# *The Field Experience Journal*

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# From the Editor

Dear Readers of *The Field Experience Journal:*

This edition of *The Field Experience Journal* begins with a submission from Cathy Davis Moore and Tiffany Santi Coleman titled: "History Starts Now: Building a 21st Century Clinical Partnership".  This article discusses the journey type of a new college collaborating with a large urban school district to create the next generation school-university partnership.

Mary Higgins shares "The Purposes of Reflective Journaling: Perspectives from Pre-Service and Mentor Teachers".  In this submission, the author provides a study demonstrating how teacher educators in their reflective journaling in their contexts can promote authenticity among teacher candidates.

"A Teacher Educator's Substitute Teaching as an Opportunity for University Students' Significant Learning: A Qualitative Study" by Ann Gillies shares a study responding to the question: In what ways does substitute teaching with a teacher educator influence a university student's learning and perception of preparedness for teaching?

Beth Birky details how faculty who have been vested in the success of teacher candidates have the opportunity to continue their positive influence through the role of a mentor during the candidate's first year of teaching in her article, "Listen and Advise Mentor Program (LAMP): A Pilot Program for Mentoring Beginning Teachers.

"Teacher Candidates' Perceptions and Field Experiences with Components of RTI" by Katrina A. Hovey, Bertina H. Combes, Endia J. Lindo, Mei Chang and Sarah L. Ferguson provides a study that explores teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences with components of Response to Intervention.

Maika J. Yeigh shares an article that details one teacher preparation program's attempt to meet an accreditation agency's call to action through the utilization of instructional rounds during clinical supervision in "Using Problems of Practice to Leverage Clinical Learning".

"The Benefits of Field Experience" provides insight as to the requirements of field experiences by various institutions and states while discussing the benefits of such experiences to teacher candidates.  This selection comes from Karen A. Frantz-Fry.

"Attributes of a Successful Field Experience:  A Best-Worst Scaling Study" is a

study that examines the perceptions of mentors and pre-service teachers regarding the most important attributes necessary to achieve successful field experiences. This study is presented by Myra Lovett, Shalanda Stanley, Matt Lovett, and Carolyn Hushman.

Finally, my thanks to those who have contributed their manuscripts for our consideration and to our reviewers for their time and expertise.

Kim L. Creasy

# History Starts Now: Building a 21st Century Clinical Partnership

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## Abstract

As educators, we continually reflect in an effort to enhance our instructional strategies and practices. We collectively discuss approaches for reform. Opportunities for reflection and reform are endless. However, the opportunity to build a college from the ground up, to imagine the kind of world that we want to create in terms of a college of education, is exceedingly rare. This article discusses that type of opportunistic journey – the journey of a new college collaborating, from the very beginning of the creation stages, with a large urban school district to imagine a new school of education and next generation school-university partnership. Beginning with a school district advisory board, the college collaboratively created a program to prepare next generation teachers for the next generation of P-12 students. This partnership continues today, collaboratively reflecting, designing, and refining its procedures and practices to best prepare the next generation for exemplary teaching and learning.

***World***

Lyrics and Music by John Ondrasik

Got a package full of wishes
A time machine, a magic wand
A globe made out of gold.
No instructions or commandments
Laws of gravity or
Indecisions to uphold.
Printed on the box I see
Acme's build a world to be
Take a chance, grab a piece
Help me to believe it.
What kind of world do you want?
Think anything
Let's start at the start
Build a masterpiece
Be careful what you wish for
History starts now….

The song *World* (Ondrasik, 2006)*,* written and performed by John Ondrasik of the group

Five for Fighting, was released in 2006. It was as if the song had been written for the birth of a

new college's educator preparation program. How often does a college have the opportunity to

build something from scratch, with few limitations being imposed and a world class school district

with which to partner? As a college that was newly established in 2005, we were in the unique

position of building an educator preparation program from the ground up. Because of program

approval requirements in the state, the college could not begin its educator preparation programs

until the college received its initial regional accreditation. This provided the college with the

unique opportunity of extended time to reflect on all facets of the programs. The natural P-12

partner was the school district in the county housing the college, which was, and is, the second

largest county in the state. The school district is currently the largest public school district in the

state, with approximately 180,000 students and over 23,000 employees; the average educator in

this school district holds a master's degree or higher advanced degree and has an average of 13

years of teaching experience. The school district has been recognized by multiple entities for its commitment to quality education and fiscally responsible operations. Clearly, a school district of this size and commitment to educational excellence provides the opportunity for a rich array of experiences for teacher candidates.

**What Kind of World Do You Want? Think Anything.**

The college held its first partnership meeting with the school district in May 2007. An advisory board emerged from that meeting that would inform all of the decisions that were made in the building of the educator preparation programs. This advisory board was comprised of classroom educators, school administrators, area superintendents, curriculum directors, and other central office personnel. The first meeting started with a simple question: what are the areas in which new educators are coming to you well prepared, and what are the areas in which they are struggling as new educators? Over the next two and a half hours, a rich conversation occurred, during which advisory board members were able to paint a clear picture of the typical new educators being hired by the school district. The dialog then shifted to brainstorming the desired new educator, and these constructs were categorized as knowledge, skills, and dispositions desirable for new educators. Other points of discussion that were not specific to individual educators were also identified:

- Field experiences must provide carefully sequenced experiences beginning at the sophomore level. No random observations—what is the purpose of the observation or hands-on opportunity to work with learners?  What skill is being observed or developed during the experience?  Need more time!
- Concept of coaching in skill development—observing a master teacher and then debriefing on the process.
- Collaboration with classroom educators who bring second language skills to the instructional process.
- Use of cohort groups for candidates in programs.
- Endorsement possibilities:  ESOL, Gifted

These conversations continued over the next two years, as the team established connections between best practices as identified in the research literature (Alexander, 2003; Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Schwartz, Bransford, & Sears, 2005; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006) and the reality being experienced in the school district. The joint team of college faculty and advisory board members developed a working document that identified the science and art of teaching for the new educator preparation unit. Additionally, the team continued to refine the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that would inform the outcomes for the unit. These outcomes were further grouped into five domains that would frame the development of candidates.

The development of these domains was also influenced by school district research identifying teaching strategies essential for implementation by classroom educators. These strategies, including assessment, non-verbal representation, modeling and practice, vocabulary, summarizing, collaboration, student goal setting, literacy, problem solving, questioning, background knowledge, comparison and contrast, and technology, are pervasive in the district classrooms (Marzano, & Kendall, 1998; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). These Quality Plus Teaching Strategies (QPTS), key elements that drive teaching and assessment at the school district were reviewed, aligned, and integrated into the work being done by the college on the conceptual framework. During this two-year period, the Advisory Board team members would come together every two months to review the work that had been completed by the college faculty and would then brainstorm on the next steps. The resulting domains and outcomes are still in place, with minor revisions in 2015 to reflect updates to the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013).

**Let's Start at the Start. Build a Masterpiece.**

As the college and school district collaboration continued, curriculum teams composed of college faculty, school district educators, instructional coaches, and curriculum directors were identified to develop the curriculum, as well as plan for assessment, for seven programs: early childhood education, special education, and five programs with a major in the discipline that lead to 6-12 Certification: biology, English, history, mathematics, and political science. The early childhood and special education programs were designed with an embedded endorsement for English Language Learners (referred to as ESOL by state program approval) awarded to candidates upon graduation, based on a desire on the part of the school district to hire educators who would be job-ready to work with English Language Learners.

The result of the ongoing collaboration between the college and school district was an integrated, interdisciplinary educator preparation curriculum enhanced by embedded, developmental field experiences. The field and clinical experiences were characterized by gradually increasing levels of engagement and responsibility in the classroom for teacher candidates, thus fostering opportunities for teacher candidates to engage in collaboration (Arthaud, T., Aram, R., Breck, S., Doelling, J., & Bushrow, K., 2007). College faculty would model collaboration with mentor teachers as they worked together to guide candidate development during field and clinical experiences (Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). A commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy was identified as being essential throughout these classroom and field experiences (Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth & Crawford, 2005; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007; Santamaria, 2009).

It was agreed that candidates would have field experiences embedded in each course after admission to educator preparation at the junior and senior level, with the exception of content

courses. The development of field and clinical experiences was centered on the premise that if candidates could be exposed to schools that are successful, regardless of the location or demographics, candidates would graduate prepared and motivated to work in a variety of school settings, thus improving educational equity across schools. In addition to meeting the required grade bands stipulated at the state level, candidates would all have at least one semester in a non-Title I school, two semesters in Title I schools, with students being allowed to choose the location for clinical experience. This broad exposure to schools in this large school district has resulted in candidates who actively seek teaching positions in Title I schools.

Field experience expectations of candidates are developmental in nature. During the first semester of field experience, candidates observe students and educators in a variety of settings throughout the school, collect field observations, assist in the classroom, facilitate small group instruction, and complete an ecological study of the school and an in-depth profile of a student. During the second and third semesters, candidates are expected to participate more actively in planning, delivering, and assessing the effectiveness of instruction in the core academic areas, and in adapting instruction to meet individual student needs. Effective fall 2017, candidates complete a yearlong experience in the same classroom, and as such, the third semester placement is the beginning of that yearlong placement for clinical experience. Field experiences provide each candidate with numerous opportunities for reflection; they conference with their college supervisor to share their perspectives, debrief, and discuss their experiences. The use of educational technology is embedded in all teacher education courses and in individual course assignments. Exploring and using technologies available in the schools is a key experience for candidates in the field. Often, teacher candidates model the implementation of instructional technology learned in the college coursework in their field placement classrooms.

Field experience sites for each course are selected collaboratively with the school district based on the needs of the course in terms of grade level placement and diversity of experience necessary. Collaborating principals agree to place groups of candidates taking a particular course with effective educators at the appropriate grade levels. This is possible because of the relatively large size of the schools in the school district. Placement of groups of candidates taking a particular course at the same school facilitates frequent on-site visits by college faculty, and allows close coordination of field experience assignments with in-class content and discussions.

The faculty who teach field-based courses meet with the mentor teachers at the school sites at the beginning of each semester to review the Field and Clinical Experiences Handbook and discuss the expectations for and the evaluation of the candidates who will be completing field or clinical experiences at that location. Faculty supervisors visit all candidates' classrooms regularly to provide feedback and support for candidates.

Looking back some ten years later, two key elements: that of having a school district with which to collaborate every step of the way, and quite simply put, the luxury of time, allowed the educator preparation unit and its programs to be a true collaboration of a school district and a college.

**Help Me to Believe It**

An important component of the partnership was the development of a human capital pipeline. The concept was simple: the college would recruit highly qualified high school students or graduates for its educator preparation programs. These district graduates would attend the college and complete an educator preparation program that was rich in field experiences and that taught the teacher candidates the school district "way." The school district would then hire the college's graduates as new teachers. The Human Capital Pipeline was implemented as the college

began accepting students into its programs. The dean of the college and the executive director of human resources presented the partnership model between the college and school district at a fall school board meeting (Author1 & Author2, 2010). Since the unit's inception in January 2010, the college has graduated just over 700 educators, 70% of whom have been hired by the school district.

The human capital pipeline not only supports recruitment and preparation of diverse candidates, but also provides mentoring critical to the induction of beginning teachers. Faculty supervisors working in the schools with current college candidates maintain a connection with graduates teaching in the district. While the primary role of faculty supervisors is to provide the oversight of pre-service teachers, these faculty also provide induction support for beginning teachers in collaboration with local teachers and administrators. The presence of college faculty in the schools facilitates a partnership that extends beyond the specifics of field experiences and provides an opportunity for collaboration among the college faculty and the P-12 teaching faculty, fostering the further development of the human capital in both entities.

From the first year that the college opened, P-12 campus visits were encouraged. The local school district regularly brought high school students, and on occasion, middle school students. Early in the college's existence, a forward-thinking principal of an elementary school approached the college about bringing fourth and fifth graders, along with their parents/ guardians. The school was in a high-poverty area, and the principal's vision was to get students in his school to begin thinking about college at an early age. This concept of the visit was met with great enthusiasm from the college, and an interactive experience was planned for the P-12 students and their families. In addition to providing students and families with the typical information regarding college admission and costs, P-12 students engaged in an activity where they problem-solved as to where dining facilities and residence halls should be built. Since the majority of the families did

not have family members that had ever attended college, the experience was eye opening for the children as well as adults. P-12 students also had the opportunity to visit a college library that was equipped with technology and to engage in science experiments. The college provided interpreters for the visitors so that all questions regarding the college could be addressed. Following this visit, the college began regularly scheduling elementary schools for campus tours, although the typical tour only includes a few parents as chaperones.

The role of the partnership continued to expand to other activities such as supporting school-based curriculum nights and spring fairs. In 2011, the college and school district partnered together on the district-level regional science, engineering fair and innovation fair, with the college hosting the event for elementary, middle, and high school students as they competed with peers across the school district. This large district fair had outgrown its previous location, and at that time, the college had space on campus for the event. College faculty served as judges for the fair, and teacher candidates provided support as greeters and escorts for students. This solution was a win-win for all—the school district had a no-cost venue for its event while the still relatively new college had the opportunity to expose community members to the campus. By the following year, the fair had outgrown the campus, but the college continues to support the regional science, engineering, and innovation fair by providing faculty and students to support the event.

Other partnership activities between the college and the school district have evolved, including a STEM grant at the state level that provides support to in-practice teachers to extend their teaching strategies in the STEM areas. This grant initially started at one elementary school and expanded to other elementary schools in the same cluster. Faculty and students in the Information Technology major began an evening and weekend technology-tutoring program for P-12 students and parents at one of the middle school. In support of an entrepreneurship pathway

that was implemented at two of the high schools, the Business Administration program at the college developed an entrepreneur internship so that college students majoring in Business Administration could be embedded in the high school to work with P-12 students pursuing the entrepreneur pathway.

**Teaching as a Profession Pathway**

In this state, high school students select a pathway during high school that allows them to specialize in a particular area of interest. High School students that are interested in pursuing teaching can select the Teaching as a Profession (TAP) pathway, which involves the completion of three courses, one of which is an internship course. Those students completing the pathway and passing the pathway assessment can apply to receive experiential credit for an introductory education course in colleges and universities in the state. Currently, 11 of the high schools in the partner school district have active TAP programs. College faculty participate in the TAP programs by teaching guest sessions at the high school programs. The college and school district collaborate to bring TAP students to campus each year for a future educator day. TAP students have the opportunity to work with college faculty in small interactive sessions and to visit the rest of the campus. The school district and college work together to encourage students to choose the college so that they can become part of the pipeline of district students who complete their programs at the college and then return to the school district to teach.

Other TAP collaborations between the school district and the college that are in the planning stages include high school students and teacher candidates jointly volunteering at a local Junior Achievement center and hosting community events for the high school. In addition, faculty have engaged with their peers from other institutions to explore additional ways to strengthen TAP experience for high school students.

**Co-Teaching Collaborative**

The Co-Teaching Collaborative occurred because of state funding made available to P-20 partnership groups throughout the state. The P-20 Collaborative in the region that included the college and school district selected co-teaching for their project as a result of discussions about the impact of year-long clinical experience on P-12 classrooms. Given the high-stakes environment in which all educators are working, it was time for the traditional model of clinical experience to be revisited. The co-teaching approach allows the classroom teacher to remain involved in planning and instruction while providing the teacher candidate with a robust clinical experience (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010; Bacharach & Heck, 2012). Partners in the P-20 Collaborative agreed that co-teaching would provide an effective means of hosting a student teacher for the entire academic year. Collaborative members chose the St. Cloud model (https://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/co-teaching/) of co-teaching as it expanded the traditional approach to co-teaching to include clinical experience. A train-the-trainer model was utilized whereby two colleges and the school district were able to send college faculty and a district teacher to the initial training. Subsequently, the team worked together to design and deliver training for additional college and P-12 educators. Having a P-12 teacher on the design team provided rich input as to how district teachers would perceive the implementation of the co-teaching model and was a key participant in the design of the redelivery training. The school district supported her attendance at the co-teaching training, the redelivery training, and a state conference presentation of the grant work by providing a substitute teacher for her classroom on those days. While a primary intent of the grant funding for this project was to provide professional learning for college field supervisors and P-12 mentor teachers, the project also fostered conversations between the school district and college partners regarding year-long clinical experiences.

**Literacy Embedded Experiences**

Our teacher preparation programs in early childhood and special education contain a series of three literacy courses, each containing a clinical experience. These courses were designed to meet the standards of the International Reading Association and the state Reading Endorsement and include Approaches to Teaching Reading, Literacy Assessment and Instruction, and Approaches to Teaching Writing. In the initial years of the program, these courses were taught in a traditional college classroom setting once per week, and teacher candidates were placed in elementary schools an additional day per week for literacy field experiences linked to the individual literacy course. Faculty teaching the courses also supervised teacher candidates in their field experiences three times over the course of each semester. While this was a strong model, disconnects were seen between content taught in the class and actual student ability to translate theory into practice. This model left much to be desired in the way of providing prompt, meaningful, and actionable feedback to the teacher candidate. In contrast, the model of instructional coaching is more closely linked to the practice we desire for our teacher candidates to emulate (Coleman, Lewis, Schoeller & Smith, 2012; Coleman & Schoeller, 2011; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Literacy faculty identified the need for implementing teaching strategies that draw upon the research on instructional coaching and the ability to sit side by side with teacher candidates, providing immediate modeling, support and guided reflection as they implement newly learned instructional strategies with elementary school students.

In an effort to further strengthen the clinical experiences of teacher candidates while increasing service opportunities for teacher candidates and faculty, literacy faculty crafted a more specific partnership with local Title I schools to embed literacy courses in the elementary schools. The partnership between literacy faculty and P-12 faculty is based on several core values and goals.

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These include the role of the college professor as an instructional coach within the field experience; the provision of literacy support for struggling learners in the partner schools; and the availability of professional learning for in-service educators in the partner schools. This partnership results in shared knowledge between the college and P-12 partner schools and advocates for exemplary literacy instruction by pre-service and in-service educators, as well as literacy achievement and college experiences for P-12 learners who struggle academically.

Teacher candidates frequently report that they learn best when they are in the field with their professors and express a desire for more frequent feedback in the form of instructional coaching (Author3, 2014). In the college instructor as instructional coach model, professors provide the course content to teacher candidates in a literacy clinic setting within the normal school day. While having college courses embedded in the local schools is not an entirely unique practice, a less common element of our model is that we bring elementary students struggling with literacy skills and in-service educators desiring professional learning into our college classrooms. In this model, teacher candidates immediately put into practice literacy assessments and instructional strategies while being afforded instructional coaching by the professor. Elementary students, many of whom are potentially first-generation college students, are provided with literacy tutoring and gain the experience of participating in a college classroom, thus making college enrollment a realistic possibility in their eyes. In-service educators, some of whom are alumni of our college, are provided with professional learning, while simultaneously developing professional relationships with teacher candidates.

Elementary students, identified in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, are matched one--to-one with teacher candidates. Each class session is centered on strategies and procedures of literacy assessment that enable teacher candidates and in-service educators to understand

intimately the areas of interest, strength and weakness of their students and to advocate for and provide appropriate, engaging, and rigorous literacy instruction. Using a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), faculty model and scaffold assessment and instruction for teacher candidates and in-service educators through large-group workshop model mini-lessons, small guided groups, and individual student conferences. As the teacher candidates engage in new learning with the elementary students, faculty work side-by-side in a coaching role, continuing to model strategies for authentic assessment, conferring, and instructional design. In-service educators are invited to participate in the class sessions and to collaboratively design and implement instruction with pre-service teachers. Drawing on research on effective professional development schools, this field experience partnership provides opportunities for collaborative learning for teacher candidates, in service educators, elementary students, and the college professors who teach and research the effectiveness of this practice (Barth, Catoe, Powell, Brigman & Field, 2009; Bennett & Kirkland, 2008; Castle, Fox, & Fuhrman, 2009; Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2009; Tichenor, Lovell, Haugaard, & Hutchison, 2008).

In the spring semester of 2016, our partnership between the school system and the college expanded by beginning a partnership between two Title I elementary schools and one of the literacy faculty members, based on a desire to utilize a stronger instructional model and to strengthen school partnerships. Literacy faculty collaborated with elementary school principals to develop a model for providing embedded instruction for the teacher candidates while simultaneously supporting second and third grade students identified as needing additional support in reading instruction. Each cohort of teacher candidates enrolled in Literacy Assessment and Instruction content was assigned to one of the two partner schools, and a schedule was developed in which the college content was taught in the morning, and teacher candidates completed the day

in a second or third grade classroom. During the morning, course content was taught for approximately 90 minutes, followed by a 45-minute block during which teacher candidates worked with the elementary students to whom they were assigned for the semester, using a case study approach. Teacher candidates were tasked with conducting literacy assessments and instructional strategies learned with their case study students. The college professor implemented an instructional coaching approach, continually rotating between observing, modeling, coaching and co-teaching; guided by her formative assessment of the teacher candidates. Anecdotal notes were taken by the professor and following the time with the elementary students, the professor and teacher candidates engaged in both written and verbal reflection of the work with students. Finally, each class session ended with approximately ninety minutes of additional content instruction, group discussion and plans for the following week. In this model, both college professor and teacher candidates support the elementary students in their literacy learning, and engaged in a cycle of assessing, designing instruction based on data, and implementing instruction.

In addition to supporting teacher candidates and elementary students in need of additional literacy instruction, this model afforded opportunities for supporting alumni teaching in the school and any additional faculty identified by the principals as in need of content knowledge or instructional coaching. By continually keeping school staff informed of the weekly class content, the professor was able to provide the school faculty with continual opportunities for professional learning. Table 1 provides an outline of a typical day in the literacy embedded partnership.

Positive feedback from teacher candidates, school administrators, literacy faculty and elementary students served in the literacy partnership led to the expansion of the embedded literacy coursework in fall of 2016. In addition to Literacy Assessment and Instruction, Approaches to Teaching Reading was also delivered in the elementary schools. In this course, teacher candidates

and college faculty follow a similar course design, bringing kindergarten and first grade students into the classroom to experience literacy mini-lessons and guided reading instruction. In spring of 2017, the third course, Approaches to Teaching Writing was added to the embedded experience. In this course, teacher candidates work with fourth and fifth grade students in writing workshop. Teacher candidates teach writing mini-lessons and confer with elementary students in writing conferences. Table 2 outlines the progression of courses in the literacy partnership.

The impact of the partnership has been beneficial to the college as well as the school district. Principals consistently cite improved teacher retention, hiring alumni of the partnership to teach in their schools, and increased engagement and literacy achievement of the P-5 students served through the partnership as benefits to the school (Author3, Author4, Author5, & Author2, 2016). Additionally, college faculty have served the school through provision of professional learning for educators and instructional coaches, volunteering for school cluster book drives, providing support for alumni currently teaching in the partner schools and tutoring case study students. One of the most exciting effects of the partnership is the impact of "being in college" on the P-5 students. These potential next generation college students view college as being attainable because they have already been in college; they have received certificates of completion, and they've been given college t-shirts in thanks for their help in their "college friends" doing their college course work. The embedded literacy partnership has been mutually beneficial. Teacher candidates are provided with opportunities to become a part of the school community in intentional and meaningful ways, and they are invited to attend professional learning opportunities at the local schools in addition to attending district literacy conferences free of charge.

**Special Education Paraprofessional Program**

The Special Education Paraprofessional Program is a partnership with the school district whereby paraprofessionals who are employed by the school district can complete a baccalaureate degree in Special Education while remaining employed by the school district. This program originated from a broader partnership in which the college dean and the administrator of Human Resources for the school district were both serving on the advisory board for the local technical college. Students at the technical college were completing an associate's degree in early care and learning, and the advisory board consulted on the development of new specializations for the associate's degree. It was noted by the technical college that the addition of a three-course specialization in Special Education would be very useful for technical college graduates seeking employment as paraprofessionals in the school district. The college dean and district HR administrator began brainstorming on ways that paraprofessionals might professionalize their certificates and become certified educators, and the Special Education Paraprofessional Program was born. Paraprofessionals who enroll in this college program take their classes at night and on the weekends. The school district covers the cost of substitutes so that the paraprofessionals can be absent from their jobs in order to complete the grade bands of field experiences required by the state. Additionally, the cost for substitutes during the intensive clinical experience time in their final semester is covered by the school district. Paraprofessionals completing this program do not have to quit their jobs to student teach and are assured of a certified teaching position if they complete the program. The paraprofessional program has the same course outcomes, requirements, and assessments as the day program for special education majors. This variation on the Human Capital Pipeline provides an innovative means of increasing the educator work force for the school

district. This unique facet of the partnership has gained interest from other school districts and colleges in the state.

**History Informing the Future**

Although the educator preparation unit has been delivering its program for less than ten years, much has been learned in that time, and significant changes have occurred, not the least of which is the transition to yearlong clinical experience. We are in the process of completing the first year of having a yearlong clinical experience, and undoubtedly, there will be conversations to be had once the data from this year is analyzed, along with the input mentor teachers and college supervisors. The key factor to our ongoing success is the never-ending process of dialog in our partnership.

In the almost eleven years of our partnership, we have journeyed together to collaboratively imagine the world we want and create a partnership that will best support our next generation educators and students. We have read, researched, practiced, and reflected to build on our experiences and to model the scaffolded instruction following the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) that we imagine our next generation educators using. This journey continues today, and will in the years to come, as we work together to build our 21st Century masterpiece.

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Table 1

*Daily Schedule for Literacy Embedded Partnership*

| Time | Reading Assessment and Instruction Course | Elementary Classroom/School |
|---|---|---|
| 7:30-8:00 | Quick Write on Readings, purpose set for the day | |
| 8:00-9:00 | | Co-teaching small group reading |
| 9:00-10:00 | Miscue Analysis of Fountas and Pinnell (2011) Informal Reading Inventory | |
| 10:00-10:45 | | Conduct IRI with case study student; professor coaches as GGC students teach/assess |
| 10:45-12:00 | Debrief work with case study students; Peer work to analyze running record; Determination of Independent, Instructional and Frustration reading levels; identification of specific reading goals and instructional strategies | |
| 12:00-12:30 | | Lunch with professor; individual conferences as needed |
| 12:30-2:30 | Professor observing individual lessons with case study students. | |
| 2:30-3:30 | | Classroom Support and/or Professor supports alumni teaching |
| | | On Occasion: Professor provides PD in faculty or grade level meetings; Professor and/or students attend/facilitate parent nights |

Table 2

*Growth of Embedded Courses in Literacy Partnership*

| Semester | Courses Offered | Partner Schools |
|---|---|---|
| Spring 2016 | READ 3600: Literacy Assessment and Instruction | 2 Title I Schools A and B<br><br>2 course sections |
| Fall 2016 | READ 3200:  Approaches to Teaching Reading<br>READ 3600: Literacy Assessment and Instruction | Title 1 Schools A, B, C and D<br><br>4 course sections |
| Spring 2017 | READ 3600: Literacy Assessment and Instruction<br><br>READ 3800:  Approaches to Teaching Writing | Title I Schools A, B, C<br><br>Non-Title 1 Schools E and F<br><br>5 course sections |
| Fall 2017 | READ 3200: Approaches to Teaching Reading<br>READ 3600: Literacy Assessment and Instruction | Title I schools A, B, C<br><br>10 course sections |
| Spring 2018 | READ 3600: Literacy Assessment and Instruction<br>READ 3800: Approaches to Teaching Writing | Title I School  A<br><br>Non-Title I Schools D, E, F and G<br><br>6 course sections |

**The Purposes of Reflective Journaling:**

**Perspectives from Pre-Service and Mentor Teachers**

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**Abstract**

This article explores teacher candidate and mentor teacher perceptions of reflective journaling during a year-long student teaching internship in a Professional Development School (PDS) context. Teacher candidates in their final year of their teacher preparation program (PreK-4) reflected on the journaling requirements of their internship year. Additionally, the mentor teachers paired with these teacher candidates shared experiences with reflective journaling and reflection as practicing teachers. Juxtaposing the teacher candidates and mentor teachers' lived experiences highlighted differences between the focus, purpose, and use of reflection in their practice. The study provides insights into how teacher educators can use reflective journaling in their contexts to promote authenticity and reflection among teacher candidates, while continuing to support the reflective practice of in-service teachers.

*Keywords:* reflective practice, reflective journaling, pre-service teachers, teacher education

Reflection is an integral component of teacher education (Loughran, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Specifically, reflective journaling is widely used as a pedagogical tool by teacher educators for capturing the reflections of pre-service teachers (Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012). While there is not a clear definition of reflective journaling (Clarà, 2015; Oner & Adadan, 2011), there are a variety of reflective journal structures used in teacher education programs (Lee, 2008; Sileo, Prater, Luckner, Rhine, & Rude, 1998) with researched benefits (e.g. Bean & Stevens, 2002; Falk-Ross, 2012; Good & Whang, 2002; Lee, 2008; Rodgers, 2002). Most teacher education programs use reflective journaling for students who are already in field experiences (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999; Isikoglu, 2007; Kaplan, Ripley, Sparks, & Holcomb, 2007; Lee, 2008; Shin, 2006) with fewer programs introducing reflective journaling earlier in pre-service teachers' coursework (Good & Whang, 2002; Knapp, 2012).

Researchers have noted that learning to reflect is not a simple task for novice educators (i.e. Bean & Stevens, 2002; Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005). Furthermore, Greiman and Covington (2017) found that journaling is often not the preferred modality of reflection for pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers often strategically comply by writing or saying what they assume their instructors want to read or hear when completing written reflections (Atkinson, 2012; Francis, 1995). Recent literature on reflective writing encourages teacher educators to consider how to reconstruct written reflection assignments in more purposeful ways, so pre-service teachers are motivated to continue reflecting on their practice as classroom teachers (Good & Whang, 2002; Knapp, 2012; Pedro, 2005).

Despite concerns of authenticity, reflective journaling offers many potential benefits for pre-service teachers' development. Through journaling, students create a dialogue with themselves (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Hedlund, Furst, & Foley, 1989). Open-ended journal writing

invites pre-service teachers to ask their own questions and respond freely (Crème, 2005). Larrivee (2000) argued, "The dissonance created in understanding that a problem exists engaged the reflective thinker to become an active inquirer, involved both in the critique of current conclusions and the generation new hypotheses" (p. 294). The writing process encourages theory to practice connections and brings commonly-held beliefs into question. Similarly, Sileo et al. (1998) found more structured journaling to help pre-service teachers synthesize personal experience and academic knowledge. Even more recently, Hume (2009) and Lee (2008) noted pre-service teacher' critical analysis of instructional strategies or personal teaching beliefs through reflective journaling. The literature broadly supports that writing can improve pre-service teachers' depth of reflective thinking, help them develop their professional identities, and influence their actions in the classroom (e.g. Bullough 1991; Good & Whang, 2002; LaBelle & Belknap, 2015; Lee, 2008; Oner & Adadan, 2011; Pedro, 2005).

## Purpose and Context of the Study

While research of reflective journaling has provided some clear recommendations for assignment structure and feedback from teacher educators (e.g. Good & Whang, 2002; Knapp, 2012), the purpose of this study was to examine pre-service teachers' perspectives on reflective writing assignments during their final year of a teacher education program. Additionally, the study examined mentor teachers' perspectives on how reflective writing influenced their interactions with pre-service teachers and their own development as educators in the field. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

- What do pre-service teachers' perceive as the purpose of reflective journaling?

- What do mentor teachers' perceive as the purpose of reflective journaling for themselves and interactions with pre-service teachers?

The context of this study is also significant in that the pre-service and mentor teachers that participated in this study were part of a Professional Development School (PDS). A strong partnership between a local school district and large research university in the Mid-Atlantic region highlights the robust relationship between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers in this setting. In this context pre-service teachers, referred to as interns, were seniors in the university's elementary (PreK-4) major that completed a full-year internship in a mentor teacher's classroom. Interns spent the entire year with a mentor teacher establishing a professional working relationship through modeling classroom procedures, co-teaching lessons, and providing feedback on instruction.

## Methodology

Maxwell (2013) described the intent of qualitative research as the examination of interactions in order to develop a holistic understanding of one's experiences. Within this qualitative framework, a phenomenological approach guided the study's design and data analysis. The purpose of phenomenology is to grasp the meaning of an experience by engaging in a direct contact with individuals that have lived the experience or are currently living the experience (Moustakes, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). According to Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, and Pollio (2017), researchers taking a phenomenological approach should remain as close as possible to the words of the participants, which was essential to the study's data analysis procedures. The goal of phenomenology is to "see the world as our study participants perceive it" (Sohn, et al., p. 125). I sought to understand teacher candidate and mentor teacher perceptions of reflective journaling through their own words.
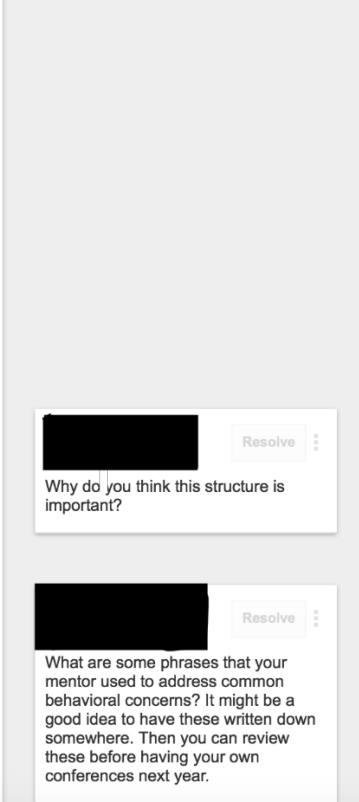
**Data Collection**

**Semi-structured interviews.** Each intern and mentor teacher were individually interviewed using a semi-structured interviewing protocol (Kvale, 1996). Participants discussed their reflective practices as members of the PDS partnership paying specific attention to written reflection and their own perceptions about the purpose of engaging in reflective writing. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

**Reflective journals.** To provide a more thorough understanding of the pre-service teachers' experiences with reflective journaling, interns shared their reflective journals electronically (see Figure 1).

Week 8

      Because of parent conferences this week, I have been thinking about how I would like to run my own conferences. I find it most interesting that the students come and are encouraged to do most of the talking. Although having the students come to the conference is different than what I used to, I like it better than the "traditional conference." I feel that when students are encouraged to speak about their goals they chose for themselves and how they are planning to reach those goals, they are starting to become more independent and responsible for their own learning. It seems like the conferences have a more positive feel to them with the student-centered approach.

      When thinking of my own conferences I will be having, I would like to have the format set up in a similar way where students talk about what they are doing good in at school and what goals they would like to achieve. I would also include in a time for parents to address any questions or concerns they have. I found that there is a common concern of homework and behavior. Listening to [my mentor teacher] has helped me understand how to phrase any concerns to parents in a positive way – meaning that I could state my observations to the parents, explain my concerns, and then explain what I will be doing to help the student improve. I have enjoyed being part of the conference experience because it has helped me understand the perspectives of parents vs. the perspective of the teacher.

Resolve

Why do you think this structure is important?

Resolve

What are some phrases that your mentor used to address common behavioral concerns? It might be a good idea to have these written down somewhere. Then you can review these before having your own conferences next year.

*Figure 1*. Example Intern Reflective Journal Entry with Supervisor's Comments.

All interns in the PDS program were required to complete a weekly written reflection that was shared with their university supervisor in an electronic document. For the majority of the internship

year, the specific topic of each weekly entry was left up to the individual intern. On certain weeks, interns were asked to reflect on specific internship experiences based on their methods coursework. Interns were encouraged to discuss the content of their reflections with their mentors and were asked to share several reflections throughout the year with their mentor. However, the interns' reflective journals were seen as a private document between the intern and his or her university supervisor.

**Participants.** Purposeful sampling, was used to identify the study's participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through the sampling process, three interns and four mentor teachers were selected to participate in this study. All three interns were female undergraduate teacher candidates, interns, in the final year of their teacher preparation program and the four mentor teachers directly mentored with the three interns involved in the study. At the time of the study, the participants were in student teaching in a kindergarten, second, and fourth grade classroom. Participating mentor teachers had a range of seven to twenty-eight years of teaching experience. Two mentors were teaching in the primary grades (K-2) and two mentors were teaching upper elementary grade levels (3-4). The interns and mentor teachers were not chosen randomly, but rather were chosen because they were working at the same school site in the PDS with the same university supervisor. This specific school group was chosen to eliminate potential differences between school sites and supervision practices among university supervisors. As Bogdan and Biklen argue (2007), "you chose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 73).

### Data Analysis

Primary data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using phenomenological thematic analysis (PTA) (Moustakas, 1994). Initially, I read the interview

transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the data. After several readings, recurring statements were marked and patterns were clustered. Patterns were validated and provided a thematic label. The interns' reflective journals were used as a secondary source to validate the patterns and thematic labels emerging from the participants' interviews. From the thematic labels, a textural description of each participant's experience with reflective journaling was created. This writing process was supported with verbatim quotes from the transcribed interviews and elaborated on with a structural description for each participant. The construction of textural-structural descriptions provided further insights into the essence of the participants' reflective journaling experiences. I synthesized these descriptions to develop a composite description representing the meanings of the experience for the group. Diligently following each step of the PTA process supported my efforts to remain as close as possible to the participants own words in describing their experience. By using the participants' voices, the essence of their experiences were more clearly articulated in the study's findings and contributed to the implications of those findings.

## Interns Lived Experiences of Reflective Journaling

Among the interns' reflective journaling experiences, five themes emerged: 1. journaling as sharing, 2. journaling as seeing, 3. journaling as compliance, 4. journaling as pushing, and 5. journaling as improving. Through reflective journaling, interns shared their experiences, saw connections, wrote to comply, used supervisors' comments to push their thinking, and improved their instructional practice.

**Journaling as Sharing.** "I want to tell my supervisor about this so I have to write it down" (Intern #1). During the school day, interns jotted down quick notes in separate notebooks. Interns wrote down wonderings they had from their mentors' instruction, conferences with specific students, and questions they wanted to ask their supervisors or mentor later on. Interns also took

pictures and videos of both their own and mentors' instruction. These notes and visual artifacts help them remember what happened during the day and gave them a starting point for their electronic weekly reflective journal entries. Interns felt the need to put the supervisor in the situation by informing them of what was happening in the classroom.

**Journaling as Seeing.** "I am always scrolling through. Just seeing...I see so many things click" (Intern #2). Another intern explained that "writing just makes it come to life" (Intern #1). The interns described how writing a reflective journal made them take a step back and recap their week. This practice helped them become more aware of what is occurring in their classrooms. A log of reflections also helped them see their own growth as educators. The electronic journal format provided interns with the ability to scroll back and look at previous entries. While reflecting on her past entries, one intern shared, "I see how [my experiences] connect to something from my methods courses or something else in the classroom. I try to make connections there and use them as an opportunity to really think about what happened" (Intern #3). Reviewing previous reflections invited interns to make connections between readings, methods classes, and classroom experiences.

**Journaling as Compliance.** "I think if it was never a requirement in the beginning, I probably wouldn't" (Intern #2). Interns noted that having a specific due date also gave them a push to write down their reflections and prepare for their own classroom. They knew that their program required a weekly entry and their supervisors would be expecting to respond to a weekly journal entry. While beneficial, interns also voiced their frustrations and current challenges with the program's required reflective journal. At times, the interns were unsure of what to write about. One intern shared, "At times, I do not know what to write about. Some weeks, I have so many ideas questions that I am not sure of myself when I start writing" (Intern #1). It often took her until

the end of the week to select a classroom experience to reflect on. With a Saturday morning deadline, she has less time to write her reflective entries. Another intern wished the program's reflective journal was more guided like the reading response journal in her social studies' method course. Our social studies response journals help me pay attention to the course readings, while paying attention to what is going on in the classroom. I really like the specific focus and purpose of these reflections because it helps me know what to look for in the classroom" (Intern #3). The interns also mentioned that providing initial probing questions would give them a goal to focus on. Interns felt a prompt would have been helpful at the beginning of the year when the interns felt overwhelmed with the newness of their mentors' classrooms.

Yet, one intern made an important connection between her willingness to write and the ways in which the structure of the journal required compliance. She was fearful that a specific prompt might cause her to miss out on important aspects of her classroom. She expressed, "I like the free choice...I am more willing to write it because it's something I want to write about" (Intern #2). When given the choice of what to write about in her reflective journal, she felt more willing to write an entry. Being able to write about something that interested her was extremely important to her written reflection practice.

**Journaling as Pushing.** "It definitely pushes the thoughts further, the conversation further...It's nice that my supervisor is willing to make that go forward, because I am not always thinking about that right away "(Intern 3). Interns description of their supervisors' feedback fell into two categories: 1) Asking questions and 2) Offering suggestions. The supervisors' comments pushed thoughts and conversations further by making interns dig below the surface of their classrooms situations and interactions. All of the interns said that they reviewed the comments left in their journals and reflected on them during the following week. They explained that they scrolled

back through their journal documents reviewing their writing and comments left by their supervisors. This reviewing practice reminded them to hit on specific topics and respond to questions based on the feedback from previous entries. The interns also emphasized the importance of receiving feedback. They struggled to see any purpose in writing a reflective journal if no one was going to read it. The interns desired feedback on how they handled challenging situations, taught specific lessons, and reflected on their classroom experiences.

Since the interns are not required to respond directly to their supervisors' comments, none of the study participants had commented back. One intern felt that she would start responding back to her supervisor's comments as she took over more instructional responsibilities in the classroom during the Spring semester. When presented with the idea of requiring responses to comments, all of the interns responded positively to this potential structural change. While they preferred in-person conversations with their supervisors, they felt that a back and forth trail of written comments could provide the conversational structure to develop this dialogue. The interns shared that requiring them to respond to their supervisors' comments could make them further explain their thinking. Furthermore, writing out their self-reflections would allow them to think more deeply about their experiences. One intern felt a need to keep a notebook near her at all times. If she did not write her initial thoughts down, she felt that it was too challenging to remember them at the end of the week. The interns' perceptions of reflective journaling welcomed the potential change of requiring written responses to supervisors' comments to the interns' current reflective journals.

**Journaling as Improving.** "I think it will help me improve the lessons, that way I am just improving overall" (Intern #3). All three interns saw extreme value in writing a reflective journal and continuing a similar practice into their teaching careers. Interns also mentioned a few

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challenges that they discovered with reflective journaling and potential hindrances for integrating it into their daily practice (e.g. not receiving feedback and finding time). Yet, they considered ways to navigate through these challenges by setting aside time to write and connecting with colleagues in their schools to share reflections. While the interns realized the time constraints and other responsibilities that go into having one's own classroom, the interns planned to continue some type of reflection once entering the field. One intern shared, "I don't think I'll completely stop because I am always asking questions" (Intern #1). The interns expressed that reflective writing is critical for teachers because they will always be asking questions, writing down notes, and working on improving their practice.

### Mentors Lived Experiences of Reflection

Along with gaining insights into the experiences of pre-service teachers, it was also critical to hear the lived experiences of practicing teachers. Mentors teachers from the same PDS partnership reflected on their personal experiences with written reflection and how they supported their interns (participants in this study) in their classrooms. Overall, mentor teachers spoke more generally about their lived experiences with reflection rather than focusing in on reflective journaling and/or written reflection. Three themes emerged from the mentor's experiences with reflection: 1. reflection as recording, 2. reflection as sharing, and 3. reflection as learning. Mentor teachers recorded their reflections, shared their reflections with others, and viewed reflection as a learning opportunity.

**Reflection as Recording.** "If I really want to remember it, I'll do a quick jot on a sticky note" (Mentor #1). Mentors shared that they often recorded quick notes or reminders to themselves on post-it notes. These were done individually for the purpose of revisiting at the end of the day or when they had more time to think about a specific situation. Mentors also reflected on their

practice by writing notes on top of printed lesson plans. They noted what went well and what did not work. Mentors found these notes helpful as they made instructional decisions for upcoming lessons and later when they revisited a lesson plan the following year.

Mentors also mentioned taking anecdotal notes to track students' academic progress. For instance, in conferring journals, teachers marked strategies that students were working on. This strategy allowed other specialists and educators to extend instruction and encouraged mentors to reflect on their conferences with individual students. The process of sharing these recorded reflections overlapped with the second theme.

**Reflection as Sharing.** "[Reflection] happens at the lunch table. Sometimes walking to recess" (Mentor #3). Mentors view reflection as a form of sharing and collaborating with others. Often mentors shared their reflections with a spouse at home. Mentors also found it helpful to share their reflections with colleagues including their interns and grade level teams. They shared these reflections in the lunchroom, at recess, and during team meetings. After collaborating on the development of lesson plans, they often asked one another, "How did the lesson go for you?" (Mentor #2). As mentors shared their reflections with their colleagues, they considered different instructional practices and the diverse learning styles of students in each class.

**Reflection as Learning.** "If I take a closer look at [my instruction] there might be something else to try" (Mentor #4). Whether self-reflecting on the ride home from working, sharing with a colleague, or writing down notes after teaching a lesson, all of the mentors saw reflection as a learning opportunity. Each mentor considered questions such as "How did this go?", "What could I do differently?", and "What will I change for next time?" They used notes from old lesson plans and other resources to improve their instructional practices and student learning. Mentors were interested in taking a closer look and considering what would happen if they tried a

different approach. They strongly believed that there was more than one way to teach a lesson and they acknowledged that educators should always strive to improve their practice.

**Discussion**

There were three major differences between the interns and mentors' perceptions of reflection: 1. focus of reflection, 2. purpose of reflection, and 3. use of reflection. Interns described journaling as a way to reflect on their own instructional strategies, whereas mentors described how reflecting on their practice allowed them to make connections between instruction and student learning. Specifically, interns identified reflection as a way to improve, whereas mentors considered reflection as a way to learning. In fact, the word "improve" was missing from the mentors' responses. The difference between the interns' use of improving and the mentors' use of learning was seen in the ways participants described the purpose of reflection. Interns focused on improving their own abilities to teach, whereas mentors used learning to describe how reflecting helped them improve student learning experiences. The final difference was seen in how the interns and mentors used reflection in their daily practice. Interns described written reflection as a regular habit, while mentors described reflection as a regular mindset. This difference could be accounted for by the reflective journal requirement of the PDS internship.

The interview data revealed that the sharing of interns' reflective journals between mentors and interns was limited. Occasionally, interns asked their mentors to take pictures and/or videos for them to use in their reflective journal, but overall mentors did not know what their pre-service teachers were reflecting on in their weekly journals. Mentors expressed that sharing the interns' reflective journals would allow the mentors to see more of the interns' thinking. This would also help them point out areas of growth, encourage interns to continue trying new practices, and share reflections among the triad. Two mentors also noted how this shared journal would be beneficial

for their own reflection as they reflect on the interns' reflections. However, the mentors expressed some concerns with sharing the document. One mentor shared, "I have never really thought to ask [my intern] because it is a little place for them to voice things or a way of letting frustrations out" (Mentor #2). This mentor's quote highlights the value of having a safe space for interns to privately express any concerns they might be having.

The interns shared that they wanted their supervisors to read and comment on their reflective journal entries. The interns noted that their supervisors' non-evaluative comments pushed their thinking and led to deeper reflections on their internship experiences. Similarly, the literature on reflective journaling supports that taking a non-evaluative stance on reviewing reflective journals by providing stimulating questions and providing further insights can reduce pre-service teachers' reliance on supervisors' feedback and evaluation (e.g. Gipe & Richards, 1992; Lee, 2008; Knapp, 2012). Despite the interns' supervisors leaving comments, interns noted that it was not common practice for them to respond directly in their journals. This disconnect highlights a missed opportunity with the technology offered through an electronic journal. Requiring pre-service teachers to respond to their mentor's questions and comments could help them move past a descriptive account of their classroom experiences to more in-depth reflections based on Van Man's Stage Theory of Reflection (1977).

Interns' descriptions of journaling were synonymous with reflection. Yet, written reflection is one mode of reflection (Bean & Stevens, 2002). Mentors detailed experiences with each modality of reflection including verbal, written, and self-reflection. This study highlighted the difference between interns and mentors understandings of reflection, which emphasizes the need for pre-service teachers to develop broader understandings of reflection. Encouraging pre-service teachers to interview their mentor teachers about their reflective practices or constructing a joint

reflection with the assistance of their mentor offers two suggestions for helping pre-service develop a more inclusive understanding of reflective practice.

## Conclusion

Pedro (2005) pushed the field of teacher education by posing the following question: "…What other forms of writing reflections can teacher educators use to teach pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their practice?" (p. 63). In response, this study suggests the use of reflective journaling as a means for critical reflection and the improvement of one's practice. Reflective journaling can be a helpful tool to encourage and monitor the development of reflective thinking among pre-service teachers (e.g. Bain et al., 2002; Chubbuck, 2010; Davis, 2003; Good & Whang, 2002; Knapp, 2012; LaBelle & Belknap, 2015; Lee, 2008; Pedro, 2005; Shin, 2006). Specifically, reflective journaling invites the author to revisit previous entries and focus in on specific areas of growth (e.g. Pedro, 2005; Killeavy & Maloney, 2010). This study demonstrated the positive impact of reflective journals on teacher candidates' development while also aligning with research on the challenges with reflection (e.g. Pedro, 2005; Maloney & Campbell-Evans, 2005). Because this study focused on a small group in one PDS context, further research should analyze the influence of reflective journaling more broadly. Future research may investigate how reflective journal acts as a mean to support the dispositional growth and help pre-service teachers grasp the complexity of theory with classroom practice (LaBelle & Belknap, 2015). The study's findings suggest that in order to promote authentic and meaningful reflective thinking among pre-service teachers, teacher educators should consider how to refine reflective journaling in their teacher education programs and ways to promote critical reflection without diminishing the authentic voices of teachers' candidates (Davis, 2003; Pultorak,1996; Knapp, 2012).

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# A Teacher Educator's Substitute Teaching as an Opportunity for University Students' Significant Learning: A Qualitative Study

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A teacher educator is constantly trying to work towards a solution for the problem of his or her university students being and feeling unprepared as they enter the K-12 classroom for the first time. The problem of unpreparedness is evident in reports first-year teachers complete and in the national attrition rate. One teacher educator's idea to address this problem was to offer her university students more time in the field, more time in real world classrooms outside of structured internship experiences, through accompanying her on K-12 substitute teaching jobs she did in the local school system. From the perspectives of the teacher educator and the university students with whom she included in these substitute teaching jobs, this idea of offering more opportunities to work in classrooms together paid off. Within the substitute teaching experience, the teacher educator was able to provide for her university students direct instruction, immediate feedback, positive reinforcement, and experiential learning while they worked together with children. The university students had carefully supported and positive teaching experiences, and as qualitative data showed, these experiences led to deep, significant learning about the complexity and multi-dimensionality of K-12 inclusive classroom teaching. These significant learning experiences influenced the pre-service teachers' confidence in a positive way and made them feel more prepared to enter their first K-12 inclusive classroom in the very near future.

This study proposed to answer the following research question:
- In what ways does substitute teaching with a teacher educator influence a university student's learning and perception of preparedness for teaching?

**Introduction**

In addition to the task of preparing university students to be effective K-12 teachers, teacher educators' roles also include engaging in research and staying connected to what is happening in K-12 schools. One of the benefits of a teacher educator staying connected to local K-12 schools is the relationship built that connects the university and the K-12 school system which can only help a teacher educator's university teaching to stay aligned with what is happening in current K-12 classrooms and focused on what is most important. Substitute teaching keeps a teacher educator current and opens a door for more practical experience opportunities for university students. Having solid relationships with people in K-12 schools also enables a teacher educator to engage in organic research and evaluation of her own university students situated in the most natural and appropriate context, the K-12 classroom.

All educators, whether they are teaching first graders or adults, strive to promote significant learning in their students. Significant learning is deep understanding of something, a whole picture, a complete awareness (Fink, 2013). Significant learning impacts a student for life and can shape his or her personal philosophy about the world. Pre-service teachers are exposed to a variety of university courses on campus and online about K-12 teaching in their preparation programs, but are most directly affected, at a significant level, by what they personally experience (Hanline, 2010).

We know the benefits of pre-service teachers engaging in extensive, intensive internship K-12 school placements throughout their university preparation, and teacher education programs have internship and field experiences structured into most of their courses, yet the problem of unpreparedness still exists. Internships have detailed syllabi with specific assignments, there are checklists provided that tell students exactly what they need to do, and oftentimes field experiences

are reflected upon in college courses with guidance and feedback from professors; these types of real-world experiences are beneficial, but are very structured and prescribed. Consider that an unstructured, non-prescribed, authentic experience in a K-12 classroom with an experienced teacher educator giving direct instruction, immediate feedback, and positive reinforcement on the spot for university students acting on their feet, spontaneously, and in the moment, provides a nice complement to the structured internship experience. A teacher educator's K-12 substitute teaching can provide such a complimentary educational experience for university students.

**Enhancing Teacher Preparation Programs through Teacher Educators Work in K-12 Schools**

It is an alarming fact that 3 out of every 10 teachers in America (teachers across all content areas) leave their teaching positions within the first 5 years of teaching (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). If teacher educators include their university students in more time spent acting as teachers in K-12 classrooms, working with students in real-life contexts, then this extra experience may help teachers feel a bit more prepared, possibly influencing them to acclimate quicker and stay in their teaching positions longer. Pre-service teachers need all the experience they can get to practice and generalize new pedagogical skills, build self-confidence and assurance, and fuel the passion they felt when they chose to become a teacher. When teachers feel unprepared, frustration and dissatisfaction may result which leads to attrition (Tyler & Brunner, 2014), so extra, creative efforts to improve teacher preparation programs are necessary.

Teacher educators using K-12 substitute teaching work as an opportunity for further pre-service teacher learning can be considered an alternative approach to traditional programming referred to as multicomponent training (MCT). Multicomponent training includes coaching and feedback, training with follow-up activities, and lecture or presentation followed by ongoing feedback on teachers' performance (Horrocks & Morgan, 2011). Some traditional approaches that

include training, lecture, or presentation only, lack valuable follow-up experience and opportunities for skill generalization. Direct and ongoing feedback are also valuable learning experiences that are absent from some traditional approaches to teacher preparation. Multicomponent training for teachers has a strong research base suggesting preparation programs that offer a variety of diverse components can be highly effective in preparing K-12 teachers for the real act of teaching (Brown, Stephenson, & Carter, 2014).

Teacher preparation program efforts to prepare university students for inclusive education are critical and can be limited due to a tight general education curriculum. The teacher educator/researcher in this study has a special education background and the university students who accompanied her in substitute teaching jobs were general education pre-service teachers. This extra time spent subbing in inclusive classrooms with a teacher educator with extensive special education teaching experience proved an enlightening, enriching experience for university students whose experience with students with disabilities was limited. This unique opportunity answers the call from Pugach, Blanton, and Boveda (2014) to redesign teacher education for the benefit of students with disabilities by rethinking the pre-service curriculum.

Engaging in unstructured substitute teaching experiences with a teacher educator and engaging in field experiences in well-constructed university internship courses both provide instruction to university students aligned with higher education teacher preparation standards from authorities including the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and InTASC. Both of these accrediting agencies stress the importance of developing the skill of being able to collaborate and co-teach with other professionals. This may be difficult to make happen in a traditional internship situation (Miller & Stayton, 2003), but easily facilitated in a substitute teaching situation where a university student is working directly alongside an experienced teacher educator. Substitute

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teaching in schools may even offer a more appropriate environment for teacher educators to work with their university students on certain standards such as InTASC Standard 1(c) The teacher collaborates with families, communities, colleagues, and other professionals to promote learner growth and development (CCSSO InTASC, 2011), and CEC Standard 4.3 Collaborate with colleagues from other agencies to improve services and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities (CEC, 2011).

**Field Experiences**

The research on the value of field experience for university students is solid. We know that real-world experiences have a positive effect on a university student's knowledge and skills (Hanline, 2010), and that with field experience, university coursework becomes more meaningful fostering a more integrated understanding of the teaching and learning process (O'Brian, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007). Even though field experiences are the best source of acquiring the practical skills of teaching, there have been issues identified with field experiences that require our attention. Moore (2003) discusses how the focus of internship experiences oftentimes is on classroom routines and procedures, meanwhile instructional decision-making, practicing inquiry-oriented teaching, and reflecting on one's own practice takes a back seat. Guiding university students to engage in more field experiences with a teacher educator substitute teaching in K-12 classrooms may be just the right forum to pick up on the opportunity to practice instructional decision-making, inquiry-oriented teaching, and then reflecting immediately on the real experience, all with guidance and support from the teacher educator.

The challenge of preparing all university students for inclusive education with diverse students becomes more feasible with more opportunities in the field. In a study with university students in general education teacher preparation programs, Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch,

Bosma, and Rouse (2007) found students who received additional projects and field experiences showed the most growth with instructional knowledge and competence for inclusive practice. After an examination of some issues around traditional field experiences, Moore (2003) suggests the need for a change in the way we structure field experiences for university students by developing more experiences that allow time for reflection and examination providing more opportunities to understand how to connect the theory behind teaching to the actual practice of doing it. Teacher educators bringing their university students into the K-12 schools for on-the-job training with immediate feedback provides more teaching moments for university students in which thoughtful reflection and examination can be done. These opportunities can offer significant learning in connecting the theory university students learn in the university classroom, directly to the application of that theory with actual children in classrooms; and this learning is supported both in the university classroom and in the field by the same person, the teacher educator.

**One Teacher Educator's Story**

I left the full-time elementary classroom 4 years ago; I traded in my stickers, tennis shoes, and kids' music CDs at the elementary school for scholarly textbooks, heels, and scheduled office hours at the university. This drastic change has taught me many things including the realization that this change is not that drastic. Students are students, teaching is teaching, and learning is learning. When I wanted to teach social skills to my Kindergarten students I would take them to the playground and coach them while we played together with other students. I would capture critical moments, directly teach in that natural environment in the real moment, model appropriate social skills, reinforce students' efforts at enacting those social skills, and encourage them to build upon and generalize that learning. I'm doing the same thing at the university level teaching

pedagogical skills to my university students. I take my university students into K-12 classrooms and coach them while we work together with children. I capture critical moments, directly teach in that natural environment in the real moment, model appropriate pedagogical skills, reinforce students' efforts at enacting those pedagogical skills, and encourage them to build upon and generalize that learning. My substitute teaching in K-12 schools has provided a forum for this extended learning that helps me be a more effective teacher educator, it helps my university students learn to think on their feet while teaching, it supports the schools, and it supports the children with whom we all are committed to serving.

## Methodology

This study explored how substitute teaching with a teacher educator (the researcher) influenced university students' learning and perceptions of preparedness for teaching. Using a qualitative approach, written responses to open-ended questions from university students gathered on a Reflection Form, immediately after their substitute teaching experience with the researcher, were analyzed. This qualitative data was collected over the course of 3 semesters.

## Participants

In a mid-sized university in the western part of the United States, undergraduate students studying Teacher Education, Kindergarten through Grade 12 General Education, all must take 2 Introduction to Education classes. All Teacher Education students focusing on Elementary Education must take an Including Students with Exceptionalities class. Over the course of 3 consecutive semesters, the researcher taught all 3 of these classes and offered the substitute teaching experience to every student in each of these 3 classes across 3 semesters. The researcher explained the Reflection Form and let students know completion of the Reflection Form after substitute teaching was optional. A total of 25 different undergraduate students voluntarily chose

to complete Reflection Forms after substitute teaching with the researcher. A total of 34 Reflection Forms were analyzed; 7 participants substitute taught with the researcher multiple times. Twenty-three participants were female, 2 participants were male. The age range of the 25 participants was 20-38 years; the mean age being 23 years, the mode 21 years. The Reflection Form included a section explaining how the students' responses may be used and granted consent to participate with a signature. All Teacher Education students must submit fingerprints and pass a background check as a part of the Teacher Education department application process, and this satisfied local K-12 school volunteer requirements as well. Participants were asked by the local K-12 school district to complete a simple volunteer form before substitute teaching with the researcher.

## Analysis

Charmaz (2009) outlines steps for conducting a constant comparison analysis of qualitative data that the researcher followed, recognizing that this method is not a linear process; it is cyclic and the researcher constantly went back over data, codes, themes, and memos throughout the entire process of data analysis.

1) Read and re-read all responses from Reflection Forms, and open coded word-by-word and/or line-by-line. Coding means attaching words or phrases to themes/concepts/constructs that the researcher saw in the data. The researcher decided which data were relevant to her codes and where the data fit into the codes.

2) During the coding process, the researcher wrote memos from her own perspective about what the data was saying to her personally. This space was used to explore ideas, think about the data, analyze, compare, synthesize, find relationships, and look for gaps. The memo-writing was done in an informal manner.

3) Throughout the coding and memo-writing process the researcher compared data with data to find similarities and differences. Sequential comparisons across time and events were made.

4) Open coding turned into focused coding which provided codes that were more directed, selective, and conceptual. These codes began to synthesize, explain, and represent larger chunks of data. The researcher compared category with category, and category with concept which ended with abstract concepts of how the researcher saw learning and perceptions of preparedness for teaching from her university students.

## Results

The researcher constructed three concepts from the constant comparison analysis (Charmaz, 2009) of the qualitative data from the Reflection Forms.

1) University students felt more prepared to teach in diverse environments because the substitute teaching experience "showed" them, enabled them to "feel", and "exposed" them to different classrooms and different students so they got to see what teaching "really means" and "looks like" through connections they made between theory (what they were learning in their university classes) and practice (substitute teaching).

2) University students appreciated the substitute teaching experience because it taught them new, more accurate information, helping them dispel inaccurate assumptions they once held.

3) University students learned new teaching strategies, positive behavior supports, cues, tricks, and activities to use in their future teaching.

University students reported solid connections they made between theory and practice during the substitute teaching experiences. Students made some of those connections

independently; some were explicitly described and pointed out in the moment by the researcher. These connections seemed to be interpreted by the students through their senses, experientially; "this experience showed me", "what inclusion really means and looks like", "feeling the energy", "I got exposure to a range of differences", "seeing how important it is", "hear how these students interacted during instruction", "able to capture the diversity", "see how helpful", "feel more prepared", "seeing their curiosity", "getting hands on experience", "amazing to watch", "seeing how to adapt". Students reported that making these concrete connections made them feel more prepared to teach in the near future.

University students described learning new information about students and teaching during the substitute teaching experience. They admitted believing things about students and teaching that the substitute teaching experience showed them to be incorrect. Students seemed to have unlearned and then relearned things about students, the inclusive classroom, and the art and science of teaching. "I also learned special education students are not very distracting", "realizing that there are so many differing levels of learning", "keep going with a new activity even though some of the students may need to step away", "I had no previous experience". This new learning surprised students and they described how before this experience, they believed something different. Students reported learning new things about themselves as well; "I could easily teach both older and younger students".

University students reported learning new practical tools and strategies in the substitute teaching experience that they planned to use in their future teaching. "Need more of one on one attention", "little words of encouragement can go a long way", "I learned some tricks", "I learned a few techniques to help students sit (behavioral rewards)", "by moving around and offering brain breaks students were focused on reading", "the stations helped engage/differentiate for all levels",

"I learned how to incorporate visual aids". University students were excited to list the different strategies, positive behavior supports, cues, tricks, and activities they saw enacted in the classrooms and said they would use these in their future teaching.

**University Student Perspectives**

Asking university students to spend extra time with their teacher educator (the researcher), outside of scheduled university classes, engaging in work that is not a course requirement, and in their free time, can be an impossible feat, until the university students try it, see the benefits of the experience, and love it.

"Working with the young children… was so much fun! We were playing with alphabet puzzles and books with manipulatives, and all of a sudden I realized I was teaching!"

"I saw how closely the parents were watching me and realized how thankful they were that I was working with their child on something educational. I explained the activity to the parents and they were really interested about how I used the toys to really get their child interested in the book."

"I really enjoyed going to…, I was able to ask her (the researcher) a lot of questions and I felt so much more comfortable working with the (students) knowing she was right there the whole time. I definitely want to go back and spend some more time there."

"…was really fun and I got to see her (the researcher) as a real teacher working with young kids and not just a professor in our classroom on campus. I want to be like her when I start teaching, and have fun with the kids like she does."

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**Discussion**

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Qualitative data analyzed from university student responses on a Reflection Form after substitute teaching with their teacher educator (researcher) indicated the presence of significant

experiences and significant learning. From this real-world field experience and practical learning comes the perception of better preparedness for teaching. Experiencing and learning in the actual context in which the university students are heading must add to their perception of preparedness and increase their confidence. The reporting of their connections made in the substitute teaching experience via descriptions of learning through their senses made the learning more concrete and real for students, adding to the deep, significant level the learning was happening. Experiential learning at this whole body, kinesthetic level also increases feelings of better preparedness for doing this same thing, teaching diverse learners in an active classroom environment, again. Significant learning that dispels inaccurate assumptions and forces one to unlearn and then relearn something new also adds to the idea that one is even more ready to face a new task and succeed.

For university students in Teacher Education, being offered as many different opportunities to work in K-12 classrooms as possible is beneficial in many ways. Accompanying their professor while substitute teaching provides one more unique opportunity for so much more exposure to the teaching experience and enables students to pick up more skills, strategies, tools, and tricks to use in their future teaching.

## Conclusion

This paper discussed the idea of a teacher educator using her substitute teaching work in local K-12 classrooms as an option for more significant learning for her university students. Reasons why this may be a good option for university students to become and feel more prepared to teach in schools were offered. This paper also shared the successful experience of one teacher educator and her university students. There is one important consideration and voice missing thus far which is ultimately the most important voice to be heard; that of the K-12 children in the community. Not only is this idea of more work in classrooms helpful for teacher educators and

enriching for university students, it more fully supports children in local schools. Schools serving children face serious issues including adults being spread thin, not enough hours in the day to spend working individually with each student, limited time for collaboration between professionals, and difficulty keeping all learners engaged at the same time. Teacher educators and their university students spending time in K-12 classrooms and supporting children directly can help everyone and teaches us all to work cooperatively together for the same cause, to effectively educate children.

"Meaningful work with children and families in practica and internships holds the key to effective performance as a professional who is confident in meeting diverse abilities and needs" (Miller, Ostrosky, Laumann, Thorpe, Sanchez, & Fader-Dunne, 2003, p. 113).

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**Listen and Advise Mentor Program (LAMP):**

**A Pilot Program for Mentoring Beginning Teachers**

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**Abstract**

Even though teacher candidates may successfully complete a rigorous teacher education program, they may need additional support during the first year of teaching. A mentor can listen to concerns, empathize with the complexities of classroom life, guide a positive decision-making process, and provide encouragement and resources. This personal relationship enables a first-year teacher to glean from the wisdom the mentor has to offer, which can potentially lead to a successful career for the beginning teacher. However, with the current demands placed on many experienced classroom teachers, beginning teachers often are not offered a mentor program. This pilot program is a potential solution for mentoring beginning teachers, as university faculty members fulfill that role for recent graduates. Faculty, who have been vested in the success of teacher candidates during their undergraduate program, have the opportunity to continue their positive influence through the role of a mentor during the candidate's first year of teaching. The prior teacher-student rapport between the teacher educator and teacher candidate offers a strong foundation for a successful mentor-protégé relationship. This initiative seeks to not only afford first-year teachers with effective mentorship but also use the data to promote program improvement. As teacher educators listen and provide advice and resources to beginning teachers, they learn more about the current climate of the profession, remain up to date with current practices, and provide a contextual framework for guiding other teacher candidates.

Mentoring has been defined in a number of ways by many researchers in the past twenty years. From business administration to technology to education, all genres have considered the best ways to use mentors. Proper use of mentoring relationship attempts to incorporate the individual's knowledge to assist the "newbies" into learning the area needed quicker (Ambrosetti, 2014; Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008; Aora, 2014). Mentors have been shown to be a productive way to gain an advantage on the competition as well as increase the learning curve of the new employee to allow for improved productivity. Definitions and ideas on what is traditionally considered a mentoring relationship varies depending on the setting or the company or business using the mentor.

Mentoring programs in former research show a multitude of advantages for the individuals involved, both for the mentor, the protégé, and the company using the system. Results also show positive changes in the work environment, practices, habits, and self-care. Reductions in turnover rates and feelings of isolation are prevented along with enhanced productivity, job satisfaction and a resilient workforce are all areas that have stemmed from following a well-run mentor program. (Ambrosetti, 2014; Aora, 2014; Fries-Britt, S., & Snider, J., 2015; Lakhani, 2015; Weeks, 2015).

**Mentoring in Educational Setting**

The mentoring job is one that should be considered a primary responsibility for the person chosen.  The mentor can make or break the beginning teacher's decision of continuing on in their career path or of choosing another career or dropping out of teaching. One of the most common responses given by teacher attrition research is that beginning teachers do not feel equipped to handle the day-by-day stress of teaching on their own (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016). Many public and private schools have mentor programs which can provide a small measure of assistance to the beginning teacher once hired (Sempowicz, T. & Hudson, P., 2012; Waterman & Ye, 2011).

Most often the mentor chosen is one assigned by the administrator, an experienced professional that already has too many things on their plate to fit in one more requirement to their already busy day.

The current research focuses on the educational setting of using mentors for the first-year employed teacher. The definition of a mentor used for this research combines and consolidates the terms used in former studies to gear it specifically to the education professional. The working definition for this research is the following: a skilled and knowledgeable professional teacher supporting, engaging, guiding and changing another less experienced instructor in the same field through reciprocal, confidential, non-judgmental, mentee-centered conversations or other communication (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Klinge, 2015; Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008; Ring, 2015; Sempowicz, T. & Hudson, P., 2012; Waterman & Ye, 2011).

**Benefits from Education Mentor programs**

As in coaching, advising, and teaching, mentoring is more focused on the relationship between the mentor and protégé than on the specific actions taken by either individual. Communication formats varied in previous research with no real significant difference in results due to face-to-face or online relationship. The focus of the mentor/protégé relationship should be on the needs of the protégé. Mentors will gain improved professional learning, see reduced stress, and often enhance their own productivity when progressing through a mentor relationship even when they are the ones giving advice. The benefits derived by both sides of the relationship are impactful to the educational system itself.

Previous research has shown three main areas that should be emphasized when beginning a mentoring program. The first area to address is that the protégé and mentor should be in different locations or schools. Advantages occurred quicker when the relationship formed outside their own

work environment. A professional distance allowed honesty in discussions and trust in confidentiality of communication between the mentor and protégé that did not happen as well when both participants were working in the same location. The protégés were more relaxed and open in conversations if the mentor did not have a direct connection to the same work environment.

Secondly, changes materialized for the mentor as well as the protégé within both the personal attitude toward the teaching and within the educational systems each was a part of. In a mentoring relationship the focus should be on what the protégé needs to talk about; however, the mentor will gain valuable insight and experience by listening to the concerns. Reviewing and reflecting on the best advice and answers to give to the protégé assists the mentor in extending their own professional learning. Sharing the pros and cons of the teaching day with another individual improves the focus, confidence, and problem-solving abilities in both individuals (Klinge, 2015; Sempowicz, T. & Hudson, P., 2012; Waterman & Ye, 2011). A third emphasis in a well-run mentor program should be on choosing the mentor not only for their experience within the profession but on the combination of the mentor's personality with that of the protégé. Since the mentoring needs to be a relationship between the two, mutual respect and advantages can result. If one school system is going through major reforms or changes this mentor relationship can be especially important for both the beginner and the experienced teacher.

## Methodology

The study occurred over the course of thirteen months. The initial stages of gaining access to participants began at the end of the spring semester of 2015. The pilot mentor program occurred during the 2015-2016 school year. Participants included teacher candidates (protégés), who currently completed their student teaching during the spring semester of 2015 and faculty (mentors) in a College of Education in a small university in the southwest.

All teacher candidates who had recently completed their student teaching during the spring semester of 2015 were sent an email at the end of the semester inviting them to participate in the study that next year. The participant consent form for the teacher candidates was also sent as an attachment with the recruitment email. This gave candidates time to examine the expectations of the study before agreeing to participate in the study. Access to candidate emails was gained through the Teacher Education Office. A copy of the candidate consent form was given and signed at the final student teaching seminar in May of 2015. If a candidate agreed to participate, this seminar was a requirement for student teaching and not an addition for this study. During this time, the candidate completed the application form which served as an initial questionnaire.

When a candidate was hired as a full-time teacher in a school district for the 2015-2016 school year, he or she met the criteria to participate in the study and entered into the status of a protégé. Protégés contacted the researchers when they had secured employment and were eligible to participate in the study. Assignment of mentors occurred at the end of the summer of 2015, as the number of participants were confirmed. Of the twenty-eight teacher candidates who completed their student teaching that semester, eleven protégés volunteered for the study.

College of Education faculty was sent an email at the end of the spring 2015 semester, inviting them to participate in the study. The faculty participant consent form was sent as an attachment along with the recruitment email. This gave the faculty member time to examine the expectations of the study before agreeing to participate. Access to faculty emails was gained through the COE Dean's Office. A copy of the faculty consent form and the initial questionnaire were mailed to each faculty member through campus mail, from which access was gained through the campus directory. This prevented faculty from having to make copies of the documents. The questionnaire was used to effectively match the faculty member with a protégé. The questionnaire

was designed to determine mentorship experience and areas of expertise. When the documents were completed, the faculty member entered the status of a mentor. Assignment of protégés occurred at the end of the summer of 2015, as the participation of mentors and protégés was confirmed. Nine faculty members volunteered, and the number of mentors did not match the number of protégés. Therefore, two faculty members agreed to mentor two protégés.

During the pilot program, the mentor was responsible for initiating interaction with the protégé at least two times per month. The interactions were done in a variety of ways: email, mail, social media, face to face, or by phone. The mentor was not required to make on-site visits to the protégé's classroom. After each contact, the mentor documented the interaction using a mentor log. The log required the mentor to record the date, circle the format of the interaction (email, mail, social media, face to face, or phone), list the issues and/or topics discussed, and take notes if needed.

At the end of the program, protégés were emailed a final questionnaire (Appendix A) and asked to return the form electronically. Mentors were also asked to complete a final questionnaire (Appendix B), which was given to them during the final mentor meeting. In addition to the interactions with their protégé, mentors were asked to participate in two meetings. Before the mentor relationship began with their protégé, the researchers met with the mentors to collaborate and draw upon their expertise as a teacher educator. During this meeting, the group discussed mentoring, establish objectives, and reviewed expectations. At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, the researchers met with the mentors again to revisit what was discussed at the initial meeting. During this meeting, the mentors were asked to complete a final questionnaire that was being used to investigate their perceptions of the pilot program and their effectiveness as a mentor. The

meetings were approximately two hours and occurred on a time and day that was most convenient for all mentors. The meetings were recorded using a digital recorder and the researchers took notes.

## Results and Findings

Categories derived from State teacher competencies included: curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, classroom management, teacher/student relationship, and professionalism. From these sections the protégé and mentor results averaged between 4.125 and 6.125 meaning that all components were valued by both participating groups. The chart below assists in visualizing how important having a mentor during the first year of teaching was to the protégé in every section. Protégés perception of the mentorship experience was more beneficial than perceived by the mentor participants.

Y-Axis
Strongly Agree = 7    Agree = 6    Somewhat Agree = 5    Neutral = 4    Somewhat Disagree = 3    Disagree = 2    Strongly Disagree = 1
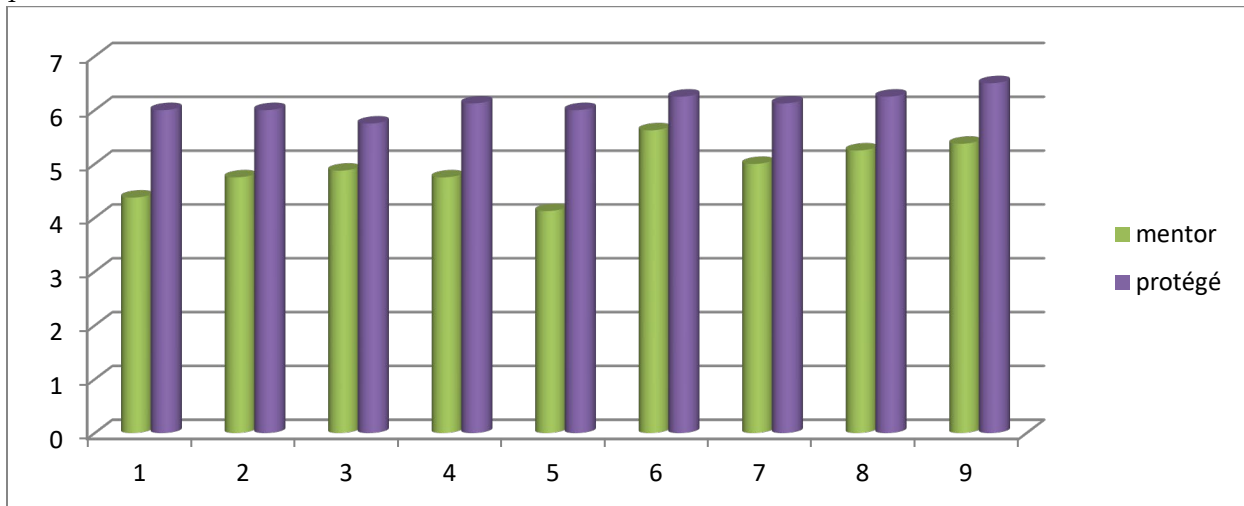


X-Axis
1. Accurately demonstrating knowledge of the content area and approved curriculum.
2. Appropriately utilizing a variety of teaching methods and resources for each area taught.
3. Communicating with and obtaining feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding.
4. Comprehending the principles of student growth, development and learning, and applying them appropriately.
5. Effectively utilizing student assessment techniques and procedures.

6. Managing the educational setting in a manner that promotes positive student behavior and a safe and healthy environment.
7. Recognizing student diversity and creating an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self-concept.
8. Demonstrating a willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate.
9. Working productively with colleagues, parents and community members.

According to the data, mentors perceived the most influential category #6 classroom management (M=5.625). However, the protégés felt that classroom management was their second highest ranked element (M=6.25). #9 professionalism (M=6.5) was where the protégé felt the mentor made the most impact (M=6.5). Mentors agreed ranking professionalism (M=5.25) second to assessment. The lowest recognized competency by both groups was in the area of assessment. Due to assessment being evaluated with two separate emphasis areas, one being feedback another being techniques and procedures; none the less all participants identified this area as neutral (M=4.875 and M= 4.125).

From the qualitative comments, professionalism was perceived to be the most impactful area, assisting the protégé in colleague relationships and communication. Other themes emerging from the comments made on the final questionnaire were;

- Mentor served as an encourager to protégé.

- Electronic communication, such as personal email and text, was the primary mode of interaction and also served as a neutral space for communication.

- Mentors sent tangible resources to their protégé through the mail.

- Interactions waned during the second semester.

- Protégés reported that they felt their mentor listened through the electronic modes of communication.

- Protégé initiated contacts.

- Protégés believed they could become mentors to future beginning teachers.

- Mentors gained insight into the needs of a beginning teacher.

**Conclusion**

Producing job satisfaction and holistic support for first year teachers is a big task for the educational systems and specifically for principals at small schools. Having a mentor program can enhance the experience the novice teacher can have especially as they go through the change from student to teacher. Extending the experienced teacher's professional learning while enhancing productivity of both individuals can only make a positive impact on the educational systems and produce a well-rounded education for all students. Mentors participating in this program would have a better idea of what first-year teachers experience, thereby giving them better insight into what the senior student should be ready for prior to graduation from the program. Field experiences and student teaching do not always cover the core areas that a first- year teacher will encounter during their first employment opportunity. Having a mentor will assist the novice instructor in continued development and encourage sustained support for the rookie educator.

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## Appendix A
## Final Questionnaire – Protégé

This questionnaire is designed to learn more about your experience in this mentor program during your first year of teaching. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Your participation will be confidential. Your participation or non-participation in this research will not affect your grade in any class nor your relationship with any faculty member, program, or the university. No information from this study or that might link you to this study will be share with your current or prospective employer without your expressed, written permission.

| | |
|---|---|
| Protégé: | |
| School: | |
| District: | |
| Grade Level: | |
| Content Area: | |
| Mentor: | |

Strongly Agree = 7    Agree = 6    Somewhat Agree = 5    Neutral = 4    Somewhat Disagree = 3    Disagree = 2    Strongly Disagree = 1

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Having a mentor during my first year of teaching was a beneficial experience. | | | | | | | |
| 2. I appreciated having someone to contact when I needed help. | | | | | | | |
| 3. Interaction between my mentor and me helped me grow as a professional. | | | | | | | |
| 4. If I had the opportunity, I would like to continue receiving mentorship during my second year. | | | | | | | |
| 5. My mentor listened to me. | | | | | | | |
| 6. My mentor provided me with valuable advice. | | | | | | | |
| 7. My mentor provided me with valuable resources. | | | | | | | |
| 8. I recommend that all teachers have mentor during their first year of teaching. | | | | | | | |
| **My mentor helped me in the following areas:** | | | | | | | |
| 9. Accurately demonstrating knowledge of the content area and approved curriculum. | | | | | | | |
| 10. Appropriately utilizing a variety of teaching methods and resources for each area taught. | | | | | | | |
| 11. Communicating with and obtaining feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding. | | | | | | | |
| 12. Comprehending the principles of student growth, development and learning, and applying them appropriately. | | | | | | | |
| 13. Effectively utilizing student assessment techniques and procedures. | | | | | | | |
| 14. Managing the educational setting in a manner that promotes positive student behavior and a safe and healthy environment. | | | | | | | |
| 15. Recognizing student diversity and creating an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self-concept. | | | | | | | |
| 16. Demonstrating a willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate. | | | | | | | |
| 17. Working productively with colleagues, parents and community members. | | | | | | | |

18. Interaction with my mentor occurred through the following ways (Circle or highlight all that apply):
    o   Email
    o   Face-to-face
    o   By phone
    o   Social media
    o   Mail
    o   Text messaging

19. How often did you typically interact with your mentor?


20. In what ways was your mentor valuable to you?


21. What would you have changed about this program?




*This document is for the use of this mentor program and will not be shared with any school district.*




Thank you for participating in this program!

## Appendix B
## Final Questionnaire - Mentor

This questionnaire is designed to learn more about your experience in this mentor program during your first year of teaching. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Your participation will be confidential. Your participation or non-participation in this research will not affect your relationship with any faculty member, program, or the university. No information from this study or that might link you to this study will be share with your current or prospective employer without your expressed, written permission.

| | |
|---|---|
| Mentor: | |
| Protégé: | |

Strongly Agree = 7    Agree = 6    Somewhat Agree = 5    Neutral = 4    Somewhat Disagree = 3    Disagree = 2    Strongly Disagree = 1

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mentoring my protégé was a beneficial experience for me. | | | | | | | |
| 2. My protégé was appreciative of my mentorship. | | | | | | | |
| 3. Interaction between my protégé and me helped me grow as a teacher educator. | | | | | | | |
| 4. If I had the opportunity, I would like to continue mentoring my protégé during his/her second year of teaching. | | | | | | | |
| 5. I listened to my protégé. | | | | | | | |
| 6. I provided my protégé with valuable advice. | | | | | | | |
| 7. I provided my protégé with valuable resources. | | | | | | | |
| 8. I recommend that all teacher educators mentor a teacher during his/her first year of teaching. | | | | | | | |
| **I helped my protégé professional develop in the following areas:** | | | | | | | |
| 9. Accurately demonstrating knowledge of the content area and approved curriculum. | | | | | | | |
| 10. Appropriately utilizing a variety of teaching methods and resources for each area taught. | | | | | | | |
| 11. Communicating with and obtaining feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding. | | | | | | | |
| 12. Comprehending the principles of student growth, development and learning, and applying them appropriately. | | | | | | | |
| 13. Effectively utilizing student assessment techniques and procedures. | | | | | | | |
| 14. Managing the educational setting in a manner that promotes positive student behavior and a safe and healthy environment. | | | | | | | |
| 15. Recognizing student diversity and creating an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self-concept. | | | | | | | |
| 16. Demonstrating a willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate. | | | | | | | |
| 17. Working productively with colleagues, parents and community members. | | | | | | | |

18. Interaction with my protégé occurred through the following ways (Circle or highlight all that apply):
    a. Email
    b. Face-to-face
    c. By phone
    d. Social media
    e. Mail
    f. Text messaging

19. How often did you typically interact with your protégé?

20. In what ways was this experience valuable to your protégé?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

21. What would you have changed about this program?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

22. Did this experience help you become a more effective teacher educator? If so, how?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

# Teacher Candidates' Perceptions and Field Experiences with Components of RTI

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## Abstract

Teacher candidates are entering the field with concerns regarding their ability to implement key components of Response to Intervention (RTI). This research study explores teacher candidates' (*n* = 169) perceptions and field experiences with components (e.g. screening, multi-tiered evidence-based intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making) of RTI. Results show between group differences in perception and experiences with each component of RTI. Participants noted benefits from or a desire for knowledgeable mentor teachers, observing the components of RTI being implemented, and opportunities to implement RTI with a wide range of students.

*Keywords:* teacher candidates, response to intervention, RTI, fieldwork, field experience

## Introduction

A major challenge facing educator preparation programs (EPPs) is preparing teacher candidates to be effective educators with students of all academic and behavioral levels. In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) required educators to provide instructional support to all students experiencing difficulties and to document the effectiveness of the strategies implemented with at-risk students. IDEIA urged implementation of a response to intervention (RTI) framework for identifying and intervening with students experiencing learning and behavioral difficulties.

Almost a decade and a half since the call for RTI's implementation, recent research demonstrates teacher candidates continue to have concerns about their ability to implement RTI (Barrio and Combes, 2015; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). Robichaux and Guarino (2012) suggested it is important for EPPs to understand the concerns teacher candidates have in regard to competently implementing RTI as practitioners. However, it is not sufficient for EPPs to simply be aware of teacher candidates' concerns. EPPs must discover in which areas gaps in RTI knowledge and praxis exist and work to fill those chasms. Identifying gaps in pre-service training will provide EPPs with the information necessary to effectively adjust practica to better prepare teacher candidates to successfully implement RTI as novice practitioners.

## Teacher Preparation under RTI

Teachers' roles continue to evolve with initiatives such as RTI calling for shifts in how many teachers engage in the instructional process. Consequently, EPPs are tasked with training their teacher candidates in RTI and providing real-world opportunities for candidates to practice key components of RTI: screening, implementing multi-tiered evidence-based interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making (Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

Properly implemented RTI has shown effectiveness (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012), as has quality teacher preparation (Compton et al., 2012; Denton, 2012; Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, & Davis, 2008; Gerber, 2005; Gersten et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 2009). However, studies on RTI suggest pre-service as well as in-services teachers do not completely understand all components of the RTI framework (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011). Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) suggested teachers' feelings regarding skills associated with RTI components such as screening and progress monitoring are negative due to perceived feelings of being unprepared to undertake those tasks. Subsequently, it behooves EPPs to examine how candidates are prepared and to identify practices that increase perceptions of readiness to implement RTI. In order for teacher candidates to immediately enter the field and demonstrate effectiveness as novice practitioners, teachers in training must acquire not just pedagogical knowledge but also authentic experiences.

**Value of Field Experiences**

Fieldwork allows teacher candidates to gain practical skills through firsthand experiences that fill gaps in their knowledge while under supervision (Hallman, 2012). Field experiences are an integral part of EPPs because teaching is not innate, but rather learned through practical experiences (Ingersoll, Jenkins, & Lux, 2014). Moreover, the National Research Council (2010) recognizes fieldwork as a necessary component of effective teacher preparation. Clark, Byrnes, and Sudweeks (2015) agreed that fieldwork is one of the most important experiences teacher candidates participate in during their preparation programs. Coffey (2010) proposed that field experiences are important pieces of EPPs because practica placements offer contexts allowing teacher candidates to connect theory with practice. Similarly, Eisenhardt, Besnoy, and Steele

(2012) emphasized the importance of providing pre-service opportunities to practice the knowledge acquired during coursework.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The present study was designed to deepen understanding of teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences with RTI. Specifically, this study explored special education and general education (i.e., EC-6, 4-8, and 7-12) teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences with RTI. The three research questions this study purports to address are: 1) Do perceptions of preparedness to implement components of RTI differ between general education and special education certification seekers?; 2) Do perceptions of preparedness to implement components of RTI differ by level of general education certification?; and 3) Which aspects of field experiences contribute to teacher candidates' perceived ability to implement components of RTI?

## Methods

The current study utilized a survey methodology to gain understanding of teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences with components of RTI. Data were collected via a researcher developed self-report questionnaire containing demographic questions, Likert-type questions, and open-response items.

**Participants**

A total of 254 teacher candidates enrolled in the final semester of an undergraduate initial EPP in a large public university accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in the southwestern United States were identified for participation in this study. Candidates were recruited for the study during a class meeting and via their university email. There were 186 initial respondents to the questionnaire. Participants that did not answer any items after giving consent to participate were removed (5.91%, $n = 11$), as were incomplete questionnaire

responses (3.23%, *n* = 6), resulting in a total sample of 169. The final participation rate was approximately 69% of the population under investigation: EC-6 general education (*n* = 94), 4-8 general education (*n* = 28), 7-12 general education (*n* = 37), and special education (*n* = 10).

**Instrumentation**

After a thorough review of existing instruments targeting teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences with RTI (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Kaplan, 2011; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012), it was determined that no existing instrument examined the four components of RTI specifically in relation to teacher candidates' perceptions and field experiences. Thus, a questionnaire was developed to measure the components of RTI.

<div align="center">

**Data Analysis**

</div>

Data were analyzed using factor analysis, descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and thematic analysis. Factor analysis was first performed to evaluate measurement validity. A one-factor solution was retained as the best-supported structure based on an eigenvalue of 50.91 and a visual analysis of the scree plot. Cronbach's α was used to evaluate the scale reliability of the responses on the questionnaire. The questionnaire demonstrated an excellent internal consistence with an α coefficient of 0.91. One-way ANOVA was run to determine if statistically significant group differences existed on the questionnaire.

The open-response questions were analyzed separately using Thematic Analysis (TA). Qualitative responses were categorized and coded based on themes that emerged from each group of respondents using the TA approach by Braun and Clarke (2006). TA was selected as the qualitative data analysis approach because it seeks to identify, describe, and analyze patterns in qualitative data. The researchers looked for both explicit and implicit ideas contained in the data and then reviewed the themes to ensure they fit and were complete. Finally, the results of the

quantitative and qualitative data were combined to provide holistic answers to the research questions. Inferences from results of both strands were triangulated and synthesized to form meta-inferences regarding the perceptions and field experiences teacher candidates had with the components of RTI.

## Results

### Quantitative Group Comparisons

To address the first two research questions, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the differences between the means of the respondents' answers on the scale (DV) across the four certification groups. Subgroup analysis results are provided in Table 1. Post hoc tests showed mean comparisons between general education certification levels, EC-6 and 7-12 and special education are statistically significant and indicate that differences in perceptions of preparedness to address the components of RTI do exist between each general education group compared to the special education group. Cohen's $d$ effect sizes show that mean of the three general education groups (EC-6, 4-8, and 7-12) were all statistically significantly lower than that of the special education group. However, group mean differences were not found among any of the general education groups.

Table 1

*Multiple Comparisons of the Dependent Variable*

| Area of Certification Sought | Area of Certification Sought | Mean Difference | *SE* | 95% Confidence Interval | | *p*-value | Cohen's *d* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| EC-6 | 4-8 | -1.78 | 2.40 | -8.01 | 4.44 | 0.88 | -0.16 |
| | 7-12 | 4.88 | 2.16 | -0.73 | 10.49 | 0.11 | 0.44 |
| | SPED | -16.72 | 3.70 | -26.34 | -7.10 | <.001 | -1.41 |
| 4-8 | 7-12 | 6.67 | 2.79 | -0.57 | 13.91 | 0.08 | 0.57 |
| | SPED | -14.94 | 4.10 | -25.59 | -4.29 | 0.002 | -1.20 |
| 7-12 | SPED | -21.60 | 3.97 | -31.91 | -11.30 | <0.001 | -1.74 |

To more closely examine the perceptions of teacher candidates regarding their confidence in implementing the components of RTI, the questionnaire asked students to rate their confidence level with each component of RTI. Table 2 presents the mean of each certification type in response to questions concerning perceived confidence in their ability to implement RTI and RTI components. Confidence ranged from *"not at all"* coded as 1, *"somewhat confident"* coded as 2, *"confident"* coded as 3, or *"very confident"* coded as 4. The results show special education seekers had higher mean perceived confidence level than general education certification seekers, and 7-12 certification seekers had the lowest overall perceived confidence in their ability to implement RTI.

Table 2

*Means of Responses to Confidence Items by Certification Sought*

| Questionnaire Item | EC-6 | 4-8 | 7-12 | SPED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence using screenings | 2.13 | 2.28 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| Confidence using evidence-based interventions | 2.19 | 2.45 | 2.08 | 2.73 |
| Confidence using progress monitoring tools | 2.25 | 2.38 | 2.11 | 2.9 |
| Confidence using data to make educational decisions | 2.39 | 2.66 | 2.05 | 3.0 |
| Confidence you can implement RTI in your own classroom | 2.19 | 2.34 | 1.97 | 3.0 |

*Note.* Certification Sought: EC-6 general education ($n = 94$), 4-8 general education ($n = 28$), 7-12 ($n = 37$), special education ($n = 10$).

For research question three, the questionnaire asked participants about their field experiences. Field experiences were described to include all field-based activities such as practicum placements, student teaching, internships, or staff development sessions. Table 3 presents the mean perceived field experiences received with response choices of *"none"* operationalized as 0 experiences and coded as 1, *"little"* operationalized as 1-3 experiences and coded as 2, *"some"* operationalized as 4-6 experiences and coded as 3, or *"a lot"* operationalized as 7 or more field experiences with RTI and the RTI components which was coded as 4. The results showed special education certification seekers perceived having more field experiences compared

to the general education groups. Among the general education certification seekers, 7-12 teacher candidates reported having the least number of field experiences with the components of RTI.

Table 3

*Mean Amount of RTI Field Experiences by Certification Sought*

| Questionnaire Item | EC-6 | 4-8 | 7-12 | SPED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RTI across all field-based experiences | 2.28 | 2.24 | 1.89 | 3.6 |
| | | | | |
| Field experiences with screenings | 1.73 | 1.9 | 1.68 | 2.7 |
| Field experiences with evidence-based interventions | 2.14 | 2.62 | 2.08 | 3.3 |
| Field experiences with progress monitoring | 2.34 | 2.45 | 2.21 | 3.1 |
| Field experiences with data-based decision making | 2.26 | 2.62 | 2.08 | 3.1 |

*Note.* Certification Sought: EC-6 general education ($n = 94$), 4-8 general education ($n = 28$), 7-12 ($n = 37$), special education ($n = 10$).

**Open-Response Question Findings**

Three open-ended questionnaire items asked respondents to provide additional information on their RTI preparation. Specifically, what did they wish had been included or more deeply covered during their preparation, as well as what details about their experiences did they believe strengthen their ability to implement the components of RTI? One hundred ten participants provided responses. The TA resulted in two themes: appreciation of implementation opportunities and value of mentorship.

*Theme 1: Appreciation of Implementation Opportunities*

Regard field experiences, responses centered around the benefits of authentic experiences. Special education certification seekers reported having more field experiences than general education certification seekers. A special education certification seeker wrote, "I had a lot of field experience with RTI." In contrast, a 7-12 respondent wrote, "I wish I had more experience implementing RTI in my classroom," a feeling shared by respondents across all general education levels.

### *Theme 2: Value of Mentorship*

Mentorship was noted in several responses. For example, an EC-6 certification seeker stated, "I wish my mentor teacher had walked through all of her instructional decisions based on her RTI data." Another EC-6 student would have appreciated opportunities to observe more teachers during field experiences. Finally, one 7-12 pre-service teacher mentioned, "I would have liked to attend trainings and meetings." In regard to individual components of RTI, screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making were all mentioned, with students expressing a general desire to have received more field experiences observing and implementing those components.

## Meta-Inferences

The combined results of both strands of this study provide holistic answers to the three research questions under investigation. Results were integrated to form meta-inferences based on the framework put forth by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) and were reached by triangulating the quantitative results and qualitative themes. The results from the quantitative portion of the study found a difference between the perceptions of the special education certification seekers compared with all three groups of general education certification seekers. The themes that emerged from the open response questions also revealed differences between special education candidates and general education candidates in regard to their experiences with the components of RTI. Responses of the special education seekers confirmed the quantitative results. Special education seekers reported having more opportunities to implement the components during field experiences. The quantitative results and qualitative themes reinforce the need for preparation programs to ensure teacher candidates are provided with thorough instruction on the RTI components in

combination with real-world field experiences that provide teacher candidates with opportunities to implement the RTI components under knowledgeable mentor teacher supervision.

In conclusion, an inference can be made that differences exist in perceptions and experiences with RTI between special education and general education certification seekers. Differences exist in the perceived confidence with the components and in the number of field experiences received. Special education seekers noted more confidence and training compared to the three general education groups. However, participants noted the importance of both coursework and field experiences in learning to implement the components of RTI. Even special education certification seekers who felt confident in their abilities related to the RTI components wished for more field experiences with a wider range of student ability levels.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether perceptions of preparedness differ among teacher candidates based on type of certification sought and to identify aspects of field experiences that contribute to teacher candidates' perceived ability to confidently implement the key components of RTI. Data analysis revealed differences between general education certification seekers at each certification level compared with special education certification seekers. General education groups (i.e., EC-6, 4-8, and 7-12) are completing their EPPs feeling less confident and having received fewer field experience opportunities compared to the special education seeking group. The results of this study expand on existing literature that found pre-service and in-service teachers have concerns related to RTI (Barrio & Combes, 2015; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012; Stuart et al., 2011; Tillery et al., 2010) and studies that investigated teacher candidates field experiences with RTI or individual components of RTI (Al Otaiba, Lake, Greulich, Folsom, &

Guidry, 2012; Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Walker, 2012; Eisenhart, Besnoy, & Steele, 2012).

The differences in perceptions between the special education and the three general education groups were not surprising. Lack of emphasis on RTI in general education teacher preparation is a documented concern which supports the findings of the present study (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2010; McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011).

Higher confidence levels reported by the special education certification seekers are likely a result of more coursework and field experiences with the components of RTI. The emphasis placed on RTI by teacher educators could also influence pre-service perceptions. The special education certification seekers noted their professors spending time on the components of RTI, providing in-class experiences to practice and observe the components, and being resources during fieldwork. On the other hand, general education certification seekers indicated a general lack of emphasis on RTI and its components during coursework.

Concerns that teacher candidates are not being well prepared to effectively teach students within a multi-tiered support framework are well-known (Jackson, Edmonds, Ziegler, & Marx, 2016). In the present study, it is unclear whether participants' lack of knowledge of RTI was due to lack of recall, lack of instruction, or insufficient exposure to RTI. This lack of knowledge is concerning because the RTI framework is intended as a preventative approach for supporting struggling students in general education classes. Findings reinforce the need for teacher educators to take the time to cover the RTI components because teacher candidates encounter RTI during their field placements. Literature on teacher preparation provides support for the belief that preparation programs are the key to effectively training teacher candidates to implement RTI

(Barrio, Lindo, Combes, & Hovey, 2015; Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). Changes to preparation programs such as instructors emphasizing the importance of RTI, providing in-class activities or assignments with the RTI components, and increasing the opportunities for candidates to implement RTI in authentic settings would enhance teacher training (Jackson, et al., 2016). Results of the present study show that teacher candidates not only know they *need* to learn about the components of RTI and practice authentically implementing the components, but they also *want* to learn about the components and practice implementing the components during fieldwork.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations associated with this study. This study only included pre-service undergraduate students from one university and should be viewed as exploratory with the goal of conducting a larger national study in the future. Furthermore, although this study provides valuable information about teacher candidates' perceptions of RTI and field experiences with RTI components, more research is needed to identify the most effective instructional methods for teaching teacher candidates about the components of RTI. Also, no option was presented on the questionnaire for participants to provide data about their instructors' or mentors' knowledge and expertise related to their RTI training. This is a limitation of the current questionnaire, and future iterations may benefit from inclusion of questions related to perceived knowledge and expertise of university instructors and fieldwork mentors.

<div align="center">

**Conclusion**

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This study has implications for EPPs regarding how best to prepare teacher candidates in RTI. Additionally, it provides information for developing more effective fieldwork expectations across EPPs. Potential exists for enhancing the literature on teacher preparation by providing the results of pre-service field experiences that increase perceived readiness to implement RTI and

perceived implementation proficiency. Furthermore, results may enrich curriculum development in EPPs to better prepare teacher candidates for implementation of RTI as novice practitioners.

EPPs must strive to educate and train teacher candidates to enter the field feeling confident in their ability to perform tasks associated with the job for which they have been trained. The results of this study suggest a need for more research to better understand how best to train teacher candidates in the RTI components. Regarding fieldwork, knowledge and expertise of mentor teachers and variety of field placements were cited across all four certification groups as being very beneficial. Participants perceived value in observing skilled mentor teachers implementing RTI components and expressed an interest in working with students of all ability levels in a wide range of grade levels. Ultimately, preparing classroom ready teachers is the responsibility of all professionals engaged in the delivery and support of preparation programs.

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**Using Problems of Practice to Leverage Clinical Learning**

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## Introduction

Teacher preparation is a complex endeavor. Preparation programs are designed to transform regular humans into adept teachers through carefully constructed coursework and clinical experiences. University programs and the K-12 school systems both play important roles in the process; however, tensions have persisted between university coursework and clinical field work—a divide between "theoretical" and "clinical". The 2010 NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel Report issued a call to action, and asked teacher preparation programs to reconceptualize approaches to pre-service teacher learning by placing clinical experiences at the heart of the work in an effort to bridge traditional theoretical and clinical divides (Henning, Erb, Randles, Fults, & Webb, 2016; NCATE, 2010). This article details one teacher preparation program's attempt to answer the NCATE call to action through the use of instructional rounds during clinical field experiences. In a pilot study, teacher candidates developed problems of practice to investigate through the instructional rounds process. In tandem with bridging the aforementioned divide, the pilot study also sought to leverage clinical experiences to improve and accelerate teacher candidate learning.

## Pre-Service Teacher Development

In a meta-analysis of pre-service teacher development, Fuller used a "concerns-based" model to identify three categories as foci of concern commonly held by pre-service teachers (1969). In Fuller's expansive review, candidates began with an inward view of teaching, with

initial concerns related to "self" as they entered into their clinical experiences. Candidates wondered what their role was in the classroom, their place in the larger school context, and whether they were allowed to make procedural and instructional decisions. In Fuller's model, as the clinical experience continued, concerns shifted toward "tasks", with candidates feeling concern toward gaining competency in completing both clinical and programmatic requirements. Toward the end of the practicum experiences, candidates turned their concerns toward "students", with wonderings that included whether students would benefit from specific instructional strategies and what methods of content delivery would best meet the needs of those students (Fuller, 1969).

More recent scholars have built on Fuller's work in a few important ways. First, Conway and Clark (2003) reinforced the understanding that candidate's developmental stages are initially focused on self and then eventually turn their concerns toward students. However, the authors built on the outward-focused model by positing that candidates also experience an inward-focused development as they gain experience in the clinical setting. In a long-term in-depth study of six teacher candidates, the researchers learned that teacher candidates initially voiced concerns about more immediate issues such as classroom management; however, as they gained experience and confidence, candidates' concerns turned toward issues such as their capacity to grow and improve in their teaching (Conway & Clark, 2003).

Stair, Warner, and Moore (2012) added another layer onto the development of teacher candidates in their study of an agricultural education program. The study followed teacher candidates as they moved from introductory teacher preparation work, into more advanced programmatic and teaching preparation, and then on to the first induction year of teaching. The areas of concern developed similarly to those found in Fuller (1969) and Conway & Clark (2003), growing increasingly more complex as the candidates gained experience. More specifically, the

candidates' initial concerns that were described as concerns about "self", naturally turned into more concern toward "tasks", and then evolved into concerns about "impact" on students and their learning. In addition, candidates voiced additional concerns that the researchers identified as "non-teaching", which included concerns about finances, securing a teaching position, and maintaining outside relationships (Stair, Warner, & Moore, 2012).

It is understood, then, that teacher candidate development begins with a concern for "self". Preparation programs can design course content, practicum experiences, and assignments that move candidates beyond this developmental phase. However, within the time constraints of preparation programs, the conundrum is whether there is a way to accelerate the process in which developing teachers move from a focus on "self" to a focus on "students". The reallocation of emphasis is important: Ensuring that students learn is the central desired outcome of schooling. DuFour reminded educators to focus on student learning as the first principle of Professional Learning Communities and that "the central mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn" (DuFour, 2004, p 1). Preparation programs play a role in developing the mindset that moves focus from *teacher* to a focus on *student learning*.

### The Role of Professional Learning Communities in Candidate Learning

In Professional Learning Communities (PLC), this shift is detailed as a purposeful pivot from "teaching" to "learning" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; DuFour, 2004). PLC structures are commonplace in schools as a means to improve teaching and learning and are based on the assumption that student learning improves in tandem with improvements in teacher learning. In 2008, Vescio, Ross, & Adams conducted a meta-analysis of the research measuring the impact of PLCs on teaching practices and student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). PLCs were commonly used, but the meta-analysis analyzed whether PLCs were indeed improving student

learning. Eleven studies were used in the analysis, all of which supported that PLCs fostered changes in instructional practices. Five studies documented specific information about the types of instructional shifts that occurred, all of which were categorized as a pivot from teacher-centric to student-focused. And, while the meta-analysis also considered other outcomes created by the effective use of PLCs (ie: school culture, teacher learning, collaboration) the analysis about student learning is most relevant for this manuscript. Eight of the studies looked at the connection between effective PLCs and positive teacher learning that led to improvements in student learning; all reported improved student learning outcomes as a result of effective PLCs. The authors write, "Although few in number, the collective results of these studies offer an unequivocal answer to the question about whether the literature supports the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in PLCs. The answer is a resounding yes" (Vescio, et al., 2008, p 87). PLCs are one means to maintain education's focus on students and their learning.

Teacher candidate development away from "self" takes time. The acceleration of teacher candidates' pivot toward student learning was the impetus for this study. The (Blinded) Teacher Education Program (XXXX) is a year-long licensure plus Master's Degree program that graduates around 90 teacher candidates at the secondary level each year. The program itself is constructed around constructs of teacher learning identified by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Teacher candidates concentrate on one content-area for their teacher licensure (ie: Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, Health/Physical Education, Science, World Language, Art, or Music) and take three terms of content-area methods coursework. Candidates also have a year-long clinical field placement in a public-school setting. The year-long clinical experience begins during fall quarter with the candidate in their host classroom for approximately 15 hours per week. During winter quarter, teacher candidates undertake more

teaching responsibilities and spend 20 hours per week in their placement. During spring term, candidates assume more complete teaching responsibilities while at their host school full-time and work the same hours as their mentor teacher.

As an additional programmatic support, teacher candidates are assigned into content-diverse cohorts, a model that has shown to contribute to teacher candidate success (Lawrence, 2002; Peterson, Benson, Driscoll, Narode, Sherman, & Tama, 1995). Candidates remain with their peer cohort and a faculty cohort leader for the duration of the program. An additional benefit of the cohort model structure is for teacher candidates to function as a large PLC. Within the larger PLC, candidates create smaller *consultancy groups* (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007) to tackle issues that emerge in their learning, specifically around clinical field work. The purpose of a consultancy group is to build and expand thinking, with the idea that using a focused group structure to tackle a dilemma provides for both a rich pool of ideas as well as a community-minded focus on problem-solving. Teacher candidates in XXXX work in consultancy groups during the fall and winter quarters; the dilemmas arise out of their clinical field placement classroom experiences.

Traditional dilemmas for new teacher candidates tend to focus on "self", as would be expected from the literature on teacher development. Examples of these dilemmas include how the teacher candidate "managed" off-task behaviors and other redirection incidents, relationship challenges with the mentor teacher, and time management for lesson delivery. Although all of these dilemmas are pertinent to the teacher candidate, they are removed from the sphere of student learning.

## Introducing Instructional Rounds with Teacher Candidates

To situate the focus of candidate learning toward the clinical experience, the Principal Investigator—a university faculty member—organized a series of Instructional Rounds in local schools. Instructional rounds are similar to medical rounds where interns observe cases together under the guidance of a practicing doctor, the difference being that instructional rounds are conducted in schools and with educators. The rounds model has been an effective tool for increased focus on teaching pedagogy for practicing teachers (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Marzano, 2011). The PI used a modified Instructional Rounds structure in visits to three schools across six months. Participating teacher candidates were all students in an English/Language Arts Methods course. Each visit was co-coordinated with an instructional leader at the school, with classrooms chosen based on teacher interest and availability. Although each school took a slightly different approach to the rounds, all three schools had a "doors-open" policy in place; both teachers and students were comfortable with observations made by individuals and small groups. Additionally, at two of the schools, teachers agreed to meet in a debrief session with teacher candidates after the observations. Teacher candidates visited classrooms in groups of four, observing between four to eight teachers, depending on the school.

The purpose of Instructional Rounds was to choose one area of focus during observations. Typically, the focus of instructional rounds is on data-based "problems" that can be studied through observation and the collection of evidence. In traditional Instructional Rounds, problems of practice are large-scale school-wide issues that participants study by observing teachers and learners. After the observations are complete, participants use a debriefing protocol to discuss the evidence collected during the rounds. In the Instructional Round structure used for this project, candidates focused on more localized *problems of practice*.

**Adding Problems of Practice to Instructional Rounds**

To focus candidates to think about how their instructional moves impact student learning, the PI introduced the concept of *problems of practice* (PoP)*.* The PI used the term *problems of practice* in a modified way from how it is described in the instructional rounds work of City, et al. (2009). Instead of focusing on large-scale and systemic issues to study, teacher candidate problems of practice were more personally located and context dependent. Teacher candidate development provides challenges to deepened thinking: When learning many new skills, it is difficult to parse apart the variety of issues that arise. Finding a problem helps to narrow the focus for teacher candidates. *Problem-finding* is one aspect of understanding the difference between the current situation and the desired result (Lee & Cho, 2007). Once there is a realization of the mismatch between the current status and the goal, plans can be formalized to study the mismatch and create a plan to address it. Starting with the right question is the first step toward increased understanding.

**Initial Problem Formation**

The first attempt to create problems of practice came early in fall term after candidates had been in their clinical placements for approximately six weeks or 90 hours. Teacher candidates were directed to consider their teaching at that point and consider what their most pressing questions (ie: problems) were. Seventeen teacher candidates responded; their initial problems of practice can be found in Table 1: Initial Problems of Practice.



Table 1: Initial Problems of Practice (N=17)
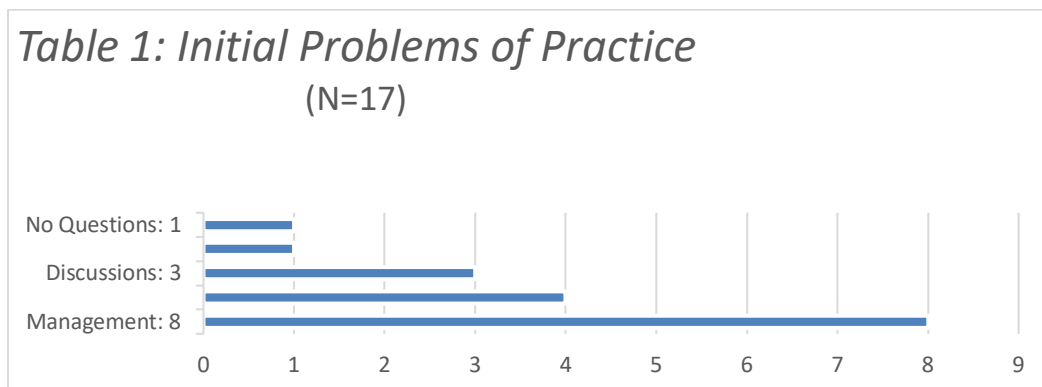
The teacher candidate problems of practice fell into four area-of-concern categories: Classroom management, student engagement, discussion facilitation, and differentiation. One teacher candidate could not identify a problem of practice. The questions teacher candidates asked were developmentally aligned with a focus on "self" and the immediate needs of managing classroom behaviors and routines. For example, management questions were worded:

| Table 2 | |
|---|---|
| Initial Problems of Practice Sample Questions/Issues. | |
| **Sample 1** | *Three students in one of my classes are extremely disruptive/disrespectful and I have gotten into power struggles with them.* |
| **Sample 2** | *I have trouble confronting disruptive students, especially boys.* |
| **Sample 3** | *I think I need to work on discipline, or how to deal with confrontation with one student in front of other students.* |
| **Sample 4** | *I need to work on waiting until I have complete cooperation before I move on with the lesson, even if it is painful.* |
| **Sample 5** | *How do I get students to ask questions when they are confused instead of doing nothing?* |
| **Sample 6** | *I'm currently thinking about the place of full-class discussions and so far I think it's mostly useful as a technique for me as the teacher, to get a broad idea of what the students think, but that it's not really very useful for the students. Is it?* |

The first Instructional Rounds experience was at a middle school with approximately 1100 students. To support teacher candidate learning development, the first Instructional Rounds structure was designed to break a class period into smaller chunks that could be analyzed. Teacher candidates used an observation protocol that focused on "opening routines" and "closing routines" used by teachers across a variety of content areas. Classroom management problems often happen at the beginning and ending of a secondary-level class period. The focus on these two chunks of the classroom period was constructed in alignment with the problems of practice posed by the candidates. Candidates collected evidence in each observed classroom, debriefed with the PI and instructional coordinator, and then met with the classroom teachers to ask questions. Once teacher

candidates returned to the university campus, they created a plan of implementation using one piece of evidence from the rounds experience.

**Refining Problems of Practice**

The second Instructional Rounds experience was at a local high school that served approximately 2400 students. The visit came at the end of fall term, when teacher candidates had spent approximately 13 weeks or 190 hours in their practicum classroom. During those 190 hours, teacher candidates moved from a One-Teach-One-Observe and One-Teach-One-Assist role (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010) to take more ownership over one classroom period in a stronger co-teaching partnership. As teacher candidates gained more experience in front of students, they had more "material" (ie: problems) to study and relate back to their own teaching. Teacher candidates observed in ELA and Social Studies classrooms, looking for evidence to inform questions based on their own teaching in their clinical experience. At the end of the second Instructional Round experience, teacher candidates were asked to modify their problems of practice based on their own teaching in combination with their new observational data. Candidates worked with their Consultancy Groups to consider three questions: 1) What is successful in my teaching? 2) What can I improve? Be specific and design a problem of practice question. 3) Considering my problem of practice, what can I try in order to make improvements?

*Table 3: Midterm Problems of Practice* shows types of questions teacher candidates asked.



Table 3: Midterm Problems of Practice (n=16)

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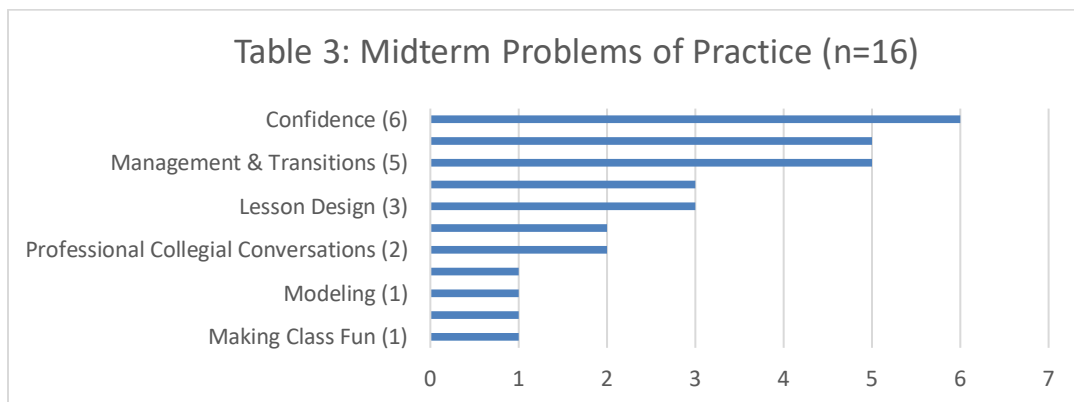
Sixteen teacher candidates participated in the second Instructional Round session. Collectively, those 16 candidates posed 31 questions. The shift from classroom control toward student learning follows the trajectory described by Stair, Warner, and Moore (2012), which can be seen in the questions asked. Table 4: *Sample Questions from Second Instructional Rounds Visit* shows some of the questions.

| Table 4 | |
|---|---|
| Sample Questions from Second Instructional Rounds Visit | |
| **Sample 1** | What happens when I prepare more specific discussion questions? Will it prompt deeper discussions? More student independence? |
| **Sample 2** | I want to be able to come up with examples that are relevant and meaningful to my students. Can I prepare for this ahead of time? |
| **Sample 3** | How can I give up some class control to students? |
| **Sample 4** | I feel rushed when I am helping one student and another student asks for help. How can I stay with one until there is a natural conclusion or understanding? |
| **Sample 5** | How do I make my lessons more interesting so students want to participate? |

In addition to asking *more* questions, the *sophistication* of the questions changed over time. As teacher candidates gained more experience in their teaching, their questions changed from simple (ie: "Students are unable to manage themselves. How do I get them to stay on task?) to more nuanced (ie: "I want to be able to come up with examples that are relevant and meaningful to my students. Can I prepare for this ahead of time?") and more focused on student learning (ie: "How can I use higher-level questioning to help students add [textual] evidence to their responses?") The change in sophistication of questions between the first and the second Instructional Rounds visit fits with what would be expected developmentally for new teachers.

**Looking for Evidence to Inform the Problems of Practice**

Prior to the third Instructional Rounds school visit, candidates worked again with their Consultancy Groups. This time, candidates added specific details to their problem of practice

questions and brainstormed what evidence they would look for on the classroom walk-throughs that would inform their question. By this time in the practicum experience, teacher candidates had logged approximately 260 hours in their placement classrooms, teaching multiple lessons and their required Teacher Performance Assessment. The additional time and experiences led Consultancy Groups to more effectively diagnose at which point during a classroom observation a candidate could find evidence to inform their question. For example, one candidate initially wondered about how students responded when the teacher used high-level questioning. The candidate's original observation plan was to tally the frequency of the teacher's questions that appeared higher-level and tally student responses. After meeting with the Consultancy Group, the candidate decided to script the starting phrases (ie: sentence stem) of the teacher's questions and then map student responses onto a matrix of Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Webb, 2002). The revised observation plan allowed for the candidate to learn specific language that prompted deeper levels of student thinking to potentially implement in her own classroom discussions.

The third rounds visit was structured specifically around English/Language Arts classrooms at a different middle school. Again, the school population was around 1100 students across grades 6-8. Each group of teacher candidates visited four classes, observing for evidence to support their problem of practice question. Teacher candidates returned to the university classroom to reflect on the third Instructional Round visit and the learning toward their problems of practice.

**Two Emerging Benefits**

Teacher candidates found benefits to the formulation of a problems of practice, making a plan to study the issue, and then the use Instructional Rounds observations to inform their thinking. Some of the candidates observed strategies is use that did not work that the candidates themselves had thought about trying. Some candidates gained ideas on how to lead discussions focused on

text; they were able to observe students in action and ask the classroom teachers about their decision making in regard to the strategy.

One of the main responses from candidates was around the design itself of the problems of practice. Some candidates reported that they found it helpful to break their issue into smaller chunks to study—even if they did not see it work out successfully in an observation, they felt that with a smaller chuck to work on (ie: preparing questions in advance, or designing sentence stems in preparation for discussions) that alone improved their teaching and increased their feelings of competence and preparedness. What initially looked like an overwhelming issue instead could be broken into smaller pieces to work on systemically. And, the main benefit the teacher candidates reported was to identify how experienced teachers tackle specific instructional issues and how student learners responded.

### Leveraging Clinical Experiences

Teacher candidates naturally face a steep learning curve; they are responsible for student learning while doing their own learning on how to design lessons, apply pedagogical understandings, get to know their students, and acclimate to a school and mentor teacher's classroom, among other responsibilities. In addition, teacher candidates face constant evaluation by their mentor teacher, clinical fieldwork supervisors, and other K-12 school personnel. It can be difficult for candidates to parse apart everything they need to learn and practice during such an intense time. In addition, teachers are expected to enter the profession with a modicum of readiness—rarely are there differences in workload and expectations for new teachers than there are for those more experienced educators. Teacher candidates need specific tools that support their focus away from self and toward student learning in order to strengthen their career readiness. This sentiment is echoed by the AACTE 2018 Clinical Practice Commission Report (AACTE, 2018)

which put a focus on PK-12 student learning at the heart of clinical teacher preparation (see page 5), a reminder of the NCATE call to action and a more-than-gentle nudge to teacher preparation programs. To put the clinical experiences at the forefront in an effort to accelerate teacher readiness, though, requires strategically structured opportunities to build candidate learning.

Designing and refining problems of practice is a form of practitioner inquiry. The honing of the problem of practice to dig deeper into the relationships between instructional practices and student learning is a key to improvement. Teacher candidates have an initial stance focused on themselves that matches what we expect with their development; finding ways that accelerate the focus to more outward actions and behaviors that influence students' learning, though, will prepare them for success during their induction years of teaching. New teachers tend to focus on the most visible issues, such as management of time and student behaviors. Fichtman Dana (2013) describes using inquiry to focus on student learning this way:

> The target goal for everything one does as a teacher is student learning. However, because the complexity of teaching springs forth many possibilities for exploration for every teacher inquirer, sometimes wonderings aren't directly related to student learning and may instead focus on such things as behavior management and time management (page 19).

While time and behavior management issues directly relate to performance, student learning itself is where we want our teacher candidates' attention to live. Teacher educators want our graduates to feel empowered to tackle the issues that emerge in their classrooms and have the strategies in place to do so successfully.

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**The Benefits of Field Experience**

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## Introduction

Colleges and Universities across the nation have rigorous requirements to prepare teacher candidates. In addition to a demanding course schedule and the customary semester of student teaching, students are also required to log hours of observation and experience in the field prior to student teaching. Most states require a full semester of student teaching, but the field experience hours are designed differently by state and even by colleges and universities within a state. Kaelin (2013) reports that "teacher preparation programs have traditionally integrated field-based learning in the form of practicum, internship or student teaching. Although requirements vary widely between states, traditional university-based teacher training programs generally incorporate field experience as a requirement for teacher certification. However, time spent by preservice teachers in field-based practice also varies widely" (p. 1).

For example, DePaul University (Chicago, IL) identifies two levels of field experience embedded into coursework prior to the student teaching semester totaling as many as 170 hours across ten courses at the undergraduate elementary level and 150 hours across six courses at the secondary level. (DePaul University Field Experience Courses, Hours and Levels). In a second example, Columbia College provides guidelines divided into four levels of experience beginning with 15 hours at level 1, where the teacher candidates devote 55% of the experience to observation; 35% interaction with students; 10% administrative tasks. At the Intermediate level, teacher candidates again spend 15 hours, with 60% interaction with students; 30% observation; 10%

administrative tasks. As teacher candidates progress to the Advanced level, the recommendation increases to 15-35 hours with 70% interaction with students; 10% observation; 10% administrative tasks and 10% teach short lessons – typically to the entire class. The final level is the student teaching experience which encompasses 16 weeks of observation and teaching (Columbia College *Field Experience Guidelines*). Other Universities across the nation have similar requirements. According to the publication*, Preparing and Credentialing the Nation's Teachers* (2011), "nationally, student teachers spend an average of 177 hours in supervised field service prior to student teaching and an average of 514 hours during student teaching," as cited in Kaelin, 2013.

Freeman (2009) offers strategies for successfully implementing field experiences for teacher candidates. One suggestion is to develop strong school-university partnerships. This can be accomplished by employing individuals at the University level who have knowledge and experience within the K-12 schools. Working with the same administrators and teachers from one year to the next also enhances the school-university partnership. Next, university personnel must be familiar with the policies and procedures of the local schools and ensure that teacher candidates are familiar with those policies and procedures (such as dress code, parking, cell phone use, confidentiality of records, making xerox copies of worksheets, etc.). Cooperating teachers should be offered some level of training before working with teacher candidates, so they know what is expected of them, and also, the requirements that the teacher candidate must meet to have a successful experience. A reciprocal conversation is necessary to ensure that all parties have a clear understanding of document access and the process (for example, a student's IEP). One consideration that is not currently in place, but is in the discussion stage, is the idea of compensation for mentor teachers. As a cooperating teacher for student teaching, a stipend is provided. However, no such compensation is provided for the mentor teacher who work with

teacher candidates within stages one through three. This is definitely an area that needs to be reconsidered in order to strengthen the program.

Finally, Freeman (2009) recommends that each teacher candidate have experiences in several different areas: rural, suburban, urban; high and low performing schools; private and public school systems; affluent schools and those that have a low social economic status.

## Definition

This article focuses attention on one small, private University in Pennsylvania and the system for assigning and implementing field experiences and student teaching for teacher candidates, so the definitions used in the article are drawn from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) *Framework for K-12 Program Guidelines*. These guidelines define field experiences as "a range of formal, required school and community activities participated in by students in teacher preparation programs, under the supervision and mentorship of a classroom teacher. Student teaching is defined as a set of organized and carefully planned classroom teaching experiences required of all candidates in a preparation program." (PDE Guidelines, p. 21).

## Purpose

The purpose of the field experience is to provide opportunities for education majors to develop a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a teacher and to provide a first-hand opportunity for education majors to engage in planning, organizing and implementing activities, lessons and assessments to educate a classroom of children.

*The Framework for K-12 Program Guidelines* established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education reflects the significance of experience in the classroom environment as follows: "Because teaching is a clinical profession, candidates for the profession are expected to spend extensive time in school settings—beginning early in their teacher preparation program

sequence—guided by university faculty and appropriately prepared Pre K-12 mentor teachers. Teacher preparation programs must be able to demonstrate how they use evidence about program graduates and evidence about the Pre K-12 students of their graduates to make continuous program improvements (n.d., p.4). Although some components of a teacher preparation program may be presented in an on-line platform, programs must also include face-to-face components, including the field experiences.

## Pennsylvania Regulations and Guidelines

Pennsylvania established guidelines for implementing field experiences and student teaching in Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) within the Commonwealth. Field Experience hours may begin in the first semester of the student's college experience, and "benefit the candidates' preparation by providing opportunities to apply principles and theories from the program to actual practice in the classroom, and provide practice with diverse populations, ages and school settings (22 Pa. Code §354.25 (d)). These experiences, just like the student teaching semester, are under the supervision of college personnel and students are assigned to work with professionals in the field who have demonstrated competence in teaching and mentoring within the PK-12 educational environment. Specifically, Pennsylvania established four levels or stages of field experience; three stages to be completed prior to student teaching and the fourth is the student teaching semester.

During Stage One (Observation), the teacher candidates function as observers in a variety of educational settings including rural, suburban, urban settings as well as high-performing and low performing schools. This stage may also include "education-related" settings such as community organizations and tutoring programs. (PDE Framework for K-12 Program Guidelines).

Stage Two (Exploration) is also referred to as the "assistant" level, because the teacher candidate is expected to gain experience working directly with small groups of students. Stage One and Stage Two are expected to be accomplished prior to official admission into the Teacher Education Program which occurs when teacher candidates have completed specific course requirements, earned the required minimum GPA and passed the Tests of Basic Skills.

Requirements for Stage One and Two include:

1. Observation log signed by cooperating teacher
2. Observation write-up by teacher candidate with instructor feedback
3. Group meeting with university instructor once each week (class sessions included) to link experience with course content

In Stage Three (Pre-Student Teaching), teacher candidates have been admitted into the Teacher Education Program and begin to take methods courses. This stage is considered the Pre-Student Teaching phase and teacher candidates continue their work with small groups of students under the supervision of a certified teacher mentor.

Stage Three requirements include:

1. Teacher candidates complete course assignments including journals, time logs and reflections) with university instructor feedback
2. Observations and feedback by a university instructor
3. Group meetings once a week with university instructor to link experience with course content

Stage Four is the Student Teaching semester and includes a minimum of 12 weeks of full-time participation in a classroom environment under the supervision of a practicing teacher who has at least three years of satisfactory teaching experience, one year of which is in the specific placement. These cooperating teachers must also receive training by the Institution of Higher Education. At this level, teacher candidates may serve the entire 12 weeks in one setting, or, if seeking dual certification, the teacher candidate may serve six weeks in each of two settings.

During Stage Four, the following elements are required:

1. Observation log signed by cooperating teacher
2. Observation write-up completed by teacher candidate
3. Observation feedback provided by university instructor
4. On-site visitation by university instructor
5. Group meeting once a week with university instructor to link experience with current courses and practices
6. PDE 430 form

At least one experience during Stage Three or student teaching must include students with special needs in inclusive settings. Inclusive settings are defined as "an educational setting that includes students with and without special needs. An inclusive setting includes at least one child with an IFSP/IEP" (PDE Framework, p. 24).

The suggested time requirements for each stage are reflected in the table below and drawn from the PDE Framework (p. 24):

| Stage | 1: Observation 2: Exploration | 3: Pre-Student Teaching | 4: Student Teaching |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggested hours (minimum) | 40 hours | 150 hours | 12 weeks |

**Implementation at one IHE**

A small, private university in Northeastern Pennsylvania serves approximately 170 teacher candidates in the Pre-K through 12 Teacher Preparation programs within the School of Education. Areas of certification are available in PreK-4, Middle Level (grades 4-8) and Secondary (grades 7-12) in compliance with current PDE certification areas. Candidates seeking Middle level certification must also have a concentration in a core content area and teacher candidates at the secondary level have the option to double major in a content area and secondary education or major in a content area and minor in secondary education. In either case, the same field hour and student teaching requirements must be met. Field hours are disbursed across several courses within each

program of study. All teacher candidates may also elect to earn a certificate in Special Education (Pre-K-8 or 7-12) in conjunction with their primary area of certification (Pennsylvania does not offer an option for stand-alone Special Education Certification).

Guiding Principles for the Field Experience component of the Teacher Preparation program comply with PDE Guidelines as follows:

1. Field Experiences are designed and delivered for candidates to make explicit connections with content areas, cognitive development, motivation and learning styles.
2. Field experiences allow teacher candidates to observe, practice, and demonstrate coursework competencies, under the supervision of education program faculty and under the mentorship of certified teachers.
3. Field experiences must allow teacher candidates to progress from observation to teaching small groups of students under the mentorship of a certified educator at the pre-student teaching level, to the culminating student teaching experience.
4. Field experiences are on-going throughout the program, aligned with coursework, and include varied experiences in diverse environments.
5. Candidates need time to learn and demonstrate the complex competencies and responsibilities required by teachers (*Teacher Education Program Field Experience Placement Handbook for Mentoring Teachers*, 2017-2018, p. 3).

At this university, a part-time employee has the responsibility for securing and assigning placements for each student in each course requiring the field experience. Another part-time employee has the responsibility for meeting each student in their respective setting once each week to monitor progress, troubleshoot issues and collaborate with the mentoring teacher. Over time, the Field Experience Placement Director and Field Supervisor have established very positive working relationships with many districts and school in the local geographic area, making the options for diverse experiences possible. Over time, the same mentors are often assigned teacher candidates and their experience with teaching and their knowledge of the university requirements make the process smooth and with few issues.

A full-time employee is the director of student teaching and employs several field supervisors to work with teacher candidates over the 12-week student teaching experience. This

full-time employee also has the responsibility for teaching the student teaching seminar and the third of three required courses in working with students with diverse needs during the student teaching semester. All part-time, full-time and supervising staff members have Pennsylvania Teaching Certification and supervisors are certified in the areas in which they supervise. The Student Teacher Director and the Supervisors have worked together for many years and are all very familiar with university requirements. Many of the supervisors, who are employed by semester as adjunct faculty, are retired teachers from local schools, so they also have familiarity with the school district policies and procedures as well as much of the teaching staff and administration. This is also a benefit to the teacher candidates as they learn to navigate a new environment during the first weeks of their student teaching experience. The design of the program is such that, the strategies for success identified above are met to ensure that teacher candidates receive a worthwhile learning experience.

All teacher candidates must enroll in *Effective Teaching* (ED 190) which includes a 40-hour field experience requirement. This course is typically scheduled within the teacher candidate's first year of study. A second course required for all teacher candidates is *Special Education Methods I* (EDSP 225) and requires 30 hours of field experience in a special education setting. Students typically schedule this course during the second year of study. The remaining field experience hours are dependent upon the course of study that each teacher candidate selects.

Within each course that includes field experience hours, instructors establish requirements commensurate with PDE and School of Education Guidelines. For example, in EDSP 225, across the 30-hour experience, students must complete a daily log of hours and activities completed within that timeframe. The mentor teacher must sign verifying the completion of the hours and

mentor teachers also complete a mid-term and final evaluation of the teacher candidate's performance during the experience.

The mid-term report evaluation is slightly different for ED 190 as compared with courses at the 200 and 300 level. Mentors are asked to rate the teacher candidate as *Satisfactory, Not Satisfactory* or *Not Observed* and are encouraged to include specific comments to elaborate on ratings. The competencies for ED 190 are as follows:

1. Self-Preparation Skills (ability to work with others, willingness to learn, and oral and written communication skills)
2. Instructional Skills (poise and confidence, ability to work with students one-on-one, ability to direct learning in a small group, ability to teach a mini- or micro-lesson to class, voice and manner of speech, and positive attitude toward teaching)
3. Classroom Environment (appropriate rapport with students, awareness of confidentiality, awareness of safety issues, ability to carry out classroom routines, and attention to orderliness and organization)
4. Professional Skills (attendance: promptness and dependability, appropriate attire, manners, and respect for school policies and procedures).

The final evaluation includes the same competencies and has an accompanying rubric for mentors to rate teacher candidates as *Target, Emerging, Needs Improvement*, or *Unacceptable.* Each level has a corresponding point value, resulting in an overall score for the teacher candidate. Additional, clarifying comments are also encouraged.

These reports are submitted to the Field Experience staff and then shared with course instructors and the teacher candidate while original is filed in the teacher candidate's comprehensive file.

In addition to the standard mid-term and final evaluation report forms, each instructor creates assignments for completion within the required field experience hours. For example, in EDSP 225, students must complete the following assignments over the course of the semester:

1. Following each visit, the teacher candidate must complete the following information:
   a. Date, Hours of experience, Class location/Type/Grade-Age Group, Lesson(s) observed.

b. A narrative description of the events during the visit including teaching strategies and materials used, description of what the teacher did, how the teacher and students interacted and reacted with one another and the teacher candidate's specific involvement within the class

c. The teacher candidate's reaction to and feelings about what occurred during the visit

d. A summary chart including what the teacher candidate found interesting, what the candidate had questions about or found interesting and the relationship (or disparity) between the experience and the content of the course

2. In addition, over the course of the semester, teacher candidates must complete and report on the following activities: These may be separate submissions or may be included with the field journals described above.

a. What is your field teacher's classroom management plan? In your journal discuss his/her plan and include: positive recognition, consequences, physical layout of room, how daily routines are accomplished, and instructional methods. Include your thoughts on this management plan, what would you do in your classroom – what would you keep the same, change, how would you change it and why?

b. After observing in your field experience setting, plan, develop (using Wilkes lesson plan template), and teach a lesson in your field experience setting. Develop a detailed differentiation of instruction section. Ask your teacher to write detailed feedback on this lesson. Submit the lesson plan, supporting documents and mentor teacher written comments.

c. Interview your teacher regarding the use of Progress Monitoring – what does the district use for progress monitoring? Complete progress monitoring on at least one of the students in your placement. Write a summary of this experience to submit by the due date.

d. Review at least one IEP for a student in your field placement. Write a summary of the main sections of the IEP and information included in each section. Also discuss what information you would add, if you were the special education teacher. Reflect on the significance of the information for members of the IEP team, including the special educator, regular education teachers and parents. Do NOT identify the student by name – use a pseudonym.

e. Interview your field experience teacher and any general education teachers that the special education staff works and collaborates with throughout the school day. Discuss the topics of co-teaching, collaboration, and open communication. What are the strengths of inclusive practices within your field placement? What are the areas that need improvement? Include specific questions that you asked your field teacher(s) and their responses. In addition, how do *you* view collaboration, open communication, successful inclusive practices based on your 30-hour field experience?

The benefits of the field experience are evident in the reflections from students as they share in journal entries and during class discussions. One student commented that the EDSP 225 experience validated her desire to pursue special education certification, while another found the

opposite to be true. This particular student thought that she wanted special education certification, but following this experience, she realized that she was not destined to obtain the certification, However, she did acknowledge a yearning to learn as much as possible about working with students with disabilities, so she is equipped provide an appropriate education for them in her regular education English classes.

In another instance, a student reflected on the challenges of developing differentiated lessons to meet the needs of diverse populations within one class. This student expressed that much more time and instruction would be necessary to reach a level of competence for meeting this requirement as a teacher of a classroom.

Another student was impressed with the fact that support personnel are not required under state or federal regulations and struggled with the challenge of meeting diverse needs as the sole individual responsible for the class. This student in particular came from a more affluent K-12 school where several paraeducators were available to support students with disabilities in the regular classroom setting.

Some students also had a difficult time grasping the notion that students with disabilities could be appropriately integrated into the regular education environment. One student at the secondary level with a concentration in Spanish was surprised and even alarmed that students with disabilities might register for this course at the middle school or high school level! In fact, many of the teacher candidates who intended to pursue secondary education were taken back by this idea. Much conversation surrounding this topic ensued during class time at the university to aid students in a paradigm shift from their personal beliefs and biases to the realization that a student with a disability is not incapable of learning and progressing within the general education curriculum.

In all, students have indicated that these experiences not only validated their personal goals, but also supported the content of the course. Students became more knowledgeable in the areas of classroom management, differentiation of instruction, universal design for learning principles, creating lesson plans that offered student choices, creating and administering assessments, monitoring student progress, and developing units of study surrounding a topic in their area of concentration. They gained a deeper understanding of the content that can be covered within a certain amount of time and the need to be prepared for unforeseen circumstances, such as technology glitches. Every student reported that the experience was a valuable one, and many expressed a desire to complete additional hours beyond the 30 required so that they could become more proficient in specific skills. First-hand experience was noted as the most valuable component of the course when students completed the end-of-semester course reflection.

Dating as far back as 1996, Zeichner and Melnick made recommendations for community-based experiences for teacher candidates (as reported in Gallego, 2001). In this University, one opportunity that is not connected with coursework is student involvement in the Schools and Homes in Education (SHINE) program sponsored by the University in seven locations across the region. This program is designed to excite children about learning. Children gather after school and participate in various exciting educational activities. Several teacher candidates have been involved in this program. They design and implement lessons with groups of children to gain additional planning and teaching experience. Although these hours of experience are not documented toward the field hour requirement, some states, do recognize this type of community-based experience toward the required field hours prior to student teaching. Pennsylvania has developed guidelines for project-based experiences, which can be considered for 25 to 50 hours of the Stage Three experience. According to the PDE Guidelines, the teacher candidate must design

a goal that relates directly to the professional core competencies and provides "the candidate an opportunity to work with learners in settings outside of typical classrooms, thus providing opportunity to enhance perspectives on the factors that underlay and affect student motivation, interest, performance, etc." (p. 4). This option has not been embedded into the program at the University of focus for this article but is certainly something to be considered as we continue to develop the program and opportunities for teacher candidates into the future. In particular, as school districts struggle to settle teacher contracts, it becomes more challenging to place teacher candidates in classrooms within the geographic region. A viable alternative would be to reach out to community-based sites for teacher candidates to gain this valuable experience.

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**Attributes of a Successful Field Experience:**

**A Best-Worst Scaling Study**

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**Abstract**

Research suggests that the symbiotic nature of the relationships between mentors and pre-service teachers is not only important to the preparation of pre-service teachers, but they also increase the likelihood of pre-service teachers being first-year ready (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Cornett & Knight, 2009). Thus, it is important to examine the perspectives of the classroom mentor and pre-service teacher regarding a successful field experience as they navigate within the shared space of the classroom. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of mentors and pre-service teachers to understand what they identify to be the most important attributes necessary to achieve successful field experiences.

In this quantitative study, a Best Worst Scaling (BWS) methodology was employed. A sample of 40 mentors and 52 pre-service teachers participated. Data were collected via online survey in Spring 2018 from a mid-size university's current pre-service teachers and their mentors (Cohen, 2009; Louviere & Woodworth, 1990). This study revealed similarities and differences in attribute rankings (BW Score) and ratio scores of relative importance (RI) between the two groups. Though both groups identified classroom management, quality of instruction, and respect within their top four attributes. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.


*Key Words:* field experience, mentors, pre-service teachers, best-worst scaling

# Introduction

Practical field experience for pre-service teachers is not only valuable in teacher preparation but also necessary (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Education Commission of the States, 2003). Early field experiences in teacher preparation programs tend to be exploratory and observational in nature and then move toward experiences that focus on teaching practices and principles (Posner & Vivian, 2010). However, within the final year, field experiences should allow pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge within P-12 classroom settings under the guidance of mentor teachers. This study focuses on the final, application stage of the field experience wherein pre-service teachers work alongside and are supported by mentors to gain invaluable experience and practice in the classroom setting.

Mentoring in teacher preparation programs is the process of supporting pre-service teachers to develop teaching behaviors and strategies through a nurturing relationship with people of more experience that serve as role models and advisors (Bigelow, 2002; Haney 1997). Since the late 1980s, mentoring for pre-service teachers has been an encouraged practice in teacher preparation programs and has evolved since that time (Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley, & Smith, 2012). Mentors are formally assigned with responsibilities and roles (Carver, 2009). It is suggested that mentors be trained and equipped for the task so that pre-service teachers can be given authentic opportunities to observe, coach, co-plan, and co-teach (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010) Furthermore, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (2010) and the Education Commission of the States (2003) indicate that effective field experiences are those that are well-planned, well-implemented, and connected to the teacher preparation coursework with the result being teacher preparation programs that have more knowledgeable, better prepared pre-service teachers  that positively impact student learning

(Blachowicz, Obrochta & Fogelberg, 2005; Hobson et al., 2012; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Norton, 2001; Schwarz & McCarthy, 2003).

Several factors are considered instrumental to successful teaching. In a review of over 200 pieces of research to define great teaching, Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, and Major (2014) named six components that hold the strongest evidence of teacher effectiveness: content knowledge, quality of instruction, classroom climate, classroom management, teacher beliefs, and professional behaviors. Access to such components through field experience is readily seen as the vehicle for supporting pre-service teachers (Knight, 2011). In his work on coaching to improve teacher practice, Knight (2011) names seven principles of partnership philosophy to guide effective mentoring between pre-service teachers and classroom mentors: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. His work indicates that through collaboration between pre-service teachers and mentors, a shared understanding and refinement of best instructional practices may be gained.

Research suggests that the symbiotic nature of the relationships between mentor and pre-service teacher is important to the preparation of pre-service teachers and increases the likelihood of them being first-year ready (American for Colleges of Teacher Education, 2010; Beck & Kosnik, 2002). Due to this knowledge, and the extended time pre-service teachers spend in the field experience classroom, it becomes increasingly important to examine their perspectives and those of the classroom mentor regarding their viewpoints of successful field experiences because they navigate the shared classroom space together.

Attributes are defined as those characteristics or components that are inherently a part of something else. Past research has cited many attributes that influence a successful field experience for mentors and pre-service teachers (American for Colleges of Teacher Education, 2010;

Bigelow, 2002; Haney, 1997). As previously stated, quality field experiences necessitate sound teaching practices by the mentor teacher as well as a partnership between the mentor and pre-service teacher that includes coaching, co-planning, and co-teaching. In the *What Makes Great Teaching Report*, Coe and colleagues (2014) reviewed underpinning research to answer several questions concerning the attributes of great teaching, the frameworks and tools that aid in capturing it, and how it resulted in promoting better learning. In this, six common components emerged as attributes of quality teaching. These included content knowledge, quality of instruction, classroom climate, classroom management, teacher beliefs, and professional behaviors. The principles of partnership philosophy discussed in Cornett and Knight's (2009) work on instructional coaching aligned with those in the aforementioned report and added further to include the partnership aspect that field experience requires for pre-service teachers. These seven principles were equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. The attributes from these two studies were merged to create twelve attributes of quality field experience utilized in the present study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of pre-service teachers and mentors to understand what they believe to be the most valued attributes of successful field experiences. These similarities and/or differences could have substantial implications on not only the effectiveness of field placements, but could also affect programmatic changes at the teacher preparation levels.

## Methods

*Common Scaling Methods*

The two most common types of quantitative methodology utilized in research are rating scales and rank orders. Rating scales often prohibit the importance of a single attribute because it is rarely measured in relation to other attributes in the study. Most studies employ rating scales

(e.g. Likert scales) to measure attitudes, motives, beliefs, etc., and participants may truly like (or dislike) multiple attributes and/or combinations of attributes and are compelled to rate them as ''important'' or ''not important'' (Cohen, 2009). In these instances, respondents cannot provide meaningful differences or adequate discrimination to help researchers understand priorities (Finn & Louviere, 1992). For instance, pre-service teachers given a list of ten attributes of successful field experience could rate all ten attributes equally high or equally low according to personal perceptions and beliefs. This best effort of the pre-service teacher; however, does not allow one to distinguish that attribute A is the most important attribute of all because the pre-service teacher feels that attributes B thru J are also all very important. In addition, rating scale methods derive the relative importance of each attribute based on respondent averages, thus limiting the ability of respondents to make mental trade-offs between attributes (Cohen, 2009).

Rank order methods do allow respondents to evaluate the relative importance of individual attributes. Respondents are asked to rank attributes in terms of specific characteristics or preference (Auger, Devinney, & Louvierre, 2007). Researchers agree that ranking is relatively easy for respondents when the number of attributes is small (Cohen, 2009). However, as the number of attributes increases, respondents become exhausted and the task becomes difficult (Weller & Romney, 1988). Thurstone (1927) developed a paired-comparison ranking methodology (two attributes at a time) that remains an easy and most reliable method for ranking. In fact, "even a child who is unable to understand a rating scale could perform a series of paired comparisons reliably" (Cohen & Orme, 2004, p. 34). The problem with paired comparison—at least from a practical research perspective— is the number of attributes needed to make all necessary attribute comparisons. That is, because the number of needed pair comparisons for $n$ attributes is $n(n-1)/2$, the necessary paired comparison rises rapidly as the number of attributes

increase. While 5 attributes need only 10 comparisons, 10 attributes require 45 comparisons, and 15 attributes necessitate an alarming 105 comparisons. Therefore, most studies must utilize only a small number of attributes or abandon ranking system methods altogether.

If, however, attributes were arranged into smaller groups of 3-4 items and subjects ordered them in terms of importance, the number of necessary comparisons would decrease (Cohen & Orme, 2004). For example, if researchers want to compare 12 attributes and each choice set had 4 attributes, a balanced incomplete block design (BIBD) would yield only 12 choice sets and, more importantly, only 12 comparisons for respondents. Therefore, instead of ranking all 4 attributes in each choice set, respondents can simply choose the most preferred attribute (i.e. best) as well as the least preferred item (i.e. worst) (Cohen, 2009). This method, known as Best-Worst Scaling (BWS), extends the paired comparisons model and represents the cognitive processes by which respondents classify the most important and least important attributes from choice sets of more than two items (Louviere & Woodworth, 1990).

*Best-Worst Scaling*

For some time, BWS has been used in the social sciences, including research on ethical behavior, food and wine marketing, health care, sport sponsorship, personality research, and consumer behavior (Auger et al., 2007; Cohen, 2009; Finn & Louvierre, 1992; Flynn, Louvierre, Peters & Coast, 2007; Lee, Soutar, and Louviere, 2008; O'Reilley & Huybers, 2015). More recently, BWS has been utilized in educational research. Burke, Schuck, Aubusson, Buchanan, Louviere, & Prescott (2013) used BWS to understand why young teachers remained in the profession. Huybers (2013) chose BWS to assess how pre-service teachers evaluate classroom teachers and university teachers. Finally, Burke, Aubusson and Schuck (2015) employed BWS to measure teachers' attitudes toward administrative support.

Also known as maximum difference scaling, BWS is a combination of multiple choice and paired comparison that is scale-free and forces respondents to discriminate between given sets of choices (Auger et al., 2007; Cohen, 2009). Respondents must repeatedly choose the objects (or *attributes* in this study) in varying choice sets of three to four objects they feel exhibit the largest perceptual difference on an underlying continuum of interest (Finn & Louvierre, 1992). As respondents are forced to make trade-offs between items or benefits, the issue of many items having similar importance weights is overcome (Cohen, 2003). Some consider this richer, more meaningful data than simple Likert scale scores because it permits the quantification of how important a particular item is to an individual, relative to other items under consideration (Burke et al., 2013). BWS further minimizes rating bias because there is only one way to choose the "most" and "least" preferred attribute that is independent of the cultural background of the respondents (Cohen & Markowitz, 2002).

The BWS methodology asks people to consider several factors at once and nominate which factor best matches and least matches the research's criterion of interest (Burke et al., 2013). If items are rated one at a time, respondents have no disincentive to make any type of item comparison and may simply indicate that all attributes matter equally (Carson & Groves, 2007). Researchers are not interested in "everything matters" because it cannot help focus strategic efforts and/or resources (Burke et al., 2013). As opposed to an isolation method, BWS allows researchers to understand the relative importance of each attribute. The more favorable attributes will be chosen more often, while the least favorable attributes will be chosen less often. In other words, BWS experiments allow respondents to designate the best and worst options in a set of attributes in a simple, easy to understand manner. The results of BWS research contribute a measure of factor importance for each attribute that has been evaluated on a comparable ratio scale (Lancsar,

Louviere, & Flynn, 2007). The present study was the first to employ BWS in the context of educational field experiences.

*Best-Worst Scaling Design*

In the BWS design, the total choices over all choice sets in the study are consistent with multiple logistic regression models, with results approximately 95% as accurate (Auger et al., 2004; Marley and Louviere, 2005). This approximation is achieved by subtracting the total worst from the total best incidences for each attribute (Cohen, 2009). As long as the experimental design is balanced (attributes included in the model the same number of times), this difference—whether positive or negative—provides a sound scale. BIBDs are considered most appropriate to organize the attributes to be analyzed into choice sets of three to four attributes. BIBDs control how many times a pair of attributes are compared to one another. Though comparing two attributes to one another multiple times in an experiment increases internal validity, the simplest designs (and the one used in this study) compare an attribute to another attribute only once, thus decreasing the number of items respondents must complete (Cohen & Orme, 2004).

Most BIBDs derive from a Latin Square design that originated in agricultural experimental settings where variations were controlled via rows and columns in fields. Therefore, a Latin Square design for *n* attributes is organized by *n* rows and *n* columns, where each column and each row (also known as a block or choice set) have all the attributes in different positions (Cohen & Orme, 2004). It is considered balanced because each attribute appears exactly the same frequency throughout the choice sets (Weller & Romney, 1988). Previous research indicates that 4-6 attributes per choice set are optimal for most respondents and most tasks (Cohen, 2009; Marley & Louvierre, 2005; Cohen & Orme, 2004). Remaud & Lockshin (2009) indicated that respondents could complete up to 20 choice sets, though they tend to get bored at roughly 10-12 choice sets.

*Attribute Choice Sets*

Based on Coe et al.'s (2014) and Knight's (2011) recommendations of effective teaching and mentoring, 12 attributes were chosen to constitute the choice sets that both pre-service teachers and mentors rated as attributes of successful field experiences. These include respect (named 'equality' by Knight), choice, climate, dialogue, voice, reflection, classroom management, application (named 'praxis' by Knight), professionalism (named 'professional behaviors' by Coe et al.), reciprocity, content knowledge, and quality of instruction. These attributes are presented and defined in Table 1.

The researchers then developed a BIBD to properly allocate the attributes to the 12 choice sets. The BWS methodology employed in this study mirrored the BIBD instructions of Cohen (2009) in his analysis of consumer wine preferences. Thus, "the BIBD for *n* attributes is denoted as (b, r, k, λ) where b is the number of choice sets (blocks), r is the repetition per level, k is the number of items in each choice set (block size) and λ is the pair frequency" (Cohen, 2009, p. 13). Therefore the design for this study is displayed as 12,4,4,1 for the 12 attributes. There are 12 choice sets, with each attribute appearing 4 times across the choice sets. Each choice set contains 4 attributes, and each attribute appears only once with each other (Cohen, 2009). This study's BIBD is displayed in Table 2.

Pre-service teachers and mentors were asked to think about a successful field experience. They were then asked to select the one attribute from the choice set of four they felt was most important and least important to a successful field experience. Table 3 displays an example of a choice set as it appeared in the survey (choice set #3). This particular choice set contains attributes 3, 4, 6 and 11. The choice sets in the survey substituted attributes in accordance to the numbers in

Table 1. It should be noted that the definitions of all the attributes were present throughout the survey in each choice set to make the process of comparing attributes easier.

*Data Collection*

Data was collected in Spring 2018 from mentors and pre-service teachers at a southern mid-sized university. The pre-service teachers (n=52; 98% response rate) were recruited from four teacher education courses that had field experience components embedded in the coursework. Mentors who participated in the study (n=40; 81% response rate) were current mentor teachers in the university's teacher preparation program. An initial email was sent to all participants asking for their participation in the study. A follow-up email was sent one month later to remind potential participants about the research opportunity. Cohen (2009) suggested that Best Worst surveys not completed properly, or those missing answers in one or more table(s) should be invalidated because missing data can lead to an unbalanced design. Thus, pairwise deletion techniques were Employed with the data set.

**Results**

The attributes from the choice sets were first transformed into their original item numbers as seen in Table 1. Then the best minus worst (B-W) for each item giving 12 BW variables for each of the 12 items. Since each attribute appeared four times in this design (Table 2), each attribute could be selected as best, four times at most, none as worst, or vice versa. Therefore, the BW score for each attribute could range from +4 to -4 for each respondent. The overall attribute rank—or BW score—was calculated by subtracting the number of times the attribute was chosen as least important (or Worst) from the number of times it was chosen as most important (or Best) in all choice sets for all respondents (Cohen, 2009). An attribute with a positive BW score means it was selected more frequently as the "Best" than the "Worst." The opposite holds for negative BW scores. The average BW score was calculated by dividing total BW scores by the number of

respondents and the frequency that each attribute appears in the design of the choice sets, or four in the present study (Cohen, 2009).

Table 4 presents pre-service teachers' BW scores as well as the average BW scores of the attributes that contribute to a successful field experience. Table 5 does the same for mentors. The tables display those attributes that are most important to each group, those attributes that are similar to other attributes, and those attributes that are least important. A graphical presentation of plotting the twelve attributes' BW average scores vs. the attributes is depicted in Figure 1.

For pre-service teachers, the most important attribute that contributes to successful field experiences was classroom management. There were four other attributes that seemed to be the strongest contributors to successful field experiences (B-W > 0), including respect, quality of instruction, climate, and content knowledge. Those attributes selected by pre-service teachers in the middle of the scale included application, voice, and professionalism, with dialogue chosen as best about the same frequency as worst. These attributes could either be positive (B-W > 0; e.g. application) or negative (B-W < 0; e.g. voice), but were close to 0 and were somewhat neutral indicators of successful field experiences. Four attributes; however, seemed to be unimportant to a successful field experience (B-W < 0). They were dialogue, reflection, reciprocity, and choice, as they had average BW scores that were strongly negative, suggesting that these attributes were chosen much more often as worst attributes compared to the number of times they were chosen best.

Similar to pre-service teachers, mentor teachers also chose classroom management as the most important attribute that leads to successful field experiences, though it was a stronger influencer for mentors (0.556) as opposed to pre-service teachers (0.412). The similarities and differences are presented in Figure 1. Interestingly, the three most important attributes for mentors

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were present in the four most important attributes for pre-service teachers as well, though in differing orders and differing degrees of influence. Similarly, the three least important attributes for both mentors and pre-service teachers were the same, though order and influence differed slightly.

The question whether classroom management is significantly different from respect—or whether there is any significant difference between any two attributes for that matter—for pre-service teachers and mentors could be answered by applying independent samples t-tests across all possible pairs of attribute means in each group. Tables 7 and 8 provide mean comparisons for all twelve attributes based on average B-W scores. We can see that, for both pre-service teacher and mentor groups, statistically similar and different groups of attributes that emerged from the data. For example, in the pre-service teacher sample, classroom management and quality of instruction are not significantly different, while professionalism and reflection are both significantly less important ($p < 0.05$) than climate. According to previous BWS researchers, the BWS method can provide better discrimination than more common rating scale methods (Cohen & Orme, 2004; Cohen, 2009; Hein, Jaeger, Carr, & Delahunty, 2008; Cohen & Neira, 2003; Louviere et al., 2000).

Another way to compare the importance of attributes is to calculate ratio scores (Cohen, 2009). This is accomplished for each attribute by taking the square root after dividing the total Best (B) scores by the total Worst (W) scores for each respondent (adding 0.5 to each W score prevents dividing by zero). This coefficient measures each attribute's choice probability as compared to the most important attribute, which is benchmarked at 100% (Auger et al., 2007; Lee &. Louviere, 2008; Marley & Louviere, 2005). All other attributes can then be compared to one another by these relative importance ratios (Cohen, 2009). Figure 2 demonstrates these relative

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importance ratios for both mentors and pre-service teachers. The interpretation is that a certain attribute is some percent as likely to be chosen best by a respondent as the most important attribute chosen by all respondents, which has been benchmarked at 100%. For example, the attribute benchmarked at 100 for pre-service teachers is respect; its relative importance is 100%. In contrast, the relative importance of reciprocity for pre-service teachers is 15.3%. That means that reciprocity only has a 15.3% chance of being selected by a pre-service teacher respondent in the survey as Best as compared to respect.

The most important attribute for mentors was classroom management. That means mentors think it is most important that pre-service teachers learn to efficiently use time, resources, procedures, and space with clarity and consistency during their field experience; it is denoted as 100%. All other attributes are related to this attribute and could be interpreted as relative to the most important attribute or to each other. In contrast, one of the most important attributes for pre-service teachers (as mentioned earlier) was respect. That means pre-service teachers think it is important that they and mentors are equally respectful of each other and are respected by the P-12 students during the field experience. This attribute too is denoted as 100%.

When consulting Figure 2, one can conclude that, in the opinion of mentors, Classroom Management (100%) is more than twice as important as Content Knowledge (43.1%). Likewise, pre-service teachers feel that Respect (100%) is just about twice as important as Climate (47.1%). Thus, in both examples, the later attribute has less than a 50% chance of being selected as "Best" as compared to the former attribute.

One of the advantages of BW scaling is that the scores tend to be unbiased and do not suffer scale confounds; therefore, it is straightforward to compare data across groups, in this case pre-service teachers and mentors (Louiviere, Hensher, & Swait, 2000; Cohen, 2009). Table 6 compares

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total BW scores, the average BW scores, and the relative importance of each attribute across both groups. With relative importance the key indicator, it appears that pre-service teachers have roughly the same probability of selecting three attributes—Application, Voice, and Professionalism—as important (between 25.4% and 30.8%). Likewise, mentors have approximately the same probability of selecting three attributes—Voice, Professionalism, and Reciprocity—as important (between 12.2% and 16.9%). If we compare attributes across groups, we can also observe similarities and differences. For instance, the relative importance of Application is similar between pre-service teachers (30.8%) and mentors (31.6%) and can conclude that the probability of choosing Application as a 'Best' attribute is similar between pre-service teachers and mentors. However, the relative importance differs greatly between the two groups in relation to Professionalism. Pre-service teachers (25.4%) were twice as likely to select Professionalism as a 'Best' attribute as opposed to mentors (13.7%). The same relationship seems to exist for the Respect attribute (pre-service teachers = 100; mentors = 65.8).

## Conclusion

The use of Best Worst Scaling (BWS) is an innovative approach in addressing the importance of the attributes of a successful field experience. There can be many benefits of using this method in field experience research as it forces respondents to not only consider the importance of the attributes of successful field experience, but to also examine the relationships among them. Respondents cannot contemplate on the attributes singularly, but they must compare them to the other set of attributes within the BIBD. Then the respondents must consider that same attribute three more times, but as it compares to a different set of attributes. This novel approach requires a deep dive into and among the attributes and allows for more meaningful delineation of

the attributes, as well as increases the validity of the respondents' choices from the perspectives of the two most important players in the experience, the mentor and pre-service teacher.

There are many advantages of using the Best Worst Scale; however, it does have its limitations. There is concern that due to the repeated items, the respondents could become uninterested and not accurately reflect their choices; however, by employing a streamlined, online survey and limiting the number of items, it is possible to reduce the likelihood of this occurring (Cohen, 2009).

This examination into the weight of each attribute as they compare not only to each other, but also across mentors and pre-service teachers allows even further exploration among the similarities and differences found between the respondents. The similarities noted in the study highlighted the necessity of certain attributes and in some cases are not surprising, such as the fact that both mentor and pre-service teachers found Classroom Management to be an important attribute of successful field experience. It is interesting; however, that due to the comparative nature of the BWS method, the results offer additional insight that may not be discovered using other methods, and offers researchers opportunities to ask more clarifying questions. For example, the found differences among the perceptions regarding the attributes professionalism and respect. The likelihood of these attributes being chosen as most important were far greater for pre-service teachers than mentors. Future research would allow further exploration of these findings in order to determine the impact of these differences, specifically how these differences might influence the perceptions of the lived field experience from the viewpoint of the mentor and pre-service teacher once it is completed, and as such, if those experiences would continue to be viewed as successful by both parties.

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**Table 1:** Attributes residents and mentors considered as contributors to successful field experiences

Attributes & Definitions

*1 Respect:* pre-service teachers & mentors are equally respectful of each other and are respected by the students

*2 Choice:* pre-service teachers have a choice regarding co-planning and lesson selection

*3 Dialogue:* pre-service teachers & mentors have meaningful, authentic conversations regarding professional learning

*4 Reflection:* verbal & written reflections on practices are integral to professional learning

*5 Application:* applying professional learning to real-life practice

*6 Reciprocity:* pre-service teachers & mentors both gain professionally from the experience

*7 Content Knowledge:* deep knowledge of the subject & the ability to teach content effectively to students

*8 Quality of Instruction:* the use of best-teaching practices including effective questioning & assessment

*9 Climate:* positive relationships among mentors, pre-service teachers and students

10 *Voice:* residents & mentors share thoughts & ideas; feel those thoughts & ideas are heard and respected

11 *Classroom Management:* efficient use of time, resources, procedures, space with clarity & consistency

12 *Professionalism:* participating in professional development; working with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders in a professional manner

**Table 2:** Balanced incomplete block design (BIBD) for 12 attributes

| Choice set # | Attribute no. (12,4,4,1) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 1 | 2 | 4 | 9 |
| **2** | 2 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| **3** | 3 | 4 | 6 | 11 |
| **4** | 4 | 5 | 7 | 12 |
| **5** | 5 | 6 | 8 | 1 |
| **6** | 6 | 7 | 9 | 2 |
| **7** | 7 | 8 | 10 | 3 |
| **8** | 8 | 9 | 11 | 4 |
| **9** | 9 | 10 | 12 | 5 |
| **10** | 10 | 11 | 1 | 6 |
| **11** | 11 | 12 | 2 | 7 |
| **12** | 12 | 1 | 3 | 8 |

**Table 3:** Example of choice set (# 3) presented to respondents

Think about a successful field experience. Below are four attributes. Please select the ONE attribute you feel is MOST important to a successful field experience and ONE attribute you feel is LEAST important to a successful field experience.

| Most Important (Best) | | Least Important (Worst) |
|---|---|---|
| ○ | Dialogue | ○ |
| ○ | Reflection | ○ |
| ○ | Reciprocity | ○ |
| ○ | Classroom Management | ○ |

**Table 4:** Pre-service teachers' scores on attributes that contribute to successful field experiences

| # | Attribute | Total Best | Total Worst | B-W Score | Average B-W Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Classroom Mgmt. | 100 | 16 | 84 | 0.412 |
| 1 | Respect | 81 | 7 | 74 | 0.363 |
| 8 | Quality of Instruction | 81 | 18 | 63 | 0.309 |
| 9 | Climate | 73 | 28 | 45 | 0.221 |
| 7 | Content Knowledge | 60 | 17 | 43 | 0.211 |
| 5 | Application | 56 | 51 | 5 | 0.025 |
| 10 | Voice | 51 | 57 | -6 | -0.029 |
| 12 | Professionalism | 42 | 56 | -14 | -0.067 |
| 3 | Dialogue | 30 | 60 | -30 | -0.147 |
| 4 | Reflection | 14 | 89 | -75 | - 0.368 |
| 6 | Reciprocity | 29 | 107 | -78 | -0.382 |
| 2 | Choice | 7 | 118 | -111 | -0.544 |

**Table 5:** Mentors' scores on attributes that contribute to successful field experience

| # | Attribute | Total Best | Total Worst | B-W Score | Average B-W Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Classroom Mgmt. | 95 | 6 | 89 | 0.556 |
| 8 | Quality of Instruction | 82 | 7 | 75 | 0.469 |
| 7 | Content Knowledge | 50 | 17 | 33 | 0.206 |
| 1 | Respect | 48 | 17 | 31 | 0.194 |
| 9 | Climate | 43 | 17 | 25 | 0.156 |
| 5 | Application | 49 | 31 | 18 | 0.113 |
| 3 | Dialogue | 44 | 27 | 17 | 0.106 |
| 10 | Voice | 20 | 44 | -24 | -0.150 |
| 12 | Professionalism | 16 | 54 | -38 | -0.238 |
| 6 | Reciprocity | 20 | 85 | -65 | -0.406 |
| 4 | Reflection | 11 | 80 | -69 | - 0.431 |
| 2 | Choice | 2 | 105 | -103 | -0.644 |

**Table 6:** Importance of successful field experience attributes by pre-service teachers and mentors; ranked by pre-service teachers' relative importance (R.I.) percent

| # | Attribute | Pre-service Teachers | | | | Mentors | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B-W Score | Average B-W Score | SQRT (B/W) | R.I.(%) | B-W Score | Average B-W Score | SQRT (B/W) | R.I.(%) |
| 1 | Respect | 74 | 0.363 | 3.40 | 100.0 | 31 | 0.194 | 2.62 | 65.8 |
| 11 | Classroom Mgmt. | 84 | 0.412 | 2.50 | 73.5 | 89 | 0.556 | 3.97 | 100.0 |
| 8 | Quality of Instruction | 63 | 0.309 | 2.12 | 62.4 | 75 | 0.469 | 3.42 | 85.0 |
| 7 | Content Knowledge | 43 | 0.211 | 1.88 | 55.2 | 33 | 0.206 | 1.71 | 43.1 |
| 9 | Climate | 45 | 0.221 | 1.61 | 47.5 | 25 | 0.156 | 1.59 | 40.0 |
| 5 | Application | 5 | 0.025 | 1.05 | 30.8 | 18 | 0.113 | 1.26 | 31.6 |
| 10 | Voice | -6 | -0.029 | 0.95 | 27.8 | -24 | -0.150 | 0.67 | 16.9 |
| 12 | Professionalism | -14 | -0.067 | 0.87 | 25.4 | -38 | -0.238 | 0.54 | 13.7 |
| 3 | Dialogue | -30 | -0.147 | 0.71 | 20.8 | 17 | 0.106 | 1.28 | 32.1 |
| 6 | Reciprocity | -78 | -0.382 | 0.52 | 15.3 | -65 | -0.406 | 0.49 | 12.2 |
| 4 | Reflection | -75 | - 0.368 | 0.40 | 11.7 | -69 | -0.431 | 0.37 | 9.3 |
| 2 | Choice | -111 | -0.544 | 0.24 | 7.2 | -103 | -0.644 | 0.14 | 3.5 |

**Table 7:** Mean comparison (independent samples t-test) of average B-W scores for pre-service teachers (*n*=52)

| # | Attribute | B-W Score | Average B-W Score | Comparison of means* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Classroom Management | 84 | 0.41 | X | | | |
| 1 | Respect | 74 | 0.363 | X | | | |
| 8 | Quality of Instruction | 63 | 0.309 | X | X | | |
| 9 | Climate | 43 | 0.211 | | X | | |
| 7 | Content Knowledge | 45 | 0.221 | | X | | |
| 5 | Application | 5 | 0.025 | | | X | |
| 10 | Voice | -6 | -0.029 | | | X | |
| 12 | Professionalism | -14 | -0.067 | | | X | |
| 3 | Dialogue | -30 | -0.147 | | | X | |
| 6 | Reciprocity | -78 | -0.382 | | | | X |
| 4 | Reflection | -75 | -0.368 | | | | X |
| 2 | Choice | -111 | -0.544 | | | | X |

*Items with X in the same column or row are not significantly different

**Table 8:** Mean comparison (independent samples t-test) of average B-W scores for mentors (*n*=40)

| # | Attribute | B-W Score | Average B-W Score | Comparison of means* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Classroom Mgmt. | 89 | 0.556 | X | | | |
| 8 | Quality of Instruction | 75 | 0.469 | X | | | |
| 7 | Content Knowledge | 33 | 0.206 | | X | | |
| 1 | Respect | 31 | 0.194 | | X | | |
| 9 | Climate | 25 | 0.156 | | X | | |
| 5 | Application | 18 | 0.113 | | X | | |
| 3 | Dialogue | 17 | 0.106 | | X | | |
| 10 | Voice | -24 | -0.150 | | | X | |
| 12 | Professionalism | -38 | -0.238 | | | X | |
| 6 | Reciprocity | -65 | -0.406 | | | | X |
| 4 | Reflection | -69 | - 0.431 | | | | X |
| 2 | Choice | -103 | -0.644 | | | | X |

*Items with X in the same column or row are not significantly different

**Figure 1:** Average B-W scores of attributes that contribute to successful field experiences (absolute values)
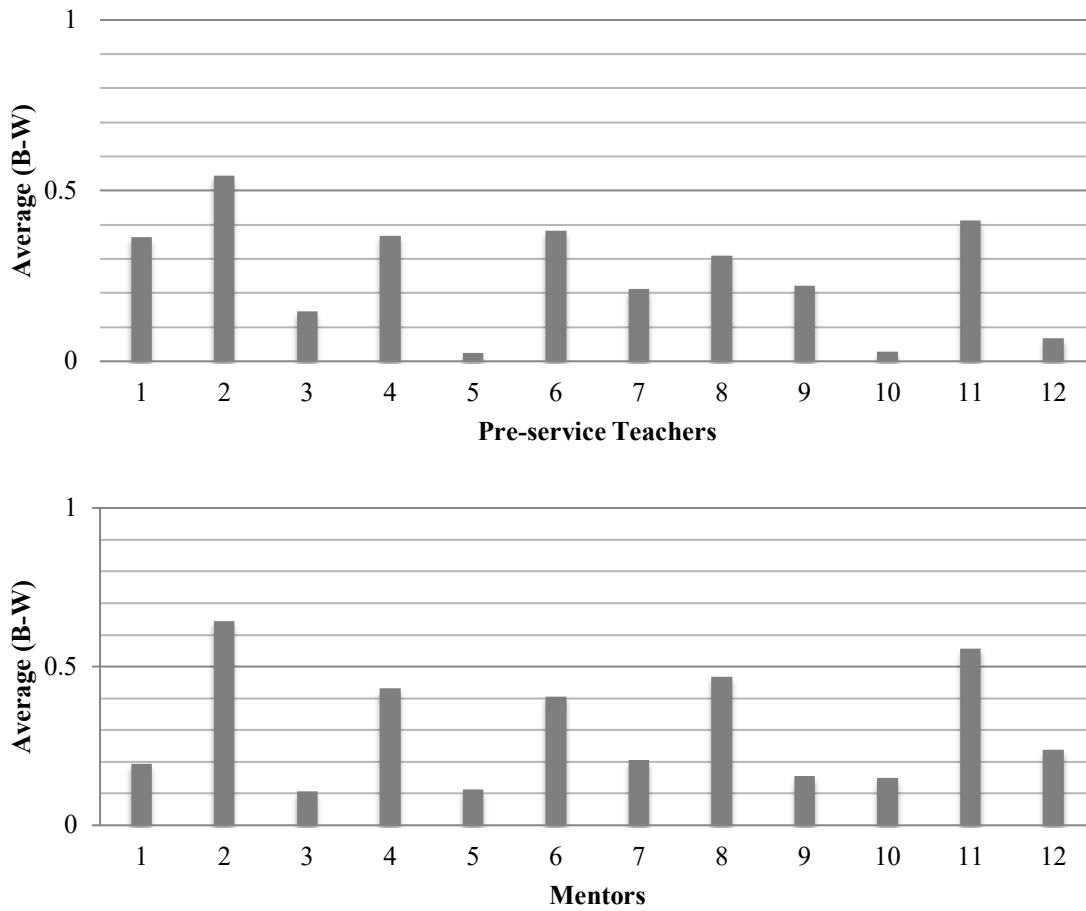




**Figure 2:** Relative importance of attributes that contribute to successful field experiences for pre-service teachers (*n*=52) and mentors (*n*=40).