

## ***Cross-university collegiality: Supporting 21st century cooperation in preservice English Language Arts teachers***

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### **Abstract**

As preservice teachers develop ideas about what it means to be and become educators, they benefit from opportunities that allow them to experience cooperative group work with diverse populations. This is especially important because during the induction phase, as they cross over from teacher education students to inservice teachers, they are often expected to engage in collegial work with their coworkers. In this article, the authors describe a cross-university project using a digital platform that afforded two sets of preservice teachers from two different universities to cooperate over the course of four weeks to inform each other's practice. This cooperative project included peer review sessions focused on lesson plans and synchronous revision conferences as part of a digital learning community. The authors considered the affordances and limitations of using an online platform as a way to foster cooperative practice among preservice teachers. Overall, preservice teachers had a positive perception of this project. In this article, we share the planning and implementation of the project, the ways in which students engaged with both their peers and the digital tools, and the trials and tribulations of the authors as instructors of these two cohorts of preservice teachers. Ultimately, our goal is to highlight the need in teacher education for projects that engage preservice teachers in cooperative practice with both the use of digital tools and authentic conversations with others outside of their own educational communities.

**Keywords:** *Collaboration; Online Learning; Teacher Education; Collegiality; Digital Project*

### **Introduction**

The authors of this article met for the first time at an English Education SIG meeting during a yearly professional conference. We sat down to discuss our academic backgrounds, research interests, and teaching assignments and found that we had a lot in common. When we sat down as instructors to collaborate, we both wanted to find a way to leverage the assignments and learning expectations that were already outlined in the courses that we were teaching. The more that we talked, the clearer it became that we both wanted a way for our students to reach beyond the scope of their field experiences to get a sense of the diverse cultural and societal landscapes that make up K-12 education. Researchers like Walters, Garii, and Walters (2009) identified the positive impact of preservice teachers traveling to learn more about others' cultures and contexts, which showcased the need

for our students to “travel” outside of their university’s philosophical and pedagogical standpoint on teacher preparation. Because both of our universities functioned on a cohort-like system where groups of students entered a teacher preparation program together and finished together, we wanted students to communicate with a different population with the same goal of teaching secondary level students. While both of our universities were in the same state, their surrounding environments and field placement contexts were quite different. For example, Katie’s students often taught in suburban school settings, while Nicole’s students often taught in more urban school settings. We believed that this experience would encourage an investigation of different lesson planning and pedagogical strategies, a way of practicing professional communication through a digital format, and, potentially, lay the groundwork for future collaborations. We hoped to foster what Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) referred to in their research as a “learning community,” meant to frame collegial professional experiences to support preservice teachers in their future careers.

Teacher educators often discuss the necessity for preservice teachers to learn the benefits of cooperative practice, yet many higher education instructors do not harness the full capabilities of incorporating such pedagogical practice into their own classrooms as models beyond the traditional approach of group work. Furthermore, while both K-12 and higher education classrooms are incorporating digital tasks and tools within student-centered, peer-to-peer, and hands-on environments, these efforts may still lack authentic audiences beyond a localized classroom cohort (Bird & Rosaen, 2005). Peer-to-peer interaction is important, but preservice teachers also need to cultivate the ability to interact with members in the education field outside of their local communities, teacher preparation programs, and universities. Connecting with practicing teachers, for example, enables timely and relevant professional discussions (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009).

One of the ways in which peer-to-peer interaction could occur in an authentic manner is through digital conversations. Preservice teachers should have the opportunity to not only engage with digital tools but utilize them for a purpose in an authentic way. Digital platforms become a necessary tool with which to accomplish that. We argue that in addition to conversations with practicing teachers, preservice teachers should converse with other preservice teachers to diversify their education and to experience cooperative efforts that mimic personal learning communities and professional development structures in the teaching profession. Unbound by temporal or geographic constraints, digital-based projects focused on cooperative practice are a way in which to facilitate these learning experiences. Our purpose in writing this article, then, is to share our experiences in connecting preservice teachers through Google Docs in hopes that this project might inform and encourage further collaborative efforts between both higher education instructors and the preservice teachers they serve using digital platforms and tools. In sharing this project, we hope to encourage additional projects that involve cooperative and collaborative practice to help most higher education instructors ‘practice what we preach.’

## **Literature Review**

### **Cooperation and Collaboration**

Holistically speaking, online collaboration is considered one of the most important skills to future employees (Moore, 2016). We know that teachers, specifically, benefit in a myriad of ways from working alongside other teachers. Not only do they learn deeply about their own practice and pedagogical stances, but they also learn about how cooperation and collaboration work so that they can support their own students in working together (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Pettit, 2017).

In an online learning environment, cooperative practice and discussion between teachers is still a necessity. Furthermore, “social presence has been identified as a significant predictor of learner satisfaction with online learning” (Alsadoon, 2018, p. 226). Our project encouraged group work that ultimately benefitted preservice teachers, as it engaged them in social online learning and was grounded in social constructivist philosophies because we believed new connections and social interaction between our two cohorts would lead to new learning (Castle, 2004; Piaget, 1970). Because we asked learners to do some of the work individually and then come together to revise and interpret each other’s work, the project entailed what can be considered “cooperative practice” (Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2012). Arnold, Ducate, and Kost (2012) distinguished collaborative and cooperative projects as those where the learner takes responsibility for the text as a whole (collaboration) versus the division of tasks and revision practice (cooperation). Both collaborative and cooperative practices are grounded in constructivist pedagogy.

### **Digital Technology for Cooperation**

The notion of cooperation across contexts is afforded by the digital tools that are made available by the use of digital spaces (Google Drive, for example) that provide a means for teachers to collaborate across geographic separation, both synchronously and asynchronously. While many researchers have found that mentoring and online communities have been shown to be effective ways to offer support to preservice teachers during their training (Cox & Nickson, 2014; Dymont, Downing, & Budd, 2013; Paris, Boston, & Morris, 2015) and that inservice teachers have used online communities for professional development (Rodesiler, Rami, Anderson, Minnich, Kelley, & Andersen, 2014) the idea of cooperation adds a collaborative and academic (as opposed to reflection) aspect to online conversations. Agosto, Copeland, and Zach (2013) found that preservice teachers benefited from social online learning and knowledge sharing from peers both online and in a face-to-face environment. In addition, Funkhouser and Mouza’s (2013) meta-analysis exemplified the shift from teacher centered technology integration to student centered technology integration; their work showcased the benefits of courses in teacher preparation which are focused on educational technology and driven by teacher cooperation.

While studies show that cooperation between teachers is beneficial in many contexts, it can also have its drawbacks. For example, Leppisaari and Lee (2010) conducted a

case study of an international digital partnership between Finnish and Korean preservice teachers, and, while they discovered that the participants' perspectives of the project were positive, the cooperative project presented barriers such as agreements on organization and language differences. Furthermore, they concluded that when divorced from foundational pedagogical knowledge, the use of digital tools to "enhance students' authentic learning experience" (p. 253) was difficult and shallow. These studies served as a framework consistent with our own goals for the cross-university project. We first prioritized our learning objectives and then chose the appropriate digital tools (Google Docs, Google Drive, and Hangouts) that would allow us to achieve those objectives. The goal was not to emphasize the use of digital technology in and of itself, although by doing so students learned a lot about the collaborative capabilities of Google Docs. Instead, it was to learn how to collaborate and to learn from collaborating with those who share similar goals but differing educational backgrounds and foundations.

Another higher education pedagogical collaboration between media design and information technology students studied by Fleischmann and Daniel (2010) revealed that not only did students feel like they learned more through semester-long authentic, inquiry-based projects but also persevered through challenges that develop professional dispositions, such as miscommunication among group members. The concept of habits of mind, professional dispositions, or intangibles came up more than once in our reflections on how the cross-university collaboration culminated. While our cooperative project was not as extensive or cross-disciplinary as Fleschmann and Daniel's (2010), we felt that the even the short time of the study provided students with a chance to collaborate, which resulted in learning gains, engagement, and an authentic learning experience. Furthermore, it gave students a genuine and motivated audience to read their lessons and provide feedback.

### **Digital Platforms for Cooperative Teaching and Learning**

The use of Google Docs and other web-based collaborative technologies has yielded varying results in the learning and cooperative processes within higher education contexts. Several studies have demonstrated the positive benefits of Google Docs for undergraduate students, including (a) convenience and ease of access for instructors and students (Rienzo & Han, 2009), (b) having user-friendly features, (c) helpfulness in improving collaboration (Chu, Kennedy & Mak, 2009), (d) improved quality of the project or writing (Blau & Caspi, 2009; Chu et al., 2009), and (e) contributing to the student learning process (Suwanatarathrip & Wichadee, 2014).

More specifically, Suwanatarathrip and Wichadee (2014) looked at writing assignments of a foreign language classroom for two undergraduate student groups: (a) face-to-face group work and (b) Google Doc group work. Students achieved higher mean scores on the writing assignment, increased positivity regarding the cooperative writing process (i.e., giving peer feedback; editing the work of peers; receiving peer feedback), and increased levels of collaboration for those using Google Docs versus face-to-face processes. The findings of Suwanatarathrip and Wichadee (2014) support findings from previous studies (i.e. Chou & Chen, 2008; Raman, Ryan, & Olfman, 2005) that the writing process, through

the use of web-based technology such as Google Docs, is helpful in contributing to student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Blau and Caspi (2009) explored the impact of cooperation versus sharing writing assignments through the use of Google Docs and found that undergraduate students engaged in cooperative groups (i.e. providing suggestions and edits via Google Docs to one another) reported significant levels of perceived importance of group work, with students reporting a higher quality of work through collaboration, resulting in the prediction of perceived learning. However, more research is needed in the collaborative learning process to explore the influence of editing versus suggesting in Google Docs or other collaborative technologies.

The use of Google Docs has also specifically benefitted preservice and inservice teachers. Teacher-librarians noted positives regarding the use of Google Docs to cultivate learning, creativity, and an outlet to share created works (Lamb & Johnson, 2010). Additionally, Donnelly and Hume (2015) sought to support pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in science through the use of collaborative technology, specifically using Content Representation (CoRe) design and a wiki space. Through focus interviews, participants reported valuing the ability to access and view peer artifacts in an online space, which helped to inform their scientific pedagogical knowledge (Donnelly & Hume, 2015). However, participants indicated a desire for the ability to chat and connect in the moment, which was not available with CoRe or the wiki space. Specifically, some participants referenced Google Docs: "I think it would be helpful if [wiki] had a communication space, like Google Docs lets you have the chat bar down the side so you can make comments" (Donnelly & Hume, 2015, p. 75). Thus, participants voiced the incorporation of a chat feature, and collaborative space such as Google Docs would be helpful in cultivating synchronous discussions to inform their knowledge versus asynchronous spaces.

## **Context**

### **Our Classes**

Katie's class was a fully asynchronous technology course. This technology course was a mandatory class offered over the summer, specifically for English Language Arts preservice teachers entering their undergraduate senior year in the fall semester. The two objectives for the course that this project addressed were:

- Evaluate and integrate various technologies to enhance productivity and professional practices;
- Demonstrate, through discussions and class projects, a sound understanding of technology operations and concepts.

In this course, students were asked to complete a draft of a lesson plan prior to engaging in this collaboration, and the instructor gave feedback to each student for their finalized

drafts. This iterative assignment encouraged students to revisit their lesson plan drafts more than once and taught them the recursive process of feedback and revision; no draft is truly ‘final.’ Some students wrote unprompted reflective emails to the instructors about their thoughts regarding the collaboration. Although not expected, most students chose to discuss the collaboration in their working groups, which were groups of five students that directed the discussion themselves every week for the entire semester.

Nicole’s course was hybrid in two ways—it had both face-to-face and online meetings and it was a mix of undergraduate and graduate English Language Arts education students. It was an elective course that was sequenced during a teacher certification program but had students from juniors, who had never completed a field experience (a classroom placement), to Master’s students that were teacher candidates seeking credentials. The course description outlined the following objectives:

- This course is designed to assist teachers in understanding and presenting information using digital literacies, technological innovations, and multicultural models of instruction, with particular emphasis on teaching speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills for middle and high school adolescents.
- Specific emphasis will be on rethinking educational objectives, pedagogical practices, and issues of social justice in the age of emergent technologies.

In this course, students completed a series of three technology-infused English Language Arts lessons, which they facilitated with classmates in a mini-teach format. After each mini-teach session, they were given summative feedback from peers and the instructor. They then chose one of the three lessons to revise and share with their cross-institutional partners.

We felt that the two courses overlapped in two ways. We both had a focus of exposing students to different digital literacies and platforms as well as a practical pedagogical focus. By encouraging students to cooperate during this project, we were able to both attend to the objective of exposing students to different digital platforms in an authentic way and allow for students to work on their lessons and pedagogical applications in an iterative fashion. Table 1 summarizes the teaching contexts for these two courses.

Table 1.

Teaching context

<b>Katie’s Course Context</b>	<b>Nicole’s Course Context</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-year undergraduate program</li> <li>• Class met asynchronously</li> <li>• One of two technology-focused classes in program</li> <li>• Class taken in junior/senior year prior to methods</li> <li>• No practicum included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-year undergraduate program combined with graduate M.Ed. program</li> <li>• Hybrid class, met both synchronously and asynchronously</li> <li>• Class taken both prior to and concurrently with methods</li> <li>• No practicum included</li> </ul>

The materials that we assigned for the project included the goals and objectives, rubric, and glow/grow (strength/weakness) examples, found in the Appendix. We also created and assigned a flipped lesson video that walked students through the goals and objectives, the assignment itself, and included a brief tutorial on how to use Google Docs to create a folder, a Google doc within that folder, how to share with group members, and how to comment on the document. The flipped lesson had a dual purpose, it modeled flipped learning and differentiated instruction for those who better grasp information when it is in multimedia form rather than in text form. We chose to exclude the link to the flipped lesson in this paper because it had information that would break anonymity.

The goals of the project were to enable students to interact with preservice teachers who are outside of their cohort and who have learned different concepts and experienced different K-12 populations. We also wanted to challenge students to practice digital workshopping with communities outside of their physical location (see Appendix for goals, objectives, and project rubric). The purpose of this project was for our students to share lesson plans they had crafted, give each other feedback, and work together synchronously on Google Docs in the effort to revise their lesson plans. For extra credit, they also had the option of communicating via Google Hangouts at some point toward the end of the project to further discuss their educational foundations and backgrounds and what it meant for their lesson plans. We felt that a synchronous meeting, in addition to the asynchronous work, would allow for students to expand upon their initial feedback as well as practice their professional speaking skill with each other. According to Pruitt's revelations on the differences between online and face-to-face coursework (2017), asking our students to work in this way could encourage them to see the human behind the product rather than focus solely on the product itself.

This cooperative project enabled students to, in our eyes, make their lesson plans more rigorous. In this case, when we use the term rigorous, we mean more thorough, detailed, and intentional. We asked students to ask each other questions about not only what they were doing but also why. Other questions included: What would their students learn from the assignment or activity? How did they plan to engage students in a way that promoted active participation? What research backed up their decision-making? Technology was used as the platform to engage in such conversations.

To promote transparency with our students regarding our own collaboration in creating the assignment, we showcased and modeled positive collegial collaboration and encouraged the preservice teachers to engage in cooperative practice. Through the flipped lesson, using Screencast-o-Matic to explain the project with our students, we shared our own work via Google Drive and Google Docs (see Figure 1). This included both of our syllabi and a draft of directions, assignment instructions, and the project rubric (see Appendix). We told our students the story of how we met, who we both were, and the purpose of the assignment. We walked through how to use Google Drive and showed them their working space as well as where to upload their lesson plans (see Figure 2). As they began working in this space, they were asked to upload their lesson plans and submit at least three 'grows' (areas to improve and/or expand) and three 'glows' (explicit strengths)

(see Appendix) per lesson plan. In their groups of three, they then used Google Drive to respond to each other's comments and edit their initial lesson plans (see Figure 3).

Google Docs served as our platform, as it encourages collaborative and cooperative practices, has many functions that could be facilitated in the K-12 classroom, is free, and is one of the tools that a handful of students did not yet feel comfortable using (and thus was a learning opportunity). It encouraged students to "build intentional... relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively" (para. 3) as outlined by NCTE's 21st Century Literacies Framework (2008) because students not only edited but questioned each other's work and ultimately helped each other revise and 'solve' issues that arose. Preservice teachers learned how to use the Google Doc platform not for the sake of using it but rather to accomplish an authentic task with an authentic audience. Educational technology should be harnessed in a way that transforms literacy and collaboration (Steckel, Harlow Shinas, & Van Vaerenwyck, 2015). This project was our way of using educational technology and digital spaces to encourage 21st century literacies rather than only fluency with a tech tool. Finally, critical thinking skills and habits of mind were incorporated into this project, although not necessarily as an initial goal, in the function of learning how to contact their peer groups and encouraging thoughtful, constructive criticism.

### **The Project & Results**

In this results narrative, we set up what the project looked like and how it progressed over the course of two weeks. Figure 1 shows the Google Drive folders that we used to collaborate in order to set up the project. The project itself required students to upload their lesson plans to a Google Drive folder created for them (Figure 2), then read the lesson plans uploaded by their other group members. Groups ranged from two to three participants. Because Katie's class was larger than Nicole's class, most of the groups had three participants, two of which were from Katie's class. We had 18 groups total, and the members of each group were chosen at random. After students read their peers' lesson plans, they were asked to provide three 'glows' and three 'grows' comments total, six per lesson. After students wrote feedback to each other, they had the option of working through that feedback synchronously through Google Hangouts, but this was not mandatory. They were asked, however, to cooperate synchronously through Google Docs (all members present during a certain period of time) to make the edits for their own lesson plans, as well as help their group members work through their own edits. Students were given the shared URL to open their collaboration space, which was completed through Google Drive (see Figure 2).



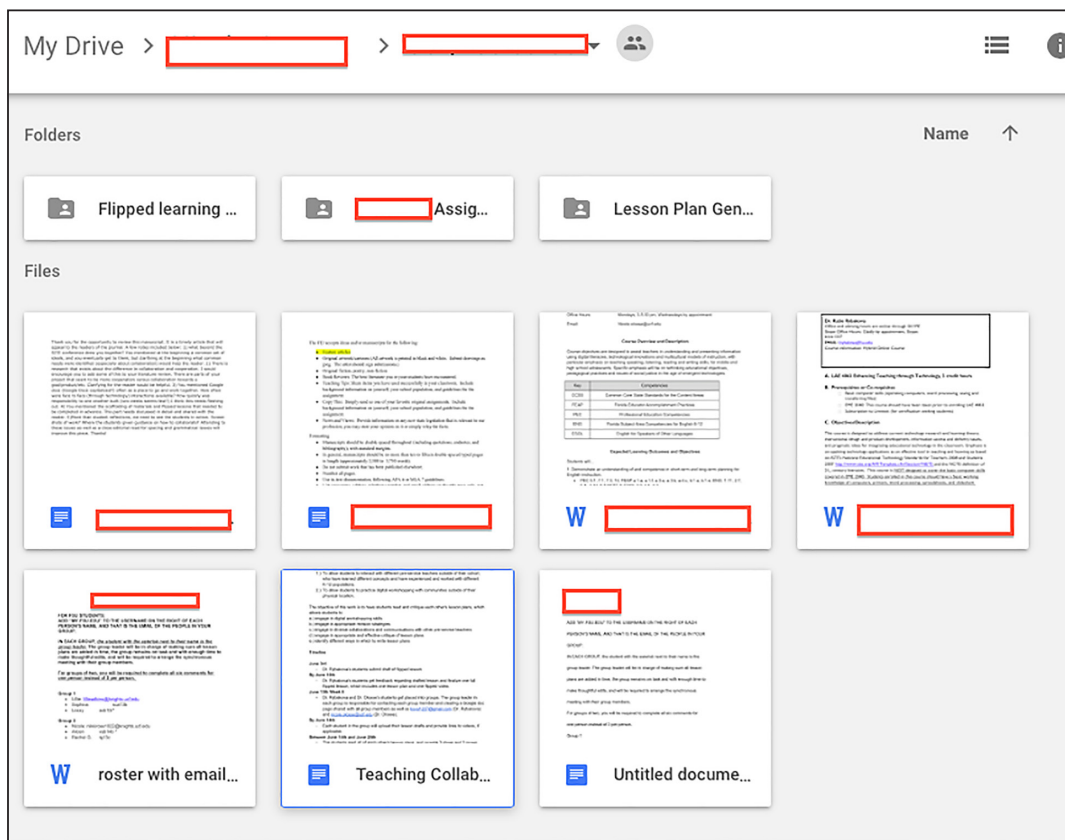


Figure 1. Katie & Nicole’s Google Drive Collaboration Portions blanked out for anonymity

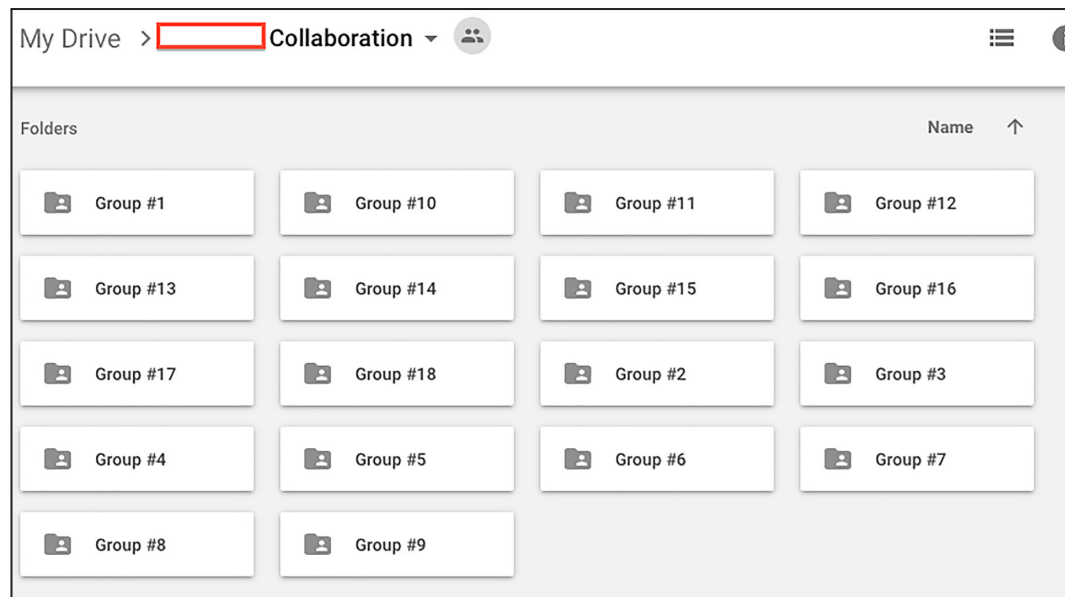


Figure 2. The group space that students entered initially Portions blanked out for anonymity

In Figure 3, this short excerpt of a lesson plan shows the way each student highlighted a particular portion of the lesson plan and then commented on it. Notice that the participants responded to each other's commentary as well. Most of the comments included not only the strengths or weaknesses but also the specifics about the lesson. For example, to improve upon one of the components of the lesson plan in Figure 3, one of the participants suggested that they should "have them talk about one thing they learned to activate that prior knowledge" to avoid a "vent session,"

**Materials:**

- Journals
- Writing Utensils
- Desks

**Anticipatory set:**

The teacher will briefly ask the students what they learned about creative writing, and what they liked about doing the lesson at home versus in the classroom.

The teacher will briefly ask the students what they did and did not like about doing the lesson at home. As a bell ringer, the students will get into pairs and select a historical event. With their partners, they will write, in their journals, about this same historical event, but from opposite perspectives. They will then have a chance to share.

**Teaching Strategy/Procedure/Activity:**

Time	Student is doing	Teacher is doing
2 minutes	Volunteering to share and	After teacher has greeted the

I think that this has the ability to turn into a vent session. Maybe try to have them talk about one thing they learned to activate that prior knowledge

I agree with [redacted] about this. Like [redacted] suggested, perhaps "summarize one thing you learned yesterday."

I think this is a bit broad. Partnering with a history or social studies teacher to see what they are learning about in their class would be a great way to make the topic relevant and give them a list of events to choose from to help guide them.

Figure 3.

Interactions on Google Docs Example 1 Portions blanked out for anonymity

In Figure 4 and Figure 5, several interactions between two participants are captured. These participants engaged in a dialogue based on the initial 'glow' comment as seen in Figure 4. Figure 5 illustrates how the participant who responded to the 'glow' comment in Figure 4 commented on the original commenter's lesson plan and expanded their glow to include specific information as to how the incorporation of technology can help K-12 students holistically.

**Anticipatory Hook:**

What would you think if you read a book that sounded like this?

My name is Doug. I like dogs. Dogs are cool. They are my favorite animal. I have a dog named Lois. She is a Great Dane. I got her when I was eight.

**Input:**

Ask the students, "What kind of sentences are those and why does the paragraph sound robotic?"

Tell the students that using only one kind of sentence makes a writing boring and monotonous.

Tell the students about the four types of sentences and that they are used to bring variety and keep a reader or listener's interest.

Glow: I don't know where you got this example or if you created it on your own but I feel this example serves as a great hook for your lesson design. If the teacher really sells how monotonous this style of writing is students right from the start of class should understand how important varied sentence structure is in writing/speaking.

I created the example. I felt like having a monotonous sounding paragraph would be a great way to get the students thinking!

Figure 4.

Interactions on Google Docs Example 2 Portions blanked out for anonymity

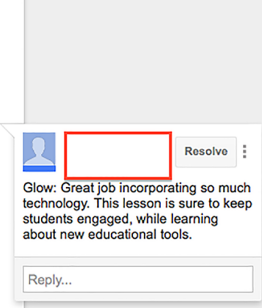
<p><b>In Class Procedure:</b></p> <p>(Sidenote: This lesson assumes that students have covered argumentative writing to some capacity and will only require students to practice this learned skill while learning about a new digital literacy in Newsela.</p> <p>1. <b>Ice Breaker/Linking prior knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open a Padlet page up and ask students to briefly answer (a sentence or two) the following question: Do you think that having self-driving vehicles is good for mankind or not? (5 mins)</li> </ul> <p>2. <b>Engaging and educating:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have students watch 2 YouTube videos discussing the pros of self-driving vehicles and the other discussing the cons of self-driving vehicles. Have student's takes notes and think about their stance on self-driving vehicles as they watch. (11 mins)</li> </ul> <p>Pros – A Ride in the Google Self Driving Car <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsaES--OTzM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsaES--OTzM</a></p> <p>Cons – The Terrifying Truth about Self-driving Cars <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrAiwv6HgFw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrAiwv6HgFw</a></p>	
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Figure 5.  
Interactions on Google Docs Example 3 Portions blanked out for anonymity

## Our Reflections

Many students reached out without prompting to reflect positively on the experience after the project was completed. For example, one student from Katie's class said: "Absolutely loved the X-X collab project. Great way to engage students and expose them to different education styles from different prep programs." This quote fit with the ultimate goal of the project, which was to expose students to peers who learned about lesson planning and other teacher preparation content a bit differently and to learn from each other. We believe that the cooperative project provided students with a way to interact with different perspectives outside of their immediate teacher education culture and challenged them to consider working cooperatively with other professionals in the field. It also provided them with access to an authentic learning community to gain feedback on their evolving understanding of planning units of study in the ELA classroom. It took a lot of planning and flexibility, but ultimately the goals were reached, the objectives met, and the students came away from the project with positive comments.

Other comments included references to the variety of lessons they were able to see, authentic practice in giving feedback to someone outside of their cohort, and confidence-building in their own writing and lesson planning. In the online class, most students chose to speak of the collaboration at length in their working groups for the weeks following the collaboration and discussed the adjustments that they would have made themselves (e.g., trying to get in touch earlier with group members, asking more questions, etc.) if they were to complete the project again. They also commented on what they learned, their positive feelings about the project, and their hope that they could do something similar in the future without feeling under pressure due to time restrictions. Nicole's students mentioned that they learned more thorough approaches to writing accommodations for ESOL learners by viewing Katie's students' lesson plans.

We were impressed with several positive learning experiences that occurred during this project. First, most preservice teachers' abilities in providing feedback showcased depth and thoughtfulness beyond what we would expect. Feedback ranged from pinpointing errors in objective writing, such as using the immeasurable term "understand," to questions that prodded the author of the lesson plan to include further detail in logistics

and details. A lot of the preservice teachers were clearly thinking of the students, and asked questions such as “how will you get students laptops?” (referencing the need to address potential access issues) and “where is the rubric for this project?” (referencing the need for clarity in regard to assessment). Some preservice teachers alluded to specific terms that the lesson plan author used to seek more details or ask for more examples. One particular preservice teacher asked a member of their group if they could add more examples to their prompt in order to help clarify the purpose of the writing task for their students. Comments that included positive feedback, or ‘glow’ comments, included not only encouraging adjectives but also a focus on student engagement, such as “this will be fun because students get to move around.”

These examples showcased several themes. First, it showed that these preservice teachers were ‘thinking like teachers’ in that they read the lesson plan not through the eyes of a general reader but rather by focusing on the learning experiences, gains, and assessment of the students. Secondly, through the variety of feedback, the preservice teachers were able to revise their lesson plans successfully by incorporating more detail and information. Thirdly, although perhaps only for a segment of the group, preservice teachers learned about different forms of feedback as well as different forms of lesson plans. Some of the emails that we received demonstrated these learning gains; several asked for copies of the lesson plan template to share with their group members, while others simply reflected on these benefits of working with those outside of their peer group. One observation we made was the gain of self-confidence that many of the preservice teachers shared in their reflections. Having others outside of their cohort admire and compliment their lesson plan made them feel like ‘real teachers.’

While the examples above demonstrated effective teams communicated and bolstered their learning, one of the more unusual learning experiences occurred through a miscommunication. One of the preservice teachers adapted a ReadWriteThink lesson plan as the submission, and the group members realized this and contacted us. Suggesting that this lesson plan was free of flaws and did not need revisions showcased that the preservice teachers assumed that because the lesson plan was published through a reputable source that it was, as per the student’s email, “perfect already.” The idea of helping the group member adapt this lesson plan for a particular audience propelled a discussion about different groups of students and the ways in which a lesson plan could be adapted for a particular audience. Lesson plan adaptation, then, became a learning experience for this group of students.

### **Considerations for Teacher Educators**

The significance of this cross-university cooperative project is that it provides a model for how teacher educators might approach authentic, cooperative, and technologically rich opportunities for their students to engage with other teacher candidates from diverse communities, cultures, and backgrounds. As demonstrated by the assignment description and overview of the project as it took place, preservice teachers worked

together to discuss and help one another through important pedagogical themes and concepts, building professional and social relationships with one another and working towards understanding schools and students in new ways. Sharing our experiences in connecting preservice teachers through the online platform Google Docs might inform and encourage further collaborative efforts between both higher education instructors and the preservice teachers they serve.

It is important, in addition to the positive aspects of the project, to examine the limitations. Every project, in its infancy, has its pitfalls. As Arnold, Ducate, and Kost (2012) stated, "Educators can create conditions that are conducive to collaboration or cooperation, but how groups tackle the task is ultimately beyond the instructor's control" (p. 433). In this case, we chose to view these 'pitfalls' as considerations for future projects simply because of the learning gains we, as instructors, made. Teaching is a human experience, and with human interactions comes confusion, especially when we push our students (and ourselves) outside of our comfort zones. As much as we had planned and as thoroughly as we had dictated the assignment, there were still students who did not understand the expectations, group members who had trouble getting in touch with each other, and students who waited until the deadline to submit their feedback (and a handful that never did). Students interpreted the assignment differently from each other at times. This ranged from submitting scant comments to submitting lesson plans already made by others, such as ReadWriteThink lessons.

In addition, we believe that lengthening the timeline for the cooperative project would help the groups establish a stronger sense of community and more solidified collegial workflow. Instead of four weeks, we might seek to develop a cross-institution collaboration that persisted for the length of one semester or longer. In addition, in the future we believe that it is essential to adjust by adding extrinsic (grades) and intrinsic (professional development) motivational factors that would encourage students to put 100% of their effort into this project. By and large, students did put in the effort and enthusiasm necessary to complete this project successfully, but there was a group of students who failed to do so, and because it was a group project, this robbed group members of learning opportunities. Adjustments to time are necessary so that students have more than two weeks to read and respond to fellow group members. Involving cross-university participants in semester-long working groups could be a way of encouraging such discussions without the pressure of time. Making sure that students have an ability to reflect anonymously may have helped us make additional adjustments to the project in the future and was a limitation of this project.

While we valued the assignment in that it provided both groups of students with authentic audiences that reached beyond the scope of our institutions, what became apparent was the need for the assignment to include an authentic purpose that was transparent to students. This may have impacted motivation and enhanced the learning experiences students had. Our initial goal of having students reach beyond the scope of their field experiences and investigate the different cultural and societal landscapes that make up K-12 education remained uninvestigated, as students focused more on

elemental and logistical components of lesson plan writing. This may have been different had we asked students to discuss their field experiences and/or teaching experiences in addition to lesson planning material. An additional limitation of this project was the uneven class numbers, which meant that many groups had two peers that knew each other working with one peer outside of their university. This may have impacted the way that conversations were held and how the groups communicated.

Our future collaboration plans include collecting data and including reflective notes from students in a more intentional manner. Additional projects might include having students interact using Goodreads, which allows for students to connect both individually and within learning communities that are started through the use of literacy groups or virtual literature circles. Because this could be completed over the course of a semester, or even over the course of several semesters, the students are not limited by time and can potentially have an in-depth discussion of their diverse experiences and philosophies.

### **Conclusion**

This cross-university collaboration taught our students of the different experiences preservice teachers have and gave them an opportunity to collaborate beyond the scope of their university teacher preparation program. Furthermore, they were able to read and give feedback to each other, providing them an authentic audience for both their feedback as well as their lesson plans. This ultimately raised their self-confidence in lesson plan writing as well as their ability to communicate with peers outside of their cohort. Online teacher communities like the one in this exploration provide a rich platform for these types of groups to develop.

As instructors, this cross-university collaboration taught us the power of technology in that connection was possible regardless of location. It also taught us the extensive amount of planning and adaptability that is necessary to engage students in authentic collaborations. Furthermore, this project allowed us to share our experiences with a broader audience and showcase the positive impact of this form of collaboration with the higher education community. We see the necessity of promoting these forms of collaboration despite the time commitment—preservice teachers who ‘travel’ (albeit asynchronously) harness diverse experiences such as this one and utilize them in their future careers (Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). These projects are instrumental in getting preservice teachers to expand their communicative skills using 21st century literacies (NCTE’s 21st Century Literacies Framework, 2008). By encouraging cooperation beyond their teacher education institutions, preservice teachers learned: a) how to participate in membership of a professional development community in the future; and b) how to communicate with those outside their like community.

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## Appendix

The goals of this collaboration are two-fold:

1. To allow students to interact with different preservice teachers outside of their cohort, who have learned different concepts and have experienced and worked with different K-12 populations.
2. To allow students to practice digital workshopping with communities outside of their physical location.

The objective of this work is to have students read and critique each other's lesson plans, which allows students to:

- a. engage in digital workshopping skills
- b. engage in appropriate revision strategies
- c. engage in diverse collaborations and communications with other preservice teachers
- d. engage in appropriate and effective critique of lesson plans
- e. identify different ways in which to write lesson plans

Requirements	Points Possible
Student provides GLOWS feedback to each student, with a total of 6 comments, 3 per lesson plan. Each GLOWS feedback element provides the writer a detailed but succinct comment regarding what, specifically, the writer did well and why.	12
Student provides GROWS feedback to each student, with a total of 6 comments, 3 per lesson plan. Each GROWS feedback element provides the writer a professional written comment that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An explanation of the critique</li> <li>• A suggestion or example to make it better</li> </ul>	18
Student is active and aids in revision practice during synchronous meeting.	5
	35 pts total

**Glow:** Statements that point out strengths of the lesson plan, including specific focus on student actions/activities, exploration of concepts/content meant to be explored in the lesson, and ideas for pacing and organization.

## Example:

<p><b>Materials:</b> Student computer access. 'Poll Everywhere'. Digital Text to "A Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe. <a href="http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/telltale.html">http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/telltale.html</a></p> <p><b>Anticipatory Set (3 minutes):</b> Students will free write: What is sanity? What is insanity? If you are insane do you or do you not know it? What is the line between sanity and insanity? How do you determine when someone is telling the truth or lying?</p> <p><b>Activity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a whole class, set a purpose for the reading—discuss and dissect the anticipatory set on a group Google Doc to prepare students for the reading. (3 minutes).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Comment [3]:</b> Great anticipatory set that incorporates low stakes writing AND allows students to be creative with their answers and also sets them up to think more rigorously later on.</p>
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**Grows:** Statements that include constructive feedback that offer suggestions for the lesson plan in terms of student actions/activities, exploration of concepts/content meant to be explored in the lesson, and ideas for pacing and organization.

## Example:

<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <p>1. 'Desiree's Baby' by Kate Chopin Read Through (27 Minutes)</p> <p>a. <b>Tone 1 (4 Minutes):</b> Class will read their handout of 'Desiree's Baby' until teacher tells them to stop. This pause will signal that there is a tone shift, and the class will collaboratively discuss the tone. They will go to their Google Docs and list any songs that remind them of that particular tone.</p> <p>b. <b>Tone 2 (5 Minutes):</b> Class will continue reading until told to stop. They will then collaboratively discuss the tone shift. They will also find songs to parallel the tones discussed.</p> <p>c. <b>Tone 3 (4 Minutes):</b> Continue to discuss tone. Continue to add to playlist.</p> <p>d. <b>Tone 4 (4 Minutes):</b> Continue to discuss tone. Continue to add to playlist.</p> <p>e. <b>Tone 5 (3 Minutes):</b> Continue to discuss tone. Continue to add to playlist.</p> <p>f. <b>Tone 6 (3 Minutes):</b> Continue to discuss tone. Continue to add to playlist.</p> <p>g. <b>Tone 7 (4 Minutes):</b> Continue to discuss tone. Continue to add to playlist.</p> <p><b>Closure:</b> Class will view the Spotify playlist they created collaboratively and will connect songs to the tones they discussed.</p> <p><b>SAMR Evaluation:</b> I think this lesson plan incorporates digital technology, as it utilizes two types of technology: Google Docs Application and Spotify Music Streaming Application. This lesson plan reads more as a Modification lesson, as the new technology modifies the lesson for the students. The Spotify playlists offers students a new way to interpret and understand tone. Google Docs offer a new way to collaborate with one another through discussion.</p>	<p><b>Comment [2]:</b> Again, pay attention to the pacing of your lesson. Building in more time to allow students to talk about and unpack the tone of each section might be helpful to their understanding and allow you to more easily formatively assess where they are in their understanding of the concept of tone. Another option is that you could break up the students into groups and have them more intensely look at each section.</p> <p><b>Comment [3]:</b> I would classify it as Augmentation the way it was implemented because, while incorporating Spotify allowed for them to access music and using Google docs allowed them to see others' answers, it really didn't change the ultimate outcome of what they were doing. One way to get to modify might be to have students share their own unique playlists and then comments on each others' work.</p>
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- Discussion on rubrics, readings, timeline, flipped classroom video, set up