# Critical Issues in Teacher Education

## The Journal of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators

# CRITICAL ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION
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**Multi-Thematic**

# *CITE*

## *Critical Issues in Teacher Education*

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# A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF TEACHER EDUCATION: DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION
## by
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## Abstract

*A gap between theory and practice has long been acknowledged in the field of teacher education. Developing partnerships between universities and K-12 schools has been one way of addressing this gap. Building a knowledge base for developing effective partnerships, however, has proved difficult to do through traditional research methods. In this paper, we first provide a narrative account of one teacher educator's experiences across four years while collaborating in a Professional Development School setting to develop a pedagogical innovation: shared instructional experience. This account serves to illustrate many of the challenges and opportunities involved in university-school partnerships. We then share the multidimensional model of teacher education developed from our collaborative work and include recommendations for teacher educators. Finally, we argue that although this work is challenging, it opens up opportunities for grounding educational practice in current theoretical understandings and developing new theories through the collaborative study of informed practice.*

A common critique in the field of teacher education is the well-documented gap between theory and practice (Alsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, Doone, 2006; Gordon & O'Brien, 2007; Liston, Whitcomb, Borko, 2006); or the university and the school, respectively. Largely grounded in Goodlad's (1984) ideas about the simultaneous renewal of P-12 schools and teacher education programs, the Professional Development School (PDS) movement was conceived as a reform strategy to address this gap through contextualized collaborative inquiry. Envisioned as innovative partnerships in which school and university educators collaboratively and systematically inquire into teaching and learning (Holmes Group, 1990), PDSs hold "significant potential for bringing about simultaneous, ongoing improvement in schools and universities" (Breault & Breault, 2012, p. 23).

We are two teacher educators who have worked in separate PDS settings surrounding the large state university where we teach and engage in research. Our vision is to develop collaborative partnerships connected to our literacy courses in which stakeholders study, practice, and reflect on learners, curriculum, and pedagogy (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LaPage, 2005) in authentic spaces. While we have done this in unique ways in our own spaces, we both approach our work from a design perspective. Specifically, we engage participants in designing a pedagogical innovation that reflects our vision for teacher education and professional development. We implement the innovation, reflect, and redesign aspects that will bring us closer to what becomes a shared vision among stakeholders. We have learned that through collaboration both the innovation and the vision shift and change as we work to meet the academic and professional development needs of all stakeholders.

In this article, we first provide a narrative account of one teacher educator's experiences across four years while collaborating in a PDS setting to develop a pedagogical innovation: shared instructional experience. This account serves to illustrate many of the challenges and opportunities involved in university-school partnerships. We then share the multidimensional model of teacher education

developed from our collaborative work and include recommendations for teacher educators seeking to build and document university-school partnerships. Finally, we argue that although this work is challenging, it opens up opportunities for grounding educational practice in current theoretical understandings and developing new theories through the collaborative study of informed practice.

### Developing a Pedagogical Innovation: Shared Instruction Experience

In fall 2012, as a faculty member at a large Midwestern university, I (author 2) began teaching a literacy methods course for elementary education pre-service teachers on-site in a school district that had a long-standing PDS partnership with the university. One of the first lessons I learned was that with longstanding partnerships come longstanding structures and ways of working that are part of the history and culture of the space. For example, while previously pre-service teacher education courses had been taught on-site in the school district, there was little collaboration between university and school district faculty. I recognized almost immediately that developing and implementing a collaboratively constructed teacher education innovation was going to disrupt structures that had been in place for many years.

Early in the first semester, as I taught my course in much the same way that I taught it on the university campus (i.e., without interaction with the teachers and children in the school), I reached out to mentor teachers, and upon being invited, began visiting classrooms in the district to engage with teachers and their students. The combination of frustration I felt about teaching my course as I would on campus and having positive professional experiences with several teachers in the district, prompted me to share my vision of learning together through shared instructional experiences with a few mentor teachers and to invite them to engage in thinking with me about how we could make this happen. One teacher with an excitement and passion that matched mine contacted me immediately. She taught fifth grade in the school where the PDS courses took place and suggested that we begin working together right away. We elicited the support of the school principal, planned through email, and in two weeks' time, halfway through the semester, we engaged in our first shared instructional experience.

The teacher and I decided that 90 minutes of the pre-service teachers' three-hour class would be devoted to the shared instruction experience. The initial experience involved the mentor teacher and me co-planning and co-teaching a literacy lesson to her fifth-grade students with my pre-service teacher candidates observing and taking notes. The instruction followed a reading workshop structure with a mini-lesson, independent reading, and sharing/reflecting. During the independent reading portion of the lesson, each pre-service teacher was paired with a fifth-grader to listen to and support her/his reading. We arranged our time adjacent to the mentor teacher's planning period, so that she could stay to debrief the instruction and student learning immediately following the experience. The mentor teacher and I found this debriefing, which included an initial oral reflection from the teachers followed by appreciations and questions from the observers, to be a powerful time for the teacher candidates and ourselves, as it afforded everyone the opportunity to collaboratively reflect on instruction and learning, connect theory and practice, and rethink planning and instruction. This process was one we wanted to continue and expand.

For the rest of that semester, we engaged in a shared instructional experience each week. At times the mentor teacher taught the lesson, and at other times the pre-service teachers, with the support of the mentor teacher and me, planned and taught the literacy mini-lesson. At the end of the semester, I sought

feedback from the pre-service teachers on the shared instructional experience model we developed during the semester and used this feedback to plan with the mentor teacher how we could more formally incorporate this model into the literacy course for the following year.

The second iteration of the shared instruction innovation presented new successes and challenges. Scheduling the literacy course at a time when the mentor teacher and her class were available was complicated, however, with the support of the school principal, we created a schedule that allowed us to embed a weekly shared instructional experience into the course. Once the semester began, the classroom teacher and I developed a teaching schedule for the pre-service teachers and a more formal debriefing protocol (see Table 1) grounded in our reflections from the first iteration of the innovation. The protocol included time for reflecting on the shared experience, appreciating planning and implementation decisions, questioning planning and implementation decisions, and planning for the following week's experience. We invited the pre-service teachers' PDS supervisor, and the school principal to participate in the shared instructional experiences as their schedules allowed.

Table 1. Lab Classroom Debriefing Protocol (Total Time: 15-20 min.)
 1. The teacher leads the debriefing with an oral reflection of the lesson which may include (3-5 minutes):
- Small moments in the lesson when you felt particularly successful or when you felt some tension
- Observations about students' responses to specific components of the lesson
- What you noticed about students' movement toward the lesson objective(s)
- Consider the alignment between lesson objectives and assessments
- Ask for specific feedback

2. The observers share appreciations of planning, teaching, and assessing (2-4 minutes).
 3. The observers question/provide critical feedback of planning, teaching, and assessing (5-7 minutes).
 4. The teacher provides a response to the feedback and considers how they will use the feedback in the future (1-2 minutes).
 5. Thinking Forward (2-3 minutes)
- Goals and objectives for next week
- Who is teaching who is observing?

Toward the end of the semester, the principal approached me to ask how more of his teachers could become involved in this experience. He believed it was powerful professional development for the teacher who was involved, and he wanted to be able to provide the opportunity to more teachers. I was excited about the prospect of expanding the model to include more teachers, however, I was not quite sure what this would look like.

It was around this time when I learned that the fall 2014 cohort of pre-service teachers was quite large and would be divided into two groups. This made the challenge of providing meaningful teaching and learning experiences somewhat less daunting, because more could be accomplished with smaller groups. Additionally, two groups meant possibly expanding the model into another school.

Through coursework in the reading master's degree cohort, I had developed relationships with teachers who served as gatekeepers, facilitating entry into other schools in the district. After several meetings with school faculties, it was collaboratively decided that in fall 2014, two schools would host a section of the literacy methods course and would plan and implement a shared instructional experience as part of the course. The intermediate school where the course had been taught for two years would host a section of 14 pre-service teachers, and a primary school in the district would host a section of 15 pre-service teachers.

It seemed that we were getting closer to bringing our vision of teacher education as a collaborative professional development experience to life. We were making a shift from embedding a shared instructional experience in an undergraduate literacy course to embedding an undergraduate literacy course into a primary and intermediate school. This was when the reality of the complexities involved in collaboratively planning and implementing a pedagogical innovation with multiple teachers and administrators in two schools set in. One issue was that while I spent time teaching and collaborating in classrooms during the fall semester, I had no contact with the district during the spring semester when my university teaching schedule kept me on campus. After bringing this to the attention of my department administrators, in spring of 2014, I was assigned, as part of my teaching load, four student teachers to supervise, two in each of the schools where we would implement a third and fourth iteration of the shared instructional experience. This afforded me the opportunity to regularly meet with teachers and administrators and maintain a presence in the district throughout the whole school year.

It was during this spring semester that much of the collaborative planning for fall 2014 took place. I learned that the principal of the school where we had begun the shared instructional experience model had accepted a new position in the district. This meant that we would need to introduce the model and a plan for expanding the model to a new principal who had no previous experience with what had already occurred. While the new principal graciously agreed to continue with the expansion of the shared instruction model, he had a different vision than had been developed with the mentor teacher and previous principal.

While our vision was to begin by engaging teachers who were interested in collaboratively constructing knowledge of literacy learning through a shared instruction model, after a meeting with his faculty, the new principal decided that 4 sixth-grade teachers would participate in the experience. This left out the fifth-grade teacher who developed the model with me. I began planning with these teachers who seemed willing, but less committed than the fifth-grade teacher who had been involved for the previous two years. Throughout the semester, I often wondered if these teachers were strongly encouraged by the principal to participate.

The model that developed at the intermediate school involved 3-4 pre-service teachers being assigned to each of the 4 sixth-grade classrooms, where they spent approximately one hour observing, planning, and carrying out literacy instruction in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The supervisor and I moved from class to class to offer support and feedback to the pre-service teachers. We attempted to arrange the schedule so that the classroom teachers could return to the PDS classroom during their planning periods to debrief with the pre-service teachers, but because they did not share common planning times, we were not always able to include the classroom teachers in debriefing. Although there was an open invitation, the busy first-year principal was unable to observe or participate in the experience.

The collaboratively designed shared instruction model looked much different at the primary school. Participating teachers at this school thought it important for pre-service teachers to observe and engage in planning and teaching

experiences at multiple grade levels. For that reason, we developed a model that consisted of two-week cycles focused on specific literacy practices (e.g., interactive read aloud, mini-lessons, guided reading). Teachers volunteered to host pre-service teachers in their classrooms for one or more two-week cycles across the semester. This allowed classroom teachers to control their level of participation and to purposefully select cycles in which to participate. Our goal was to have 4 host classrooms, one from each grade level K-3, for each two-week cycle. Pre-service teachers were assigned in small groups to a classroom for each cycle. During week one, pre-service teachers observed classroom teachers' focus practice lessons. In week two, one pre-service teacher from the group collaborated with the classroom teacher to plan and teach a lesson in the same classroom. There was a formal debriefing period after each shared instructional experience, using the debriefing protocol developed the previous year.

Teachers interested in participating in cycles met for planning every other Wednesday morning before school began. The supervisor and I moved between classrooms to observe so that we could meaningfully participate in the debriefing conversations. We developed a rotation that allowed teachers to participate in debriefing conversations about the shared instruction that occurred in their classrooms and gave pre-service teachers additional opportunities to teach and work with students at multiple grade levels. Throughout the semester, the principal regularly attended and encouraged teachers to participate in at least one of the two-week cycles. By the end of the first semester of implementation, more than half of the teachers in the school had participated in at least one cycle.

As this innovation is part of a literacy methods course, during planning at both schools, we collaboratively selected texts that aligned with the course objectives and were of high interest to school faculty. I acquired funding from the university to purchase course texts for school faculty. All teachers in both schools had access to the course syllabus and the schedule of readings. I developed a course wiki so that pre-service teachers and teachers could share lesson plans and offer feedback. Each pre-service teacher chose a literacy practice on which they developed a page on the wiki to post information and resources related to the practice.

In the spring 2015 semester, I again supervised 4 student teachers and informally reflected on the fall semester shared instruction model with pre-service teachers, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, I taught another course in the reading master's cohort, and I began working closely with a doctoral student who taught in a different primary school in the district and often mentored pre-service teachers in the year-long program. The doctoral student had been sharing with her principal about the collaboratively planned innovation. She and her principal inquired with me about the possibility of bringing a section of the course to their school. The three of us met. I explained that I did not want to impose on a school, but that if the majority of faculty members seemed interested, we could begin exploring possibilities. After meeting with faculty, the principal invited me to a faculty meeting to describe the existing models. The faculty then designated a leadership team to begin planning over the summer for implementation the following year.

At this point, I decided to withdraw from the intermediate school because the new principal was making staffing, curricular, and scheduling changes that required the full focus of the school faculty. In fall 2015, the fifth and sixth iterations of a collaboratively developed shared instruction model occurred in two primary schools, one that had participated in fall 2014, and one that was participating for the first time.

While the design of the model shifted and changed with each iteration based on the participants involved and our informal observations and reflections, we decided that in the 2015-2016 school year, we would be more systematic in collecting and analyzing data to guide our program. To this point, our collaborative reflections had informed logistical issues related to scheduling and structure. We agreed that we needed more information about what was happening during the innovation. With an embedded course model in place, we turned our attention to examining how participants discursively constructed knowledge about teaching and learning literacy, and how we were positioning ourselves and each other as we did so. We planned to use what we learned to continue to develop and improve our model. We collaboratively designed a qualitative study to inform our work. In addition to course syllabi and instructional materials, we collected participation data from the course wiki, planning meetings, and cycles; school and district contextual data; audio recordings of planning and debriefing meetings; and interview data from participating school faculty. Although we were implementing an iteration in two schools, we decided to collect data only at School B, which was in its second iteration. We analyzed data during the spring and summer of 2016 and used our findings to revise aspects of the model for a fall 2016 implementation.

Our initial findings indicated a hierarchical feedback structure in which the course instructor's feedback was privileged by the classroom teachers and the classroom teachers' feedback was privileged by the pre-service teachers. Further, praise was favored over more critical constructive feedback, and participants often avoid opportunities to engage in critical discussions of planning and instruction. In terms of the content of our discussions, we found that pedagogy was the focus of discussion well over half of the time. In reflecting on our findings, we began exploring ways we could revise the existing model to disrupt the feedback hierarchy we noticed, as well as how we might change the debriefing protocol to guide the discussions toward a more critical examination of practice. In preparation for year 5, we added an observation guide that focused observers on student learning and engagement, instead of teacher language and actions, and we revised the debriefing protocol (see Table 2) to focus our discussions on evidence of student learning.

Table 2. Shared Instructional Experience Debriefing
Protocol (Time: 15-20 min.)
1. The teacher leads the debriefing by sharing the learning goals for the lesson and responding to the following questions (2 minutes):
   - Was the lesson effective?
   - Were the learning goals met for few, some, most, or all students?
   - How do you know?
2. Observers provide evidence of students moving toward learning goals and connect evidence to instructional decisions/practices (4-6 minutes).
3. Observers provide evidence of students' misconceptions or difficulty making sense of the learning goals, connect evidence to instructional decisions/practices, and suggest alternative instructional possibilities (6-8 minutes).
4. The teacher provides a response to the feedback and considers how she/he will use the feedback moving forward (2-4 minutes).

### Making Sense of Complex Work: A Multidimensional Model

Through our research and experience in PDS settings we have developed and refined a multidimensional model of teacher education and professional development. This model, shown below, has been constructed to conceptualize the

process of collaboratively and simultaneously engaging in teacher education and professional development with school partners.
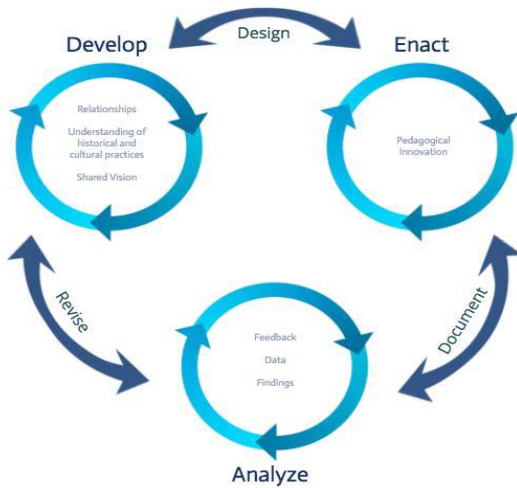


Figure 1. A Multidimensional Model

        The model depicts an ongoing cycle, where we collaboratively develop, enact, and analyze the work of the partnership. The develop component of the cycle relates to developing relationships, developing understanding of historical and cultural practices, and developing a shared vision among stakeholders. In the narrative account above, it is possible to recognize that this work is particularly pertinent early in a collaboration. In year one, for example, when author 2 articulated to mentor teachers her vision of learning through shared instructional experience and then was contacted by one of these teachers who was excited to implement this approach. This work, however, is also ongoing. For example, in year 3, when a different principal within the district invited author 2 to talk to faculty and a leadership team began planning to implement shared instructional experience. Similarly, concerning enacting the pedagogical innovation, this work is informed by an iterative process. The observation protocol was refined over time based on feedback from participants and debriefing transcripts, and classes had to be organized differently in order to work best within a particular setting. In order to propel the effective development and enactment of the pedagogical innovation, the analyze component of the cycle is also essential. This analysis was formalized over time and helped to illuminate parts of the pedagogical innovation that would benefit from revisions. An example was changing the debriefing protocol to help shift the hierarchical nature of discourse and to focus discourse on student learning.

        Each component of the overall cycle is itself an ongoing cycle that continuously informs and is informed by the other cycles to constitute the whole. The arrows establish the interdependence among the component cycles and represent a process for conducting research as participants design, document, and revise a pedagogical innovation. This model, which is grounded in more than four years of collaborative partnership work, is now the model that guides our thinking about new

partnerships. While developing and enacting this model, we have gained important insights that we offer as recommendations for teacher educators seeking to develop and research school-university partnerships.

### Recommendations

We recommend that teacher educators, at the onset of a university-school collaboration, develop a clear but flexible vision of what they hope to achieve and why they value this collaborative approach. Then, seek out a wide range of opportunities to talk with teachers and administrators in both formal and informal settings. For example, attending PDS orientation and faculty meetings, visiting classrooms, reaching out to teachers via email, and maintaining a presence within the district through ongoing engagements, such as supervising student teachers, attending school events, and teaching graduate courses.

We have found it useful to begin by discussing the well-documented gap between theory and practice in teacher education, and by calling attention to the problematic separation of university and school experiences. Even when educators are not familiar with the research documenting these disconnects, most are aware of these issues from their own university and professional development experiences. We, as university professors, have found it important to acknowledge to educators our own part in this problematic situation, and assert our commitment to collaborating with schools in our joint mission to improve teaching and learning. As a productive alternative, we propose a multidimensional model of teacher education, involving various stakeholders (i.e., children, pre-service teachers, school faculty, and university faculty) and experiences. In particular, we lay out a vision of experiences that include iterative processes of interrogating theory, conducting classroom observations, planning lessons and curriculum, engaging in shared instructional experiences, and debriefing, with reflection cutting across all stages.

We recommend, especially in the early stages, having one individual with a clear vision and strong commitment, who is willing to dedicate the time and energy to share the vision, get others excited about being involved, and work through all the logistical issues that inevitably arise when engaging in such complicated and valuable work. With that said, we also recommend that this individual presents the vision as flexible, and actively encourages all stakeholders to be involved in shaping and refining the vision. If the vision remains the domain of only one person, then it is of limited value. Consequently, it is essential for individuals to resist the temptation to impose a vision; and instead, to develop a shared vision. This, of course, takes time and involves a generative process.

In terms of constructing shared instructional experiences or other pedagogical innovations, we recommend starting small - ideally, with one teacher or grade level. There are many logistical considerations (e.g., coordinating the schedules; becoming familiar with the school, curriculum, and classroom expectations; and getting to know students) that make organization complicated. The process of digging deep into a pedagogical innovation is difficult work. Starting small minimizes organizational considerations and makes it easier to focus on promoting depth of inquiry. Although change is inevitable as more classrooms, teachers, and children become involved, many logistical and process components can be negotiated when you start small.

For all the reasons that starting small is beneficial, expanding gradually is typically a good idea. New individuals and new settings avail new opportunities but also new challenges. Once momentum around a collaboration starts to build, we have found that we often experience pressure from multiple sources to quickly grow the collaboration – and because we are passionate about this work we are tempted

to get as many people involved as quickly as possible. Because of the complexity of this work, however, we caution against rapid expansion. We have found that the bigger the collaboration the larger number of committed individuals needed to sustain its success. Expanding gradually, allows for momentum and commitment for a project to build over time and helps to enable the resolution of issues before they become major problems.

Starting small and expanding gradually also allows time to get to know the historical, cultural, and social practices within the collaborative setting and to cultivate relationships with the gatekeepers (e.g., university administrators, district personnel, principals, and classroom teachers) that make this work possible. Although a top-down approach where teachers are told by administrators to participate in partnerships may be a quicker way to start out, we have found that beginning with teachers who are interested and excited to participate is far more powerful and sustainable.

We consider a major goal of this work is to enable all stakeholders to be both teachers and learners within the process. Given the collaborative nature of this work this is perhaps an obvious point; however, this goal is not easy to achieve, as hierarchical structures are so deeply embedded within educational settings. We recommend taking deliberate steps to disrupt hierarchical structures and to enable stakeholders to take on multiple roles. In particular, we have found that it is important to consider how we, as university professors, position ourselves within a collaboration, and how others position us. Rather than acting as researchers who observe others from a distance, we have found it important to become involved in the messy complexity of classrooms. We get down on our knees and talk to students, we teach mini-lessons, and we listen to teachers, administrators, and pre-service teachers. We do not pretend that we have all the answers. Instead, we invite everyone to engage in deep inquiry together. At times, we do take on the role of an expert, who has valuable information to share about literacy teaching and learning. However, we also position the teachers and administrators as experts, who have the local knowledge of the children and the school. We also ensure that we provide opportunities for our pre-service teachers to take on leadership roles in the teaching process, as well as considering the opportunities for agency that we are affording students within the process.

This kind of collaborative inquiry about teaching and learning is only possible when time is provided for shared reflection, assessment, and planning. For this reason, we recommend prioritizing meeting time for the success of this work. Stakeholders need opportunities to regularly meet in order to sustain inquiry and maintain focus on student learning. Because time is typically of a premium in educational settings, regular time for shared reflection is unlikely to be possible without university and school administrators who support this work, and teachers, pre-service teachers, and university faculty who are prepared to be flexible in creating these opportunities.

Early on as we sought to take a multidimensional approach to teacher education, it was clear that traditional educational research methods would not be a good fit for this work. Given the complex and dynamic nature of school-university partnerships, where it is not possible to control the myriad of variables that exist, experimental methods are problematic - if not impossible to use. Moreover, while there are many well-established methods for naturalistic study of educational settings, these methods are largely descriptive, without an orientation towards direct action and intervention. In seeking to resolve this dilemma, we recommend employing a design perspective to research and practice.

What does this design perspective look like? Initially it tends to be quite informal, involving us thinking alone and with other stakeholders about problems and possibilities inherent within the school-university partnership, especially those focused around a specific pedagogical innovation. We deliberately do not introduce formal research until strong foundational relationships have been developed, because we want stakeholders to be involved in the research, rather than merely research subjects. After time, however, we would recommend formalizing research and practice. In particular, to help with this formalizing process, we have found Design Based Research (DBR) valuable (Brown, 1992; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). DBR involves the following key tenets: drawing on and informing theory; intervening to promote positive change; collaborating and participating; responding to the unique social context; and employing iterative cycles of investigation (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). Each of these tenets aligns well with our proposed multidimensional model of teacher education.

## Conclusion

In this article, we provided one account of a school-university collaboration and described the multidimensional model that informs our work. Teacher educators who endeavor to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders to design and implement a multidimensional model of teacher education face many challenges. These challenges include: navigating the historical and cultural practices of institutions and, at times, disrupting these practices; building collaborative relationships and moderating issues of power among stakeholders; negotiating common time for planning, teaching, and reflecting to allow for deep and sustained inquiry about student learning; and documenting and publishing research. While these challenges may serve as a deterrent to a multidimensional approach to teacher education, our research and experience tells us that with these challenges come important opportunities: opportunities to question and, when appropriate, change practices that are embedded within institutions; opportunities to initiate and sustain collaborative relationships among multiple stakeholders with the shared goal of improving student learning; opportunities to create spaces for deep inquiry that bridges theory and practice; and opportunities to conduct research that is contextualized, practical, and meaningful. Despite the complexity of this work - in fact, because of it - we firmly believe in the value of this multidimensional approach to teacher education.

The divide between universities and schools and between theory and practice are longstanding problems in teacher education (Alsopp et al., 2006; Gordon & O'Brien, 2007; Liston et al., 2006). More recently, quick fix programs are frequently offered to rapidly train teachers and place them in schools. We find both these old and new trends in teacher education disturbing. Instead, we propose a multidimensional approach - with all its complexity - as a productive way to keep university faculty informed about the realities of classrooms, to empower educators as professionals, and to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders towards the ultimate goal of improving student learning.

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# EVALUATION RESEARCH AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS: LESSONS LEARNED
## by
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## Abstract
*This paper focuses on the process of conducting an evaluation study with school districts and community preschool partners who received grant funds from the Kentucky Department of Education, in order to increase the number of full-day high quality preschool programs for three- and four-year old children in Kentucky. Our evaluation study evolved from a quantitative evaluation framework to be more aligned with mixed methods evaluation and an empowerment evaluation framework. In doing so, our study examined the unique contexts of different preschool programs to learn about the individual perceptions, needs, and wants of these programs. Ultimately, we learned invaluable lessons for conducting evaluation research with school districts, and helped to shape the state-level evaluation framework for future grant opportunities.*

Preschool programming has been a part of Kentucky's public school districts since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 (Peck, & Bridge, 1992), which mandated accountability and more equitable access to education, regardless of children's residency location. KERA efforts resulted in restructuring of Kentucky's schools and creation of four days-a-week, half-day, local district, state-funded preschool classrooms for eligible children, in hopes of improving student learning outcomes (1992). Specific eligibility in the Kentucky child care landscape for preschool age children will be discussed further in the Literature Review section.

In Fall 2016, all public school districts in Kentucky had the opportunity to apply for a Collaborative Preschool Partnership grant through the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). This grant was intended to incentivize school districts to work with their community early childhood partners in order to increase the number of children who have full-day, high quality preschool program experience prior to kindergarten. The districts could apply for planning or implementation grants. The planning grants would provide funds for building districts' capacity to establish partnerships through a formal plan. The implementation grants would provide funds for providing full-day high quality programs to more 3- and 4-year olds through collaboration with community partners and/or increase quality of existing community full-day preschool programs within the community. A total of 46 districts received the implementation grants and 23 districts received the planning grants. The scope of this manuscript, however, will only focus on the implementation grantees within the Northern Kentucky region. This paper will focus on the process of conducting an evaluation study with these public school district implementation grantees as well as the lessons learned from this.

## Literature Review
This section will begin with a description of the child care landscape in Kentucky for preschool age children, then best practices in approaches to evaluation research, given the focus on collaboration between public school districts and community preschool programs for the KDE Collaborative Preschool Partnership grant.

The choice of child care for children between three and five years in Kentucky includes community child care centers, family or in-home child care, childcare provided by a relative or friend, Head Start programs, and school district state-funded preschool programs. However, each type of childcare has its own eligibility requirements. For example, children have to meet the federal Head Start income eligibility for their families to be able to attend Kentucky Head Start programs (Office of Head Start: An Office of the Administration for Children and Families, 2017).

The community child care centers and family or in-home child care can vary in operation hours and mission: not-for-profit or proprietary for-profit. Not-for-profit programs can be individual cooperatives, programs sponsored by an agency, government, or public school, campus child care programs, or privately-sponsored not-for-profit programs. For-profit programs can be independently or corporately owned and could follow the franchise or chain model. These community child care programs can accept any children whose families can pay for their services. All licensed, certified, or registered providers, whether in a center or an in-home setting, are regulated by the Division of Child Care under the Department for Community Based Services of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2018).

Registered providers are typically a relative or friend who watches over children, and these registered providers are not required to be licensed or certified. However, the Division of Child Care, Kentucky's child care program licensing body, can mandate certain requirements for registered providers if they want to accept children of families who receive Kentucky's child care subsidy program from families, Child Care Assistance Program (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Human Services, 2018).

The school district state-funded preschool programs adhere to the Kentucky Department of Education guidelines, and KDE is under the auspices of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. As noted at the beginning of this paper, state-funded preschool programs are four days a week, half-day (i.e., three hours) programs in operation during the academic Fall and Spring semester. The enrollment is only for four-year-olds from families with low income (i.e., 160 percent of federal poverty level or less) and three- and four-year olds with disabilities (Kentucky Department of Education, 2018a). The Kentucky Department of Education also mandates public school districts of state-funded preschools to engage in Kentucky Full Utilization Requirement with Head Start programs (2018b).

The Head Start programs in Kentucky that choose to become an enhanced or blended program with the state-funded preschool program under the KDE Head Start Full Utilization requirement enter into an agreement with the school district. The blended Head Start program with the state-funded preschool program follows the mandates of the school district preschools. The Kentucky Head Start State Collaboration Office located in the Governor's office of Early Childhood is available to help these Head Start programs with Memoranda of Understanding and fostering partnerships. In summary, programs serving preschool age children in Kentucky are many, but access can be restricted due to mandated formats and eligibility requirements by different government agencies that oversee these programs.

Best Practice in Approaches to Evaluation Research

Seeing that the main focus of this paper was the process of conducting an evaluation study with the public school district implementation grantees, this section outlines key approaches to evolution research. Attention to fidelity of research methods and approaches, as well as a systematic inquiry that is data-based is the first principle stated in the American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles for

Evaluators (American Evaluation Association, 2004). Galport and Galport (2015) reiterate the importance of systematic inquiry by noting "[s]electing the best set of theoretical approaches, data collection methods, and analysis techniques for a project is critical to the success of any evaluation" (p. 17).

One way of a systematic inquiry would be to conduct a quantitative evaluation with standardized metrics. The expectations for quantitative methods in program evaluation involve collecting evidence to aid in making judgments and decisions about particular programs (Sanders, Worthen, & Fitzpatrick, 2011). Evaluation can serve to improve programs, help to decide whether or not a program should continue or to "rally support" for a program (Anderson & Ball, 1978). One major assumption of quantitative research is that the inferences made are valid, because they are based on valid, reliable measures. Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2009) state that inferences regarding the results of studies are ones that are consistent and on target. These valid inferences from quantitative methods in program evaluation, then, can be used to make sound judgments and decisions about the program at hand, and to be able to effectively communicate results to stakeholders in a clear way.

Another option is to incorporate qualitative components. Unlike the quantitative frameworks, qualitative research examines the why of a phenomenon through a naturalistic or constructivist paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert "Program evaluation is a major site of qualitative research" (p. 15) and define qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). The strengths of qualitative research, as alluded to in the prior definition, include the fluid, dynamic nature in approach and methodology best aligned with the research question or context. The key outcome for qualitative research is gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon or topic being studied from the participants' perspective through rich contextual data rather than numerical data (Basit, 2010; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2001). These context specific findings may not be generalizable to all situations or people, but the qualitative research process allows flexibility to respond to the program evaluation study needs as they arise and inform next step of the evaluation study through a recursive/cyclical nature of data analysis.

The Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014) and Mixed Methods Social Inquiry (Green 2006; 2015) are indicative of more recent developments in evaluation research approaches. Mixed Methods Social Inquiry blends elements of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and incorporates philosophical, epistemological and sociopolitical considerations to create a more complete picture of the research context. Empowerment Evaluation seeks to empower stakeholders in the evaluation process, thereby making the process more democratic.

Fidelity of an evaluation research depends on selection of appropriate methodology for gathering data so that the evaluation outcome tells the "true" story and informs the next step with integrity. The more recent approaches of Empowerment Evaluation and Mixed Methods Social Inquiry allow flexibility for the researchers to respond to the ebb and flow of the evaluation project context.

**Our Evaluation Study Experience with Seven District Implementation Grantees**

At the outset of our evaluation study, we wanted to collect data that would allow us to paint a collective picture of the state of the preschools in the Northern Kentucky area after implementation of the 2016-17 Collaborative Preschool Partnership grant the goal of which was to increase access to quality full-day program for preschool children. The main purpose of the evaluation study was to

show that awarded grant monies were being used to improve preschool programs and partnerships for the seven Northern Kentucky school district implementation grantees. The quantitative evaluation study metrics we planned for in order to measure improvement included increases in enrollment slots, increases in students being enrolled in the programs, teacher hires with associated teacher qualifications, test scores and kindergarten readiness measures. These data were selected to be used as indicators of increased access to preschool and improved quality of preschool, which were the two main purposes of the grant.  We were aware that we would need additional time points to draw inferences about increases in kindergarten readiness, which would involve longitudinal tracking of students. We also understood we needed to link three different levels of data, at the child, teacher, and school level, to demonstrate effectiveness of grant programs in benefitting traditionally underrepresented groups of children who were enrolled in these programs. However, our study soon evolved into something different than what was originally proposed. We had to adopt qualitative methods when we sent out data collection templates to the districts, and experienced no response from districts for our data request or received data not aligned with the requested metrics. The end evaluation product resulted in closely aligning with Greene's (2006; 2015) mixed methods of social inquiry, as we attempted to situate our quantitative methods within the philosophical context of the school districts' motives and ideas, and also within the larger sociopolitical context. The next section expounds further on the context notion.

Understanding Context

The districts' lack of  response for the requested quantitative metrics helped us realize the importance of understanding different contexts as one of the keys to conducting evaluation research. As researchers in teacher education, we already understood the importance of context in conducting evaluation research, but in our case we had to understand seven different contexts because the districts defined their "implementation" differently, which meant their grant project scope, outcomes, as well as physical locations were varied as described below.

The seven districts worked with 12 community partners, impacting 207 children, ages 3-5 years during the grant cycle. The majority of partnerships occurred with either a non-profit agency (40 percent) or private for-profit child care centers (47 percent) with a high proportion of child care subsidy program eligible children. All of the seven districts' implementation efforts focused on 1) increasing the number of children being served in state-funded and community partner preschools; 2) expanding the operation hours of preschools to better meet the child care needs of the families; and/or 3) improving the quality of programming in community partner preschool classrooms. Each district's activities to achieve the above outcomes were dependent on the current capacity and openness of their community partner(s).

Districts' use of grant funding ranged from providing transportation to and from the district preschool program to the community child care program sites, paying for a district aide or community partner teacher to supervise children outside of the district preschool program hours, placing district certified teachers directly at the community partner site or community facility that was all-day (i.e., 10 or 12 hours), extending the teaching hour expectation for the certified district preschool teachers from four half-days a week during academic semesters to five full-day per week including summer at the community facility, creating new positions to be a presence in the community for recruitment of new preschool children as well as sharing of children between the state-funded preschools and the partner child care program.

Districts also focused on providing supports to community partner staff and the partner classrooms to improve the quality of programming for children enrolled in the district as well as children in the community partner preschool classrooms. Coaching and modeling were used by some districts for improving instruction at community partner locations. Some districts focused on professional development of community partner staff, which consisted of national/state early childhood conference participation opportunity or $500 signing bonus for starting work on a nationally recognized early childhood entry level credential. Alignment of curriculum between the districts and partner sites, assistance with family education/engagement events, and purchase of items for improving the partner site environments were provided by different districts as well.

Therefore, the unique manner in which each individual district conducted their preschool partnership grant, as elaborated above, for better access, availability, and quality of programming for preschool age children in their respective communities necessitated us to gain a deeper understanding of each district's context. Additionally, forming relationships in the context of the research setting, and study at hand, was another process of conducting our research that happened concurrently as we met with district personnel to learn about each district's grant project scope. Some of the districts did not fully understand the purpose of the evaluation, or what it was we were asking of them, which led to apprehension in complying with our initial request for completion of a standardized format for data collection, linking child-level, school-level, and teacher-level data. Our interviews with each district prolonged the data collection period, but it was a necessary step if we wanted a clear picture of what was happening in each district, the cause for reluctance in providing data, as well obtaining the type of data needed to make valid inferences about program effectiveness.

The interviews helped in developing our understanding of success in each location. Quantitative data collection and analysis was the focus of our work, but a qualitative research method (i.e., individual interviews) was needed to understand the context, stemming from the nature of our relationships with the districts as well as the nature of the districts with their preschool partners. These relationships influenced each context, and the different processes used by the districts sometimes contributed to lack of communication between the district and the evaluator. Relationship building efforts were crucial in addressing the misalignment in communication through clarification of language, value systems, and circumstances.

Building relationships in evaluation research was important for gaining the trust that all parties need in order to comfortably work with one another. We tried to develop those relationships that were not as robust as we had hoped. Once we began meeting with districts, we began building rapport with the stakeholders and communicated our data needs to them. One of the main barriers we had to overcome was getting child-level data from districts. Confidentiality was the main ethical consideration related to this barrier. The reason for obtaining child-level data was to make inferences regarding the effectiveness of the various preschool programs and initiatives based on the different groups of children with whom the preschools were working. As evaluation researchers, we did not want any identifiable information, although we needed some type of identification number to link the children to specific programs and centers while being able to see child-level correlations. For instance, demographic data is helpful in demonstrating that historically underrepresented groups are being served well under a certain program, based on that program's curriculum, resources, teachers, etc. Many of the districts were hesitant to give this data to us, and with good reason. The chance exists for information to leak out, even with precautions being taken to ensure that this does

not happen. After making the argument for using child-level data to gain insights into program effectiveness, explaining the nature of secondary-data collection that adhere to American Educational Research Association (2011) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (2011) ethical guidelines for working with children and other vulnerable populations, and negotiating most essential fields for analysis, most of the districts understood the need to provide this data and were willing to do so, if the data existed. When a circumstance arose that might breach confidentiality of any children whose data we received was without any identifying student codes, we did not include this data within our database. For example, one district had only one child of color enrolled in the preschool program; therefore, the district and evaluators mutually agreed to exclude this child from data collection/analysis to protect this child's identity. The National Forum on Education Statistics (2010) include "a list of personal characteristics that would make the student's identity traceable; or any other information that would make the student's identity traceable" (p. 4) in the definition of personally identifiable information. Clear communications regarding intent and needs is key for negotiating ethical challenges that belie evaluation research that include vulnerable population, especially information regarding children.

Another communication barrier resulted from the fact that one researcher was an outsider to the field of early childhood education. The researcher has done research in multiple settings, but did not have training specific to early childhood. The initial duties of the researcher with "outsider" status was to consult on methodology and crunch the numbers that would allow us to make valid inferences regarding the effectiveness of the preschool programs. This seemed simple enough to begin with, but became challenging when trying to understand the language of early childhood education. Even though the same basic research principles apply across different fields and settings, it became absolutely essential to understand the language with which we use to discuss the early childhood setting. Without this understanding, the meaning behind the interpretations we make concerning the data can become lost and disconnected.

One particular frustration involved the different acronyms used to describe the different certifications and aspects of preschool programs that are governed by different agencies with more agency-specific acronyms. To an "outsider" these terms sounded foreign and made data collection difficult. During the analysis stage, it was difficult to standardize the collected responses when terms often overlapped or meant different things than what was understood by the researcher. Therefore, standardization of measures was another area of concern for the evaluation research team. We needed a standardized way of collecting data and making sure that district partners responded in a standardized fashion. In reality, this did not happen. Partners responded to the required items on the data survey in different ways, using different terminology. The researcher often had to consult with the early childhood "expert," to make sense of the data and establish a standard description for each of the variables.

From a quantitative, objective perspective, standardization seems easy and something done on the front end of an evaluation project; however, our shift in methodological focus required us to collect data from the perspective of the participating preschool programs, and the labeling of data was much more subjective since it came from each respective program and stemmed from their available data sources. As evaluation researchers, we had to grapple with whatever data was given to us by the districts.

**Data and Analysis Issues**

We wanted to examine correlations among the student-level data, teacher-level data, and school/partnership data. The ultimate purpose for our evaluation was to show that the preschool programs at the school level were impacting students in a positive way. Showing the types of students as well as the types of teachers who were involved in this process would tell a richer story to the stakeholders and decision makers. The data collection process proved to be an extremely messy, based on the fact that many districts had unique situations regarding students enrolled in their programs and districts/partnerships did not keep uniform student records.

Additionally, even though we distributed standardized template request for data, districts and their partners responded in a variety of ways. It was left up to us to sort through the different responses to try to make some sort of sense out of what we received, and we were not always sure how to interpret the data that a district did provide. Moving forward, we need to devise a better, closed-ended system for districts to respond to our data requests. Another data issue had to do with the time in which districts and partners returned their responses. Some districts were timely, while we had to remind others several times to return responses. Districts and partners were extremely busy, as they usually are during the first few weeks of the school year, which caused some of the delays.

Another issue that arose during the analysis phase was how to deal with missing data. Fortunately, most of the data fields that were negotiated with the districts in our individual interviews were completed for the datasets that we did receive. Since we were using basic descriptive analysis, we simply analyzed the data, as it existed for each of the variables that were described. In the future, when we begin to make inferences based on correlations among the variables in our dataset, we will need to make a decision regarding missing data points. In current and future discussions about methodology, we will need to be much clearer regarding our data needs and standardized procedures for responding. Hopefully, this will alleviate some challenges experienced during our first round of analysis, and support us in making valid inferences about relationships among preschool program effectiveness, program quality, and the performance of our target groups of students.

Our experience is one of evolution, requiring patience and flexibility. What began as the development and administration of quantitative measures of effectiveness and quality of local preschools, evolved into a study of preschool contexts, and was redirected to establish trusting relationships among researchers and stakeholders. Relationship and trust building through face-to-face interviews was a necessary first step in obtaining the data and specifically, the child specific information that would allow a proper evaluation, and ultimately would benefit and support local preschool programs and stakeholders' efforts. We considered it necessary to adapt to the nature of the situation by including qualitative components that would capture our participants' perspectives. One could consider this as a paradigm shift. We adapted our research to what Greene (2006) would call mixed methods social inquiry. Mixed methods social inquiry is a methodology that grounds both quantitative and qualitative research within four domains. These domains are a) philosophical and epistemological assumptions, (b) inquiry logics (methodology), (c) guidelines for practices (data collection tools and analysis), and (d) sociopolitical commitments (in what ways, and how is the research situated within the political context) (2006). Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) support this framework for mixed methods social inquiry and offer their own definition. They suggest that "mixed methods research is an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research

paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research). It recognizes the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results" (p. 129).

We also believe that our evaluation study evolved to include stakeholders in the evaluation, thereby making our study more democratic and authentic in nature. This collaborative process essentially empowered the communities with whom we were working. Consequently, we feel that our study was closely aligned with the framework of Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014).

Hearing and recording the multiple voices of the participating districts was necessary in understanding the multiple contexts of our evaluation study. Each stakeholder had something to offer with their unique perspective and set of activities with which they implemented their grant project. We became immersed through our interviews and relationship building. Navigating barriers is an integral part of doing evaluation research in education. This holds true for quantitative, qualitative, and more contemporary mixed methods of program evaluation.

Solid evaluation that satisfies the five overlapping American Evaluation Association (2004) guiding principles: Engaging in systematic inquiry, Competence toward stakeholders, Integrity/Honesty, Respect for people, and Responsibilities for general and public welfare, the KDE (2018c) requirement regarding student information security and privacy for districts, and "do no harm" to children principle of AERA and NAEYC can only be possible if the evaluation researchers comprehend perceptions, needs, and wants of the stakeholders.

This study gave us a window into district perceptions, needs, and wants. Each of the districts had their own perception of how grant money was best used and how quality is defined. For example, some districts strictly focused on increasing the number of children being served in their preschools, and they spent money on a variety of resources to meet this end. Some focused on childfind efforts through community engagement and family outreach programs and materials. Other districts used money to hire a liaison to lead the community engagement efforts. Some districts focused more on increasing the capacity of the available slots in their preschool programs and hiring the certified personnel to support these efforts. Without our multiple interviews, we would not have this type of insight that underlies the surface-level quantitative measures. We might have received responses, but would not have the benefit of understanding the complex stories told by the districts, which explained how they arrived at those responses through the natural methods of how they went about using the grant funds.

Districts also had different ways of measuring and increasing program quality. These differences were often based on their available resources and population of children and families within their district. Some districts spent money on overhauling their curriculum and providing professional development training for their local preschool partners. Other districts did what they had to do to increase their rating for the state quality rating and improvement system for early childhood education (Governor's Office of Early Childhood, 2016).

In learning about the unique situations of each district, we were able to revise our understanding of how to measure program quality and effectiveness. The measures for our study and subsequent measures that will be used at the state level to evaluate program quality, developed organically, out of our discussions with each district and grew out of the specific context of each district. Ultimately, our work will have an influence on how the state evaluates the overall grant among different districts and partner sites across the state. We believe that the utility of the grant

metrics is much more in tune with the needs and wants of districts participating in the grant program. We also feel that our measures hold more value having been developed this way.

## Conclusion

Our study might best be described as an evolution. Our evaluation study, which was originally quantitative in nature, evolved into a mixed method evaluation in order to account for the multiple viewpoints and experiences of the stakeholders. We set out to develop a measurement instrument that would fully capture the quality of the various preschool partners and show how the quality of the respective programs improved over time due to the funding they received through the grant. We soon learned that we had to examine each piece of context-specific information and hear each district's voice before we could figure out what type of data gathering process and analysis would work successfully.

Several themes that aligned with our original intent emerged from our study, which was to show an increase in the number of children served, an increase in the capacity of program slots, and to demonstrate an increase in quality. The important difference between the emerging themes and our original intent in showing program quality and effectiveness was the path that we took in realizing these themes. What started as a strictly quantitative evaluation research project, quickly morphed into more of a mixed-methods social inquiry study, incorporating interviews and dialogues with the key stakeholders in our study. Without the district and partner insights, we could not have learned about their individual goals, needs, and outcomes during the semester in which they sought to improve program quality and effectiveness through the use of grant funds. We learned about district and partner insights through a careful navigation process of relationship building and working to overcome barriers in communication. Without this important navigation phase, we could not have understood these invaluable insights. Maintaining confidentiality of data, building relationships with stakeholders within the research context, and upholding the integrity of our data during the collection and analysis stages of our study, all came with potential issues. In our case, navigating these issues proved to be challenging, and as we explained in this paper, forced us to maneuver in ways that shaped our study into something much different than was originally envisioned. The context in which we conducted our study seemed to snag the fabric of our study design so that we had to allow it to evolve in order to conduct the research that we set out to do.

Bridging the gap between the state and districts by moving toward contextual grounding was perhaps the most significant implication of this study. This gap is the space between the state's view of evaluation data existing only in quantitative nature, and the district/provider's view of markers of quality as both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative evaluation research detached from the context or population in which it attempts to study does not benefit from the rich, lived experiences of those that make up the various contexts of the study. In bridging the gap through contextual grounding, the evaluation researcher and those people making the decisions based on the research move closer to understanding the true nature of the data and the value from collecting and analyzing the data. The contextual grounding helped to inform our study's methodologies and analytical tools of the philosophical orientation of the districts (Greene, 2006; 2015). This also means that our inferences from the data become more valid and now hold more weight as legislative members make high-stakes decisions based on this data. Essentially, our results will help to inform the legislature about needs at the local, district level. Hopefully, this will contribute to additional funding opportunities in the

future. Additionally, the contextual grounding enabled our district partners to take ownership of their respective programs and included them in the evaluation process, which is more democratic in nature and in tune with Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014). We also realize that evaluation is intertwined with politics (Clarke & Dawson, 1999; Greene, 2006; 2015). The purpose of our evaluation has direct implications for political decisions, but our evaluation is itself, political. As researchers, we cannot totally detach from the political nature of evaluation, but we can be aware of our political biases and our positions as researchers as we relate to our program constituents. The transformation of our study into something more closely resembling Green's (2006; 2015) Mixed Methods in Social Inquiry and using elements of Fetterman's Empowerment Evacuation (2005) helped us to situate our study within the larger sociopolitical context of the preschool programs and state, and helped to give the participating districts a voice in the process.

Throughout the course of our study and data collection period, we gained invaluable insights into the perspectives of our district partners. It was through the realization that we need to listen to the needs and wants of our district partners, that we were able to gain these insights. These conversations with district partners and our resulting insights contributed to our conversations with the State Department of Education, and ultimately, shaped the subsequent measures of preschool quality that were being developed at the state level. We feel that there was a shift in the alignment of these measures with the stakeholders that are being served by these instruments. And, even though the next data collection cycle has not begun, we believe that the new cycle of data collection will be much more in tune with the perceptions, needs, and wants of the districts.

Several themes that have implications for the teaching of quantitative evaluation research, have emerged from this study. One key theme is to "know the context." This study has hopefully, allowed us to bridge the gap between researcher's perceptions and participants' perceptions, needs, and wants. The context gives the data meaning, and without an intimate knowledge and understanding of the context, the data becomes merely numbers without direction, and from which valid inferences cannot be made. We were able to gain an understanding of each individual context through our face-to-face interviews with the local school districts. We worked to develop relationships with the local districts, and in doing so, communicated our data needs, while listening to them and learning about their needs. This process worked to establish a more robust set of measures, and which we were eventually able to relay to the state. It also allowed us to bridge the gap and ground the statewide measures of preschool quality within the context of each individual district.

Another main theme is to learn to navigate when the context is foreign. Quantitative evaluation researchers, especially those who have not conducted qualitative research, need to become comfortable with stepping outside of their main area of training and background. By stepping outside of the comfort zone of quantitative research, the researcher allows oneself to become immersed in the stakeholders' different situations. In doing so, the researcher becomes better informed and the evaluation methodology and practices become much richer and able to tell a more complete story. Researchers must avoid the pitfalls of being detached from the participants and not being well versed in the language of the research setting. Immersing oneself in the context is absolutely necessary for more valid inferences and a meaningful evaluation.

Finally, evaluation researchers should not be afraid to embrace other methods or frameworks if these methods and frameworks can prove to be useful

tools in achieving one's research ends. Initially, this project was to administer an evaluation instrument to the district partners that they would return, the data would be collected and analyzed, and then an evaluative report would be developed based on the findings. We soon realized that interviews would be an important first step in understanding the context of each district and their preschool partners. We set up meetings and met with each of the districts in our study so that we could better understand their intentions regarding the use of the grant money and how the money helped to meet their needs and improve the quality of their respective programs. The interviews allowed us to realize several overarching themes that guided our data analysis and final evaluative report. The interviews gave our study richness and depth. We think that the more recent Mixed Methods Social Inquiry (Greene, 2006; 2015) and Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014) are frameworks for evaluation research that suited the needs for our study well, but also benefit and serve the needs of all stakeholders well.

Finally, many of the issues encountered during the evaluation process could have been avoided if all of the grant recipients had begun their work with a clear understanding of the outcomes that would be measured by the evaluation, as well as knowing their duty to provide data to the evaluation team. In the present study, the evaluation team was not included in the grant application process. As it stood, we were in the awkward position of evaluating the programs after their respective projects were underway. Had our team been included from the start, it would have likely made for a much more efficient process. We were able to overcome these obstacles, for the most part, by being flexible, listening to stakeholders, and allowing our evaluation plan to evolve. This resulted in our study becoming more in tune with the more recent frameworks of Mixed Methods of Social Inquiry (Greene, 2006; 2015) and Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman, 2005; Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan, 2014).

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# SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR NOVICE TEACHERS AND DEGREE OF RESOLUTION FOR THEIR PROBLEMS
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### Abstract
*This study investigated to whom novice teachers turned for help with their problems, how many problems they reported, and to what degree they felt their problems were resolved. A repeated measures survey was used to gather data from 15 novice teachers across grade levels. Most, but not all, participants had a mentor teacher assigned to them. Results indicate that novice teachers turn to their assigned mentor as well as other teacher colleagues, administrators, former professors, and family and friends for assistance. Novice teachers who had a mentor reported having fewer problems than those who did not have a mentor although they felt their problems were resolved to a similar degree whether they had a mentor or not. This confirms the importance of having a mentor, but also the necessity for others in a school and larger community to be involved in the induction of a novice teacher.*

Teaching is difficult work and the first few years when a novice teacher enters the profession are often the most challenging. Over the past 40 years, numerous research studies have sought to identify the problems that are experienced by novice teachers. One goal of these research studies has been to gather information about these problems for the purpose of developing induction programs that have a strong mentoring component and are aimed at addressing the problems that novice teachers are likely to experience. Although such programs have been in existence for many years (Odell, 1990), vast numbers of teachers are still leaving the profession in their early years of teaching.

While much research has been done to identify the problems that novice teachers have and mentoring programs have been developed to address these problems, such programs are generally designed around the assumption that novice teachers will go to their mentors for help with problems and that their mentors will be able to help them resolve issues. Few studies have looked at to whom novice teachers actually report seeking assistance from when they encounter a problem or have a concern and the degree to which they feel their problems are resolved. The goal of this current study was to find out more from the perspective of the novice teacher. The current study adds to the knowledge base in this area by describing to whom novice teachers turn for assistance and guidance with problems they experience as well as determining to what degree they feel their problems are resolved. This has strong implications for how mentoring programs should be designed and how schools should treat mentoring as a part of novice teacher induction.

### Background Literature

Once pre-service teachers graduate from their teacher preparation program and secure their first professional position they are expected to perform the same tasks as experienced veteran teachers (Lortie, 1975) although they are brand new professionals. Numerous researchers and some conventional wisdom indicate that a teacher's first year is often very challenging. This first year is sometimes referred to as a "sink or swim" year meaning that teachers are either successful (they swim) or unsuccessful (they sink and potentially leave teaching). A large number of teachers

leave the profession each year creating a problem for school districts to retain their teachers. By some estimates as many as 50% of novice teachers leave within their first few years (Fantilli, & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012; Moir & Gless, 2001). Some move to different schools while others leave teaching entirely. An additional source of teachers leaving is through retirement with estimates indicating that nearly 50 percent of current teachers will shortly be reaching retirement age (Huling, Resta & Yeargain, 2012). When a school district hires a new teacher, they have spent countless hours reviewing resumes and interviewing the candidates they feel are the best fit. Not only is this a time consuming process, it is also expensive to hire a teacher only to need to replace him or her in a year or two (Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz, 2012). Thus research that can help determine more about what happens during the early career of a teacher is important to finding better ways to support the novice teacher.

## Teacher Problems

In an effort to determine what happens during the first years and why these years are often so difficult for novice teachers, researchers have invested extensive time and published numerous studies. Beginning in the 1970s, researchers such as Fuller (1969), Fuller and Bown (1975), Ryan (1986), and Berliner (1988) described stages of development that teachers pass through as they move from novice to experienced teacher. These researchers developed different names and descriptions of each stage that they proposed novice teachers pass through on their way to becoming experienced. While each research proposed a slightly different model, the point was the same: the beginning stage is difficult for teachers as they try to survive in their new teaching jobs.

More contemporary researchers have moved away from stage theory and toward describing teacher problems as areas of concern. This began with Veenman (1984) and includes many more recent researchers such as Brown (2005), Burke, Schuck, Aubusson, Kearney, and Frischknecht (2018), Charnock and Kiley (1995), Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017), Dollase, (1992), Fantilli and McDougall (2009), Ganser (1999), Gordon (2016), He and Cooper (2011), Louws, Meirink, van Veen, and van Driel (2018), Stroot et al. (1999), and Veenman (1984). A few studies have even found that a teacher's first years can be made up of largely positive experiences (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Huisman, Singer, Robb, & Catapano, 2010). Each of these researchers has described the experiences of beginning teachers by asking teachers to talk about the problems they experienced and then categorizing them. Problems frequently cited by these researchers include classroom management, handling differences among students, grading student work, dealing with parents, principals, and colleagues, and meeting the needs of all students. For this reason, the researchers posited that novice teachers do not move through stages so much as they have different areas that they are concerned about at different times in their early careers.

## Induction and Mentoring

Because problems during the first years of teaching can seem overwhelming, school districts have increasingly instituted mentoring programs as part of their induction of novice teachers (Du & Wang 2017). The purpose is to guide novice teachers into the profession and smooth the transition to becoming a teacher. Odell (1990) tells us that the term *mentor* originates from Homer's work in *The Odyssey*. When the character Odysseus left home to fight in the Trojan War, he left his son in the care of his friend, Mentor. Mentor's job was to teach and guide Odysseus's son. Odell states that the classic definition of a mentor in business, law, or other fields is

someone who has experience in the profession and takes on the responsibility to help a new member of the same profession become proficient. A mentoring relationship in schools has typically meant that a new teacher was matched with an older experienced teacher (Guskey, 2000; Zembytska, 2015). Over the last thirty years mentoring has increasingly been used to help beginning teachers cope with the challenges of their first teaching positions.

In 1980, Florida was the only state in the country that had a mentoring program for novice teachers (Odell, 1990). Today, the support programs for novice teachers are numerous and vary widely by state and within states by school district. Some states have a formal state-wide mentoring program and others leave mentoring of beginning teachers solely at the discretion of school districts. For example, beginning in 2004, New York State mandated that school districts have mentoring programs in place to support teachers during their first year. Pogodzinski (2012) notes that as of 2010, at least 30 states require mentoring in some form for novice teachers.

Induction programs may share similar sets of goals (Gold, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1989; Odell, 1990) but the actual components of each program vary widely. For example, sometimes initial meetings are set up for novice teachers (Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teusher, 2007), professional development workshops may be provided (Martin, Buelow, Hoffman, 2015; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008), the novice teacher may have opportunities to observe the mentor teaching (Richter et al., 2013), or additional time to work with grade or content area colleagues will be provided (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

As a vital component of a broader induction program, mentoring programs take a variety of forms. For example, many programs expect the mentor will ensure that the novice teacher is aware of the professional expectations in the building (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). Vallani (2002) notes mentoring programs may provide support in the form of a colleague who is assigned a formal role as a "helping [or] buddy" teacher (p. 14). Other components of mentoring programs include time for beginning teachers to meet and talk about their problems, a reduced teaching load (Zembytska, 2015), and assignment to team or co-teaching classrooms with a more experienced colleague (Pugach & Winn, 2011). For the mentor teacher, programs often offer remuneration or opportunities for the mentor to receive awards or a reduced teaching load to compensate for their participation (Zembytska, 2015).

Although the components of mentoring and induction programs can vary, a recent study called for the further examination of "how new teachers are experiencing induction program activities" (Mitchell, Howard, Meetze-Hall, Scott Hendrick, Sandlin, 2017, p. 81) with the idea that it is important to determine which parts of the induction process are actually the most useful in retaining teachers in the profession. There is conflicting evidence about how helpful mentoring programs actually are to increasing teacher retention. On one hand there is evidence that having mentoring as part of an induction program does reduce the chance that a novice teacher will leave (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Zembytska, 2015). However, a study by Glazerman et al. (2010) that found that induction programs do not necessarily help keep novice teachers from leaving the profession.

Induction programs including mentoring are one possible solution to increasing teacher retention, but such programs are often designed by school districts in order to solve the problems that novices experience from the district's perspective. Even research on mentoring does not often take the perspective of looking at how the novice teacher mentees viewed the process (Izadinia, 2015). It is not enough to assume that because a novice teacher has a mentor, s/he will go to that mentor for

support and that mentor will be able to help with the problems the novice teacher experiences. More must be investigated to see who actually helps novice teachers.

Shuck, Abusson, Buchanan, Varadharajan, and Burke (2018) report that even with a mentor available, many problems novice teachers experience appear to continue and are not resolved. Similarly, Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) note that previous research studies often assume that novice teachers will be impacted positively by having a mentor, but argue that it is important to actually study what is happening during the conversations novices and their mentors have. In essence, these studies suggest that further research be done to determine more information about who is guiding novice teachers as well as whether the problems of novice teachers are actually being resolved.

Few studies have attempted to collect data about who novice teachers view as supports when they encounter a problem. Two of the few studies that examine this are Hertzog (2002) and Tellez (1992). Both provide important results but have limitations. Hertzog looked at novice teachers who were prepared to teach through an alternative certification pathway. These teachers had not graduated from a teacher preparation program, although they were currently enrolled in such a program and were supported by district mentors and a university supervisor. That is, Hertzog did not look at traditionally prepared teachers who enter teaching through an undergraduate or graduate teacher education program and complete a student teaching experience prior to entering the field as a novice teacher and it is possible that the teachers in this study had different responses due to their different preparation. Tellez (1992) also looked at who novice teachers turn to for help. He found that novice teachers seek assistance primarily from their assigned mentor or a colleague not assigned as their mentor. A limitation of Tellez's work is that his data only reflected the first two months of the school year rather than looking at the entire school year. It is possible that novice teachers seek help differently as the school year progresses. Additionally, both Hertzog and Tellez published their articles before most states had mentoring requirements for novice teachers. As such, the results may be different now.

Hertzog (2002) and Tellez (1992) focused on finding out to whom novice teachers turn for support. A few other studies offer some insights on this although it was not the primary focus of the study. This is essentially an examination of what Pogodzinski (2012) referred to as the "informal social structure of schools" (p. 982) and has not been extensively examined in the literature. Based on a review of the literature, I developed a list of people novice teachers turn to for guidance.

Given the extensive literature on mentoring, it is natural to expect that novice teachers would turn to their mentors for advice with problems. By design, formal mentoring programs are set up so that novice teachers will seek out their mentors for assistance with problems they experience. There is strong evidence that novice teachers do use their mentors for support (e.g., Desimone et al., 2014; Izadinia, 2015; Pogodzinski, 2014; Tellez, 1992, Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008; Zembytska, 2015) although the formal mentor may not always be the first person novice teachers ask for assistance (Hertzog, 2002).

Many researchers including Smith and Ingersoll (2004) and Fry (2007) noted that administrators are an important part of the network supporting novice teachers. Researchers such as Correa and Wagner (2011), Engvik and Emstad (2017), and Fultz and Gimbert (2009) looked specifically at the school leader's (principal's) role in supporting new teachers while Friedrichsen, Chval, and Teuscher (2007) expanded this to also include the role of vice-principals. Schmidt (2006) and Peacock (2014) noted that an administrator might also be a district-level supervisor or a department chairperson for a particular content area. Some researchers found that a lack of

assistance from a building administrator was a reason cited by novice teachers who left (e.g., Eggen, 2002). Each of these studies supports the importance of the role of the administrator in supporting a novice teacher.

Not surprisingly, many studies have identified family and friends of the novice teacher as people the novice teacher turns to for assistance. Tellez (1992) found that novice teachers often turned to a significant other such as a boyfriend or girlfriend for advice. Sometimes a relative or other friend was asked for assistance and it was not necessary that this person was a teacher (He & Cooper, 2011).

Several researchers (e.g., Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teusher, 2007; Hertzog, 2002, Tellez, 1992) found that novice teachers sometimes turned to former professors from their teacher education programs when they had a concern. Although not the first preferred types of assistance, Charnock and Kiley (1995) found that one source of support novice teachers wanted was the opportunity to speak with a teacher education faculty member.

Colleagues are sometimes identified in the existing literature as informal mentors (Desimone et al., 2014) and other times this collegial support is referred to as teacher collaboration (Zembytska, 2015). In any case, the assistance of other teachers who are not assigned as formal mentors appears to play an important role in assisting a novice teacher. In fact Du & Wang (2017) found that informal mentors were so important to novice teachers that they recommended opportunities be provided for novice teachers to find their own informal mentors.

The advantage of a colleague is that they can be self-selected by the novice teacher and may better meet their needs for socio-emotional help because they are seen as a caring individual (Tellez, 1992). In some cases, a group of colleagues may serve to help a novice teacher debrief and relax (He & Cooper, 2011). In this way, novice teachers seek out those colleagues with whom they feel they can interact more informally (Pogodzinski, 2014). Colleagues may also be located physically close to the classroom of the novice teacher (Hertzog, 2002) in comparison with a mentor who may have a classroom located further away and therefore be harder to ask or the mentor might not teach the same subject (Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teusher, 2007). Finally, a colleague may also be selected by a novice teacher for support because that teacher had the same students the year before and the novice teacher believes the colleague can offer some insight (Tellez, 1992).

### Rationale for the Current Study and Research Question

Many studies have looked at and described the types of concerns and problems that novice teachers experience. Other studies have examined mentoring programs looking at how they are organized and what goals they have for guiding new teachers, but few researchers have combined these two areas. The purpose of this study was to answer the research questions: "Who do novice teachers turn to for support with problems and concerns they encounter?" and "To what degree do novice teachers feel their problems are resolved?" Additionally, data were collected over the course of an entire school year so that a full picture of the novice teacher experience could be developed.

### Method

Fifteen novice teachers participated in this study. Each was in his or her first or second year of teaching in grades ranging from pre-school to eleventh grade. The participants were teaching in schools located throughout the United States and in settings ranging from rural to suburban to urban.

Data were collected through a repeated measures survey emailed to participants approximately once each month during the school year. The first survey was sent in

September and the last in late May. Most of the participants returned the survey numerous times and this resulted in a data set of 78 individual surveys returned. Each survey posed identical questions asking participants to (a) describe a problem they had experienced since the last survey, (b) indicate whom they had turned to for support or guidance to resolve the problem, and (c) indicate whether they felt their problem had been resolved. Several demographical questions aimed at determining the details of the setting where the participant taught were also posed on the first survey.

The first question was open-ended and asked participants to describe a problem they had experienced since the last survey administration. The responses were analyzed qualitatively for patterns in the data following the tradition of qualitative methods to code for themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The second survey question posed a Likert-type scale and participants had a choice of responses regarding whom they had asked for assistance with the problem they had described in the first question. The choice of responses was culled from the literature as noted in the literature review section above. Participants were asked to mark as many as applied and the choices were: "my mentor," a "colleague not assigned as a mentor," a "school administrator," a "friend or family member," a "professor from my teacher education program," "no one," or "someone else." If a participant selected "someone else" a drop down menu appeared and the participant was asked to indicate to whom they had turned for advice.

The final question examined whether participants felt their problem had been resolved. This was also posed as a Likert-type scale question with participants asked to select from a list whether they felt their problem was resolved: "no," "sort of," "yes." These responses were assigned a number on a 0 to 2 scale where 0=No, 1=Sort of, 2=Yes. This made it possible to compute an average of the degree to which participants felt their problems were resolved. For example, if there had been only two problems in the data set, one marked "sort" and the other marked "yes," these would have received numerical values of "1" and "2" respectively. This means that the average degree of resolution would be 1.5 and indicates that the degree of resolution overall for the two problems was equidistant between "sort of" and "yes." This information is most useful when it is used to compare the degree of resolution experienced by those novice teachers with a mentor to those who indicated they did not have a mentor.

## Findings

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whom novice teachers turned to for support and assistance with the problem they identified and whether they felt their problem had been resolved. The majority of this section is devoted to describing those data. While the participants described a problem that they had encountered for each administration of the survey, describing that problem was not the primary purpose of this study so I will only briefly describe the problems the participants described below.

First I took the data set as a whole and coded the problems the novice teacher participants reported. The issues reported include concerns with classroom management, dealing with parents, handling the expectations of administrators, figuring out how to implement the curriculum, issues with access to resources including technology that did not always perform as expected, and personal issues which included being tired and feeling stressed and lacking time.

Of the fifteen participants, 12 indicated that they had a formal mentor assigned and three did not have a mentor so the remainder of this section is divided into

reporting the results from those who indicated they had a mentor and those who did not.

Twelve participants indicated they had a mentor formally assigned to them. These participants account for 60 separate problems (nearly 77%) reported during the course of the school year when the survey was administered. Of all 60 problems, only two times did the participants indicate s/he had asked *only* his/her mentor teacher for assistance, so the majority of responses indicated that the participant had sought the assistance of several people in resolving the matter.

For 13 of the 60 problems (nearly 22%), the participant indicated that s/he had not consulted his/her mentor teacher. This includes two problems where the participant asked no one for assistance. Out of the remaining 11 problems, the novice teacher participants indicated s/he had asked a colleague 10 of those 11 times. This suggests the importance of the role of colleagues in inducting a novice teacher.

Novice teacher participants indicated they had turned to their administrator (principal, assistant principal, department chairperson) for assistance with 26 of the 60 problems (43%). In no case was the administrator the only person asked; each time, the participant indicated asking someone else in the school (a mentor or colleague or both) for assistance while also asking their administrator.

With 16 of the 60 problems (almost 27%), a friend or family member was consulted for assistance. And 10 times (almost 17%) a professor from the participant's teacher education program was asked for help in resolving the problem. In a handful of cases the participant marked "other" on the survey and indicated that an additional person was also asked for help such as a technology expert or math or literacy coach.

Those novice teachers with a mentor indicated that their problems were resolved with an average degree of resolution of 1.18. This is between "sort of" and "yes" and indicates that participants felt a majority of the problems were closer to being at least partially resolved rather than not resolved at all.

Naturally, it would be impossible for those novice teachers without a mentor to turn to a mentor for assistance, but it is still valuable to see whom these participants asked for help since not every new teacher is supported with a mentor. In this study, three participants indicated they did not have a mentor teacher assigned to assist them. These participants accounted for 18 separate problems (23%) reported over the course of the school year. These participants indicated that they asked a colleague for assistance with 12 of the 18 problems (67%) and asked an administrator for assistance one third (six of the 18 problems) of the time. In a number of cases, both a colleague and administrator were consulted.

Friends or family members were consulted regarding 6 of the 18 problems (nearly 33%) and a professor from the novice teacher participant's teacher education program was asked for help almost 28 percent of the time (five of the 18 problems). Only one time did a participant indicate she had asked no one for help. In most cases, multiple people were asked for assistance with the same problem.

Those without a mentor indicated that their problems were resolved to an average degree of resolution of 1.11. This is between "sort of" and "yes" but slightly closer to "sort of" than the results for those novice teachers who had a mentor.

## Discussion and Implications

Problems reported largely mirror those found in existing literature and did not appear to be different for those teachers who indicated they had a mentor than for those who reported they did not have a mentor. Classroom management concerns are mentioned frequently in the literature (e.g., Bullough, 1989; Charnock & Kiley,

1995; Ensign, Mays Woods & Kulinna, 2018; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Gordon, 2016; Hertzog, 2002; Intrator, 2006; Nicholson & Heidenreich, 2007, Veenman, 1984) as well as meeting the expectations parents and administrators (e.g., Burton & Johnson, 2010; Corley, 1998; Fry, 2010; Ganser, 1999; Gratch, 1998; Veenman, 1984). Novice teachers often struggle to figure out how to implement the curriculum (e.g., Dollase, 1992; He & Cooper, 2011; Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Hertzog, 2002). This study confirms the literature that lists access to resources is an issue for novice teachers (e.g., Burke, Schuck, Aubusson, Kearney, & Frischknecht, 2018; Stroot et al., 1999). A substantial number of problems fit into another category which included being tired and feeling stressed or facing other personal matters that impacted classroom performance, as well and handling time concerns  (e.g., Brown, 2005; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Charnock & Kiley , 1995; Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Fry, 2007, He & Cooper, 2011; Louws, Meirink, van Veen, and van Driel, 2018; Veenman, 1984).

While there appear to be no differences in the types of problems reported by novice teachers with and without a mentor, there is a difference in the number of problems experienced. Interestingly, the three participants who indicated they did not have a mentor reported almost one quarter of the total problems reported. The other approximately three quarters of the problems were reported by 12 participants. In essence, four times as many participants had a mentor teacher and, on average, those with a mentor reported one problem fewer throughout the school year. It is possible that the three participants without a mentor simply felt more comfortable sharing problems they were experiencing, but it is also possible that having a mentor reduced the number of problems the participant experienced. This suggests an area for further study to better determine the impact of having a mentor teacher available.

Mentors were not the only people being asked for assistance. For those novice teacher participants both with and without a mentor, it is clear that other individuals within the school building are very important. Many times the participants reported asking a colleague. These colleagues are functioning as informal mentors as identified by Desimone et al. (2014). Vallani (2002) described this same relationship as "buddy" teachers and reported that it is a recognized component of some mentoring programs (p. 14). The teacher colleagues in this current study appear to be acting in this fashion by providing informal guidance on a specific area of concern. This was true even when the novice teacher participants also indicated asking his/her mentor for assistance. Since participants who have a mentor reported that for almost 22 percent of the problems they experienced, they turned to a colleague and not their mentor for advice, it is clear that colleagues form a very important part of the support network novice teachers turn to for guidance.

Based on the number of times a novice teacher participant indicated asking a colleague for assistance, schools may want to widen mentoring programs where novice teachers are assigned a mentor and several other teachers who might be able to address specific concerns. These findings support and extend the case Du and Wang (2017) make for a "hybrid model" of mentoring where novice teachers start with more informal mentors and then move into a formal mentoring phase of induction (p. 325-326). The teacher colleagues in the current study would be what Vallani (2002) called "buddy" teachers (p. 14) and might be matched with novice teachers based on teaching the same grade or subject, or having a similar classroom management philosophy. This would allow the beginning of a novice teacher's career to be more informal before s/he moved to the formal part of the mentoring process.

Novice teacher participants also reported asking their administrators for assistance. As reported by Correa and Wagner (2011), Engvik and

Emstad (2017), and Fultz and Gimbert (2009) the principal and other administrators have a vital role in supporting new teachers. Since novice teacher participants in this study frequently reported seeking assistance from their administrators, it is logical to suppose that participants believed their administrators could provide assistance with certain problems. Administrators need to understand that they are important sources of support for novice teachers and they need to take time to work with novice teachers in their buildings and departments. This cannot be left to mentors or teacher colleagues as the novice teachers look to their instructional leaders for guidance with some matters.

Previous studies have found that novice teachers sometimes contact their former professors for guidance (Charnock & Kiley, 1995; Friedrichsen, Chval, & Teusher, 2007; Hertzog, 2002, Tellez, 1992). Those findings are supported by the results of this current study and this suggests that former professors at the novice teacher's teacher education program must understand that their role is not completed when the pre-service teacher graduates. They may be called upon to support that individual when s/he becomes a novice teacher. This extended mentoring by college and university faculty members is one that has not been extensively investigated in the literature and further studies should be conducted to determine if there are models of support that work best and should be adopted by teacher education programs.

It is worth noting who participants in this study did not ask for help with problems. Although one category on the survey allowed participants to check off that someone other than the roles listed had assisted them, in only a small number of cases did the participant mark this category. In none of these cases, did the participant indicate that they had sought help from a guidance counselor, social worker, speech language pathologist, physical therapist, consultant special education teacher, or another individual with a similar support role. This is different than what is found in existing literature as Charnock and Kiley (1995) found that novice teachers appreciated the opportunity to consult with other professionals such as psychologists and speech language pathologists. Friedrichsen, Chval, and Teusher (2007) also found that novice teachers sometimes turned to athletic coaches, counselors, or special education teachers. This suggests that either the participants in this study did not experience problems they felt individuals in these roles could assist with or perhaps that they did not think about turning to these experts for help. It may also be that for some reason novice teachers today do not think about all of the other professionals available to work with students. Teacher Education programs may need to do more to help pre-service teachers understand other roles in schools and the range of professionals with whom they should collaborate.

Those with a mentor were slightly more likely to indicate that their problem was resolved (1.18 average degree of resolution versus 1.11 average degree of resolution, where the larger the number indicates a more resolved problem). If taken at face value, this appears to corroborate what other researchers have found with regard to the importance of novice teachers having a mentor (e.g., Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Zembytska, 2015), however these numbers are so close, that they may not really represent a difference among degree of resolution. We must keep in mind that Glazerman et al. (2010) found that induction programs do not necessarily help keep novice teachers from leaving the profession. Thus, the similarities in degree of resolution seen in this study, suggest that this is an area that should be investigated further in future studies to determine if those novice teachers with a mentor find that their problems are more resolved than those without a mentor.

As with any research, it is important to consider the limitations. Limitations with this study include that this study relied on a relatively small sample size of 15 teachers. Additionally, these teachers were asked to self-report whom they had turned to for support with a problem and whether they felt the problem had been resolved. It is possible that the teachers did not self-report accurately or that they reported what they thought they should say rather than what they actually did. Finally, because of the small number of participants, it is possible that something other than degree of resolution accounts for the differences in resolution of the problems reported by those with a mentor and those without a mentor.

## Conclusions

From the results of this study it is clear that novice teachers often turn to their mentor for support but they do not *only* turn to their mentor. Colleagues, administrators, family and friends, and professors from the novice's teacher education program are frequently consulted. Thus, mentoring programs should take this into account to the extent possible and teacher educators should be aware that their responsibilities to prepare candidates do not entirely end when the candidate graduates, as they are likely to be consulted later as the former pre-service teacher candidate begins his or her early career.

As a novice teacher, developing a sense of belonging and being part of the larger school community is important to wanting to do well and to being willing to ask for help when needed. This allows the novice teacher to become comfortable in the school environment. The novice teacher relies on this "informal social structure" (Pogodzinski, 2012, p. 982) as well as on formally assigned mentors. Further research should be done to add more data to the literature on these other people who are part of the world of a novice teacher (e.g., colleagues, administrators, family, and former professors).

This means that entire school communities must be aware of the needs of novice teachers and be prepared to assist them. The entire community is essentially what Gordon and Lowery (2017) call a " mentoring web" where a novice teacher uses the larger community as a support system. While the teacher with the classroom next door may not feel as invested in supporting a novice teacher, s/he must be. The current study adds to the literature by supporting the call Pogodzinski (2012) has made for investigating the social structure within schools to see how it impacts the experiences of novice teachers. The induction of a new teacher is the responsibility of everyone in the school building. It is important for formal mentors to exist, but it is not sufficient for others in the school and community to believe that the formally assigned mentor will have full responsibility in responding to a novice teacher's questions and needs for support.

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# EXPLORING FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT LITERACY TO INFORM PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PREPARATION
**by**
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## Abstract
*This study examines first-year teachers' assessment literacy to better inform pre-service teacher preparation. After examining multiple sources of pre-service teacher data, an area of weakness – assessment – was discovered. Particularly, pre-service teachers struggled to use student assessment data to analyze patterns of learning, provide meaningful feedback, and inform instruction. By looking at recent graduates first-year of teaching, the goal was to better aid pre-service teachers in understanding assessment, how assessment functions in real classroom practices, and to improve the teacher preparation program overall. Findings indicate first-year teachers experience shifts in thinking with assessment literacy due to continuous planning, instruction, and assessment cycles.*

In reviewing several years of pre-service teacher performance data for my program's latest accreditation cycle, one area continued to show stagnant growth in scores and pre-service teacher understanding – assessment. In particular, the pre-service teachers struggled with Task 3 of the edTPA as it relates to assessing student learning: analyzing patterns of learning from student evidence, providing meaningful feedback to individual students, and using evidence to plan instruction. The pre-service teachers had difficulty with moving beyond non-specific comments when relating details of student performance and noting a variety of detail instruction moves to help with student learning (edTPA 2016). Burns, Henry & Lindauer (2015) note the majority of student teachers feel overwhelmed by the edTPA, and teacher preparation programs need to provide more scaffolding and other supports for pre-service teachers. One method of supporting teacher education programs and edTPA preparation concerning assessment is by examining recent graduates' experiences with and understandings of assessment to make explicit connections between what is currently happening in the classroom to teacher preparation to reflect current ideals in teaching instruction and student learning.

Many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to create appropriate educational assessments (Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Volante & Fazio, 2007; Popham, 2009), yet it is one of the most important pieces of classroom practice that greatly impacts student performance (Popham, 2009). Part of the difficulty is the lack of assessment literacy among teachers in deciphering between accountability assessments and assessments that guide instruction (Popham, 2011; Siegel & Wissehr, 2011). Stiggins (2002) notes this focus on standardized and high-stakes tests are not helping teachers help students learn. A shift, then, is needed for teachers to recognize different purposes of assessment and use them accordingly to understand how assessment can drive instruction (Volante & Fazio, 2007).

Teacher education programs are not always consistent in how they educate pre-service teachers on assessment (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010). Siegel & Wissehr (2011) argue that in addition to focusing on knowledge, principles, and views of learning that accompany assessment, pre-service teachers should have experiences with classroom conditions and situations to interpret and plan action. This includes providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with and understand assessment *for* learning (Stiggins, 2002) rather than just assessment *of* learning.

Most importantly, colleges of Education must create some sort of way to track both their pre-service teachers' and graduates' understandings of and experiences with assessment to reduce the "number of teacher candidates graduating with sizable knowledge gaps" (Volante & Fazio, 2007, p. 762) in this important content area.

## Methodology

This study was designed to explore recent graduates' experiences with and understandings of assessment in their first year of teaching. My program hoped to understand what did and did not translate over from the new teacher's undergraduate coursework and experiences with assessment into their first year of teaching. The goal was to better aid our pre-service teachers in understanding a critical component of edTPA task 3, how assessment functions in real classroom practices, and to improve our teacher preparation program overall.

This qualitative study was grounded in a case study approach. As Creswell (2013) explains, a case study examines one bounded case over time through detailed data collection of multiple sources and reports a case description and themes. This case study consisted of studying two recent pre-service teacher graduates, one elementary and one middle level. Initially, a list was compiled of all recent graduates. All graduates were contacted and the participants were chosen based on who taught locally, who replied back and was willing to do the study, and an attempt was made to have varied grade levels and subject areas. The two participants were chosen using purposive sampling (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003) to reflect the features of our student graduate's job placements: The elementary school teacher, Robyn (all names are pseudonyms), teaches second grade at public suburban, diverse, low-to-high socioeconomic school where the curriculum is dictated by the district and Robyn teaches all subject areas. The middle school teacher, Kelly, teaches at a private religious, suburban school with students who are predominately white, with mid-to-high socioeconomic status where she teaches one content area, math, and creates her own curriculum.

Research questions for the case study included:
1) How do first year teachers gather assessment evidence and make sense of what students have learned?
2) How do first year teachers provide meaningful feedback to students?
3) How do first year teachers use student evidence to plan next steps in instruction?
4) How do/do not first year teachers' experiences with assessment connect to their teacher preparation programs?

Data collection consisted of interviews, classroom observations, and teacher curriculum materials. A total of four in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006) were conducted with the first-year teachers at various points during the school year, specifically beginning, middle, and end. The first interview focused on the first-year teachers' university preparation experiences with assessment, student evidence to evaluate and change teaching practice, and teacher feedback. Subsequent interviews examined these same topics but in the context of the first-year teachers' current classrooms and practices. The following list includes sample interview questions asked:
- How do you use assessment evidence and make sense of what students have learned?
- How do you use student evidence to plan next steps in instruction?
- Do you use theory/research to guide your thinking with assessment? If so how do you use it? If not, why not?

- How do and don't your experiences with assessment in the classroom connect to what you learned at Concordia?
- What would have been helpful to learn at Concordia that would help with assessment and student learning?
- What have you learned about your students through your different assessments?
- Do you and/or your staff engage in data analysis of student assessment results?
- Is there anything in your content area that affects student learning and assessment?

A total of four classroom observations occurred during the school year, two in the fall and two in the spring. The observation protocol consisted of taking field notes for a rich, thick description of the setting (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These notes included descriptive and reflective comments. The descriptive notes included information on the physical setting, the social environment, participants and roles, and meaning of what was observed. Reflective notes consisted of ideas, impressions, criticisms and clarifying points.

Any teacher materials used in the observed lessons were collected from each teacher as to corroborate evidence from the interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009). These materials included lesson plans, unit plans, student handouts, instructional examples and content, lecture notes and/or multimedia presentations. Relevant passages of text and other data from these teacher materials were identified and organized into categories related to the central questions of the research (Bowen, 2009).

Data was reduced into manageable and meaningful segments (Corban & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013). Once data was assigned names or codes, they were combined into larger categories and themes. The goal was to search for search for patterns, threads, tensions and themes by reading and rereading in order to theorize across a number of cases (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Findings were validated through the use of multiple sources of data, member checking with the participants, and further considering the role of context in analysis (Moen, 2006).

**Findings**

The case study findings indicate the two first-year teachers experienced shifts in thinking concerning assessment in different areas. These included the ways they use multiple types of assessments and evidence to make sense of student learning; the different ways they provided meaningful feedback to students to help them grow in the learning; and how they used all this assessment and evidence information to plan instruction in order to improve student learning. Finally, both the first-year teachers described how their experiences with assessment as undergraduates did and did not match up with their experiences as first-year teachers. Each one of these areas will be discussed in further detail.

In Kelly's (middle school teacher) initial interview in the beginning months of school, she mentioned that most of her assessments were tests and quizzes. After she graded them, she figured out the most common mistakes or errors and then she "told (her) students both before and after learning a skill what the most common mistakes were." This was mirrored in the way Kelly set up her classroom schedule. As seen in classroom observations, Kelli always started with a brief homework check where students checked their answers and Kelli quickly addressed any mistakes. This was followed by a warm-up activity where Kelli always selected problems that students either missed frequently on the last quiz or test. Kelli had students talk

through how they found their answers in the warm-ups and followed up with any clarification or reminders.

Through the school year, Kelly addressed these misconceptions in a more sophisticated way than just telling her students about them in class. For instance, when Kelly and her students were grading homework in class, she would write down the mistakes and then "we went through it as a class and picked out what was wrong and explained it. Then I gave them a similar worksheet that I was going to collect and grade, and the results were mainly better." Similarly, in the third classroom observation in February, Kelly had moved to purposefully integrate math academic vocabulary to help address misconceptions. Her warm-ups would always include targeted vocabulary words that were attached to math problems. For instance, Kelly taught the idea of *Volume* by providing a definition first, looked at how it is measured (specifically centimeters cubed), provided directions to solve problems, gave multiple examples with visuals and numbers, solved problems with students as a class and individually, and finally ended with the specific formula. This structure was taught with multiple ideas like the Pythagorean theorem, Area, Surface Area and so forth.

Throughout the year, Kelly also recognized that some of her students were not good test takers due to anxiety. She recognized the importance of looking at multiple types of assessments including classwork, homework, and most importantly "observing and see what they know" to better understand student learning This was seen throughout all Kelly's classroom observations where she would check in on individuals and groups during work time, used technology programs like Kahoot! to review for tests and Quizzes.com to create problem sets for students to collect data and information on where they may be struggling, and used manipulatives to help provide a visual for students.

From the beginning of the school year, Robyn (elementary school teacher) had utilized a variety of assessments to make sense of her student learning. As seen in classroom observations and through teacher-collected materials, these assessments included homework, exit slips, informal assessments like using whiteboards during a math lesson, writing assignments, small group instruction, summative assessments, and programs loaded on her students' Chromebooks. While Robyn utilized these varied assessments on a regular basis, towards the end of the Fall semester, Robyn mentioned, like Kelly, the importance of observing and listening to her students:

> I've learned even more so the importance of asking students their understanding and getting to hear how they could explain, whether it's a math problem or a reading strategy. I've noticed that a lot of times I'll ask my students if they understand what I am teaching and they will all nod, 'yeah" and later, of course, they don't (understand).

This verbal questioning was especially important to Robyn as she recognized how traditional assessments did not always provide immediate feedback, while asking students questions and having conversations let her know, "immediately who I need to work with that day or right then and there when I can…Those are the assessments I use the most because then I can change things around right then and there or the next day." In numerous classroom observations, Robyn would spend time stopping and starting her reading curriculum to ask questions linked to the content and text features. For example, in one observation, Robyn stopped to ask students what a "caption" was and how this helped them understand the text. In the same lesson, Robyn also asked students to silently summarize what they read in their heads before turning to a partner to share. Robyn then asked two pairs to share their summaries and asked other students to listen and add any details that were missing.

In the spring, Robyn provided multiple prompts for thinking and focusing to connect to her reading curriculum's essential questions. For instance, in a unit on games around the world, Robyn took the time to help her students understand the curriculum's strategy of compare and contrast by looking at the similarities and differences of games they read about and games they know. She first targeted academic vocabulary by having students define and explain similarities and differences. She then moved into having students verbally share answers on similarities and differences. She ended by providing a handout reviewing the skill of similarities and differences with games from the book and had students create and discuss their own. Before students could move to their Chromebook curriculum, Robyn conducted an informal assessment by having students show their handout to her and sharing the similarities and differences of the game they chose.

Through their experience in the classroom, both Kelly and Robyn have grown in their understanding of assessment by utilizing a variety of forms to make sense of what students are learning. They have also learned the best ways to provide immediate feedback to students to clear up misconceptions and better support student learning.

Initially, Kelly would give feedback to students by focusing on specific problems and helping them pick out their errors. She would also provide positive feedback to students on correct answers to difficult concepts. Later in the school year, Kelly learned that giving meaningful feedback was important immediately rather than waiting to give it on written assignments. For example, Kelly notes:

> If you see the 'what' face, just trying to think of some other way you can say (the concept) where they are going to get it. Trying to think inside their head and see how they are going to get it… sometimes if kids hear something a different way it clicks better.

Kelly created multiple opportunities in her classroom schedule to allow for immediate feedback as seen in classroom observations. As mentioned, she always did a quick homework check at the beginning of each class in order to address any problems the students might have experienced in their homework. Similarly, she facilitated a warm-up of particular concepts to hear student reasoning and thinking and provided immediate feedback over correctness or anything that needed to be fixed.

Kelly always had a teacher key present that students could refer to on their own for work on any given day. Kelly also allowed students to resubmit homework and retake tests in order to give as much feedback to improve student learning. Kelly mentioned that not all students took advantage of the resubmissions, but the option was available, and both the students and the parents knew of the policy.

For Robyn, being positive was one of the most important aspects of teacher feedback at her grade level: "I find that positivity is much more meaningful to students, especially at such a young age, because they are still learning basic skills that they will be using throughout their education." Robyn gave positive feedback during small group discussions or by writing comments on papers. In a math classroom observation, Robyn had her students use individual whiteboards to answers problems from the board. Not only could Robyn provide immediate feedback to all students when they held up their answers, but she also positively noted who had showed their work correctly, who remembered to add the proper math label, and who might be solving the problem in a different way to encourage the rest of her students to do the same.

Later in the school year, Robyn targeted individual students that she knew needed extra help for meaningful feedback: "I think knowing which students will need that extra support, it's been easier to kind of pull them aside and either work with them together or after they have, let's say, turned in an exit slip. I do this a lot." This

targeting of students was attributed by Robyn to having a strong connection with her students.  She thought she had

> Realistic expectations because I'm really good at connecting with my students. Just trying to reach all of them through the day…Whether it's pulling them into another group of students or something that I can quickly find another strategy for to help them understand the content. I think I'm good at assessing immediately where they are at or at least what they need.

This targeting of students could be seen in a math classroom observation towards the end of the year. Her students were playing a "I Have/Who Has" math game reviewing equivalency of coins. Rather than passing out the game cards randomly to students, she picked specific cards based on student knowledge and understanding, moved around the room to be near students who needed extra help, encouraged students to help their tablemates, and when a particular student struggled, Robyn first had the student ask a friend for help, then opened the question up to the class to help the class remember that it is okay to ask for help.

Both Robyn and Kelly have moved beyond giving feedback to students because it is something that a teacher does to really focusing on individual concepts or students to support learning. They recognized the importance of targeted, specific, and timely feedback to make it more meaningful.

Both Robyn and Kelly admitted that it "took a while" to figure out how to use their student assessment data to plan the next steps of instruction. For Kelly, focusing on specific mistakes that students made in assignments or seeing confusion on students' faces during class helped determine her next move in instruction. Once she saw that students were struggling on a particular concept, Kelly determined "that we did not spend enough time on the skill. Instead of moving on, I decided to take a step back and almost reteach the skill. I also made students correct their quiz and give a detailed explanation on what they did wrong." By slowing down, stopping, or re-teaching, Kelly had better results from her students. She still had a few students who struggled even after the re-teaching, but "(the results) were definitely better than the first time. I thought that was pretty good, because it's all their mistakes, and it was happening over and over again." By using student evidence to plan next steps of instruction, Kelly had helped correct her students' misconceptions and improve their learning.

For example, Kelly frequently used technology in reviews to collect evidence and guide her next steps. In classroom observations, Kelly used both Kahoot! and Quizzes.com to help her students review key concepts, but to also collect data on what to reteach. After using Quizzes.com in one classroom observation, Kelly explained how the website collected data on what problems students missed, how many students missed the problem, and if there were any frequent errors such as calculation or misusing a formula. Armed with this knowledge and evidence, Kelly would take time before a quiz or test to review the most common mistakes and errors and reteach if necessary.

Robyn used the knowledge of her students, the concepts of the assessments, and her students' performance on formative assessments to plan her instruction. For example, Robyn kept

> a particular assessment in mind when I'm planning, really making sure I know what's to come in the unit so that I'm preparing them – not teaching for a test, but just preparing them so that when it comes time for a test, they'll have enough knowledge to independently work on it.

This planning also included building in days for reviewing and re-teaching over a long unit to reinforce concepts learned early in the unit. It also included taking time to

review homework to address issues. In the second classroom observation, Robyn scanned her student's homework from the night before to see what problems were frequently missed and adjusted her lesson for the day to first address these particular issues.

Robyn also believed in "making sure (students) are having time to talk to each other…so that they are kind of sharing their own ideas to make sure they can really get as much of another person's perspective as well as their own." This was particularly evident during a math classroom observation where students first answered a math question on individual whiteboards from the teacher. Then students created their own problems for others to solve. Once partners solved each other's problems and sought feedback, Robyn kept the cycle going by having students find new partners, write new problems, and solve new problems. Using all this evidence to plan instruction was to achieve Robyn's goal of "making sure everyone is reached so that when it comes time for any assessment, they are comfortable."

Kelly and Robyn felt more positive towards the end of the year about their students' success on both formative and summative assessments. They attributed this success to using evidence along the way to plan their instruction to help individual students and address difficult concepts.

Both Kelly and Robyn stated they learned from their university training the importance of assessing their students frequently and in many forms. Both expressed, however, a desire to learn types of assessments other than pencil/pen and paper-based. Kelly stated she found it difficult with paper-based assessments "to keep students interested. [I would like to] connect to what they are interested in so the students are not like, 'oh, this again?' I cannot think of anything I learned in college that was different or very engaging." Similarly, Robyn indicated that through her coursework she did learn about the different forms of assessment, but "I would like to experience new and fun ways to assess students other than exit slips, tests, etc."

Kelly and Robyn also experienced two different scenarios when it came to summative assessments. Since Kelly was in a private school, her colleagues and her spent the majority of their time creating their own summative assessments, something Kelly mentioned her university helped prepare her for to where she felt comfortable. Robyn, on the other hand, had her summative assessments provided by the district based on the curriculum, which she notes, "can be frustrating because I would have reworded questions or completely taken out content." Robyn's biggest struggle, though, was not feeling prepared to know how to effectively create formative assessments to mirror district-generated summative assessments to fully prepare her students.

Both Robyn and Kelly noted how their university training also placed a strong emphasis on assessments being something you physically collect, while in the classroom they discovered how much they learned just by speaking with students. In particular, Robyn expressed throughout the year how

> Some of the most important assessments I've gotten are just from having a conversation or a discussion as a whole group or in my guided reading groups. Those are the assessments I use the most because then I can change things around right then and there or the next day.

Kelly also gauged her students understanding by the looks on their faces if they were misunderstanding and she could clear up misconceptions "by rewording what I just said and trying to think inside their head to phrase the idea or concept differently."

Not knowing their students ahead of time left Kelly and Robyn the most unprepared from their college training. Especially at the beginning of the year, Kelly

was unsure of "how it was going to go with each group of students. In college, you create a variety of assessments, but don't have the actual group of students to see how it really goes." Oftentimes Kelly felt she adequately taught a concept and her students seems to respond favorably, but how well her students did on an assessment told otherwise. Towards the end of the year, Kelly started to spend more time reteaching and providing practice on difficult content "rather than feeling like I had to move on to keep moving through the curriculum."

Robyn expressed similar ideas in that she felt she was always running out of time, especially with a curriculum that covered numerous ideas. She would like more flexibility "to go through [the content] again before setting them of to do an activity. Because sometimes I feel like I don't know completely where they are at when I'm having them start their work." In reflecting upon her school year, Robyn recognized the need to decide where to spend the majority of her teaching – either in whole class, small group, or individual work time – depending on her students, the content, and how well her students did on their assessments.

## Implications

Both Robyn and Kelly showed growth in their understanding of assessment and how to better meet the needs of their students from their undergraduate experiences to their first year of teaching, but would they be considered assessment literate? Popham (2009) describes teachers who are assessment literate of possessing knowledge in the areas of classroom assessments – the formal and informal measures teachers to draw inferences of student learning – and accountability assessments – usually standardized tests used by school districts and states to look at overall effectiveness. Robyn and Kelly spoke at length about their classroom assessments and how they adapted them as the school year progressed, but only briefly mentioned larger accountability assessments and what that meant for their instruction. Clearly it is crucial for teachers to understand both types of assessment, but the importance lies in how they use these assessments to help students learn more. (Popham, 2009; Popham, 2011; Stiggins, 2002).

Stiggins (2002) highlights several reasons why teachers should understand how to use assessment to ultimately advance student learning. These reasons include using assessments to help build student confidence, help provide specific feedback on how students can improve, and most importantly, keeping students motivated to keep learning. Teachers, in turn, have more motivated students, instructional decisions are informed by more accurate information, and save more time. Teacher education programs, therefore, should replicate conditions to help pre-service teachers experience more assessment for learning (Siegel & Wissehr, 2011). Robyn indicated as much when reflecting on her undergraduate education program. She commented how she wishes she would have spent

> more consecutive days in a type of environment, because sometimes I feel like I would go into a classroom and teach one lesson that I planned so hard for and walk out feeling great. Who knows if did a follow-up lessons the next day or week and got results over a longer period of time if I would have felt the same way.

Both Robyn and Kelly mentioned multiple times how they would prepare lessons and assessments but it would not go as planned and were not prepared from their undergraduate education programs for what to do next.

Shifts in thinking occur throughout pre-service teacher education programs as pre-service teachers gain foundational knowledge, experience the practical application of this knowledge in classroom settings, and decide what to put into practice in their future classrooms. Growth of Assessment Literacy should

accompany these shifts in thinking at multiple points in teacher education programs. As indicated from Robyn and Kelly's experiences, more continuous experiences in classroom settings where assessment is examined, put into use, and reflected upon may contribute to more shifts in thinking of assessment for pre-service teachers.

## Conclusion

Understanding both accountability and classroom assessments and how to interpret the data they provide to focus classroom instruction will continue to be commonplace in school and district professional development and experiences. If teachers possess more assessment literacy, their classroom assessments will be better and teachers will have more accurate interpretations of assessment-elicited data (Popham, 2009). Pre-service teachers should have more opportunities to examine not only key ideas about assessment before teaching, but also experience classroom teaching conditions whereby they continually engage in multiple planning, instruction and assessment cycles. This will help pre-service teachers feel confident in all facets of the edTPA and ultimately translate this knowledge and experiences into successful assessment practices in the first year of teaching and beyond.

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# REVIEW OF RESEARCH SUPPORTING THE ATE STANDARDS FOR FIELD EXPERIENCES IN TEACHER EDUCATION
## by
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## Abstract
*The ATE Standards for Field Experiences were first established in 1990 and revised in 1996. A significant and substantial review of the literature was conducted during the discussion and debate of the standards and helped form the basis for the establishment of the specific standards. The research that follows is a review of that literature review and will assist the reader in not only understanding the importance and value of field experience in Teacher Education but also to value the research that supports field experiences.*

Field experiences are often considered the most important and powerful component of teacher education programs (McIntyre, 1983; McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Over the past twenty years, most teacher education programs incorporated more field experiences into their programs and increased the number and variety of sites in which students are placed (Black & Ammon, 1992; Garibaldi, 1992). In addition, school context, especially the school-based supervisor, has been found to have a significant impact on teacher development. McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx (1996) asserted, "the placement of the prospective teacher for both early field experiences and student teaching is a critical stage in teacher preparation" (p. 173). Graham (2006) also emphasized that the two components critical to the success of the intern experience are the cooperating teachers who guide and support students and the sites where the experiences occur.

In 1904, John Dewey spoke of "miseducative" practices and believed that practice should be accompanied by reflection on the effects of practice. Many teacher education programs have the goal of preparing reflective teachers and espouse field experiences that give opportunities for analysis of and reflection on teaching (Zeichner, 1982). However, Monk (2015) stated that in order for the field of teacher preparation to flourish, there is a need for knowledge about not only what constitutes effective teaching, but also what constitutes best practice for preparing people to become effective teachers.

Although it is clear that field experiences have a profound effect on teacher development, it is not clear that the impact always is positive. Goldstein and Lake (2003) supported this notion and believe that during field experiences, teacher candidates' images of themselves as teachers and their understandings of the contours of the job of teaching are constantly in a state of flux.

A nation-wide study of teacher education programs revealed that often little connection is made between courses and field experiences and that faculty and school-based personnel often do not connect field experiences to particular goals (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx (1996) reported a trend towards more thematic programs, but research does not support that field experiences are well connected to these themes, particularly that of reflection and inquiry (Howey, 1986; Howey & Zimpher, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

Some evidence indicates that the school context is not always a positive influence on student teacher development (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Zeichner (1986) stated that

adequate attention is not always paid to the impact of the choices made in selecting student teaching placements.

McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx (1996) reported that (a) increased practice without reflection and analysis does not lead to professional growth; (b) the context of field placements is very influential on professional development; and (c) evaluation of field experiences should reflect the complex world of teaching. Finally, Zeichner (2010) concluded that although many programs include field experiences throughout the curriculum, the time that teaching candidates spend in schools is often not as carefully planned as are campus-based courses so that little or no clinical curriculum exists.

The importance of field experiences is not disputed among educators. How field experiences are conducted, though, varies greatly across teacher education programs. Although some variability is desirable in order for programs to respond to their unique circumstances, some of the differences reflect variations in the quality of programs. As far back as the very early sixties, Margaret Lindsey (1961) stated that professional standards are the responsibility of a profession for the quality of its service.  The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation has developed rigorous standards for teacher education programs (CAEP, 2014.) These standards address field experiences in Standard 2, Clinical Partnerships and Practice: 2.3 Clinical Experiences. The ATE Standards for Field Experiences (2015) provide further impetus for requiring teacher education programs to design and implement strong, effective field experience programs as a most important component of their clinical practice program.   In addition, the Association of Colleges of Teacher Education's Commission on Clinical Practice (2018) recently released proclamations for clinical practice programs. Thus, this review of the literature provides the foundation and support for ATE's national field experience standards.

### Context/Culture of Field Experiences

Goodlad (1990) found that many teacher education programs had no influence over the placement of their student teachers and that convenience rather than quality was the major criterion for placement. Other studies suggested that haphazard placements can undermine program goals. For example, Winitsky, Stoddart, and O'Keefe (1992) found that when student teachers used a constructivist approach to teaching, as taught in the teacher education program, cooperating teachers intervened and made these teacher candidates conform to more didactic methods used by the teachers.

Contexts offer the prospective teacher an opportunity to reflect on the roles and responsibilities of teachers, the structure of the school, and the relationship of the school to the community, particularly as it applies to the teaching and learning process (Maxie, 2010). Savage, Cannon and Sutters (2015) claimed that multiple factors must be considered when planning placements for teacher candidates in their teacher preparation program, including faculty input, personal interviews, and individual candidate needs. However, as the placement period draws near, fewer teachers are available to serve since the economy affects the number of available qualified teachers.  Teacher education programs have had to adapt how they place teacher candidates, cajole overworked teachers into serving as cooperating teachers, create digital reporting systems that simplify required paperwork, and rethink what our teacher candidates can reasonably expect to gain from their practicum placement.

 Monk (2015) asserted that we must be clear about what constitutes a rich clinical experience. He stated that most students who are preparing to become teachers tend to be very bright, very idealistic, and sometimes naïve about the institution they plan to enter. Typically, their personal K-12 schooling experiences have been good and they can identify an inspirational teacher or two they admire

and wish to emulate. If we equate 'rich clinical experience' with spending time with similarly excellent and inspirational teachers, we risk compounding the naïveté that is already present. Moreover, one of the things we know about excellent teachers is that they make what they do look easy. To an inexperienced student teacher this can be misleading and potentially mis-educative. He believes that insights can be gained from teachers who are struggling and that while it may seem counterintuitive, a portion of 'rich clinical experience' might include time with a less than excellent teacher.

The context of field experiences has been posited to have a strong influence on teacher socialization (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Zeichner, 1990). Hoy and Feldman (1987) averred that school context had two constructs: (a) affective context that is the ambience of the school created by such things as teacher morale; and (b) objective context that is the socio-economic status of the school. Zeichner (1982) found that the following factors influenced the development of teachers' perspectives: teacher-pupil ratio, material resources, authority relations, school values and ideals, and collegial influence. Kagan (1992) reviewed current research on the role of context in teacher socialization. She reported four contextual factors affecting growth and success: the teaching assignment (the nature of the content and pupils to be taught); colleagues' willingness to provide support; parental relationships; and degree of autonomy and leadership afforded teachers. Guyton and Wesche (1996) studied the contexts of field experiences and found that (a) placing preservice teachers in schools with good morale, pleasant surroundings, a compatible and welcoming cooperating teacher who is a good role model may be just as important as pupils' backgrounds in determining success in full time field experiences, and (b) students whose attitudes are consistent with teacher education program experience enhanced teaching performance.

Recently, Zeichner (2010) argued for the creation of a *third space* in teacher education programs that brings together school and university-based teacher educators and practitioner and academic knowledge in new ways to enhance the learning of prospective teachers. In opposition to the traditional disconnect of campus and schools and to the assumption of academic knowledge as the authoritative source of knowledge for learning about teaching in traditional college and university models of teacher education third spaces bring practitioner and academic knowledge together in less hierarchical ways to create new learning opportunities for prospective teachers. He makes the point that it is crucial for teacher education programs to work with schools and communities in closer and more respectful ways across teachers' careers if we are to remain a source for future teachers.

### Diversity

A generally accepted and understood goal for teacher education is the development of teachers capable of working with diverse student populations. Sleeter (2001) stated that one of the major challenges in preparing pre-service teachers for the 21st-century classroom, as well as for an increasingly competitive job market, is providing the necessary skills and background to effectively educate diverse populations of students.

The primary method for achieving the goal is placing field experience students in schools with diverse populations. Diversity is defined broadly in terms of racial/ethnic/economic differences. America's school children are becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. This increase in diversity is accompanied by rising numbers of poor children, especially in urban schools. These student demographic trends are in stark contrast to the demographic profile of the American teaching force. Over 86 percent of America teachers are European Americans, mostly from middle class, suburban

communities. Since it is not likely that these demographic trends will be reversed in the foreseeable future, it is imperative that teacher education institutions begin to address them. The numbers of teachers of color are diminishing while the numbers of students of color are rising (AACTE, 1987; Fuller, 1992; King, 1993; Tewell & Tribowitz 1987). Reasons for the shortage are related to finances, attitudes toward teaching, prestige, other career opportunities, competency tests, and integration (Tewel & Tribowitz, 1987; Graham, 1987; King, 1993), and solutions focus on recruitment (AACTE, 1987; Bainer, 1990; Henninger, 1989). Increasingly, though, it has become accepted that the majority white teaching force needs opportunities to learn how to teach diverse students.

McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx (1996) summarized the findings from research on the impact of teacher education programs on preservice teachers. From these findings, three conclusions can be drawn. First, preservice teachers do not enter teacher education programs with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to work successfully with a diverse population of students. Second, although students can be educated to have greater awareness and understanding of issues regarding multicultural education, they do not necessarily practice what they have learned. Third, preservice students need to be placed in schools where they have the opportunity to work with a diverse student body. Furthermore, they need to be encouraged and supported in their analysis of decisions they and others make as teachers and the effects those decisions have on students.

Cochran-Smith (1991) insisted that urban teachers needed to learn to "teach against the grain."

> ...teaching against the grain is deeply embedded in the culture and history of teaching at individual schools and in the biographies of particular teachers and their individual or collaborative efforts to alter curricula, raise questions about common practices, and resist inappropriate decisions. These relationships can only be explored in the company of experienced teachers who are themselves engaged in complex, situation-specific, and sometimes losing struggles to work against the grain (p. 280).

Therefore, Miller and Mikulec (2014) believed that early field experiences must be meaningful in the sense that they provide teacher candidates with opportunities to work with diverse populations of students. In terms of relating to the students, they found that the pre-service teacher participants were initially hesitant and lacked confidence in their ability as future teachers to interact with and relate to students in an urban setting. This clinical experience served to demystify diversity and provided teacher candidates with a demonstration of diversity in practice that led to the realization that "diverse" students have more in common with their peers than meets the eye. In a related study, Research reveals that field experiences are an important component of a teacher preparation program for achieving the goal of culturally responsive teaching (Lee, Eckrich, Lackey, & Showalter, 2010). However, in order to lead pre-service teachers toward this goal, it is important that teacher educators facilitate meaningful dialogue that examines pre-service teachers' existing dispositions and beliefs, as well as opportunities to for them apply knowledge to practice (He & Cooper, 2009). In a related study, Burbank, Ramirez and Bates (2016) indicated that there is potential for helping teacher candidates understand the varying degrees of diversity and how they will respond during their teaching experience thru the use of critically reflective teaching. However, they stated that lingering questions remain regarding the depth of that impact when inconsistencies surface after teacher candidates leave their teacher preparation programs and enter the teaching profession.

As a result, teacher educators must seek out unique clinical experience sites that will challenge teacher candidates to redefine their definition of diversity and teaching.

## Collaborative Review and Reform

Definitions of collaboration suggest that joint work between two kinds of organizations can produce cooperation, but collaboration requires each to stretch to meet the other (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Kanter (1984) asserted that collaboration is essential for innovation--"...to produce innovation, more complexity is essential; more relationships, more sources of information, more angles on the problem, more ways to pull in human and material resources, more freedom to walk around and across the organization (p. 148)."

Garland and Shippy (1995) found that traditionally, teacher education faculty work with teachers and administrators in public schools to provide a variety of clinical experiences for teacher candidates. Unfortunately, these arrangements are often more cooperative than collaborative, because in most instances they work with programs initiated and directed by personnel from higher education. Collaborative arrangements, however, are substantially different. They are viewed as (a) being true partnerships between colleges or universities and public schools; (b) involving shared decision-making, and in doing so, creating new roles, relationships, and responsibilities for all participants; and (C) focusing on outcomes that are intended to benefit the personnel and the programs at both institutions. The success of collaborative efforts rests on a variety of factors.

The key players during the field experience are the teacher candidate, the school-based teacher educator, and the campus-based teacher educator. This threesome is often referred to as the student teaching triad. A number of studies conducted in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia indicate that the primary roles and functions of each member of this triad are typically implicit rather than explicit and are likely to be unclear (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Cope, 1973; Tittle, 1974; Yates, 1981). Each member may, therefore, develop role conceptualizations and expectations that do not align with the expectations of other members of the triad.

Research also reveals this lack of clarity may give rise to a number of tensions within the triad, including the emergence of competitive versus cooperative attitudes, the inclination to become increasingly more negative toward one another, and the tendency to blame each other when problems arise (Tittle, 1974; Yee, 1967). Lack of clearly agreed upon and delineated goals, roles, and responsibilities not only hamper teacher education programs in general but also more specifically hinder the effectiveness of the triad as a supportive alliance to advance the growth and development of the teacher candidate (McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx, 1996).

In addition, Hancock and Gallard's study (2004) indicated that university teacher educators and K-12 teachers must be mindful of the tensions likely to result from participation in field experiences. Those tensions involve complex notions of teaching and learning that are based upon previous experiences as K-12 students, content of methods courses, and current field experiences in K-12 schools. Additional factors almost certainly include subtle influences, such as cultural norms for teacher practice, established social interaction patterns, and tacitly held role conceptions. As preservice teachers gain experience and grow, it is important to consider what happens during and between field experiences. Their case study participants described viewing few examples of student-centered, experiential learning, providing them with little opportunity to explore that element of their own beliefs.

True collaboration takes time. Collaborative ventures never proceed as smoothly and quickly as those undertaken by one or two individuals. It takes time to build trust and working relationships, particularly when forming partnerships among institutions with

different missions and cultures. There are inevitable differences, disagreements and conflicts that must be resolved within this complex relationship. Both the public school and higher education institutions may look upon the partnership as an addition to an already heavy workload; consequently, collaboration should ultimately be a part of the job rather than an addition to it (Sandholtz, 1996). Participants in the field experiences triad must take steps to collaboratively ensure that role expectations are made explicit and are clearly articulated among all three members of the triad. True collaboration also requires that the public schools share with higher education institutions the responsibility for the field-based portions of teacher education and incorporate the role of teacher education into the school structure.

### Reflection and Analysis

Research shows that interventions must affect teacher cognitions (i.e., teachers' thinking about their own acts of teaching) in order to affect teacher performance. Research also shows strong links between teachers' cognition and student outcomes (higher order skills). Teacher education assumes that the more time observing practicing teachers, the better, but the value of observation (guided or unguided) in early field experiences is unknown (Arrastia, Rawls, Binkerhoff, & Roehrig, 2014). As a result, teacher education needs to move preservice teachers to higher conceptual levels, including more complex thinking about teaching and to influence teachers to make connections between their lives in classrooms and what is being learned (Jacobs, Yendol-Hoppey, & Dana, 2015). Caprano, Caprano, and Helfledt (2010) stated that these early field experiences must be meaningful and conducive to instilling confidence rather than simply fulfilling another requirement. This may be best achieved through structured field experiences that also require pre-service teachers to reflect on their experiences and their impact on their development as teachers.

There also is a growing acceptance that teaching performance is a function of complex intellectual processes. Sprinthall, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1996) summarized findings from a study of teacher education. "Effective teacher education programs are based on a conception of teacher growth and development; acknowledge the complexities of classroom, school, and community; are grounded in a substantial and verifiable knowledge base; and are sensitive to the ways teachers think, feel, and make meanings from their experiences" (p. 687). The authors advocated a model for cognitive-developmental instruction that includes: role taking, taking on a more complex role; reflection (journals, demonstrations, case studies for dialogue on the meaning of experience); balance of role taking and reflection that forms an interactive praxis; continuity; and a balance between support and challenge. They advocated working on the development of programs that promote more efficient cognitive problem solving by teachers and on developing authentic assessments to judge the effectiveness of the interventions.

Teachers' thought processes have been a subject of study for some time (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Many studies have shown some connection between teacher cognition and student outcomes. Miller (1981) found that people functioning at higher conceptual levels exhibited behaviors such as reduction in prejudice, greater empathic communication, a greater focus on internal control, more thoughtful decision making, more flexible teaching methods, more autonomy and interdependence, and superior communication and information processing. McKibbin and Joyce (1981) found a direct relationship between level of cognitive development and employment of innovative teaching methods learned in workshops. Sprinthall, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall (1996) found strong support for the relationship between cognitive developmental level and more competent, effective, and efficient teachers. A case study by Fennema, Franke, Carpenter and Carey (1993) showed a strong link between teacher conceptual complexity and student higher-order thinking and problem solving. Peterson, Fennema, Carpenter and Loef (1989) found that teachers at

higher levels of cognitive complexity employed increased higher order teaching skills such as problem posing, active listening, ongoing assessment, and continuous adaptation, while Knapp and Peterson (1991) found teachers at higher cognitive levels were more likely to use new and innovative teaching techniques. Costa and Garmston (1994) summarized a number of studies that found a relationship between cognitive complexity of teachers and student achievement. Finally, Philipp, Ambrose, Lamb, Sowder, Thanheiser and Chauvot (2007) found that student teachers who were poised to emerge from student teaching as reflective practitioners were those most reflective about their own beliefs as compared to the beliefs of others. All of these studies support the need for an emphasis on developing teachers' cognitive development.

This growth requires a stimulating and supportive environment along with appropriate interaction. A study (NCRTE, 1991) also found that experience is not necessarily an indicator of growth. There were no significant differences between novice and experienced teachers in elementary schools in attitudes, conceptual skills, and classroom practice. These studies strongly suggest that intervention is needed to promote teachers' cognitive growth. As Dewey (1938) posited, experience at times can be miseducative. There must be ways of drawing meaning from experience. Much theoretical support exists for developing the reflective ability of teachers (Schon, 1983, 1987; Reiman & Parramore, 1993; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1993). Ross (1988) asserted that teacher education programs must contribute to teacher reflectivity, and Nolan and Huber (1989) identified one of the goals of supervision as engaging teachers in reflection on practice.

Krug, Love, Mauzey and Dixon (2015) believe that a well-designed student teaching experience can help future teachers develop problem-solving confidence. In their study, they gave the problem- solving inventory (PSI) to university education majors in a pretest-posttest format where the teacher candidates responded before and after the completion of student teaching. Analyses indicated the student teachers thought they had more confidence for problem solving during the posttest condition. The student teaching semester spent in the classroom played an essential role in the development of the necessary subjective confidence for solving classroom problems.

Coaching is a procedure that shows much promise for affecting teachers' cognitions and for engaging them in reflection. Joyce and Showers' (1989) meta-analysis study found a large effect size for coaching on the transfer of new skills and models of teaching learned in professional development. Several studies (Buttery, 1988; Phillips & Glickman, 1991) reported that developmentally based peer coaching had a positive effect on teachers' conceptual levels. Costa and Garmston (1994) summarized several studies that showed positive effects of cognitive coaching on teachers' cognitive development.

Maxie (2011) described a framework that recognizes the developmental nature of learning to teach and considers the field experience as an ideal opportunity for novice teachers to reflect on self, contexts, relationships with students, and the work of teaching. During the early field experience, self refers to introspection into teaching-related concerns and a focus on personal change with respect to teaching science. She described reflections on self as captured in autobiographies, journals, and in lesson analyses. As participants work with students, they reflect upon what they are learning about students from student work and from interactions with students. They examine how students come to understand science concepts. They become familiar with cultures, languages and styles of learning that students bring to the classroom. This is the domain of relationships. Finally, participants reflect on specific teacher knowledge and activities, including how teachers craft successful environments for student learning; how teachers support student learning; and, how teachers plan instruction.

## Selection, Preparation and Assignment of
## Campus-Based and School-Based Teacher Educators

Specific guidance for teacher candidates is valuable (Odell, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1995). Educators conclude that this guidance should come from school-based and campus-based teacher educators. The school-based teacher educators should be specially prepared, trained in supervision, aware of the goals and objectives of the field experience, and have holistic knowledge about the teacher education program in which they are participating (Applegate, 1982; Faire, 1994; McIntyre, 1983). They also should be professional role models who are able to articulate their concepts of the teaching profession and are active in professional organizations (Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986) Good school-based teacher educators are mentors who provide opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect upon and understand teaching (Lewis, 1993; Rekkas, 1995) and coaches who provide regular feedback (Farris, Henninger, & Bischoff, 1991; McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx, 1996).

Campus-based teacher educators should be involved in the field experience and should be associated with the university and its programs beyond the supervision of the particular field experience (Enz, Kimerer, & Freeman, 1996; Goodlad, 1990). They also should be specially prepared for the role (Faire, 1994). The campus-based teacher educator is the liaison between campus and school and communicates the goals and objectives of the program to school personnel and to the teacher candidate (Goodlad, 1990; Johnson, 1988). It is desirable that the campus-based educator have associations with the school beyond the single field experience, participates in school activities, provides professional development opportunities for school-based teacher educators, is ultimately responsible for evaluating the teacher candidate and provides regular feedback to the teacher candidate in collaboration with school-based educators (Applegate & Lasley, 1986).

Becher and Ade (1982) found that being a good role model is not sufficient for school-based teacher educators to influence positively the behaviors of teacher candidates. It is important that they give feedback and allow opportunities for innovation. Many school-based educators are unable or unwilling to articulate good teaching practices (Wright, Silvern, & Burkhater, 1982). Several studies found that teachers with specific training in clinical supervision are better at giving feedback to teacher candidates (Killian & McIntyre 1986); improved their communication with teacher candidates (Hauwiller, Abel, Ausel, and Sparapani, 1988-89); and made positive changes in teachers' cognitive growth, active listening, use of different teaching models, and self-direction (Thies-Sprinhall, 1984; 1986). Joyce and Showers' (1980) analysis of 200 studies concluded that instruction, demonstration, and coaching were all essential elements of supervision, and their later research (Joyce & Showers, 1995) confirmed the importance of coaching skills for supervisors. These findings suggested that school-based educators need to be educated in instructional supervision to have the maximum influence on teacher candidates' teaching.

## Assessment in Field Experiences

Program feedback and evaluation are important aspects of field experiences programs. Assessing teacher candidates in terms of the goals of a program can be a validation device for the program, as well as a source of information for program improvement.

McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx (1996) stated, "The evaluations of students in practicum experiences are based on a limited knowledge base." (p. 186). They advocate models of evaluation that incorporate demonstration of competencies (more quantitative, low inference measures of teaching) as well as more naturalistic, holistic approaches (more qualitative, high inference measures of teaching). If assessment is authentic, then it is useful not only in providing information to teacher candidates about their teaching but also is useful in

assessing if the teacher education program is meeting its goals. Tellez (1996) stated, "Assessments are authentic to the degree to which they are meaningful to and helpful for teachers in the exploration of their practices" (p. 707). The purpose of assessment is teacher growth and development. Measuring teachers' development within a framework of teacher education program goals is the best way to assess field experience programs. Obviously if the goals include such outcomes as reflective teaching, then more traditional, quantitative, low inference models of assessment will not yield good information for the program. Support for observations in combination with written feedback and conferences is abundant (Wood, 1991; Wilkins, Shin & Ainsworth, 2009). Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski (1993) provided a strong rationale for conducting conferences that address longitudinal issues related to instructional decisions and teaching and promote self-reflection. Portfolios allow teacher candidates to show actions and decisions made over time by compiling artifacts of their work. Candidates can document their work and analyze their decision-making processes. The value of portfolios for teacher growth is well-documented. InTASC's Performance Assessment Development Project (1996) offers criteria for evaluating portfolios. Many institutions include portfolio requirements in their teacher education programs.

## Conclusions

Field experiences are part of the complex developmental process of becoming a teacher. The research cited above was instrumental in the consideration and development of ATE's Standards for Field Experiences. Margaret Lindsey stated in 1961 that standards help define a profession. We strongly support that statement and just as strongly urge all teacher education programs to measure their field experience programs to the standards established for field experiences by the Association of Teacher Educators.

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# BEING AN INTENTIONAL EDUCATOR WITH CLASS-SENSITIVE ENGAGEMENT
### by
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### Abstract

*Working-class and poor students and their families are continually labeled with deficit descriptors due to a lack of class understanding and knowledge from educators. In this article, I present the need for class-sensitive pedagogies—practices that privilege all students, challenges assumptions and judgments, and ultimately eradicates classism. Drawing on Jones and Vagle's (2013) five principles of class-sensitive engagement, as well as examples from my experiences as an elementary school teacher, my phenomenological research in a socioeconomically diverse school, and as a teacher educator, I urge educators to take a critical and reflective stance considering the ways that classrooms privilege some perspectives while marginalizing others.*

Students and families from working-class and poor backgrounds have long experienced deficit narrations about their lives. These pathologizing stories depict working-class and poor students as living lives *less than* their middle-class peers, stories suggesting that these students need and deserve pity and assistance from their middle-class educators. Some researchers compare middle-class educators to missionaries compelled to save working-class students (Freire, 1985) and to policemen/policewomen closely monitoring and reporting their working-class and poor students' and families' actions (Walkerdine, Melody, & Lucey, 2001). Educators frequently believe they are acting in the best interests of their students, but they lack understanding and knowledge of ways to embrace students' economic differences and draw on their working funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005).

As a former elementary school teacher, I have a personal history with damaging and hurtful opinions teachers communicate about their working-class and poor students and families. Conversations from my colleagues sounded like, "*Don't count on much parent involvement with this mom—she works night shift at a restaurant and during the day she works at a gas station;" "These parents just don't care about their child—they never sign any of the papers I send home;"* and *"Look at the stains on this child's jeans! I can't believe they would let their child come to school so unkempt."* I tried to ignore these deficit accounts and to remove myself from spaces where these conversations tended to occur (such as the teacher workroom), yet when I was confronted with them, I felt ill prepared in my pre-service training to combat these discourses. I remained silent, believing that if I was not engaging in these deficit discussions, then I was not part of the problem.

After one of my working-class kindergarten students was nearly removed from her mother by child protective services at the hands of middle-class policing, I recognized and acknowledged that not only did I work in a system that privileged middle-class lives while marginalizing working-class and poor, but I played a part in this complicated systemic problem. Remaining silent was no longer a solution; I desired to find ways to make school an equitable place for all.

This article draws on my experiences as a teacher (both elementary and now higher education) and a five-month phenomenological study where I examined the ways social class was lived, experienced, and embodied by students and faculty at a racially and socioeconomically diverse elementary school in the southeastern United States. I apply Jones and Vagle's (2013) five principles for class-sensitive

engagement to critically look at examples from my research and anecdotal classroom experiences. Jones and Vagle's (2013) five principles are:

1. *Analyze educators' and students' experiences of class within broad social and political contexts;*
2. *Locate and disrupt social classed hierarchies in school and communities;*
3. *Integrate social class and marginalized perspectives into curriculum;*
4. *Perceive classed bodies in moment-to moment interactions with educators, students, and families; and*
5. *Change broader school and classroom policies and practices to reflect and anticlassist and antipoverty commitments* (p. 130).

Applying these five principles to my teaching and research experiences enhanced my commitments of being an intentional and invitational teacher to all my students and their families.

I assert that educators must be intentionally class-sensitive and strive for class equitable practices for all. We must give careful, critical, and reflective thought to our pedagogies and to resist deficit perspectives and discourses that entrench working-class and poor students' schooling experiences.

## Literature Review

To adopt class-sensitive pedagogies, educators must first analyze issues of social class within broad, social, and political contexts (Jones & Vagle, 2013) and question dominant persuasive teachings such as meritocracy. Meritocracy teaches that through hard work anything is possible, and any economic dream can be achievable; "that achievement is deserved rather than rendered" (Gorski, 2013, p. 14-15). Meritocracy narrates the power of possibilities—everyone can equally achieve upward mobility through hard work. If you want to succeed in life, you hold the power to make it possible.

Like most narratives espousing hope, meritocracy feels inspired and possible; it provides the confidence that we all start out on a level and fair playing ground, that all children despite their backgrounds are given a fair and fighting chance (Lareau, 2003). We live in a society that constantly preaches that class does not matter, yet research proves the opposite to be true--class *does* matter and critically analyzing meritocratic teachings allows educators to see its flaws.

Notions of meritocracy are seen as more of a myth than a reality when educators dig into the social and political structures in place that make it impossible for all students to succeed in this country (Gorski, 2013). Working-class and poor students are faced with many inequalities that prohibit them from starting on a level playing field with middle-class students. Inequalities for working-class and poor students include overcrowded classrooms, high teacher turnover, inexperienced/unqualified teachers, low teacher expectations, more policing of students and families, and fewer resources such as computer labs and libraries (Brantlinger, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Jones &Vagle, 2013; Gorski, 2013; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Brantlinger (2007) adds:

> Americans still like to believe that success in schools and markets depends on such personal traits as intelligence, stamina, common sense, and a strong work ethic rather than social class and race privilege. Few patrons question the win/lose aspect of meritocratic schooling (p. 238).

In meritocratic schooling there are no winners. Brantlinger (2007) and others (Jones & Shackelford, 2013; Lareau, 2003) argue that middle/upper class students are losers in this system as well, with highly negative attitudes towards

schooling, worries about not meeting parents' high expectations, and the stressful feelings of not living up to the expectations of their social class position. Working-class and poor students, as well as students of color, "are often placed in stigmatizing school arrangements, receive primarily negative feedback about schoolwork, and are subjected to discrimination by teachers and schoolmates" (Brantlinger, 2007, p. 238; also see Hicks, 2002; Luttrell, 1997; Kozol, 1991, for further examples).

In addition to schoolhouse inequalities, working-class and poor students also face inequities outside of school, including lack of access to affordable healthcare, quality childcare, resources such as home internet for schooling assignments/enrichment, transportation, healthy living and working environments, and "access to a validating society" (Gorski, 2013, p. 74). Gorski adds,

> If bearing the brunt of these deprivations…is not enough, low income youth also weather a fairly constant storm of bias and bigotry…carrying with them an underlying message that they are to blame for the very inequities that repress them (p. 82).

These are just a few examples of what Kozol (1999) deem as *savage inequalities*-- unfair treatment and conditions based on racial and class distinctions further replicating social class statuses. Jones and Vagle (2013) emphasize the importance of *social* when discussing *social* class noting "individual narratives of success or failure force one to recognize the tangled web of economics, politics, social networks, access, power, and personal opportunity" (p. 131).  By situating the personal within the broader contexts, educators can ask themselves this important question, *under what conditions could this become possible?* This simple question repositions potential assumptions by acknowledging systematic inequalities and complications that working-class and poor students and their families encounter. Putting the social back in the class discussion allows us to see that these inequities are social problems and, therefore, can be eradicated (Gorski, 2013; Kozol, 1991; Lareau, 2003).

### Imagined Trailer Knowledge

I currently teach pre-service early childhood teachers at a large university situated in a high poverty city. Each semester I witness my students engaging in imagined knowledge about working-class and poor students and their families. In my courses, I teach that educators should use ethnographic methods to study and learn more about the community they work in (Brooks, 2017) and not simply drive into the school for work and leave. Since most of these pre-service teachers conduct their practicum and/or student teaching in local schools that have high poverty rates, we discuss the importance of exploring the community beyond university boundaries in an effort to gain perspective of students' lives outside of school.  I share that many school principals organize school buses for teachers to take mini-community field trips to better understand where their students live and the resources their community provides (see Osborne 2018 for example).

One student opposed this idea of learning more about her students' community and stated that if she knew a student lived in poor conditions (she used a trailer as an example) she would feel sorry for that student and his/her family for how little they had. On the other hand, if she knew a student lived in a two hundred thousand dollar house, she might favor the student more. For this student, a two hundred thousand house had a particular "taste" to it—it seemed to offer economic and cultural capital to its owners that the trailer did not.  The student offered imagined knowledge about what the families in each dwelling must be like, thinking that the family who lived in the more expensive home lived a fuller happier life and is

one not to be pitied, one not to felt sorry for, whereas the trailer inhabits *were* to be felt sorry for and must not be living as happy of a life (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Lareau, 2003).

In regard to working-class students and families, imagined knowledge is used primarily to designate them as "deviant, or different in a negative or pejorative sense because 'these people or some of their actions and beliefs, pale in 'mainstream values'" (Gans, 1995, p.11-12). Daily, educators label students and their families ascribing a particular set of understanding, judgments, and assumptions based on perceived economic status and social class (Jones and Vagle, 2013). Often these judgments portray working-class and poor families in negative deficit ways, painting a picture that depicts their lives are less than the lives of others (Delpit, 1995).

As a teacher I too had imagined knowledge about one of my students based on my perceptions and constructions of social class, that almost resulted in the child being removed from her mother by Child Protective Services. When we privilege our own perceptions of what is normal while marginalizing others, the consequences can be life changing. Therefore, we have the power and responsibility to examine ourselves and our practices to make sure we are not reproducing inequities in our classrooms (Gorski, 2013).

Before an educator can engage in critical class sensitive work, educators must undertake autobiographical work examining the multiple ways they read and understand the world (Jones & Vagle, 2013; Vagle & Jones, 2012). Hankins (2003) adds that when educators become inwardly reflective it affords the ability to understand others. Becoming critically aware of ourselves allows us to examine our own personal histories, prejudices, assumptions, and judgments that affect our classroom decisions and interaction with families and students. Hicks (2002) contends that teachers first have "to confront their own racisms and classisms *before* they could see the richness of children's culturally saturated lives" (p. 26, emphasis added).

Children, like adults, are enveloped in culturally specific practices, that sometimes are valued in schools and sometimes are not (Heath, 1983). Without examining our own personal histories, social class positioning, and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005), we may privilege our ways of knowing while marginalizing students who may read the world in different ways.

Understanding our autobiographical and ancestral roots that encompass us and shape our understandings is important work especially when our histories come into conflict with students and families from working-class or poor backgrounds. As teachers we "*always* bring [our] own history to teaching" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 22, emphasis added) and thus our histories must be deconstructed and analyzed for biases, prejudices, and stereotypes we possess (Hankins, 2003). Our histories encompass our constructions of normality, that for the majority of educators, are typically saturated in middle-class ideologies (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2007).

Jones (2004) suggests that how we read the world is based on the lives we have lived or the lives we wish we could have lived. We bring our lives, both positive and negative elements, into shaping our understanding. Alternatively, when we think only in terms of how we read the world, we dismiss how others read it. As educators, we often privilege *our* lives, experiences, and perspectives whether in classroom discussions, literature we select, or ways we form assumptions about our students and families. Engaging in reflective practices, much like any critical work, is always a work in motion---constantly moving and shifting and is essential to class sensitive work.

*"I connected to that book you read. When I was 4 or 5 we lived in our own house and my mom—she lost her job. She lost her job because she had college and a lot of stuff to do and couldn't keep up with the time for the job. She came home and told my dad and he got mad. We could only eat a plate of supper, maybe a little bit of breakfast because we were running low on food."* Fourth grade student featured in my research study discussing connections with the children's book *Tight Times.*

My five-month phenomenological research study took place in a socioeconomic diverse school where many students in a particular fourth grade classroom experienced financial hardships. After reading the children's book *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979), that features a young boy experiencing economic struggles, I shared my own personal connection to the book as a young child who also experienced economic struggles. After I finished, my student shared his connection to economic hardships (as seen in the opening vignette) and others soon followed.

Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002) explain that using books that foreground social class issues "make difference visible, give voice to those traditionally silenced, explore dominant systems of meaning in our society, question why certain groups are positioned as others, and show how people can begin to take action on important issues" (p. 384). Jones (2008) further explains that for working-class and poor children to "recognize themselves in children's literature is equally as important as teaching them to reposition themselves as critical readers who recognize in/visibility in texts and speak out against representations that marginalize and devalue tens of millions of families' lived realities in the United States." (p. 50). Working-class and poor students need to be able to see themselves in literary pages and equally must be able to critically examine the ways in that they are conveyed.

Class-sensitive researchers and educators understand and advocate the importance of knowing and understanding your students and the importance of creating classrooms that reflect their diverse needs. Jones and Vagle (2013) advocate integrating lives, issues, and experiences of working-class and poor perspectives into the curriculum. All students come with particular ways of engaging with the world that connect in many different ways in the classroom. Teachers need to be responsive to their students, taking note of what the students value and the funds of knowledge they possess (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). One way to do integrate marginalized perspectives into the classroom is through the implementation of children's literature foregrounding issues of class (see appendix for examples of these books) and critical literary discussions.

Students, in addition to educators, can conduct critical autobiographical work attending to the "why" of their experiences (Dutro, 2009, p. 231). Dutro (2008, 2009, 2011) discusses how classrooms can be transformative places where testimonies and critical witnessing can occur where wounds are allowed to speak (Dutro & Bien, 2014) and status quos can be challenged (Dutro, 2013). Dutro (2013) acknowledges that students enter classrooms with difficult stories on a daily basis but as critical witnesses we must "reify the pre-existing storylines that assure us that certain experiences are not to be voiced in school or are just the kinds of challenges, pathologies, that *they*, as opposed to *we*, would confront in life" (p. 311). Troubling and disrupting the pre-existing storylines, such as the assumptions and judgments associated with living on the lower ends of the social class spectrum, invites educators to take up the difficult work of critical witnessing that requires educators to listen and value students' experiences.

Drawing on the metaphors of testimony and witnessing, Dutro & Zenkov (2008) advocate for educators to consider how students document their lives and experiences in the classroom and how educators respond to the information learned. These metaphors offer critical tools to peel away or deconstruct the stories that have

been told about them and to explore the ways students and teachers can engage in transformative acts of critical witnessing that disrupt pre-exiting storylines and challenges deficit perspectives (Dutro & Zenkov, 2008).

### Lunch Bunch

This semester I started something new with my pre-service teachers: Lunch Bunch.  As a former elementary teacher, I recognized the importance of having lunch with my students both in the cafeteria and with a small group in the classroom.  It was a less formal time where we could talk, be a bit silly, and collectively discuss our lives outside of school.  I decided to start this practice with my pre-service teachers and invited them (through a Google Document) to select a day before class to come to my office and have lunch with myself, my graduate assistant, and three other classmates if they would like.  While we ate our lunches, my students shared with me and each other the complexities and excitement of college life, their insecurities, hopes and dreams for the future, relationships, and asked me questions about teaching and my life as a mother.  Often students would respond to another with "I didn't know that about you!" as new levels of understandings were formed.  It was after one lunch bunch where I learned that one of my students, a quiet reserved student who often seemed tired and disengaged in class discussions, was responsible for her educational expenses and was feeling the pressure and stress of holding down a job while balancing strenuous academic workloads. We talked at length about other possibilities for income so she could focus more efforts on her school work and practicum experiences. Through this moment-to-moment interaction with my student, my perception of her shifted from that of a disengaged student to one who was actually working much harder than I perceived.

During my research study, I discovered that when I stationed myself in specific places, like on the playground field near the students away from other teachers, deep and rich interactions occurred with the students.  As I sat on the grassy field, I was open and attentive to whatever the students wanted to share with me.  Students took note that I was actively listening, and one student shared that she knew I really cared about her and was really listening to her words because I was looking at her and not distracted by other things such as my cell phone.  In the students' classrooms, I huddled beside desks, sat with students in corners or on the floor to place my body in a way that gave them to the power to share their stories.  I was quick to listen and slow to speak. Students shared stories filled with happiness, sadness, anger, laughter, and sometimes combinations of several emotions.  In response, I felt an embodiment of emotions and often felt the intensity of their words. Emotions, as Boler (1999) describes, are both socially constructed and individualized and "reflects the complex dynamics of one's lived situation…emotions are inseparable from actions and relations, from lived experienced." (p. 2). It was in these moment-to-moment interactions that my relationships with students strengthened and deepened.

### Postcards from Across the USA

When I was an elementary school teacher, I had a father of one of my students come to me and sadly tell me that he would love to be involved in the class but as a truck driver his job takes him all over the country for long periods of time. I thought of a way to involve the father in a unique way: I asked if he would send us a postcard from all the different cities he stopped in and write three facts about the city so we could learn more about different parts of our country. He said he would love to and each week sent several postcards from around the country to the school. His son stood proudly in front of his classmates and shared his father's postcard that he

mailed to the school. That year his father was a major part of our classroom even though he never stepped foot in our classroom after his first visit. Before the postcard project, I heard a few students making rude comments/jokes about truck drivers and after the postcards began coming students shifted their perspective to a more privileging one by commenting how neat it was that his father got to travel the country and see so many places.

This young boy acted as a powerful agent who gave a voice to his life experiences and privileged what his father did for work. By adopting a critical stance, he invited others to disrupt their misconceptions of what it means to be working-class by showcasing his father's job in a meaningful way. Everyone benefitted from the postcards and we completed many activities with them such as sorting them by states and regions. Students' asked if their family members could send postcards from places they lived and soon our classroom was filled with family members from all over the world! While they were not physically in our classroom, students were able to introduce us to aunts from Korea, cousins from Mexico, and family friends from Germany (and it was especially neat when they would write postcards in other languages).

Teachers can shift classroom practices from deficit perspectives into asset perspectives, reflecting anti-classist commitments, by drawing on students and families' funds of knowledge and privileging all families and types of work. Students in my research study also acted as human agents "who resisted and worked against ways they may have been marginalized in the past by giving their lived experiences a voice" (Dutro, 2009, p.90). By taking a critical stance, students were invited to disrupt commonplace misconceptions of what it means to be working-class and poor by sharing their stories about their families that often contradicted the deficit narratives told by their teachers. While their teachers may have described their students' families in negative ways, students offered a counternarrative that their families were heroes, people they were proud of, and people who they aspired to be.

### Conclusion

In my teacher preparatory training and throughout my years as an elementary teacher, meaningful discussions of social class and adopting a class-sensitive pedagogical stance were rare at best. As a result, when classist remarks were made about my working-class and poor students and their families, I lacked appropriate knowledge to combat these deficit descriptions. Now, as a teacher educator, I am committed to equipping future educators with the class-sensitive knowledge I lacked. Using Jones and Vagle's five principles of class-sensitive engagement provides a useful framework to examine our pedagogies, become reflective of our practice, to resist deficit perspectives, and to privilege all students and their families.

### A List of Children's Books Foregrounding Working-Class and Poor Perspectives

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Ada, A.F. (1997). *Gathering the sun.* New York, NY: Lothrop.

Ajmera, M., Ivanko, J. (2004). *Be my neighbor.* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.

Atkins, J. (1998). *Get set! Swim!* New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, Inc.

Barracca D., Barraca, S. (1990). *Adventures of taxi dog.* New York, NY: Trumpet Club.

Bates, A.A. (1995). *Ragsale.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Baylor, B. (1998). *The table where the rich people sit.* New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Boelts, M. (2009). *Those shoes.* Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Borden, L. (1990). *The neighborhood trucker.* New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

Brisson, P. (2004). *Mama loves me from far away.* Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Browne, A. (2001). *Voices in the park.* New York, NY: DK Children.

Bunting, E. (1993). *Fly away home.* New York, NY: Clarion Books.

Bunting, E. (1994). *Day's work.* New York, NY: Clarion Books.

Castaneda, O. (1993). *Abuela's weave.* New York, NY: Lee and Low Books Inc.

Cole, Kenneth (2001). *No Bad News.* Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Cooper, M. (2000). *Gettin' through Thursday.* Lee & Low Books.

Crews, D. (1998). *Big mama's.* New York, NY: Harper Trophy.

Day, A., & Edens, C. (1997). *Christmas we moved to the barn.* New York, NY: Harpers Collins.

Garland, S. (1992). *Billy and Belle.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Gershator, D., Gershator P. (1995). *Bread is for eating.* New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Gunning, M. (2004). *A shelter in our car.* Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Book Publishing.

Hall, N. (1978). *Big enough helper.* New York, NY: Golden Press.

Hartland, J. (2007). *Night shift.* New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

Hazen, B.S. (1979). *Tight times.* New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Hest, A. (1996). *Jamaica Louise James.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Hill, E. (1991). *Evan's corner.* New York, NY: Viking Penguin.

Isadora, R. (1992). *At the crossroads.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Isaacs, Gwynne L. (1991). *While You Are Asleep…* New York, NY: Walker and Company.

Jackson, E. (1994). *Cinder Edna.* New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.

Jackson, Isaac (1996). *Somebody's New Pajamas.* New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.

King, S.M. (2005). *Mutt dog.* New York, NY: Harcourt Children's Books.

Kinkersley, B. (1995). *Children just like me.* New York, NY: Dorling Kinkersley.

Lewis, E.B. (1999). *My rows and piles of coins.* New York, NY: Clarion Books.

Loh, M. (1987). *Tucking Mommy in.* London, UK: Orchard Books.

London, J. (1996). *The village basket weaver.* New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books.

Mendez, P. (1989). *Black snowman.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Munsch, R. (1991). *Good families don't.* New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.

O'Connor, B. (1997). *Beethoven in paradise.* New York, NY: Sunburst Books.

O'Connor, B. (2001). *Moonpie and Ivy.* New York, NY: Frances Foster Books.

O'Connor, B. (2003). *Fame and glory in Freedom, Georgia.* New York, NY: Frances Foster Books.

O'Connor, B. (2004). *Taking care of Moses.* New York, NY: Frances Foster Books

O'Connor, B. (2007). *How to steal a dog.* New York, NY: Scholastic Books.

O'Connor, B. (2008). *Greetings from nowhere.* New York, NY: Frances Foster Books.

Seskin, S. (2006). *A chance to shine.* New York, NY: Tricycle Press.

Slawson, M. (1995). *Apple picking time.* New York, NY: Trumpet.

Sonneborn, R. (1970). *Friday night is Papa night.* New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Steig, W. (1988). *Brave Irene.* Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Sun, C.F. (1994). *Mama Bear.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Williams, V. (1982). *Chair for my mother.* New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
   Williams, V.B. (1986). *Something special for me.* New York, NY: Harper
   Trophy.
Williams, V. (2001). *Amber was brave Essie was smart.* New York, NY: Greenwillow
   Books.
Wyeth, S.D. (1998). *Something beautiful.* New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.
Many of the books found on this list were from extensive list collections found on
   http://www.childpeacebooks.org. In addition, other titles were added from:
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   through children's literature. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*
   [Online], 4(2), 40-58. Available:
   http://www.coe.uga.edu/jolle/2008_2/representations.pdf.

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   social-justice-through-collaborative-ethnography-8ef2057fe8a0.
Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New
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Dutro, E. (2008). 'That's why I was crying on this book': Trauma as testimony in
   responses to literature. *Changing English, 15*(4), 423-434.
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   class-privileged assumptions of a mandated curriculum. *Language Arts*,
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   perspective on student positioning in schools. *American Educational
   Research Journal, 51*(1), 7-35. Retrieved May 2, 2014, from
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   Conference.
Freire, P. (1985), Reading the world and reading the word: An interview with Paulo
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Gans, H (1995). *The war against the poor.* New York, NY: Basic Books.
Gonzalez, N, Moll, L, & Amanti, C (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices
   in households, communities, and classrooms.* New York, NY: Routledge.
Gorksi, P. (2013). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing
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Hankins, K. (2003). *Teaching through the storm: A journal of hope.* New York: NY:
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# TRACING SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH'S IMPACT ON POLICY AND PRACTICE SINCE IDEA

by
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### Abstract

*Special education research has had – and continues to have – a powerful impact on educational practices, policies, and issues, documenting where the field of special education has been and just how far it has come. From the process-product – or Quantitative – era of research that scholars and educators used to inform their improvement efforts in the classroom, to the emergence of the interpretive – or Qualitative – paradigm, varying trust and favorability of each has both isolated and melded them. This paper traces pivotal research in the field of special education since IDEA and the impact it has had on special education policy, teaching practice and teacher preparation. Implications of current and future research are discussed.*

In 1987, Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg challenged the status quo of service delivery in special education with a scathing review of the "pull-out model," the familiar model by which students requiring special education were primarily served several decades ago. Titled, *The Necessary Restructuring of Special and Regular Education*, and published barely a year following the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1986), the authors challenged scholars, practitioners, and school leaders to take a hard look at the practice of removing students with disabilities from the general classroom for instructional support. In this article, the authors coined a new "category" of disability: the *30-minute disability*, which sparked debate and shook many educators from their status-quo slumber. The pull-out model remained prevalent within this young field for decades, as little criticism could be found in the literature of this widely accepted practice. Given its popularity, it seems reasonable to ask how long it might have remained the most generally-accepted form of special education service delivery in the U.S. had researchers not challenged its real effects on students and teachers?

Special education research, which has been influential on educational practices, policies, and legislation in the United States, can be traced back for generations (Winzer, 2012). Transformation of all three has played out over the past thirty years, during which PL94-142 laid the groundwork for free appropriate public education, least restrictive environments, Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), child find procedures, due process, inclusion, and "how-to" information for educators. For those interested in correlational or experimental studies related to student behavior, there were process-product studies available. By the late 1970's, demand for information would prompt investigations to go further by inquiring into the "why" of a process, product, or outcome. This paradigmatic shift began in the 1980's and extended into the new millennium, ushering in naturalistic (i.e., interpretive) research in the form of qualitative studies on topics, such as Social Justice (Cochran-Smith, 2004), Empirical Inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2000), and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy or Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Research has been at the heart of the trajectory that the field of special education has taken. This path began on the precipice of a shaky accountability movement in the 1970's, followed by a mediational paradigm in the late 1970's and '80's (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1985), becoming the

compelling, albeit much-debated and influential resource we know today.  From mainstreaming to inclusion, and collaborative consultation to differentiation, an exhaustive trail of research literature has alternately extolled and exposed the trials and triumphs of policies and practices capable of pulling students with exceptionalities out of the classroom…and pushing them back in.

Despite questions regarding inquiry's quality and rigor, it has not only helped shape how we serve individuals with exceptionalities, but how we regulate and legislate policies and procedures in the U.S. Through processes such as credibility, authenticity, triangulation, reflexivity, multiple coding, respondent validation, and deviant case analysis, researchers have brought inquiry to the fore of what consumers of research wonder about and question. Not since the earliest investigations into what makes special education "tick" has the impetus to use the research base to challenge what we know as professional educators and use what we should and can to improve the educational outcomes of individuals with exceptionalities and their families, been greater. The proliferation of the knowledge base in special education has brought us full-circle from the angst of Brown vs. Board of Education, to an epistemology of Social Constructionism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), reflected by topics such as deficit-based thinking; cultural, racial and linguistic bias; overrepresentation of racial minorities in special education; the arresting shortage of special education expertise in P-12 classrooms; and others. Given the perspicacity required by us as special educators, it seems both timely and reasonable for us to examine the roots of special education literature, beginning with the origins of the field of special education.

### Brief Overview: Origins of the Field of Special Education

For the majority of children who were poor, minority, or exhibited exceptionalities during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century in America, institutional schooling of any sort was an elusive proposition (Osgood, 2007). Schooling in the U.S. had been, historically speaking, reserved for the elite (Winzer, 2012). Schools for those with exceptionalities did not begin to appear until the early to mid 1800's, around the same time that public and private schools were established, with specially designed services noticeably absent. It was the sentiment of educational leaders that young people with handicaps be provided with residential care that would "cure" their emotional and behavioral deficits in order to make them productive citizens (Kode, 2002; Winzer, 2012). This deficit view of disability and/or exceptionality is one that can still be seen and remains the greatest single threat to inclusive ideology and education today (Jansen, 2010). During this period in American history, segregated schools were created including the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction for the Deaf and Dumb, which was opened by Thomas Gallaudet in 1817, and the Perkins School for the Blind that was opened in 1854. Other schools followed during this time period specializing in educating "idiotic" individuals, as exceptionality was considered an abnormality. Yet despite a social movement to increase special schools during this era, most children with exceptionalities in the United States received little to no schooling at all (Osgood, 2007; Winzer, 2012).

With the passage of compulsory education laws in the early 1900's, little changed by way of schooling for individuals with exceptionalities in this country. Although there was some movement for those with mild handicaps, the main track for those with disabilities and/or exceptionalities was largely placement in asylums and residential schools away from the general public (Osgood, 2007; Winzer, 2012). Although exclusion of individuals with disabilities and/or exceptionalities may have been the social response of this era, the result of the "locking away" of

our most vulnerable population assisted in the development of the field of special education and special education research.

Exclusionary practices prompted the establishment of parental advocacy groups, which provided a major impetus for federal governmental intervention (Kode, 2002; Winzer, 2012). During the 1950's and '60's, parents organized the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) and used its power to influence President John F. Kennedy to establish the President's Committee on Mental Retardation. Congress followed with an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Act which helped to establish aid to states that developed programs that serviced individuals with special needs (Kode, 2002; Winzer, 2012). Increasingly, public awareness grew, as did other related jurisprudence and social movements which occurred in the middle of this century, causing a shift in our response to those with exceptionalities in terms of their education and treatment.

### Mid-Century Inquiry: Emergence of Literature

Before 1950, and continuing through the next two decades, general research on teaching and learning ultimately promulgated research of a more specialized typology of research. Due in part to the specter of educational jurisprudence in our nation, litigation, directly and indirectly, contributed to the recognition of students' rights and caused fundamental changes in the educational system. The federal government had gained entry into public education in the US. and laid the foundation for subsequent school and civil rights policy and legislation (Osgood, 2007; Winzer, 2012).This period of educational investigation was mainly comprised of studies that applied behavior science (Skinner, 1953) to investigations of memory and comprehension in U.S. classrooms. Classrooms themselves were generally not examined; but the subjects within the classrooms were investigated to see the effect that operant conditioning had on their learning behaviors. Also known as process-product research, the goal was to observe the outcome or product associated with a particular pedagogical process (Gage, 1963). The extant literature did not investigate students' surroundings as context for their behaviors; the social context of the classroom had not yet come into play in the minds of scholars and academicians. Rather, researchers generally sought to describe student learning in narrow and siloed behavioral terms during this period. Researchers did not want to know more about why students behaved and learned in a particular way, so much as they wanted to know what worked in classrooms that would make students successful.

Challenging this constrictive research approach was the 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education, which served as a catalyst for both defining and defying segregation on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and disability. Many saw this civil rights decision, which resulted from the segregation of an African-American child on the basis of race, as consistent with the struggle that individuals with disabilities endured across an entire nation at this time in U.S. history (Osgood, 2007; Winzer, 2012). Adopted by society as its mantra for individuals with disabilities, a new era of social justice awareness, as well as special education provision by state, had emerged. The genie was out of the bottle and the isolation that children with exceptionalities and their parents had long endured - and many educators had long decried - was slowly dismantling.

The 1960's brought many true attempts to look at teaching in general education classrooms and correlate student outcomes with what was actually being taught, despite the fact that special education services were diluted and spotty at best across the U.S. In 1963, the first Handbook of Research on Teaching (Gage, 1963) debuted, and two years later, the precursor for the

Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975 - the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA (1965) – had found its way into the American education system. Propped by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and signed by President Johnson just a year before prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, it provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and made employment discrimination illegal. The stage was now set for the establishment of a process for providing educational services for all students with exceptionalities. The special education literature that appeared to dominate the late 1960's and 1970's was generally fixed on measures of accountability for all students, but, in particular, the growing needs of individuals with disabilities. Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA) established specific tenets linked to forwarding access to, and utilization of, general classroom instruction for students with exceptionalities. A Free and Appropriate Education, along with the establishment of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), were central features of this public U. S. law. A proliferation of research focusing on what an IEP was, how it should be used, what its components should be, and who should be eligible, flooded the literature.

The special education research at this time continued to encompass the process-product approach to research on teaching (Gage & Needles, 1989), which largely ignored conceptual considerations such as teachers' intentions, context for teaching and learning, teachers' thought processes, and theory building. Instead, "how-to" instructions for pedagogical procedures, managerial oversight, and IEP creation and implementation dominated the literature. The "gate keepers" of research at this time were largely scholars who developed "cookbook approaches" to successful teaching and management, such as Brophy's (1981) investigation of classroom-process data on teachers' verbal praise; Housner's (1990) *Selecting Master Teachers*: *Evidence from Process-Product Research*; and Brophy and Good's (1984) *Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement*, all of which were highly regarded by general and special education consumer communities as providing useful information on effective teaching. The body of literature would eventually shift toward a natural paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), but not before educators eased their reliance on process-product research. In the late 1960's, a seminal article surfaced, rousing the intellectual curiosities of those who worked most closely with individuals with mental retardation. Titled, *Special education for the mildly retarded – is much of it justifiable?* (Dunn, 1968), it has endured through the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st century as one of the most often-cited articles in special education research history (McLeskey, 2004). In this seminal article, the author argues that the then-prevalent practice of labeling students as mentally retarded disenfranchised them, positing that having them remain unlabeled in the mainstream of education and taught by special educators serving as resource teachers for all pupils with learning difficulties would, instead, enfranchise them (p. 18). In a 1983 commentary, Dunn remarked that his paper had been cited in over 240 publications since 1968, and more recently, McLeskey (2004) rated Dunn's article among the most influential in the field of special education, "far outdistancing" other articles as the top choice for a classic article in special education from among his "Top Ten" list (p. 81). McLeskey (2004) elaborates by pointing out that in addition to Dunn's article serving as a catalyst for the mainstreaming and inclusion movement as well as laying the groundwork for educating all students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) by use of nondiscriminatory assessment, the article had a profound impact on the field of special education by

> changing services for students with mild mental
> retardation, including homogeneous grouping in
> separate classes, the overrepresentation of
> students from minority and/or low socioeconomic
> backgrounds in separate classes, and the lack of
> demonstrated effectiveness of separate classes
> for students with mild mental retardation, and the
> harm done by disability labels (p. 81-82).

Today's scholars (Blanchett, 2009; Krezmien, Mulcahy & Leone, 2008) would argue that overrepresentation of students from minority and/or low socioeconomic backgrounds in separate classes remains a highly charged and troubling trend despite Dunn's admonition of practitioners and practices. It could also be argued that this has fueled research on Culturally Relevant Teaching (Gay, 2010), largely due to the inequities that have consistently disenfranchised students from minority and/or low socioeconomic cultures.

Regardless of decades of scholars' and practitioners' calls to promote inclusionary practices for all learners since Dunn's challenge (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Manset & Semmel, 1997; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Stainback & Stainback, 1985; Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1999; Walther-Thomas, 1997), U.S. schools continued to experience reluctance, if not downright opposition, to inclusionary practices (Osgood, 2007). School districts and local educational agencies were skeptical of inclusion. Some found the transition from mainstreaming to full inclusion befuddling and nearly impossible to implement. Transitioning from a reactive (mainstreaming) stance to a proactive one took thought, planning, reorganization, and ideological reconceptualization. Nearly twenty years following Dunn's work, three authors would publish an article that meaningfully justified one of the most significant educational reforms of the final quarter of the twentieth century.

If special education research followed a positivist path in the 1960's and 1970's (Brophy, 1981 Gage, 1983), the decade that followed saw the emergence of naturalistic or interpretive inquiry by special education scholars, who asked more "why" than "what" questions. In 1994, Guba and Lincoln posed a series of questions that helped the educational research community conceptualize human constructivism as a basis for qualitative inquiry (p. 109). Known as "naturalistic inquiry," (1985) the authors challenged researchers to examine competing paradigms in qualitative research, their assumptions, and the implications of those assumptions for a variety of research issues (p. 105). Their justification for paradigms as basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, was divulged in *Competing paradigms in qualitative research* (1994). Widely influential, this manuscript joined a legion of well-regarded texts in the field including: Stake's *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995); Merriam's *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (1991); Wolcott's *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (1990); and Creswell's "bible" for naturalistic inquiry, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (1997), the last considered one of the foremost volumes for exploring qualitative, or interpretive research. These are, of course, only a short list of resources, but a starting representation of the expanding research trend that begged the question, "what lies beyond process-product?"

Leading up to this emergence of naturalistic inquiry, researchers Reynolds, Wang & Walberg (1987) published a transformative paper that shook the practical world of special education service delivery with their challenge of the pull-out service delivery special education model titled, *The Necessary Restructuring of Special and Regular Education.* In this author's opinion, this article represents the best example of how

special education research can change special education policy than any other. Published barely a year following the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1986) in the U.S., the paper challenged scholars, practitioners, and school leaders to take a hard look at the [all-too-common] practice of removing students with disabilities from the general classroom, typically in half-hour intervals, for instructional support from a special education provider outside the general classroom. The authors generated a new (farcical) "category" of disability: the *30-minute disability,* which brought awareness to a practice that had been poorly serving our most vulnerable students in P-12 schools.

### IDEA and Emergence of Qualitative Research

Originally enacted by Congress in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education that is specifically designed based on their individual needs, the Individuals with Disabilities Act's (1986) similar purpose was to provide learners with disabilities the same opportunity for education as their typically developing peers. Included in this four-part piece of legislation were amendments that cover the general provisions of the law (Part A); assistance for education of all learners with disabilities (Part B); infants and toddlers, ages birth to three years of age (i.e., Establishment of Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) for infants & toddlers with disabilities) (Part C); and national support programs administered at the federal level (Part D).

It was at this time that Congress found that the needs of nearly eight million children with exceptionalities in the U.S. were not being fully met, while approximately one million children were completely excluded from public schools (Osgood, 2007; Winzer, 2012). IDEA had been an attempt to eliminate not only the exclusion of students with exceptionalities but also provide them with the legal right to an education (Murphy, 1996). Major provisions of IDEA included: 1.) zero reject, meaning that no student regardless of their disability, could be denied an education; 2.) substantive and procedural due process of the law should there be any disputes in a students' placement or diagnosis; 3.) provision of an Individualized Education Plan that clearly and specifically outlined their educational program; 4.) the guarantee of a free and appropriate education, and 5.) students with exceptionalities must be educated in the least restrictive school environment. "Person-first" Language, not a mandated policy, but rather an ethical and moral expectation, permeated the field despite slippage at the practical level (Winzer, 2012).

At the time of IDEA's passage, even students who were receiving an education were placed in substantially separate settings creating a dual system of education – the same environment against which the Brown decision had railed three decades earlier. Additionally, for many, if not most, states the cost of special education had become unsustainable quickly following implementation. School systems were now faced with the daunting task of providing an education for all students in their district and forced to search for new and more efficient ways to combat the growing costs while conforming to the mandates of IDEA. IDEA's mandates became the focus of research generated during this era.

Educational research became increasingly naturalistic, or qualitative, as many scholars became increasingly wary of positivist "how-to" research that left out the contextual realities of the classroom and the ideological and philosophical leanings of teachers. The literature began to shift its focus on Teacher Knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994); Teacher Culture (Zeichner, 1996); Teacher Thinking (Peterson, 1986): Teacher Development (Zumwalt, 1991); and Multicultural Education (Banks, 1993), most of which transferred to the field of special education. However, literature's influence was most felt

in the area of special education legislation, which increased social justice awareness for students with exceptionalities and their families utilizing due process accountability.

Society's shifting view of exceptionality was aided by research focused on Inclusion vs. Mainstreaming (the reactive process where students are increasingly introduced into a classroom with fewer restrictions); collaboration's more dominant role in the literature; steady (but slow) climb of empirical data; democratic and socially just education (Apple, 1993; Freire, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996); Cooperative Learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009); Co-teaching (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, 2004; Friend & Cook, 1992; Walther-Thomas, 1997); and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). Further along, the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997) - which went beyond providing access to students with disabilities to a general curriculum by mandating that they demonstrate real progress in the classroom as well - provided for (a) transition services for older students; (b) increased culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy (IDEA 1997); and (c) inclusion of parents as integral to the collaborative IEP process, becoming fodder for researchers who saw these topics as integral to special education practice. Later on, the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA advocated for instruction to be given to those with a disability while attempting to mitigate the continuous and burgeoning paperwork of the special education teacher.

According to McLeskey (2004), other trends noted in the field resulted in research in special education, spanning the final quarter of the twentieth century and focused on school reform (Deno, 1970; Stainback & Stainback, 1985); assessment, classification, and placement of students with disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1977); student behavior and discipline (Wang, 1992); attitudes and labels (Semmel, 1991); instructional interventions (Hammill & Larsen, 1974; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1985); and Families and Early Childhood Education (Castro & Mastropieri, 1986). The fallout from several of these trends are noted today as curriculum, instructional, and social justice issues persist and the latter part of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century, qualitative studies continue to contribute to understanding individuals with disabilities and the nature of services developed to meet their needs. A wide range of qualitative research designs and tools have been uncovered to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students. Naturalistic inquiry has explored attitudes, perceptions, and perspectives of those engaged in school and schooling and has been used to trace and document how and why particular teaching strategies and evidence-based practices work (Creswell, 1997; 2014). Attempting to discover "why" has become an enduring goal of educators who, seeking to understand the qualities, the essence, or the nature of a phenomenon within a particular context, both rely upon, and generate, special education research.

## Implications of Current and Future Research

Since IDEA, special education research has trended toward several areas, particularly in terms of the way that students with exceptionalities are served in P-12 classrooms. Educational technology has vastly altered the landscape of both general and special education and has augmented the field of special education exponentially. For some students, augmentative, or assistive technology has made it possible for them to communicate their needs, knowledge, and desires in the classroom and beyond. It provides the tools they need for academic success and access to learning that would not exist without this technology. It is no wonder that research on technology application in the classroom has surged greatly in the last several decades and only promises to increase and expand.

While from 2000 to 2010, students in special education categories such as learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disabilities has dropped in numbers (Fordham Institute, 2013), cases of autism spiked dramatically, quadrupling

over 10 years. Research has been prolific in the area of autism spectrum disorder, spanning topics in the field of special education which include early detection, classroom inclusion, causes and etiology, self-determination, and college success.

Contemporaneously, Understanding by Design (UbD), an ideology borrowed from Universal Design for Learning (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014), which strives to ensure that the learning environment, including curriculum, assessment and teaching and learning tools, promote learning for all individuals, continue to dominate special education research. Both UbD's and UDL's precepts are grounded in the concept of barrier-free, or accessible, architectural design, a method for improving life for individuals with exceptionalities and their families. Working jointly with high-leverage practices (McLeskey, Barringer, Billingsley, Brownell, Jackson, Kennedy, Lewis, Maheady, Rodrigues, Scheeler, Winn, & Ziegler, 2017), they provide the ideal conditions for evidence-based practices (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009) to be utilized in inclusive classrooms.

A critical initiative that is gaining ground throughout the U.S. involves the implementation of accountability measures that reach beyond P-12 classrooms to include educator preparation providers (EPPs), or teacher preparation programs in higher education. In addition to assessment measures that hold classroom teachers accountable for their performance and the performance of their P-12 students, faculty within teacher preparation programs who prepare teachers will soon be accountable for the performance of its graduates. This "drilling down" process introduces a new era of assessment and accountability as it unearths the source of a practitioner's effectiveness…or does it? Critics have argued that this measure could go too far by mistakenly assigning culpability to an undeserving party. Further, it would seem inconceivable that the contributions of general and special education teachers and/or faculty members of a preparation program (or several) could reliably be determined from the myriad of student assessment data..

The aforementioned trends, nonetheless, hold significant implications for P-12 practice as well as teacher preparation programs. They can signal the possible restructuring of policies, procedures, and resource expenditure as well as assessment reform and accountability shifts in both general and special education. The Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law in 2016, not only allows individual states and districts to gain larger control about how to use assessment results, but also reworks many aspects of involvement by the federal government, including special education. While individual states will still be required to separate and report out performance data on students with exceptionalities, the law will limit the number of students who may take alternative state tests, most often those individuals with severe and/or profound cognitive disabilities. In what is clearly meant to empower and enfranchise individuals with exceptionalities, having them take alternative assessments will not preclude them from attempting to get a regular high school diploma vs. an alternative diploma or certificate. Additionally, the new law requires states to specify how they plan to "reduce bullying and harassment, restraint and seclusion, and suspensions and expulsions — all of which disproportionately marginalize students with disabilities" (ESSA, 2016).  Far more research is needed for professional educators, scholars, and university professors to cogently address the myriad of issues and outcomes of this newest legislation.

### Conclusion

Special education research has had – and continues to have – a powerful impact on educational practices, policies, and issues, documenting where the field of special education has been and just how far it has come. This paper has traced pivotal research in the field of special education since IDEA and presented enduring trends that special education research will continue to follow and disseminate. That special

education research has had a significant impact in helping scholars and professional educators understand the functions and effects of special education policy, teaching practice, and teacher preparation, speaks to its enduring value in improving outcomes for all students with exceptionalities and their families.

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# Master Licensure in Illinois: An Investigation of the Reflective Practices that Characterize Accomplished Teachers as Required by the NBPTS
## by
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## Abstract
*As the demands required of in-service teachers regarding creativity, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness in their teaching augment, so do the needs that students bring with them to their classes. Teachers now more than ever must have a solid command of their teaching and be able to reflect on how well their teaching approaches, assessment practices, feedback processes, and learning environments are working for the benefit of students. By focusing on an exploration of what the literature regards as best practices for reflection in education, this article analyzes the reflective skill practices that are required of teachers seeking master licensure in Illinois through The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The potential benefits and gains that can be derived from supporting teachers throughout the process of becoming accomplished reflective practitioners will also be discussed.*

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides a path that leads teachers to the achievement of a master licensure in over sixteen areas of both primary and secondary education in the state of Illinois (NBPTS, 2017). NBPTS is the only organization of its kind in the United States and was developed by teachers and for teachers. Teachers seeking NBPTS certification are required to complete activities of accomplished practice in four main areas referred to as Components: Content Knowledge, Differentiation in Instruction, Teaching Practice and Learning Environment, and Effective and Reflective Practitioner. This paper focuses on the specific requirements of the most recently added Component 4, Effective and Reflective Practitioner. The goal of this paper is to analyze reflective skills and practices that teachers must attain to be awarded their master licensure in Illinois. Additionally, this article aims to highlight the potential benefits that a teacher can derive by becoming an accomplished reflective practitioner.

### Fulfilling the Requirements of Effective and Reflective Practice
Component 4 of the NBPTS certification process provides teachers with an opportunity to highlight their abilities as reflective practitioners who are effective in developing and applying their knowledge of their students (NBPTS, 2017). Teachers need to gather information about their students

related to each of the four Components. In each of these areas, teachers need to fulfill specific requirements and show evidence of how their teaching practices effectively lead to the achievement of the desired outcomes by their students (NBPTS, 2017). Teachers must also provide evidence demonstrating their collaboration with caregivers, family, colleagues, and the community indicating how these collaborations have contributed to the growth and learning of students. According to the NBPTS scoring guide, the portfolio section, which includes Components 2, 3 and 4, comprises 60% of the total weighted score. Component 4 alone makes up 25% of the portfolio portion total which is equivalent to 15% of the total weighted score (NBPTS, 2017).

Component 4 has subject combinations that are grouped depending on the age of students to be taught. The age groups are in six main groups: Early Childhood, Middle Childhood, Early Childhood through Young Adulthood, Early and Middle Childhood, Early Adolescence, and Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood. For instance, combination examples could include Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood/Health or Early and Middle Childhood/English as a New Language. The subject combinations are 24 in Total (NBPTS, 2017).

Regardless of the subject/age level combination master licensure a teacher seeks to obtain, the requirements to be fulfilled remain mostly the same. The kind of information submitted by the teacher, informational sources, and the way in which they are used by teachers remain specific to the subject specialization. Additionally, characteristics and the unique features of the school settings, students, community, and district will also vary (NBPTS, 2017). A Scoring Rubric specifies the type of information a teacher is expected to submit. Firstly, the teacher is expected to create a profile of a group of students based on the information collected from caregivers and family, colleagues, the community, and other sources. Secondly, they must show that the assessment choices they make in any instructional unit are a direct result of knowledge of their students acquired through their collaboration with various sources, their understanding of assessment practices and principles, unit learning objectives, and the subsequent use of that information to positively impact student learning. Thirdly, they are required to use their knowledge of their students to analyze and reflect on the effectiveness of their assessment practices as well as how they used the assessments to increase student learning. Finally, teachers need to reflect on their practices to determine the learning needs of a particular student for whom they have provided collaboration, advocacy, or leadership indicating how learning improved as a result of their efforts.

The portfolio entry and rubric used to assess student work must align with five core propositions as well as the standards of the area of licensure (NBPTS, 2015). This alignment with the propositions translates into providing a contextual information sheet that explains the wider context. This sheet includes information such as: knowledge of the students using student group information as well as a profile form accompanied by the associated evidence, assessment data submitted in the form of two

assessments with one being summative and another formative, evidence of participation in a learning community describing a student need and how a learning situation was improved as a result of this collaboration, and a written commentary on their practice of student information gathering and how they use the information to positively impact the lives of students (NBPTS, 2017).

## The literature and effective practice

Teaching is a complex activity and has a body of knowledge that is identifiable and which is closely related to the characteristics of students, content, and the learning process (Thorpe, 2014). In order to prepare students for further development in their academic progress, in life, and in their independent development of habits to succeed in their lives, teachers need to be constantly updating their skills and knowledge to provide students the best education possible (NBPTS, 2015). Although many teachers already possess these skills, the goal should be to help ensure that all teachers obtain these skills. The need for consistency in all schools, especially in schools with a higher poverty level, is apparent.

According to NBPTS (2014), the essence of the board's vision is to provide an accomplished procedure for teaching captured in a structured document. The heart of this vision is embedded in five core propositions:

- o  Teachers are members of learning communities.
- o  Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience
- o  Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- o  Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- o  Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

These propositions show that an accomplished teacher learns through research, study, and experience. This is learned from daily interactions in the classroom and the many decisions that are used to shape the learning experience. Teaching needs a balance between the demands of the profession and the important daily educational goals. This is dependent on the observations of student settings, revision of subjects, and continued classroom development. An accomplished teacher is expected to make use of professional and technical knowledge as well as their pedagogical and interdisciplinary skills in the development of instructional design and curricular objectives, and to promote the learning experience of students in an effort to increase student success rates.

Edwards (2017) supports the employment of activities such as those used in Component 4 arguing that analyzing material prior to practice confronts the obviousness of the students' learning environments and how they approach decisions. Activities of Component 4 provide an opportunity for both students and teachers to learn from their colleagues, reflect on their

attitudes and practices, and find ways to modify their line of thought determining if their roles are in line with their future careers (NBPTS, 2017). Also, Harbour, Evanovich, Sweigart, and Hughes (2015) consider teacher behavior to be a critical factor in increasing the academic success and engagement of students. Higher levels of engagement in students have been related to increasing success in their academics in the present and the future by various researchers. Teachers are at the forefront when it comes to encouraging student engagement through their instructional design, lesson development, and creation of a learning environment that is positive, conducive, and encourages students to participate actively (NBPTS, 2015).

In the same line, Jaeger (2013) supports reflective practice stating that a reflective teacher brings both tactic and tacit knowledge to their professional practice. They acquire knowledge while in action which makes it easier for them to act spontaneously and can easily provide a rationale that is explicit. Similarly, they can bring teaching strategies that are not entirely new but are unique. They always share certain elements with previous lessons covered by the teacher. The ability of a teacher to recognize the difference between similar lessons is what enables a teacher to respond to the progress of the lesson appropriately.

The NBPTS considers reflective teachers to be positive role models that provide lifelong learning experiences (Masters, 2013). Reflective teachers are risk takers and make the entire learning process visible to their professional learning communities and their students. This gives them the enthusiasm to inquire more, and their students can see their passion for learning. Reflective practice has also been considered a form of professional teaching that depends on the intersection of the student and the teacher to ensure success. The use of effective practices by teachers maximizes the probability of active engagement by the students in academic instruction. This has the effect of students achieving greater social and academic success (Harbour, Evanovich, Sweigart & Hughes, 2015). As required by Component 4, feedback increases the effectiveness of student learning, overall academic success, and active participation by providing students with more. Incorporation of all these activities gives teacher an opportunity to maximize their instructional time and increase active participation in class. When appropriately implemented, feedback serves as a means where teachers directly impact the success of their students and consequently promote their emotional, academic, and social success.

Sempowicz (2012) explains how providing feedback is important to equip teachers with a means to reflect towards their teaching process in class. The teacher's personal attributes, articulation of academic knowledge, and the knowledge of the requirements by the education system, as well as their ability to model the reflection, influences a student's ability to reflect on the effectiveness of their learning, hence their success. When a teacher models a process for reflection in action, for instance, constant note-taking to provide solutions for future problems and planning, the student becomes more willing to accept and make use of the feedback provided by the

teacher which influences their ability to criticize their own work positively (Sempowicz, 2012).

Benade (2016) considers teachers to be contextual and this context helps in shaping their current beliefs and practices. Having the knowledge of the 21st Century and being able to apply it to teaching in relationship to reflective practice is varied among teachers (Kimmons, Miller, Amador, Desjardins & Hall, 2015). But the most consistent and constant aspect is the policy that is imperative and requires teachers and leaders in schools to have a quicker response to the rapidly evolving teaching environment. Some of the reflection tools provided by technology are blogs and web-based portfolios (Oner & Adadan, 2011). Jones and Ryan (2014) indicate that by using blogs teachers are likely to reflect on issues concerning teaching and their ability to manage classrooms. This explains the effectiveness of a teacher's teaching strategy irrespective of whether the participation is in a structured or unstructured environment like a class discussion. Themes that emerge in the blog provide a point of reflection for the teacher.

## Potential Benefits of Becoming an Accomplished Reflective Practitioner

Research has shown that effective teaching is linked to reflection, inquiry, and continued professional growth. Reflective practice is considered to be a helpful form of professional development. Teachers remain able to increase their classroom effectiveness if they clearly understand their teaching styles which can be achieved through reflective practice (Sarma, 2015). Component 4 provides comprehensive coverage on understanding student attitudes, professional knowledge, interests, skills, and values together with functional orientation (NBPTS, 2017). Teachers benefit from reflective practice by gaining a greater understanding of their teaching style which, in the end, leads to greater teaching effectiveness. Reflective practice allows a teacher to take personal responsibility for their professional growth. As much as experience is important in teacher education, reflection is vital for an in-depth learning experience. Reflection for a teacher involves thinking about issues and seeing situations from different angles (NBPTS, 2015). Reflection is not inborn; a teacher learns it through practice over time. Reflective practice enables a teacher to attain the required competencies in teaching effectively.

Another implication of reflective practice is that it enhances the competency of teachers at both pre-service and in-service levels. Reflective practice is important for the process of analysis and hence should be incorporated into schools for the general professional development of all staff members (Unrath, 2002). Reflective practice can be used by teachers for the creation of a professional portfolio which is one way of maintaining professional accountability. The artifacts included by a teacher in their portfolio are indicative of their teaching style. When used together with reflection, portfolios give a summary of all materials a teacher believes are relevant for the success of students. This enables a teacher to have a

greater understanding of their teaching style. They can also deliberate carefully on their teaching processes and choices while maintaining a meaningful record of their teaching experience.

According to NBPTS (2015) in What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do, reflective practice helps teachers build a knowledge-base of content and teaching skills in order to attain a level where their main aim becomes development in accomplished practice. Therefore, reflective practice allows teachers to show that they have the knowledge and capacity to be effective in a classroom situation and that they are ready for an accomplished career in teaching. This also implies their willingness to grow into accomplished practitioners.

Professional teachers, although they have already demonstrated the skills and knowledge needed to impact the lives of their students positively, can benefit from engaging in reflective practice because reflection is a medium for professional learning and personal growth. By engaging in this lifelong practice, professional teachers can continuously meet the needs of their students (NBPTS, 2017). Teacher leaders are developed through reflective practice (Jackson, Burrus, Bassett & Roberts, 2010). This is done through the ability of a teacher to demonstrate their positive impact on students. Once this is achieved, teachers can grow into leadership positions in their schools, states, districts, or their professions. The application of the five core propositions from the NBPTS encourages teachers to identify changing needs and remain relevant in the education field.

## Conclusion

Although limited research is available in the literature regarding the effectiveness of Component 4 on student learning, much research has been conducted regarding the benefits of reflective practices (Goldhaber, Perry & Anthony, 2004). Studies suggest that there is a strong link between the award of master licensure and the achievements of students (NBPTS 2017). In addition, the measures used to gauge the academic proficiency of teachers have a direct link to the success of students. Therefore, there appears to be a positive relationship between the reflective skills and practices that teachers are required to demonstrate during the process of Component 4. Before teachers are granted master licensure, the effectiveness of their teaching is compared to the success of their students. The question yet to be answered is whether the NBPTS certification process provides value to teachers beyond the evidence provided by the literature. In the future, perhaps the data collected regarding Component 4 will assist policymakers in the education sector concerning the licensure process and whether licensure can be used as a barometer to measure the quality of the education process.

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