

# *The Field Experience Journal*

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## From the Editor

Dear Readers of *The Field Experience Journal*:

The first article in this edition comes to us from Amy Earls Thompson of Central Arkansas University. This study examines teacher candidates' perceptions while working with struggling readers in an embedded clinical field experience.

Leigh M. Tolley, Rebecca O'Brien, and Peter Sheppard in their submission titled "Examining Financial Implications for a Year-Long Residency in a Teacher Preparation Program" seek to inform teacher preparation program stakeholders of teacher candidates' financial realities and perceptions of a state-mandated year-long undergraduate teacher residency program.

Student agency such as student voice, choice, autonomy and interest is the focus of "How Teacher Candidates Support Student Agency in an Early Field Experience" provided by Amanda Wall.

Todd Hodgkinson and Jennifer Thoma in their article "Looking for the "Carrot": Factors that Could Motivate In-Service Teachers to Host Clinical Field Placements" share the results of surveying done to investigate the motivation of teachers to serve as mentors and provide placement opportunities for teacher candidates.

Authors Amy Farah, Kimberly Swartzentruber, Tiffany Coleman, Katharine Page, and LaTeshia Warren discuss the roles of instructional coaches in the transference of research and practices to the practice of college level supervision of teacher candidates in our final article.

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

# **Embedded Field Experiences: Establishing Practices in Reading Instruction**

*Amy Earls Thompson*

*University of Central Arkansas*

## **Abstract**

The ability to effectively teach struggling readers is critically important. Research has shown that providing teacher candidates with authentic learning experiences can better prepare future teachers. This study examines teacher candidates' perceptions while working with struggling readers in an embedded clinical field experience grounded in Kolb's experiential learning theory. Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as the framework, the author collected and analyzed data from 37 participants including digital journals and focus groups. This study found that this experience impacted (a) instruction; (b) management of students; and (c) theory to practice while working with struggling readers. This study demonstrates how vitally important embedded clinical field experiences are in educator preparation programs.

*Keywords:* alternative licensure, teacher education, experiential education, literacy

“It is difficult to overestimate the importance of reading for success in school and in life,” (Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 2; Miller et al., 2010). “Without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational successes are limited” (Lyon, 2003, p. 3) Effective literacy instruction can reduce reading difficulties (Kilpatrick, 2015; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012) and begins with educator preparation programs (EPPs) (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Traditional EPPs have not produced the number of teachers needed to fuel the teacher pipeline (Lewis-Spector, 2016; Sass, 2015; Nakai & Turley, 2003; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2011). Therefore, alternative licensure programs for those entering the teaching profession via a post-baccalaureate pathway have risen in number with many university and college EPPs establishing programs to help fill this increasing need (Lewis-Spector, 2016; Sass, 2015; Nakai & Turley, 2003; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2011).

Preparing K-12 teacher candidates to deliver effective literacy instruction can be achieved through the use of embedded clinical field experiences (ECFE) (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Through these experiences, teacher candidates become equipped to differentiate learning for all (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). In alternative programs, this can be challenging because not all states require literacy coursework and field experiences which does not allow teacher candidates time to develop a (a) knowledge base, (b) coursework connected to practice, and (c) experience involving prolonged yet consistent mentoring (Risko & Reid, 2019). Of the programs with literacy courses, candidates are prepared to teach literacy to struggling readers via instruction and (a) no field experience, (b) field experience in their own classroom, or an (c) ECFE (Grossman & Loeb, 2008).

A gap in the literature exists regarding ECFEs for the preparation of teacher candidates enrolled in alternative certification programs (Risko & Reid, 2019). Additional research is

needed to understand the value of ECFEs in preparation of these nontraditionally prepared and alternatively certified K-12 teachers to clearly identify and better understand the structure, purpose, key components, and perceived successes and barriers - allowing solutions to be created to overcome these barriers (Risko & Reid, 2019; Boyd et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Seeing value in the significance of ECFEs, one mid-south EPP, designed for alternative licensure seeking graduate students, consisted of the course Reading Difficulties which incorporated experiential learning during which teacher candidates worked in an ECFE with struggling readers. Working in the ECFE provided a focus on assessment and intervention with the instructor on-site to model and guide. To examine the impact of the ECFE, a qualitative study was developed with the research question: What are teacher candidates' perceptions working with struggling readers in an ECFE grounded in Kolb's experiential learning theory?

### **Rationale and Significance**

“Combating illiteracy has become a national problem;” however, “effective teachers can provide the solution,” (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016, p. 46). The International Reading Association (IRA) concluded placing a quality teacher in every classroom is key to addressing the challenges of reading achievement in schools (IRA, 2007). Because colleges and universities prepare 80% of K-12 teachers, increased attention to the preparation of teacher candidates in literacy is critical (United States Department of Education, 2013). EPPs can make great strides towards placing a quality teacher in every classroom by involving their teacher candidates in diversified ECFEs in authentic contexts with explicit guidance and differentiated instruction (ILA & NCTE, 2017).

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Preparation of K-12 Teachers for Literacy Instruction**

Reading researchers have focused on the effectiveness of EPPs in literacy instruction. Researchers reported the most effective approaches to literacy instruction were grounded in rigorous, peer-reviewed research (ILA, 2016). The ILA has established standards for the profession that can be used to guide EPPs in curriculum and assessment design and to meet the professional call for improvement in teacher preparation programs that can be accomplished by (a) addressing literacy in every course and clinical experience and (b) ensuring that EPPs equip their teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective literacy teachers in order for their students to become effective readers (ILA, 2016).

### **Clinical Field Experiences**

Clinical field experiences are defined as a variety of K-12 opportunities in which teacher candidates observe, assist, and/or instruct (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2002). Ronfeldt et al. (2014) found that teacher candidates with more clinical field experiences and methods-related courses felt better prepared in both traditional and alternative EPPs. Alternative EPPs with limited to no field experience often prepare teacher candidates by asking them to respond to scenarios or to participate in role-play experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In order to offer a stronger and more effective program, EPPs should provide authentic, extensive, supervised, and modeled clinical field experiences integrated with coursework linking theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Many graduate programs have moved to online interfaces to meet the needs of working adults (Caywood & Duckett, 2003; Gillett et al., 2007). EPPs are embracing online education requiring a change in delivery methods. Teacher educators continually seek innovative ways to deliver content via distance learning in ways demonstrating pedagogical best practices (Daves &

Roberts, 2010; Gillett et al., 2007; Wake & Bunn, 2015) which can be challenging when incorporating ECFEs into a program of study (Hixon & So, 2009; Rosenberg et al., 1996).

### **Field Experiences in Literacy**

EPP courses and clinical field experiences typically have been separate entities (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). However, research indicates reading courses in EPPs should explicitly engage teacher candidates in a variety of early ECFEs so teacher candidates can apply course concepts and pedagogical methods and interact with strong models and mentors (Coffey, 2010; IRA, 2007; Zeichner, 2009). Although these recommendations represent the ideal, teacher “educators face a variety of challenges when planning productive, meaningful clinical experiences throughout their preparation programs . . . [as they] seek ways to transform traditional learning opportunities into purposeful and relevant experiences for candidates” (Heafner et al., 2014, p. 520). ECFEs should allow teacher educators to create environments that challenge candidates to bridge content to practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Hammerness et al., 2005).

Teacher candidates must accept that the needs of today’s K-12 students are varied, requiring K-12 teachers to differentiate more than ever before (Tomlinson, 2014). As a result, K-12 teachers should be able to adapt to their students’ needs and maintain a repertoire of skills, strategies, and methods at their disposal (Tomlinson, 2014). Teacher candidates must be involved in more in-depth field experiences to rise to these expectations (Tomlinson, 2014). These experiences include providing teacher candidates with opportunities to enact intervention as well as small and whole group instruction (ILA & NCTE, 2017).

### **Experiential Learning**

David Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a “continuous process grounded in experience” (p. 41). In Kolb’s theory of experiential learning (1984), a cycle of four processes

provides a procedure for which an experience, such as a field experience, can be transformed into knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Dennick, 2012). The process includes (a) concrete experience - engaging in a new experience; (b) reflective observation - observing, reflecting, and assessing the experience from different perspectives; (c) abstract conceptualization - summarizing the experience and synthesizing the information; and (d) active experimentation - adopting and applying new concepts (Di Muro & Terry, 2007; Su, 2015).

The purpose of Kolb's experiential learning theory is for the adult learner to gain knowledge from a concrete, life experience that is authentic, challenging, and generates problems or questions (Murphy, 2007; Kolb, 1984). Experiences should be enhanced by social interaction, discussion, support from facilitators/mentors, and reflection (Kolb, 1984). Through the support of a more skillful teacher, the learner can be guided through this area of potential learning where, through experiential learning, experiences transform to new understanding (Turunen & Tuovila, 2012). Providing students with experiential learning is difficult due to tensions felt by the institutions of higher education to provide students with online learning experiences, either as part of the course or as the entire course (Bell, et al., 2002).

### **Method**

As a result of the diverse needs of K-12 students, K-12 teachers must be able to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom (Lewis-Spector, 2016; Tomlinson, 2014). Teacher candidates must be involved in more in-depth clinical field experiences to obtain experience needed to meet these expectations (Lewis-Spector, 2016). In this study, teacher candidates were engaged in experiential learning in an ECFE grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory qualitative study was to describe and understand the



perceptions of the teacher candidates working in an ECFE with struggling readers at the BearsRead Literacy Camp (BLC). An ECFE will be generally defined as a field experience, embedded within a course, with on-site instructor supervision. (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the research study was designed to examine candidates' perceptions as they relate to their developing practice around the use of assessment and intervention with struggling readers. Examining if this ECFE made a positive impact on the preparation of the teacher candidates would contribute to understanding one way EPPs can support the learning of struggling readers.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study examined teacher candidates' perceptions of their practices in an ECFE grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory in a Master of Arts in Teaching alternative licensure program's required literacy course – Reading Difficulties. Teacher candidates began each class in the BLC ECFE. Each teacher candidate provided intervention for 75 minutes once a week for eight weeks. For 15-20 minutes after each BLC session, teacher candidates recorded their reflections using the ReCap digital journal app. Class followed with questions, answers, and commentary about the ECFE before delivery of new instruction. University faculty on hand included the director and the course instructor of the BLC.

Parents from around the state applied for the BLC which was marketed for struggling readers in grades one through eight. A letter of recommendation from the student's teacher was required. Teacher candidates enrolled in the Reading Difficulties course assessed students pre- and post- intervention. Teacher candidates provided phonological support with the Barton Reading and Spelling Program and differentiated lessons based on student's individual needs.

### **Setting**

The research setting was a four-year public university in the mid-south offering

undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees to students in face-to-face, online, or hybrid capacities. MAT candidates in the College of Education at the university have previously earned baccalaureate degrees without teaching credentials from accredited institutions graduating with a minimum 2.7 GPA. The MAT program is designed primarily for teacher candidates teaching in their own classrooms on provisional licenses. Prior to the creation of this ECFE, teacher candidates were assumed to be gaining direct experience teaching in their own classrooms as the teacher of record. The transfer of content from MAT course work to the candidates' classrooms in K-12 schools was assumed to occur through a process of natural transfer. MAT faculty began to question this assumption in terms of literacy instruction and desired to create an ECFE that was integrated into the course with more direct control to benefit both teacher candidates and local young struggling readers in a reading clinic-like setting. The ECFE allowed teacher candidates to move from theory to practice while being supervised by the university instructor.

### **Participants**

Thirty-seven MAT teacher candidates participated in the study ( $n = 37$ ). Of the 37 participants, eight identified as male (22%) and 29 as female (78%). Fourteen participants were 21-29 years of age. Seventeen were 30-39 years of age. Four were 40-49 years of age. One was 50-59 years of age, and one was older than 60 years of age. Racially, participants reported their ethnicities as two (5%) African-Americans, 34 (92%) Caucasians, and one (3%) Hispanic.

Reported teaching experience varied amongst the participants. Ten of the 37 participants were teaching in their own classrooms - four in charter or private schools and six in a public-school classroom on a provisional teaching license. Two of the four participants teaching in charter or private schools reported having four or more years of teaching experience. The remaining eight of the ten teaching in their own classrooms reported having no more than one

year of teaching experience. Participants in the research study were studying to become certified in various areas: (a) K-6; (b) middle level 4-8; (c) secondary 7-12; and K-12 specialty.

### **Data Collection**

Participants created digital journal reflections utilizing the ReCap app after each BLC session. All participants completed the required journals as part of their coursework. However, participants signed consent for their work to be utilized in the research study. Weekly prompts were provided to the participants where participants reflected on assessment, pedagogy, intervention, and experiences. Prompts were created by “building focused questions to flesh out our categories” and based on Kolb’s Theory of Experiential Learning (Charmaz, 2017, p. 2).

At the end of the course, participants were invited to participate in a single category design focus group. Focus groups were used because they allowed the researcher to listen, gather information, and encourage participants to share their perceptions and perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The focus group ensured a more natural environment than an interview because focus group members were influenced and being influenced by other focus group members, replicating the way people tend to behave during typical conversations (Creswell, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The researcher conducting the focus group was the instructor of the course. While the focus group moderator was known to the participants, ethical assurances were met by transparency in all aspects of the design, methodology, and dissemination of information (Sim and Waterfield, 2019). Participants were aware “there are risks in taking part in focus group research and taking part assumes you are willing to assume those risks,” (Tolich, 2009, p. 103).

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Qualitative analysis is systematic, verifiable, sequential, and continuous (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Themes were identified and categorized using NVivo 11 software through a

constant comparative method where patterns were identified in the data, and relationships were identified between ideas or concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Entries in the digital journals were recorded by each participant, and each focus group session was audio recorded. Both were transcribed by the researcher. After the focus group, the researcher debriefed the participants by summarizing their responses for correction or verification. Constant comparative analyses of the digital journals and focus group data were conducted to assess teacher candidates' perceptions of working in an ECFE.

According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), three major stages characterize the constant comparative analysis: (a) open coding, (b) grouping into categories, and (c) selective coding. These stages were evident as data were coded at the paragraph level with multiple codes tagged to each paragraph unit as relevant and appropriate. The first set of data were coded separately by the researcher and a colleague, serving as an objective reviewer. The two met, compared codes, and aligned their coding using joint-probability of agreement and an iterative process. The participants' statements were read multiple times to check and refine alignment with identified codes, categories, and themes (Charmaz, 2017). Codes were agreed upon. The researcher then asked five experts to code a randomly selected sampling of data in order to assess percent agreement and serve as another means to validate the codes and categories. The researcher recorded the responses for statistical analysis and to refine the coding. The researcher sought feedback on the codes and the experience at the end of each session.

Based on the percent of agreement, results for each code, and comments from the content experts; codes were collapsed, reorganized, renamed, and/or deleted. Code definitions were revised for readability and clarification. This process helped refine and solidify code structures. The researcher and colleague then re-coded the initial data set to determine a final inter-rater

reliability statistic. Both percent agreement and Cohen's Kappa were conducted. Cohen's Kappa coefficient measures inter-rater agreement for qualitative items and is more robust than simple percent agreement as it controls for the possibility of chance agreement between two raters who each classify items into mutually exclusive categories (Field, 2013). The percent agreement was 70%. The Cohen's Kappa coefficient resulted in a moderate agreement at 63.7%. The final list of codes can be found in Table 1.1 in Appendix A.

## **Results**

The coded data provided insights into the experiences and perceptions of the teacher candidates participating in the ECFE. Analysis of primary codes led to an organization system of main categories. The three primary categories were Principles, Practices, and Professionalism. Practices accounted for 54% of the data and encompassed the curriculum, instruction, assessments, and classroom management ranging from planning and preparation through facilitation and forethought to the next learning experience. Data analysis resulted in three findings under the category Practices. These findings were a direct result of Kolb's Experiential Learning stages reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. Teacher candidates observed, reflected, assessed, and summarized their experience - synthesizing the information into a new concept (Di Muro & Terry, 2007; Su, 2015; Kolb, 1984).

### **Finding One: Instruction in the Embedded Clinical Field Experience**

Based on the category and code Practices: Instruction in the ECFE, teacher candidates saw value in utilizing differentiation, multisensory instruction, and varied instructional materials to meet the needs of struggling readers. Instruction in the ECFE was coded in 18% of the Practices category. Codes under Instruction included: (a) Differentiation, (b) Instructional Materials, (c) Modification and Adjustment, and (d) Multisensory Instruction. Instruction was

found in the concrete experience stage of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory in the ECFE with teacher candidates engaging in this new experience (Di Muro & Terry, 2007; Su, 2015; Kolb, 1984). Instruction was defined as the ability of teacher candidates to provide content in an engaging way that utilized a variety of Instructional Materials (i.e., games, technology, books, manipulatives) and multisensory practices. While planning and providing Instruction, teacher candidates practiced Differentiation via individualized Instruction to meet the needs of their learners. Teacher candidates also needed to understand and employ Modification and Adjustment based on circumstances beyond their control and the mastery of content.

Differentiation was an important concept the teacher candidates learned through the ECFE. Candidates commented, "Reading instruction is diverse and complex. It needs to be tailored to fit a student's needs. Not all strategies work for all students." In a focus group, one teacher candidate responded to that statement by affirming, "It is a mixed bag that varies from student to student, requiring what is essentially endless differentiation."

Teacher candidates in the ECFE displayed resourcefulness by utilizing a variety of Instructional Materials. Teacher candidates utilized Barton tiles, iPads, apps, balls, play-dough, sidewalk chalk, marker boards, board games, and slime into the lessons. The materials were used because teacher candidates valued Multisensory Instruction. One teacher candidate commented:

Multisensory instruction taps into the memory of material being learned. I had a lesson where I had my students jump on circles for each sound in a word, and this seemed to help them begin to understand the separation of sounds.

Furthermore, another teacher candidate stated, "Multisensory instruction engaged the student. The student enjoyed phonics games and literacy games on the tablet. The student loved going outdoors and dribbling a basketball for syllable count activities."

Teacher candidates in the ECFE also identified understanding and employing Modification and Adjustment during Instruction as important. One teacher candidate stated I learned during the first lesson that I used Barton tiles that 30 minutes straight is not going to maintain student interest and motivation, so I was able to use that learning experience for the next week. I was able to exchange the Barton tiles for other things like M and M's one night, and construction paper where he was able to jump from tile to tile instead of moving tiles on the desk. That helped.

### **Finding Two: Management of Students in the Embedded Clinical Field Experience**

Based on the category and code Practices: Management of Students, teacher candidates in the ECFE encountered behaviors to be addressed before learning could occur. Teaching also involves complex motivational and behavioral dynamics based on student needs. Management of Students in the ECFE was coded in 9% of the Practices category. Management of Students helped ensure students were on-task and engaged, behavior concerns were addressed, and plans changed based on behaviors that limited the learning experience. While managing students, teacher candidates participated in active experimentation in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory by trying and adopting new concepts (Su, 2015; Kolb, 1984). Through trial and error in the ECFE, teacher candidates delivered differentiated instruction and managed behaviors that were not always resolved by the end of the session. "A plan that didn't go as intended was the first Barton lesson. They threw the tiles, refused to work, and were just silly the entire time." Sometimes those behaviors took a toll on the teacher candidates. "I do not see much value in a student that did not make an effort to benefit." Sometimes those behaviors sent the teacher candidates looking for a new way to go about interventions.

I was not prepared for the 1<sup>st</sup> grade energy level. Coming here and seeing how she was

like climbing on the walls and doing all of this high energy stuff, I thought, I have got to do something else, or this is not going to be a very good month.

### **Finding Three: Theory to Practice in the Embedded Clinical Field Experience**

Based on the category and code Practices: Theory to Practice, through reflective observation (Di Muro & Terry, 2007; Su, 2015; Kolb, 1984) teacher candidates in the ECFE found the experience a move from theory to practice. They were able to assess, plan, and prepare instruction for struggling readers while planning to transfer their learning into their own classrooms. Theory to Practice in the ECFE was coded in 13% of the Practices category. Codes under Theory to Practice were (a)Planning and Preparation and (b)Transfer of Learning. When teacher candidates were involved in authentic learning situations (i.e., ECFE), they could immediately put Theory into Practice. Planning and Preparation were key elements in the experience. The purposeful authentic learning situations allowed a Transfer of Learning to occur when teacher candidates implemented practices applicable to their classrooms. Overwhelmingly, the teacher candidates appreciated and valued the experience provided through the ECFE. One teacher candidate commented:

I can learn about struggling readers and reading disabilities and things like that all day in order to do research and write a paper about it, but I never would've had the hands-on experience, know what to do, know how to do the testing, and how to implement these things if I had not participated in a hands on camp.

By and large, the teacher candidates echoed, "I support using the BLC in the MAT program, because it provides hands-on experience. This experience will help prepare preservice teachers to be in the classroom. It will also build confidence in pre-service teachers."

Through the ECFE, teacher candidates Planned and Prepared each week for their



struggling reader(s). For the first week of planning, teacher candidates frequently commented they felt immensely unprepared to plan for and work with a struggling reader. After the first session, however, teacher candidates began to gain confidence. One candidate commented:

One thing that I learned from tonight is just how to manage my time. I don't want to rush through things, but I don't want to also spend all the time playing a game. It helped me see that I need to be making sure that I'm doing what I need to do to have good time management with them, because when you're planning a lesson, you really think you have all this time. When you get in there it really goes by really quickly.

Through the ECFE, many teacher candidates found ways to Transfer this Learning into their own classrooms and authentically made use of this course and their experiences.

One teacher candidate shared:

I'm just glad I have some tools to use for my own classroom because I felt like I didn't know what I was doing this past year at all. Nobody gives you anything. They are just like here you go. Here's your classroom, and I kinda wish I would have had this class before. Of course, I've researched on the internet, I didn't just wing it, but you know I feel like I've really been given a lot of tools in this course. I have a lot of struggling readers in my classroom, and I'm pretty excited to use a bunch of the stuff that you showed us in here. I think it's really going to make a difference.

Secondary teacher candidates specifically discovered the importance of literacy instruction and were Transferring this Learning into their classrooms. One teacher candidate asserted:

Basically, I hadn't really considered reading as part of my job because I teach high school math and being a part of this has just helped me realize that reading is extremely important. Even math has its own language that students need to learn as

well as just regular non-math related reading and writing. I still need to help students with that even if it might not tie into the current standards.

### **Discussion**

“If preservice teachers [teacher candidates] could develop their confidence and competence about teaching a subject, they are more likely to teach it when they graduate” (Russell-Bowie, 2013, p. 47). Lazar (2007) suggested when teacher candidates had positive experiences in learning about and teaching reading in their course activities and assignments, they were more confident about teaching the academic content subject area. One approach that has been successful is Kolb’s experiential learning theory (Russell-Bowie, 2013). Through experiential and reflective learning, key aspects of Kolb’s experiential learning theory (1984), educators strive to motivate and involve their students in the learning process, thus changing attitudes and confidence in their chosen academic content subject areas.

Kolb’s experiential learning theory could be integrated into EPPs. In the concrete experience stage, practical hands-on activities, or field experiences, could be offered (Welch, 1995). Meiners et al. (2004) conveyed that teacher candidates learn more when actively and physically participating in experiences rather than passively observing or reading about them. In the reflective observation stage, the act of reflection can be included in EPP courses and field experiences. During reflection, the adult learner internally analyzes their experiences and makes meaning and understanding about these experiences that can be expressed through journal writing, guided discussion, or other reflective activities (Russell-Bowie, 2013). In the abstract conceptualization stage, adult learners use ideas and logic rather than feelings to understand the situation or problem (Akella, 2010). In an EPP program, knowing that researchers suggest experience can change attitudes, and by providing students with

experiential learning, that could be key to changing their competence and attitudes (Russell-Bowie, 2013). In the fourth and final stage, active experimentation, adult learners try their theories or models they have developed, put them into practice, and plan for the next experience (Akella, 2010). Palmer (2006) found when primary school teacher candidates taught science lessons in a K-12 classroom, teacher candidates' positive attitudes and confidence increased in teaching science.

### **Conclusion**

In this research study teacher candidates participating in the BLC as an ECFE developed their Practice by assessing, designing, and implementing interventions, and post-assessing outcomes to determine growth. After each experience, participants utilized the ReCap app to respond to digital journals to participate in reflective observation. Participants observed during the experience by reflecting and assessing the experience from different perspectives. After reflecting, participants summarized the experience, analyzed the data, and identified components of literacy still needing remediation. Through abstract conceptualization, a new concept or plan emerged for the participants to enact with their students the following week. Then the four-step model begins again. Kolb (1984) and many others understood the importance and value of experiential learning. Through this research study, teacher candidates demonstrated understanding and valued experiential learning in order to improve their practice as teachers and specifically as literacy teachers.

<p><b>Dr. Amy Earls Thompson</b> is an Assistant Professor at the University of Central Arkansas where she is the program director for the IDA Accredited MSE in Reading and Dyslexia Endorsement programs. Dr. Thompson has an MSE in Reading and is certified grades 1-6 and as a K-12 Reading Specialist. She has training in multiple dyslexia programs and continues to research and learn about dyslexia. Dr. Thompson has a Ph.D. in Leadership with Cognates in Literacy and Dyslexia. She is passionate about assessment, intervention, field experience, and literacy teacher education.</p>
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## Appendix A

Table 1.1. *Final List of Codes.*

Main Codes and Nested Codes

Anxiety

Collaborate

Components of Reading

Constraints

Data Driven Instruction

Efficacy

Main Codes and Nested Codes

Instruction

- Differentiation
- Instructional Materials
- Modify and Adjust

Multisensory

Management of Students

Rapport

Reflective Thinking

Theory to Practice

- Transfer of Learning
- Planning and Preparation

Transformative

- Shift

**Examining Financial Implications for a Year-Long Residency  
in a Teacher Preparation Program**

*Leigh M. Tolley, Rebecca O'Brien, and Peter Sheppard*

*University of Louisiana at Lafayette & Whitworth University*

**Abstract**

The purpose of this mixed-method inquiry was to inform teacher preparation program stakeholders of teacher candidates' financial realities and general perceptions of a state-mandated year-long undergraduate teacher residency program. The totality of the study findings indicate teacher candidates felt that their passion toward education and desire to teach was being leveraged and their financial realities and concerns of entering the teaching profession were diminished. Thus, continued inattention toward these financial issues takes advantage of teacher candidates' devotion, dedication, and commitment to the profession. We recommend providing financial support—commiserate with their commitment—for teacher candidates during the year-long residency in order to mitigate their financial anxiety.

*Keywords:* teacher preparation, year-long residency, finances

## **Study Overview**

As of July 1, 2018, year-long residencies are required by a southern state for teacher certification; the College of Education at State Teacher University (STU) has been implementing iterations of a modified year-long residency since 2015. Accordingly, this research endeavor served as a pilot study into current STU teacher candidates' financial commitments and their perceptions of the year-long residency through a survey (i.e., an electronically-delivered questionnaire) and focus group. Specifically, the study aimed to inform stakeholder understanding of teacher candidates' financial anxiety (or lack thereof) and views on the year-long residency requirement.

While the aforementioned appear at first glance to be linear, we also sought to learn more about the unintended consequences, including financial implications, for teacher candidates enrolling in a year-long residency. Thus, we framed the work with the following research questions:

1. What financial realities exist among STU teacher candidates (including those currently enrolled and expected to enroll in year-long residencies)?
2. What are STU teacher candidates' perceptions of a year-long residency?
3. What interactions exist between STU teacher candidates' financial commitments and STU teacher candidates' perceptions of a year-long residency?

## **Literature Review**

Money and financial stability are long-established factors of why people choose particular positions and occupations. For example, in the medical field, researchers have found that young physicians choose particular specialties, or residencies, based on financial considerations tied to personal student debt (Morra et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2011). Similarly,

researchers have cited that once in the profession, part of teacher attrition can be attributed to teachers leaving for better salary and benefits (Ingersoll & May, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2017).

Researchers have found that college students' concern over future potential debt influences their decision to avoid pursuing careers with low-paying jobs, such as teaching, in which they would likely incur more debt (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Rothstein & Rouse, 2011). Additionally, the financial burden of debts has been found to reduce the rate of college completion (Santos & Haycock, 2016). Baum and O'Malley (2003) concluded that this effect was magnified for ethnic minority students, as minority students were more likely to change their career plans because of student debt and the burden of loan payments. Other scholars have posited that rising tuition and loan costs deter students from ethnic minority backgrounds from even enrolling in teacher preparation programs (Gasman et al., 2017; Osler, 2016).

Researchers studying the effectiveness of the teacher residency model find that one of the important factors for residency program success is adequate financial assistance for teacher candidates (Berry et al., 2008; Guha et al., 2016). The cost of participation in teacher residency programs is high for candidates who bear not only the cost of college enrollment and course work, but also "the cost of living while preparing, and the opportunity cost of lost income while completing unpaid student teaching" (Berry et al., 2008, p. 17). With the average amount of student loans increasing to almost \$25,000 (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2013), it stands to reason that increasing that debt to take on a year-long teacher residency without pay might prohibit potential teacher candidates from entering the profession.

## **Methods**

This mixed methods study used a sequential explanatory design, where quantitative data are collected and analyzed, and then qualitative data are collected and analyzed (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova et al., 2006). Data collection from STU teacher candidate participants occurred in the form of (a) an online questionnaire and (b) a focus group. The qualitative phase was used to further explain the results from the quantitative phase.

## **Participants**

Study participants were undergraduate declared education majors in the College of Education at STU, with approximately 150 teacher candidates responding to the online questionnaire. Of those respondents, 28 agreed to participate in a follow-up focus group, but only three actually participated. Half of the questionnaire respondents were classified as seniors, and approximately 40% were juniors. Of the questionnaire respondents, 44% were currently participating in the year-long residency, 39% were planning on participating in the residency, and 9% were in traditional student teaching, i.e., a single-semester placement.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Online Questionnaire***

The online questionnaire (see Appendix A), comprised mostly of closed-ended items, was distributed via email with a link to the researcher-developed survey run through Qualtrics, an online survey tool supporting academic research. Qualtrics collected responses anonymously from approximately 150 teacher candidates. Analysis of open-ended items is forthcoming, but raw qualitative responses are available for perusal.

### **Focus Group**

After completion of the online questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group to further discuss these topics. The focus group items, based in part on questionnaire responses, are included as Appendix B. Full analysis of the qualitative focus group data is in progress at the time of this writing, with the full transcript

available for viewing. Excerpts from the focus group transcript are included in the findings section of this report.

## **Analysis**

Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using computer-based statistical add-on packages to the Qualtrics survey platform. We reviewed basic descriptive statistics for each item on the surveys to verify data suitability, as suggested by McCoach et al. (2013). We examined the data through correlational and regression analyses to identify the relationships and predictability between student responses to items on the questionnaire using ANOVA, Chi-square difference tests, *t*-tests, and measures of effect size.

Focus group data were transcribed verbatim. They are in the process of being coded for emergent themes (Stake, 2010) using constant comparative analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **Findings**

### **Questionnaire Results**

#### ***Financial Realities***

Descriptive self-reported data indicate the following financial realities for the teacher candidate sample at STU ( $n = 144$ ):

- Seventy-six percent of respondents reported that they worked a paying job in addition to being a full-time student.
- Eighty-three percent of respondents reported at least some anticipated student loan debt at graduation, with 40% expecting \$20,000 or more in debt.
- Eighty-four percent of respondents received scholarships or other tuition assistance, excluding loans.

- Sixty-one percent of participants think a year-long residency should be required to complete a teacher preparation program if financial assistance from some source or university financial aid (excluding loans) covers living expenses; 24% oppose a mandatory year-long residency, due to financial obligations.

### ***Perceptions of the Year-Long Residency***

Participants were asked direct questions regarding their views on the year-long residency.

Descriptive results are as follows:

- With regard to the teacher preparation residency requirement, *anxiety* ( $\bar{x}=7.45$ ,  $n=120$ ) and *uncertainty* ( $\bar{x}=6.34$ ,  $n=122$ ) were terms with the highest mean scores among participants, using a 1-10 scale with 10 being “a great deal of anxiety, comfort, confidence, or uncertainty.”
- Sixty-four percent of the participants reported a positive outlook on the year-long residency and that perceived residency benefits outweighed residency challenges ( $n=128$ ). Twice as many candidates reported *Very Positive* (14%) views of the residency when compared to those who reported *Very Negative* (7%).
- One-third of participants think a year-long residency should **not** be required to complete a teacher preparation program due to time commitment; 25% of participants believe year-long residencies should be mandatory if candidates could spend between 25% and 59% of the school district’s instructional time in their placements.

### ***Interactions between Financial Realities and Residency Perceptions***

Statistical analysis of survey results shows a number of outcomes worthy of further discussion among stakeholders. These results collectively and individually comprise “unintended



consequences” resulting from the interaction of financial realities and residency perceptions. In some cases (as noted by italics), interactions are analyzed with self-reported notions of anxiety, uncertainty, comfort, and confidence. Note that subgroups were created by the researchers based on self-report data from participants.

- Participants with positive perceptions of the residency expressed a stronger desire to receive financial compensation commensurate with their time commitment ( $p < 0.001$ , Cramér’s  $V = 0.399$ ).
- Those with over \$25,000 in anticipated student loan debt were more likely to not support the residency requirement because of the financial obligation (38.5% of students in this category), or support the residency requirement if their financial compensation was commensurate with their time commitment (31.5% of students in this category;  $p < 0.05$ , Cramér’s  $V = 0.299$ ).
- Those students that were in favor of a required residency component with regard to their financial commitments (i.e., those in favor of receiving at least some financial support for participating in the residency) were more ***confident*** in their preparedness for teaching (i.e.,  $\bar{x} = 6.25$  on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most confident [ $p < 0.05$ ; Cohen’s  $f = .337$ ]).
- With regard to their financial obligations, those expressing support of the residency requirement with the provision of some financial support reported higher levels of ***comfort*** with their teaching preparedness (i.e.,  $\bar{x} = 6.0$  on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most comfortable [ $p < 0.05$ ; Cohen’s  $f = .407$ ]).

- Those students that were in favor of a required residency component with regard to their time commitments reported higher levels of **anxiety** (i.e.,  $\bar{x}$  = 8.25 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most anxious [ $p < 0.01$ ; Cohen's  $f = .258$ ]).
- Those students that were in favor of a required residency component with regard to their time commitments (i.e., those in favor of spending more than 25% of the school's time in residency) were more **confident** in their preparedness for teaching (i.e.,  $\bar{x}$  = 5.75 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most confident [ $p < 0.001$ ; Cohen's  $f = .540$ ]).
- Those with a positive perception of the residency (i.e., reporting the benefits outweigh the positives) were more **confident** in their preparedness for teaching (i.e.,  $\bar{x}$  = 6.00 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most confident [ $p < 0.01$ ; Cohen's  $f = .486$ ]).
- Those in favor of spending more than 25% of the school's time in residency were more likely to report higher levels of **comfort** (i.e.,  $\bar{x}$  = 6.5 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most comfortable [ $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $f = 0.603$ ]).
- Those students working between 10 and 30 hours a week at a paying job in addition to being full-time students were likely to report lower levels of **comfort** (i.e.,  $\bar{x}$  = 5.0 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being most comfortable [ $p < 0.05$ ; Cohen's  $f = .387$ ]).

### **Focus Group Synopsis**

Focus group participants reported an anticipated drastic reduction in their available hours to work a job outside of their teacher preparation program due to starting the year-long residency, leading to concerns about affording living expenses. Two participants are

independently supporting themselves financially; the third is supporting a family. Yet, focus group participants all said that they were looking forward to starting the year-long residency in Fall 2019. Despite their financial concerns, they believed that the residency would be very beneficial in preparing them to be effective teachers.

In order to be more comfortable in terms of finances, focus group participants recommended that teacher residents be provided with supplemental income (e.g., a stipend) to help cover expenses. They understood that substitute pay was possible for up to 10 days for each semester, but noted that a major component of the residency is having a mentor teacher to provide guidance, and some opportunities for mentoring are missed if the teacher candidate is serving as a substitute teacher. Participants' suggestions included a stipend of at least \$2,000 per semester, or teacher residents earning a per diem rate equivalent to what a substitute teacher would earn (at least \$50 per day).

Each focus group participant explained that they felt the year-long residency would be immensely beneficial to them. They described the residency as a “real-life experience” that would prepare them for the classroom much better than a different pathway. Participants identified factors such as working with a mentor teacher, time in the classroom, increased professional experiences, participating in all aspects of the school year, and their own passion for and value of education as reasons why they believed the year-long residency would help them to become effective teachers.

Focus group participants all stated that they had invested a great deal of time and effort into the teacher preparation program, and that they wanted to complete their degrees in education. Although the year-long residency requirements—especially the financial concerns—

had caused them to seriously question their decision to remain in the program, they stayed in education, as they felt it was the right choice for them.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Research into factors—financial and otherwise—that impact preservice teachers’ perceptions of teacher residencies (including anxiety and confidence), as well as decisions about the extent to which they participate in residency-based teacher preparation programs, will contribute to an understanding of barriers teacher candidates face and allow programs to devise approaches to best ameliorate these issues. The findings of this study can be used as a basis for additional research, both within and outside of the state, as STATE implements mandatory year-long residencies. Addressing these concerns may contribute to upticks in enrollment of preservice teacher preparation programs and perhaps contribute to increased retention rates when said preservice teachers enter the profession. At a minimum, attention to the matter demonstrates a sustained measure of support at the candidate level that appears necessary.

As this research was an exploratory study on the potential implications of residency requirements, further study is needed to (a) broaden the sample and population of candidates and (b) better understand the complexities of the uncovered relationships. By administering this survey to students in other teacher preparation programs around the nation, we would increase the cultural and geographic diversity of the participants. Through broadening the population studied, we would also be in a better position to identify the potential specific causes of the identified consequences. By re-administering the survey to a larger population, we will have the opportunity to integrate more extensive statistical analyses and employ variable modeling that will better detail the relationships of the variables. In the future investigative study, we will run an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring through SPSS to determine

the number of factors to extract (McCoach et al., 2013). We will then examine the items aligned with each factor to reach conclusions about the nature and identity of the underlying constructs (Wegener & Fabrigar, 2004). We will use MPlus statistical software to employ structural equation modeling to model the structure of the relationships and correlations (Muthén & Muthén, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

In this pilot study, we found that the diminishing of teacher candidates' financial realities effectively leveraged their passion toward education and desire to teach. Thus, continued inattention toward these financial issues takes advantage of teacher candidates' devotion, dedication, and commitment to the profession. Based on the findings of this pilot study, we recommend providing financial support—commiserate with their commitment—for teacher candidates during the year-long residency in order to mitigate their financial anxiety.

**Leigh M. Tolley, Ph.D.** is Assistant Professor, Secondary Education in the College of Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her research interests focus on mixed-method approaches to educational evaluation in multiple contexts, including at the college and program levels in teacher preparation and within the classroom with both preservice and inservice teachers.

**Rebecca L. O'Brien, Ph.D.** is currently the Assistant Professor of Gifted Education and Graduate Studies in Education at Whitworth University in Spokane, WA. She has research and teaching experience in research methods, identification and support of learners with high potential, assessment, and pre-service and in-service teacher learning.

**Peter Sheppard, Ph.D.**, holder of the SLEMCO/BORSF Professorship in Education II, is a full Professor and Executive Director of the Center for Excellence in Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. His research seeks to uncover demonstrable ways in which the schooling experiences of underrepresented groups is enhanced so that discussions regarding the cerebral capacity of the aforesaid shift from embellishing test score discrepancies leads to fostering a culture of excellence.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaire Items

1. What is your current classification?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  
2. Please indicate your race/ethnicity. (Check all that apply.)
  - a. Black, African American
  - b. White, Caucasian
  - c. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - d. American Indian
  - e. Hispanic, Latino/a
  
3. Please indicate which of the Financial Obligations listed below are things that you currently are responsible for earning money to pay. Check all that apply.
  - a. Entire rent/mortgage
  - b. Shared rent/mortgage
  - c. Utilities
  - d. Car note
  - e. Groceries
  - f. Entertainment and living expenses
  - g. Tuition
  - h. Teaching resources
  - i. Child care
  - j. Other
  
4. How many hours a week on average do you spend working at a paying job (or jobs)?
  - a. I do not have a paying job
  - b. 0 to 10 hours per week
  - c. 11 to 20 hours per week
  - d. 21 to 30 hours per week
  - e. 31 to 40 hours per week
  - f. Over 40 hours per week
  
5. What do you anticipate your student loan debt to be at graduation?
  - a. \$0
  - b. \$1 to \$4,999
  - c. \$5,000 to \$9,999
  - d. \$10,000 to \$14,999
  - e. \$15,000 to \$19,999
  - f. \$20,000 to \$24,999
  - g. \$25,000 or more

6. Do you currently receive a scholarship or other tuition assistance (excluding loans)?
  - a. Yes; it pays less than 25% of my costs for tuition, books, and fees
  - b. Yes; it pays between 25% and 50% of my costs for tuition, books, and fees
  - c. Yes; it pays more than half, but not all of my costs for tuition, books, and fees
  - d. Yes; it pays for all of my costs for tuition, books, and fees
  - e. No; I do not receive scholarships or other tuition assistance (excluding loans)
  
7. How much pressure or expectation did/do you feel from your family/friends with regard to going to college and becoming a teacher: Pressure to go to college?
  - a. None at all
  - b. A little
  - c. A moderate amount
  - d. A lot
  
8. How much pressure or expectation did/do you feel from your family/friends with regard to going to college and becoming a teacher: Pressure to become a teacher?
  - a. None at all
  - b. A little
  - c. A moderate amount
  - d. A lot
  
9. How much pressure or expectation did/do you feel from your family/friends with regard to going to college and becoming a teacher: Pressure to major in anything but teaching?
  - a. None at all
  - b. A little
  - c. A moderate amount
  - d. A lot
  
10. How much pressure or expectation did/do you feel from your family/friends with regard to going to college and becoming a teacher: Pressure to make money to provide for my family?
  - a. None at all
  - b. A little
  - c. A moderate amount
  - d. A lot
  
11. How much pressure or expectation did/do you feel from your family/friends with regard to going to college and becoming a teacher: Pressure to make money to live on my own?
  - a. None at all
  - b. A little
  - c. A moderate amount
  - d. A lot

12. What other programs or options have you considered as alternatives to the teacher preparation residency program? Check all that apply.
- Traditional student teaching without a residency requirement
  - Alternative certification
  - Teacher preparation program at another college/university
  - Career outside of education
  - No other program or option considered
13. How familiar are you with the teacher preparation program residency program at STU?
- Not familiar at all
  - Slightly familiar
  - Moderately familiar
  - Very familiar
  - Extremely familiar
14. Are you participating in the teacher preparation residency program currently?
- Yes, and I plan to complete the program
  - Yes, but I am not sure that I want to continue with the residency component
  - Yes, but I am thinking about leaving the teacher preparation program entirely
  - Yes, but I wish I had chosen traditional student teaching
  - No, I am participating in the traditional student teaching program
  - Not yet, but I plan to
15. Considering your time commitments, do you think a year-long residency should be required to complete a teacher preparation program?
- Yes, as long as time in the residency is at least 80% of the school district's time
  - Yes, as long as time in the residency is 60%-79% of the school district's time
  - Yes, as long as time in the residency is between 25 and 59% of the school district's time
  - Yes, as long as time in the residency is below 25% of the school district's time
  - No, because of the required time commitment
16. Considering your financial obligations, do you think a year-long residency should be required to complete a teacher preparation program?
- Yes, as long as my financial assistance from the school district matches my time commitment to the school (i.e., if I work 60% of the time a teacher works, I should be paid 60% of a teacher's salary)
  - Yes, as long as my financial aid (excluding loans) covers my living expenses
  - Yes, as long as my financial aid (including loans) covers my living expenses
  - Yes, as long as my financial obligations are met through other means (e.g., parents, spouse, paid job)
  - No, because of the financial obligations

17. How do you feel about the year-long teacher preparation residency requirement?
  - a. Very positive; the benefits outweigh the challenges
  - b. Positive; there are more benefits than challenges
  - c. Somewhat positive; there are a few more benefits than challenges
  - d. Somewhat negative; there are a few more challenges than benefits
  - e. Negative; there are more challenges than benefits
  - f. Very Negative; the challenges outweigh the benefits
  
18. With regard to the teacher preparation residency requirement, indicate to what degree each of the feelings below describe you [presented as a matrix with a Likert scale from 0-10]:
  - a. Comfort
  - b. Anxiety
  - c. Confidence
  - d. Uncertainty
  
19. Are there any unique circumstances you have that might impact your participation in a year-long residency? If so, please briefly describe them.
  
20. What advice would you give to someone thinking about entering a teacher preparation program with a residency requirement?
  
21. What else would you like to share about your teacher preparation program experience?

## Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

**OPENING:** Thank you for speaking with us today about your thoughts about the year-long residency program in the College of Education at STU.

[Review and have participants sign informed consent form.]

To ensure that we capture your thoughts accurately, we will be taking notes during the conversation. We would also like your permission to record this conversation so that we may accurately transcribe your responses. Once the conversation is transcribed, the audio will be deleted.

Do we have your permission to audio record this conversation? (Record only if permission is granted; if so, state “Just to confirm, do we have your permission to audio record this focus group?” at the beginning of the recording.)

Let’s get started with our questions:

1. How does the residency requirement impact your decision to continue as a teacher education major?
2. What aspects of the teacher preparation program influence your confidence about being an effective teacher candidate or teacher?
3. What is it about other routes or other majors that you find more appealing than teacher prep programs with residency requirements?
4. Suppose you were a leader for the STATE Department of Education. What issues would you consider if amending the year-long residency policy?
5. If you were a leader for the STATE Department of Education, what considerations would you make for people with extenuating circumstances?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

## **How Teacher Candidates Support Student Agency in an Early Field Experience**

*Amanda Wall*

*Georgia Southern University*

Field experiences provide crucial contexts where teacher candidates continue to expand and apply their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching. Time in classrooms allows teacher candidates opportunities to enact and augment their understandings of a range of concepts. In this study, teacher candidates in a middle grades program expanded their concept of student agency during an early field experience. Agency can be understood as relating to the ways that an individual influences their situation (Bandura, 2006). Related concepts like student voice, choice, autonomy, and interest (cf. Author, 2018) align agency with middle level ideals like developmentally responsive, student-centered, and democratic education (Beane, 1993; National Middle School Association, 2010). The concept of agency spans different content areas; teacher candidates can support student agency in the ways that they plan, teach, assess, and foster a learning environment.

In coursework, teacher candidates may discuss the value of topics like student voice, or motivation, or agency; they understand these concepts in relation to young adolescent development and the nature of middle level curriculum. However, it can be a challenge to put these ideas into action and to shift from principles to practices (Vaughn, 2018). Field experiences provide opportunities for candidates to apply knowledge and principles in practice. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways that teacher candidates supported student agency in their first extended field experience.

### **Relevant Literature**

The literature on agency and middle level education informed this study. Agency is defined here according to Bandura's idea that "To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (2006, p. 164). Other scholars have described agency as being flexible and responsive to context (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; Nagaoka et al., 2015) and shown in action (Biesta et al., 2015; Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Biesta and colleagues conceptualized agency as a quality of the ways in which people engage in contexts and not as a "quality of the actors themselves" (2015, p. 626).

Some studies have explored teacher candidates and agency. In one study, Moore (2007) studied how teacher candidates developed identity and agency, focusing on ways that teacher candidates could see themselves as "agents of change" in urban classrooms. It was important that the teacher candidates in that study develop their own agency for teaching. In another study, Gallagher and Farley (2019) prompted teacher candidates in a middle grades social studies methods course to create heuristics related to justice and how they intended to support justice in their teaching. Through these heuristics, teacher candidates documented a "conceptualization of their future agency as teacher upstanders" (p. 7). Themes across different candidates' heuristics related to focus on students and elements of instruction. The authors noted that these heuristics were created within a course and thus represented "conceptualizations of their future agency and not actual action taken" (p. 12). The present study builds on these previous studies by asking teacher candidates directly about their own agency in the context of a field experience.

Agency relates to ideals for middle level education as outlined in *This We Believe*, the position paper for middle level education (National Middle School Association, 2010). This document posits four essential attributes of education for young adolescents, that it developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable. Key characteristics that

relate to agency are, for example, that students are engaged in active purposeful learning, that teachers understand and value young adolescents, and that curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant (NMSA, 2010). As agency varies by context, educators can cultivate agency in students through areas including curriculum, instruction, and learning environment (Author, 2018). Akos (2004) conducted a study of middle school students' written responses to a prompt about offering advice to incoming middle school students; he noted evidence of student agency in the ways that students gave advice to an audience of peers. Eliciting ideas and thoughts from students, as in this study, is one way to support student agency. Nagaoka et al. (2015) published a framework for supporting success among young adults; they noted agency (along with competencies and integrated identity) as a key factor for success and stated that young adults need "opportunities for action and reflection" (p. 5) to develop agency. Gallagher and Farley (2019) similarly noted the importance of agency for middle level education in their study of how teacher candidates created heuristics related to their own agency for teaching. They determined that many teacher candidates emphasized curriculum and instruction, as well as relationships and learning environment as pathways to support student agency.

Putting these ideals into action is important for teacher candidates. Field experiences offer important sites not only for how teacher candidates apply knowledge but also where teacher candidates continue to learn (Zeichner, 2010). Guidelines from Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP Accreditation Standards, 2013) and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (2018) emphasize the importance of field experiences for teacher preparation. A research agenda developed by the Middle Level Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association (Mertens et al., 2016) includes a question asking how field and clinical experiences affect the preparation of middle level teacher



candidates; this study addressed this question of field experiences through the lens of agency. The concept of student agency is sometimes seen as elusive (Vaughn, 2018) in research, so it is important for teacher candidates to extend their concept of agency through practice. In a similar way, Adams and Rodriguez (2019) explored how teacher candidates expanded their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy through a summer field experience. Teacher candidates in their study applied knowledge, expanded understanding, and grew in their own sense of efficacy. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be enacted in any classroom, in any content area, for any age group; likewise, teachers can support student agency in different content areas and in different age groups. Since middle level philosophy promotes student-centered education, it is appropriate to see how teacher candidates foster student agency even in their earliest experience planning and teaching in their field experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two perspectives guided this study. First is a sociocultural perspective following Bandura's idea about agency, that it is related to the ways an individual influences their actions and circumstances (2006, p. 164), and Lasky's idea that agency is mediated through interactions and contexts (Lasky, 2005). Second is the importance of field experiences as sites where teacher candidates advance their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching; this perspective follows the Central Proclamation that "clinical practice is central to high-quality teacher preparation" (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018, p. 13). An important review of middle level teacher preparation programs also advocated for "early, frequent, and rigorous" field experiences (Howell et al., 2016). The present study adds to the literature in its context of an early field experience two semesters prior to student teaching. This

study was situated in the context of an early field experience for six middle grades teacher candidates. These research questions guided the study:

1. How do teacher candidates describe student agency?
2. How do teacher candidates plan and teach to support student agency?
3. How do teacher candidates reflect on their teaching in terms of supporting student agency?
4. How do teacher candidates describe their own agency?

## **Method**

A case study approach was appropriate to exploring how teacher candidates support student agency. This study had an embedded case design (Yin, 2009). In an embedded design, there is one context with multiple units of analysis. The context is defined here in two ways: first, all participants were teacher candidates enrolled in the same field practicum; second, all teacher candidates were placed at the same school. Each teacher candidate was a separate unit of analysis. The goal of the study was not to compare the candidates to one another, but to understand how teacher candidates support student agency in an early field experience. The goal of analysis was to identify responses to the research questions as well as any trends in the ways that teacher candidates supported student agency.

The participants were six teacher candidates in the second semester of their junior year. All were female, and all were traditional undergraduates. The candidates identified with different ethnicities, representative of candidates enrolled in the middle grades program. They were a convenience sample (Yin, 2009) because the researcher was their university supervisor. Even though the candidates presented a convenience sample, their field placements spanned three grade levels and four content areas.

The candidates (all names are pseudonyms), their content areas, and grade levels are briefly introduced. Ruby was in sixth grade Science; her unit focused on weather, including hurricanes and tornadoes. Iris was in sixth grade Language Arts; her unit focused on a historical narrative and sequencing in literature. Amber was in sixth grade Math; her unit focused on volume and surface area. Violet was in sixth grade Social Studies; her unit focused on geography and natural resources in Canada. Livia was in seventh grade Math; her unit focused on angle relationships. Hazel was in eighth grade Social Studies; her unit focused on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in our state.

These teacher candidates were in their first extended field experience. In a course during the prior semester, also taught by the researcher, candidates studied *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010), the position paper of the Association for Middle Level Education. Each also wrote a vision statement (Duffy, 1998) explaining their goals for themselves and for their students. While many of the concepts in *This We Believe* align with agency, agency was not a direct focus of the class discussion of that text. As part of the explanation for this study, the researcher explained the concept of agency and related it to concepts from the candidates' previous course. At the time of the study, each candidate was taking one methods course in accordance with their content concentrations; in the field placement, each was placed with a teacher in a content area corresponding to the methods course. As a capstone project, each candidate planned and taught a weeklong unit under the guidance of their cooperating classroom teacher, methods instructor, and university supervisor.

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

Sources of data included lesson plans and instructional materials for a unit that each candidate planned and taught in the field placement; observation notes by the researcher;

reflections on each lesson taught and on the entire field experience; and a post-teaching conference with each candidate. Each candidate reviewed the notes from their post-teaching conference as a form of member checking. Questions from the debriefing conference that were included in data collection are in the Appendix.

As this was an exploratory study, open coding allowed the researcher to identify themes in the data. Key attributes and characteristics of middle level education from *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) that aligned with student agency were used as part of the coding scheme. The attributes were developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable education. Some of the characteristics related to curriculum—that it be relevant, integrative, challenging, and exploratory—and others related to teacher factors like valuing your adolescents. Other keywords related to agency (e.g., choice, autonomy, interest) were coded. Data for each candidate was analyzed holistically to provide insights on each case. Because the research design was an embedded case study, analysis focused on themes across the six candidates rather than comparing them to one another.

## **Findings**

Findings are organized according to the research questions. The first research question asked how teacher candidates defined student agency. The debriefing interview provided the data for this question. Most teacher candidates described agency in terms of providing students with choices. For example, Iris described agency as student engagement, involvement, being active.” Also, Livia explained that agency related to giving students “choices so they can take ownership and take part in their learning.” The themes in the responses related to engagement and choice, which connect to the ideas of empowering and equitable education (NMSA, 2010).

The second research question focused on how teacher candidates planned and taught to support student agency. This was each candidate's first experience with planning and teaching a unit of instruction, so several factors impacted how they planned and taught. Lesson plans and materials, reflections, observation notes, and post-teaching conferences provided the data for this question. In explaining what factors influenced her planning, Violet said that she consulted content-area standards and asked friends and former teachers for help; she focused first on aspects of instruction. Hazel likewise explained her planning for agency in terms implementing a variety of instructional strategies within the schedule for class her cooperating teacher followed each day. These two candidates' responses aligned with the ideas of challenging and responsive education. Interestingly, Ruby centered her own experience as a teacher candidate in her response: factors that influenced her planning included "other classes, workload, social life." She did not relate her planning to curriculum, instruction, or learning environment as some peers had.

Several of the candidates conceptualized agency in line with the key attributes and characteristics of middle level education. To make learning about weather relevant, Ruby asked students about their experiences with hurricanes, common in our area, as a way to activate prior knowledge. In one reflection, she wrote, "Asking the students to write their personal recollections of their hurricane experience and then asking them to explain how it relates to the formation of hurricane and the lesson itself helps students to actually visualize the scenario." By planning simulations, using maps and charts, and grouping students, Ruby planned challenging and exploratory lessons to strengthen science content and to support agency. Livia's actions related to the idea empowering students; she noted that she saw students demonstrate agency "when they would try to teach themselves or teach each other in small groups, think-pair-share." Livia further explained how some students in one class "would come to the board and even talk

me through” the math concepts. In a reflection, Livia wrote that students “thrive in getting to talk and interact.” Other teacher candidates supported agency through social-emotional means related to relationships and learning environment. Hazel incorporated short articles and an activity where students posed questions for their peers to answer. After video-recording a lesson and watching it, Hazel wrote in her reflection that her students “can learn a lot from each other and are sometimes more receptive to information when the information is coming from someone else rather than their teacher.” In this activity, Hazel supported student agency through empowering students. Amber similarly tried to plan choices for students; she noted that she “didn’t get that in school”. She did plan a choice board that she did not implement due to time, but she recognized the impact when students “have a choice in their own learning.”

The third research question asked how teacher candidates reflected on their teaching in terms of supporting student agency. The daily reflections, overall reflections, and, importantly, post-teaching conference provided the data for this question. Responses varied; many related to the idea of valuing young adolescents (NMSA, 2010) through instruction, interaction, and choices. Amber discussed teaching for agency in terms of instruction; she mentioned a hands-on math cube activity as well as the flexibility students had to complete assigned activities in the order of their choosing. Her cooperating teacher and another teacher often used the same schedule for each Math class and designed stations activities, and Amber adapted these structures for her own unit planning. Livia and Hazel mentioned options, or choices, that they each designed for students when asked how her teaching supported agency. Violet said that her teacher spoke with her after the second day of her unit about how teacher-directed the lesson had been. From there, she adapted her plans so that the lessons would include more student-directed activities. For example, she gave students “free will” to create their own notes with a picture or

list of main concepts from the lesson. In this way, she enacted developmentally responsive and empowering teaching as pathways to supporting student agency. Iris also focused on ways for her students to be active learners. She made a lesson on text analysis relevant by starting with an activity based on quotations from Disney movies. From there, she applied the idea of quotations to a “lifted line” activity during which each student selected an important line from their class text (a short book about the Titanic) to analyze and discuss with peers. In the post-teaching conference, Iris stated her goal to get students “involved, get them up and moving, make it relate.” She included a comic activity as well as activities connected to Disney movies and the Harry Potter movies to offer potential ways for students to connect to the lesson contents.

The fourth research question asked how teacher candidates described their own agency. The teaching reflections and post-teaching interviews provided the data for this question. This question was included in the post-teaching conference to promote candidates’ reflections on their experiences in classrooms. Themes from the candidates’ responses are choice, autonomy, relationships, and personal achievement. The former two ideas relate most closely to concepts of agency in much of the literature. Hazel highlighted the idea of choice and how her agency stemmed from “me having a choice to choose instructional materials; I didn’t have to do just what my teacher was doing.” Violet’s response related to her growing autonomy as a teacher candidate. She explained that her agency as a teacher derived in part from “learning on your own.” Amber likewise described herself as a critical thinker; she said that she has “always been the kind to be able to make decisions, so I’m always good about critically thinking and choosing.” The teacher candidates’ experiences of autonomy strengthened their agency for teaching.

Other candidates focused on relationships and personal achievement. Ruby described her agency as a teacher as “knowing your students enough to create the environment”; for her, relationships were the foundation for learning. Importantly, she also made comments related to autonomy, explaining that agency involves “Knowing your goals for yourself and your students.” Livia’s agency came from her choices in structuring lessons to support enjoyment of learning, saying that “it’s my choice in making it fun for me; it will be fun for them.” Iris explained her agency as a teacher with a sense of accomplishment: “I planned my whole unit.” She also summarized how she collaborated with her teacher; as this relationship became more collaborative over the course of the semester, Iris achieved greater agency for teaching.

## **Discussion**

The teacher candidates in this study prioritized relevant curriculum, student-centered instruction, and choices for students. Through these means, each supported student agency in ways that align with ideals for middle level education in *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010). The field experience allowed each candidate to enact ideas from their coursework in actual classroom settings. The focus on student agency in this study built on what they had learned about middle level curriculum, instruction, and philosophy; the field experience provided the context to apply and extend their knowledge and skills. This study focused on teacher candidates over the course of their first extended field experience. While each had written lesson plans before, this was their first experience planning and teaching for several days of instruction. Although candidates were focused on designing their units, building rapport with students, and strengthening their content-specific methods, each also found ways to plan and teach to support student agency. Over the course of the semester, their own agency for teaching also expanded in various ways as they gained experience with planning, teaching, and assessing student learning. The design of the



practicum followed guidelines from research and standards (AACTE, 2018; CAEP, 2013; Howell et al., 2016).

This study has implications for future research and for teacher education. This study contributes to the research base on early field experiences. Additionally, it focuses on an aspect of teaching—supporting student agency—that spans content areas and grade levels. As agency can seem like an elusive concept (Vaughn, 2018), it is important to draw attention to agency and related concepts during candidates' early field experiences. The main limitations of this study are that there were only six participating teacher candidates, and that the study lasted only one semester. Engaging more teacher candidates in a study of student agency would expand on these findings. A parallel study of advanced teacher candidates engaged in their final student teaching experience may provide insights about how more experienced teacher candidates support student agency. A longitudinal study of teacher candidates over the course of multiple semesters would be an interesting extension of this study. Teacher candidates could expand their practices for teaching and their practices for reflection.

This study also has implications for teacher education. The topic of student agency could be a stronger focus in coursework. Although it aligns with course topics in a course the researcher teaches, agency is not a feature of that course curriculum. From this study, the researcher has made two main adjustments. First, in the introductory middle grades' courses, the instructor and candidates discuss agency specifically. Course readings related to agency have been introduced, and the ideas of autonomy, voice, and choice, as well as key concepts from *This We Believe* are now linked directly to agency. Also, in this course, candidates write a vision statement (Duffy, 1998) about their goals for themselves and their students. This vision statement offers a space for candidates to articulate how their goals for themselves and their

students also support their own and their students' agency (cf. Author, 2020). Second, there are ways to continue the conversation about agency throughout the program. When candidates write a lesson plan using a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) checklist, some of the ideas can be linked to agency. Candidates can also revisit their vision statements farther along in their preparation program to continue to engage in reflective practice. These modifications in candidates' coursework can support their understanding of student agency and their own growing agency as teachers. Engaging candidates in conversations about supporting student agency was successful in helping them shift their focus from their own teaching to how their teaching impacts students and their learning.

## **Conclusion**

This study of six teacher candidates revealed that, even in an early field experience, candidates plan and teach to support student agency. These candidates interpreted agency in some ways as providing students with choices. Accordingly, each candidate incorporated choice at different points throughout the lessons they planned and taught. They also interpreted agency in terms of making curriculum relevant and engaging for students; this outlook informed specific choices they made to create challenging yet relevant learning for students. The field experience offered a site for each candidate to translate research and best practices into her own emerging teaching practice.

<p><b>Dr. Amanda Wall</b> is an associate professor and teacher educator at Georgia Southern University in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education. Her research focuses on middle level education; within this domain, she studies curriculum integration, literacy integration, and topics such as student agency. She also supervises candidates in field experiences.</p>
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## **Appendix A. Post-Teaching Conference Questions related to Agency**

1. What factors influenced the planning of your unit?
2. How did you consider student agency as you planned your unit?
3. How did you consider student agency as you taught your unit?
4. How would you describe student agency?
5. When during your teaching did students demonstrate agency? How do you know?
6. How did your teaching support student agency?
7. How would you describe your own agency as a teacher?

## **Looking for the “Carrot”:**

### **Factors that Could Motivate In-service Teachers to Host Clinical Field Placements**

*Todd Hodgkinson and Jennifer Thoma*

*Drake University*

#### **Abstract**

Fieldwork is important component of teacher preparation; however, locating clinical placements for pre-service teachers can be a difficult endeavor. One challenge is the willingness of in-service teachers to participate in clinical partnerships. In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of why in-service teachers choose to mentor, we surveyed 394 participants in six school districts. Our findings indicated that teacher participants chose to become mentors for altruistic reasons or because they were asked to do so by an administrator. Lack of time, too much extra work, little to no compensation, and a lack of clear expectations were among the major reasons cited for not choosing to mentor. Teacher Education Programs should consider these findings while working to establish partnerships and secure placements for their teacher candidates.

## Objectives

An essential part of any teacher preparation program is clinical fieldwork or as Hvenegaard (2012) describes it, “any component of the curriculum that entails leaving the classroom and learning through first-hand experience” (p 1.). In-the-field experiences give teacher candidates a better sense of what to expect as future practitioners (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR), 2017), ground their understanding of student development and learning theory (Malin, 2010), help candidates hone their professional goals (Everling, et al., 2015) and help them shape their identities as teachers (Allen, 2005).

Unfortunately, setting up and maintaining field experience placements for prospective teachers can be a challenge (Liejie, Wang, Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins, 2014; Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015). Time and resource constraints, lack of clarity about the field experience expectations, (Allen, Ambrosetti, and Turner, 2013; Liejie, Wang, Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins, 2014), mentor teachers and supervisors not being paid for their extra time and work, and little time to establish and develop collaborative partnerships (Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015) are just some of the barriers that teacher preparation programs face while attempting to locate clinical placements for their pre-service candidates.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on improving the quality of in-the-field experiences (Dursken and Klassen; 2012; Scherff and Singer, 2012; Kertesz and Downing, 2016; La Paro, 2016; Cooper, Beverly, and Grudnoff, 2017)—with several studies documenting the perceived experiences of pre-service teachers (Pratschler, 2009; Graves, 2010; Hennison, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, Bergen, 2011; Maddamsetti, 2018)—few studies have highlighted the perspectives of mentor teachers (Jones, Reid, & Bevins, 1997; Lijie, Wang,



Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins, 2014; Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2016); and there remains a lack of research regarding *why* in-service teachers choose to become mentors in the first place. The purpose of this study was to examine in-service teacher's perceptions about mentoring, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding about why teachers choose to mentor and what, if anything, might encourage or inhibit them from doing so in the future.

### **Perspectives**

This study was framed within social constructivism as this work seeks to understand the perspectives of mentor teachers in their work with pre-service teachers (Cresswell, 2013). Additionally, this study examined shared values, beliefs and behaviors of a group. Therefore, an ethnographic approach was used to interpret the data and results (Wolcott, 2008). The literature on pre-service field experiences (Allen, Ambrosetti, and Turner, 2013; Dursken and Klassen, 2012; Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015; Scherff and Singer, 2012) was used to help us develop our survey questions.

### **Connection to Literature**

#### **History**

As early as 1906, clinical field experiences have been called for in the preparation of teachers (La Paro, 2016). Unfortunately, before the 1980s, few teacher education programs asked students to participate in more than a single semester of student teaching (Huling, 1998). Today, a majority of teacher preparation programs ask their candidates to complete multiple field experiences, in an attempt to: introduce students to the profession, have candidates apply the knowledge and skills learned in coursework, and to lay the foundation for student teaching. Since the 1980's, researchers have also worked to identify what makes a "quality" field experience.

From the 1950s to present, education has been positioned as a national crises, with policy-makers vying for control over teacher education (Bales, 2006). In 1954, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was founded, establishing efforts to unite qualifications for teacher programs. During this time, critics have argued that U.S. schools are failing, with teacher education needing major reform (Loughran & Hamilton, 2016). While many critics would support reform, tensions exist around what reform might look like due to the lack of empirical support for these ideological and political tensions.

While the political tensions keep programs and states from regulated teacher training criteria, there are established characteristics recognized as necessary components for teacher education. One component, the field experience, has been widely recognized as an essential part of teacher training.

### **Quality Field Experiences**

According to La Paro (2016) there are eight components that are critical to a quality field experience, the first being strong partnerships. Collaborative partnerships with schools allow for common goals and the generation of learning opportunities between in-service and pre-service teachers. Quality settings, clinical teachers, and coordinating faculty are also critical components of a high-quality field experience—as is having a clinical curriculum in which expectations are clearly communicated. The length of the program is another factor cited by La Paro (2016). At least 30 weeks, or 900 clinical hours, of supervised clinical practice with a mentor teacher is recommended (AACTE, 2010). Finally, having an evaluative component—and a way to communicate feedback to teacher candidates on this evaluation—is critical to making these clinical experiences meaningful (La Paro, 2016).

In addition to these recommendations, Dursken and Klassen (2012) recommend that preservice teachers be paired with supportive mentor teachers. Positive practicum placements, as deemed by preservice teachers, include experiences where supportive mentor teachers modeled effective assessment and management strategies, created a collaborative environment for the preservice teacher, and provided opportunities for success and feedback. Dursken and Klassen (2012) suggest that the purposeful selection of experienced teachers influences preservice teachers' long-term engagement to the field. Because of this, they also recommend that teacher preparation programs and schools districts work to build the mentorship skills of prospective mentor teachers through targeted professional development and training.

Other researchers have sought ways to improve clinical field experiences for both preservice teachers and mentor teachers. Kertesz and Downing (2016), for example, attempted to match the interests and capabilities of pre-service candidates to their assigned mentors. In another intervention study, Scherff and Singer (2012) gave preservice teachers a framework for examining and having conversations about what they were observing during clinical experiences. In the end, both interventions enriched the quality of learning experiences for pre-service candidates and their mentors.

### **Identifying Quality Placements.**

**Challenges.** While positive partnerships between Universities and K-12 institutions is a requirement for establishing opportunities for preservice teachers, creating these partnerships can be fraught with barriers (Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015). Some barriers which have been cited in the literature are time and resource constraints for both schools and faculty, lack of reciprocity between academics and school teachers (school teachers do not feel they gain anything from the relationship), differences in workplaces between faculty and school teachers,

lack of clarity around the practicum experience, and different interpretations of the practicum experience (Allen, Ambrosetti, and Turner, 2013). Other researchers have also found resistance from parents (parents are concerned that there will not be enough teacher time to support their students and the practicum teacher), teachers not being paid for their extra time and work, insufficient space to accommodate many candidates, a lack of alignment between the university and the school's professional development content focus, preservice teachers not understanding professional norms, and not enough opportunities for the university and schools to exchange information and receive support (Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015).

Similar to the findings of other researchers, Allen, Ambrosettin, and Turner (2013) and Liejje, Wang, Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins (2014) found that three additional challenges presented themselves when trying to establish settings for practicum students. First, the practicing teachers received inadequate forms and guidelines when working with preservice teachers. Second, there was a lack of policies and procedures put into place to secure placements for pre-service and mentor teachers. Finally, the practicing teachers were uncertain of feedback and communication practices required for the practicum.

### **Potential Solutions to Barriers**

Some researchers have worked to create an effective model for practicum experiences. For example, Cooper, Beverly, and Grudnoff (2017) replaced an old model of field experience where thirty students were placed in pairs in thirty different classrooms one day a week for the academic year. Their new model consisted of one teacher responsible for all of the pre-service teachers' placements and work with mentor teachers. This teacher worked with the faculty at the university as well as mentor teachers as a liason. A lecturer was responsible for teaching tasks

and supervising while the preservice students taught. A school principal designed a model which fit the needs of the building and then assigned preservice teachers to the specific classroom.

Another model developed by Lijie, Wang, Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins (2014) examined ways in which rural, isolated areas could benefit from having preservice teachers expose practicing teachers to new practices from the university. Three motivators that were found to have an effect on whether in-service teachers would be willing to participate in this model: student teachers promoted student engagement; it gave practicing teachers a ‘time out’ to monitor their own students’ learning; and it gave practicing teachers a reminder about their own career development.

Creating positive mentoring experiences and partnerships can be challenging. The purpose of this study was to examine in-service teacher’s perceptions about mentoring. This provides a deeper understanding about why teachers choose to mentor and what, if anything, might encourage or inhibit them from doing so in the future. Therefore, the research question for this study was: How do in-service teachers perceive mentoring experiences within their current context?

### **Significance**

Providing pre-service teachers with high quality practicum experiences is essential for their success as future educators. Quality field experiences have also been shown to benefit mentor teachers (Lijie, Wang, Yunpeng, Clarke, and Collins, 2014) and school organizations. Yet, multiple barriers exist that prohibit the development of successful partnerships and mentoring programs, including a lack of time and incentive for in-service teachers to participate (Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015). By working to understand the motivators and barriers to why in-service teachers chose to mentor a pre-service teacher, we hoped to provide future

teacher preparation faculty and coordinators with information they can draw upon when identifying in-the-field experiences for their pre-service teachers.

### **Methods**

A survey was developed based on the existing literature on teacher mentoring experiences (Dursken & Klassen, 2012; Kertesz & Downing, 2016; LaParo, 2016; Montecinos, Cortez, & Walker, 2015; Scherff & Singer, 2012). The survey was created using a sequential explanatory mixed-method design (Cresswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). A committee of five faculty and staff undertaking the study of current practicum practices at the university first reviewed the survey for validation. Three practicing teachers took the survey to provide feedback and clarify any questions which were unclear.

A total of ten districts were approached for this study. Each district had either currently or previously served practicum students from the cooperating university. Of the ten districts, six agreed to send out the survey to teachers in their districts. Table 1 shows the districts and demographics below.

**Table 1**  
Participating Districts by Size

<b>District</b>	<b>Student Population*</b>	<b>Teaching Staff (K-12)</b>
RCPS	33,057	2,583
WRCM	8,918	622
West End	10,599	677
SE Portence	6,843	456
Oakdale	3,406	299
Aerendele	3,421	232

\*as reported by State Department of Education 2017-18 enrollment. A total of 421 people took the survey. A total of 348 surveys were completed. The known demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

Districts chose to send out an anonymous link, therefore it is unknown how many respondents completed the survey from each district. A total of 430 people clicked on the link to take the survey. Nine people were not able to take the survey at that time. In the end, a total of 421 people took the survey and 348 surveys were completed. The known demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Teacher Demographics  
N=394

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-K</b>	<b>K-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>9-12</b>
<b>Number</b>	10	74	97	89	124
<b>Percentage</b>	2.5%	18.8%	24.6%	22.5%	31.4%

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. Data from open ended questions were initially read to identify codes using participants’ words. Codes were then analyzed for themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Findings and Discussion**

When asked to rank order the reasons why they chose to mentor, fifty percent (n = 100 ) of in-service teachers ranked “to ‘give back’ to the profession” as their number one reason (see Table 3). An additional forty-nine percent of teachers (n = 95) identified this as their second, third, and fourth reasons for choosing to mentor. Interestingly enough, no teachers (n = 0) ranked “to give back” to the profession as their last reason for mentoring, indicating that in-service teachers might see it as “their duty” to shepherd prospective teachers into the profession. This

sense of duty or feeling of obligation is something that teacher preparation programs might capitalize upon when looking to recruit in-service teachers for mentoring or induction.

**Table 3:** Why did you decide to mentor?

	1	2	3	4	5
To “give back”	50%	27%	16%	6%	0%
Administrator	29%	20%	26%	23%	2%
Personal satisfaction	10%	34%	30%	24%	2%
Compensation	5%	17%	26%	44%	8%
Other	5%	2%	2%	3%	88%

Twenty-nine percent (n = 57) of participants ranked “I was asked by an administrator” as their primary reason for mentoring—and an additional eighty-nine percent (n = 136) stated this was their second, third, or fourth reason for choosing to mentor. We did not ask mentor teachers if they felt pressured or compelled by their administrator to accept a pre-service teacher field placement, or if they felt valued that their administrator chose them to act as a mentor.

Nevertheless, these findings appear to indicate that, when in-service teachers are not choosing to mentor for other reasons, having an administrator ask them to mentor can be nearly as effective as “giving back” in securing placements.

Ten percent of in-service teachers (n = 20) ranked “personal satisfaction” as their number one reason for agreeing to mentor a prospective teacher—and an additional sixty-four percent (n = 125) of participants cited this as their second or third reason for mentoring. These results seem to align with our earlier findings and the conclusion that teachers choose to mentor for both altruistic reasons or the intrinsic value of satisfaction.



Only five percent of teachers (n = 10) identified compensation as their number one reason for choosing to mentor. Whether or not this was because compensation was not provided—or even an option—or simply because they would rather choose to mentor for other reasons (e.g., personal satisfaction and/or to give back to the profession) could not be determined. In the state where our study took place, teachers do receive credits for renewing their teaching licensure, but it is not common practice for teachers to receive monetary stipends for agreeing to mentor a pre-service teacher. With that said, more research would need to be conducted in order to determine whether or not these results support the finding that teachers mentor for altruistic reasons rather than external motivators (e.g., compensation).

It should be noted that “grade level taught” and “work assignment” (e.g., elementary, secondary, math, science, special education, etc.) do not appear to be correlated with a specific reason for mentoring given by our participants.

**Table 4:** Which would make you more likely to mentor a pre-service teacher?

	Highly likely	Somewhat likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Moderately unlikely	Highly unlikely
Licensure renewal credit	50%	37%	7%	3%	3%
Personal satisfaction	48%	36%	13%	2%	1%
College or course reimbursement	43%	36%	13%	4%	4%
Monetary Compensation	38%	39%	17%	2%	3%
Being asked by administrator	37%	43%	14%	3%	3%

In response to the question, “Which would make you more likely to mentor a pre-service teacher?”, eight-seven percent of our survey respondents (n = 285) indicated that licensure renewal credit would be “highly likely” or “somewhat likely” to incentivize them to mentor a pre-service teacher; seventy-nine percent (n = 264) indicated that for college or course credit/reimbursement would incentivize them; and seventy-seventy percent (n = 256) stated that monetary compensation would encourage them to take on a pre-service teacher. Eighty-four percent (n = 276) of participants indicated that they would be likely to mentor a pre-service teacher for reasons of “personal satisfaction”; and eighty percent (n = 267) of respondents stated that being asked by administrator was “highly likely” or “likely” to prompt them to mentor a pre-service teacher.

In examining the responses, we found it interesting that receiving “licensure renewal credit” was the most common response (87%) and motivator for teachers. This result seemed to run contrary to our earlier findings—that teachers chose to mentor “to give back” to the profession or for personal reasons.

Then again, the fact that the second most common response (84%) and motivator was “personal satisfaction” might indicate that—offering extrinsic rewards, such as money, college credit, or licensure renewal credit—may not be the best use of resources for teacher education programs. Rather, appealing to mentor teacher’s “sense of duty” or “self-satisfaction” might be just as effective in securing field experience placements. In the end, though, it appears that more research needs to be conducted—in terms of what might motivate teachers to mentor, in order for policy decisions to be made.

It should be noted that “being asked by an administrator” also seems to be a strong motivator for teachers, especially since this was the third most common response (80%) given by

participants—and that teachers ranked it ahead of “college credit” and monetary compensation. This finding also aligns with our early findings about why teachers chose to mentor (see Table 2). Given these results, teacher education programs might benefit from working closely with administrators to secure field experience placements for their students.

In our analysis of the qualitative data that teachers provided regarding what would make them “more likely” to mentor included we found several themes: 1) more time to work with the pre-service student; 2) greater continuity in scheduling of classroom/site visits; 3) clearer expectations about what “to do” with the pre-service teacher; and 4) having a personal connection or prior relationship with the pre-service. Our results support the research highlighting the barriers that teacher preparation programs face when looking to secure field placements for their students. Specifically, our findings support the research if Allen, Ambrosettin, and Turner, (2013) and Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, (2015) who also found that a lack of clarity about expectations and a lack of time to work with students limits the success of in-the-field-experiences. These results also appear to support the literature on best practices for creating high-quality field experience programs (Cooper, Beverly, and Grudnoff, 2017) by highlighting the need for teacher preparation programs to communicate their expectations for pre-service teachers with greater time to collaborate with their cooperating teacher.

We did not find any statistical differences in our cross-tabulation of responses to this question with participant demographic data; thus “grade level taught” and “work assignment” (e.g., elementary, secondary, math, science, special education, etc.) do not appear to be correlated with a specific motivator. We also found no statistically significant difference when

we compared the responses of teachers with prior mentoring experience and teachers with none, in terms of what would make them “more likely” to mentor.

**Table 5:** Of the following reasons, which would make you LESS LIKELY to mentor a pre-service teacher?

	Highly likely	likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Moderately unlikely	Highly unlikely
Lack of time	43%	39%	8%	6%	5%
Not sure what to do with practicum student	6%	23%	20%	19%	33%
Too many demands from university/extra work	12%	38%	21%	19%	9%
Practicum students inexperienced	7%	20%	24%	25%	24%
Resistance from parents	1%	7%	23%	23%	45%
Too difficult to communicate with university faculty	5%	13%	24%	29%	30%
Expectations from university are unclear	11%	23%	23%	23%	19%
Not compensated for time	14%	26%	28%	14%	17%

With respect to the survey responses that teachers gave that would make them “less likely” to mentor a pre-service teacher (see Table 5), the top three were: 1) “lack of time” (88%) (n = 271); 2) “too many demands/extra work” (50%) (n = 166); and “not being compensated for their time” (40%) (n = 135). An additional thirty-four percent of teachers (n = 113) indicated that unclear expectations from university officials would deter them from mentoring. Twenty-nine percent (n= 96) indicated that being unsure about what to do with a student would inhibit them from taking on a teacher; and twenty-seven percent (n=90) cited that pre-service teachers’ lack of classroom experience (in general) would prohibit them from mentoring.

Eighteen percent (n=57) of teachers indicated that difficulty “communicating with university faculty” would make them “less likely” to mentor and eight percent (n=29) cited that “resistance from parents.”

In our analysis of the qualitative data that we received about reasons that would make teachers “less likely” to mentor, five themes emerged: 1) Unprepared practicum students; 2) Poor experiences with pre-service teachers; 3) Not being prepared/ready to work with a pre-service teacher; 4) Compensation; and 5) Scheduling conflicts/issues. With respect to the first theme, three teachers were uncomfortable with their pre-service teachers’ ability to manage the classroom or handle “extreme behavioral outbursts.” Others (n = 2) expressed concern about a pre-service teacher’s lack of experience working with special populations of students (e.g., urban, special education). Still others (n =5) reported that they had poor experiences with pre-service teachers in the past, that their pre-service teachers were too judgmental of their teaching, that students lacked professionalism, and that students were not “committed” to the practicum/field experience. Several teachers (n = 4) also indicated that they were unprepared to

take on a pre-service teacher, either because they were a newer teacher themselves or that they didn't know how to best support/mentor lesser-experienced teachers.

Unsurprisingly, in-service teachers being asked to take on the additional work of mentoring without the compensation of time, money, or other incentives appears to be the primary barrier for teacher preparation programs, in terms of locating field placements for their pre-service teachers. This result supports the literature in the field highlighting barriers to securing field placements for teacher preparation programs (Montecinos, Cortez, and Walker, 2015). It also supports our earlier findings that teachers would be “more likely” to mentor if they received some type of compensation; however, more research is needed to determine the type of compensation or external reward (e.g., extra time, monetary reward, recognition of contribution to the profession) would be most appealing to teachers.

In our cross-tabulation of responses to this question with participant demographic data, we found no statistical differences that would indicate a correlation between “grade level taught” or “primary work assignment” and the reasons that deter teachers from mentoring. We did, however, note that if a participant had not mentored a pre-service teacher, they were more likely to select “Not sure what to do with a practicum student” as a reason that would deter them from mentoring ( $p < .00$ ). Given this result, it appears that teacher preparation programs might attract more new mentors, if they provided these mentors with clearer guidelines of how to support their pre-service students or with professional development opportunities in how to mentor.

### **Conclusions**

The data from this study indicate that in-service teachers are more likely to serve as practicum mentors when approached by an administrator. Incentives for mentoring include allowing time for preparing for mentoring, licensure credit, or monetary compensation (including

classroom materials). It will be important for university faculty and staff to be flexible with time when working with practicum mentors and ensure that university students are well prepared for diverse K-12 student populations.

Teacher preparation programs (TPP) looking to secure field experiences for their pre-service teachers might benefit from clearly articulating the expectations for professional behavior and from helping their pre-service identify “their role” in the mentor teacher’s classroom. Additionally, TPP might want to provide in-service teachers with clearer guidance about how to shepherd a new teacher into the profession. The results from this study are derived from an urban, rural, and suburban districts in the Midwest and may not be generalizable to the general population.

**Todd Hodgkinson** is an Associate Professor of Education at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. He earned a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Iowa, a M.A. in Gifted Education from the University of Northern Colorado, and a BA in English from the University of Iowa. His research interests include: curriculum design, literacy instruction, and supporting the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted learners through curriculum making.

**Dr. Jennifer Thoma** is an Assistant Professor at Drake University. Her areas of expertise are in the fields of Literacy, Early Childhood Education and Technology Integration. Previously, she was an elementary instructor and K-5 Instructional Coach at Ankeny Community Schools and an elementary instructor and Supplemental Reading Coach in the Des Moines Public Schools.

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## **College Supervisor as Instructional Coach:**

### **Mentoring the Next Generation of Exemplary Teachers**

*Amy Farah, Kimberly Swartzentruber, Tiffany Coleman, Katharine Page, and LaTeshia Warren  
Georgia Gwinnett College, Gwinnett County Public Schools, and Henry County Public Schools*

#### **Abstract**

The world of educator preparation is ever evolving as we strive to prepare for the next generation of teachers for the rigor and reality of today's classrooms. Historically, there too often has been a gap, a disconnect, between the educator preparation programs (EPPs) and day to day expectations of novice teachers. One of the disconnects is the variance between the ways that clinical professors and field supervisors support teacher candidates and the ways that instructional coaches support novice teachers. In this article, the authors discuss the roles of instructional coaches and the ways in which the research and practices of instructional coaching may be easily transferred into their practice of clinical supervision at the college level. Drawing upon their work in P-12 schools as instructional coaches, the authors offer suggestions for bridging the gap between traditional practices of clinical supervision and the ways in which exemplary instructional coaches support teachers. These suggestions are informed and supported by vignettes gleaned through the authors' own experiences coaching teacher candidates in field experiences.

## Introduction

Teaching is complex work and requires problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Given today's classroom diversity, a teacher will be faced with a variety of instructional decisions. Additionally, differentiated instructional choices will need to be considered for the varying levels of learners. It is imperative that teachers enter the profession with the ability and habit of reflecting on their practice and thinking about their own thinking. The Association of College supervisors (ATE), published standards for field experiences, and among those standards is one on reflection and analysis (ATE, 2016). As part of the standard on reflection and analysis, ATE posits that "college supervisors need to move teacher candidates to higher conceptual levels, including more complex thinking about teaching," which may "...best be achieved through structured field experiences that also require preservice teachers to reflect on their experiences and the impact they have on their development as teachers" (ATE, 2016, p. 10). However, reflecting on their experiences is not something that preservice teachers automatically do without purposeful support and guidance. Thus, it becomes an essential role of college supervisors to build preservice teachers' capacity to reflect on their experiences. The ATE Field Experiences Standards (ATE, 2016) assert much theoretical support exists for developing the reflective ability of teachers (Schon, 1983, 1987; Reiman & Parramore, 1993; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1993). Teacher education programs must contribute to teacher reflectivity (Ross, 1988), and one of the goals of supervision is engaging teachers in reflection on practice (ATE, 2016).

Additionally, many states now require that teacher candidates take and pass the Educator Teacher Preparation Assessment (edTPA) in order to earn teaching certification. A common thread throughout all parts of the edTPA is teacher candidates reflecting on their decisions

before, during and after their implementation of instruction (SCALE, 2016). It is important for certifying bodies to be able to assess teacher candidates' abilities to think strategically about what they are doing in their classrooms and how they are impacting student learning as a result of the decisions they make. Given these rigorous demands, it is necessary for college supervisors to take on an instructional coach approach in order to better support teacher candidates in their cognitive development and produce graduates who are prepared for the challenging and complex teaching profession.

### **Background and Context**

In traditional teacher candidate supervision, the structure of conversation between supervisor and candidate is one-way and often more of a monologue rather than a dialogue. The supervisor's feedback consists primarily of statements (e.g. "What you did well is..." "What you need to improve on is..."). Teacher candidates are told where they are in their practice, and then the supervisor sets goals for them. With this traditional approach to supervision, the teacher candidate plays a passive role in the experience while the supervisor does the majority of the cognitive "heavy lifting." As Danielson states of traditional supervision, "...it is scarcely surprising that teacher candidates don't learn much as a consequence of [this] process, they aren't *doing* anything" (2009, p. 4). In contrast, in an instructional coaching approach to supervision, teacher candidates do most of the talking. Assessment is conducted by both supervisor and teacher candidate with a focus on self-reflection. The supervisor's feedback consists mostly of questions that guide the teacher candidate in thinking back through their instructional decisions and the effectiveness of those decisions on student learning (e.g. "What do you think went well?" "What would you do differently next time?"). Teacher candidates discover for themselves where they are in their practice and take a lead role in the goal-setting

process based on self-identification of strengths/areas for growth. “Excellent coaching that gives teachers this support is more important than ever in an era of rising standards and heightened expectations for students” (The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, Learning Forward, & Public Impact, 2016, p. 5).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Instructional coaching is grounded in social constructivist learning theory and the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) with the coach filling the role of the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). The primary tenet of social constructivism is the concept that knowledge development is both a cognitive and social process. Specifically, Vygotsky contended that the potential for cognitive development is dependent on the individual’s “zone of proximal development,” (ZPD) and that growth is significantly enhanced with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other. This theory supports a paradigm shift and a rationale for employing the college supervisor as instructional coach approach rather than the traditional supervision model to the pre-service field experience. While a supervision model emphasizes one direction observation and evaluation, a preservice teacher coaching method fosters a collaborative mentor relationship with a candidate that facilitates interactive discussion, reflective practice, and the gradual release of scaffolding to promote independent problem solving and build habits of reflective practice (Schon, 1983).

### ***Social Constructivism Defined***

Social constructivism is one of many theories that attempts to describe how children and adults learn. It has been defined in various ways, ranging from a philosophical view of how we come to understand and know (Oldfather, West, White, & Wilmarth, 1999; Savery & Duffy, 1995) to the belief that learners are active constructors rather than passive recipients of

knowledge and that learning is a complex interaction between the prior experiences of the learner, the purposes of the learner, and the subject matter requirements (Henderson, 1992). Social constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning, not a prescriptive way of teaching (Richardson, 1997). Because social constructivism does not advocate a single method of teaching, it may best be defined by describing it in contrast to traditional methods of teaching.

Traditional methods of teaching are characterized by the role of the teacher being the expert, or possessor of all knowledge and truth. In the empiricist perspective, the teacher imparts this knowledge to the learner without regard for the learner's prior experiences, knowledge, or input. The traditional alternative to the empiricist model is the nativist approach. As in the empiricist perspective, nativist thought includes the teacher as expert. However, in this theory, the learner comes to school with predetermined cognitive abilities and behaviors. The responsibility of the teacher is to provide a rich learning environment in which the students can reach their highest potential level of achievement as a result of natural development (Kroll & Ammon, 2004). In contrast, teachers who provide instruction based on social constructivist thought will work to determine the prior knowledge and experiences of their students and provide instruction, modeling, and scaffolding within the zones of proximal development of the learners in order to facilitate their construction of new knowledge, regardless of factors outside of school. This theory of socially constructed knowledge is applicable to adult learners and is best created in a model of instructional coaching.

Social constructivism implies that knowledge cannot be reduced to funds of data that exist within or without the learner. Students are constructors of knowledge, active participants in the learning process, not passive recipients into whom the teacher pours all knowledge (Henderson, 1992; Marlow & Page, 1998). Construction of knowledge emerges from the

learner's interactions with people and the world around the learner (Kroll & Ammon, 2004). Students construct knowledge through an active process of thinking, analyzing, understanding and applying, rather than a passive process of receiving, memorizing, and repeating (Marlow & Page, 1998). Coaching in the academic disciplines is grounded in knowledge-based constructivism by providing the learners with rigorous discourse (West & Cameron, 2013). Providing teachers with this learning framework encourages and enables them to reflect on their own practice, and to develop adaptive expertise in their teaching craft (Anders & Richardson, 1991; Coleman, 2003; Kroll & Ammon, 2004; Richardson, 1997).

### **Relevant Literature**

College supervisors have traditionally taken on a primary role of evaluator in their supervision of these field experiences. Frequently, the collaboration between the college supervisor and the mentor teacher and other school staff is limited, and teacher candidates feel disconnected between the college coursework and the field placement experience. As we search for the most effective means of pre-service preparation, much can be learned from the research on and practices of school based instructional coaching (Killion, 2006; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Knight, 2007, 2011).

College supervisors seeking to improve their effectiveness in mentoring teacher candidates can implement roles of instructional coaches (Killion & Harrison, 2006, 2017) and partner with mentor teachers and instructional coaches in the local schools. This partnership and approach enhance teaching practices and promotes higher levels of achievement for both the teacher candidates and the students they teach (Coleman, 2014; Coleman, Lewis, Schoeller & Smith, 2012; Coleman & Schoeller, 2011).



According to Knight (2007), “coaching almost always involves three interrelated elements: (a) a planning conversation; (b) an event, which usually is observed by the cognitive coach [college supervisor]; and a reflecting conversation” (p. 11). This three-step model is employed by college supervisors who take an instructional coaching approach to their supervision of teacher candidates.

### ***The Power of Reflection***

“Systematic reflection [can] significantly enrich a novice teacher’s understanding

Reflection:

- Helps [pre-service] teachers organize their thoughts and make sense of classroom events.
- Leads to professional forms of inquiry and goal setting.
- Promotes a model of learning that views teaching as an ongoing process of knowledge building.
- Promotes conversation and collaboration with mentors [and supervisors]” (Boreen, et al., 2000; p. 68).

When supervisors encourage reflection and integrate reflective practices into their regular work with a teacher candidate, they provide an avenue for the learner to “[tease] apart a perplexing situation or problem and [seek] a solution or explanation [that guides] and propels [his/her] reflective inquiry” (Boreen, et al., 2000, p. 69). Learning is an active intellectual process, so if a teacher is to learn, the teacher must be the one engaged in intellectual work; thus, reflection on the part of the teacher, is crucial (Danielson, 2009).

### ***The Importance of Conversation***

Dialogue is powerful when it comes to teaching and learning, and through conversation, learners can make sense of what they have done, what they are doing, and what they need to do

next. Often, setting aside time to talk about teaching practices is not scheduled or protected. Too many times, “other” things get in the way, and the opportunity to discuss what happened in the classroom and what teacher candidates think about what happened in the classroom slips away. Coaching is a “conversational process” that gets people “...to think about their own experiences and to practice new behaviors over time” (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 5). “It’s all about the conversation. It’s through conversation that teachers clarify their beliefs and plans and examine, practice, and consider new possibilities” (Danielson, 2009, p. 72). When supervisors engage in conversation with their teacher candidates, they should provide time for dialogue; listen carefully without controlling the conversation; and use observational data to drive the discussion about the work (Boreen et. al, 2000). When time and space are made for teacher candidates to have the opportunity to regularly discuss their practice and analyze their own thinking, they acquire habits of the mind that enable them to think on their own (Danielson, 2009).

### ***Skilled Facilitation***

While reflection and conversation are the hallmarks of teacher candidates who can build capacity as they enter the profession, these activities do not happen haphazardly. Rather, they are promoted by a skilled facilitator – one who is well versed in developing an avenue for such valuable activities to take place. “What is important is that the conversation is enhanced by the skill of those conducting to dig below the surface, to help teachers examine underlying assumptions and likely consequences of different approaches...conversations can help a teacher reflect deeply on their practice and see patterns of both student behavior and the results of teacher actions” (Danielson, 2009, p. 1). Knight (2007) affirms the importance of skilled facilitation and acknowledges that the facilitator must be “skilled at unpacking their [teacher

candidates'] goals so that they can help them create a plan for realizing their professional goals” (p. 13). When supervisors are able to formulate and ask questions to teacher candidates about their practice, they help them “...develop critical thinking skills to analyze their own teaching...” and enable them to “think like a teacher” (Boreen, et. al, 2000, p. 43, 53).

### **Guiding Questions**

When reflecting on their work with teacher candidates, the authors ask themselves: What instructional coaching roles do teacher education professors play, and how do these roles affect teacher candidate success? This question is important to consider and explore as it provides insight for educator preparation programs as they consider how best to support and produce the next generation of exemplary educators.

### **Applying the Roles of the Instructional Coach**

In an effort to describe and define the complex and diverse work of instructional coaches in schools, Killion and Harrison (2006, 2017) identified ten roles of instructional coaches. These roles include: resource provider, data coach, curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, mentor, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner. Coleman (2014) adapted these roles to describe her own work in transitioning from a school based instructional coach to a university professor and clinical supervisor. Although a case could be made that all ten roles apply to the work of the university professor, three roles focus primarily on the work of improvement of an entire school culture, staff and student achievement. These roles include data coach, school leader, and catalyst for change and are omitted from analysis in this paper. What follows are descriptions of each instructional coach role a university supervisor of teacher candidates may play and anecdotal compilations, offered by the paper's individual authors, as experiential examples of the seven coaching roles. Similar to the nature of

the individually tailored coaching experience, the structure and tone of each “Voice from the Field” vignette also presents uniquely and may focus on a specific candidate or speak to multiple facets of the coaching model. Pseudonyms and the omission of identifying details are used to protect the anonymity of referenced individuals within the vignettes.

### **Role 1: Resource Provider**

The purpose of the Resource Provider is to expand the teachers’ use of a variety of resources to improve instruction. In this role the college supervisor offers resources for teaching and learning and shares research and best practices. These resources may be instructional strategies, professional readings and/or materials. These may also be in the form of providing professional connections and/or learning experiences, such as introducing preservice teachers to practicing teachers that may be of support to them, or providing opportunities for professional learning experiences such as conference attendance (Coleman, 2014; Killion & Harrison, 2006, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Resource Provider**

In the coaching relationship, teacher candidates often discuss specific educational areas of interest to their future careers. When this occurs, the college supervisor may provide resources in the form of professional networking. In one such instance, a student approached me with questions about pursuing a master's degree in speech pathology. During this conversation, it became apparent that the student was interested in speech pathology because her case study student was receiving speech services, and she was observing how these services were positively impacting the student’s ability to pronounce, and therefore correctly spell and decode words in her literacy sessions. However, she had little understanding of the role of the speech pathologist. Drawing on my professional network, I contacted a colleague working as a speech pathologist

and arranged for the student and herself to shadow the speech pathologist as she pulled out a small group of students and as she supported students in an inclusion classroom. During the observations, the teacher candidate and I took anecdotal notes. Between observations, we engaged in a debrief and coaching discussion. Following the observations, we engaged in questions and discussion with the speech pathologist. This professional connection and coaching experience resulted in the student developing a professional resource in the form of a collegial relationship in a specialty field of interest. Additionally, the student experienced the professional learning opportunity that observing a colleague affords and expressed her desire to continue to observe other teachers and talk with them about their practice beyond her teacher preparation program and into her career.

### **Role 2: Curriculum Specialist**

The purpose of the Curriculum Specialist is to ensure the teacher candidate is developing accurate and deep content and pedagogical knowledge and skills. The college supervisor will help to deepen the teacher candidate's content and/or pedagogical knowledge, provide support with lesson plan development and curriculum pacing, model how to align curriculum standards and objectives to lesson elements, including assessment (Killion & Harrison, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Curriculum Specialist**

Teacher candidates often struggle to see the connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I observed a teacher candidate in a second grade field placement who taught a nicely paced and engaging lesson addressing the standard, "Ask and answer questions such as who, what, where, when, why and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text." The lesson she planned had the students participating in a close read of a non-fiction science-based passage. Her young students moved through the reading of the passage, coding key words,

starring portions of the text they were confused about, and identifying important details. At the end of the lesson, the students were prompted to answer three comprehension questions about the reading. When debriefing the observation, I posed the following question to the teacher candidate: “How do you know that your students mastered the outcome of this lesson?” This question promoted her to reference the standard, the lesson outcome, and the assessment to determine if all were aligned. After a few other guiding questions, the teacher candidate realized her procedures did not align to the rest of her lesson plan. She was able to loosely align her lesson to the “answer” portion of the standard, but she quickly realized she needed to adjust her procedures and her assessment in order to strengthen alignment. The most important outcome of this debriefing interaction was that the teacher candidate did all the cognitive “heavy lifting.” As the coach, I asked carefully crafted guiding questions that raised the teacher candidate’s awareness of the connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

### **Role 3: Instructional Specialist**

The purpose of the Instructional Specialist is to ensure implementation of sound instructional strategies that may be used across various instructional contexts. In this role, the college supervisor supports teacher candidates’ implementation of effective research-based instructional strategies and classroom management techniques, as well as aids them in differentiating instruction to support curricular knowledge (Killion and Harrison, 2017). Often, this support is provided in the way of modeling strategies in their own instruction of teacher candidates and then engaging them in an explicit debrief of the strategy afterward.

### **Voices from the Field: Instructional Specialist**

The role of the Instructional Specialist is one in which the primary goal of the coach is to help teacher candidates add “tools” to their “toolbox.” It is important for teachers to have a

variety of strategies they can use to meet the needs of their students and the content they teach. When debriefing with candidates, it is important for the coach to refrain from the traditional supervision model by explicitly telling the teacher of a better, more effective, research-based strategy to use. Rather, the coach guides them in identifying what might have been more effective and helps them understand why. While observing a teacher candidate's science lesson on rocks, she began with a brief explanation of rock samples. She proceeded to lead a thirty-minute lecture on the three main types of rocks using a Power Point slideshow. Her students were expected to sit and listen with little participation opportunities. When debriefing with the teacher candidate, I began by discussing how the lesson went. As is common prior to teacher candidates learning to self-reflect, the response was, "I think it went well." In response, I posed a few analytical questions that prompted her to consider what evidence she collected from the lesson to support her statement. Additionally, I was strategic in helping her to think about individual portions of the lesson. For example, "How do you know that your students were engaged in the introduction of the lesson? How did you know your students were engaged during the mini-lesson and direct instruction?" Through the answers to both questions, she was able to identify that her students were in fact engaged in the introduction and merely compliant in the direct instruction. Finally, I was able to follow up with additional questions that prompted her to draw on strategies that she had observed me using in the college classroom that would be engaging and developmentally appropriate for her lesson.

#### **Role 4: Classroom Supporter**

The purpose of the Classroom Supporter is to increase the quality and effectiveness of instruction. In this role, using the gradual release of responsibility model, the college supervisor will help to deepen the candidate's knowledge and implementation of effective instructional

strategies through the use of modeling, observing, and debriefing. The college supervisor may co-plan, co-teach, and provide feedback about the teaching and learning (Coleman, 2014; Killion and Harrison, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Classroom Supporter**

Once teacher candidates have reached their final semester in the educator preparation program, they must complete sixteen weeks of full-time student teaching. It is during this time that I can observe teacher candidates' ability to implement the instructional strategies they have learned in their field-based classroom. While there are many students who thrive during this time, there are others who need more guidance and support. One teacher candidate was struggling with understanding mathematical concepts for her fifth-grade class while also working with implementing small group math stations. To provide support, the student and I examined the pacing guide and math lesson plans for the next six weeks. As a team, we worked together, and I modeled how to create the first week of plans that included mini-lessons, small group stations and several mathematical strategies for her students. We then worked together to create the next two weeks of plans, and finally, the teacher candidate was charged with completing the remaining plans on her own. I noticed that she was not lacking in ability. However, she needed the planning to be modeled for her, and her confidence in understanding and creating stations and strategies for her students increased. In addition to planning lessons together, I supported the teacher candidate in her placement employing a coteaching model for small group math lessons. In the end, the teacher candidate achieved success as a result of my classroom support.

### **Role 5: Mentor**

The purpose of the Mentor is similar to that of a critical friend, working to increase instructional skills of the novice teacher. In this role, the college supervisor helps support the



teacher candidate in a variety of different ways, sometimes extending past the “professional” lane. The college supervisor also supports the mentor teacher in this role, ensuring that they are confident and able to support the teacher candidate (Coleman, 2014; Killion & Harrison, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Mentor**

Upon my arrival to a fifth-grade classroom observation, the mentor teacher nodded toward the back of the class toward my teacher candidate. As the room emptied of students going to lunch, I sat down beside my teacher candidate who burst into tears. I found tissues and lead her to an conference room where she stretched her sweater to form a “protective” cloak. I asked what was wrong, and she slowly began to share the source of her distress. She explained that her first two placements had been in kindergarten and second grade classrooms, and she did not like the upper grades. I quickly assessed, by my teacher candidate’s level of anxiety that before we could address her clinical skill development, I needed to help her deconstruct the contributing factors related to her negative field placement perception. I guided her through creating a mind web of specific feelings and then had her attach contributing context to the identified emotions. This activity led to significant self-awareness, and collaboratively she and I were able to create action steps and a plan for reflecting on the outcomes of her efforts. With determination and support from the mentor teacher, the teacher candidate not only thrived in the fifth-grade placement, but ultimately requested a fifth-grade student teaching placement the following semester. More importantly, I was able to model and guide the teacher candidate through the problem-solving process which is an essential skill set for practitioners to possess.

### **Role 6: Learning Facilitator**

The purpose of the Learning Facilitator is to design collaborative professional learning experiences inside or outside the college classroom that build independent learners. In this role,

they will often lead, or facilitate, reflective conversations using questions like, “What do you (the teacher candidate) think about how the lesson went?” rather than, “Let me tell you what I saw...” (Killion & Harrison, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Learning Facilitator**

“I keep watching my lesson video over and over and I get so frustrated because I don’t know what I am supposed to look for or write about!” This exasperated declaration was expressed on a phone call to me by one of my elementary education candidates in response to a newly implemented pre-student teaching field assignment. The purpose of the activity was to provide an opportunity for candidates to record an example of them delivering instruction and use the video evidence to analyze and answer constructed responses regarding their teaching and their students’ learning. Additionally, the activity was offered as a practice simulation for a performance task that was a part of a mandated student teaching certification portfolio.

I met with the teacher candidate with the intent of collaboratively viewing the video, modeling the analysis process, and allow him to demonstrate the approach. Although I was able to easily pause the recording at critical points and extract evidence, the teacher candidate still seemed puzzled at the identification and dissection process. During the one on one coaching and inquiry session, I began to realize that the complexity of the prompts and the inclusion of unfamiliar academic and function language impeded the student’s ability to complete the task. Several of his cohort peers shared similar challenges. The experience with this student and additional feedback suggested that for some candidates, the assignment, as originally designed, was outside their zone of proximal development. To address the gaps related to academic language, video instruction analysis and constructed response writing skills, a revised assignment was developed to include the following scaffolding constructs: (a) breaking down the assignment

into smaller chunks; (b) creation of video evidence collection graphic organizers; (c) small group, infield workshops designed to explicitly attend to the prompts and build aligned sentence stem options; (d) the addition of one to one collaborative video viewing analysis sessions.

In this capacity, I took on the role of learning facilitator by listening to and exploring challenges expressed by candidates and structuring responsive differentiated opportunities for inquiry and social construction of knowledge. What began as a stressful task that frustrated teacher candidates evolved into a set of experiences that facilitated the production of highly effective reflective practitioners and independent learners.

### **Role 7: Learner**

The purpose of the Learner is to model continuous professional learning; to be a thought leader. In this role the college supervisor continually shares new learning, models ways of new learning, and seek out ways to actively participate in professional learning communities and networks (Killion & Harrison, 2017).

### **Voices from the Field: Learner**

It is vital that our teacher candidates view their leaders as learners and not finished products. The role of a supervisor is often perceived by teacher candidates to be the giver of knowledge. However, when acting as an instructional coach, college supervisors must demonstrate that they too possess a learner's mindset. I had the opportunity to share my learning with a teacher candidate after I visited a local professional development school. This school is a private school in our metro area that is focused on guided principles of structure, discipline, respect balanced by creativity, passion and enthusiasm. Just a few days after my visit to the school, I observed a teacher candidate teaching in a very diverse classroom. The class demographics differed from the teacher candidate's personal experience. She struggled with

classroom management as a result of her difficulty making connections with students she perceived to be unlike her. When debriefing with the teacher candidate, the topic of classroom management was identified by her as an area for improvement. This request for support granted me the opportunity to share with her some of the instructional approaches and classroom management strategies I had learned during my visit to the professional development school. I shared that I had never tried these strategies before, so we learned how to best implement the new ideas together. The student and I worked together to create an action plan for the new ideas, and then we met to debrief the implementation of this plan. Through this experience, we learned alongside one another.

### **Implications**

If we want to grow reflective practitioners who can self-assess, adjust instruction, and meet the diverse needs of learners, we must be purposeful in how we get them there. Through an instructional coach approach to supervision, where space can be made for ongoing and carefully crafted dialogue, reflective practitioners can develop. Teacher candidates should talk first, reflecting on strengths/weaknesses of practice. College supervisors should facilitate critical reflection through carefully crafted questions that promote metacognition in candidates (thinking about their own thinking). These guiding questions help to probe and extend the reflection to promote a deeper analysis of what occurs in classrooms. Examples of these questions, although not an exhaustive list, can be found in Figure 1. Most importantly, the college supervisor probes candidates to dig deeper into their own thinking by referring to observational data and asking questions to help them discover what knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs impacted their decision making. Lastly, the college supervisor challenges the candidate to reflect on what they would do differently if they were to have an opportunity to teach this lesson to a new group of students,

making sure the candidate can justify their proposed revisions with evidence as to WHY the proposed changes would be appropriate.

Ultimately, our goal in using an instructional coaching approach is to foster teacher candidates' cognitive development such that reflection becomes a habit. As these teacher candidates enter the profession and become leaders of their own classrooms, we as supervisors do not travel with them. Thus, we have an obligation and responsibility to build their capacity and equip them with the knowledge and skills to enable their continued professional growth.

**Dr. Amy Farah** is an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Georgia Gwinnett College. Dr. Farah has taught teacher education for seven years now. Prior to coming to higher education, Dr. Farah worked as a district level instructional coach and supervised beginning teachers through an alternative preparation program. She began her teaching career as a high school English Language Arts teacher. Dr. Farah's research interests include clinical supervision, technology in education, and teacher leadership.

**Dr. Kimberly Swartzentruber** is an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Georgia Gwinnett College. Dr. Swartzentruber is an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Georgia Gwinnett College. Prior to beginning her career in higher education, Dr. Swartzentruber worked as a high school, middle school, and elementary school history and language arts public school teacher for 17 years. Her primary areas of research include pre-service teacher candidate holistic development and field experience supervision.

**Dr. Tiffany Coleman** is an Associate Professor of Literacy Education at Georgia Gwinnett College. Dr. Coleman is Chair of Literacy Studies at Georgia Gwinnett College. A thirty year veteran to education, Dr. Coleman used her background in instructional coaching at the P-12 level to inform her development of a literacy partnership with local elementary schools in which literacy courses are taught in the schools, and elementary students are invited to "come to college" and work with pre-service teachers. This partnership allows Dr. Coleman and her colleagues to teach using an instructional coaching approach in each class meeting. Dr. Coleman's research interests include school-university partnerships, literacy instruction, and instructional coaching.

**Dr. Katharine Page** is a Second Grade Teacher in the Gwinnett County Public Schools. Dr. Page has worked as an elementary teacher, literacy and math coach, district level instructional coach, assistant principal, and college professor. In her role in higher education, she served for several years as the Chair of Field and Clinical Experiences and provided professional learning for both college supervisors and mentor teachers. Her unwavering passion for teaching and working with children has recently led her back to the elementary classroom.

**Dr. LaTeshia Warren** is a Gifted Educator/Instructional Coach in the Henry County Public Schools. Dr. Warren has worked as an elementary teacher, literacy and math coach, and college professor. She served as Chair of Studies and Chair of Faculty for the Elementary Education program at Georgia Gwinnett College for several years. She has recently returned to the P-12 world where she serves students and supports classroom teachers as a Gifted Educator and Instructional Coach.

Figure 1.

### **Questions to Lead Your Coaching Conversations**

*\*Some questions taken from, The Facilitator's Book of Questions: Tools for Looking Together at Student and Teacher Work, by David Allen and Tina Blythe (2004).*

#### **General Inquiry Questions:**

- What leads you to say that?
- Did you consider ...?
- What do you think would have happened if ...?
- What was your intention when ...?
- Why? Why? Why? (Several WHY questions, asked in succession, can be VERY effective!)

#### **Questions About Planning:**

- Can you make a connection between what you've planned for this lesson and what you've learned in class?
- How did you plan for ...?
- What would you have changed so that ...?
- What's another way you might have ...? How did you decide/determine/conclude ...?

#### **Questions About Instruction:**

- What are some things that went well during your lesson?
- What are some things that didn't go well during your lesson?
- Can you tell me a time in the lesson where you saw evidence of that?
- What did you notice when...?
- What would you have changed so that ...?
- What's another way you might have ...? How did you decide/determine/conclude ...?

#### **Questions About Assessment:**

- How do you know your students know?
- In what ways did your students' work meet the lesson outcome?
- How did your assessment tool match the lesson outcome and standard(s)?

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