

## The Final Curtain

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The Talladega College Education Department faculty completed a series of four carefully crafted lesson studies. As the faculty Lesson Studies drew to a close, the final curtain fell on October 8, 2021 as two classes of upper classmen met with Dr. Yulanda Clinton to help work through an intricate lesson. Their focus was on answering the following question:

What does it take to be a teacher who is ethically committed to students?

This question is so important, and many have grappled with the meaning of the ethically guided teacher. My entire career has been in search of the answer to this question. Dr. Clinton chose a subject that is hard to teach and hard to measure. Our students were on point, and they have lived experiences, good and not so good, in the classrooms where they grew up. They were the perfect group to grapple with the answer to this question.

As the students gathered in Savery Library, there was a tension in the air that produced a synergy throughout the hours we worked. The lesson was packed with multiple teaching and learning techniques. The lesson brought to life some of the most difficult concepts to teach as well as difficult to learn content. The standards representing this work are a formidable task to use in a lesson. The lesson focused on these Alabama Core Teaching Standards ACTS 2a, 3l, 4b, 9:

- ACTS (2) Learning Differences
- ACTS (3) Learning Environments
- ACTS (4) Content Knowledge
- ACTS (9) Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

### What I Noticed

The key element that I noticed was the grit and tenacity of the professor teaching the lesson, Dr. Yulanda Clinton. Grit is defined as a part of personality and means that persons possessing the trait do not give up. Instead, the person who has grit keeps working toward a goal even when succeeding seems difficult. A simple description of this characteristic is to never give up. Dr. Clinton never gave up during her work and the teacher candidates were right there for her.

During the session, teacher candidates worked in their own small groups with peers to collect their thoughts on the *I wonder what would happen if Small Group Chart*. This modeled grit with commitment since the professor relinquished control to the teacher candidates. Dr. Clinton models her deep dedication to Lesson Study and student involvement and feedback through this action. Dr. Clinton demonstrates grit in her commitment to improving her lesson by going to the students to seek the lesson challenges. In their reflections, the students were honest and professional and this aided our ability to see the lesson through their view. This is unusual since the professor was willing to utilize *teacher*

*candidate voice* in this part of the lesson study, which showcased teacher candidate autonomy. (Video: Lesson 4 Debrief - The Students Speak: <https://youtu.be/bslREmzNjMY>. The teacher candidates respected Dr. Clinton's work. You will see it in the video. When teacher candidates ask for the lesson time to be extended, you know you are a winner in your lesson. Listen to the small video of the teacher candidates' reflections. We see examples around us many times but for the purpose of this reflection on Dr. Clinton's lesson I will cite the following evidence of her grit shown in the professor's leadership by:

- choosing rigor over a shorter lesson;
- including student voice extensively;
- enacting a lesson full of interaction and movement; and
- pushing the lesson timing to add rigor.

All of these elements are the mark of grit and self-confidence, which played well with the teacher candidates on the evening of October 8, 2021. These actions are exactly what our teacher candidates deserve every day.

### What I Wondered

I wondered if the lesson was a measure of the teacher candidates' dedication to their teacher, Dr. Yulanda Clinton. I am so thrilled to see the teacher candidates' growth in this final lesson. They embraced the work and enacted their student role as a community of learners. In less than a year, the professors each taught a lesson. This was the best opportunity to see growth over time in the lessons. This was the fourth lesson, and each lesson progressively demonstrated a growth trajectory and an increase in rigor. The students were engaged throughout the eight months that the lesson studies were conducted. Many of the same teacher candidates were in every lesson.

The first lesson was enacted on February 21. The lesson was simple compared to the complexity of Dr. Clinton's lesson; however, it was the beginning lesson with many unknowns. The second lesson masterfully led by Dr. Robinson on February 22 followed my lesson that included the active learning strategy of four corners. The third lesson was conducted on September 10, 2021 and included some elements of Lesson Study two. The teacher candidate interest seemed to spiral upward with every lesson.

I wonder if the lesson study process over the eight months created a deeper commitment to teaching and the learning in professors as well as the teacher candidates. Did the teacher candidates realize that their role in the lesson was as important as the professors' roles? Did they see themselves as a part of something bigger than the usual lesson experienced each day? Finally, I wonder what the students felt about their role over time.

### What Wowed Me

The wow factor for me rested in my observation that the students stuck close by the professor and followed her lead. The two entities of teaching and learning worked in synergy with each other extremely well by the fourth lesson. The leadership exhibited by ShaMarla Samuels and Ashliyah Allen was the most interesting aspect of the lesson studies. As we have teacher candidates facilitating lesson study taught by sociology and psychology

professors in the upcoming lesson studies on March 25, the leadership factor will be put to the test.

In conclusion, Dr. Clinton's carefully designed and executed lesson answered her inquiry question: What does it take to be a teacher who is ethically committed to students? Her lesson and the teaching of it demonstrated that she is ethically committed to students. It takes instruction, lessons, and engagement like the work that Dr. Clinton created to demonstrate ethical commitment to students. Her work provides a living example of teacher ethical commitment. The final curtain fell on the night of October 8, 2022 and will open again in a much better place on Friday, March 25, 2022, a little over a year since we started the first lesson study on February 21, 2021 .