes related to the curriculum topic, and written a 20-page curriculum unit reflecting their knowledge and applications for the classroom. Along the way, professors act as subject content mentors and academic resources for the teachers as they explore topics that they are passionate about and motivated to introduce in their classrooms.

To date, more than 350 CMS teachers have written over 500 curriculum units for more than 76,600 students. In 2013, CTI was recognized by the Council for Great City Schools with its Shirley S. Schwartz Urban Education Impact Award for a university-school district partnership that has had a significant, positive impact on student learning. CTI empowers teachers: 98% of teachers grew professionally and intellectually; 96% of teachers gained knowledge and confidence in their subjects; and 94% of teachers developed higher expectations of their students' ability to learn. Additionally, 75% of teachers who completed the program still

serve in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools since 2009. These data are taken from a recent program evaluation (Ellis, 2016).

### *2017 Seminars*

Three College of Liberal Arts and Sciences professors are leading three different CTI seminars in 2017. Their seminars are called “Using Mathematics to Understand Social Issues,” “Media and Minorities: Unpacking Stereotypes,” and “Memorials, Memories, and American Identity.” These three seminars will each include thirteen Charlotte-Mecklenburg School classroom teachers in elementary, middle and high schools. The application period opens in January, teachers are selected into seminars in March, and seminars begin meeting in April. Teachers will submit a prospectus stating their original idea for a curriculum unit based on ideas from the seminar and their classroom standards in June. Then they will get feedback from the professor before conducting research on their refined topic.

Seminar meetings pick up again in mid-September and will meet weekly through early December. After submitting and getting feedback on two drafts of their curriculum units, teachers will submit a final draft for approval in December. From January through May 2018, teachers will teach their curriculum unit to their students.

### *Problem Based-Learning*

The theoretical foundation for this project is based in Problem-Based Learning (PDL). Problem-Based Learning is a learner-centered pedagogy that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a solution to a defined problem (Savery, 2006). PBL was founded to support medical education as a way to

engage and train medical students in the 1960s (Barrows, 1996). Since then it has been adapted in a wide variety of educational practices in schools, organizations and businesses.

PBL is based on an approach to teaching that begins with a “messy problem” (Larmer, 2014). This messy problem is something found in CTI – for example, teachers are asked to write a curriculum unit about capitalism that can be taught to elementary school students – and in college teaching – for example, students are asked to design an energy efficient home on a particular fixed budget. These problems require that the learners investigate, ask questions, research and ultimately propose a solution. These problems also often occur over a long period of time, involve some type of data collection and research and culminate in a comprehensive final product.

### *Ethnography*

Ethnography as a methodology is a written representation of a culture or selected aspects of a culture (Van Maanen, 2011). This focus on culture as a central feature of ethnography permits attention on people and groups of people in ways that attempt to capture lived experiences in dynamic, interactive ways. In addition, ethnography’s purpose, if it can be summarized so, is to provide rich, holistic insights into people’s views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). An important element of ethnography is data triangulation, that is, the collection of data from various sources to examine a particular phenomenon. Bringing together data from various sources provides the researcher the opportunity to examine aspects of culture that might otherwise be hidden.

In order to represent a fullest picture of professors’ experiences it is critical to examine data from pre-existing sources. These all help to tell the story of the program’s culture. CTI

conducted a three-year program evaluation to examine core aspects of this teacher professional development approach. A majority of the research focused on the impact of teachers and their students in the classroom through surveys, interviews, classroom and seminar observations, curricula content analysis, and focus groups. Professors were included in the early stages in the seminar observations and interviews. Results suggested the program was meeting its goals to empower teachers, increase content knowledge, build collaboration and emphasize creativity and curriculum development among teachers. Additionally, professors gained greater respect for the teaching profession and encouraged teachers to remain in the profession. Professors also fostered critical thinking skills by asking high-order questions in seminar discussions, provided constructive feedback and access to academic resources, and functioned as expert facilitators of discussion (Medina & Scott, November 2013).

The interplay of Problem-Based Learning as an educational theory and ethnography as a methodology lead naturally to certain methods that capture the essence and lived characteristic of culture, practice and experience.

### **C. Methods**

This project will center on the three UNC Charlotte professors and their students, and the teachers taking part in the 2017 seminars offered in the Charlotte Teachers Institute. These seminars begin in April 2017 and conclude in December 2017.

#### *Initial Interviews with Experienced CTI Seminar Leaders (Feb/March 2017)*

The researchers will conduct initial interviews with 8-10 experienced CTI Seminar Leaders from UNC Charlotte and Davidson College. These interviews are intended to elicit

feedback from professors about their experiences leading a CTI seminar, in particular, how that experience was similar to and different from teaching college students.

These interviews will take place in February and March 2017.

These interviews will be the foundation for an interview protocol that will be used in Phases 1, 2 and 3.

*Phase 1: Professors Teaching Students (March/April 2017)*

First, each professor will be interviewed by an investigator based on a semi-structured interview protocol. Responses to these questions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Then, an investigator will observe a college-level course from each professor. A protocol will be used to focus observations and record detailed information. It would be ideal if this course topic related thematically to the CTI seminar topic. Additionally, the professor will be asked to identify a particular class lesson for that meets criteria for problem-based learning, such as focusing on a messy problem, is completed over a relatively long period of time, and ends with a final proposed solution or project. Finally, an investigator will conduct a focus group interview with a sample of college students from the course. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

*Phase 2: Professors Leading Teachers (September/October 2017)*

First, each professor will be interviewed by an investigator based on a semi-structured interview protocol. Responses to these questions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Then, an investigator will observe two CTI seminar meetings from each professor. A protocol will be used to focus observations and record detailed information. It would be ideal if this seminar topic related thematically to the college level course topic from the spring 2017. Finally, a



graduate student will conduct a focus group interview with a sample of CTI teachers from the seminar. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

*Phase 3: Professors Teaching Students (March/April 2018)*

First, each professor will be interviewed by an investigator based on a semi-structured interview protocol. Responses to these questions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Then, the graduate student will observe a college-level course from each professor. A protocol will be used to focus observations and record detailed information. It would be ideal if this course related thematically to the CTI seminar topic and was the same course (and even topic) as the course visited in spring 2017. Finally, an investigator will conduct a focus group interview with a sample of college students from the course. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Graduate students will be used to transcribe field notes, professor interviews and focus group interviews. In the tradition of ethnographic research, the investigator will begin to analyze key codes or categories during the data collection processes (Ezzy, 2002). After graduate student transcriptions are ready, the process of analysis will continue from those written transcripts.

#### **D. Evaluation**

The evaluation of this project is linked to the ethnographic methodology and the related methods. The issue of reflexivity must be addressed in terms of the evaluation process (Reeves, et al., 2008). Given both investigators have extensive experience with the CTI program, using ethnography makes the most sense. The investigators deep relationships with the people and processes of CTI positions them in such a way to detect subtle gestures and identify program-specific language that would otherwise go missing from an outside observer.

Direct observations, ethnographic interviews and focus groups are the three methods used in this project. Consistent with ethnographic research practices, data analysis will begin when the investigator begins to collect data initially. Mindful of the power of reflexivity, both investigators will draw on their extensive knowledge of CTI to better understand the culture of CTI professors. Following the inductive approach to data analysis for qualitative research (Ezzy, 2002; Reeves, et al., 2008, and Fetterman, 1989), investigators will explore the data sets through a process of coding and categorizing. Rather than moving to merge the categories to form main themes in a purely inductive way, at this stage of the analysis the investigators will then draw on the Problem-Based Learning theoretical framework to further analyze the data. This level of analysis will help to frame and illuminate the findings of the project. Given the initial questions related to professors' work with teacher and college students the problem-based learning lens will position the findings of the project within a practical teaching context. The analysis of the data in this systematic way will provide the foundation for the investigators to create a practical tool for professors aimed at supporting college students and teachers through a long-term process focused on writing growth and development.

Another important aspect of evaluation will be the use of member checks to add trustworthiness to the project (Merriam, 2009). Professors, teachers and college students who participated in the project will be given a chance to review the final drafts before they are finalized. Their feedback will be incorporated into the final version. Additionally, professor participants will be asked to review the final teaching guide product to evaluate for clarity and feasibility of the proposed tool. This element of trustworthiness is essential to quality ethnographic research in that providing opportunities for participants of the very culture under

study to share their perspectives on the investigators' analysis only seeks to increase the extent to which an accurate representation on that culture is attained.

### **E. Knowledge Dissemination**

The target audiences for this project include professors, teachers and college students. While professors and teachers (and related PreK-12 and college students) who have participated in, or are committed to CTI would be the most likely target audience, all professors, teachers and learners would find these results of great value. Results will be presented at the SoTL showcase in 2019. Additionally, investigators will present at the North Carolina Association of Research in Education conference in 2018 and 2019. Preliminary findings will also be shared with the participants to increase trustworthiness of project. CTI teacher and professor groups including the Teacher Steering Committee, Seminar Coordinators, School Contacts and the University Advisory Committee will receive the final report. In addition, these groups will be given opportunities to hear presentations and provide feedback.

### **F. Human Subjects**

IRB approval to conduct this project will be submitted in IRBIS in fall 2016. Approval will be forwarded upon request.

### **G. Extramural Funding**

No extramural funding was sought for this project.

### **H. Timeline**

- A. By February 2017, 8-10 experienced CTI professors will be interviewed to help develop questions for Phase 1.

- B. By April 2017, the researchers will interview and observe the three professors leading CTI seminars in 2017 for Phase 1. Additionally, the researchers will collect data from the undergraduate college student focus groups.
- C. By October 2017, the researchers will interview and observe the three professors for Phase 2. Additionally, the researchers will collect data from the CTI teacher focus groups.
- D. By April 2018, the researchers will interview and observe the three professors for Phase 3. Additionally, the researchers will collect data from the undergraduate college student focus groups.
- E. By June/July 2018, a product will be created:
  - a. A best practices guide for college professors aimed at long-term writing practice growth for college students and adult learners.

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