

Following the Leader: A collaborative training model to develop  
and sustain best practices for teacher candidates

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&

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## Abstract

Recent paradigm shifts in teaching methodologies and increased accountability on practicing K-12 teachers have made it more difficult for teacher training programs to find internship sites with willing teachers who model best practices. Exemplary role models are critical for young, aspiring student-teachers, who are now subject to new assessments that require video evidence of their best practices to receive state licensure. To address this concern and enhance teacher candidate graduation rates, the researchers will identify, recruit, and train a pool of high quality practicing K-12 teachers to serve as cooperating teachers in 2015-2016. Using classroom observations, surveys, interviews, and edTPA assessment scores, the research team will then examine the impact the recruitment and training has on the cooperating teacher support and on teacher candidate performance on the summative, performance-based assessment in the student-teaching internship (i.e., edTPA). The project has the potential to a) develop a strong and enduring pool of high quality cooperating teachers, b) ensure UNC Charlotte teacher candidates are exposed to best practices that they emulate and carry forward into their future careers as teachers, c) facilitate successful candidate completion of a new high stakes assignment during the student teaching internship, and d) ultimately improve the instruction and quality of education of K-12 students who will be taught by these teacher candidates.

## Budget Request for SOTL Grant

Year 2015

Joint Proposal? X Yes        No

Title of Project Following the Leader: A collaborative training model to develop and sustain best practices for teacher candidates

Duration of Project One year (spring 2014 – spring 2015)

Primary Investigator(s) Dr. Scott Kissau and Dr. Laura Hart

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UNC Charlotte SOTL Grants Previously Received (please names of project, PIs, and dates) PI: Kissau, S. (2012-2013). *The Best of Both Worlds: Hybridized Second Language Methodology Instruction*

Allocate operating budget to Department of Middle, Secondary, & K-12 Education

**Addendum: The previous SoTL grant project is complete. Dr. Kissau is scheduled to share his findings at the 2014-15 SoTL showcase. This has been confirmed with Kim Buch.**

		Year One
Account #	Award	January to June
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	

920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	
925000	Travel - Domestic	
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
<b>YEAR 1 TOTAL</b>		<b>\$0</b>

		<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	\$ -
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	\$1,000
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	\$2,100
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	\$6,300
925000	Travel - Domestic	

926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	\$113.05
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
	<b>YEAR 2 TOTAL</b>	\$9,513.05
<b>YEAR 1 and YEAR 2 GRAND TOTAL</b>		\$9,513.05

**Attachments:**

1. Attach/provide a narrative that explains how the funds requested will be used.
2. Has funding for the project been requested from other sources?  Yes  No. If yes, list sources.

A proposal will be submitted by Drs. Kissau and Hart to the Spencer Foundation (Small Research Grants in the Areas of Inquiry) by the November 18, 2015 deadline.

## Budget Narrative

### **Special Pay (\$2,100)**

The investigators will consult with faculty members in six disciplines (math, science, social studies, English, English as a second language, and foreign language) to seek input on the best teaching practices expected in an exemplary Cooperating Teacher (CT) in each area. These practices will align with the expectations of edTPA, a national summative assessment currently used as the student teaching capstone project designed to answer the question, “Is the candidate ready to teach?” The investigators will then work with these faculty members to identify and recruit practicing K-12 teachers who exhibit these best practices in the content areas and who are willing to serve as future CTs for our teacher candidates. In July of 2015, these identified teachers will come to campus to participate in a workshop. During the workshop, the six faculty members (1 from each content area) will conduct break-out sessions with the practicing K-12 teachers who share their content area expertise. The break-out sessions will 1) review best practices in the respective content area as aligned with the three primary domains of edTPA, 2) familiarize teachers with both the content-specific key understandings of edTPA and edTPA-specific vocabulary and teaching practices they should be modeling for their interns, and 3) address how they may further support teacher candidates in successfully completing this project. For their involvement in organizing and conducting the break-out session in their respective content area during the summer, the researchers request stipends of \$350 for the six participating faculty members (total of \$2,100).

### **Participant Stipends (\$6,300)**

In Year 2, the researchers also request a stipend of \$350 for each of the 18 K-12 teachers (\$6,300) for their one-year commitment to the project. These teachers will attend a half-day

workshop on the UNC Charlotte campus in July 2015 and then serve as a CT for a UNC Charlotte teacher candidate in either Fall 2015 or Spring 2016 (or both semesters).

**Graduate Student Salary (\$1000)**

A graduate assistant (GA) will work closely with the research team during Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. At the rate of \$9/hour, the researchers request \$1000 for approximately 110 hours of GA support. Most of this time will be spent transcribing interviews. Any remaining time will be used to assist the research team in locating relevant literature for the literature review and to prepare manuscripts and conference presentations.

**Supplies (\$113.05)**

The researchers request \$113.05 in Year 2 for refreshments for 18 K-12 teachers participating in the half-day workshop in July. A 30-minute break will be scheduled during the afternoon workshop. Chartwells will provide beverages (coffee, lemonade, and sweet tea) and a snack (cookies and brownies).



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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Committee  
**FROM:** Dr. Ellen McIntyre, Dean  
**DATE:** November 3, 2014  
**RE:** Support for SoTL proposal from Dr. Kissau and Dr. Hart

I am pleased to offer my support for the SoTL grant proposal, "Following the Leader: A collaborative training model to develop and sustain best practices for teacher candidates" proposed by Drs. Kissau and Hart. As the College of Education at UNC Charlotte, and other teacher training programs across the country, implement a new high-stakes, performance-based assessment of student teachers (edTPA), there is a critical need for research projects, such as this, that inform the implementation of the assessment and serve to better prepare teacher candidates to successfully complete it.

The project has the potential to a) develop a strong and enduring pool of high quality cooperating teachers, b) ensure UNC Charlotte teacher candidates are exposed to best practices that they emulate and carry forward into their future careers as teachers, c) facilitate successful candidate completion of the new assessment during the student teaching internship, and d) ultimately improve the instruction and quality of education of K-12 students who will be taught by these teacher candidates.

The proposed project has been informed by Dr. Kissau's research on teacher beliefs and practices that has been published in several top-tier journals and by Dr. Hart's extensive knowledge of the new edTPA assessment and many years of experience working with teacher interns. In addition to contributing to a much-needed body of research related to edTPA, the project's findings can potentially impact the way our College of Education assigns and places student teachers, thereby positively impacting our students' educational experience and supporting their future success as teachers. I enthusiastically endorse this project for SoTL funding.

Sincerely,

*Ellen McIntyre*  
 Dean Ellen McIntyre



## Project Narrative

### A. Specific Aims

Each year over 500 UNC Charlotte teacher candidates in the College of Education complete their student-teaching internship in a K-12 school. Between 100 and 150 of these interns come from the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education. The student-teaching internship is believed to be the most important component in teacher preparation programs (Caires & Almeida, 2007; Ferber & Nillas, 2010; Taggart & Wilkinson, 1985). During this culminating experience, student-teachers apply the theories, methodologies, and strategies that they have learned throughout their education coursework and encounter new ideas and strategies in K-12 classrooms. A key player in this experience is the Cooperating Teacher (CT). In addition to hosting aspiring teachers in their K-12 classrooms for several months, CTs serve as instructional coach and confidante, offer support and feedback, assess student-teacher progress, and model best practices. Ferber and Nillas (2010) identified CT practices as a critical factor in the effectiveness of the student-teaching experience. The important role of the CT in the student-teaching experience and career trajectory of teacher candidates makes it critical that high quality teachers be selected by teacher education programs to serve as CTs.

The need for CTs that model best practices for their interns is even greater in this era of edTPA: a high stakes, performance-based assessment implemented in 34 states and the District of Columbia and recently adopted by UNC Charlotte's College of Education (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2014). The edTPA requires teacher candidates, during the student-teaching internship, to provide convincing evidence of their ability to teach using research-based best practices that have a positive impact on their K-12 students. Evidence must include a sample of teacher candidate-developed lesson plans that reflect best practices in

the content area, as well as video clips of the intern applying those practices in a K-12 class and detailed reflections on their instructional strategies, assessment, and decision-making. The submitted evidence is reviewed by trained scorers, and a candidate's score has an impact on whether or not he or she receives a teaching license. At UNC Charlotte, candidate evidence is assessed externally by Pearson Education at a cost of \$300 per candidate.

The implications of such high stakes and costly testing on teacher education programs are clear. Colleges of education implementing edTPA and wishing to ensure a high quality, beneficial student teaching experience must secure effective CTs that model best practices for each teacher candidate. Research consistently shows that teacher candidates often emulate the instructional strategies modeled by their CT, even when those strategies do not align with what they have been taught in their training (Kissau, 2014). With this in mind, interns placed with CTs who model traditional, teacher-centered instruction risk perpetuating those dated practices in their own classrooms and may struggle to meet the requirements of edTPA, thereby jeopardizing their ability to obtain licensure. Unfortunately, placing teacher candidates with CTs that model best practices is challenging. Recent paradigm shifts in teaching methodologies and increased accountability on teachers have made it difficult for colleges of education to find CTs who exhibit "best practices" and are willing to allow a novice teacher to teach their K-12 students. This project (aligned with the SoTL focus on increasing student retention, progression, and graduation rates) will identify, recruit, and train a pool of high quality, practicing K-12 teachers who commit to serving as CTs in 2015-16, and to examine the impact these exemplary CTs possessing a clear understanding of edTPA has on our students' teaching performance. The investigators hypothesize that by providing specific training for CTs on requirements of edTPA, CT capacity to effectively mentor teacher candidates will be increased and will result in higher

scores on the edTPA assessment among teacher candidates whose CT received the training than those whose CT did not. Following the identification, recruitment, and training of the CTs, the investigators seek to answer the following questions:

- To what extent are the edTPA-specific vocabulary and domains addressed in the CT training modeled in CT classroom practice? In other words, how did the training affect the CT's practice?
- To what extent does the CT training affect the performance of student-teachers during the internship experience?

In addition to contributing to a much-needed body of research related to edTPA, the findings can potentially impact the way the College of Education at UNC Charlotte, and more specifically the Office of Field Experiences, assigns CTs to its student-teachers, thereby positively impacting students' educational experience and supporting their future success as teachers.

## **B. Literature Review**

Each teaching discipline is unique, with associated teaching beliefs and behaviors often referred to as pedagogical content knowledge that are considered to be best practices. For example, in foreign language instruction, multiple studies involving hundreds of post-secondary and K-12 teachers have contributed to a growing professional consensus on best practices in language teaching (Brown, 2009; Kissau, Algozzine, & Yon, 2012).

Despite such agreement on pedagogical content knowledge, it has been well documented in studies involving a variety of content areas that teachers' instructional beliefs about best practices are not always reflected in their instruction (Kang & Wallace, 2005; Lee, 2009). In their study involving 63 primary and secondary school math teachers, Quinn and Wilson (1997), for example, found a dramatic disconnect between teachers' beliefs and actual classroom

practices. While all teachers in the study expressed positive attitudes about the benefits of integrating student writing into mathematics instruction, they provided students with opportunities to write less than once a week. Similar incongruence between teacher beliefs and practice were noted by Lee (2009) in her study involving more than 200 secondary school English teachers. While the teachers reported that grammatical accuracy was only one characteristic of good writing, more than 94% of their feedback to students on written work addressed grammatical errors and less than four percent related to content.

In an era of instructional reform when teachers are asked to adopt new, interactive and student-centered approaches, possible disconnects between beliefs and practice are both relevant and troubling. This is particularly important for teacher candidates just entering the profession who are still developing and honing their instructional beliefs and practices. Studies involving multiple teaching disciplines demonstrate that teacher trainees are particularly vulnerable to adopting classroom practices that are not congruent with their beliefs and do not reflect best practices (Watzke, 2007). Recent research involving teacher trainees suggests that teacher candidates are highly impressionable and heavily influenced by the beliefs and practices of their CT. A study by Kissau (2014) investigating the teaching performance of 51 aspiring ESL teachers found that the instructional practices of interns were significantly shaped by the CT, and it noted that interns frequently mirrored the practices of their CT when in doubt about what to teach, how to teach it, or how to manage the classroom. CTs that do not follow best practices can instill such beliefs and practices in their interns, who are at a time when Feiman-Nemser (2001) reported that teaching beliefs and behaviors are being solidified. Instructional practices modeled by CTs that are not congruent with best practices, thus, may become engrained in aspiring teachers and continue throughout their careers. The investigators expect that this study ultimately

will help to provide student-teachers at UNC Charlotte with strong internships that align with the best practices that are associated with their given content area and that are required in the edTPA assessment.

### **C. Methods**

In Spring 2015 the investigators will work with faculty members and local school district curriculum coordinators to identify K-12 teachers who exhibit best practices in teacher education licensure areas housed in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education, and who agree to serve as a CT in Fall 2015 or Spring 2016. Three teachers will be selected from each of six content areas (math, science, social studies, English, English as a second language, and foreign language) for a total of 18 K-12 teachers. In July 2015, these teachers will participate in a half-day professional development workshop. During the first half of the workshop, all participants will be familiarized with the project, as well as with the expectations of the edTPA assessment to be used for all UNC Charlotte teacher candidates. Instructions will also be provided on logistical details, such as how to video-record teacher candidate lessons, obtaining parental consent to video-record K-12 students, and ethically supporting interns. The second half of the workshop will involve break-out sessions on specific content areas (i.e., foreign language teachers will attend a workshop led by a foreign language methodology instructor). The break-out sessions will 1) review best practices in the respective content area, 2) familiarize teachers with both the content-specific requirements of edTPA and the edTPA-specific vocabulary and key content understandings they should be modeling for their interns, and 3) address how they may further support teacher candidates during the internship.

After completing the training, half of those completing the workshop (1-2 per discipline) will be assigned a teacher candidate seeking licensure in his or her content area who is scheduled

for an internship in Fall 2015. Remaining CTs completing the workshop will be assigned interns in Spring 2016. The control group will be made up of teacher candidates who will be assigned to a CT who has not completed the training.

#### **D. Evaluation**

A strong evaluation plan is in place to measure the project's impact. To investigate how the training affected CT practice (research question #1), the investigators will collect both quantitative and qualitative data. First, the investigators will conduct classroom observations of a sample of CTs (1 in each content area) who did and who did not complete the training (12 total). During these observations, CT use of the edTPA-specific vocabulary and teaching practices addressed in the training will be noted via an observation checklist. Second, at the end of the semester, all student teachers (with and without a trained CT), who provide the necessary consent, will complete a survey to gauge their perception of CT use of edTPA-specific vocabulary and teaching strategies. A link to the survey will be sent via email and completed electronically via Surveyshare. Qualitative data will also be collected via semi-structured interviews with CTs who did and who did not receive the training (6 of each). During the interviews CTs will be asked to describe how they supported their intern, what further support might they have provided, and how the College of Education at UNC Charlotte could assist them in supporting their interns. In regard to the quantitative data, the investigators will calculate total mean scores for items on the observation tool and survey and compare the two groups (CT with training and CT without training). With respect to the qualitative data, the researchers will use a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our goal is to examine and compare data collected from the interviews to detect emerging themes that help explain the findings from the quantitative phase of the study.

To measure the effect the project has on teacher candidate performance during the internship (research question #2), all teacher candidates will complete the edTPA assignment during the internship semester. All components of this standardized, performance-based assessment (lesson plans and resources, video-clips, and rationales for decision-making commentaries) will be uploaded to a data management system. Assignments are then scored externally by trained Pearson evaluators to enhance the reliability of the instrument. After Pearson completes its scoring, the researchers will compare scores for candidates who worked with a trained CT to those who worked with a CT who had not received our training. As an additional source of data, CTs will be asked during the interviews to describe their intern's teaching performance during the internship.

#### **E. Knowledge Dissemination**

In addition to the Dean's Office and the Office of Field Experiences in the College of Education, the investigators will present project results to the College of Education's teacher training programs and the entire campus at the February 2017 SoTL Showcase. The researchers will announce these findings and the presentation at the SoTL Showcase through the College of Education's weekly newsletter, *Connections*. At the state level, the investigators will present study results at the 34<sup>th</sup> conference of the North Carolina Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (NC-ACTE) and at the national conference (2016) of the American Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (AACTE). In addition, they will prepare and submit a manuscript to the *Journal of Teacher Education*, a prestigious, international journal that is especially interested in research surrounding edTPA and clinical placements in K-12 schools.

## F. Human Subjects

IRB approval to conduct this research project was submitted in Fall 2014. IRB approval will be forwarded upon request.

## G. Extramural Funding

The research team met with Kris Duryea, Director of the Office of Research Development and Management in the College of Education, to explore external funding opportunities for the project. Following this meeting, the investigators intend to submit, by the November 18 deadline, a grant application through the Spencer Foundation (Small Research Grants in the Areas of Inquiry), which is intended to investigate ways in which education, broadly conceived, can be improved around the world. The Foundation's Small Research Grants program provides funding up to \$50,000; this project aligns with their Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Resources area of inquiry. Should this external grant proposal be funded, we would expand the project to include the training of a much larger number of CTs than the 18 described above.

## H. Timeline

Date	Project Task
Spring 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIs identify and recruit 18 local K-12 teachers who model best practices in 6 licensure areas (3 each) via support from district curriculum coordinators.</li> <li>• PIs invite teachers to participate in professional development workshop at the College of Education in the summer.</li> </ul>
First Summer Session 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIs develop workshop presentation on new edTPA performance assessment. Faculty members from six content areas prepare break-out session presentations.</li> </ul>
Second Summer Session 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIs and 6 faculty members conduct professional development workshop for 18 teachers (July 2015).</li> <li>• PIs assign candidates in each discipline scheduled to complete internships in Fall 2015 to CT who completed training.</li> <li>• PIs assign remaining teacher candidates to CTs who did not complete training (control group).</li> <li>• PIs conduct literature review for future manuscript development.</li> </ul>

Fall 2015 First cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher candidates begin internship with trained/untrained CTs.</li> <li>• PIs observe sample of CTs who completed training as well as sample of those who did not.</li> <li>• Teacher candidates complete edTPA assignment.</li> <li>• Teacher candidates complete survey.</li> <li>• Six CTs participate in interviews.</li> <li>• GA transcribes interviews and helps to develop a literature review.</li> </ul>
Spring 2016 Second cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher candidates begin internship with trained/untrained CTs.</li> <li>• PIs observe sample of CTs who completed training as well as sample of those who did not.</li> <li>• Teacher candidates complete edTPA assignment.</li> <li>• Teacher candidates complete survey.</li> <li>• Six CTs participate in interviews.</li> <li>• GA transcribes interviews and helps to develop a literature review.</li> </ul>
Summer 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIs analyze data and develop manuscript.</li> <li>• PIs disseminate results.</li> </ul>

(word count: 2467)

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