

## Evidence 5.3.1 NKU Innovation Projects

### NKU Innovations Projects

Year-round Field Experience Pilot Project  
at Glenn O. Swing Elementary School, Covington, KY  
Prepared by Dr. Patricia Bills, NKU Department of Teacher Education

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#### ***Introduction and Purpose***

The pilot project began in the Spring semester of 2014 as a way to develop opportunities for NKU elementary majors to work in urban settings, specifically, at Glenn O. Swing Elementary School (GOS) in Covington, KY. GOS is a low-income, high-needs, high-performing school in Covington, KY. It serves approximately 360 students, and has an 88% free and reduced lunch rate. 44% of the students are from minority communities, and approximately 4% of the students are identified for special education services. Even with the demographics that indicate a school that typically exemplifies schools in our country that struggle academically, GOS is a high-performing school. The school has modeled itself after the famed Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, GA, and has recently gained recognition in the region as one of the most high-performing elementary schools on KY state standardized tests. The school is quickly gaining recognition across the greater Cincinnati area for its success, and the principal, Scott Alter, was recently recognized with an award for his contributions to the Covington community.

The pilot program has significant potential for informing the NKU Teacher Education program in terms of designing meaningful long-term field experiences for pre-service teachers as well as making stronger connections with many of the region's urban school districts.

At the time of this writing, we have completed 5 consecutive (fall and spring) semesters of a pilot program with GOS. The program involves undergraduate elementary education majors in placements at the school for both the Professional Semester Field Experience II and Clinical Experience Semesters. The purpose is to provide extended opportunities for elementary teacher candidates to work in an urban school setting, and it is the only one of its kind at NKU.

Dr. Bills created the program and serves as the sole university supervisor for both the Pro II FE and Clinical semester placements at the school.

#### ***Structure***

Students work with one teacher for the Pro II FE and then for the first 8 weeks of the Clinical Semester, at which point, they move to another teacher's classroom for the final 8 weeks. Students sometimes move to the new classroom in the first 8 weeks, and return in the second 8 weeks to the classroom where they worked for the Pro II semester. In both cases, teacher candidates have a full-year experience in the same school, working for most of the time in the same classroom, with the same teacher and students. The benefits of such an arrangement include:

- developing a deeper understanding of students' needs,
- understanding of the school curricular goals, mission, and culture
- developing a deeper understanding of various other supports for families and students served by the school,
- gaining insight on student learning from ongoing assessment, and continuous planning with practicing teachers
- developing specific teaching skills with repeated practice over time, supported by school personnel and a university supervisor who also understands the school context and expectations very well.

To date, we have had 21 elementary education majors participate in the program. eight have done a full-year of work at GOS, and of those, six have been subsequently hired to full-time employment in the building (K, 2, 3 and SPED). And one has been hired to work full time as an itinerant teacher, helping in all classrooms, until a full-time teaching position has opened up for her.

During the Pro II Field Experience semester at GOS, NKU Teacher Candidates are given a choice about whether to stay for the clinical semester. Those who decide not to stay at the school for the clinical semester usually do so for one or several of the following reasons<sup>1</sup>:

- They did not know enough about the school, or feel comfortable enough, to make an informed decision before they were to notify the clinical program director of their desired placements.
- They discovered that they did not desire an urban school placement for clinical, or that they were not interested in ultimately teaching in an urban school.

Some students reported to me that after their immersion week in their Pro II FE, they had a much better understanding of the school, and those who had chosen not to stay for the clinical semester, regretted this choice. It appears that offering earlier immersive experiences in the school helped students make more informed choices about where they wanted to be placed for clinical. Some students reported that they wished they had stayed. Some of those same students have applied for teaching jobs back at this school and in the district over 4 months after their first placement there.

These initial findings have begun to inform the design of the Pro II Field Experience. For example, in the Spring of 2016, the elementary program added a week of immersion early in the semester for all students. Again, students reported to their field supervisor that this was helpful in their becoming more familiar with the school context, and helped them to get to know their students' needs more deeply and allowed them to teach whole group lessons earlier in the semester as a result. These added opportunities to teach earlier in the semester, is supported by teacher education research on field and clinical experiences.

Likewise, the students who stayed at GOS for their clinical experience semester report that unlike their peers, who have to re-learn a different school context, they can more quickly move into teaching roles, are given more early opportunities to take on curriculum, and thus have a longer period of time to practice new teaching skills. Clinical students who were at GOS for their FE II said that compared to their peers, they felt more prepared for their clinical experience and report earlier successes in their teaching.

#### *Research - Preliminary Findings*

An in-depth study exploring the effects of the year-round program on new teachers at GOS is underway and is revealing some interesting trends. One preliminary finding is that new teachers at Glenn O. Swing report that the full year experience was essential in their success as first year teachers there. As expected, all teachers interviewed reported that they knew some key practices of the school in the first days that otherwise would have taken them a full year to learn. They cite things like, the school-wide learning expectations and behavior plan, the ongoing assessment procedures that all teachers conduct, and knowing the school community and the particular needs of their students as things that helped them to start their first semester as full-fledged teachers successfully. Without knowing these things, they would have struggled much more than they did. Also, knowing the teaching staff and principal well helped them to start their first year as teachers in the building by knowing where to get resources and support, and to whom to ask questions. As we know, new teachers struggle with the day-to-day aspects of getting around in a new context. Having been in the building for an extended period of time reduced the amount of time that they had to spend on clerical tasks and procedures (which are a large portion of their work), and increased their ability to design positive learning experiences for children more quickly than they had anticipated. All participants reported that having two consecutive semesters at the school also helped them to feel more like a part of the teaching staff, especially for the clinical semester. This means that in their clinical semester, they were able to have more leadership in the classroom and teach much sooner in the semester than their peers at other schools who have not had this opportunity. Further data collection and analysis is ongoing and will continue into the 2017-18 school year.

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<sup>1</sup> This is anecdotal information only.

### ***P-12 Clinical Educators***

Classroom teachers were chosen to be P-12 Clinical Educators (CEs) primarily by the principal of GOS. We chose CEs for the Pro II FE according to the standards of the Clinical semester (e.g., that teachers must have at least 3 years of teaching experience, demonstrate strong classroom management skills, and strong instructional skills). We did this because we needed to be sure that NKU TCs could then move into their clinical placement with the same teachers. This created some constraints for staffing:

- 1) There were few upper elementary teachers with the required experience who were also available and willing to be P-12 CEs. This meant that the pairing with the lower elementary teachers was more difficult for the clinical placement.
- 2) Only 2 upper elementary teachers who satisfied the requirements were able to work with students during the Pro II FE. This meant that fewer pairs of teachers could be used for the year-round program.

Currently, there are two pairs of teachers (upper and lower) who are working with NKU students consistently. These 4 teachers report that having NKU students in their classrooms has been beneficial. They have stated that the extra teacher in the classrooms has allowed them to work in small groups more often, and to work on individual skills in a more focused way. They also indicate that they find it rewarding to work with future teachers.

The principal, Scott Alter, reports that he has enjoyed having our NKU pre-service teachers in his building as they have become involved in many aspects of the school community. A few of our students have elected to work in the after school programs, have assisted teachers on field trips, have attended special events at the school, and have brought another layer of support to students. Additionally, Mr. Alter also reports that it has helped him with staffing. Knowing that an applicant for a teaching position had spent their Pro II FE and Clinical Experience semesters at GOS means that he can trust that the newest teachers in his building are already knowledgeable about the curriculum, assessments, and most importantly, the students and their families. For example, he hired one NKU TE immediately after interviewing her, and asked her to take on the responsibility of science leader for her grade team, citing her excellence in teaching and understanding the latest science standards and curriculum ideas. This is largely due to her learning in our teacher education program.

### ***Potential Next Steps***

As a result of some very promising early lessons, Dr. Bills is continuing her study of the program and the effects on teacher learning and new teacher success at the school. New cohorts will be added to the program as staffing at the school becomes available. It is possible to grow the program in future semesters at this school, or others in the area, as the staffing needs change. That is, because of Kentucky's requirement for P-12 Clinical Educators, it is often difficult to find qualified and skilled teachers to serve as mentors for our pre-service teachers. As we know, the turnover rates in urban schools is higher than in other settings, which often means that teachers generally have less experience in urban settings. We are interested in placing our students only with teachers who are the most skilled. The current staffing at the school and in others around the region in urban places means that finding mentors is often more difficult. This constrains the extent to which we can expand our programming. It is important to note that if the teachers who are hired from our program stay at Glenn O. Swing, in two years, they will be eligible to become mentors for NKU pre-service teachers. This kind of continuity will offer the school, and our pre-service teachers, extraordinary opportunities for learning.

**Florence Elementary  
Elementary Project**

Overview

During the spring of 2016, NKU undergraduate courses in section 002 of Professional Semester I block (e.g. EDU 302, 310, 314 and 390) moved “on site” to Florence Elementary School. Our goal was to provide a more consistent presence in the classrooms to support teachers and k-5 learners. Additionally, we felt this embedded presence in the school would support a deeper understanding of the daily demands of teaching for the NKU teacher candidates by having NKU students in the classrooms (i.e. ‘field placements’) four days a week instead of two days a week. NKU coursework time was arranged around the field placement time to provide the methodology and theory underpinning the design, implementation and assessment of developmentally appropriate lessons aligned with state and district directives. We solicited feedback from several stakeholders during our pilot semester. The strengths and considerations are summarized below;

**Teachers (15) & Administrators of Florence Elementary School:**

**Strengths:**

- Incorporated new instructional routines because of the additional help in the classroom
- Students received more assistance, attention and feedback
- Support with classroom management
- Provided additional help on field trips and special events at the school
- Tammie’s daily presence and professional development support

**Considerations:**

- Adjust time NKU students have to spend with us- more time to discuss, plan and reflect with them
- Due dates for submitting lesson plans needs to be several days for review/revisions
- Practicum pairs and time for teaching units of study needs to be revisited

**NKU Teacher Candidates:**

**Strengths:**

- Relationships with teachers and k-5 students happened quickly because of daily presence in the classrooms
- Member of the school community
- Exposure to many different aspects of being a teacher, not just lessons
- Application and connection to coursework – “seeing it in action by my CT”
- Afternoon placements (314) another context \*1<sup>st</sup> grade only
- Flexibility- changes in schedule, snow days, classroom routines- “life as a real teacher”
- Practicum pairs- support and co teaching models
- Deep immersion in the daily running of the classroom/school built confidence

**Considerations:**

- The 8am start time was challenging, especially during the winter months and snow days
- Feeling a bit disconnected from campus life
- Afternoon placements (314) – very little involvement of some placements
- Flexibility- changes in schedule, classroom routines- “life as a real teacher”
- Campus for one class on Mon pm
- Extend the field experience time towards end of semester
- Practicum pairs- difficult to get in the teaching required before testing window

**NKU Faculty, Dr. Amy Bacevich (EDU 390 and EDU 314- Classroom Management, Wed 1215-245)**

**Strengths:** The key strength of the spring pilot at Florence Elementary was the “on-site” design, including location and schedule, which created a meaningful experience for NKU students. Because they were onsite for four days, including the full day on Wednesday, the NKU students built close relationships with teachers and students. They had a deeper understanding of the instructional and management routines in place in their classrooms. I observed and heard about their work with a wider range of teaching experiences (e.g., leading calendar, teaching centers, doing read-alouds, teaching whole class lessons) than with other practicum-level teacher education students I’ve worked with (who often spend their time

circulating in the classroom except when completing their assigned teaching experiences). I also speculate that having courses in the same building, with very little “lag” between class time and field time, allowed NKU students to access their experiences more readily than they might if they were driving 30 minutes to campus for a once-weekly three-hour course.

Considerations: That said, even with an on-site design, I felt the limits of the traditional structure of teacher education. The course I taught, EDU 314, was taught on-site but was traditional in the sense of taking place once a week for nearly three hours. I tried to make good use of the elementary teaching going on around us by implementing an “afternoon field time,” which was intended to provide a second elementary context for the NKU students to study and to involve additional FES teachers in the pilot. Because it took place only once a week with unfamiliar teachers, this field experience felt awkward, according to several NKU students. They spent most of their time observing rather than teaching and interacting with students. Further, my time as a faculty member was divided between my FES responsibilities and my other teaching and campus responsibilities. I often felt my time at FES was appointment-based – I was there to teach EDU 314 or to observe a practicum student at a particular time, and then I had to leave FES to teach my class on campus or observe a teacher candidate. I had little time for more informal visits to classrooms, which can be extremely useful for assessing practicum students’ progress and building relationships with P-12 clinical educators. It could be useful to explore ways to push further on the traditional structures we work within – including the ways courses are designed and the ways we organize faculty teaching schedules – in order to make fuller use of the opportunities for pre service teacher learning within the NKU-FES partnership.

#### **NKU Faculty, Dr. Tammie Sherry (EDU 302, 310 & 390- Literacy Instruction, M-R 8-12)**

Strengths: There were several strengths of the project during the pilot semester. The greatest strength was the frequent presence in the classroom and school. NKU students were able to engage with students and faculty at a deeper and more personal level because of our daily presence which was a benefit in a couple of ways. First, as evident in teacher feedback, the NKU daily presence made it possible to for k-5 students to receive more one on one and small group instruction. This, in return, allowed more flexibility for the classroom teacher to work in a variety of instructional routines that might have been more difficult without the added classroom assistance. Additionally, the daily presence created a deeper understanding for the NKU teacher candidates regarding the daily demands of teaching. As their instructor, we were able to have more meaningful conversations related to instruction earlier in the semester. I noticed that our candidates were seeing the real world application of literacy instruction as we were learning about it as part of our coursework. The connection of effective literacy instructional procedures and strategies made sense to them, they could see it, hear it and live it as we read about. The teacher candidates became quite perceptive of overlapping concepts and the classroom discussion was rich with professional analysis.

Another strength of the pilot semester was the involvement of the FES specialists in the NKU classroom. Florence Elementary has several faculty who are key personnel that lead the school in areas such as assessment coordination, special education, English language learners, Response to intervention and Family resource services. Over the course of the semester, the lead faculty specialists visited during our classroom time to share information about how they supported students at FES. The guest speakers shared identification policies, state regulations and details about the specific demographic make-up of the students at FES. This was a positive way for us to include school experts in our classroom discussion. The FES specialists appreciated the opportunity to share their expertise and it provided the NKU candidates with specific information and a person of reference for support or questions.

A final strength that stands out is my involvement with the faculty and administration of Florence Elementary. Even though I have placed practicum at FES for the last three years, this year I became part of the school and I feel that the faculty is coming to know me as ‘part of the team’. I attended monthly faculty meeting, as well as grade level PLC meetings to provide input, support or just to understand what was occurring at each grade level. The SBDMC at FES adopted a new reading series, so I also attended trainings with the FES teachers and discussed how the NKU literacy lessons required in the coursework would aligned with the commitment to the series. In May, at the request of the school principal, I provided a full day of professional development for the FES faculty. The day focused on establishing a writing workshop based method of writing instruction, which is a new Boone County Schools directive for all elementary classrooms.

Considerations: Although the pilot semester was marked with many positives, I also recognize that there are some changes and things to consider for upcoming semesters. First, I had 21 students to place and only 15 classrooms available. In order to keep all of the section 002 students at FES, some of them were placed in pairs in the classroom. The positive was that most of the pairs worked well together and the classroom teacher appreciated the double assistance. However, there were some pairs that did not get along and the pairing created a competitive atmosphere. Surface level evidence of this was quickly resolved with a conversation and the pairs continued through the semester with no other overt instances of personal differences. Some suggestions were to send an email survey prior to the placements and gather the willingness of individuals to share the classroom space and time with a partner. I have already done that for the upcoming fall, so we will see if this is a way to remedy that situation. Another challenge with the pairs was the time available to teach the four day units of study. It was difficult for the classroom teachers to give up eight days of teaching time right before the spring state assessment. Although it seems like an issue that probably would only effect the spring semester, it is something the teachers and I are working through. We feel that if the students are in a pairs that perhaps a co teaching during just one unit of study would work for time.

Another consideration for the upcoming semester, is the challenge of the school daily schedule. Many of the cooperating teachers want more time with the practicum or staggered time by grade level. I am working with the idea of a staggered release time into the classroom as coursework is covered and even teaching the NKU courses by primary/intermediate rotations. This is also a challenge with the EDU 314 afternoon placements, as you noticed in Dr. Bacevich's narrative. It is something we will work with teachers and admin on as we prepare for the fall semester.

#### **UK-UL-NKU Middle Grades Collaboration Project**

The middle grades education programs at Northern Kentucky University, University of Louisville, and University of Kentucky are all designed around the tenets of effective middle level practice as articulated in *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) and the Association for Middle Level Education SPA standards. The main goals of this collaboration were to begin the process of developing a shared understanding of effective middle level practice across our middle level teacher preparation programs, promote reflective thinking in our teacher candidates, and model a team approach. We wanted our candidates to interact with one another and participate in common experiences and activities as a way to build a foundation for professional networks and future advocacy of middle level teacher preparation programs in Kentucky. If our candidates were to teach together in the same school building, we wanted them to come together knowing the importance of teaming, common planning time, and developmentally responsive practices, so they could collaboratively model and advocate for these practices. Additionally, candidates are generally place-bound, and it is difficult for them to experience a broad range of field experiences. To that end, the participating professors designed a virtual field experience that would enable candidates at all three institutions to virtually observe the same classroom, debrief the lesson with the classroom teacher, and engage in reflective conversation about the experience.

The collaborative team identified a relatively novice teacher (in her 3rd year) and secured her permission to share a live video feed from her classroom to each of the university sites. The teacher teaches in a diverse, urban district in Louisville, Kentucky. On the day of the "observation," the candidates at each university site observed the teacher teaching using WebEx (video conferencing tool). A graduate assistant used an iPad to video the class session, and each university site projected the image on screens at their locations. During the observation, candidates had several guiding questions to focus their observations. In addition, candidates at each institution engaged in conversation about their observations using Today'sMeet, a backchanneling platform (similar to text messaging). The candidates' conversations and observations were visible to all candidate participants. At the conclusion of the observation, the classroom teacher engaged in reflection and conversation with all of the candidates via WebEx. The candidates asked questions about her instructional decisions and classroom management, and she provided the rationale for her decisions. The experience was received positively by the candidates at each institution. In particular, they found observing a relatively novice teacher most helpful as it helped them gain confidence in their own abilities as future teachers. They were able to observe novice teacher mistakes which helped them realize the challenges new teachers face. The teacher also found the

experience professionally rewarding, almost a professional development experience, as it forced her to reflect upon and explain her practices.

This collaborative experience was piloted in spring 2016 and repeated with a different classroom teacher in spring 2017. In spring 2017, several adjustments were made to the guiding questions, and candidates shared their perceptions of the experience via an anonymous, online survey. There are plans to continue the experience in fall 2017 with some modifications.

The instructors from the three middle grades programs have begun to share this work through presentations and publications. To date, the work has been shared in the following venues:

Howell, P., Rintamaa, M., Faulkner, S., & DiCicco, M. (Accepted, 2017). Four professors, three universities, two modes of technology, and one eighth grade classroom: Collaboration in middle level teacher education. *Middle School Journal*.

Howell, P., Rintamaa, M., DiCicco, M., & Faulkner, S. (April 28, 2017). *Cross-institutional collaboration: (Co)Constructing knowledge about teaching and learning in the middle level classroom*. Roundtable session at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, Texas.

Howell, P., Rintamaa, M., Faulkner, S., & DiCicco, M. (October 11, 2016). *Developing a shared understanding of effective middle level practice: Cross-institutional collaboration*. Best Practice and Research from the National Professors of Middle Level Education refereed roundtable presentation at the Association for Middle Level Education Annual Conference, Austin, Texas.

Photo of the observation experience (Spring 2016):



### **Secondary Mathematics Innovation Project**

In 2016, NKU received a state-funded grant to address the issue of collaboration among K-12 cooperating teachers, university faculty and preservice middle grades mathematics teachers. The Mathematics and Teaching: Clinical Horizons (MaTCH) project was a collaboration not only among our university and two

school districts, but also with the Kentucky Center for Mathematics. Objectives of this project included (1) redesigning and co-teaching the middle grades mathematics methods course to allow for an embedded experience, (2) creating a professional learning community comprised of university faculty, cooperating teachers, and preservice teachers, and (3) providing co-teaching clinical experiences where teacher candidates and cooperating teachers collaborate in all aspects of planning, instruction and assessment.

Through this program cooperating teachers engaged with preservice teachers not only in their classrooms but also in methods courses and professional development opportunities. We found that the preservice teachers valued having more interaction with the cooperating teachers outside of the middle school classroom. According to one, “the [experience] helped add continuity because I was able to teach some of the concepts we were learning about in methods. Also, I had a better relationship with my [cooperating teacher], since I had more opportunities to work and interact with her.” It was also evident that the cooperating teachers valued the opportunity to collaborate more with the university faculty: “The interactions between the university professors made the experience more than just teacher candidates coming and going in my room. I felt that I was part of their class and experience in the Methods course.”

#### **Data from teacher candidates and P-12 Clinical Educators on the Innovative Experiences:**

##### **Teacher Candidates and PK-12 Clinical Educators Questions:**

One of the goals for this innovative experience was to model a professional community of teaching and learning that included the teacher candidates (you), the university instructor(s), and P-12 clinical educators. Did you feel you were part of a professional teaching and learning community through participation in this experience?

**100% of teacher candidates answered: Yes; 100% of P-12 Clinical Educators answered: Yes**

Do you believe the P-12 students benefited from your participation in this innovative experience?

**93% of candidates said: Yes 100% of P-12 Clinical Educators said: Yes**

Was this innovative experience structured appropriately (i.e., daily schedule, sequence of activities, working with P-12 students and clinical educators)?

**96% of candidates said: Yes 100% of P-12 Clinical Educators said: Yes**

##### **Candidates only questions:**

Did this innovative experience contribute to your knowledge of teaching and learning in a P-12 school?

**96% of candidates said: Yes**

Will this innovative experience influence your practice as a teacher?

**96% of candidates said: Yes**

Rank order the most powerful aspects of this innovative experience, with the most powerful being 1 and the least powerful being 4.

**Most powerful: Watching a live lesson implemented by the P-12 clinical educator**

**Least powerful: Interacting/ collaborating with peers (other teacher candidates) in a shared experience.**

Provide specific examples describing your interactions with teacher candidates, university instructors, and P-12 clinical educators while participating in this innovative experience.

**Teacher Candidates: Watched a live lesson and discussed afterwards; lots of discussions with peers after completing field experiences; participated as part of the everyday school experiences**

**PK-12 Clinical Educators: Noticed candidates repeating my phrases and using my strategies; full immersion in school day and experiences; relationship building between NKU candidates and P-12 students**



What were the strengths of this innovative experience?

**Teacher Candidates:** Frequency in the school/classroom; interactions with professionals; relationships built with peers; relationships built with students; being in the classroom every day made me more like a teacher; more involvement with P-12 and university clinical educators.

**P-12 Clinical Educators:** Co-taught lessons; closer collaboration with university professors; candidates experienced a complete day, not just a few hours; extra adults to help in the classroom.

What were the challenges of this innovative experience?

**Teacher Candidates:** Overall pace of the classes and work involved in the classes; more hours in the school in field experiences; technology issues;

**P-12 Clinical Educators:** Time to complete everything; balancing work with two NKU students; communication