# Mentoring in an Online Simulation:
# Shaping Preservice Teachers for Tomorrow's Roles

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*This article explores how preservice teachers can develop mentoring capacities (i.e., perspective taking, connection with students, and self-reflective opportunities on their roles as teachers) by participating in a historically-based online simulation game with middle school students. The arena for this exploration, the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT), is a web-mediated learning platform that utilizes character play to enhance historical and cultural understanding. Through the description of three preservice teachers/mentors in JCAT, we illustrate how the preservice teachers/mentors work to support the learning of the middle school students while developing their teaching skill set. Our research explores the ways in which participation in the dual roles of character and mentor shapes the university students' development as preservice teachers. Findings revealed two major tensions in the mentor experiences: tensions related to preservice teachers/mentors' desire to stay in character while supporting middle school students' learning and tensions related to preservice teachers/mentors' focus on attending to the learning of middle school students while also attending to themselves as learners. Through this complex process of shifting perspective taking, preservice teachers/mentors had to strike a balance between these roles in order to be active members of an ever-changing community. Their energetic membership, in turn, supported the action of the simulation and the development of the middle school students. As such, this study offers teacher education programs a new model for helping preservice teachers learn the essential capacity of understanding multiple perspectives.*

*Keywords:* mentoring, teaching, technology, historical simulations, role

As mentoring has become an increasingly popular method for developing preservice teachers' skills, we must strengthen the ways in which preservice teachers bridge the gap between theory learned in university courses and practical applications of these theories in their school-based practice. While past research on mentoring concentrates on the benefits of mentoring from the perspective of the student mentee, our research focuses on how the mentoring dynamic can shape the preservice teacher when she plays the role of the mentor. We are particularly focused on mentoring within nontraditional settings like web-mediated, role-playing simulation games. An under-discussed aspect of mentorship training is performing the role of mentor through the confines of a role-played character. Our research is theoretically rooted in the notion of role-taking and the assumption of how role shapes the relationships between educators, learners, and subject matter (Hawkins, 2002). Given that, our research question is "how does the tension between dual roles shape preservice teachers/mentors' perspectives as they participate in an online, educational, role-playing simulation?"

The arena for this exploration is called the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT)[1]. JCAT is a web-mediated, asynchronous, text-based, role-playing simulation for middle school students in 10 Jewish day schools across North America. The JCAT website resembled a social networking site (Headley & Killham, 2013) and was custom-designed to fit the needs of the JCAT program (Kupperman et al., 2011). It is a variation of a simulation game called Place Out of Time (Kupperman, et al., 2011; Kupperman, Stanzler, Fahy, & Hapgood, 2007). JCAT is a virtual space where role-played figures from history co-mingle with contemporary figures; a place where fictional and "real" persons meet for the first time to discuss a wide range of topics related to Jewish education (e.g., Israeli immigration policies, Holocaust education, and reparations).

In the Fall 2010 simulation, thirteen North American institutions participated, including 10 Jewish Day Schools, two universities, and one Jewish day school network. Approximately, 75% of JCAT participants were middle school students (124 characters). All participants engaged in the simulation in the same ways that the middle school students did: assuming the role of an historical or contemporary character, posting in first-person on the site, and engaging with others through the context of the trial scenario. The other types of participants included: middle school teachers (12 characters), preservice teachers/mentors from two Midwestern universities (14 characters), teacher educators/project directors responsible for the education course from the University of Michigan's Interactive Communications & Simulations Group (3 characters), and participant-researchers/authors from the University of Cincinnati (7 characters). All participants came together as a community to discuss and determine the outcome of the court case from the position of their character as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1.* The JCAT Participant Pool

| JCAT Participant Pool | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Type of Participant* | *Name of Participating Institution* | *Number of Characters Represented in JCAT Simulation in Fall 2010* |
| Middle school student (also referred to as mentees) | Jewish Day Schools | 124 characters |
| Middle school teacher | Jewish Day Schools | 12 characters |
| Preservice teacher/mentor | Midwestern universities | 14 characters |
| Teacher educator/project director | University of Michigan | 3 characters |
| Participant-researcher/author | University of Cincinnati | 7 characters |

These participants assumed the roles of characters from all walks of life and converged virtually in JCAT. The intention of gathering in this "place out of time" was to engage in a fictional scenario rooted in significant current events. In 2010, the scenario focused on deciding the fate of a family of Darfurian refugees seeking asylum in Israel. The central aim of the simulation was a "fictional but plausible court case" (Kupperman et al., 2007), which takes place virtually at Masada in Israel. In essence, JCAT resembles a case study, but the material was presented in a much more engaging format as a result of the interactive, web 2.0 features of JCAT (Killham, 2013/2014).

In order to provide a Vygotskian form of scaffolding and growth (1978), the simulation took place over the course of a semester, beginning with the character selection process and progressing toward trial-specific dialogue. All participants selected three character choices they wished to portray, whether it was someone from times past like Queen Esther or a contemporary figure like Oprah Winfrey. Character selections could be political, like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or fictional, like *To Kill a Mockingbird's* Atticus Finch. Repeat characters were not permitted. Project directors designated characters, honoring the participant's first choice when possible. In cases when all three character choices were not possible, project directors would suggest a similar, lesser known person for the participant to portray (e.g., Gandhi was unavailable therefore Thich Nhat Hanh was assigned). To further the Vygotskian scaffolding, preservice teachers/mentors were assigned more complex, controversial characters capable of deepening court case related dialogue (Killham, 2013).

After characters were selected, all participants used first-person language while on the JCAT website to interpret their character's thoughts and feelings as they navigated the scenario. All participants drafted a biographical resumé detailing a description of their character. The resumé functioned as a starting point for the participants to learn about character, role, and perspective taking (Brooks, 2009). This resumé was also the introduction point through which the characters met and through which they grew comfortable with interacting with participants from other institutions.

Preservice teachers/mentors also played an instrumental role in helping middle school students become more comfortable on the JCAT site. The preservice teachers/mentors were responsible for scaffolding and supporting the middle school students' growth with historical thinking and perspective taking (Killham, 2014). They also supported middle school students in ways that included ensuring middle school students remained in character and had access to primary sources regarding the questions being raised with the court case. Such scaffolding occurred in private messages (much like e-mail), public conversations with the middle school students'

characters on the site itself, and modeling persuasive writing and civil discourse. On the JCAT site, there was no way, by design, to distinguish between the preservice teachers/mentors and the middle school students, though many of the middle school students tried to guess who was a preservice teacher/mentor based on the type of language used. Some middle school teachers chose to tell their middle school students that university students studying to become classroom teachers were also playing, in order to let them know that there was an adult audience and to increase their motivation. Other middle school teachers chose not to tell their middle school students because they felt this could be intimidating.[2]

Each week, project directors posted writing prompts to promote public discussion on the JCAT site. Project directors used the voice of their character for such posts. Early postings written by project directors were intended to give participants an opportunity to practice assuming the voice as their character. In a few weeks' time, the public forums on the JCAT site advanced towards the unpacking of the court case. This shift in focus towards more trial specific content was necessary because the experience culminates with a verdict from a panel of justices, ultimately deciding the fate of the family of Darfurian refugees. In order to facilitate an in-depth examination of the contentious political issues inherent in the simulation's court case, JCAT combined online and face-to-face instruction for both the middle school students and preservice teachers/mentors, taking place at their respective institutions.

Middle school students were asked to log-in to the JCAT website twice per week for a total of one to two hours of online time. Offline, middle school teachers provided classroom-based instruction aimed at promoting character development and storyline advancement, as well as furthering curricular goals such as writing and research skills. To assist middle school teachers in providing classroom-based instruction for middle school students, the JCAT project directors provided a handbook for middle school teachers with suggested activities to strengthen character development, increase participation, and motivate engagement with the theme of the simulation.

Preservice teachers/mentors were asked to log-in to the JCAT website three times per week for five hours of online time. Offline, preservice teachers/mentors were provided with classroom-based instruction aimed at playing their character well and moving the project ahead as a whole. In accordance with the preservice teacher/mentor's course syllabus, preservice teachers/mentors were responsible "for the success of JCAT as an educational enterprise" (Fahy & Stanzler, 2011, p. 2).

The work of the preservice teachers/mentors was embedded within the support system of the university-level course titled *Mentor Seminar for Educational Programs*. This course was taught by the JCAT project directors who served as teacher educators for the preservice teachers/mentors. Preservice teachers/mentors were provided with the following instructions in their course syllabus:

> *This class is different because you are responsible not just for your own learning, but for the learning of younger peers who are depending on you. In that sense, it qualifies as a class in the Education department. But in order to fulfill that responsibility you will need to understand and articulate a variety of cultural and historical perspectives, as filtered through the personalities that appear in the simulation—thus it is also listed in the International & Global Studies Program. Finally, POOT/JCAT is a rich example of using technology in innovative ways for educational purposes, and so it qualifies as an educational technology course.* (Kupperman, 2011, pp. 1-2)

The syllabus defined seven tasks for the preservice teachers/mentors, which were to (a) learn the goals of the simulation, (b) do background readings, (c) research their character, (d) play their character, (e) be a proactive mentor, (f) reflect, and (g) be supportive and proactive in class and online.

Under the leadership of the teacher educators/project directors, the mentor seminar was held for three hours once per week at two Midwestern universities. During the seminar, preservice teachers/mentors met face-to-face and out-of-character with teacher educators/project directors to brainstorm how to best support the learning of the middle school students. Conversations on mentoring stemmed from puzzling over JCAT posts and involved discussion and brainstorming about how to encourage the middle school students to elaborate on their posts or become more engaged in the simulation. The guiding question for mentors' actions was: Where is the opportunity for creativity, engagement, deep thinking, and play? In addition, preservice teachers/mentors also participated in a mentor-only online support forum called the JCAT Mentor Log, which had a separate URL and log-in. The JCAT Mentoring Log enabled preservice teachers/mentors to document their emergent questions, articulate their thought processes, and share mentoring techniques with one another. The JCAT Mentoring Log also provided teacher

educators/project directors a forum to provide additional feedback to preservice teachers/mentors outside of regular classroom hours.

The participant-researchers/authors had a distinctly different role from the other JCAT participants, one more heavily rooted in observation and reflection. Their entryway into the JCAT project was through a graduate level education course taught at University of Cincinnati during Fall 2010. The purpose of this course was to provide an introduction to the theory and practice of classroom-based action research, and their participation in JCAT was predicated on JCAT serving as a common place to develop researchable questions, investigate prior research in the field, collect data, analyze data, and share findings. In order to participate, participant-researchers/ authors were also required to adopt the persona of a character while on the JCAT site. Three participant researchers from the Fall 2010 course elected to engage in a more detailed analysis of their JCAT experience, resulting in this article. More detail on the role of participant researcher/author is also discussed in a later section focusing on researcher stance.

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**Literature Review**

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The following review of the literature situates JCAT mentoring in the more general mentoring literature, including e-mentoring. In addition, we will discuss the research on simulation-based learning in order to contextualize JCAT in larger field online simulations.

### Mentoring

Web 2.0 tools like JCAT are changing the way knowledge and communication are constructed (Qing, 2010). The prevalence of web 2.0 tools and other technology-enhanced curricula have paved the way for creative forms of teaching and learning, specifically in relation to e-mentoring. E-mentoring, also termed distance mentoring, is a form of virtual or distance learning conducted using web-mediated communications (Smith & Israel, 2010).

Our research offered an observation into the world of distance mentoring, specifically within the context of online cultural and historical activities such as JCAT. Jaffe and colleagues pointed out that the bulk of the research on e-mentoring is centered on topics related to math and science (Jaffe, Moir, Swanson, & Wheeler, 2006, as cited in Smith & Israel, 2010). An even smaller body of work on e-mentoring includes special education (Smith & Israel, 2010). The research presented here addresses an area of e-mentoring that has not yet been studied.

While Smith and Israel's description of e-mentoring helped us understand the landscape of e-mentoring practices, we also wanted to understand the dimensions of the mentoring experience in JCAT. In defining the scope of what it means to be a preservice teacher/mentor in JCAT, we began with Evans and Ave's (2000) definition of mentoring as "an enduring relationship between a novice [mentee] and an older, more experienced individual [mentor] who provides guidance in a particular domain" (pp. 41-42). We prefer this definition to Murray and Owen's (1991), which emphasized a skills deficit in the mentee by defining mentoring as "a deliberate pairing of a *more* [emphasis added] skilled or experienced person with a *lesser* [emphasis added] skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies" (as cited in Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, Feldman, & Hixon, 2011, p. xiv). While these definitions may be suitable in certain contexts, they did not encapsulate the components of strength-based mentoring models (Ye, 2009). The word "novice," in particular, does not confer as much equality between the mentor and mentee as was built into the experience of the simulation we studied.

Given the multitude of definitions for mentoring, we sought to situate the unique form of mentorship taking place in JCAT within strength-seeking models that were less hierarchical than more traditional, normative conceptions of mentoring (Murray & Owen, 1991, as cited in Barczyk et al., 2011). To do this, we drew from the JCAT Handbook, which highlighted the integral role that preservice teachers/mentors play. Preservice teachers/ mentors in JCAT facilitate the progression of the simulation's storyline, fulfill the position of teaching assistant for middle school teachers, engage in reflective self-learning, and stimulate content-rich discussions and deep thinking (Fahy & Stanzler, 2011). We also drew from Killham's (2014) work on mentoring in *Place Out of Time* (POOT), in which Killham defined mentoring in POOT as "a relational endeavor which charges the mentors with the responsibility of being facilitators, educators, learners, and thought provocateurs" (p. 4). It is through this spirit of mentoring that the preservice teachers/mentors, while engaged in character role-play, approached their task as JCAT mentors.

Such an understanding of mentoring is built on a relational process of the teaching-learning process. Hawkins alerts us to the triarchic nature of learning—a dynamic interaction between the I, Thou, and It, or the learner, teacher, and subject matter/text (Hawkins, 2002). Some scholars have referred to this as the 'instructional

triangle' (e.g. Grossman, Stodolsky, & Knapp, 2004), and more recently, the 'relational triangle' (Raider-Roth & Holzer, 2009), to highlight the dynamics of relationship that occur between and among the learning partners. The dynamic movement between the roles in the triangle activates the teacher and learner's presence to one another, themselves, and the texts.

Our rationale for focusing on the experience of the JCAT preservice teacher/mentor was that existing research pertaining to mentoring programs centered almost exclusively on a traditional view of mentoring. From prior research on mentoring, the benefits of mentoring for mentees were well-documented (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Ragins & Verbos, 2007, as cited in Bullen, Farruggia, Gómez, Hebaishi, Mahmood, 2010). However, Bullen et al. (2010) and Edwards et al. (2011) illustrated that little is known about the metamorphic nature of mentoring for the mentor. Furthermore, even less is known about how technology-enhanced e-mentoring involving role-play can shape preservice teachers' development as future educators. This article attempts to bridge that gap by providing a more comprehensive understanding of mentoring in online platforms involving role-play and offers an opportunity to promote theory-to-practice links for future educators.

**Simulation-Based Learning**

Our foundational understanding of simulation-based learning (SBL) is embedded within a larger body of work on games; however, we recognize defining games and simulations is a complex task (Parker & Becker, 2013; Rieber & Noah, 2008). In *Rules of Play*, Salen and Zimmerman defined a game as "a rule-based system in which players undergo a conflict or competition in an attempt to achieve a quantifiable goal, such as winning or losing" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, as cited in McCall, 2011, p. 4). Building upon Salen and Zimmerman's definition, McCall (2011) stated simulations function "as a dynamic model of one or more aspects of the real world" (p. 4). In other words, simulations are artificial, simplified versions of complex, real-world situations (Sauvé, Renaud, & Kaufman, 2010; Datta, Upadhyay, & Jaideep, 2012).

Simulations, such as JCAT, require what Suits (2005) called a "lusory attitude" (pp. 52-53). Inspired by Suits, Kupperman et al. (2007) defined a lusory attitude as the intentional acceptance of unnecessary goals and obstacles. Kupperman and colleagues (2007), as well as Sousanis (2006), suggested a lusory attitude is vital to our engagement with games and learning, particularly with role-play. Several researchers have noted the observance of this lusory attitude which enabled players to suspend their disbelief during SBL activities (Jong, Junjie, Fong-Lok, & Lee, 2008; Kupperman et al., 2007).

SBL enables learners to progress from physical models to computer-based tools. These tools help move the learner from skills acquisition toward the ability to manage complex interactions and relationships, and to consider how they can be influenced by human factors (Khan, Patterson, & Sherwood, 2011). We theoretically rooted our understanding of SBL in Holden et al.'s (in press) conception of a gameful learning, "a framework that encourages improvisation, playfulness, and social interaction, and which takes into account the unique contingencies of individual people and specific content" (p. 1). Within gameful learning, Holden and colleagues seek "to describe why teachers and students are intrinsically motivated to play, experiment with identity, question, and learn—all within school. The primary objective of [gameful learning] is synthesizing multiple influences into a teaching and learning 'way of being' with games, digital media, and play" (p. 3).

The aim in SBL is to support learning through immersion in a scenario and includes reflection, debriefing, and application (Crookall, 2010). This is well demonstrated in professional education. For example, within health professions education, learners are being encouraged to foster skills such as crisis situation management, systematic life support, clinical decision-making, and reasoning. In addition, SBL supports the development and reinforcement of team skills, empathy, compassion, and integrity in patient and professional interactions. These domains can perhaps best be assessed through simulated settings since these skills must be imparted in a manner that will not jeopardize patient care and safety (Khan et al., 2011). The opportunity to learn and practice these important skills in a safe environment in which a miscalculation will not result in a dangerous outcome is an improved form of teaching and learning.

A number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary SBL projects exist. Literacy scholars have explored the linkages between composition and games (Alberti, 2008; Gee, 2004; Sheridan & Hart-Davidson, 2008). Work to contextualize history and geography through narrative writing has been generated (Akkerman, Admiraal, & Huizenga, 2009; Tuzun, Yılmaz-Soylu, Karakuş, İnal, & Kızılkaya, 2009). For example, Akkerman and colleagues used a mobile game and the construction of narrative stories to learn about medieval Amsterdam. Tuzun and colleagues reported gains in geographical understanding based on the participant's experience exploring the Global Village in the game Quest Atlantis. High school history teacher McCall (2011) authored *Gaming the Past,* an

educator's guide to SBL in history education. Other researchers have considered the implications for gaming in education across disciplines (Sauvé, Renaud, & Kaufman, 2010; Schrader & McCreery, 2008).

Despite the promised educational benefits of SBL, there still exists a compelling need for investigation into these new learning platforms (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee, 2005). For example, the literature on SBL is less robust in teacher education, both for preservice as well as inservice teachers. Interestingly, however, discussions regarding simulations in teacher education can be traced back to the 1960s (e.g. Cruikshank, 1969) and can be found in contemporary teacher education literature as well (Ellington, 2012; Walker & Dotger, 2012). Current surveys of the field suggest SBL must become a core subject area in teacher education programs. Not only is learning to play and facilitate simulations important, but also the learning process of "debriefing" the action is central, as essential dimensions of learning stem from observing, describing, and analyzing the unfolding events of the simulation (Crookall, 2010).

Simulations offer preservice teachers the same opportunities as those afforded to physicians or pilots to work in an emotionally and intellectually safe place. Because teaching is a profession that puts theory into practice—often at a moment's notice—Morrison and Aldrich (2003) note the importance of helping preservice teachers to "make careful discriminations and informed judgments based on their knowledge" (para. 37). Again, having a non-threatening environment, especially one like JCAT that offers time for curious and careful thought, helps to make these decision-making processes—these applications of knowledge—more thoughtful. In sum, while an  expansive topic, we drew from what we believed to be the most comprehensive and relevant literature aligned with our research goal: to deepen the field's understanding of SBL. Below, we outline our research stance, findings, and conclusions.

## Research Stance

Our research group agreed it was important for us as participant-researchers to have an inquiry stance when entering our research environment (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). As participant-researchers, we were cognizant that we were not simply engaging in the simulation as players, but that we also were engaging in the setting in order to conduct active research. Given this relationship to the setting, we agreed that we must have an appropriate stance—one that enabled us to simultaneously engage and observe. Our task involved investing in many pursuits at one time and doing so with an eye toward change and improvement in ourselves and in the   contexts we were studying.

As participants and observers in JCAT gameplay, we found it helpful to assume the stance described by Patricia Carini (2001), one of the founders of the Prospect School in Vermont. Carini advocates a descriptive stance that—above all else—honors the work and personhood of those you are observing. Carini's approach requires the observer to set aside his or her preconceived notions and judgments as a way of attending carefully to others' work. She relates—perhaps even warns—that, "Describing is slow, particular work. [You] have to set aside familiar categories for classifying or generalizing. [You] have to stay with the subject of [your] attention. [You] have to give it time to speak, to show itself" (2001, p. 163). We challenged ourselves to assume a descriptive stance so that we could more fully understand the meanings and intentions of the participants in our study.

In practice, assuming this stance meant that we were committed to seeing others on the JCAT site as valuable members of a community with whom we were constructing knowledge, post-by-post. We were also committed to give special attention to the words/actions of others and to try to understand those words/actions as fragments of the other players, which deserved close and non-judgmental attention. As Seidel (1998) notes, this is not an easy task. He reflects that,

> *seeing—taking something in visually and truly considering that thing—is not necessarily a result of looking. Rather seeing is the result of deliberate work: noticing, considering, comparing and wondering. It is serious cognitive activity, demanding full attention and engagement.* (p. 70)

This respect for both the work of others and of the work of careful observation—what Carini terms "attending"—were the roots from which we developed our action research stance and our consideration of the efforts of others on the site. Inspired by Carini's ethos of "attending" (2001), Lawrence-Lightfoot's "strength-seeking" approach (1997), and Seidel's "seeing as deliberate work" (1998), our research led us to careful consideration of the preservice teachers/mentors as they experienced dual roles and as they laid foundations for their future professions.

**Participants**

Using a purposeful sample approach (Maxwell, 2005), we selected a small, narrowly-defined group that met the inclusion criteria for our research on preservice teachers mentoring in online educational simulations. A total of 14 university students participated as mentors in the JCAT activity, and five were preservice teachers. Of the five preservice teachers, three agreed to participate in this study and two declined to participate. No reason was stated for the decline. Our research centered primarily on the three preservice teachers/mentors (n=3) who were enrolled in the university course titled *Mentor Seminar for Educational Programs*, were assigned as mentors to middle school students during the fall 2010 JCAT simulation (September-December), and were selected based on their status as preservice teachers. Each preservice teacher who served as a mentor was assigned five middle school students as mentees.

Each of the three preservice teachers/mentors in this study selected a sociopolitical character to portray. Characters choices were selected based on relevancy to the simulation's topic and ability to meet the charge to mentor in-character. One character was that of Primo Levi, who was one of the 650 Italian-Jews that were taken to Auschwitz in early 1944, and one of 23 to survive, becoming a writer and sharing the experience with the world; another was Geert Wilders, a 20th century Dutch Libertarian political figure best known for his negative stance on Islam; and the third was Sofia Reinhardt, a fictional Romani character who was a Holocaust survivor.

Due to the anonymous nature of the game, in which players took on roles and played as other people, the gender, ethnicity, age, and other identifiable characteristics of the research population were not considered in our research because we did not have access to this information, nor was it pertinent to answering our research question.

**Research Process: Question Formation and Data Collection**

As participant-researchers, our original intent was to locate our curiosities based on real-time observations and genuine dilemmas, followed by formulating these curiosities into researchable questions (Hubbard & Powers, 2003, p. 2). At the conclusion of the fall 2010 JCAT simulation, our research team elected to work toward answering our original research question: "How does the mentoring experience in JCAT shape the learning of preservice teachers?" While this question was of primary interest to us then, as our inquiry deepened, we explored many avenues, including our current question: "How does the tension between dual roles shape mentors' perspectives as they participate in JCAT?"

Oversight from the Institutional Review Board had been requested and granted as part of a larger research study focusing on the nature of learning in JCAT (deNoyelles & Raider-Roth, 2012; Killham, Talbot, Chundur, & Zhao, 2012). While we had been engaged in the simulation, only the public postings (comments, resumés, legal philosophies, and decisions as justices) were visible to us as players (Geert Wilders = 43 public posts; Primo Levi = 16 public posts; Sofia Reinhardt = 53 public posts). Once the simulation ended, we were given access to players' private postings—the in-game private messages of the preservice teachers/mentors and middle school student mentees (Geert Wilders = 30; Primo Levi = 33; Sofia Reinhardt = 33). After reviewing the online discussion logs and creating reports of our findings, we contacted the preservice teachers/mentors for interviews. The interviews occurred out of character and off site. In addition, two of the three mentors offered their end of the term reflection assignments as additional data sources.

Members of the research team conducted telephone and Skype interviews with three of the mentors who had been mentors in the Fall 2010 simulation. These mentors were selected based on the criteria noted above. The researcher-generated interview guide consisted of questions that were open-ended and semistructured. In our interviews with mentors, we asked several questions to explore how mentors attended to themselves as learners during their JCAT experience. In particular, we focused on their learning about teaching. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

**Data Analysis**

In order to break down the rich complexities of our findings and closely align ourselves with our research stance, we engaged in holistic data analysis. Our analysis was approached as a recursive re-engagement and re-examination of the data requiring us to employ what Hubbard and Powers (2003) term the three important concepts for creative data analysis: patience, a willingness to theorize, and playfulness. Our process is detailed below.

First, it is important to note that we acknowledge the real-time site observation and question formation process outlined earlier as an integral and introductory part of our data analysis phase as opposed to seeing the research phases in isolated blocks. Given that, we note the following six, collectively agreed upon, themes which

emerged from our in-game observations: Describe your character on the site in relation to (a) role, (b) perspective taking, (c) person with intentionality (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010), (d) development and shifts over time, (e) language use, and (f) content with legitimacy (Barab et al., 2010).

Following these thematic formations, our team engaged in one year of post-simulation site analysis of archival data. JCAT posts written by our participant mentors were examined by individual researchers, followed by collective analysis within our interpretative community. Communications from other JCAT characters, directed towards our mentors, were considered in our analysis as part of the mentor's gameplay, but were not analyzed separately due to the scope of this project. Post-simulation site analysis consisted of three main phases: (a) an initial description of each character's site behavior; (b) a detailed synthesis of each mentor's character, including the rationale for selecting the character, questions pertaining to the character or character-play, and a detailed description of character in relation to the resumé, middle school student mentees, private messages, and public posts; and (c) comparison of site data with end of term reflections and interviews.

The interview process was followed by transcription of the recorded interviews and a review of transcripts. Each team member concentrated on a single preservice teacher/mentor's interview transcript, website comments, and reflection assignments. The transcripts, website comments, and reflections were analyzed thematically by each team member and then discussed as a group to help us identify common and diverse experiences in the game and mentoring activity. Then our team met to review, compare, and synthesize our observations of the preservice teachers/mentors' actions and experiences. The process of our interpretive community led to the discovery of two pronounced themes, which have been outlined in the findings section below.

## Findings

In our research we identified two major tensions in the preservice teachers/mentors experiences. The first was preservice teachers/mentors' desire to stay in character while supporting student learning. The second was preservice teachers/mentors' focus on attending to student learning while also attending to themselves as learners in preparation for becoming teachers. The first tension reflected the process of participation in the simulation (i.e., self as character on equal playing field with all other characters vs. self as preservice teachers/mentors). The second tension reflected the preservice teachers/mentors' emergence as teachers (i.e., self as emerging teacher vs. self as learner). Preservice teachers/mentors had to strike a balance between these roles. The tensions related closely to the prescribed tasks to be active members of an ever-changing community that relies on their participation in order to push forward the action of the simulation and the middle school students' development, as well as the goal of having preservice teachers/mentors develop as teachers in a safe learning space.

The learning space in JCAT was safe for both middle school students and preservice teachers/mentors in that they were not taking conversational and writing risks as their real selves. Character-play gave preservice teachers/mentors a freedom of expression and a safety to experiment with their communication, roles, and participation on the site that might seem daunting in a face-to-face learning environment for a preservice teacher. We found this to be particularly true for characters like Geert Wilders, who are known for their inflammatory speech in real life. The preservice teacher/mentor portraying Geert Wilders provides an illustration of this safety in his end of term reflection, where he noted, "As a learner and a teacher, I found myself being very open to controversy in  public spaces. One of the things that I tried to focus my postings on was mixing it up with other fellow mentors about controversial issues." By this he meant that he purposely engaged others from the graduate class in dialogue about issues that would enliven the online discussions and perhaps draw the middle school students into the conversations. He continued, "I really wanted to focus on the [contentious issues] that Mr. Wilders is so famous for . . . I felt that the [middle school] students would get the most out of it." He then connects this to his own learning, reflecting, "[The controversy] helps me learn and become exposed to ideas and beliefs that I would have never otherwise come into contact with. I plan on continuing to use it and I hope the [middle school] students will get a lot of learning though this method."

Despite Geert Wilders' openness and desire to continue using historical role-play in his teaching, we recognize it is certainly a challenge for the preservice teacher/mentor participants to negotiate the added layer of portraying their character while also mentoring the middle school students with whom they interacted. The preservice teacher/mentor portraying Sofia Reinhardt expressed her initial uncertainty:

*[W]e started exploring the [JCAT] website, and I, kind of, got an idea of "oh, this is going to a little bit be like Facebook, but how is this going to work in terms of mentoring somebody, and if we are all playing in characters, and they are playing in characters, how are we going to mentor them?" like, it didn't work out*

*in my mind very well . . . then, after we went on the website, like when we were assigned our little group of [middle school student mentees] and we were assigned our characters, I started to understand.*

This uncertainty is in many ways a realistic challenge preservice teachers must negotiate during teacher preparation. In his end of term reflection, Geert Wilders connected his experience with the historical role-playing to his student teaching experience in a local K-12 school.

*When I related this to my teaching in the classroom, I found it to be a very good replication of how I teach my students [in my regular classroom]. In my social studies classes, I will often present my students with a controversial or difficult issue just to see what they think of it or to see if it challenges their beliefs.*

Not every preservice teacher has a personality which lends itself ideally to the mentoring process. Learning how to play the role of a teacher is an important step for preservice teachers as they take on leadership and mentoring roles within a classroom. In her interview, the preservice teacher/mentor portraying Sofia Reinhardt confessed, "In my real life class, when I am in front of a classroom in real life, I actually tend to be a very shy person and it takes me time to be comfortable enough to approach even students, like, I was terrified of them for quite a while." She continued in her interview, expressing how JCAT helped her overcome her fears of interaction. Rather than adding an artificial barrier to the simulation, the responsibility of portraying a character while mentoring provided preservice teachers with valuable and realistic experience juggling personality and responsibility as new teachers.

### Staying in Character and Supporting Student Learning

As preservice teachers/mentors engaged in the simulation via the character they portrayed, they made decisions about how to further their mentoring efforts with their middle school student mentees. During this process, the preservice teachers/mentors navigated the space between mentor and character. An early exchange between preservice teacher/mentor Primo Levi and middle school student/mentee Rabbi Akiva illustrates the duality of role and the tension it creates in the mentor/mentee relationship. By way of introduction, Primo Levi sent the following message to the Rabbi. Primo Levi used a short message that strikes a curious, nonthreatening tone to draw the middle school student/mentee into conversation:

*Hello Rabbi, It is an honor to meet someone of such great stature. Even now, thousands of years after you walked this earth, Jews are still persecuted. I was wondering what thoughts you have regarding the continuing persecution of Jews. As a Jew myself, I've always thought that we don't deserve such hatred.* (JCAT site, October 9, 2010)

A week later, Rabbi Akiva replied:

*Greetings Primo, What I think about persecution of our on religon is discrase [sic]. I cannot believe it is still going on this crisis. I agree with you Primo we do not deserve such hatred. What did we do to deserve this hatred?* (JCAT site, October 17, 2010)

Instead of directly answering the Rabbi's question and perhaps posing another question, Primo Levi instead sent the following response:

*We have other members amongst us that have treated Jews with disgrace. I know of two people so far: Emperor Hadrian and Queen Isabella. I encourage the both of us and whoever else has experienced Jewish persecution to ask them what influenced their hatred towards the Jewish people.* (JCAT site, October 17, 2010)

Both of the specific characters Primo Levi mentions here, Emperor Hadrian and Queen Isabella, were played by university mentors—a fact Primo Levi would have been familiar with as a fellow participant in the university mentor seminar. Instead of encouraging further private communications between himself and the Rabbi, Primo Levi used the connection between his character and Rabbi Akiva, both of whom were concerned with religious persecution of Jews, to encourage Rabbi Akiva to seek further interactions on the site with a wider variety of characters. The manner in which the preservice teacher/mentor portraying Primo Levi used biographical

connections, to encourage the middle school student/mentee's thinking and interaction with others demonstrated an opportunity in which the mentor-role relationship was conducive to supporting student learning.

Role duality was also apparent in the interactions between preservice teacher/mentor Geert Wilders and middle school student/mentee Henry Ford. This occurred when Geert Wilders chose to position his character differently in order to interact with Henry Ford, a man with strong anti-Semitic beliefs. In a welcome message to Henry Ford, Geert Wilders attempted to establish a connection while minimizing their political differences by saying, "I am also very interested in the wisdom and insight that you will bring. I have often been inspired by your methods of business which has also influenced some of my political beliefs in free enterprise and creativity" (JCAT site, October 6, 2010). Geert Wilders used an alternative aspect of the characters' biographies to establish a connection. This was done instead of emphasizing differences between the characters, which may have stifled continued conversation and interest from the middle school student/mentee. Even when these connections may have seemed tenuous, the attempt at forging a relationship based on character biography was a strategy many preservice teachers/mentors employed throughout the simulation.

Another example of role duality was apparent when the preservice teacher/mentor portraying Sofia Reinhardt received harsh criticism from middle school student/mentee Paul McCartney for her remark to other guests stating, "There are many people on the court who do not understand matters of justice" (JCAT site, November 6, 2010). Paul McCartney, sensitive to the preservice teacher/mentor's critique, confronted Sofia Reinhardt. Sofia Reinhardt responded carefully, juggling the charge of self as mentor and self as character:

> *I am sorry that you were offended by an email that I sent to other justices. However I don't think you understand the spirit of the message. Yes, in my message, I took issue with particular justices and I should have been more specific. Not everyone on the court has created injustices, and I include you and quite a few others in the list of people who have not . . . You said that I am somehow less experienced than other justices.* **To this end I can speak**. *My culture and people have been victims of legal injustice for centuries and in various countries (including under Justice Francisco Franco of Spain). In the 1940s, German Nazis worked together to put gypsies, Jews, and political dissidents into concentration camps.* At age 12, I was sent to such a camp. *I lost my entire family, all of my friends* (emphasis in original). (JCAT site, November 8, 2010)

By respectfully addressing Paul McCartney ("I am sorry that you were offended") and clarifying her intent ("Yes, in my message, I took issue with particular justices and I should have been more specific"), we see Sofia Reinhardt beginning to positioning herself as a mentor. She follows her acknowledgement of Paul McCartney's words by positioning the conversation as ongoing and in such a way that encourages Paul McCartney to think and respond to new and more complicated content ("In the 1940s, German Nazis worked together to put gypsies, Jews, and political dissidents into concentration camps."). At the same time, she allowed her outspoken, 13-year-old character to react to Paul McCartney in a way that was true to her character.

The preservice teacher/mentor portraying Sofia Reinhardt spoke of this exchange in her end of term reflection, stating, "I can say that I was quite upset." Reflecting on this exchange, she states she sent "Mr. McCartney a long (too long) response that, as I look back at it, was equal parts me and Sofia Reinhardt." She further indicated:

> *Paul never responded to that tirade. I can understand why: it was long and verbose. And he's a rock star so he can do what he wants. I learned a valuable lesson from all of this, though: no matter how submerged we all are in our characters, we are still present . . . Even though to the [middle school] students I was just another character, I knew that I was a mentor so it took me by surprise when some kid pretending to be Paul McCartney confronted me (Sofia). In the end, I am very glad that he did. After that, I tried to stop acting like a mentor and more like any other member of JCAT.*

The above reflection helped make the implicit struggle between mentor-character explicit. Transitioning to a different interaction between Sofia Reinhardt and a middle school student-played character, we again witnessed Sofia Reinhardt's demonstration of her concern for supporting middle school student learning while she maintained the authenticity of her character. Middle school student/mentee Sarah Aaronsohn asked for clarification on Sofia Reinhardt's legal philosophy[3] which Sofia Reinhardt had submitted as a part of her role as one of the justices. Staying in character, Sofia Reinhardt politely indicated:

*I realize my legal philosophy was a bit confusing. I have never written such a thing before. What I was trying to say is that I'm a bit distrustful of legal systems. One thing that worries me, even in this trial, is that some people are justices and some are not. Why is this, Sarah? Shouldn't we all be? Don't we all have just as much a right to say something about this? This is why I sent out these messages so that we could talk about whether or not this was fair. It is also a way for people who were not selected can still get a say— even if it is through me. If you have more questions, please feel free to ask me.* (JCAT site, November 15, 2010)

By citing her own inexperience with the legal process being conducted and showing democratic reasoning, Sofia Reinhardt clarified her thinking and made an effort to include Sarah Aaronsohn in the decision-making process. Sofia Reinhardt encouraged Sarah Aaronsohn to contact her again, in an effort to keep her engaged in a conversation, and asked some directed questions that might solicit additional responses.

It is important to note that the preservice teachers/mentors not only attended to their assigned middle school student mentees, but also interacted with any middle school students with whom they came into contact. Sofia Reinhardt and Sarah Aaronsohn's interactions in this case were informed more by their roles within the trial (Sofia Reinhardt as a justice and Sarah as one that was not chosen to be a justice) than by their respective biographical backgrounds. This was a strong example of role tension within mentoring. Throughout this educative exchange, Sofia Reinhardt maintained her role as an inexperienced, opinionated 13-year old justice with Sarah Aaronsohn in order to encourage Sarah Aaronsohn to consider life perspective from another's point of view—a central goal of the simulation—while also leaving room for debate.

Staying in character and supporting student learning was not always easy or intuitive for the mentors. In his interview, Geert Wilders reflected on his interaction with his middle school student/mentee: "I was sitting back, thinking like a grad student, but not necessarily how a 10-year-old thinks. . . . [The mentee] didn't know what to do with me. I guess I kind of intimidated her a little bit. I wanted to interact with her, but she wasn't open to it.

Similarly, Sofia Reinhardt remarked in her interview, "I felt like it was hard for me to get people to respond to me and I think that I wrote in a way that was a little bit too complex at first." In further reflection, Sofia Reinhardt pointed to this again when noting her tendency to privilege characterization over communication, particularly through her use of French words and overemphasis on her character's complex identity. As a way of addressing this, she stated, "I tried to scale it down and instead of waiting for people to respond, [I would] just keep going after people." Sofia Reinhardt later described "going after people" as a process of asking probing questions. She continued her reflection by stressing the importance of meeting middle school students where they were cognitively and pushing them to where they could go.

When discussing how she worked to understand where the middle school students were and how to meet and help them, Sofia Reinhardt commented, "[My teacher educator/project director] always said 'bring it back to the playground' like, when (we) would think about really big issues like 'well, you know, this situation in the geopolitical sense is really unfair,' and [my teacher educator/project director] would say, 'well, what would a younger kid, like the ones we are dealing with, define as fair or not very fair?'" Sofia Reinhardt urged her preservice teacher/mentor peers to place less importance on showcasing their character, and more emphasis on scaffolding their middle school student mentees.

Geert Wilders documented a similar type of guidance on behalf of the teacher educators/project directors based on an early exchange with Rosa Parks. After reading a reply message from Rosa Parks, he responded, "[Rosa Parks'] message really did not inspire me to write back to her because at the beginning of JCAT, I naively thought that [middle school] students would be more responsive." We know from his end of term reflection the forethought that went into crafting his message to Rosa Parks. He detailed, "I introduced myself in a favorable way and asked her a question. I also made sure to avoid bringing up any of the controversy surrounding my character for the initial contact in an attempt to make her feel more welcome and possibly less intimidated." We hear Geert Wilders' expressed disappointment after carefully crafting a message to Rosa Parks to inquire about what inspired her to challenge the Jim Crow laws. A few days after his exchange with Rosa Parks, Geert Wilders got a message from a teacher educator/project director asking him to send another message to Rosa Parks, "because [Rosa] was confused/worried" about his character. Geert Wilders expressed, "I understood where [the project director] was coming from, my character is a controversial one and could potentially be seen as a problem for someone like Rosa Parks." Geert responded to this prompt with a follow-up message to Rosa Parks. In reviewing Geert Wilders' email to Rosa Parks, we see the effort on behalf of the preservice teacher/mentor who portrayed Geert Wilders' to connect to Rosa Parks. We also see his welcome messages reflect an increased effort to connect to his middle school student mentees. For example, Geert Wilders replied to Rosa Parks:

*Ms. Parks,*
*I admire your courage in acting on your beliefs. I try to act in a similar way. I try to speak for many people who are scared to speak. Although you may not find my message agreeable, you should certainly see where I am coming from. I speak for those who are scared their society is being ruined by immigrants. I am not a racist, I just believe in the preservation of Dutch culture and I am anti-Islam as a result of the hate that the religion teaches. I have nothing against blacks or the civil rights movement, I just believe my culture should be preserved in the face of this threat to my nation.*
*Geert*

Afterwards, Geert Wilders reflects, "I think I really did a great job with trying to relate to her. I wanted to point out how even though my character was a lot different than hers, we still had a lot in common and could potentially work together." Geert Wilders followed this with a discussion about how he thinks he could use this experience to improve his interactions with other middle school students to solicit more in-depth responses. The kind of guidance from teacher educators/project directors provided to Sofia Reinhardt and Geert Wilders helped them understand how to support the middle school students' learning by encouraging the preservice teachers/mentors to consider the middle school students' point of view.

Further tensions between role-playing and mentoring strategies were present for some mentors within JCAT. Preservice teachers/mentors who interpreted mentoring as unnatural for their character often experienced difficulty as they contemplated how to correspond with their middle school student mentees. Even Primo Levi, a writer and a Holocaust survivor, who could use experiences in expressing his characters' views and in connecting with other Jewish characters on the site, found navigation between mentoring and portraying a character difficult at times. In reflecting on his character, Primo Levi said:

*For me, it was completely out of character for him [Primo Levi] to just be there in general and interact with other people. 'Cause I felt like he was just someone—it's more of like you come to him—he doesn't find you.*

Though this was an obstacle for Primo Levi, he noted that, upon consulting a JCAT teacher educator/ project director about this conflict, he was able to process the tension between dual roles differently. He explained, "Well, I guess that this is one of those times you're going to have to break character for the sake of the . . . inter-action on the website." As with the advice sought by other mentors vis à vis communicating at appropriate levels with the middle school student mentees, this role-playing and mentoring advice from teacher educator/project director helped the preservice teacher/mentor portraying Primo Levi to re-orient his focus in the game on the middle school students he was mentoring.

While staying in character and supporting student learning presented many challenges, it also offered opportunities for growth for these emerging educators. For example, Geert Wilders said in his interview:

*My character allowed me to be mean. I am typically not someone who goes around insulting someone's religion or beliefs. [JCAT] allowed me to take a conservative stance and it was a lot of fun to pretend to be someone else, especially as a teacher, because in the classroom, I can't tell them they are completely wrong just off of my opinion. [JCAT] allows me to play a character and speak through character. . . . It's a nice buffer as a teacher.*

By assuming a character, Geert Wilders used a new method to challenge the middle school students in order to stretch their thinking. The role becomes a "nice buffer" for him to take risks in developing his voice as a teacher.

**Attending to Student Learning and Self as Learner**
In the preservice teachers' work as JCAT mentors, we observed them confronting a second role-based tension: the desire to attend both to themselves as learners of teaching and to their desire to support student learning. We intentionally used the word 'attend' to describe this tension in order to highlight the active process of watching out for, fostering alongside, and nurturing growth within middle school student mentees.

As we discussed earlier, we saw Geert Wilders proactively establishing connections with his middle school student mentees from the beginning of the simulation via his welcome messages (JCAT site, October 6,

2010). And, yet, he explained in his interview and his end of term reflection how challenging these interactions felt for him:

*One of the biggest things that JCAT taught me about myself as a teacher was that what I really want to improve on is my ability to randomly approach a student and ask him what he or she thinks about a topic. I noticed myself very hesitant and at other times unwilling to communicate with a random student.*

He added later:

*Although I was frustrated at times because I felt I was not getting much of an interaction from the [middle school] students where I was learning, I had to step back and realize that this exercise was more for the kids than for me.*

This statement points back to his earlier comment about breaking character for the sake of the interaction on the site. Geert Wilders could not concentrate solely on his need as an emerging teacher to produce meaningful dialogue with these middle school students; he also needed to foster their engagement in the activity. In an attempt to balance these tensions, Geert Wilders challenged himself as a preservice teacher/mentor to engage the middle school students and encourage them in this new learning modality.

In regard to the applicability of JCAT to the practice of teaching, Sofia Reinhardt spoke of similar retrospective insights. During her interview, she commented that, central to her learning in JCAT was the importance of attending to the middle school student mentees, particularly to paying attention to mentees' need to be heard. She notes how "important it is that everybody gets a response and gets some kind of validation for what they say."

We saw this principle enacted during an email exchange with Bob Dylan, where Bob Dylan advised Sofia Reinhardt that his atheist identity impacted his views on the trial and invited her to call him Bob. To this Sofia Reinhardt replied, "Thank you, Bob! I did not realize you were an atheist! Have you always been or did you change your beliefs at some point? Sofia" (JCAT site, October 31, 2010). Here, Sofia Reinhardt recognized the importance of attending to her student (Bob), and to finding relational contexts (Thank you, Bob!) in which to connect and nurture Bob as a learner (did you change your beliefs at some point?), both important elements of her future teaching strategy.

Building on this, Sofia Reinhardt related the importance of being heard to her student teaching experience. "When I was grading essays," she said, "I would start writing little responses like, little paragraphs at the end of their paper." Her end-of-paper remarks were intended to signal to her real-world students that someone actually read their written work. Furthermore, Sofia Reinhardt indicated that her real-world application of JCAT did not stop with a sentence indicating she read the student's work. She embedded individualized ways for her real-world students to improve their work, much like she did in JCAT with Bob Dylan. Both with Bob Dylan and her real-world students' papers, she responded with the intent to deepen the other's learning, and to reinforce that their voices were being heard.

To better understand her desire to deepen student learning, we returned to Sofia Reinhardt's interactions with the middle school students/mentees portraying Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney. In analyzing how the middle school students responded to Sofia Reinhardt, we found her drawn to the notion of what it means to be responsible for someone else's learning, even when the other person does not respond in detail. Reflecting on her online experience, Sofia Reinhardt offers us this advice: even if they just write one little sentence or three words we should not discount it because it might be the most they have written all year.

Sofia Reinhardt admitted that the approaches she outlined were more labor-intensive for the preservice teachers/mentors. She acknowledged it took an extensive amount of time to reflect on who the middle school student was in the simulation and how to "use everything [she] knew about them to connect with them [in that context] in JCAT." Over time, we saw how she developed her understanding of the amount of effort that she would need to make in order to connect with her future real-world students, and compared knowing and connecting with the JCAT characters to knowing and connecting with her future classroom students. She reflected that through JCAT character interactions:

*The really big take away even in JCAT where people are pretending to be other people, you get a sense of who [the middle school students] really are, their personalities that may be hidden when they are in the classroom; it brings out things in them that they might not have known were there; but, I realize like, in my*

*classroom, like in [a] real classroom, there is going to be all these personalities, all these different contexts that each character has.*

Primo Levi learned several lessons about how to interact with his middle school students in the simulation, as well. He reflected that "in the beginning when I started JCAT . . . I was trying to motivate them to do better" with engaging with their characters and understanding their characters' motivations. Later, he realized that, "now, I would say you have to start with getting them to actually like being on that site and interacting with other people." Through participating in JCAT and through mentoring in a simulation that focused on middle school students, Primo Levi came to realize that relationships must be established on a personal level [such as], "Thank you for your support, Ms. Kagen." (JCAT site, November 20, 2010) before you ask "those really, big deep questions [such as] "What actions do you think we should take to ensure that we give Mr. Eissa and his family their freedoms?" (JCAT site, November 20, 2010). In connecting these learning experiences to his future teaching career, Primo Levi reflected, "You have to first bridge that gap between teacher and student. So, there's a connection, there's a relationship so that there's some sort of motivation for that student to interact on that site, or to interact in class." On the site, he attempted to build a bridge with Margot Frank [such as] "I can identify with you, Margot." (JCAT site, November, 20, 2010), and again with Rosa Parks [such as], "I agree with you, Ms. Parks." (JCAT site, November 20, 2010). Through his interactions with middle school students like Helena Kagen, Margot Frank, and Rosa Parks, Primo Levi learned more about establishing rapport with others in order to further learning goals. These interactions provided him with a way to engage middle school students in content within his future classroom while acknowledging the social nature of learning and the possibilities for a humanistic learning focus that emphasizes the whole learner.

## Summary

Exploration of the preservice teachers/mentors' two tensions in this study—staying in character and supporting student learning, and attending to student learning as well as to themselves as learners—helped to illuminate the constant pull between roles. The preservice teachers/mentors achieved a sense of purpose for their mentorship when they realized that they needed to approach the middle school participants by assuming their point of view and developmental needs. In addition, in order to engage them in the simulation and to help them enjoy interactions with others through their own character roles, the preservice teachers/mentors learned to challenge them to think and react as the other (their character). The preservice teachers/mentors also realized that, in order to encourage the middle school students to think as their character would think, they needed to balance and vary their approaches in order to gain trust and build relationships with them. Their learning as future educators grew from their recognition of the necessity of paying close attention to the needs of the middle school students and to strategically approaching them in order to encourage their engagement and learning.

### Conclusion and Implications

The JCAT experience provided a creative opportunity for preservice teachers to practice mentoring skills in a safe environment with direct and indirect feedback from middle school students, preservice teacher/mentor peers, middle school teachers, and teacher educators/project directors. Through the preservice teachers' mentorship, middle school students were guided in the simulation toward perspective-taking, reflection, experiential consideration of contexts, and social interaction. Equally importantly, the preservice teachers/mentors' efforts provided them with practical experience in attending to students and encouraging them in their educational growth while providing insight into how these skills should be carried forward into their future teaching. Despite tensions raised by the context of the simulation, which required preservice teachers/mentors to portray a role, they developed strategies that utilized the social nature of learning to connect with their middle school student mentees and suggest actions for the student mentees to undertake in JCAT. This opportunity to experiment with different mentoring strategies, even within a highly-constructed and somewhat artificial atmosphere, provided preservice teachers/mentors with practical skills that they later reported were applicable in their face-to-face student teaching contexts.

As the teaching profession becomes more demanding and 21st century preparedness becomes a necessity, educators must learn to navigate complex, technology-rich learning environments (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Smith & Israel, 2010). Furthermore, we must continue to investigate our own cultural, religious, and ethnic understandings as educators (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) in an effort to recognize the ways in which practice—as teachers and teacher educators—supports and impedes the participants' learning (Schön, 1995). The outcomes of

this research strengthen the ability of teacher education programs to equip novice educators and preservice teachers for just such environments.

An important finding from this study suggests that JCAT offered the preservice teachers/mentors an in-depth and extended experience focused on perspective taking—especially the perspectives of the middle school students. Being able to look at an experience through the eyes of a young person is essential work for all educators, and especially important for new teachers. Through this scaffolded experience, where preservice teachers/mentors receive feedback from all of the participants in the game, they engaged in and reflected on perspective-taking opportunities in an unusually focused manner. This study offers preservice teacher education programs a new model for the development of such essential capacities.

Finally, our study illuminates the ways in which the essential partners in the learning process—students, teachers, and texts, or in David Hawkins' terms, I, Thou, and It—move dynamically to support the construction of new knowledge. In JCAT, these roles are fluid. At one moment the preservice teacher/mentor might be mentoring a middle school student, and at another moment s/he might be mentored by a teacher educator/project director, middle school teacher, preservice teacher/mentor peer, or middle school student in the game. Experiencing the role of "teacher" as someone who moves fluidly between the role of "I" and "Thou" offers new teachers the opportunity to understand teaching as a complex, relational process requiring humility, confidence, curiosity, and leadership.

## Endnotes

[1] JCAT is a specially designed variation of Place Out of Time, which developed from a partnership with RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network, the University of Michigan's Interactive Communications and Simulations Group (ISC), and the University of Cincinnati's Center for Studies in Jewish Education and Culture, and was funded by the Covenant Foundation.

[2] Classroom teachers detailed their use of JCAT in semi-structured teacher interviews conducted as part of a larger study related to teaching and learning in JCAT.

[3] Characters who were selected to fulfill the role of Justice in the JCAT courtroom were required to post a public legal philosophy. The purpose of the legal philosophy was to outline the character's stance on general legal issues related to right and wrong, morals, and law and order.

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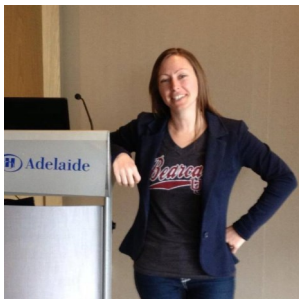
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