The Learning and Teaching the Disciplines through Clinical Rounds project produces better teachers by connecting—and improving—disparate parts of teacher preparation.

Each September, throughout the United States, thousands of brand-new teachers step into their very first middle school or high school classrooms. No one, not the novice teachers nor their veteran colleagues, not the school districts, and certainly not the parents of their young students, wants the teachers to be anything other than fully trained and prepared. But how does a new teacher, who may have just received her bachelor’s degree two or three months previously, enter the classroom ready and able to teach effectively?

Teachers are exceptions to the orthodox opinion regarding those earning liberal arts bachelor’s degrees. These degrees are generally not considered vocational—instead, it’s thought that they provide broad knowledge across a spectrum: science, mathematics, English, history, etc., combined with deeper expertise in a major field. And even though a bachelor’s degree is a prerequisite for many jobs, most employers understand that the newly graduated employee is going to need additional job-specific training and will continue to learn—and that they may not reach their full potential for some time. It’s a time-honored system in which the focus is on workers’ potential, rather than on their current abilities.
But we can't apply this model to teachers. The stakes are too high and we cannot allow children to be at risk while new teachers learn how to teach. It is crucial that beginning teachers be responsible practitioners.

The traditional solution for teachers has been to incorporate in-the-classroom training as part of their undergraduate degrees. In most teacher preparation programs, students serve as student teachers in a classroom during the final semester of their undergraduate program.

One problem with this strategy is identified by Deborah Loewenborg Ball, William H. Payne Collegiate Chair, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, and dean of the School of Education: “An enormous faith is placed on ‘learning from experience,’ despite substantial empirical evidence that experience is an unreliable ‘teacher.’”

Bob Bain, associate professor in the School of Education and in the Department of History in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and faculty chair of secondary teacher education, laments what he sees as a fragmented system. “Typically, university teacher education is a non-systemic system where prospective teachers learn their content in one place, pedagogy in another, and learn to apply these in a third. In most programs, the burden of building coherence and developing programmatic meaning, of making connections between their work in their content courses, in their professional education courses, and in the classroom, is on those who are least capable—the preservice teachers.”

In 2005, Bain and Elizabeth Birr Moje, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and associate dean for research, began a program that has brought together the teacher preparation elements, creating a unified experience in which the students learn about and experience explicit components of teaching.

The project, Learning and Teaching the Disciplines through Clinical Rounds (commonly known as the Rounds Project), has significantly revamped the preparation of secondary history and social studies teachers—and the improvements in the Rounds Project are spreading to the preparation of teachers in other disciplines. What may be surprising is that what has become a revolutionary redesign began as a modest refinement.

LITERACY IS CENTRAL TO ALL LEARNING

Both Moje and Bain have been secondary teachers. Moje taught high school history and science, for seven years, Bain taught high school history and social studies for 26 years. In their classrooms, both
saw challenges and opportunities with literacy, specifically, with the challenges students faced in making sense of information presented in texts and encoded in language.

In their high school teaching, Bain and Moje observed that students who could read proficiently in some domains were sometimes challenged in others. When the students were allowed to choose their reading materials, they were typically proficient and engaged readers. But if the same students were asked to read a history textbook, or read a primary source such as the Federalist Papers, then they often faltered. Moje says “I struggled with how to engage my students in deep, careful text reading, and I became fascinated with why they didn't seem to engage with the texts in the ways I thought they should, and in ways that would allow me to teach what I needed to teach.”

“Literacy is everything,” says Moje. “Instruction in any domain involves teaching, whether teachers or young people, about oral and written language and knowledge production and representation in the disciplines. Good subject-matter instruction involves providing access to the ways that members of the disciplines represent knowledge through language.”

In Bain’s case, in addition to his concerns with his students’ use of texts, he also noticed a literacy problem for teachers related to segmentation of fields. “When I was working in classrooms, I ran into teaching problems and found that the literature that history teachers typically read didn’t help,” he says. He sought answers outside of his discipline and found the pedagogical help he needed. This served as a reminder of what he had learned in his own teacher preparation program—that teaching is a combination of elements. A good history teacher isn’t just a historian, nor just an instructor, but a complex blend of both.

Together, Bain and Moje designed a program to integrate more fully literacy teaching practices into history and social studies teacher education.

FROM LITERACY TO PROGRAM REDEVELOPMENT

At the School of Education, Moje and Bain became acquainted and discovered their shared interest in the centrality of literacy instruction in learning the disciplines. And, in 2005, they set out to develop stronger ties across experiences in the teacher education program that would sharpen preservice teachers’ understanding of and capacity to help adolescent readers and writers comprehend and compose complex texts of the subject areas.
They began with data collection, assessing students’ understanding of content, literacy, and teaching practices. What they found was both good news and bad news. The good: the students in the teacher education program were having great experiences. The bad: the experiences were disjointed and not well connected with each other. In response, Moje and Bain developed cross-course and cross-semester coordination of curricula and activities, creating a spiraling program of study that allowed instructors in one course or field experience to refer to and build on lessons learned in another.

One pivotal step was to strengthen disciplinary foci within the program, including the reinvention of the general literacy course as discipline-specific. The general literacy course became five subject-specific courses that focused on literacy teaching practices in history/social studies, literacy teaching practices in mathematics, and so on. The discipline-specific literacy course served as an introduction to the next semester’s discipline-specific teaching practices course that had been part of the program since its inception.

To develop, maintain, and capitalize on curricular coherence across courses, semesters, and field experiences, Bain and Moje run weekly meetings of the instructors of five different courses (which include field experiences) in the secondary teacher education program. At one recent meeting, for example, lesson plan evaluations were discussed—all students, as part of their first- and second-semester student teaching, must prepare lesson plans for their instruction and have them closely evaluated by the program. In the course of the discussion, it became evident that were differences in the assessments and how they were evaluated across semesters. The instructors discussed the central concepts underlying the assessments and worked together to develop common criteria that would become progressively complex as the students’ knowledge and abilities advanced. These criteria would be uniformly applied from one instructor to another and from one course to another, creating a consistent connection where connections were previously implicit and up to the teaching intern to make.

In addition to programmatic issues, the meetings provide a forum where problems or challenges relating to individuals or small groups of students can be addressed. Some students do well with their School of Education coursework but find unexpected difficulty as leaders of high school classrooms. In the weekly meetings, the instructors pool their knowledge, both of the individual and of the interventions that have been used in similar past situations. Usually, they are able to devise supports for the students that enable them to be successful. But on the rare occasion that they cannot, in good conscience, recommend a student for state teaching certification, they counsel the student to find an alternative to teaching that is a better fit for the student. They do this reluctantly, and only as a last resort, but the standards must be met. Moje says her bottom line is, “Would I want this person teaching my daughter?”

**TAKING OUR MEDICINE: ADOPTING BEST PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

Many professions have developed protocols for training novices and enabling them to learn and polish their skills. Hair stylists must complete classroom and on-the-job training before becoming certified. Trades, such as plumbers and electricians, have ranks related to skill and experience: apprentice, journeyman, and master. But medicine is the field with a structured training system that is best adapted to teachers. Because of the similarities between practice in medicine and education, Bain and Moje decided to use the medical model as a guide for further developing their innovation.

In medicine, students become interns once they have completed their classroom training but before they are licensed to practice medicine. They continue their education, usually at hospitals or clinics, with on-the-job training under the close supervision of an attending physician. They spend time in various medical specialties—emergency medicine, pediatrics, etc.—during which the attending physician instructs the students in all procedures, provides feedback, and ensures that the patients receive responsible and appropriate healthcare.

Teacher preparation has long taken a similar approach—student teachers are taken into schools and classrooms where they experience on-the-job training under the supervision of an experienced cooperating teacher. But Moje and Bain thought that teacher preparation would benefit from a more rigorous application of the clinical model.
To guide the development of clinical education experiences, they focus on a small set of vital teaching practices, including selecting and using texts of instruction, planning for instruction, assessing students, and developing student writing, among others. They have also sought out a group of practicing teachers who are highly skilled with these practices of teaching, and very effective in the classroom. They chose the teachers and the schools with care to provide the teaching interns with a breadth of experiences.

In addition, they recognize that there are myriad skills effective teachers must learn, and multiple contexts in which to ply those skills. Traditionally, teaching interns have worked in just two or three classrooms. Bain and Moje have instituted “rotations,” in which the teaching interns rotate through the classrooms of master teachers who have been carefully selected to model particular aspects of the practice of teaching, such as selecting and scaffolding text of instruction effectively.

New titles for all participants have been adopted to reflect the professional approach to training. “Student teachers” are called “teaching interns” in this model, to reflect their professional stage and role. To represent the new roles played by the classroom teachers who are demonstrating methods and approaches and helping to teach the interns, Bain and Moje refer to these teachers as “attending teachers,” after the clinical model in teaching hospitals where attending physicians work closely with residents and interns. Attending teachers are encouraged to intervene in ways that support the growth of teaching interns.

ASKING MORE OF ATTENDING TEACHERS

The attending teachers who participate in the Rounds Project are asked to relate to the teaching interns in their classrooms in different ways than have been typical for supervising teachers and student teachers. Historically, supervising teachers observe and evaluate student teachers and give their feedback hours or even days later. In the Rounds Project, Bain and Moje ask the attending teacher to carefully interact and guide the teaching intern in real time, while the teaching intern teaches the young pupils.

Bain summons the medical model to explain: “The attending physician is a teaching physician as well. The attending physician would not allow the patient to suffer so that the intern can try something—the physician would intervene. We’ve been discovering that our cooperating teachers would allow our students to do things, or not require them to do things, to be cooperative or nice.”

Teaching is a solitary practice for many teachers. Few good models exist of practicing teacher/novice teacher interactions. Some teachers are overly cautious about doing anything that might reduce the intern’s authority. In the eyes of the students, the intern must be seen as The Teacher, and veteran teachers often are reluctant to weaken this perception.

“We adopted the terminology used in medical rounds to convey to the people that we work with in the field that we expect them to intervene,” says Bain. On a recent visit to a classroom, Moje and Bain modeled how to interact with a teaching intern during a lesson without undermining her authority. Although some teacher educators might worry

Ninth-grade teacher Tom Hoetger of Cody-Detroit Institute of Technology is one of the attending teachers participating in the Rounds Project. Hoetger engages and guides teaching interns with a particular focus on assessing secondary students’ reading and writing skills in history.

In this rotation, teaching interns work with Hoetger and School of Education field instructors to assess secondary students' skills in reading and writing, and then work on ways to offer productive feedback to the secondary students. Such close working relationships with attending teachers like Hoetger have contributed significantly to the success of the clinical rounds reform.
that intervening would be seen as interfering, evidence from Moje and Bain’s experience suggests something very different. For example, teaching intern, Crystal King, from Redford, Michigan, recently wrote of her clinical experience at Cody High School: “The support and suggestions you offered us helped make our lesson plans successful and I think to a certain degree we really got through to the kids. I can confidently say that they can make connections between the material and their own lives, and if it wasn’t for your suggestions during our first WWII lesson, I’m not sure we would have accomplished that!”

MORE AND PARTICULAR EXPERIENCES WITH GREATER COHESION

The interns work in classrooms in public and independent schools in urban, exurban, and suburban locations, and with a variety of grade levels. The Rounds Project places interns in five different classrooms in five different school settings over two semesters, enabling instruction and practice in both context-specific features of teaching as well as with the social, cultural, and developmental dimensions of educating adolescents.

New Teaching Interns Agree to Uphold the Ethical Obligations of Teaching

On September 8, 2010, the forty-seven new undergraduate teaching-interns in the school’s elementary teacher education program participated in an investiture ceremony at the School of Education. The interns were given lists of nine ethical obligations of teaching and discussed these before participating in a ceremony in which they were given name badges to wear throughout their program.

The ethical obligations of teaching are a product of research and deliberation within the Teacher Education Initiative, our ongoing comprehensive project that is redesigning how teachers are prepared for practice at the University of Michigan, as well as building knowledge and tools that will inform teacher education more broadly. The obligations include demonstrating commitment to every student, working continuously to improve instructional competence, and ensuring equitable access to learning in the classroom.

Prior to the ceremony, Elizabeth Davis, associate professor and faculty chair of elementary teacher education, called upon the interns to wear their badges as symbols that they accept the ethical obligations and commit to supporting all children in learning.

Later, Davis charged the interns to wear their badges whenever they are in their schools. “Your name badge serves so that others know who you are and it also serves as a reminder to yourself about this role that you’re taking on, and the responsibilities and obligations that you have as a teacher. The badge helps everyone who sees you know who you are and what you’re doing.”