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From the Editor

Dear Readers of *The Field Experience Journal*:

The articles submitted for this edition of *The Field Experience Journal* address wide-spread experiences in clinical settings for teacher candidates. While this is not unique from other editions of this journal, it is of particular note for this edition. To the authors sharing their research and experiences, a sincere thank you as we seek to constantly make more meaningful and memorable these critical preparatory experiences for teacher candidates.

As the most recent semesters have ended, certainly all of us are appreciating those who serve as mentor/cooperating teachers for our teacher candidates. These semesters have provided clear evidence of the adaptability of educators to not only cope with the restrictions of a pandemic, but to guide teacher candidates in providing instruction that served young learners in a delivery that many were not previously prepared to utilize as fully as became necessary.

Truly, there were times of frustration (technical difficulties) that were felt by all parties engaged in the triad (mentor, teacher candidate, and university supervisor) as delivery varied from the norm, supervision was also altered. In correspondence with many colleagues across our country, I am led to conclude that those of us serving as supervisors learned a great deal about what educational delivery may look like in the future. Certainly, instruction and supervision may never fully return to previous methods. After discussing for several years in pedagogy classes the need for flexibility, even I was required to demonstrate this quality for the benefit of my students.

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

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The Pandemic's Influence on Diffusion of Innovation of Instructional Technology in Teacher Education Programs

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Technology is constantly evolving and impacting almost every aspect of life and industry. If the goal of higher education is to prepare individuals for successful participation in this increasingly technological workforce, then it must be intentionally integrated into the curriculum both in terms of modality of instruction and the use of workforce specific technologies. This is particularly true for teacher education programs preparing pre-service teachers for classrooms that are increasingly blending online and offline learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this innovation as teachers around the world found themselves suddenly using virtual tools to teach even the youngest of students, and many believe that education will be forever changed by this shift and investment in technology. Now that educators in both PreK-12 and higher education settings have made a shift to more blended instructional models, it is important that pre-service teachers and in-service PreK-12 teachers are provided with opportunities to engage in a professional learning community to develop their use of technology to support teaching and learning. Blended learning represents a variety of instructional approaches that include both face-to-face (e.g., synchronous) and online (e.g., asynchronous) components. Examples of emerging approaches to blended learning include flipped or inverted learning. These approaches include distinct online delivery of instruction and course content, followed by live discussions in a face-to-face setting (Lee, Lim, & Kim, 2017). Higher education institutions must also invest in a professional learning infrastructure that

provides organizational support and resources to position teacher education faculty and mentors in the field to embrace instructional innovations and engage with blended instructional modalities to support this new world of education. It is also important to understand the benefits of blended instructional innovations in both the higher education and PreK-12 contexts as well as how to best implement the necessary adjustments to teacher education programs.

Background and Context

Education institutions are operating in the era of breakout technology and apps but must get ready for the future of computational and brain-based synergetic learning by the middle of the 21st century (Amirault, 2015). Teacher education programs specifically must position themselves to deal with the transience and the resulting impacts on instructional methods, altered instructional materials, and reorganization of instructional programs to equip students with 21st century skills. Previous studies have found that learning technology influences the perceived quality of instruction and overall satisfaction of students (Goh & Sigala, 2020). A strong connection between the integration of instructional technologies and the students' application of emerging technologies when they enter the workforce has also been indicated. Key advantages of the adoption of instructional technologies include connecting to real world experiences, encouraging reflective learning, improving individualized feedback, engaging students in course content, and simplifying access to content materials. Some common obstacles to instructional technology innovations are that institutional policies tend to constrict innovation, decision-makers are often in the late majority in the adoption of technology, and people outside of the faculty role often make technology purchasing decisions that do not align with faculty needs (Botha-Ravyse & Blignaut, 2017). These organizational obstacles must be overcome to provide immersive digital communities that the students desire. Successful diffusion of innovation is a

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result of a negotiation between the institution that is evolving to meet new demands and the creative and innovative faculty and staff (Samarawickrema & Stacey, 2007). An important consideration is creating a safe environment where faculty feel that their career priorities are protected as they engage in the innovation process. Institutions can create an atmosphere of safety in a number of ways including adjustments to institutional policies to remove barriers, adequate resources, and strong supports.

Theoretical Framework

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation model (Rogers, 2003) is often used to conceptualize the organization shifts to deal with transient technologies. This model seeks to explain how and why new ideas and technologies spread with a focus on the rate of adoption of these innovations. His theory categorizes various groups of people into innovators (2.5% of individuals), early adopters (13.5% of individuals), early majority (34% of individuals), late majority (34% of individuals), and laggards (16% of individuals) based on their categorization of innovativeness and the degree to which the individual adopts new ideas. The innovators create the ideas, early adopters embrace the ideas early, and subsequent groups adopt later. Successful diffusion of innovation is a result of a negotiation between the school that is evolving to meet new demand and the creative and innovative faculty and staff (Smaarawickrema & Stacey, 2007).

Literature Review

Blended learning is a combination of instructional approaches including both face-to-face (i.e., synchronous) and online (i.e., asynchronous) components. These approaches include live interactions in a face-to-face setting alongside online modalities of instruction and course content (Lee, Lim, & Kim, 2017). Many faculty members in both PreK-12 and higher education settings intuitively believe that face-to-face instruction is superior to online instructional modalities. Yet,

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several meta-analyses have shown that the latter can produce improved student learning outcomes in higher education settings (Means & Murphy, 2014). SRI International conducted a meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of face-to-face and online instruction for the United States Department of Education in 2010. They found that students experiencing significant amounts of online learning outperformed those receiving exclusively face-to-face instruction by a modest but statistically significant amount. Further analysis revealed that it was the subset of students who experienced blended learning approaches that was responsible for the online advantage observed in the study. A previous similar study by Zhao et. al (2005) examined the effect sizes from 51 published studies and found an effect size of zero for student performance. However, further analysis revealed that the subset of studies contrasting blended instructional approaches with face-to-face had a significantly positive average affect. Another meta-analysis (Sitzmann et. al, 2006) investigated the impact of online learning on specific types of learning including declarative knowledge (“knowing that”) and procedural knowledge (“knowing how”) as compared to face-to-face training. As with the previously mentioned studies, blended learning situations outperformed purely face-to-face training for both types of learning outcomes. Several more recent studies have continued to observe the blended learning advantage over both purely face-to-face and asynchronous online instruction (Kunnari & Ilomaki, 2016; Leffler et. al, 2020; Porter & Graham, 2016). More recent studies have also demonstrated similar impacts on student learning outcomes in elementary and secondary settings (Pratt, 2019; Wilkes et. al, 2020). Therefore, it is essential that teacher education programs make a shift to embrace and master technological innovations, not only because of the technological shifts resulting out of necessity from the pandemic, but to facilitate the improved student learning outcomes that blended approaches have been shown to provide for students young and old.

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Process of Adapting Quickly

The transience of technologies must be a consideration in the adoption of educational innovations. Amirault (2015) considered how higher education institutions adopt technology and the resulting organizational changes, but particularly focuses on how institutions deal with the transience of technological innovations. Institutions must make decisions about what technologies they will adopt and how they will manage the organizational structure to respond to constant disruptive innovations in technology. Brown and Keep (2018) also focused on the impact of technological change on the workforce and the resulting impacts on education. They pointed to a new phase of technological innovation that research indicates will impact the labor market in one of three ways including labor scarcity, job scarcity, and end of work perspectives. The overarching idea is that technological innovations will fundamentally change the level of skills workers will need and how educational institutions will leverage technologies to prepare them for these new demands. Amirault (2015) suggested that universities position themselves to deal with the transience and the resulting impacts on instructional methods, altered instructional materials, and reorganization of instructional programs to equip students with 21st century skills. A suggested theme going forward is for educational institutions to provide an increased focus on both digital and social skills (Brown & Keep, 2018). The type of high-level skills will be determined by the perspective that prevails, but all will result in a need for major educational reforms including a focus on life-long learning.

Aligning Interests of Stakeholders

Another notable theme from the literature is the necessity of aligning personal dispositions of stakeholders in the diffusion of educational technology innovations. Both-Ravyse and Blignaut (2017) conducted a qualitative study on one faculty member's experiences

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innovating instruction with technology-enhanced learning in health sciences courses in South Africa (Both-Ravyse & Blignaut, 2017). The study identified important considerations for the faculty role in the adoption of new technologies for instruction and focused specifically on the struggles and successes of early adopters and their efforts at course innovations. An additional focus was the educational preferences of Generation Y students and how instructional innovations with technology can meet these expectations. The study used Rogers' diffusion of innovation and Van Deventer and Blignaut's framework that explains the interplay of the instructor, student, and content during the diffusion of instructional technology process. The key observations from the study were that institutional policies tend to constrict innovation, decision-makers are often in the late majority in the adoption of technology, and people outside of the faculty role often make technology purchasing decisions that do not align with faculty needs. The authors advocated that these organizational obstacles must be overcome to provide immersive digital communities that the students desire. They also addressed some key obstacles including lack of robust internet access and limited resources.

Another extremely important consideration is the perceptions of students. Goh and Sigala (2020) looked at how technological innovations can be implemented in the higher education curriculum--particularly the factors that prevent university instructors from embracing new information and communication technologies. Learning technology influences the perceived quality of instruction and overall satisfaction of students. A strong connection between the integration of instructional technologies and the students' application of emerging technologies when they enter the workforce has also been indicated. The authors identified some key advantages of the adoption of instructional technologies as connecting to real world experiences, encouraging reflective learning, improving individualized feedback, engaging

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students in course content, and simplifying access to content materials. Low self-efficacy with use of technology and tech readiness by faculty were identified as the primary barriers to adoption of new technologies. In most cases, faculty use of instructional technology was limited to the storage of course data versus providing a truly active experience for students. Increased student engagement, flexibility for learners, and enhanced communication are primary motivations to overcome barriers to full faculty adoption of instructional technology. Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory was used as a framework to develop some practical implications for motivating instructors to adopt instructional technology.

Impart Your Will (Influence)

Several previous studies have considered how organizational stakeholders can impart their wills on the diffusion of educational innovations and the resulting impact on others in the organization. An early study investigated the interactions between factors impacting the diffusion of technology innovations in elementary and secondary schools, nineteen K-12 schools in four school districts (Zhao & Frank, 2003). The study found that innovations cannot be implemented without consideration of the internal social structures of the organizations and external pressures. Additionally, systemic innovation reforms may be too ambitious. Samarawickrema and Stacey (2007) conducted a case study of an Australian university's transition to online instruction. They examined decision-making around such things as selecting a learning management system to meet institutional needs. Rogers' diffusion of innovation was used as a framework for the study. The study found that successful diffusion of innovations is a result of a negotiation between the institution that is evolving to meet new demands and the creative and innovative faculty and staff. Porter and Graham (2016) looked at the institutional drivers and barriers specifically related to the implementation of blended learning approaches

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and their inherent diffusion of instructional technology innovations. They used a framework of blended learning adoption that they created including the identification of three stages: (1) awareness/exploration, (2) adoption/early implementation, and (3) mature implementation/growth. They also used Rogers' diffusion of innovations as an additional framework. In an online survey regarding factors that influenced their adoption of blended learning methods, faculty largely pointed to structure decisions and support decisions as most influential on their decision to adopt the innovation. These included the availability of sufficient infrastructure, tech support, instructional support, data collection and a clear communication of the institution's purpose for adopting blended learning. In a more recent study, Ugur and Turan (2018) looked at the behavioral factors involved in faculty adoption of e-learning modalities. They used the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model as the framework for their study to understand the reasons for the growing popularity of e-learning and the factors that influence the adoption of e-learning by faculty in higher education institutions. Some important findings were that faculty intended to use instructional technologies to improve efficiency, to increase interactions in courses, and to enhance the effectiveness of instruction. An important consideration in the diffusion of instructional innovations from all of these studies was creating a safe environment where faculty feel that their career priorities are protected while they engage in the innovation process. Institutions can create an atmosphere of safety in a number of ways including adjustments to institutional policies to remove barriers, providing adequate resources, and ensuring strong supports.

Collective Buy-In

Frank and Zhao (2004) conducted a longitudinal study on the implementation of technology in six K-12 schools in three states to learn more about the processes of implementing

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new practices. The researchers specifically looked at how schools diffuse innovations through social processes. Because teachers tend to draw on social capital as they implement innovations, the researchers found it important to consider the distribution of this social capital in schools. Rogers' diffusion within organizations is used as a framework for understanding how innovation was communicated within organizations with emphasis on the individual decision-making level. The study found moderate effects of social capital on the diffusion of technology innovations. The job conditions and stress of individuals in organizations should be attended to if implementation of innovations is to be successful.

Gregory et. al (2015) sought to understand why teaching in three-dimensional (3D) environments has not become mainstream in spite of prevailing interest in the approach since the 1980's. This technology is particularly useful to provide learning experiences for students that would otherwise be difficult or cost prohibitive to provide in the real-world setting. Yet, even when adopted, these spaces are largely underutilized or abandoned. The researchers developed a survey that was distributed to members of the Australian and New Zealand Virtual Worlds Working Group as well as worldwide through various social media platforms resulting in 233 participants with questions designed to elicit response regarding persistence or abandonment of the use of virtual learning platforms. The primary factors identified for ceasing use of virtual technologies were technological issues, student difficulties, institutional issues, and personal perceptions. The authors suggest that a "trough of disillusionment" is a natural inclination in the Garner Hype Cycle and that persistence by some adopters will eventually lead to a "slope of enlightenment" and ultimately a "plateau of productivity." This study emphasized considerations for the future of the use of virtual technology including the need for ongoing

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training and support and provision of time for development of faculty as identified in other studies.

Kunnari and Ilomaki (2016) conducted a single case study qualitative research project including 46 faculty participants in Finland. Data were collected as part of a training program including a questionnaire to answer what are the sources of enthusiasm and interest as well as what current challenges exist in the diffusion of educational technology innovation. They looked at motivational experiences of faculty like enthusiasm and interest as well as challenges such as organizational support in the process of implementing a research, development, and innovation (RDI) program. The authors advocated for adjusting instructional practices in response to extensive changes in the industry sector including globalization, technological advances, and networking and believe that affective constructs of faculty such as enthusiasm, joy and excitement should be considered in the diffusion of innovation. They stated that organizations will be most successful with adopting innovation when they develop a culture of change. Results of the study indicated a need for reorganization to provide resourcing including more time and funding as a means of support. Faculty also pointed to the importance of creating time and space for relationship building that leads to improved communication and supportive leadership as essential to successful innovation. The authors framed the faculty as being “teachers in between” as they try out the new innovation and also continue to operate in a traditional structure.

Guiding Questions

This researcher seeks to develop a model for guiding a diffusion of blended instructional innovations in both teacher education programs in higher education settings as well as school district partners. Some guiding questions for the construction of this model include:

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1. How can lessons learned from previous research on diffusion of education innovations be applied to teacher education programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How might teacher education faculty and mentors for field experiences work together to innovate a blended instructional approach that best prepares pre-service teachers to best support student learning?

These questions are important to explore as they provide insight for all stakeholders involved in teacher education on how to best adjust to the rapid technology diffusions schools have experienced due to the pandemic.

Applying Lessons Learned

An overarching theme from previous research is the need to create an atmosphere of safety by removing barriers, providing adequate resources, and building strong supports for early adopters who will subsequently serve as models for other higher education instructors and PreK-12 teachers. While it is important to develop and implement a robust diffusion of innovations protocol tied to specific measurable goals, it is also understood that time is of the essence in the current situation caused by the pandemic. Instructors and teachers need help now to use a variety of instructional technologies as they meet the needs of students transitioning back and forth between face-to-face, hybrid, and virtual school schedules. They are also expected to prepare their students to master content and perform on assessments of school success.

Therefore, it is essential that lessons learned from previous research on diffusion of educational innovations be carefully applied to a specifically targeted professional development protocol.

While faculty may perceive a number of challenges with adopting instructional innovations, blended learning approaches may serve as a mediator; blended approaches are often perceived as less threatening because the faculty role remains central to decisions about delivery of

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instructional content. Blended learning leverages the advantages of both online and traditional modalities of instruction to produce greater student outcomes (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Steyn & Tonder, 2017). Further, blended approaches allow faculty members to decide what portions of instruction to provide through online systems and resources and how to best use live instruction in the classroom.

Supporting Early Adopters

One major implication from the previous literature was that administrators should carefully assess individuals in the organization and select those identified as early adopters on the Rogers Diffusion of Innovations framework who receive strong amounts of training and support to implement the innovation. In the teacher education context, this means identifying faculty members who identify themselves as early adopters and matching them with teacher mentors in the field so they can work together through a process of diffusion of blended innovations. Therefore, pre-service teachers will have the opportunity to learn about and experience blended modalities across both settings, likely resulting in higher levels of application of blended instruction to their practice.

Administrator Role

Another implication from prior research was that administrators should develop a positive communication campaign about the innovation that presents the new technology as simply as possible. Administrators must overcome their own hesitations regarding innovation and work with innovators and early adopters to develop a strong and positive message that is shared widely within the organization so everyone has an opportunity to both be inspired by the proposed innovation and feel safe in their participation with it.

Faculty Input

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Additionally, higher education instructors and PreK-12 teachers should be involved in the process of making the decision about the technology innovation and provided with strong technical support as they move forward with the adoption. Often technology professionals or administrators make decisions about new technologies to purchase and then distribute them to users. While it is important to tap into this expertise, it is more important that those who will use the technology have great input into those decisions. A great place to start is pairing the early adopters with the technology professionals to make determinations about what hardware and software products will be most useful and easier to apply in the field. This becomes even more important when considering teacher education programs working with school district partners. The technologies need to work across both types of organizations for the greatest utility and impact.

Social Capital

Next is the development of a critical mass to ensure that the new technology is embraced by the early and late majority from the Rogers model. This can be helped by highlighting the success of innovators and allowing these late adopters to be influenced by their enthusiasm. As the pairs of higher education instructors and field mentors receive high levels of support and are able to demonstrate competence, the early and late majorities will experience greater agency and perceptions of efficacy in participating in the diffusion of the blended innovations.

Faculty Support

A final consideration is reducing the workload of higher education instructors and mentor teachers, so they have time to commit to the training and development necessary to make the shift to new technologies. This involves developing a robust training program in the tools and modalities of blended learning. In order to model the blended learning modalities, the training

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should include both live meetings (either face-to-face or virtually) and interactive online work and field experiences to be completed between live sessions. The training should be for both elementary and secondary teachers serving as field mentors as well as teacher education faculty and include concepts applicable to both groups, with more focused activities during the online and field-based components. A small-group cohort model should be implemented with a strong emphasis on relationship building so participants are able to engage in mutually beneficial interactions that come from a professional learning community. Additionally, each participant should be placed in a partner group to complete the online and field-based components of the training together. Online and field-based experiences between live meetings with an emphasis on giving participants the opportunity to practice the blended learning strategies they are learning in the training should be facilitated using a learning management system (such as Canvas or Google Classroom). In some cases, participants should be asked to video themselves implementing blended strategies and provided with feedback and an opportunity for reflection. An ideal parallel experience to the blended training would be Google Educator Levels I and II Certification. The level I fundamentals training includes 13 self-paced online units that focus on such topics as getting ready to use technology in the classroom, having a mostly paperless classroom, saving time with communication, bringing meetings and student work online, measuring and sharing student growth, building interactive lessons, using video, facilitating group work, and promoting digital citizenship. The level II certification is an advanced course that includes such topics as promoting and modeling effective use of digital tools, leveraging learning models to personalize learning, using advanced features to optimize workflow, connecting with parent/guardians, analyzing and interpreting student data, teaching beyond the

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four walls of the classroom, harnessing the power of Google for research, and giving students voice and agency.

Conclusion

A primary goal of the diffusions of blended innovations model is to give teacher education instructors and field mentor teachers the tools and support they need to better meet the learning needs of their students. A subsequent goal is to provide a full blended training and Google certifications at the fundamental and advanced levels for early adopters as they engage in the diffusion of blended innovations. It is believed that the cohort model and ongoing supports will build relationships that will promote continued expansion of blended learning and innovation of technology that will transform schools and lead to positive student learning outcomes.

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Examining Cooperating Teachers Experiences during the Student Teaching Placement

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Abstract

Teacher education literature has identified the critical role cooperating teachers (CTs) play in preparing preservice teachers. Unfortunately, many student teaching placements can be fragmented or lack proper support for the student teacher and result in an unenjoyable experience for the teacher candidate or CT. Investigation into physical education cooperating teachers' (PECTs) experiences during the student teaching experience is explored in the current study to assist physical education teacher education (PETE) programs in identifying essential considerations for ensuring a positive and successful student teaching placement. This study aimed to examine PECTs experiences and perspectives of what is required of a quality student teaching experience. This study design used a phenomenological research approach to describe PECTs experiences and perspectives of a quality student teaching experience. Three themes emerged through data analysis: (a) PECTs relationship with the PETE faculty and the student teacher (b) PECTs knowledge of program and expectations from the PETE program, and (c) perceived benefits of being a PECT. This study suggests PETE programs should work intently to foster relationships early with PECTs to train and fully prepare them for their supervisory role before the student teaching experience begins.

Keywords: Physical education teacher education, cooperating teacher

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Examining Cooperating Teachers Experiences during the Student Teaching Placement

The student teaching experience is an extended field experience designed to be as realistic and intensive as actual teaching, taking place under a cooperating teacher (CT) and a university supervisor (Zeichner, 2010). CTs serve as a necessary and integral component of training new teachers and are often the last link between preservice teacher preparation and attaining a teaching certificate (Rakiciouglu-Soylemez & Eroz-Tuga, 2014; Soslau & Rath, 2017). Ideally, CTs' are cognizant of and attempt to reproduce similar outcomes as the teacher preparation program, aligning with the student teachers' training. Similarly, teacher preparation programs should communicate their educational goals to the local schools and CTs before and during the student teaching experience (Coulon, 1991; Leatham & Peterson, 2010). A complicated situation can arise for the student teacher, CT, and university faculty supervisor when the CT does not reinforce practices learned in the teacher preparation program during the student teaching experience (Gurl, 2018; Ó Gallchóir, O'Flaherty, & Hinchion, 2019; Young & MacPhail, 2015).

While it is widely recognized the important role CTs play in teacher education, there is no consensus of how to best prepare CTs for their integral role in supervising student teachers. In many cases, CTs are selected based on their distance and location to a teacher preparation program or university. It is common for CTs to know very little about the specifics of the methods and foundation courses that their student teachers have completed on campus; likewise, the university faculty often know very little about the specific practices used in the K-12 classroom placements (Zeichner, 2012). Koskela and Ganser (1995) suggest "more direct involvement of CTs in teacher education programs as a way of narrowing the gap between

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schools and teacher education institutions and improving the transition of new teachers from the university to the school setting" (p. 125).

While field experiences are essential to teacher preparation, they are perhaps the least intentional component of the process (Levine, 2002). For field experience placements to benefit preservice teachers, they should be well planned in positive learning environments with quality educational professionals and institutions (Bernhardt & Koester, 2015). Consequently, teacher educators have tried to identify the best ways to organize and think about teaching experiences, issues, and problems associated with teaching experiences and identify recommendations that might enhance or improve field experiences.

While substantial research has recognized the vital role classroom CTs play in preparing preservice teachers (Clarke, Triggs, & Neilsen, 2013; Izadina, 2015), little research focuses specifically on physical education cooperating teachers (PECTs). A PECT is a cooperating teacher serving as a P-12 physical educator and supervising a physical education teacher candidate. Further investigation into PECTs experiences can allow PETE researchers and faculty to identify the critical features that unequivocally support quality student teaching experiences for the physical education setting. With a better understanding of how PECTs perceive quality student teaching placements, PETE programs can better inform, prepare, and support PECTs for their influential role during student teaching. Therefore, this study aimed to examine PECTs' experiences and perspectives of quality student teaching. Specifically, this study inquiry hoped to recognize PECTs' experiences and beliefs about their supervisory role by generating new ideas emerging from the data without being confined to a set of research questions.

Methods

The current study is part of a larger project that aimed to determine the beliefs and experiences of PECTs during the student teaching experience. The qualitative element of the
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larger sequential explanatory research design used a phenomenological method approach to describe PECTs' experiences and perspectives of a quality student teaching experience to "grasp and sense the lived experience" of participants on the nature of participation supervising field experiences (Creswell, 2012). In phenomenology, ideas articulate from a rich amount of data through induction, human interests, and stakeholder perspectives. In study, the researchers aimed to gain insight into the phenomenon of interest by interviewing knowledgeable participants (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this study explored the lived experiences of PECTs to understand their experiences and perspectives during the student teaching experience. This study was approved by the researchers' university Institutional Review Board.

Theoretical Perspective

Interpretivism argues that people, unlike non-human forms of life – interpret their environment and themselves in ways shaped by the particular cultures in which they live (Crotty, 1998). These distinctive cultural orientations shape what they do and when and how they do it. The roots of interpretivism come from Max Weber (1864-1920), who suggests that in the human sciences, we are concerned with understanding (Verstehen). Weber contends that, in any scientific study of society, understanding (Verstehen) be supported by empirical evidence. By positing a reality that cannot be separated from our knowledge of it (no separation of subject and object), the interpretive paradigm suggests that researchers' values are inherent in all research process phases (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) suggested the researcher adopt an exploratory orientation, one that tries to learn what is going on in different situations and arrive at an understanding of the people's concerned distinctive orientations. The interpretivist perspective serves as the theoretical foundation for the study.

Participants

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Participants in this study included five purposefully selected PECTs based on their reported lived experiences as PECTs. The PECTs selected included those that had different levels of education (bachelors, masters, doctorate), a range in the number of student teachers supervised (1, to 20+), and varying amounts of years of teaching experience (5, to 40). Table 1 represents the demographic information for the five PECTs interviewed for the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Descriptive data from PECTs was first collected through an online survey, which was part of the larger project. Survey items included demographic information and descriptions of their perceived roles of serving as a PECT. The second and primary instrument used for the current study was a semi-structured interview guide. Each individual was interviewed on one occasion, lasting approximately 45-90 minutes via telephone. The interviews consisted of open-ended and in-depth questions about their perceptions and lived experiences of serving as PECTs. The opening questions reviewed the participants' reported descriptive data from the survey and initiated the conversation by focusing on the participants' individual experiences of being a PECT. Next, questions focused on PECTs' perspectives of what PECTs should do and how they might engage during the student teaching experience. The interview guide included open-ended questions to discover unique perceptions of the PECTs' experiences and perceptions of their roles. Probes delivered a platform for participants to expand upon remarks and clarify the meaning of their answers. Many PECTs discussed their experiences in detail without prompting and spoke beyond the scope of the question at hand. Lastly, PECTs had an opportunity to ask questions and add information they of value. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

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Based on the literature review and proposal for further inquiry into 'CT participation in teacher education,' the study's review developed into a semi-structured interview guide. The lead researcher prepared the interview guide, which was reviewed and revised by an extensively published researcher in CT literature and two PECTs. The two PECTs had served in the role of PECT for at least five years and supervised at least three student teachers. The three experts reviewed the questions for readability, validity, and comprehension. After the review, interview questions were revised accordingly. Interviews concluded after the researchers established data saturation was met (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Guest et al., 2006). The researchers determined that the five interviews yielded sufficient, in-depth data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic and individual response item data from the survey. For interview analysis, the researchers employed Moustakas' (1994) approach to data analysis, as Creswell (2016) recommended. First, the researchers read the interview transcriptions multiple times. The data were analyzed with an inductive approach by first exploring the general sense of data, next coding the data, and specifying the themes (Creswell, 2012). The second and third readings by researchers identified participant statements significant to the experience of participation as a PECT. A final list of significant statements was developed, then grouped into larger information units, and from these units, identified common themes (Creswell, 2013). The researcher identified frequently repeated and consensus statements considered as the most significant. Based on these significant statements and the themes, the researchers wrote an exhaustive description of 'what' the PECT participants experienced related to beliefs and participation in the identified teacher educator roles. Representative quotes were identified to support the narrative. Next, researchers wrote a detailed description of 'how' the

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PECT participants experienced their beliefs and participation in the identified teacher educator roles. Once again, representative quotes were identified to support the description. A final narrative was written to describe the essence of the experience to complete the data analysis. This narrative is a composite of the first two narratives, including the 'what' and 'how' of the PECTs' experiences. The process outlined by Moustakas (1994), which includes an examination of the data for themes, using writing to analyze, and including researcher reflection, "yields an explicit structure of the meaning of the lived experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 195).

Trustworthiness and Dependability

Several operational techniques utilized increased the likelihood that credible findings were produced. First, triangulation within and across data from the survey questionnaire and interviews was used to strengthen the study's credibility and dependability (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, data from the participants' interview responses were triangulated with data collected in the initial survey questionnaire (Merriam, 2009). Also, transcripts were read by a peer debriefer to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data. Peer debriefing requires the researcher to work together with one or several colleagues who hold impartial views of the study. The impartial peers examine the researcher's transcripts, final report, and general methodology. Afterward, feedback is provided to enhance credibility and ensure validity.

Results

Three themes emerged through data analysis: (a) PECTs' relationship with PETE program, faculty, and student teachers, (b) PECTs' knowledge of program and expectations from the PETE program, and (c) perceived benefits of being a PECT. Each theme is presented with a brief discussion, with subthemes and identified quotes from the interview to support each paradigm.

Relationships with PETE program, faculty, and student teacher

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This theme explores the presence of relationships among the PECT, PETE faculty, and the student teacher. Each of the five PECTs interviewed mentioned having some relationship and communication line with all parties involved with the student teaching experience. This theme highlights the unique interactions PECTs can have with PETE programs, which can vary greatly.

Positive interactions with PETE faculty and supervisors

All five PECTs shared examples of their positive experiences when supported by the PETE programs. Most of these responses stem from asking the PECTs to share their experiences in their supervisory role. One example was Barry, who shared stories of support with the PETE program supervisor:

I felt like an extension of faculty from the university, the way that he [university supervisor] handled interacting with the mentors like myself was to bring them in as colleagues and to join us in the gym and in the office as colleagues. Everything about the way he [university supervisor] interacted was collegial, saying "We need you. You are an extension of our faculty." (Barry)

Likewise, Kelly stated how she has always felt appreciated and supported by the PETE university supervisor and that she had only positive experiences to share:

She [university supervisor], is really great at reflecting and talking me through things. I feel like we really trust each other and engage more like colleagues than like I'm being supervised by her when I supervise the student.

While all the PECTs shared examples of positive and supportive happenstances with PETE programs, it is essential to share the negative experiences to capture the full essence of the PECT role.

Negative interactions with PETE faculty and supervisors

Two of the five PECTs talked about challenges they had encountered during their time working with student teachers and PETE university supervisors. One example is from Barry,

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who expressed frustration and feeling underappreciated by the PETE program university supervisor:

Most of them [PETE supervisors] didn't have any engagement. They were ... I'm sorry, they were perfunctory. I was just another guy, and they had more important stuff to do. It was important that the focus on the student teacher was there, but there was not an engagement on the professional level with me, which was disappointing with the time and effort I put in.

In general, PECTs reported positive and supportive structures from the PETE program faculty and university supervisors with whom they interacted more than negative encounters. While there were a few reported challenges when working with a PETE program, most 'what and how' the PECTs experienced their dealings with PETE programs were supportive and positive.

Interactions with the student teacher before the student teaching experience

The five PECTs mentioned either meeting or interacting with their potential student before the placement began helped them prepare and plan for the supervisory and mentor tasks of being a PECT. For example, Kelly explained how she would essentially interview her student teachers before their placement with her to make sure it would be a good match for both of them:

I actually had to reject my first student teacher because when he came in to complete practicum hours with me, he was super unprofessional. While interviewing him [student teacher] I said, "We are professionals. We are working together, I'm not your babysitter. You are an adult. You need to be the person in charge when you're in here, and the middle school students need to know that."

In the same way, Tim explained that one of the PETE programs he would accept student teachers from provided him information about the student teacher prior to their placement, which he said helped him to prepare for the student teacher's arrival:

They [student teacher] send a form to us, before they come, about their interests or what they have taught, and they give us a resume of what they have been doing in their program or for work. It is like a little scouting report. It's a chance for me to see who I will be working with on paper and an idea of what the student teacher is bringing to the table before we start.

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Four out of the five PECTs mentioned their relationship with the student teacher before the student teaching placement was a factor in their overall experience as a PECT. The PECTs appreciated the opportunity to meet the student teacher before the placement.

Knowledge of program and expectations from the PETE program

All five PECTs shared the importance of gaining prior knowledge about the PETE program curriculum and goals as contributing factors to their experiences in their role. The PECTs expressed that without an indepth understanding of the PETE programs, they cannot perform their supervisory roles to their fullest potential.

Seeking clarification for PECT expectation

Each of the PECTs mentioned having to reach out to the PETE faculty, university supervisor, or student teacher to inquire about different aspects of their supervisor role. For example, four PECTs shared uncertainty about how much feedback they should be providing the students or how quickly to step in if they are struggling with a lesson. Furthermore, some PECTs expressed unknowingness about the managerial role of supervising:

I found myself talking to the colleges and the supervising professor . . . I felt comfortable saying, "I want to know what's required of me in terms of filling out paperwork, doing observations, using your rubrics. . ." (Barry)

Similarly, Kelly shared how the PETE program informed her of the student teaching experience expectations via a Student Teaching Handbook and direct communication with PETE faculty:

I always appreciate the checklists in the handbook to make sure I was giving feedback and reflecting with the student teacher everyday and checking their lesson plans and dispositions. They [PETE programs] do a good job of giving you resources, and then she [university supervisor] is great to communicate with and helpful when you need her. I always felt like if I was ever struggling or if I was not sure about something, I could always just call her, and she would help me out.

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Overall, PECTs expressed the importance of learning about the PETE program goals as necessary for their effectiveness as a PECT.

Prior knowledge of the PETE program

All the interviewees acknowledged the significance of awareness of the PETE programs curriculum, goals, expectations, or philosophy to satisfy their role fully. Barry communicated his experiences supervising students from different PETE programs and how varied his experience was, based inherently on the PETE program structure:

The [PETE] program philosophy, teacher development style, and the direction of the program, and how I view quality professional activities is important. My cooperating teacher experience varied based on the [PETE] program that I received student teachers from. (Barry)

Barry continued to share an example of how he would learn a lot about his student teachers' educational background and teaching experience through conversing with the PETE faculty:

He [university supervisor] would come out, and we would have great conversations about what they're [PETE faculty] trying to do in the program, what the student teachers are bringing in terms of strengths, or where he would see a weakness . . .

Ultimately, all PECTs expressed a desire to have background knowledge of their student teachers' education, content, and experience before beginning the student teaching experience.

Perceived benefits of being a PECT

This theme highlights the PECTs' experiences, which influenced their continued participation of being a PECT. The five PECTs shared their perceived benefits and reasoning for why they continue to supervisor student teachers as a way for them to give back to the field, gain professional development opportunities, and the newness it can bring to their PE program.

Giving back to the field

Four out of the five PECTs felt participating as a PECT was their way of giving back to the field and doing what they can to help future teachers be successful. During her interview,

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Kelly said, "For me, I feel like it's my contribution to our field and just helping teachers be the best that they can be when they're starting out."

Professional development opportunities

All five interviewees talked about the professional development gained during their time as a PECT, and the newness brought to their physical education program. When discussing their experiences, they mentioned what they learned from the experience, whether directly or indirectly, from working with a student teacher. Kelly shared her perspective of honing in on her teaching practices as a result of supervising the student teachers:

I found that through the student teaching process, it really helped me focus in on the essential learning experiences for new teachers. . . What is the most important thing that they need to know to be successful and for their students to be successful? It has helped me refine and clarify some things, and pushed me to try new things.

The PECTs shared their involvement in the new and exciting activities, lessons, management, and teaching strategies they adopted after observing their student teacher.

A huge part of supervising student teachers is I learn a lot too. All my student teachers and my practicum students always come in with background in new games, new activities, and new technology, and things that are out there that I might miss, because I'm not in school anymore. I feel like there is this great opportunity to tap this well of knowledge that these student teachers have that we, who have been in the game for a while, might not have anymore. I really liked that. (Kelly)

In the same way, Nicole stated during her interview, "Yeah, sometimes I pick up new ideas from them. I say, "Oh, that's a good way to do that lesson." To summarize, all the PECTs mentioned perceived benefits of working with student teachers and how it can provide opportunities to give back to the profession, provides professional development opportunities, and potentially brings newness to their PE program.

Essence of the Experience

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The PECTs expressed the importance of having a relationship with the PETE program, faculty, and student teachers to have a successful and pleasant student teaching experience. When the PECTs felt supported and had a complete understanding of their expectations and the student teacher's expectations, PECTs were more likely to fulfill their role to the best of their ability. The PECTs experience of serving in the supervisory role during the student teaching experience was a way to give back to the profession and fine-tune their teaching. The opportunity for professional development and adopting new teaching techniques and instructional strategies were perceived benefits of serving as a PECT. To fully grasp the essence of the PECTs' experiences, it is important to acknowledge the challenges PECTs face in their roles if they do not have a positive rapport with their student teacher, the PETE faculty, and university supervisor.

Discussion

This study supports previous literature that identified the importance of a positive relationship between teacher preparation programs and the CTs. A long-standing critique of teacher education programs has been that fieldwork and coursework are often only loosely connected (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Gurl, 2018; Lesley et al., 2009; Moore, 2003; Shantz & Ward, 2000). University courses are perceived as being theoretical spaces, while classrooms are places where authentic teaching practice occurs. Thus, supporting two themes that emerged in this study illuminates the need for PECTs to develop positive relationships with the PETE program, faculty, and student teachers and gaining knowledge of the program and expectations from the PETE faculty. Through building relationships with PECTs, PETE programs can make gains in helping PECTs have a positive experience in their role. These ideas also reiterate Christenson & Barney (2011) call for more congruency and communication among PECTs and PETE programs.

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Training PECTs about becoming a teacher educator, the multifaceted ways they engage during the student teaching experience, and how to provide adequate supervision is one possibility to better prepare PECTs for their role. Teacher preparation programs must identify and utilize effective CTs and develop training for in-service teachers to prepare more effective CTs. Results from the current study indicate that less than 25% of the PECTs surveyed have ever received formal training to meet the demands and understandings of their role: meaning, PECTs likely supervisor student teachers based on their experiences of being mentored as a student teacher. Therefore, the argument could be made that PETE programs' programmatic goals are not necessarily part of the PECTs supervisory efforts. Instead, they are based on PECTs own perceptions, experience, and understanding of what it means to supervise a student teacher.

Grossman and colleagues (2008) examined the relationship between preservice teachers' perceptions of program coherence to features of the field experience to support this idea. Programs that were perceived as coherent provided students with an aligned vision of teaching and learning that occurred across field experience placements and university settings, and specific structures that consistently worked together to link university coursework and fieldwork. The authors found that coherent university teacher education programs were more likely to include control over the selection of CTs, more frequent supervisor observations, and more opportunities for supervisors to meet with university faculty (Grossman et al., 2008).

If a positive relationship is not present between the PECT and PETE program, a worry arises when looking at the PECTs adherence to the PETE program goals. Darling-Hammond (2009) referred to the lack of connection between campus courses and field experiences as the Achilles heel of teacher education. Due to the complex nature of the student teaching experience, the PETE program goals must be communicated clearly to the PECTs to ensure the PETE

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program's goals are met. A constructive working relationship and open communication line with the PETE program, faculty, and student teacher is critical for a positive PECT experience.

Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample, which is problematic because those who chose to participate in the study may have been different from those who did not participate (Creswell, 2012). Another limitation concern includes threats to internal validity due to the nature of the self-reporting of the data. PECTs may have responded with socially desirable answers rather than the most accurate response. Also, I recognize that a limitation in the study includes my own biases. Qualitative research is grounded in human reality, but it is subject to the researcher's interpretations (Creswell, 2013). I came into this study with the perception that the PECTs experiences are potentially related to their supervisory role readiness.

Sustained research into the multifaceted role a PECT should continue. Suggestions for future research include investigating the congruency of practices by PECTs during the student teaching experience as aligned with the PETE program curriculum. Providing and analyzing the impact of PECT supervisory training on PECTs' effectiveness and experiences would provide the occasion to confirm that PECTs more fully satisfy their supervisory role when they have a deeper understanding of PETE programs' curricular goals and expectations. Similarly, analyzing the consistency of the PETE faculty and the PETE university supervisors' perceptions of PECTs' experiences could add a complete perspective about how PECTs are perceived to engage during the student teaching experience.

An additional recommendation includes studying the impact of a supervisory training method for PECTs to elicit positive experiences during the field experience. Research has shown

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that providing professional development and intentional learning opportunities on engaging as a supervisor and mentor is very useful in defining their role in teaching practice. The PECTs in one study of PECT training felt that all future PECTs should have to participate in the cooperating physical education teacher program training before taking on a student teacher (Belton, Woods, Dunning, & Meegan, 2010).

Conclusion

Having a positive working relationship and open communication line with the PETE program, faculty, and the student teacher is essential for a positive PECT experience. There is a need to cultivate close and systematic engagement with K-12 schools and acknowledge the important contribution CTs make to new teachers' professional learning (Sahlberg Report, 2012). PETE programs should work intently to build on previous understanding about developing stronger teacher preparation models. PETE programs and university faculty need to persist with current efforts or begin to make efforts to involve PECTs as partners in the PETE programs and preparation of preservice teachers.

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Table 1
Summary of Demographic Characteristics

PECT (Age)	State	Grade Level	Degree Earned	Years of Experience	Number of STs	CT Training Received
Sarah (28)	CO	Elem.	Bach.	5	1	No
Nicole (62)	HI	Elem.	Mast.	40	20	Yes
Barry (46)	ID	Middle	Mast.	19	14	Yes
Tim (47)	NY	Elem.	Ph.D.	19	19	Yes
Kelly (32)	CO	Elem.	Bach.	8	2	No

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An International Internship to Develop Undergraduate Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

This article explores a study investigating an international internship and the impact this experience has on undergraduate teacher candidates. The teacher candidates taught at an international school in Europe for eight weeks as a part of their degree program. They were immersed in the culture of the international school and the community, providing diverse cultural and language teaching experiences. The findings of the study revealed themes: candidates developed a more profound sense of effective teaching, child development is the same for children around the world, and contextual knowledge of culture and community support teaching and learning. This study highlights the significance of international field experiences as an option for teacher candidates within their undergraduate experiences.

Keywords: International Field Experience, International Internship, Teacher Candidate Efficacy, Teacher Candidate Perceptions, Internships, Clinical Education, Pre-Service Teachers, Teacher Candidate, Diversity, Internships in the Pandemic

An International Internship to Develop Undergraduate Teacher Candidates

An increasing number of university teacher education programs incorporate study abroad international field experience into the professional education curriculum options (Bonnett, 2015; Mathews & Lawley 2011; McGaha & Linder 2012). These international clinical education internships are typically incorporated into the teacher education program's range of field experience internships and pedagogical framework with the assumption that such placements will provide the interns with rich learning experiences for those who have the opportunity to engage in field experiences abroad (Bonnett, 2015). Given the growth of teacher education programs offering options for teacher candidates to engage in international internships, it is crucial for these programs to have data concerning the overall impact for participants.

Throughout literature about teacher candidates' international internships, there are several themes that are apparent. Most often, the focused areas of international internship placements include the candidates' personal, professional, and pedagogical transformations (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Malewski et al., 2012).

In this study, the university, which is located in the midwestern United States, has a long history of providing international enrichment experiences for its students. Yildirum et al., (2021) discuss the idea that students participate in international travel to gain knowledge and skills to bring to their home lives, experiences, and professional endeavors. Through these international internship opportunities, teacher candidates can anticipate gaining a better understanding of the field of education, learning more about themselves, and achieving the personal and professional confidence to seek experiences beyond their typical daily interactions (Dejordy et al., 2020). Additionally, participants gain cultural experience and understanding beyond their own lived experiences.

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Like the motivations for other research on the impact of international teacher education internships (McGaha, & Linder, 2012; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), the researchers for this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of an international internship and the relationship to teacher development. As teacher educators, our aim within this study, was to explore perceptions, experiences, and challenges of international field experiences. This effort would aid teacher education preparation programs with research-based information about international teacher education programs.

Context of the Study

This study took place with undergraduate teacher candidates during an international field experience that counted toward their degree program as part of their internship requirement. The international school, grades kindergarten through middle school, where the teacher candidates completed their international field experience was located in Europe. Each undergraduate teacher candidate was in the classroom with an experienced contract teacher from the international school. They prepared and taught lesson plans and engaged in similar field experiences in the midwestern United States before their internships in Europe.

The international school taught students from all around the world with many cultural practices and religions represented. All the students at the international school could speak English; however, they also were fluent in at least one other language. This created a culturally diverse environment for pre-service teachers to prepare learning experiences. The undergraduate teacher candidates lived in housing outside of the school and were at their placement during school hours for eight weeks. A university faculty member, from a College of Education in the midwestern United States, traveled to and from Europe with the undergraduate teacher candidates. Before their international field experience, there were two preparation sessions that

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included a checklist of items needed, information concerning currency, secured housing, information on travel within Europe, etc. The faculty member was only with the students at the beginning of their fieldwork and at the end of their fieldwork.

International Field Experiences

Most, if not all, teacher preparation programs require teacher candidates to participate in internships, which are often called field experiences. Some universities have created international internship opportunities as an additional or alternative learning experience for their teacher candidates (Robinson, Robinson, & Foran, 2019). The international internship option can be in addition to the traditional experience or in lieu of. Either way, interning in a different country enlightens teacher candidates and divulges new perspectives of teaching and students' learning.

The international internship experience is different from what a traditional internship experience provides. Therefore, candidates obtain different yet meaningful knowledge to be effective classroom teachers. Authentic, meaningful internship experiences are important pieces of teacher preparation programs for teacher candidates to assist in preparing them for the diverse population of students that will be in their classrooms (Miller & Gonzales, 2016). Additionally, international internships allow both personal and professional growth for teacher candidates, therefore becoming better teachers and better people (Robinson, 2017).

There are several benefits to international field experiences. When teacher candidates have the opportunity to participate in international field experiences, they gain authentic personal and professional awareness of cultural responsive practices. They also build a strong foundation for knowledge regarding a global perspective and multicultural understandings (Miller & Gonzales, 2016). This foundation creates a perception, an understanding, and compassion for

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their future students. Because of the vast benefits gained by such an experience, university teacher preparation programs have created opportunities and committed resources for teacher candidates to experience and learn from a different school culture (Bryan & Sprague 1997).

Lupi, Batey, and Turner (2012) noted numerous deep benefits in teaching and pedagogy from teacher candidates that have participated in international internships. Diversity realization and understanding is an essential part of being an effective teacher. Teacher candidates that participate in international internship experiences are likely to have a positive impact on diverse students' learning experiences in educational settings (Miller & Gonzales, 2016). According to Martin et al. (1999), barriers to teaching and learning can be a source of potential misunderstandings. Simultaneously, as interns and students interact daily in the educational setting, there is an exciting teaching and learning opportunity. Learning from each other generates international knowledge and intercultural skills for the interns and the students (Knight, 2006).

Matthews and Lawley (2011) challenge the idea that international internships should produce a different experience and opportunity, rather than simply offering more of the same opportunities for interns. They argue for the investigation of personal and professional expectations, experiences, and long-term learning impact. Learning should be intentional, meaningful, and with purpose. All field experiences bestow on teacher candidates learning, knowledge, and tools; however, each type of field experience provides unique opportunities and is valuable for teacher candidates.

Methods and Analysis

This qualitative research study included four teacher candidate interns who participated in an 8-week clinical education international internship. The researchers conducted semi-

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structured interviews, journaling, and two focus groups. Teacher candidates were asked to respond to journal prompts during their international internship and reflect on their experiences both inside and outside the international school. The university faculty members checked in digitally to ask follow-up questions.

The teacher candidates participated in two individual interviews, one before and one after the international internship. They also participated in focus group interviews before and after their international internship. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (Chloe, Angela, Paige, and Ruby) to keep their identity confidential. Within the article, the pseudonym was utilized to differentiate quotes and journal entries. Transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, along with all journal entries, were coded utilizing van Manen's (1990) selective highlighting method. The highlighting method allows researchers to read through the data and highlight words, phrases, and statements that are similar among the interviewees. This process of coding data is in line with van Manen's (1990) thematic analysis process. The themes provided a way to explore data, and the experiences of the teacher candidates' international internship experience in an effort to answer research questions. Each theme created was directly linked to all participants and was utilized with multiple examples within the research data.

Discussion of Themes

The preparation and development of teachers can be a challenge. Questions arise concerning what are the best experiences to support each teacher candidate as they embark upon their teaching journey. We know that practice in field experiences is a powerful method of teacher development. International field experiences provide a platform for global teacher development (Miller & Gonzales, 2016). This research attempted to capture the lived experience of an international field experience for a small group of teacher candidates. Through the

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exploration of interviews, focus groups, and journal entries, researchers captured key take-aways through emerging themes. In the following section, themes are more fully discussed.

Journey to Become a Teacher: Growth in Self-Efficacy

The teacher candidates in this study were full of anticipation as they prepared to travel abroad and experience an internship in a different country. All study participants shared a desire to explore international teaching before this internship was an option at their university. This desire for international travel and possible international teaching beyond graduation provided motivation for the teacher candidates. However, along with their excitement, there were also areas of concern that crept into their dialogue. Angela shared, “I just know it will be a lot different than it is here...they will view education differently.” She goes on to state, “I know it is going to be a completely opposite experience than what I currently have.” Angela anticipated that the international experience would provide her with an experience she would not have had in the Midwest. This was both exciting and caused insecurity about her current teaching abilities.

Another teacher candidate, Paige, also shared Angela’s feelings of fear about encountering different teaching practices: “what is appropriate here is American, might not be appropriate in an international school.” Paige concurred that her current abilities might not prepare her to work with international students. And Ruby confirmed her teaching views before leaving for the trip, “I think going into this, I know that students will have different needs than the students I have taught They might be disciplined differently...” These examples show a hesitation concerning their current teaching efficacy. The hopes and fears expressed by Ruby, Paige, and Angela are in line with research conducted by Shoyer and Leshem (2016), which identified the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of teacher effectiveness as teacher candidates moved through their field experiences. There is an undertone that the teacher

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candidates feel they are prepared to teach in the United States but might not be prepared to effectively teach international students. The eagerness to teach and the fear of facing new teaching situations are all part of the journey many teacher candidates move through as they develop professional self-efficacy. This journey to become a teacher marked the overall process of both, being excited and hesitant about their ability to relate to students and meet their learning needs. This process is expected for teacher candidates doing their final internships in either the United States or abroad.

The interesting factor was how the teacher candidates' views were altered at such a rapid rate. Angela had a discipline issue with a special needs student who became overstimulated by the environment. She stated in her journal, "once I realized I was able to calm him down, that is when I knew I could properly handle the classroom." The teacher candidates were able to become more reflective and apply information learned from their university classrooms to their international internship within the first few days. This process of applying prior knowledge from their university coursework into the international internship allowed self-efficacy to grow and removed a layer of doubt about the international experience – the doubt being that it would not be in alignment with teaching and learning experiences here in the United States. This aligns with research by Francis (2015), where teacher candidates' self-efficacy increased rapidly after an international field experience. They had expressed preconceived ideas about international students, teachers, and schools that were later refuted. The teacher candidates expected the teaching strategies to be different from the midwestern United States. In Chloe's interview, she articulated how she found, "the basic principles of effective teaching are worldwide." Paige expressed her new-found confidence: "I generally always felt confident with my abilities to work

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with students... I believe that all my internships have prepared me the most to empower, teach, and guide students in my future classroom.”

Kids are Kids

Teacher candidates expected different cultural experiences during the international internship. However, they were surprised that their perceptions of international children changed at the end of the experience. In Europe, teacher candidates reflected upon and shared their thoughts in journal entries about three weeks into their student teaching. As reported in their journal entries, their perceptions of their students began to change. Initially fearful about their ability to engage with international students due to cultural differences, they soon learned that similarities in child development transcended nationality. This realization was of paramount importance for the teacher candidates.

Paige expressed in a journal entry a shift in viewpoint in her statement before the trip that the children will be “a lot different.” In Europe, she wrote: “the international school is just like every other teaching experience...network of fallible people who have to come together to educate a group of developmentally diverse students.” Another teacher candidate, Angela, shared in her journal entry how she had an unrealistic expectation for students to “have no home life issues and behave perfectly in this International school,” acknowledging that she soon found out that the international students shared developmental patterns found in her child development coursework. This was a critical synthesis moment for Angela to determine that children experience child development phases similarly around the world (Bruner et al., 1966; Erikson, 1968; Piaget, 1929). Children world-wide can be found experiencing similar developmental traits, which was both a surprise and affirmation for Angela. She also shared her discovery that both international students and students from the midwestern United States also enjoy the same

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types of play experiences such as “singing, dancing, imagining, attention, and the simplicity of life.”

Chloe confirms both Paige’s and Angela’s sentiment, “right from the start, I was quickly reminded that children are children.” She goes on to say that “regardless of their background, for the most part, all children are curious, happy, and fun-loving.” These engagements in the classroom allowed the teacher candidates to develop new perceptions concerning how children will behave in the classroom and how to prepare and engage children in meaningful ways. This is not to diminish any cultural or ethnic differences but to embrace the concept that children around the world will always have similarities. In turn, teachers will always utilize teaching strategies from current research that have the most positive impact on learning and developing students.

Power of Prior Knowledge

“I think it would have been nice to know more in advance... I should have learned more about the different cultures and languages” (Angela). The teacher candidates expressed their feelings of not taking time to prepare for the trip ahead of time. The preparations needed before international travel would be to study the culture of the school and community. To develop a deeper expressed understanding of the culture, language, school, curriculum, and roommates were all topics of conversation. These views of teacher candidates taking time to research and conduct a more in-depth study into the cultural practices of the community in which they will live and explore was a shared view in research conducted by Encarnacion (2011). Ruby shared her lack of preparation for her internship and regret in not researching the community and school to be better prepared. “I had no idea what IB (International Baccalaureate) curriculum was, so I really had to learn to be flexible and jump right in.” She was not alone in feeling she had not

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researched the school, prepared for the cultural experience, or prepared mentally to live in a new place for multiple weeks. Chloe also shared her lack of mental preparation for the international experience. “I did not prepare myself to be away from home for weeks.” Being away from the midwestern United States was a challenge for the participants who had not traveled much before their international internship.

As a group, the teacher candidates also expressed how being better acquainted with one another would have also been helpful in preparing for the trip. If they knew each other better before they lived together, this might have supported their overall well-being during their time away. “All of a sudden, you are living with strangers with completely different habits and personalities” (Paige). Encarnacion’s research (2011) stated how important it was to provide information to teacher candidates before they embark on a new teaching experience in another country. This study confirmed that teacher candidates needed more information about the culture in which they would live, the school at which they would teach, and also about the people they would live with for the duration of the international teaching experience.

Cultural Seekers

As much as the participants of the study shared their need for more preparation, they also shared the sense of adventure the international field experience provided. “My advice for the next interns is to go explore as much as possible.... Just jump on the subway and hop off at a random stop... you will be amazed at what you find” (Angela). For many of our undergraduate teacher candidates, this was their first time to travel internationally. Part of the experience was the adventure of visiting a country overseas while at the same time feeling hesitant and overwhelmed by the newness of each experience. “Everything is going to be uncomfortable and everything is going to be hard, but those things are the most rewarding” (Paige). There is a level

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of stress in not being able to speak the language of another country. Some of the first-time travelers were eager to explore the city and then branch out on weekends to other regions within Europe. Others stayed close to the school and spent time preparing to teach when they had downtime.

Ruby shared, "...I learned from the kids and the kids learned from me; we all went with the flow of learning." The teacher candidates stated they were not prepared for the diverse groups of students within the international school. Angela stated in her journal, "It was around week three when I began to feel fully confident and comfortable in the classroom with the students." They did not realize they would not only have students from Europe, but also from Asia, Australia, and South America, to mention a few. This broad array of cultures provided the teacher candidates with a way to explore culture and language more deeply and develop an understanding of how learning works when you have a diverse group of students within the classroom. Van Reken et al. (2009) refers to this experience as the development of cross-cultural experiences needed for future teachers to be most effective in our ever-changing world. The international school used many inquiry techniques as part of its curriculum. This provided a platform for the teacher candidates to learn alongside the students and try out teaching strategies and classroom management strategies. Martins-Shannon & White (2012) described the ability of teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning in a framework that considers their culturally diverse students as creating culturally responsive teaching. Angela explains, "the international school is preparing students for the real world...students are questioned, to really think, and problem solve." From the data, both students at the international school and teacher candidates were learning how to think critically and problem solve.

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Implications of COVID-19

Beginning spring 2020, international travel was eliminated and our partnership's country was quarantined and their schools transitioned to virtual learning experiences. With the influx of COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic, these teacher candidates have temporarily lost the additional enrichment of these international internship experiences. This loss of experience will have impacts not only on the teacher candidates but also for their classrooms of future students that these future teachers will teach. Some of the anticipated impacts will be seen in decreased teacher candidates' confidence, adaptability, and critical thinking skills. The lack of these skills results in decreases in teacher candidates' future self-efficacy in the classroom and this lack of self-belief in their abilities and classroom practices will also influence the interactions and experiences they provide to their future students. Additional impacts will be seen in their cultural awareness and competence. Black and Duhon (2006) explain that international study opportunities aid teacher candidates in developing empathy for others and cultural understandings. Without the knowledge of cultural awareness and the skills of having empathy for others, that would typically be gained through international experiences, teacher candidates may have deficiencies in their understanding and willingness to empathize with students and their families in their future classrooms.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The data shared in this study confirms the positive impact international internships can have on the development of teachers. The teacher candidates had a heightened development of self-efficacy, which in turn made them better prepared to take on the challenges within their future classroom. This study confirmed that child development is similar around the world, which was a profound discovery during the international teaching experiences. This, along with

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other data results, supports the efforts of university coursework and theory needed for future teachers.

Another area of data from this study indicates that preparation is needed before teacher candidates embark on an international teaching experience. Preparation could come in the form of a seminar the semester before the international internship or could also be embedded within the coursework. One final note is how the data from this study supports previous research concerning cultural responsiveness, cultural competence, and diversity as powerful learning experiences in the development of teachers.

The teacher candidates from this study shared their perspectives and experiences, both positive and negative, as they embarked on teaching in an international school in Europe. As all teacher candidates were from the midwestern United States, an important future exploration would be to investigate how teacher candidates from other regions of the United States were impacted by an international field experience or internship. Post-COVID international internship experiences would also be meaningful in adding to a new body of work. How has COVID impacted international travel? And how has Post-COVID international teaching and learning procedure been impacted or not impacted?

At this time, there is not a huge percentage of teacher candidates who have international experiences in their undergraduate studies, which leads to fewer research studies related to international internships (Robinson et al., 2019). Our experience and findings add to the body of research already available. However, we do believe there is much more research and international internships needed for teacher candidates who attend college in the midwestern United States. The powerful impact of the data from our study supports the need for international field experiences or internships to help develop effective, culturally responsive teachers.

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