In mid-March, H. Richard Milner IV, Cornelius Vanderbilt Endowed Chair of Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, headed a panel discussion at the UGA College of Education on the topic of “Provoking Critical Consciousness and Identity Development in Teacher Education at UGA.”

Milner’s research examines practices and policies that support teacher effectiveness in urban schools and has influenced designs and practices of teacher education courses and programs across the country. He serves as editor for the journal *Urban Education* and has published seven books, including *Rac(e)ing to class: Confronting poverty and race in schools* and, most recently, *These kids are out of control*: *Why we must reimagine “classroom management” for equity* (co-authored).

**Social studies collaboration supports new teacher growth**

An innovative secondary social studies collaboration is having a positive effect on local teachers and UGA teacher candidates.

**Sonia Janis**, clinical associate professor and district-wide professor-in-residence for secondary social studies, together with Clarke County School District’s **Laura Ambrose**, coordinator of social studies and school performance, and **Glenda Huff**, coordinator of high school curriculum and school performance, work as a team to support induction teachers, redesign curriculum, facilitate professional learning and conduct research in a middle school classroom.

In their second year of collaboration, the school-university partnership team meets regularly to discuss the district’s goals for secondary social studies education, including supports needed for teachers to create dynamic learning experiences for all students. Janis focuses her professor-in-residence activities in specific areas of need determined by the team.

**Induction support**

This fall, Janis began coaching eight secondary social studies teachers who are in their first year of teaching at four middle schools and two high schools. Through on-site, classroom-based support, she mentors these new teachers in many areas, including curriculum, instruction, assessment and professionalism. Research shows that during the induction phase of teachers’ careers, the first through third years of teaching, they need additional support. In addition to working with assigned mentor teachers in their schools, Janis provides the novice teachers with non-evaluative, ongoing support that promotes their individual growth and learning.

“Shifting the focus squarely on first-year teachers has not only been rewarding to observe immediate growth among the teachers and their students, but it is also addressing a need within the district to deliberately support the needs of teachers in their first five years,” said Janis. “As a teacher educator, it also informs my work with pre-service teachers. I want to ensure that the teacher candidates in my program successfully transition from pre-service teachers into in-service teachers.”

**Nyla Bell**, an 8th grade Georgia studies teacher at Hilsman Middle School, said she appreciates the coaching.

“As a first-year teacher and career-changer, I have found Dr. Janis’ observations and feedback to be crucial to my decision to continue in the profession,” she said. “She is immensely supportive, has the ability to pinpoint exactly what went well and what didn’t go so well, and offer a variety of strategies to assist me in my new career.”
“You have an opportunity to continue supporting your graduates (in-service teachers who have graduated from your program) into real classrooms so that they do not revert to ineffective practices pervasive in a school culture.”

After the panel, participants broke into small groups based on the topic of their interest. One group discussed how faculty can make space for and attend to the needs of students of color and immigrant students when so much of teacher education curriculum is geared toward white pre-service teachers. Another group brainstormed ideas for how the College can support the recruitment of more people of color (both professors and students) to the field of teacher education.

At the request of Superintendent Demond Means, Milner has been supporting professional learning related to equity in the Clarke County School District this year. He hopes to continue dialogue with the College as well. At the close of the program, College of Education Dean Denise Spangler thanked the participants and emphasized that this event was just the beginning of ongoing dialogue related to critical consciousness in teacher preparation programs.

Fifth-graders among presenters at NAPDS

The annual meeting for the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) took place Feb. 16-18 in Atlanta. The year’s conference location made it possible for both Clarke County School District and UGA College of Education representatives involved in the Professional Development School District partnership to attend and present.

Over the course of the three days, 36 colleagues from the partnership shared 15 presentations. Sessions covered topics such as raising cultural consciousness, district-level curriculum, college and career readiness, the importance of play, culturally responsive advisement and teacher empowerment.

Seven Fowler Drive Elementary School fifth-grade students also presented at the NAPDS conference in Atlanta in February. The school’s principal, professor-in-residence, a teacher, and two teacher candidates who all are involved in the Fowler University project aimed at increasing college and career readiness joined them.

The students led a panel discussion, along with one teacher and two UGA teacher candidates, to share their experiences with a unique program, Fowler University.

Each week a group of fourth- or fifth-graders joins the UGA class of pre-service teachers in their Integrated Curriculum in the Early Childhood Classroom course, which is taught on-site at the school by Beth Tolley, professor-in-residence and clinical associate professor in the department of educational theory and practice. When the elementary students arrive in the college class, called Fowler University, they are exposed to college-level activities, and UGA teacher candidates learn first-hand from the students.

Other NAPDS presentations included a combination of Clarke County teachers and/or administrators, UGA faculty and UGA graduate students, exemplifying the importance of varied stakeholders in partnership work.

In addition to sessions, participants interested in professional development school research met throughout the conference to begin the formation of a national professional development school research agenda. Educators interested in learning more about professional development schools are invited to attend the NAPDS regional affiliate conference, the PDS Southeastern Region Vision for Education conference Oct. 26 at Georgia State University in Atlanta.
Another teacher, Adledih Morales-Bello, a sixth-grade social studies teacher at Clarke Middle School, agrees.

“Dr. Janis has observed and coached me to tailor my classroom management to fit the needs of my students,” she said. “I have seen a great improvement in my classroom environment as a result.”

Ambrose and Janis work closely to plan new teacher support aligned with the district’s goals and standards. Ambrose said Janis is an invaluable resource for new teachers.

“Dr. Janis is a sounding board for new ideas and helps with classroom management, which can be extremely daunting for first year teachers,” said Ambrose. “She provides immediate feedback and her understanding of the district’s overall goals allow her to guide new teachers in the most productive directions.”

Curriculum design and professional learning

This year the social studies team has also been redesigning the secondary social studies curriculum. The curriculum includes new elements such as inquiry-based approaches to instruction, revised Georgia Standards for Excellence, rigorous curriculum design and a “C3” framework (college, career and civic life for social studies). Janis, Ambrose and Huff also co-facilitate ongoing professional learning with teachers to help them implement the new curriculum.

Janis has also been involved in co-writing the eighth-grade social studies curriculum, focused on Georgia studies. For example, the team has been aligning the eighth-grade unit assessments with the new social studies standards and guidelines associated with Rigorous Curriculum Design.

Teacher candidate study

In addition to supporting Clarke County teachers, Janis also teaches secondary social studies teacher candidates. All of her teacher preparation courses are clinically based and taught on-site at Clarke County schools.

This year, in cooperation with Clarke Middle School, sixth-grade teacher Chris Batson, Janis and two graduate assistants, Chantelle Grace and Kaitlin Wegryzyn in the department of educational theory and practice, are continuing a research study focused on enhancing the pedagogical judgment of teacher candidates in clinical spaces.

Each week during the spring semester, 35 UGA teacher candidates in secondary social studies education take their field experience course in Batson’s classroom with half attending a class on Tuesdays and half on Thursdays. The UGA students work with middle school students in small groups to support their learning, including conducting formative assessments and one-on-one conferencing related to learning outcomes. The sixth-graders benefit from differentiated instruction that enhances their understanding of social studies concepts.

At the end of each class, Batson debriefs with the UGA students about their experience working in his classroom, offering his insight and advice. UGA students benefit from the opportunity to ask questions from a practicing teacher, such as “How do you facilitate an effective classroom discussion?”

Batson said he wanted to open his classroom up to UGA students because it benefitted his students as well.

“I wanted to be involved in this partnership and study so that my students could get more exposure to college students and see what it looks like to be in college,” he said. “I also wanted to be able to answer any questions the UGA students may have about what it is like to have your own class; being a UGA alumnus myself, I want to be able to pay it back in any small way that I can. I learned a lot from this partnership about my own teaching, as it has forced me to reflect on how I ask questions and what practices are best for our students.”

All teacher candidates are required to complete assignments in advance of working with the middle school students and write reflections on their learning experiences interacting the students. Janis, Grace and Wegryzyn analyze the assignments and reflections to examine how teacher candidates are making pedagogical judgements during this early stage of their teacher preparation.

They are incorporating the analysis into a larger study that Janis, Grace, Wegryzyn and Mardi Schmeichel, another social studies education faculty member, are conducting on developing the pedagogical judgement of pre-service teachers during their time in the UGA social studies teacher education program. The study builds off initial findings from Janis and Schmeichel’s work with teacher candidates during an on-site course at Cedar Shoals High School in spring 2017. The study’s findings will be published in the Peabody Journal of Education’s 2020 Special Issue on Clinical Practice.

The UGA and Clarke County secondary social studies team look forward to continuing these collaborative, impactful activities into the 2019-2020 school year.
The Office of School Engagement has coordinated a bullying prevention essay contest with the Clarke County School District’s secondary schools for four consecutive years. This fall the contest expanded to include elementary students’ artwork that illustrated the concept of bullying prevention. Chasity James, a doctoral student in the department of educational theory and practice, and Dan Smith, Clarke County’s curriculum coordinator for fine arts and physical education, administered and judged the contest.

At the end of last semester, five students were honored at their schools for their outstanding artwork. The schools received the students’ framed original artwork to display, and the students received certificates and journals with their artwork printed on the covers.

The program began in 2015 when Jasia Clark, then a senior at Clarke Central High School, envisioned the bullying prevention essay contest. Katherine Raczynski, a districtwide professor-in-residence for school climate at that time, worked closely with Clark to organize, launch and manage the contest. Clarke County students have written 242 essays over the years. The 2019 essay contest winners had not been announced as of press time.

Contest Winners

Timothy Road Elementary: Anna Meehan (Kindergarten) and Kavya Sinhmar (first grade)

Chase Street Elementary: Kenyah Wise (fifth grade)

H. B. Stroud Elementary: Eric Ryan Willis Jr. (third grade) and Tayshawn Richardson (fifth grade)

Kavya Sinhmar, a first grader at Timothy Road Elementary, won an award for her artwork depicting a school counselor intervening to stop bullying at school.

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