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One Academic Year Study of Experiences of One Cohort of Graduates from a Midwestern University's Teacher Education Program

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by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Signature: Christine Ann Albers Date: 8/28/15

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Abstract

Teacher attrition is a growing problem within the education system in the United States. A study that tracked the experiences of graduates of a particular program was designed to gauge the program's success. There were three research questions. The first asked, What are the first year teaching experiences of Midwestern University educator preparation program graduates? The second question was in two parts and asked, What do graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their ability to carry out their duties as a first-year teacher? How does this change from August to May? The third question asked, How do the responses of graduates to the first two questions vary by type of school where they are employed, level and area of certification, and MAT or BA? To answer these questions, six graduates of Midwestern University's Educator Preparation Program were followed during their first year of teaching.

The participants were interviewed throughout their first year of teaching. The data was presented in case studies. These participants taught in urban, suburban, and rural schools that were either public or private. Some of the participants had earned a BA degree, some a MAT degree, and some were still completing their MAT degree. Three of the teachers were at the secondary level and two were at the elementary level. The data from these interviews helped clarify emerging themes from their experiences.

This study showed the relevance of student teaching assignments. The graduates whose student teaching assignments had more varied ability levels and grade levels had an easier time transitioning into a first year teacher. Other experiences demonstrated how a cooperating teacher affected the success of the student teacher and the ability to

transition into a full time teacher. Many of the participants developed their own style of classroom management as they progressed through their first year of teaching. Some participants struggled with IEPs and had to learn from their co-workers the correct way to implement them. Overall though, substitute teaching experience was found to be the most beneficial tool in preparing university students to become classroom teachers.

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List of Abbreviations

AA – Associate of Arts degree

BA – Bachelor of Arts degree

CAEP – Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation

CTEL - College of Teacher Education and Leadership at Arizona State University

DESE – Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

ECU - East Carolina University

ELL – English Language Learner

EPP – Educator Preparation Program

GPA – Grade Point Average

HLC – Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP – Individualized Education Program

IRB - Internal Review Board

MAT – Master of Arts degree

NAPDS – National Association of Professional Development Schools

NCA – North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

NCATE – National Council for accreditation of Teacher Education

NCTAF - National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

PD – professional development

PDS – professional development school

REI - Regular Education Initiative

SAT - a globally recognized college admission test

TEAC – Teacher Education Accreditation Council

TFA – Teach For America

Chapter One: Introduction

On the first day of school, novice teachers anxiously awaited the arrival of their students while silently wondering if they were ready, were they prepared, and were they going to succeed. These teachers had graduated from Midwestern University's (pseudonym) teacher education program. Part of the success of this program would be gauged by their ability to carry out their duties as first-year teachers.

The educational leaders in the United States wanted to improve the quality and quantity of their teaching force. The country had experienced shortages of qualified teachers. Furthermore, national, state, and local levels of government were requiring teachers to increase student achievement to higher levels and use a new standards-based, accountability-driven system of education (Levine, 2006). With more demands and accountability, some of the newly minted teachers quickly changed their minds about wanting to teach.

According to a report done by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF),

> First-year teacher attrition has been steadily increasing since 1994. After five years, over 30% of our beginning teachers have left the profession. Many of these teachers leave before they have had time to become proficient educators who know how to work with their colleagues to improve student learning. (NCTAF, 2010, p. 4)

With the teacher attrition rate rising, the faculty of the department of teacher education at Midwestern University needed to measure the success of their graduates in the teaching field. Furthermore, with the newer guidelines for accreditation and program evaluations,

Midwestern University wanted to be pro-active in assessing their educator preparation programs.

Statement of Purpose

A one academic year qualitative study of one cohort of the graduates of Midwestern University's teacher education program was the basis of this project. The purpose of this study was to describe the first year of teaching for these graduates and seek possible factors in areas of strength and weakness in their ability to carry out their duties as first-year teachers. Some of these possible factors as indicated by the literature included the ability to effectively create and implement lesson plans that were congruent with the goals of their school, the ability to successfully manage a classroom, particularly behavioral issues of students, the ability to use appropriate technology in the classroom, the ability to address the needs of special needs students, and the ability to effectively deal with parental complaints. The study also drew attention to areas that could be improved in the Midwestern University teacher education program.

Within the last few years, transitional changes to university teacher education programs had been implemented across the United States to align themselves with newer state standards for educator preparation programs. There were increased teacher testing for certification in areas of basic skills, subject matter, and pedagogy. States adopted accountability measures that included a publication of institutional pass rates for graduates on teacher licensure exams (Official Internal Report, 2014) and identification of low-performing schools of education (Levine, 2006). States had developed newer K-12 curriculum standards and assessments to align with the nationally established Common Core Standards. In addition, many new assessments were developed for

teacher education candidates. The timeline for these implementations was rapid with a start date of fall of 2014 for teacher education in the state of Missouri. In addition to the changes at the state level, the merger of NCATE and TEAC into CAEP created new standards of accountability.

Midwestern University had two programs leading to initial teacher certification: the bachelor's degree and the Master of Arts in Teaching. The MAT was designed for students who already held an undergraduate degree and wanted to pursue an initial teaching license. MAT candidates could receive certification without actually completing the degree; three core courses were required for the graduate degree, but not the state teaching certification.

For undergraduate students to be accepted into Midwestern University's Teacher Education Program, they were required to pass the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBASE). This exam was developed at the University of Missouri-Columbia in the late 1980s and was used by over 110 colleges and universities in the United States (University of Missouri College of Education, 2015). It was a criterion-referenced achievement examination that consisted of five parts, including a writing component. This exam assessed knowledge in four subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The exam measured three cross-disciplinary competencies: interpretive reasoning, strategic reasoning, and adaptive reasoning. Proficiencies in these knowledge and skill areas were usually attained during the first two years of college (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). In addition, students needed to have a cumulative GPA of 2.5 with a grade of C or above in all education and content coursework. The Council of Teacher Education at

Midwestern University then voted on accepting the student into the Department of Teacher Education. The use of the CBASE, as other testing and GPA requirements, was mandated by DESE. In fall of 2014, many of these requirements changed. However, the participants in this study completed the program under the previous testing battery and GPA requirements.

Once students were accepted into the Department of Teacher Education, it was necessary for them to complete all professional education coursework, any required content courses, in addition to completing any remaining general education requirements. The exact courses varied by certification level and subject matter. Once the coursework was finished, then the student could begin the student teaching component of the degree. Along with completing the student teaching practicum, students were required to maintain a portfolio of their work. The Praxis II Subject Assessments were a series of licensure exams that measured the knowledge of specific subjects that K-12 educators would teach in addition to other general and subject-specific teaching skills and knowledge (ETS Praxis, 2015). The passing score for each certification area was set by the state. At Midwestern University, students had to pass the appropriate Praxis II exam before being placed for student teaching, the culminating field experience.

Teacher education programs require a partnership between the university and the schools for student teaching and any other field experiences. It was "also important to examine the perspectives of K-12 teachers and administrators who work[ed] collaboratively with university faculty to create and sustain teacher education programs, particularly those programs featuring clinical immersion or teacher residencies" (Smiley, Drake, & Sheehy, 2010, p. 5). The traditional practice of future teachers spending three

years taking classes at a university and then the fourth year participating in field experiences such as student teaching had been questioned regarding its effectiveness as an authentic model for future teachers (Polizzi, 2009). Thus, Midwestern University, like others in the state, followed the state model of 30 observation hours and a 30-hour pre-student teaching practicum. Some programs, such as elementary, included additional field experiences in specific courses such as reading methods.

I followed a cohort group from Midwestern University in an effort to form a basis for future discussion regarding the effectiveness of their educator preparation program. I used interviews to gather information from the graduates of Midwestern University's educator preparation program who taught at a variety of schools, both public and private, to obtain their feedback regarding the experiences they had during their first year of teaching. These interviews were done over the course of nine months. The interview questions pertained to experiences that would be expected by first year teachers; these typical struggles are discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. The questions also referred back to their coursework at Midwestern University.

Rationale

According to a study spearheaded by Levine (2006), it was estimated that the United States was facing nearly 200,000 teacher vacancies a year due to high attrition rates among new teachers and the retirement of more experienced teachers along with increased student population due to immigration, population redistribution, and regional growth.

> Qualitatively, teacher skills and knowledge have to be raised if we are to substantially increase student achievement to the levels needed for an information

> economy. Ordinarily, increasing teacher quality necessitates a reduction in quantity, and increasing quantity requires a trade-off in quality. Our teacher education programs are facing the challenge of doing both at once.
>
> (Levine, 2006, p. 11)

According to Rogers (2013), one way to gauge the success of a program was to track their graduates, not only for teacher education but all programs. The tracking showed which graduates secured full-time employment, how soon after graduation they were hired, and which programs had better job placement rates.

Increasingly, one of the metrics used by state and national accrediting bodies for teacher education was tracking graduates into the field, in part because of high numbers of teacher attrition and high numbers of graduates from teacher education who did not find a job. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) annually sent a survey to all new public school teachers and their principals (Official Internal Report, 2014). However, a limited amount of data could be gathered from this, and there were no disaggregation by degree program (MAT or BA) or certification area. In addition, those teachers employed at private schools or out of state were left out of this survey. A year long, qualitative study of one cohort of the graduates of Midwestern University's teacher education program who obtained a job in public or private schools in or out of state would give much insight into the program.

Some studies had been conducted within the last decade that researched the contributing factors for teacher attrition in the schools within the United States (Berridge & Goebel, 2013; Ingersoll, 2012; Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Perez, 2012). However, these studies used samplings from the K-12 schools, not the university educator preparation

programs. The teacher education programs and administrators of the schools where the teachers ultimately were employed needed to understand the factors that affected the ability of the novice teachers to be successful (Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008).

Studies demonstrated that an essential element to improving schools was recruitment and retention of good teachers. In addition, the teachers' preparation and ongoing learning needed to be addressed (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 2004). There had been a growing consensus that the quality of the nation's schools depended on the quality of their teachers. There was a direct relationship between what students learned and the effectiveness of their teachers. The teachers' skills depended on the knowledge and skills they learned when preparing to become a teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Academic literature had uncovered a disconnection between the content and practical knowledge regarding the professional training of teachers (Lovat, 1999). There was a growing concern that teacher education programs at universities were graduating students who were competent in theory but lacking in practice (Levine, 2006). Taguchi (2007) suggested that teaching was a profession where theory should be embedded into the practice. Allen, Ambrosetti, and Turner (2013) found that linking assessable university coursework to the practicum was an important way to integrate the theory and practices learned, but implementing this form of assessment was problematic. They found practical constraints associated with implementing this type of assessment as well as policy stipulations against allowing pre-service teachers to perform assessable coursework during their practicum (Allen et al., 2013). As can be the case, good ideas in theory were not always good ideas in practice.

Teacher education needed to have more innovative learning environments that incorporated technology, practical experience, and development of performance assessment rubrics so that the teacher education student could be evaluated based on their knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Olafson, Quinn, & Hall, 2005). The needs of future science and math teachers were not always met by the educator preparation programs since some did not necessarily require more advanced science or mathematics course work (Moreno, 1999).

New teachers were often placed in schools with a diverse and high-need student population. Teacher preparation programs needed to go beyond internships and include intense study of high-need students and diverse student populations (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010). Students in teacher preparation programs needed to learn how to effectively use differentiated instruction to meet the challenges of diversity, particularly the inclusion of students with disabilities (Rao, 2009). Furthermore, Trent and Artiles (1998) noted that the majority of teacher candidates were White females and their research showed that these teacher candidates did not understand the effects that racism and minority status had on student learning. The demographic make-up of teachers in K-8 classrooms continued to be mainly White and English speaking while the make-up of students were culturally and linguistically diverse (Gomez, Strage, Knutson-Miller, & Garcia-Nevarez, 2009).

Potential teaching candidates needed to have interactions with diverse student populations throughout their preparation but also required to continually examine their own beliefs, attitudes, and actions towards culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Gross, Fitts, Goodson-Espy, & Clark, 2010). While race, ethnicity, class,

and gender were frequently the targeted key points in educator preparation classes when addressing diversity, Turner-Vorbeck (2005) pointed out that family diversity should be included as well. In today's family, there are adoptive, step, and homosexual family networks. A suggestion made by Tatebe (2013) was to use service learning, where pre-service teachers did community work in the diverse communities as a way to introduce these teacher candidates to the plights of their student population. This study would also add to the literature by following a cohort of graduates from an EPP into the field, rather than studying a group of first year teachers at one school or district.

Schools of Education at the university level had strengths that went unrecognized and weaknesses that they were unwilling to acknowledge. In other studies, members of the education school community would ask for a persuasive defense of their school while members outside the university community wanted proof of necessary change. Insiders worried about any criticism and outsiders feared that any praise would protect the status quo (Levine, 2006). By following a cohort of recent graduates of Midwestern University's Educator Preparation Program, strengths of the program might be ascertained. Furthermore, weaknesses of the program would be discussed and possible avenues for improvement as suggested by the participants could be provided to the Midwestern University School of Education. The purpose of the study was to describe the first year of teaching for these graduates and seek possible factors in areas of strength and weakness in their ability to carry out their duties as first-year teachers.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to describe the experiences of the first-year teachers from Midwestern University's educator preparation program.

Additionally, the questions served as a basis of exploration regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Midwestern University's educator preparation program.

RQ1: What are the first year teaching experiences of Midwestern University educator preparation program graduates?

RQ2: What do graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program (EPP) perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their ability to carry out their duties as a first-year teacher? How does this change from August to May?

RQ3: How do the responses of graduates to RQ1 and 2 vary by type of school where they are employed, level and area of certification, and MAT or BA?

Limitations of Study

The teachers in this study were not representative of all of the graduates of the teacher education program. Yet, their experiences added to the theoretical understanding of what many graduates experienced during their first year of teaching. The teachers were selected by their willingness to participate in the study. I made several attempts to contact graduates through email and postal mailings with only seven graduates responding. One of the respondents was a male but unfortunately he never replied to later attempts to contact him. It would have been preferable to include a male participant in the study to have his first year of teaching perspective. Six of the respondents agreed to participate in the study and they were all female. However, they represented a wide cross-section of teaching assignments.

In addition, the participants were asked to recall information about classes that they had taken one to five years previously. This was taken into account when developing the interview questions. Specific assignments that were completed were not

the basis of the questions. Information gained, lessons learned, and strategies that were being used were the emphasis as the participants recalled their educator preparation classes.

Due to the distance between the schools where the participants taught and my own location, personal observations were not made. Phone interviews were recorded and transcribed. It was my assumption that the participants gave thorough, honest, and thoughtful responses to the questions during the interviews.

Definition of Terms

Charter School – funded by state and local government, ran by privately held Board of Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015)

Large School – total student population over 500 students

Praxis I and II – nationally recognized achievement and certification exams

Private School – funded by private donations and tuition, ran by privately held entity (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015)

Public School – funded by state and local government, ran by publicly held Board of Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015)

Small School – total student population less than 500 students

Title I School – at least 40% of the students are from low-income families (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015)

Summary

Midwestern University used standards-based criteria as the foundation of their Educator Preparation Program. Students needed to achieve a specific GPA or higher and pass a criterion-referenced assessment exam in order to be accepted into the program.

The students had teacher education coursework as well as general education coursework to complete prior to their student teaching practicum. Students studying to be secondary level teachers also had to complete subject-specific coursework. The students were required to maintain a portfolio of their work, complete their student teaching, and get a passing score on a nationally normed licensure assessment exam.

Theoretically, this was to adequately prepare them for the duties they would encounter as a teacher. "It would appear that the illusion of what teaching entails is drastically different than what teachers find when they step into the classroom. Perhaps teacher education programs are not realistically preparing potential teachers for the realities of the job" (Curtis, 2012, p. 787). The purpose of this study was to describe the first year of teaching for these graduates and seek possible factors in areas of strength and weakness in their ability to carry out their duties as first-year teachers.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

This literature review explores the common practices in educator preparation programs. The partnerships between universities and local school districts as well as partnerships between universities and community colleges were also researched. Student teaching was a vital component of the educator preparation programs and various practices were examined. Best practices of educator preparation programs that were recognized as superior were evaluated.

Once candidates were in front of the class, either for their student teaching experience or their teaching position after graduation, issues came to the forefront. Much literature has examined the typical struggles of novice teachers, and this aligned with quantitative data from Midwestern University's results on the state first year teacher and employer survey. Research indicated that the types of induction and mentoring given to novice teachers played a large part in their confidence level and the rate of attrition. The use of technology in the classroom became an emergent element of teaching. Classroom management was often cited as the least covered during the educator preparation programs. In addition, subject specific factors played into the success of secondary teachers in particular. Finally, cultural diversity and managing students with special needs was exposed to be a growing concern for the novice teachers in many research studies. This literature review analyzes recent research studies on these topics.

Teachers most likely play a pivotal role in a person's life, good or bad. So when people decide to become teachers, they typically have images of teaching and learning that provide a basis for interpreting and judging ideas and practices they encounter during their teacher preparation. These pre-formed ideas and practices at times make it harder

for the prospective student to form innovative ideas and original habits of thought and action (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

"It is imperative to have high-quality teachers. In today's information economy, education has become the engine driving the future of the country and of our children. . . The quality of tomorrow will be no better than the quality of our teacher force" (Levine, 2006, p. 11). Three important issues are necessary to improve education. The first is recruiting and retaining good teachers. The second is paying attention to teacher preparation programs and their ongoing learning. The third issue claims that school reforms will not succeed unless there is a focus on creating conditions where teachers can teach well (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 2004).

Within the last decade, some research has been conducted in an attempt to determine the contributing factors for teacher attrition in the schools within the United States (Berridge & Goebel, 2013; Ingersoll, 2012; Sass et al., 2012). The role teacher induction plays into the rate of teacher attrition was the main target of the research completed by Ingersoll (2012), Lambeth (2012), and Shernoff et al. (2011). There is research that delves into the impact of technology on the teachers. Other studies are more discipline specific. English teachers were investigated by Burns (2007), Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff (2008), Hancock and Scherff (2010), Hochstetler (2011), and Scherff (2006). Curtis (2012) explored middle and high school math teachers, while Gilbert (2011) examined two transitioning science teachers. Cultural factors were considered by Barnes (2006). Rao (2009) and Zeichner (2003) examined the problems facing public school teachers who had students with special needs in their classrooms. While various factors

seemed to contribute to teacher attrition, there were common practices within many educator preparation programs.

Common Practices in Educator Preparation Programs

Teachers in the United States typically pay for their own college and sometimes even their own professional development. Many earn 20-25% lower salaries than other professionals that require similar levels of education. This produces chronic shortages of qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 2004; Hastings & Agrawal, 2015).

There was a wide disparity between state standards for teacher licensure and teacher preparation programs according to Levine (2006) and Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004). There were large and small institutions, ranging in offerings of certification only, undergraduate, graduate, or both degrees. Schools ranged from those that only offered a few education courses to schools that offered all levels of education through doctoral research classes. The number of clock hours required in early field experiences varied across programs. Feiman-Nemser (2001) noted that there are typically no incentives for members of the arts and science departments to collaborate with members of the school of education. In addition, there are little incentives for the members of the school of education to embark on the time-consuming and labor-intensive work of program development.

Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) reviewed several hundred studies and concluded that teacher education is a vital element, whether it is in mathematics, science, early childhood, elementary, or vocational education. “Teachers who are fully prepared and certified in both their discipline and in education are more highly rated and are more successful with students than are teachers without preparation” (Darling-Hammond &

Ball, 2004, p. 3). Teacher preparation was a dynamic component for many successful teachers.

In the past, our schools focused on achieving common processes whereas now they focused on seeking common outcomes. Schools shifted from teaching to learning, and shifted from being taught skills and knowledge to mastering skills and knowledge. Schools were required to educate every child and achieve the same learning outcomes even though the student body had changed academically, economically, racially, linguistically, and geographically (Levine, 2006). Prospective teacher candidates needed opportunities to examine their pre-conceived notions of what teaching would entail. They would not be standing in front of a classroom of well-behaved students giving their full attention. Teacher preparation programs needed to encourage their students to critically analyze their previous beliefs and cultivate new ideas of respectable teaching practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

A controversial aspect of teacher education according to Angrist and Guryan (2004) was that few teachers specialize in an academic subject. Teacher education amounted to teacher testing. Much like law schools and the bar exam, the mission of teacher educator programs was in preparation of state certification exams. "States impose[d] a test requirement in the hopes of selecting high-ability teachers" (Angrist & Guryan, 2004, p. 242). While the GPA and SAT scores of students tended to have strong correlations, the GPA and the Praxis certification scores had little correlation according to Angrist and Guryan (2004). They also concluded that the teacher education programs were essentially teaching to the test (Angrist & Guryan, 2004).

There were many aspects of good teaching that promoted student learning. This repertoire of teaching tools included discussions, experiments, interdisciplinary units, journals, writing workshops, and even field trips. It was this understanding that teaching was made up of various approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that developed good teachers. Educator preparation programs were a time to begin to develop a basic repertoire of teaching skills (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Group-based learning within the educator preparation program was investigated by de Jong, Cullity, Haig, Sharp, and Spiers (2011). Their findings affirmed that group based learning is not only successful, but an influential learning and teaching technique. Group based learning increases the students' critical thinking and social interaction skills. Conflict resolution strategies were encountered during the pre-service teachers' coursework and this aided them in applying those strategies when they eventually taught in their own classroom. By understanding and using the group based learning methods during their pre-service coursework, the students were better prepared as teachers and more able to review and revise course curriculum to meet the needs of their students.

According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a highly qualified teacher consisted of three components: obtaining a bachelor's degree; having full licensure as defined by the state; and demonstrating competency, as defined by the state, in the specified subject area (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). With more teaching positions available than highly qualified teachers, an alternative licensure program was established for individuals without an education degree from a university based teacher preparation program to apply their skills from the workplace into the classroom (Hoepfl, 2001). There was a difference of opinion regarding

> the how's and when's of teacher education between those who believe teaching is a profession like law or medicine, requiring a substantial amount of education before an individual can become a practitioner, and those who think teaching is a craft like journalism, which is learned principally on the job. (Levine, 2006, p. 13)

A pressing issue in the field of education was alternative routes to teacher certification (Friedrich, 2014). While alternative licensure was originally meant to be for emergency use, it had become used more readily with former engineers deciding to teach math and former health care workers deciding to teach science (Bowen, 2013). These alternative routes boiled teacher education down to a minimum, passing a test over the subject matter and spending some time in a monitored classroom setting. People selected for these programs usually had strong academic performance and were provided a quick route to a job that offered some sense of security or possibly a sense of civic duty (Friedrich, 2014). This caused concern about the effectiveness of these alternatively licensed teachers because of their lack of pedagogical knowledge and ability to effectively develop and deliver lesson plans, potentially resulting in lower student achievement (Bowen, 2013). Additionally, Friedrich (2014) purported that it is challenging to produce a high quality teacher in a few weeks dedicated to developing technical skills. Teaching is a complex position that required a complex understanding of the process to become a successful teacher.

The components of teachers' knowledge showed a distinction between content (*Knowledge of Subject Matter & Curriculum Goals*) and methods (*Knowledge of Teaching*) that was natural yet necessary in maintaining teacher professionalism. The knowledge of these components and their differences, along with an understanding of the

students' minds (*Knowledge of Learners and Their Development in Social Contexts*) was what made teachers specialists in their profession (Friedrich, 2014). Figure 1 depicts the interrelatedness of the different types of knowledge.

Figure 1. Components of teachers' knowledge. Adapted from Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005, p. 11).

Qualitative observations in a study done by Bowen (2013) showed that alternative licensed teachers have some potential pedagogical classroom management technique issues. While traditionally licensed teachers used small and large group settings, the alternatively licensed teachers used more individualized work with activities, projects, and assessments. However, the principals of these teachers found them to be equally prepared and capable of providing adequate instruction for the students.

Teacher qualifications have a substantial influence on student achievement, second only to home and family factors. As Figure 2 illustrates, the teacher qualifications

have almost as much impact on student achievement as their parental and family support. The least influence on student achievement is small classes and schools.

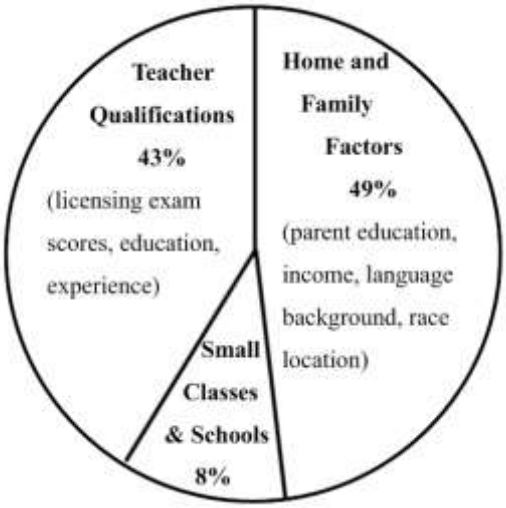

Figure 2. Influence of teacher qualifications on student achievement. Adapted from Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004, p. 2).

Partnerships Between Universities and School Districts

The last decade brought changes to the educational landscape. Partnerships developed between universities and school districts both in the United States and foreign countries like Japan and the Netherlands. Professional development schools were formed, and they provided professional learning and development to university faculty, experienced teachers, and student teachers (Polizzi, 2009).

Cunniff (2011) asserted that partnerships need to be established between P-12 school systems and universities. The university needs to identify and understand the mission statement and vision for the school selected for partnership. Universities brought educational research to school districts to assist in curricular and financial problems. In doing so, the universities fulfilled their part of their mission. Technology assisted in the

communication between the two entities. The knowledge and improved education of the P-12 students and university students benefitted both parties.

However, maintaining the school-university partnership was not always easily accomplished. The staff at both the school and the university would periodically change and the effectiveness of the partnership would be challenged (Bloomfield, 2009). A comparative study done by Allen et al. (2013) found that successful partnerships between a school and university need to be clearly defined, articulated, and enacted upon. Furthermore, in order for these partnerships to be sustained over a course of time, there needs to be regular and meaningful communication between the stakeholders of the school and university.

Another issue with the cooperating school during the practicum was conflicts with their policies and the desired actions of the university, particularly when assessing knowledge of theory and ability of practice during the practicum. While the cooperating school applauded the importance of linking assessable coursework to the practicum experience, it was not practical to implement. The school curricular priorities took precedence over a pre-service teacher assessment task (Allen et al., 2013).

A unique partnership was established between the College of Teacher Education and Leadership (CTEL) at Arizona State University and the Teach For America organization. Teach For America (TFA) and the traditional two-to-four-year education preparation programs had contentious relations since its inception in 1989. TFA recruited recent college graduates, gave them a five-week summer training, and assigned teaching duties in K-12 classrooms for a two-year commitment. In 2008, over 3,700 new teachers were hired by TFA to teach in urban and rural schools. Of those, almost 390 of

them taught in the Phoenix, Arizona schools (Heineke, Carter, Desimone, & Cameron, 2010). Instead of dwelling on their differences, CTEL and TFA worked together to better support the urban teachers of thousands of Arizona students (Heineke et al., 2010). As described by Heineke et al. (2010), the TFA teachers have an undergraduate degree and then receive five weeks of intensive summer training that concentrates on classroom management, instruction, and assessment. Most of the teachers' professional development, however, occurs while they are in the classroom.

The TFA teachers in Arizona were given a state-issued *intern certifica*te allowing them to teach in the classroom. If the TFA full-time teacher at one of 13 urban school districts in Phoenix simultaneously enrolled in the Induction, Masters, and Certification program at CTEL, then that teacher would be certified to be a *teacher of record*. These teachers needed to fulfill their two-year teaching commitment for TFA and complete the coursework at CTEL. When they exited the program, the teachers had a master's degree and were eligible to apply for a provisional Arizona Teaching Certificate (Heineke et al., 2010). Using this model, it took these teachers roughly the same time to get their master's degree in education as teachers using traditional educator preparation programs.

A growing type of partnership, particularly in the area of education, was between four-year universities and two-year community colleges. Locklear, Davis, and Covington (2009) studied a partnership between the East Carolina University (ECU) School of Education and their surrounding community colleges. The purpose of this partnership was to fill more teaching vacancies in the area by making a four-year education degree available at the community colleges throughout the region. The community colleges were suitable for recruiting future teachers since they enrolled a large percent of first-

time college freshmen and they had a more diverse student population than at a traditional university.

East Carolina University used a university center model that was based on a two-plus-two partnership between a four-year university and a community college according to Locklear et al. (2009). The community college faculty delivers the general education coursework and the university faculty delievers the teacher education coursework. All decisions regarding the program's first two years are handled by the community college and decisions regarding the last two years are handled by the university. An integral part of the partnership is the hub site coordinator. This is an ECU faculty member that works at the hub site and is responsible for recruiting, student support, and advising. The program uses a cohort model where a group of students begin and end the program at the same time by taking the same sequence of courses. Students in both the unversity center model and ECU campus programs are evaluated regarding their upper-level coursework GPA, final internship grade, Praxis II scores, and ratings of the student products in their portfolios.

The data, as reported by Locklear et al. (2009), clearly showed that there is no significant difference between the students who completed their degree on-campus and those that completed their degree through the community college. This study demonstrated the efficacy of the university center model to be a viable alternative to the traditional university programs. Furthermore, by making these degrees accessible in the local communities and recruiting students with rural backgrounds, when these students graduated, they are more likely to remain in their rural area and teach in the rural schools that had shortages in teachers. The results also suggested that educational leaders and

policy makers should construct and expand these cooperative models in an effort to reduce the teacher shortage.

Partnerships ranged from those between universities and school districts to universities and community colleges. Other partnerships were between universities and educational organizations. However, the goals of all of these partnerships were the same, to produce qualified and skilled teachers.

Student Teaching / Field Work Experiences

In keeping with best practices, state and national accreditation bodies mandated that teacher preparation programs require students to begin early field experiences (Gomez et al., 2009). The NCATE (2008) advised that field experiences be implemented and evaluated to enrich the development of knowledge and skills expected from the student teachers. The student teaching experience was routinely ranked as the most or one of the most valuable components of the educator preparation program (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Fletcher, 2013). The findings in research by Gomez et al. (2009) supported other claims that early field experiences help students decide if they really want to become a teacher.

Yet students cannot always depend on a positive student teaching experience. Cooperating teachers try to alter the teacher candidates' perspectives as learned from their preparation program. Supervisors of field experiences do not always find suitable cooperating teachers who share their expertise (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Many teacher preparation programs do not give enough attention to the placement of their students for their student teaching assignment and the supervisors fail to provide meaningful feedback. Some universities are unable to expose all of their students to a variety of

settings and teachers with diverse teaching styles because of the large number of students. Consequently, some students are given placements that do not effectively address their subject matter or their individual needs. Fieldwork with students with special needs or in an urban school are also very limited (Levine, 2006). However, students who receive field experiences in Title I schools have a greater rate of attrition in teaching interest than students whose field experiences are in non-Title I schools (Gomez et al., 2009).

The field-based experience is more beneficial if it includes observations, apprenticeships, guided practices, and inquiry. The student teachers need opportunities to test theories, use their knowledge, try out practices, investigate problems, and analyze situations that arise in the classroom. Reform proposals provide longer periods of time for field experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). A common criticism of educator preparation programs, as noted by Levine (2006), is the need for better-integrated fieldwork experiences that last longer, start earlier in their coursework, and are more frequent than one field experience.

Many education preparation programs use the field experiences to initiate reflective thinking. Yet one of the challenges with using reflection is that the students do not make the connections between the theoretical ideas and the real practice in the classroom. A deeper connection needs to be made by the students (Pena & Almaguer, 2012).

Lupinski, Jenkins, Beard, and Jones (2012) continued this discussion of reflection by asserting that reflection has become a major element in educator preparation programs. Reflection provides a source for continued personal and professional growth. It gives educators an avenue for renewal. A primary emphasis for educators is to create

learning environments that positively impacted student achievement. Transformative leaders utilize reflection and action to create these learning environments. Furthermore, Lupinski et al. (2012) claimed that there are six components of a teachers' knowledge that guide how they teach. These components are behavioral, technical, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, deliberative, personalistic, and critical. With the exception of behavioral, these components involve the use of reflection.

A group of first semester teacher education students from the University of Texas – Pan American were participants in a study by Pena and Almaguer (2012). As part of a field observation assignment, they were asked to write reflections on six topics. Their reflections were guided in that they had to follow a three part format: (a) observe the theory as it was applied in the classroom, (b) evaluate the mentor teachers' implementation of the theory, and (c) determine what changes they would make to improve effectiveness. After this was completed, students posted each reflection to an online discussion board. Finally, the students were required to respond to other students' reflections. Pena and Almaguer (2012) noted that the majority of the participating students reach higher levels of critical thinking than non-participants. They also suggested that using prompts which require students to not only observe but evaluate the implementation and propose modifications stimulates the development of their higher order thinking skills.

When students are assigned fieldwork, the university student teaching supervisors also play a role in the student teaching experiences. Unfortunately, many times the cooperating teacher and the student teacher are reluctant to trust the teaching supervisor and feel judged by the supervisor. Furthermore, the teaching supervisors perceive

themselves as outsiders within the P-12 school and the supervisory role is just another task to add to their teaching load (Fletcher, 2013). While the supervisory role is necessary, certain elements of trust appear to be missing.

In research done by Gomez et al. (2009), the findings vary regarding students who have exposure to diverse students in an early field experience. Some student teachers gain a better understanding of cultural diversity and begin to question the social inequities, as opposed to student teachers who find the exposure to diverse populations only reinforces negative attitudes and a lack of desire to work in those schools. Others report no change in their attitudes.

One concept that had been gaining more and more support was that of Professional Development Schools (PDS). These schools opened in various places in the United States as well as Japan and the Netherlands. The PDS in the United States is overseen by the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS). The definition of a PDS as noted by NCATE is to align themselves in much the same manner as a clinical setting for doctors. The PDS is to be a teaching hospital of sorts where teachers are treated as seriously as medical interns (Polizzi, 2009).

Transformational learning was utilized in the PDS. Polizzi (2009) continued by remarking that student teachers and mentors are immersed in a deeper, longer commitment to the school-district-university partnership. A core belief of the PDS improving literacy levels through student and teacher engagement and inquiry to achieve a clear understanding of the concepts. A mentor and alumnus of an educational program that used a PDS likened the experience to a first year of teaching with scaffolding. The best practices of educational programs are explored.

Best Practices in Educator Preparation Programs

Challenging the dominant views of teacher learning and learning to teach is at the center of school reform. This necessitated an overhaul of the current ideologies for teacher preparation and induction. The changes are felt at all levels of the educational system (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

A study of seven effective teacher education programs in the United States that was conducted by Darling-Hammond (2006) maintained that programs that are well-constructed, collaborative, and have efficiently coordinated field experiences dramatically contribute to the successful training of teachers who have the knowledge of theory and the skill set they need to serve diverse learners. There are six key components of an effective teacher education program according to Darling-Hammond (2006):

1. Coherence – the program should be founded on a common vision of good teaching that was based on an understanding of learning
2. Strong Core Curriculum – this should be imbedded into the practice
3. Extensive, Connected Clinical Experiences – these should support the concepts and practices in the coursework
4. Inquiry Approach – this should connect the theory and the practice
5. School-University Partnerships – there should be a common knowledge and shared belief system that develops between the two
6. Assessment Based on Professional Standards – teaching should be evaluated on demonstrations of critical skills and abilities

By focusing on these six components, university educator preparation programs could establish a list of criteria as the basis of their goals for future improvement. According to

Levine (2006), a high priority should be placed on attaining a better balance between subject matter preparation and field experience.

Alverno College in Milwaukee has an exemplary teacher education program according to a study done by Levine (2006). Alverno College teacher education program relies on extensive fieldwork. Prior to student teaching, students are required to complete at least 100 hours of field work that is divided into four different experiences, one taken each semester of the sophomore and junior year. The first experience is to watch a good teacher in action and then the student needs to teach two lessons. The second experience emphasizes literacy and the development of goals, objectives, and standards. The third experience focuses on assessment and classroom management. The fourth experience takes place in an urban school and the student teacher has to teach eight lessons. The student teaching practicum consists of two nine-week placements with at least one in an urban school. At the conclusion of each placement, the students are required to write a comprehensive case study about the effectiveness of student learning (Levine, 2006). In several studies reviewed by Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004), successful teachers were required to pass rigorous examinations of subject matter and teaching knowledge before they enter the profession.

Another superior program was at Emporia State University in Kansas (Levine, 2006). At this university, students entered the teacher education program their junior year. When the students were sophomores, they took a course titled “Introduction to Teaching” which required proof of 100 hours of supervised work experience with children, including 30 hours of tutoring in local schools. This provided the university students a chance to interact with elementary and secondary school age students as well

as provide opportunities for the faculty to see the interactions of their potential future school of education students. This allowed the faculty a chance to suggest to some that they choose a different field. Once admitted to the program, the junior year was comprised of coursework pedagogy and the entire senior year was spent as an intern in a professional development school where they were treated like staff members and expected to complete all of the duties of a teacher. Students viewed this intern experience as intense and valuable (Levine, 2006). Furthermore, Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) concluded that students who are provided with intensive mentoring, support systems, and reduced teaching loads allow them to gradually learn and become more proficient teachers.

A third prototypical program was the University of Virginia, Curry School of Education (Levine, 2006). Unlike the other programs, this one was a five-year program. By the end of their fourth year of the program, students had up to six field experiences and up to 90 hours in the field. The fifth year the student worked on his or her master's degree and taught full-time during the first semester. The second semester consisted of a capstone course and a research project based on a classroom problem. Faculty supervisors were required to take a three-credit course on evaluating teaching (Levine, 2006). In studies reviewed by Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004), graduates of five- or six-year programs that include an extensive internship tied to coursework are more successful and more likely to remain teaching than graduates of traditional undergraduate programs.

Promising practices in the field experience used carefully structured field assignments to highlight theoretical learning and to promote reflection. Others focused

on the child as a foundation for connecting perceptions about human development. Many used reflective logs, dialogue journals, and individual conferences to assist the student teachers in learning from their experiences. Finally, there were multiple placements to gain exposure to various types of schools and teaching methods (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The University of Hawai'i at Manoa restructured their College of Education in 2002 to make way for the new Institute for Teacher Education. After several years of researching best practices and gaining insight from other universities, the Institute for Teacher Education was to oversee four main programs: the Bachelor of Education in Elementary Education, the Bachelor of Education in Secondary Education, the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Secondary Education, and the Master of Education in Teaching. All of these programs shared one important element; all programs were field-based. Students spent one to two days each week per semester participating in field experiences leading up to their full-time student teaching assignment. The field experiences, student teaching, and teaching internships were embedded into the university coursework and completion was required to graduate from the program. Furthermore, the university faculty partnered with the school administrators and mentor teachers at the local schools to support the progress of the students in their program. The Institute for Teacher Education incorporated experiences in planning, implementation, and assessment of national and state standards into their programs (Hitz & Walton, 2004).

While the programs were viewed as very successful, Hitz and Walton (2004) cited some weaknesses. The Bachelor of Education and the Master of Education degrees have the most field experiences integrated into their curriculum and these programs receive the

highest ratings. The post-baccalaureate secondary program has fewer field experience hours so increasing the hours are targets for improvement. In addition, the university faculty work very closely with the local schools and it is the expectation that all faculty members supervise field experiences. However, in reality, the more senior faculty members felt that they no longer needed to participate in the field experiences, leaving the bulk of the supervisory work to the newer faculty members. This made it challenging to recruit faculty members when positions are open.

Schwab, DeFranco, and McGivney-Burelle (2004) reviewed the University of Connecticut's School of Education which had reexamined and redesigned their traditional four-year teacher preparation program and changed it to a five-year program called the Integrated Bachelor's/Master's (IB/M) Teacher Preparation. There were highly competitive admission standards and it was nationally recognized. It integrated coursework, school-based clinic experiences, and utilized the university and K-12 faculty for the student teaching experiences. Every student in the program completed at least one clinic placement in an urban setting, one in a special education setting, and one K-12 setting. A major element of the IB/M program was the relationship with the selected public school districts known as Professional Development Centers (PDCs). There were three urban centers and three suburban centers made up of elementary, middle, and high schools, each within six districts. University faculty, school administrators, K-12 teachers, and student teachers collaborated at these centers. Throughout the program, learning experiences were organized around three main components: core courses, clinical experiences, and seminars. The core courses dealt with the pedagogical knowledge, the clinicals provided teaching experience, and the seminars helped the

students integrate their coursework and clinical experiences. In addition to these best practices, induction and mentoring also benefitted the new teachers a great deal.

Types of Induction and Mentoring

A novice teacher had two jobs – teaching and learning to be a teacher. Regardless of the educator preparation program, there were some skills that could only be learned on the job. Real teaching began when someone received their own classroom. Beginning teacher induction programs introduced the novice teachers to the expectations and how they fit into the school and larger community. There were questions that could not be answered in one sitting. Induction and mentoring programs assisted the novice teacher in interpreting and using all of their new found information in their teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Teacher induction programs and mentoring programs have been used more frequently in an effort to keep qualified teachers (Lambeth, 2012). Induction happened with or without a formal program. There were multiple challenges for novice teachers, although when paired with a supportive mentor these novice teachers were more willing to try ambitious pedagogies and complex activities. Having a supportive mentor allowed the new teachers an opportunity to develop better teaching habits. However, it was strongly maintained that the mentor should not be the evaluator since a novice teacher would find it difficult to ask for help from someone that was evaluating them (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) implemented a mandatory teacher mentoring program in 2003 for all public schools. This program aimed at reducing the attrition rate of novice teachers in the state of

Missouri. DESE wanted to design a program that could be easily followed by all schools within the state. They provided suggestions for administrators to use to when choosing teachers to be mentors and training the mentors. Table 1 lists the teacher mentoring standards as designed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015).

Table 1

DESE Teacher Mentoring Program Standards

Introduction to school & community	**Systemic & ongoing program review**	**Individualized plan**	**Appropriate criteria for selecting mentors**	**Comprehensive mentor training**	**List of responsibilities for mentor, beg. teacher & administrator**	**Sufficient time for observations**
Teacher/student handbooks	Identifies stakeholders	Aligned with standards	A minimum of 3 years experience	Recognizes mentoring is NOT evaluation		Aligning class schedules
Expectations of community	Identifies mentoring outcomes	Systematic mentoring plan	Enthusiastic, commitment to job	Includes cognitive coaching skills		Utilizing state & local PD funds
Introduction to state/national levels	Gathers systematic feedback from mentor	Aligns with districts certification requirements	Committed to self-growth & mentoring	Observation & feedback training/skills		Provides time for observation & meetings
Discusses classroom equality-gender/race/abilities	Based on best practices	Establishes outcomes	Holds a similar position	Provides an awareness of phases of first-year educators		Encourages support of outside resources
Systematic intro to data analysis, assessment practice	Requires exit interviews	An extension of PD plan	May end pairing if not satisfied	Provides training on mentoring standards		
Includes district initiatives & parental concerns	Supported by central office	Establishes classroom observations checklist	Understands broad educational issues	Includes catalogue of resources available		
Defines professional & district acronyms	Included in broader PD	Structured experiences & expectations	Strong understanding of pedagogy	Recognizes need for strategies on classroom management		

Effective mentoring used a careful process to select, prepare, and support the mentor. They were given adequate time to mentor and appropriate compensation. Some programs allowed the mentors to work with the novices for one to three years; other programs combined mentoring with classroom teaching. Mentoring was viewed as a resourceful professional development experience for expert teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Teachers who were surveyed cited that a key component of them remaining a teacher was the principal leadership. Successful principals in retaining teachers were self-motivated and had good problem-solving abilities. These principals had appropriate relationships with their staff, supported their teachers, included teachers in certain decisions, and provided opportunities for the teachers to advance in their profession (Curtis, 2012). Several states and school districts had mentoring programs but according to principals, the success of the mentoring programs depended on the availability of funding, the quality and quantity of mentors, and the commitment of principals and superintendents to follow-through with the mentoring programs (Levine, 2006). Feiman-Nemser (2001) claimed that if pre-service teacher educators can depend on the induction and mentoring programs to continue to build on and extend the work they began with the pre-service teacher, then the pre-service teacher educators will be able to focus more on laying a solid foundation of learning within their program.

Michigan State University faculty members decided that even though there were state mandates that school districts provided mentors to novice teachers, they would integrate an induction component into their educator preparation program (Stanulis, Burrill, & Ames, 2007). The university faculty believed that this induction component

provides a new opportunity to develop partnerships with them and the K-12 schools where their students complete their field experiences. They hired consultants made up of recently retired principals, administrators, mentor coordinators, and veteran teachers who had previously served as mentors to work together to develop an induction curriculum. It proved to be challenging. Some felt there was not a need for the university to stay connected to their graduates, others felt the university would be overstepping their boundaries by advising employees of districts, and still some recognized that the state already mandated a mentoring program and there was not a need for the university to do the same thing. There were many challenges in developing the induction curriculum according to Stanulis et al. (2007). One positive element came out of the process though and it was an online chat room set up for graduates in their first year of teaching and student teachers completing their field experiences. The chat room provided an opportunity for the novice teachers and teachers in training to raise questions, respond to timely issues, and take part in focused discussions. The use of online resources and technology were also examined.

Technology in the Classroom

An increasingly important curriculum component is technology. Teacher educators modeling the use of technology in a classroom setting and during the field experiences were vital in developing the knowledge and skills of the technology systems used as a teacher (Olafson et al., 2005). Teacher education programs were challenged to alter their programs so that pre-service teachers developed skills using current technology. These technology-enabled learning design proficiencies were needed to help their students become twenty-first century leaders (Bower, Highfield, Furney, &

Mowbray, 2013). University faculty was tasked with understanding and familiarizing themselves with the range of technologies that their students would encounter in the classroom setting so that they could develop the pedagogy. One-on-one consultation sessions gave the university faculty an opportunity to collaborate and reflect on the curriculum design to best incorporate technology to achieve a pre-determined learning outcome. After the technology was infused into the curriculum, students indicated that they were more confident with its use and were better able to differentiate between effective and inappropriate uses of technologies (Bower et al., 2013).

Research by Mishra and Koehler (2006) found that educator preparation programs typically view content, pedagogy, and technology as separate entities. They proposed that these elements of knowledge are not separate. Instead, they should be depicted as all three together and overlapping. Figure 3 illustrates this idea.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) used an example of teaching chemistry to explain their triad of knowledge. Chemistry is the content, symbolic representations such as equations or molecular diagrams the pedagogy, and the technologies that are used to display and manipulate them in a program called CHIME allows the students to dynamically view and manipulate the molecular representations. It was important for student teachers to not only understand the content and pedagogy, but also be able to integrate the technology component into the lesson.

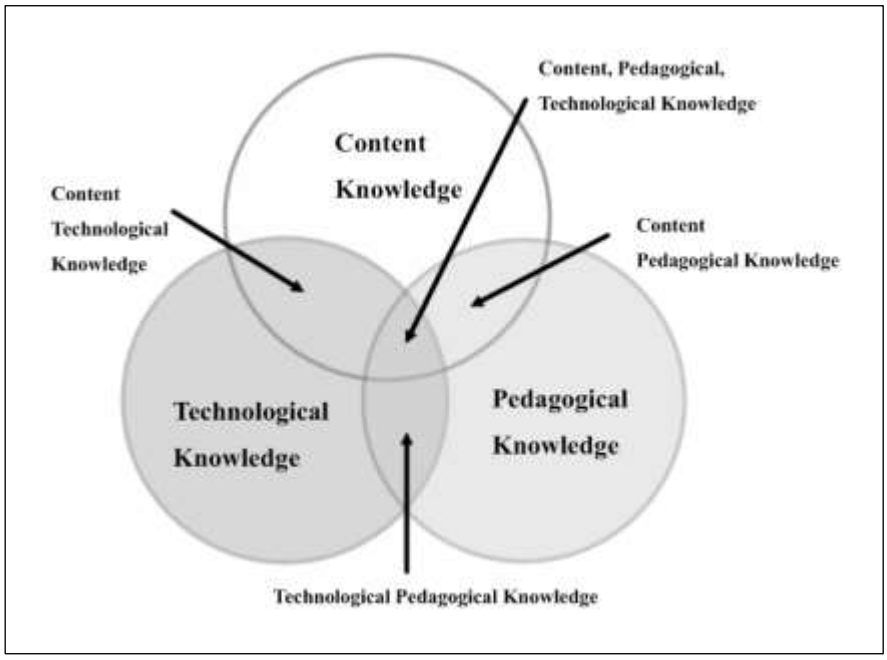

Figure 3. Content pedagogical technical knowledge. Adapted from Mishra and Koehler, 2006.

Hyde, Edwards, and Jones (2014) offered an intensive, one-year course to develop technology knowledge through skills-focused and hands-on workshops. They discovered that at the end of their technology course, the students expressed high levels of classroom confidence in teaching with digital technologies. They also found a strong, positive correlation between the students' personal confidence and their classroom confidence. Hyde et al. (2014) proposed that there are four aspects of teaching with technology, specifically with mathematics. The first is using digital technologies when it is beneficial to achieving the teaching objectives. The second is using digital technologies effectively in relation to mathematics-specific objectives. Another aspect is effectively organizing digital technologies in the classroom. The final aspect is assessing student progress when digital technologies had been used to support learning.

Taking those aspects a little further, Hyde et al. (2014) recognized seven elements that supported the use of digital technologies in teaching. These seven elements were all ways to develop the use of technology in teaching. Teaching practice in schools, optional sessions for different software, enrichment days working with pupils at the university, individual / group tasks and activities, additional support materials and opportunities, peer support, and digital technologies integrated into the course were the seven elements. Figure 4 illustrates this dynamic part of teaching in a world where technology changes daily.

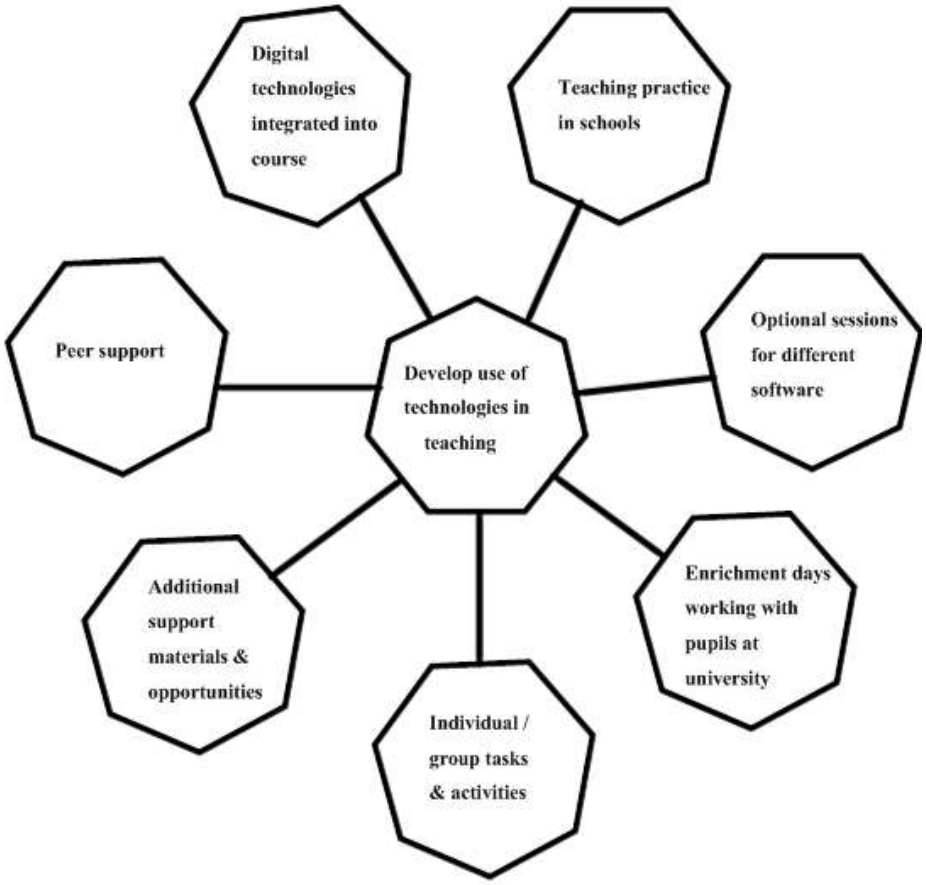

Figure 4. Seven elements that develop use of technologies in teaching. Adapted from Hyde et al., 2014.

Student teachers who took the course offered by Hyde et al. (2014) began with proficient skills using word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, and the Internet. At the conclusion of the course, they had gained confidence with their use of technology in the classroom and they stated that they found the use of technology interesting, enjoyable, time-saving, and a way to make diagrams neat and more accurate.

Classroom Management

Fletcher (2013) studied three different groups of student teachers. Overwhelmingly, they felt least prepared for and challenged with classroom management issues. This was consistent with a conceptual model of pre-teaching phases in which one particular phase was concerned with the student teachers' self-adequacy in the classroom.

A study by Berridge and Goebel (2013) of over 70 student teachers echoed these concerns about classroom management. One participant simply wanted to know why the university prepared them for the perfect classroom and not the realistic classroom. Other student teachers wanted to know how to discipline a student without disrupting the entire class. In general, the student teachers felt that they were not prepared for classroom management and disciplining the student. These student teachers witnessed fighting among students in their classrooms and were surprised at the poor behavior that was tolerated at the public schools. There was a basic lack of respect for the teachers.

Bullying was reported as an issue in schools by Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles, and Simmonds (2013). The three most common forms were physical (kicking and hitting), verbal (hostile teasing), and relational (attempts to damage social relationships and exclusion). The general perceptions were that physical bullying was the worst, relational the least, and verbal somewhere between those two. Relational bullying

was often done in cyberspace using electronic media such as cell phones, mobile devices, or personal computers. Cyber bullying was more prevalent in schools than the other two forms.

Boulton et al. (2013) noted that many teachers feel unable to cope effectively with bullying in general. The level of teachers' self-efficacy was proposed as a determinate of their ability to intervene when presented with a bullying situation. Pre-service teachers' beliefs and reactions to bullying were not yet based on their professional experiences but rather on their personal experiences growing up. Female teachers were found to have more negative attitudes towards bullying than male teachers. Pre-service teachers believed cyber bullying was serious but not a problem in the schools. Male pre-service teachers felt more confident than females in knowing how to deal with cyberbullying in a classroom setting.

Berridge and Goebel (2013) discovered that the student teachers lack the necessary skills and experience required to manage extreme forms of student behavior. They concluded that educator preparation programs need to offer more classroom involvement through field experiences prior to student teaching. The student teachers need to have multiple opportunities to witness veteran teachers modeling best practices for managing student discipline in the classroom so that the student had ideas to draw from when they did their own student teaching. In addition to multiple opportunities for classroom management, student teachers at the secondary level need multiple opportunities in teaching the various levels of the subject matter.

Subject Specific Factors

Teacher education course work, particularly for secondary education, was divided into two areas; the teaching pedagogy coursework from the School of Education and the subject matter coursework from the School of Arts and Sciences. At many universities, these two schools were in conflict. While some universities attempted to narrow the gapping chasm by suggesting that faculty members in the School of Arts and Sciences take the subject specific Praxis II licensure exam to see what components were on the exam, most universities continued to have both schools not supporting each other's efforts in educating their students (Levine, 2006). When courses were taught by individual faculty members in different departments, there was rarely a connection and consequently a lack of cohesion in the organizational themes of the educator preparation program. Without a unified framework to guide the program, students had difficulty envisioning good teaching habits or making connections between the knowledge and the skill (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

It was necessary for teachers to not only know the content of their subject, but understand the nature of inquiry. A proof in mathematics was different from a historical explanation or a literary interpretation. Teachers also needed to understand their subject from a pedagogical perspective so they were able to offer alternate explanations or varying models of instruction (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

English teachers were an integral part in education systems since students must obtain passing scores on literary achievement tests in order to graduate high school (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). That placed a tremendous amount of pressure on these teachers and consequently, "literacy teachers and English teachers are particular targets

for scrutiny" (Burns, 2007, p. 123). The teacher education programs and administrators of the schools where the teachers ultimately were employed needed to understand the factors that affected the ability of the novice teachers to be successful (Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008). In some teacher education programs, the actual study of English methods courses was not covered until the senior year (Hochstetler, 2011).

When comparisons were made of novice teachers, it was found that some mathematics and science teachers tended to have a non-education degree in mathematics, biology, or chemistry as opposed to a degree in mathematics education or science education (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). On the other hand, some secondary teachers did not even have a minor in the subject matter they were teaching. Almost half of the high school students in the United States who took physical science were taught by an out-of-field teacher. This percent was even higher in lower track classes, in high-poverty schools, and high-minority schools (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 2004). Furthermore, research done by Ingersoll et al. (2012) found that of new teachers, 68% of science and 42% of math teachers have non-education degrees prior to teaching compared to 29% of other new teachers. In addition, these teachers take alternate routes to obtaining their teaching credentials than the traditional college teacher education program. Despite the influx of math teachers, there still appeared to be a shortage. It was estimated by Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) that students in the high minority schools have less than a 50% chance of getting a math or science teacher who has a license or a degree in the subject they teach.

Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) found that the extent of the teachers' preparation in mathematics methods, curriculum, and teaching is important in predicting

the teachers' effectiveness. Students who studied with fully certified math teachers had greater improvements in achievement than students who studied with a non-certified math teacher.

According to Curtis (2012) one of the reasons for poor teacher performance is that the classroom setting is much different from how these new teachers believe it would be and possibly they are not realistically prepared for the job of teaching math. Ingersoll et al. (2012) concurred stating that in some alternative teaching routes, people with degrees in other fields are allowed to start teaching while they work on their teaching certification. Friedrich (2014) claimed that the idea behind the alternative licensure routes seems to be that anyone with a good disposition and subject knowledge can become a good teacher with some practice and an introduction to basic teaching. With a shortage of math and science teachers, Lambeth (2012) reported that each year many schools are forced to hire under qualified teachers or teachers that are qualified to teach a different subject but assigned to teach a math or science class.

Gilbert (2011) studied two different science teachers, one of which had a biology degree and then decided to become a science teacher as a fresh intellectual challenge. This teacher "did not view the teaching profession as a calling or a deep intrinsic need to work in the classroom context" (Gilbert, 2011, p. 400). Consequently, this teacher stopped teaching after two years when the intellectual challenge waned. While the importance of subject specific knowledge was great, the data from research done by Ingersoll et al. (2012) found that especially math and science teachers are at a disadvantage if they do not have any training in how to teach their subject matter. In addition, Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) stated that teachers who are both certified in

their discipline and adequately prepared to teach are more successful with their students than teachers with less preparation. They continued by claiming that teachers with more training are more effective with their students than teachers with less training. Not only was experience in subject specific matters important, but also experience with cultural diversity.

Cultural Diversity Factors

While training in teaching methods was shown to be a vital part of being a successful teacher, other factors also contributed to the overall retention of teachers. According to Barnes (2006), the public schools have become more and more diverse yet the typical teacher is still a white, middle class person. Heineke et al. (2010) stated that many university teacher preparation programs fail to provide their graduates with the skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to face the realities of urban schools. There was a lack of sustained effort by universities, according to Zeichner (2003), to address the growing diversity of K-12 students. The universities would add a course or two on multicultural, bilingual/ESL, or urban education but leave the rest of the curriculum untouched. Diversity was not embedded into the curriculum. Gomez et al. (2009) added that the demographics of K-8 classrooms are culturally and linguistically diverse, while the teaching force remains a homogeneous, Caucasian, English speaking group. Zeichner (2003) echoed these sentiments claiming that white, monolingual education instructors often lack the experience themselves in teaching in culturally diverse schools and the lack of diversity among the faculty undermines the efforts to prepare intercultural competent teachers.

Efforts were made to attract minorities to teaching programs, yet a study done by Hancock and Scherff (2010) showed that minorities only represented 13% of the teaching force. In order to serve the educational needs of the growing numbers of diverse students, Gomez et al. (2009) advised that there must be a commitment to teach in diverse classrooms and to understand the cultural and linguistic differences among the students in their classrooms.

In a study of four urban universities, Smolen, Colville-Hall, Liang, and MacDonald (2006) discovered some interesting perspectives about the methods of teaching diversity at universities. It is shown through research that most of the teachers are White females. What had not been eluded to was that most of the teacher educators are White and/or lacking in exposure to diverse student populations.

> Teacher educators play a pivotal role in tackling this serious problem in education, for they are the ones who are charged with preparing mostly monocultural teachers to teach in multiculutural classrooms. If they are to be effective they must have multicultural competence themselves. (Smolen et al., 2006, p. 47)

These faculty members with limited exposure to minorities were attempting to communicate to student teachers about instructing in classrooms with diverse populations, and these faculty members had essentially no experience teaching within these diverse populations (Smolen et al., 2006).

However, based on their data, Smolen et al. (2006) found that extended contact with minorities impacted the perspectives of the faculty members. The quality of contact with diverse student populations was influential and contributed to more changes in

attitude. Faculty members also needed to be engaged in reflection and reflective teaching when presented with diversity issues. Results of the study suggested that cultural immerison was an important element of multicultural education. Yet, the results also pointed out that many students in the educator preparation programs, as well as many of the faculty members teaching them were less likely to travel abroad than students and faculty in a different area of study.

Gosselin and Meixner (2013) assumed that the students in their educator preparation program would be able to simultaneously internalize and execute their changing beliefs as they learned about and were exposed to diverse student populations. However, they found that the students were unable to immediately assimilate their changing beliefs about culture while learning methods of instruction, classroom management techniques, and lesson design. They concluded that there are developmental layers of learning for college students as Figure 5 illustrates.

Figure 5. Developmental layers of learning for college students. Based on a model from Gosselin and Meixner, 2013.

College aged students needed to evaluate new ideas before they could internalize them. They needed to internalize the ideas before they could act upon them in social

relationships. The students' beliefs could not be interrupted and completely integrated within the time frame of their educator preparation program (Gosselin & Meixner, 2013).

Research with English Language Learners (ELL) further demonstrated the layers of learning for college students. Gross et al. (2010) concluded that by simply placing students in socially different contexts, one cannot expect substantial changes in their beliefs and actions to happen overnight. Students in an educator preparation program were assigned a field experience of working with ELL students at a local school. Initially, the student teachers believed that being bilingual or not speaking English as their first language would be problematic. By the end of the field experience, the student teachers realized the difference between social and academic language. While the ELL students were able to converse easily with their student teacher, using the English language in an academic context was often challenging. The student teachers recognized their own limitations when communicating about a subject and how to explain abstract concepts. This conveyed the idea of how teaching should be addressed for ELL students. Gross et al. (2010) asserted that their student teachers realize that to effectively teach content, their students need to have a command of academic language in addition to conversational language.

A three step program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania had foundations in the developmental layers of learning ideology as suggested by Gosselin and Meixner (2013). Two faculty members, Kerr and Dils (2011), collaborated to develop a program for that university's school of education that addressed the NCATE Standard 4 which required that pre-service teachers demonstrated and applied proficiencies related to diversity. The first step of the program was an introduction to diversity concepts in teacher education

courses, such as an ELL or ESL course and a methods course. Instructors used teaching vignette video clips or scenarios to set the stage for analysis and discussion. The task was to coach the students so they could identify effective teacher behaviors. The second step was an initial experience with diversity using their "Diversity Series." A variety of experiences were offered that exposed the students to diversity and diversity issues. The last step was to use field experience placements in P-12 schools with diverse students. This allowed the students to apply their understanding of diversity concepts and to reflect on the pedagogy to further develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards diversity. This field experience was supplemented by coaching and feedback from supervisors and cooperating teachers. As the program continued to grow, Kerr and Dils (2011) planned to make adjustments to meet the needs of their students.

A different proposal as a means of integrating diversity into a program was service-learning (Tatebe, 2013). Service-learning was an alignment of educational goals with mutually beneficial community service work. The benefits strengthened academic learning, developed personal skills, increased knowledge or community issues, fostered a sense of civic and social responsibility, reduced stereotyping, and created a greater awareness of the needs of diverse students. However, it was not without problems. There were several logistical, school, and personnel factors. Placing students in other areas meant travel and accommodation arrangements needed to be made for both them and the faculty supervisor. It was difficult at times to find faculty members willing to accept the role of service-learning supervisor. In essence, the idea was good and the outcome was good, but the practicality of it was challenging.

Finally, when universities and schools spoke of diversity, it usually was rooted in their concerns about race, ethnicity, class, and gender. However, there was another silent form of diversity that was often neglected – family. The make-up of families was no longer a mother, father, and one or more children. Today there were families with adopted children, step-children, step-parents, half-brothers or sisters, foster children, and parents of the same sex (Turner-Vorbeck, 2005).

A discussion that introduced the topic of family diversity where the objectives were openly shared with students was suggested by Turner-Vorbeck (2005). These four objectives are:

1. Develop an awareness and an initial understanding of family diversity
2. Discover individual opinions and biases about family diversity
3. Create and explore class activities that could be used to demonstrate diversity
4. Reflect on personal views about family diversity through journaling

Turner-Vorbeck (2005) pointed out that teachers need to be made aware that commercially prepared lessons and textbooks often depict a traditional nuclear family and many times that is not the type of family of today's students. Since teachers partner with families to support student learning, an understanding of a variety of family dynamics is important.

Teaching Students with Special Needs

The schools in the United States followed a policy of inclusion of students with special needs. This was a result of the Regular Education Initiative (REI) from the 1980s and more recently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from 2004. This brought about two critical issues for public schools: the inclusion of students with

disabilities in the general classrooms and the preparation of teachers to use best practices with their students with special needs. The term special needs refers to students with disabilities, giftedness, or linguistic differences (Rao, 2009).

Zeichner (2003) emphasized that only around one fourth of the teachers who work with ELL students receive any substantive preparation regarding teaching strategies and language acquisition theory. Evaluations by graduates routinely rated ELL preparation very low. Levine (2006) noted some student teachers claim that the teaching methods being taught in their teacher education program are no longer being used in the classrooms. These methods make no reference to teaching students with disabilities and there is an assumption that all of the student body is highly literate in the English language. Other factors became prevalent during studies which noted that meeting the demands of special education requirements and the lack of administrative support played into the teachers' reasons for switching schools or leaving the profession (Scherff, 2006).

Actually, as reported by Rao (2009), over 90% of students with disabilities are educated in regular schools and over 70% of them educated in general classrooms. These classrooms represented a diversity of intellectual, communication, sensory, and behavioral differences along with students that had emotional and behavior disorders, severe social maladjustment problems, multiple and severe handicapping conditions, and physical differences.

A solution suggested by Rao (2009) to meet this diversity is to use a cross-categorical approach to service delivery. This approach grouped students according to their instructional needs rather than their disability labels. Rao (2009) also recommended that educator preparation programs incorporate the following 12 best practices into their

curriculum. These practices include: case studies; lecture practices; thoughtful questions; group discussion triggers such as for example; modeling; rewarding learner participation; cooperative group assignments; reflective responses to learner contributions; active learning strategies; goals to grades connections; climate setting; double-loop feedback; and fostering learner responsibility.

Furthermore, Rao (2009) asserted that educator preparation programs need to prepare their student teachers for four broader roles that they might encounter as a teacher involving four forms of collaboration. The first form was collaboration-consultation which was when a general education teacher requests services from a special education teacher to help generate ideas to handle a particular situation. A second form was a peer support system where two general education teachers work together to brainstorm ideas. Another form was teacher assistance teams that includes special educators providing assistance to general education teachers. A final form was co-teaching where general and special education teachers work together to provide services to the students. Differentiating instruction was key to meeting the challenges of teaching to a diverse student population.

Summary

The common practices used by university educator preparation programs were not necessarily the most effective. Partnerships were established between universities, community colleges, and local school districts in an effort to recruit and support the novice teachers. Field experiences remained an important element in the preparation of teachers. Educators in the United States lacked a common vision of how to prepare teachers to meet the realities of today's classrooms. There appeared to be an increase in

divergent and sometimes contrasting approaches to reform (Levine, 2006). There were, however, exemplary programs that were reviewed and they offered best practices for other universities to emulate.

Once the students graduated and were hired as teachers, the role of induction and mentoring played a large part in their success and failure. New technologies in the classroom were introduced. The novice teachers grappled with classroom management skills that had not been adequately covered in the educator preparation program. The secondary teachers in particular were faced with having content knowledge but not necessarily a strong background in teaching methodology of that subject matter. Finally, the increasingly diverse student population left some novice teachers unprepared for the cultural differences and differentiated instruction required for students with special needs. With those topics in mind, I generated a study to examine the educator preparation program at Midwestern University.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a description of the research site and the participants of the study. In addition, the procedures used for collecting and analyzing the data are explored. A qualitative research method using case studies based on recorded interviews with six participants was the basis of the data. Purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2013) was used to select the participants. As stated by Maxwell (2013), there were five main goals for purposeful selection: achieving good representation, achieving a range of representation, deliberately selecting individuals critical to the study, establishing particular comparison to illuminate reasons for variance, and selecting participants that would openly and honestly answer the queries posed to them. The six participants were selected specifically for their willingness to participate in the program. Fortunately, these six participants represented a broad cross-section of the graduates from Midwestern University's educator preparation program. The participants varied in age, type of degree earned, physical location of teaching position, type of school, public and private, and grade level taught.

The Research Site

Midwestern University was an independent, four-year, liberal arts university located in the Midwest of the United States. The university offered over 120 undergraduate and graduate degree programs at the time of the study. The student enrollment was approximately 17,000 students. The university strived to develop the whole person with their programs. Midwestern University had been recognized both nationally and internationally for its entrepreneurship, innovation, and dedication to its students. The university is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North

Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Midwestern University Teacher Education Programs are accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The Midwestern University School of Education is a member of the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). The degrees in Education at Midwestern University are developed to meet the needs of aspiring and practicing educators. The goals of the Education Degree programs are to build on the students existing skills while offering various approaches to analyze contemporary problems in education. One of the goals for the Education Degree programs is for the students to gain new perspectives and techniques. The Midwestern University School of Education stated 14 distinguishing characteristics of its program with the following six being particularly relevant to this study:

- Highly Regarded Accredited Programs
- Outstanding Faculty Expertise and Experience
- "Real World Authentic" Learning Experiences
- Top Job Placement Rates
- Embedded Leadership Development
- Preparing Educators for 21st Century Instruction

Midwestern University offers undergraduate and graduate teacher education certification programs. The undergraduate programs are Early Childhood, Elementary Teacher Education, Middle School Teacher Education, and Secondary Teacher Education. There was a graduate program for a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT).

There were graduate teacher education advanced certification programs that included English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Library Media, Counseling, Psychological Examiner, Reading Specialist, Gifted certification, and Special Education certification. Furthermore, there were graduate teacher education non-certification emphasis areas of study that included Character Education, Autism Spectrum Disorders K-12, Early Interventions in Autism and Sensory Impairments, Educational Technology, Mathematics Education Specialist K-5, Content Area Specialty, and Interpretation in American Studies. Midwestern University offers a wide range of educator degrees and certifications.

Methodology and Rationale

I used a case-study research design. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) cited the utilization of a case-study approach for qualitative researchers. Patton (2002) asserted that a case-study research design that was based on analysis of inductive and comparison procedures would uncover categories or patterns that developed without any predetermined assumptions. Furthermore, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) emphasized that using case studies was a highly structured form of relaying information.

My research was planned around a conceptual framework. According to Patton (2002), conceptual frameworks were useful as a guide for identifying patterns as long as there was no action to suppress naturally occurring themes. Qualitative studies that framed questions around a specific setting had several advantages, stressed Maxwell (2013). The first advantage was protecting me from inappropriate generalizations. Another advantage was that I was allowed to recognize the diversity between the participants in the study. Finally, I was permitted to focus on the actions, events, and

specific beliefs of the participants. Qualitative textual data claimed Coffey and Atkinson (1996), enabled me to analyze the experiences, the meanings and motives behind the experiences, and the reasons why they were remembered and retold to me.

Development of Interview Questions

The initial interview questions (Appendix E) were based on the need to provide demographic information and establish a description of the participants' teaching environments. Subsequent questions (Appendix E) were based on information needed to support common themes found in other research studies and common themes that surfaced during the previous phone interviews with the participants of this study. Results from Midwestern University's state administered first year teacher survey were also used to guide the creation of interview questions. These results were consistent with the topics discussed in the literature review of this dissertation.

Procedures

I applied to Midwestern University's internal review board (IRB) to begin an academic year-long study that followed a group of cohorts from their teacher education program. In the application, details about the study objectives, selection of participants, informed consent, research methods, and benefits of the study were provided. Upon obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A) on May 12, 2014, I contacted the student teaching supervisors to see if I could speak to the spring teacher education graduates. They had already attended their last class, so I asked the student teaching supervisors to send a mass email to all of the students explaining my dissertation study. When I only received three responses, I sent out a mass postal mailing since I had determined that many of the

graduates were no longer checking their university email. I received three more responses from the mass mailing (Appendix B).

All of the participants completed a short demographic survey and returned a signed consent form (Appendices C & D). One male participant returned his survey and consent form. However, after multiple attempts over several months, I was unable to contact him and therefore he was not a final participant in the study. In August and September, I conducted phone interviews with five of the participants. The sixth participant was interviewed in late October. These interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to 80 minutes. In February, March, and April I conducted phone interviews with all six of the participants and these were recorded and transcribed. Each participant was interviewed three times. They participated because I worked around their schedule and did not take up too much of their time since the interviews were spaced out with one to three months in between the interviews. Following the final interviews, I sent a personal note to each participant thanking them for their time and effort. I offered words of encouragement and wished them well in their future. The results of the study were provided to the members of Midwestern University's teacher educator program.

Participants

Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants and any other identifying information had been changed to maintain their privacy. One participant was not hired as a teacher, but she was substitute teaching. Initially, I asked the participants demographic questions. I wanted to determine their race, gender, and age range. I also wanted to get some background information regarding their personal educational experiences. I believed that it was important to note the types of schools the participants attended to see

if the schools where they eventually taught were similar. The classifications included suburban, urban, or rural and whether the schools were public or private. The types of degrees previously earned and those earned through Midwestern University were included in the demographic survey. Finally, the classification of school where the participants had their student teaching experience was compared to the classification of school where they experienced their first year of teaching. The results of the survey are compiled Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	Age Range	Type of Elementary School Attended	Type of Secondary School Attended	BA BS MAT	Certification Area	Type of School Student Teaching	Type of School Teaching At
Amy	Over 40	Public, Urban	Public, Suburban	MAT	English Lang. Arts	Public	
Cassie	Under 30	Public, Suburban	Public, Suburban	MAT in progress	Unified Science & Chemistry	Large Public Suburban	Large Public Suburban
Elaine	Under 30	Private, Suburban	Home-Schooled, Suburban	BA	Elementary Education	Large Public Suburban	Small Public Rural
Kelley	Over 40	Private, Rural	Private, Suburban	MAT in progress	English Lang. Arts & Speech Theatre	Suburban University	Large Public Urban
Mary	Under 30	Private, Suburban	Private, Suburban	MAT	Mathematics	Large Public Suburban	Small Private Suburban
Sally	Over 40	Public, Suburban	Public, Suburban	MAT in progress	Elementary Education	Large Public Suburban	Large Public Suburban

Amy. Amy was an over 40 years of age, Caucasian female who attended an urban, public elementary school and a suburban, public secondary school. She received an MAT degree in secondary education, while already having earned a BA in English and Art History. Amy was certified to teach middle school and secondary school English and Language Arts. In her opinion, she had a great deal of exposure to culturally diverse groups. Amy's preference for teaching positions was in a suburban, public school. While she completed her student teaching in public schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings, Amy was unable to secure a full-time teaching position and was a substitute teacher at the time of this study.

Cassie. Cassie was an under 30 years of age, Caucasian female who attended a suburban, public elementary school and a suburban, public secondary school. She received an MAT in secondary education and had secondary certification in unified science and chemistry. Previously she had earned a BA in Management and Computer Science. In her opinion, she had some exposure to culturally diverse groups. Cassie preferred teaching in a suburban, public high school. At the beginning of this study, she was a part-time science teacher at a large, suburban, public high school. However, after first semester, she was hired to be a full-time science teacher at that same school.

Elaine. Elaine was an under 30 years of age, Caucasian female who attended a private, suburban elementary school and was home-schooled in a suburban setting for her secondary education. She received a BA in Elementary Education and was certified to teach grades 1–6. In her opinion, she had some exposure to culturally diverse groups. Elaine wanted to teach in a suburban, public elementary school, similar to where she did

her student teaching. Elaine was hired to teach fifth grade at a small, rural, public elementary school in the Midwest and had to relocate to that area.

Kelley. Kelley was an over 40 years of age, Caucasian female who attended a private, rural elementary school and a private, suburban secondary school. She received her MAT in Secondary Education and was certified to teach middle school and secondary school English and Language Arts. She also had a BA in Theatre Performance. In her opinion, she had a great deal of exposure to culturally diverse groups. Kelley wanted to teach in a suburban, public high school, although she did her student teaching at a suburban university. With over 10 years of guest teaching experience in Theatre Arts classrooms, Kelley was hired to teach high school English at a large, urban, public school in a Midwest metropolitan area and relocated to that area.

Mary. Mary was an under 30 years of age, Caucasian female who attended a private, suburban elementary school and a private, suburban, all female, secondary school. She received her MAT in Secondary Education was certified to teach secondary mathematics and also had a BS in Mathematics. In her opinion, she had a great deal of exposure to culturally diverse groups. Mary preferred to teach in a private, suburban high school even though she did her student teaching in a suburban, public high school. Mary was hired to teach math in a small, private, suburban, all female high school.

Sally. Sally was an over 40 years of age, Caucasian female who attended a suburban, public elementary school and secondary school. She received a BA in Elementary Education and also had a BA in Theater Arts. Sally was certified to teach elementary level students. In her opinion, she had some exposure to culturally diverse groups. Sally wanted to teach in a suburban, public elementary school, similar to where

she did her student teaching. With over 10 years of substitute teaching experience, Sally was hired to teach second grade at a different elementary school within the same school district where she did her student teaching.

Procedure

Due to the distant between the location of the participants and myself, I conducted phone interviews. These were done using a Google Voice phone number. Interview questions were pre-determined and I asked additional follow-up questions based on the responses of the participants. The length of the interviews ranged from around 20 minutes to over an hour. Prior to each interview, I would text message each participant to inquire about a good date and time to hold our interview. Once that was established, I would call all participants on their pre-determined date and time to ask if it would be a good time to do the interview. If it was still a good time, then the participant would call the Google Voice phone number which linked it to my cell phone. When I answered their calls, I would prompt Google Voice to record the conversation.

The conversations consisted of me asking follow-up questions from our previous interview and me asking the new questions for that interview. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on any of their answers and I asked additional questions when necessary to prompt a more thorough response. Following the recorded conversations, I manually transcribed and saved the recorded conversation to a word document.

Data Analysis

I used qualitative coding techniques to answer the research questions. Open coding was used to discover emerging themes from the participant interviews. Axial coding was then used to connect the emergent themes and identify how these themes

related to the strengths and weaknesses of the novice teachers ability to carry out their duties as a first-year teacher. Finally, I wrote case studies describing the experiences of the participants.

Summary

Qualitative research using case studies explored the experiences of the first year of teaching by one cohort of graduates from Midwestern University's educator preparation program. The interviews were analyzed and coded. Emerging themes were used to answer the research questions.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to describe the first year of teaching for these graduates and seek possible factors in areas of strength and weakness in their ability to carry out their duties as first-year teachers. In addition to the traditional BS and BA degrees in education, Midwestern University offered a MAT program that allowed students to begin teaching prior to completing the MAT degree. The students must have completed 36 hours of teacher education coursework at the university, completed a detailed portfolio of their graduate work, completed the required number of student teaching hours for their specialization, and successfully passed the PRAXIS II certification exam in their area of specialty.

Case Studies

Pseudonyms were used to maintain the privacy of each participant and case studies were written to describe their experiences. When the study was completed, I sent each participant a personal note of encouragement and appreciation for them continuing to participate in the study. At the conclusion of the last interview, I asked each participant how they would rate the way that I conducted the interview and why they continued to participate in the study for nine months. Sally exclaimed, "You were awesome! You were flexible with the crazy schedules. It was really good to be able to talk about everything." Elaine thought that the study was conducted really well. Cassie stated that she "appreciated the text reminders and the heads up and working with my schedule. I think that you did well." Kelley and Amy liked how I was willing to listen to them discuss their problems regarding teaching. Mary thought that I asked "great" questions. She found the study to be interesting and was curious about other graduates

experiences during their first year. Each participant acknowledged that they did not expect a gift card from me at the end of the study.

Cassie. Cassie was an under 30 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to be a high school science teacher. She had two bachelor degrees, a BA in Management and a BS in Computer Science but she had always wanted to be a science teacher. She went to Midwestern University to pursue a MAT degree. Since Cassie wanted to teach high school science, she needed to take additional science courses to qualify for her certifications in Unified Science and Chemistry. She took these courses at four different places. Some were taken at Midwestern University, some were taken at two other nearby universities, and some were taken at the local community college. However, all of Cassie's educator preparation courses were taken at Midwestern University.

Cassie completed 60 hours of teacher observation before student teaching. She had a full semester of student teaching. She observed for the first two weeks and then began teaching for the remainder of the semester. She student taught at one high school, and all of the classes taught were honors level. When Cassie had completed the student teaching assignment, required portfolio, and passed her certification exam, she began searching for a teaching position. She still had two courses to take to complete her MAT degree. During this study, she took one course in the fall semester and her last course in the spring semester. She was on track to complete her MAT at the end of her first year of teaching.

In April 2014, Cassie interviewed for a full-time teaching position at a local suburban high school. She was not offered the position. The following month she did not receive any responses from any of the high schools where she had applied. Then in

June, Cassie had three schools call her to interview for science teaching positions at the high school level. In addition, she received a call from the high school where she had interviewed in April. They offered her a part-time teaching position. She did not want to risk interviewing at the other three schools and end up not getting offered a teaching position. At this point, Cassie made the decision to accept the part-time teaching position at the school where she really wanted to teach so that she could become a member of their teaching community. This school was in a larger district in the area where Cassie grew up.

Cassie had completed some observations at this high school, and the head of the science department was familiar with her. The school offered Cassie a part-time teaching and part-time student supervisor contract. She was assigned a class titled "chemistry concepts" which was a low ability level class, and a regular level biology class. The remainder of the day she supervised students in ISS (In-School-Suspension).

During the summer months before starting her first year of teaching, Cassie looked over the textbooks that she was going to be using but decided to wait until she talked to the other teachers before she started developing lesson plans. Cassie wanted to see what ability level her students were and then adjust the lesson plans accordingly.

The week before school started, Cassie participated in the new teacher orientation for all new teachers in the district. She said that it helped her to get to know the other teachers and to become familiar with the computer programs that the district used. She was able to get logins for her online gradebook and other online programs that she would be using in the upcoming school year. Cassie was assigned a mentor who was a teacher that she had observed during her practicum. The mentor had remembered Cassie and was

instrumental in getting her hired when the part-time position became available. Cassie and her mentor had a good working relationship, and Cassie believed that the mentor supported her in a positive manner. The science department had 16 teachers with three of them new for that school year.

When school started, Cassie felt prepared because she had gone through the new teacher orientation, and she had taught science during her student teaching. However, she admitted that she did not feel prepared for some of her students. Cassie had only taught honors level science classes during her student teaching. When she was hired as a part-time science teacher, she was given a chemistry class for lower ability level students. "I'm learning the ropes of how to teach lower level kids. I've talked to the other teachers and my mentor to come up with a plan for teaching these students." Cassie felt knowledgeable with the science material because she had taken many science classes for her certification. "It's just more of the struggle that I had with the lower kids. How do I adjust what I know down to their level," she wondered. Cassie stated that she

> had observed some below average classes so it was kind of nice to see both ends of the spectrum, because when I did my practicum I had been observing the below average classes and average classes. It was a little hard because I didn't have much discipline problems with honors but there were other problems. Now I more have discipline problems, not like big problems, I have to think about it more than I had to with student teaching.

To tackle her student discipline issues, Cassie read articles, talked to other teachers, and asked them about their own successful strategies.

The October parent conferences went fine for Cassie. She did not have many students since she was part-time and consequently did not have many parents attend. Fortunately, by the end of first semester, Cassie was notified that she would begin teaching full-time for the second semester. She was excited about getting to teach full-time when another teacher left after first semester. The classes were for average and below average students unlike the honors classes where she did her student teaching.

During her first year of teaching, Cassie had one formal observation and four or six walk through observations. The administrator would follow up with a short conversation the next day offering constructive criticism. The conversations were not negative in nature. The administrator provided advice for Cassie based on what was observed, such as other ways to present the material or implement a lab.

Technology was used not only in the day-to-day attendance and gradebook programs, but also by the science department for instructional purposes. Cassie learned how to use these programs during her student teaching or during professional development days during her first year of teaching. There were many simulation programs for science experiments. Cassie researched and talked to other science teachers in her school to become more familiar with these programs since they had not been covered in her classes at Midwestern University.

A good day of teaching for Cassie was when her plans worked out the way that she expected them to work. When she planned an activity that she was really excited about and the students got excited about it made for a good day. Sometimes her plans did not go so well. When that happened she wrote notes to herself for next year or changed the plans a little before the next class. “If it’s not something that I can tweak on the fly,

then I'll write a note. If it's something that I can change like how I presented my notes wasn't the best way or change my notes, I'll do something like that."

A bad day of teaching was when there were a lot of things going on and a major issue came up. The only time that Cassie questioned whether she wanted to be a teacher was in regards to an IEP issue. "I had a lot of IEPs and just trying to figure out what accommodations I need to do. So when there's an issue with that, it's very stressful to figure out what I have to do. Luckily I have a mentor to help me."

Cassie definitely felt part of the school community. She believed that the other science teachers and the administrators were supportive of her. "That's one of the things that I love about my school district. It's really a big family environment and if you're struggling with something, almost everyone is willing to help you out." Cassie thought that teaching was a good fit for her and by the end of her first year of teaching, she was having mainly good days and only a few that were bad.

The school district where Cassie taught her first year did not get a tax increase approved. Consequently, they did not immediately offer first year teachers a new contract. Cassie thought about looking at other school districts and applying to open positions, but she really liked the school where she was teaching. She saw herself as staying at that high school for her whole teaching career. Fortunately, Cassie was later offered a full-time teaching contract for the new school year, and she accepted it.

Elaine. Elaine was an under 30 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to be an elementary school teacher. She earned a BA degree in Elementary Education from Midwestern University. This was her first post-secondary degree.

Elaine did her student teaching with a co-teacher. In this model, the student teacher was only supposed to teach for three days on her own. Elaine's cooperating teacher believed that it would be better for Elaine to teach more so she ended up teaching for two full weeks. Elaine did most of her observations in first grade classrooms, and her student teaching with one class of second graders.

After applying to around 150 different elementary education positions, Elaine was called in for three interviews. One of these schools was where she had student taught and she did not get offered that position.

> In the school where I student taught, there were actually a few positions open, and all of the student teachers interviewed for the positions, but they ended up giving it to someone that had been a TA [teacher's assistant] there for two years and she had her degree. So she had the couple of years' experience in the building. I think that some years there's more out there. It just comes down to what's available, who's applying, and the fact that it's a very competitive field.

Then Elaine did a phone interview with an elementary school principal at a school within the same state but it was 100 miles north of her current home. The phone interview went well. In June, Elaine traveled to the smaller, rural community to meet the principal and do another interview. She was offered a full-time contract teaching fifth graders.

During the next few months, Elaine taught at a summer camp to keep in practice with teaching students. The students at the camp were a K-5 grade mix. When the camp ended, she moved to the small, rural community to get settled before the school year started. Elaine felt prepared for her upcoming school year as a new teacher.

The week before school started, Elaine attended a brief meeting and was given the teacher handbook to read. There were three fifth grade teachers and two of them were new to the school. Elaine was introduced to her mentor who taught fourth grade and had been at that school for several years. Elaine liked her mentor and felt that she got valuable feedback and advice from her. Although Elaine admitted that she did not always do what the mentor suggested, such as presenting a topic or managing student behavior.

At the beginning of the school year, Elaine's principal gave her the opportunity to observe another teacher in the same building who had a similar style of teaching. This helped Elaine get ideas for classroom management. Her mentor also gave her several suggestions for working with challenging students. Elaine had student taught second graders, and now she was teaching fifth graders. "Second graders want to please you and they want you to like them. Fifth graders want their friends to like them." Classroom management was one of Elaine's most difficult tasks.

> It's one thing when you have someone in there with you to give you suggestions or give you immediate feedback when things are not going well. But when you have to do it all on your own, like you can see it slipping one day and the next day it's all out of control. It's being able to realize on your own how far to let them go and when to pull them back.

Classroom management continued to be an area where Elaine felt a need for growth.

In October, the parent teacher conferences went well. Elaine believed that they were very positive. She received a lot of parent support and follow-through after their conversations for the remainder of the school year.

As a new teacher, the principal required Elaine to submit her lesson plans on a weekly basis. While she was not writing the extensive lesson plans that were encouraged during her classes at Midwestern University, Elaine maintained that many of those components were still in her lesson plans. Based on the feedback from her principal, she needed to have the objective and plan for achieving it in her lesson plans. While Elaine would have the other activities planned out, she did not necessarily have to write it in her planner.

A good day for Elaine was when one of her students with a difficult personality had a good day. This particular student liked to push the boundaries and when he was more agreeable, then Elaine had a better day. Overall though, she thought that she had an "awesome class. They're such a good bunch of kids. I got lucky getting this class." However, there were challenges and that was mainly Elaine determining her own personal boundaries for classroom management.

> Yes I've had challenges but it's not only them figuring out where my limits are but me figuring them out. Coming from someone else's classroom where the limits were already in place, now I have to really stop and think about where do I draw the line. Which of the things are really going to bug me. Where am I going to put my boundaries.

For Elaine, being a new teacher meant reflecting on her own classroom priorities.

Elaine was not the only new member to the faculty this school year, yet she believed that throughout the school year, they were all working together to build their team. She felt very welcomed and supported by everyone at her school. "It's been a really good experience and it's been kind of what I expected it to be. I feel like I had a

pretty good idea from what to expect from a teacher's perspective because of the practicum." Furthermore, Elaine was observed four to five times during the school year. One of those was a formal observation where a form was filled out and a conversation between the principal and Elaine occurred afterwards. Most of the time the principal simply stopped by and Elaine felt that if the principal did not say anything, then she must be doing OK. Yet Elaine admitted that it would have been helpful to have more conversations and more feedback.

Even though Elaine had relocated to a town 100 miles away from her home, she had no desire to apply at a different school for the next school year.

> As great as this year's been, I can't imagine having to do it over again right away, a first year. The more that I think about it, I considered doing a second year and then maybe move closer to home. They say that your third year you really have everything under control, so I really want to have that feeling before I move on.

Elaine wanted to stay at her current school. "I just want to get comfortable with myself as a teacher before I try to make a move to someplace closer to home. I think that you have a better chance of getting hired at another district if you have a couple of years under your belt." Elaine was offered a full-time teaching contract for the upcoming school year teaching fifth grade again. She accepted the contract.

Kelley. Kelley was an over 40 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to be a high school theatre arts teacher. She had previously earned an associate's degree in Acting, a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Performances, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Directing Theatre. She was still nine hours short of earning her MAT from Midwestern University. Kelley had completed her student teaching in Theatre Arts,

compiled her portfolio, and passed the Speech/Theatre teaching certification exam. Worrying that there were not going to be very many Theatre Arts positions available, Kelley also took her English certification exam and scored in the top 5%.

Prior to working on her MAT degree at Midwestern University, Kelley had been a guest Theatre Arts instructor at several suburban schools and universities for the last 20 years. She was hired to be an adjunct instructor at Midwestern University while she was working on her MAT degree. This position was also used as her student teaching experience. Since she was considered an adjunct instructor, she did not really have a cooperating teacher during her student teaching experience. Instead, Kelley had another instructor that was like a mentor teacher but since Kelley had worked with her for two years, the mentor teacher let Kelley teach the class on her own. Midwestern University was unable to find a student teaching position for Kelley in a local high school.

Kelley sent out many applications and a large urban district over 200 miles away responded. This district had apparently received over 10,000 applications; they interviewed 2,000 people, and hired 80. Kelley was hired to be an English teacher at a racially diverse urban high school in a blue collar community. Previously, Kelley had only worked in private, suburban high schools or universities as a guest instructor for Theatre Arts. Kelley was told that she would be teaching junior and senior English. So she and her daughter packed up their belongings and moved across the state to a different city. Kelley moved to a suburban school district and enrolled her daughter in school.

The urban school where Kelley went to teach had around 100 teachers and 22 of them were new to the school that year. In addition, the principal and one of the assistant

principals had previously worked at the middle school level in the district, so they were also new to the school.

The district offered a week of training in June for the new teachers, but that was before Kelley was hired. Instead, she received two days of new teacher training right before school started. Despite everything though, Kelley was optimistic about the school year and ready to start teaching.

> That optimism soon faded as the reality that Kelley faced became clearer. The very first day of class, I had two big 18 year old boys pulling themselves out of their chair ready to go at it and I got in the one kid's face as he was about to get out of his chair and with my best New York glare said 'Not in my class.' And he backed down and we stared at each other for a good 30 seconds. He did not get up and now we're best buds, but that first day I had to stare down a fist fight.

The issues with discipline continued to be a problem for Kelley. "The discipline thing has been really, really hard. I have been sexually harassed in front of the class." Kelley had received no training in discipline procedures. She was unsure whether she could give detentions to students or what other disciplinary options were available. She also confronted students with weapons in class.

> Five of my six classes are tough kids, the worst of the worst. One of my kids was the one that got tased by the police on TV. One of my kids was kicked out for making sexual threats. Many of my students have been expelled.

Unfortunately, the administration did not offer Kelley any support.

> The assistant principal tells me that the kids are fine but the level of disrespect is my fault. But I have been rigidly strict with these kids every time. They don't

> care. They are all smart kids who have been overlooked or bored or abused at home and they don't know any other way to survive other than to get attention. If that means failing to get attention, that's what they're going to do. If that means getting into any kind of trouble, that's what they're going to do. And they put 10 boys like that in one class with over 30 kids. Of my six classes, at least two of them have been over 30 and one of them was as high as 34. So I'm doing the best that I can.

Needless to say, this was a major difference from the private schools where Kelley had been a guest instructor.

Initially, Kelley was not given a mentor even though the district was required to provide one.

> They never gave me a mentor until I begged them for one. That lady, I've seen her once. She doesn't return my emails. She doesn't talk to me. So that's totally useless. I asked for a curriculum for my classes and they said that there isn't one, just go by the standards, make it up. I asked for a textbook. They said there was no textbook. So for three classes, there's no textbook, no syllabus, no curriculum, no anything.

As a guest instructor, Kelley had always taught gifted and self-motivated kids in Theatre Arts. She had never taught English in a classroom since she simply took the exam to become certified to make herself more marketable to find a teaching position. Kelley was assigned the lowest levels of juniors and seniors with three different classes to prepare.

> Every day was a battle just to be heard, much less get them to do what I asked them to do. Throwing food, physical and sexual threats against me was what I faced. To do that to a new teacher … it would have been worse if I was 25.

If anyone needed a mentor, it was Kelley.

To make matters worse, Kelley was not trained how to use the district's gradebook software.

> I was three weeks into school before I could get anyone to tell me how to log onto it. I spent the rest of the semester trying to get caught up on grades. I had the impression that grading would still be done in a gradebook. I didn't get training at my school. I used Blackboard since I taught college but I had no idea about online grading.

Kelley did not know how to use a SmartBoard either.

Kelley thought that her administrators were supportive regarding some aspects but not on others. Classroom observations became a very subjective tormentor. Kelley was observed five or six times during the school year. The administrators were supposed to meet with the teacher within 48 hours of the observation, however, one time Kelley had to wait 13 days before her meeting. At the meetings, Kelley would attempt to explain the activities that her administrators had observed.

> I would explain some of their comments and they would modify their comments, but they would never change my scores. I think that's really unfair. You can't watch somebody for five minutes to see if they are a good teacher. They would always ask a kid that had a reputation for not paying attention what was going on in the class. There were other kids that said things because they were mad at me

> and then they would tell me a few days later that they said something mean about me because they were mad at me. They want you to do this workshop model and that's terrific if you have self-motivated kids.

The administrators would also send conflicting messages. They wanted the teachers to be available to the students 20 minutes before school so that students could come and ask them questions. Yet they also wanted the teachers to stand in the hallway to oversee the behavior. Kelley believed that her administrators' lack of support was because they were new to the school also and still trying to figure out their role.

> Kelley did not get very much support from the parents of her students either.
>
> The kids that get pregnant, many of them get kicked out of their house. I've met some of the parents and they have really bad manners, really bad tempers, and really bad language. Many of my kids' parents were only 16 when they had these kids.

However, by the end of the school year, Kelley at least felt respected by her students.

> There are other kids where you have to develop a relationship, where you have to develop some type of trust. My kids come to me and tell me about being raped, beaten, abused, they're pregnant – what do they do. They come and tell me their big problems and I know they don't do that with all of their other teachers. Kids come in my room during lunch because it's a safe place to go. Yet I've been chastised because I have not been eating with my co-workers. The other teachers feel like I am a snob since I don't go to the lunch room.

Kelley had relocated with her daughter to a new city and had yet to make any friends.

The English department wanted to offer Advanced Placement –AP courses. Kelley attended a department meeting with the other twelve English teachers. Of these teachers, Kelley was the only one qualified to teach the AP courses because she had a Master's degree and sufficient graduate level English courses. The administrator said that he needed to see if Kelley actually qualified.

> They hate me or they act like they hate me. But what's confusing is that I get all of these negative messages, and then the next day someone will tell me oh you're doing a great job, we love you. Don't worry about those evaluations.

The anxiety was growing for Kelley as the end of the year approached.

The school district did not offer contracts until the end of March and Kelley was worried.

> I don't know if I'm going to be offered a contract for next year. I don't know if I should be applying to different schools. My daughter is really happy in her new school and I don't want to make her move again. If I had been here 2 years and I was getting this kind of treatment, I would just blow it off. But I have never worked in a place where people told me every day or as often as this that I was this bad. I have always been applauded as one of the most reliable, most prepared, most creative employees. Here I don't get any recognition for the things that I do well. I am very confused. I'm very anxious about my job security more and more every day. I do like it. I like the kids. I don't mind being in a school that's not the best. I like most of the people that I've gotten to know but I haven't made friends.

The strain that Kelley felt was intensified when she was not offered a contract for the upcoming school year. The administrators said that her observation scores were too low.

So Kelley started applying at other schools again. She received one call from a rural school in a community north of the city that she had just relocated to last summer. This school offered her a position teaching Theatre Arts and English classes. She would have five preps a day and making several thousand dollars less per year than she did at the urban school. Kelley worried about the high cost of moving again. She worried about making her daughter switch schools again. However, this was the only job offer that Kelley received. She accepted the offer and was preparing to relocate once more.

Mary. Mary was an under 30 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to be a high school mathematics teacher. She had previously earned her BS in Mathematics. Mary then passed her teaching certification exam for high school math and earned a MAT degree from Midwestern University.

The placement for student teaching was a very diverse suburban high school that Mary had chosen for those reasons. She had attended private, Catholic elementary and secondary schools. After observing this particular high school, Mary knew that it would offer her exposure to students of various race, religions, and cultures. In addition, the math department at this school was always trying out new techniques for teaching or using new technology before the district implemented them at their other high schools.

When Mary started student teaching it was during the Fall Semester and she believed that time of the year was beneficial.

> I think doing my student teaching in the fall was good because I got to see what happens in the summer, how to start a class, and taking them all the way to the exams. So I got an idea of how you would end the school year.

In addition, Mary was able to student teach different levels of students and use different types of grading.

> I had a pretty good variety. I had an Algebra I program which was a variety of kids. I co-taught one of the classes and I had another Algebra I which was a little better and not as crazy. I taught two honor's geometry. The Algebra I was standards based grading, so I got exposed to that. The honors geometry was just a normal class with the honors program. We also did what they called back lab. It was basically one on one tutoring where it was remediation for students.

Mary stated that this variety of ability levels and class structures were helpful in making her a more rounded teacher. Since she had substitute teaching experience, her cooperating teacher let her start student teaching the Algebra I classes right away.

Mary sent out 10 -15 applications to teach math at the high school level. She had a phone interview with one school and went for an interview at another school. A third school had her return for a second interview and demonstrate her teaching skills. She was told beforehand what type of lesson she would have to teach to a class of students. Following the teaching example, she had an interview with the administrators of that school. She was not offered the position. Another high school, where Mary had been a substitute teacher, ran their interview process in much the same way. Mary had a personal interview and then returned to demonstrate her teaching skills. She taught a lesson in front of the administrators and then followed up with an interview. Mary was

offered a full-time contract teaching math at this private, all girls' high school. This school was very similar to the high school that she had attended.

During July, Mary attended two staff meetings and received her laptop. Since she had been a substitute teacher previously at this school, she was familiar with the different websites and programs that the school used. Mary began prepping her first chapters for each of her subjects. Another math teacher was her mentor and the administration had new teacher meetings every other week. Mary felt highly supported by her mentor, co-workers, and administration.

When the school year began, Mary was not worried. However, like other study participants, she was assigned some of the lower ability students.

> I was just really excited. I knew what would be my challenge. I had two sections of the low students and they were full classes. How do I get the low students to understand and make math more interesting was what worried me. So that was kind of like the challenge but I had dealt with similar classes during my student teaching.

During Mary's student teaching, she had taught Algebra I. As a first year teacher, she was teaching an honors Algebra I class and a low level Algebra I class.

> The A level are the lowest kids. With my A kids, they were like a huge learning curve. I learned pretty quickly that I can't skip anything. Figuring out the pacing with them was huge. Then second semester the classes shifted so I had most of the low kids in one class. They were kind of my huge learning curve.

Mary acknowledged that her student teaching experience and supportive mentor greatly helped her have a successful school year. She also had a collaborative math department

where everyone helped each other out whenever they needed advice or for brainstorming ideas for lessons.

Mary thought that her parent teacher conferences went well. Since she had mainly freshmen, she had many parents attend the conferences.

> It was really nice to kind of meet the parents. It was very much like a team effort. This is what I see at school and this is what you see at home. So this is what we can do to improve. If the students are struggling, the way that our schedule works, it's easy to get in touch with them and get them back on track. The parents were very supportive about what they could do at home.

Mary had heard stories about parent teacher conferences where the parents yelled at the teacher. She was happy that the parents of her students were considerate and supportive.

A good day for Mary during first semester was when she had everything completely prepped and everything went good. "First semester I felt like I was always trying to stay on top of grading, of lesson preps, and I felt like I was always just ready for the next day." By second semester though, Mary had gotten into a good routine and had her lessons planned out a week in advance.

> Good days are just when it clicks with them. I've had a lot of moments where the students really get the material. That is really rewarding. I know how to help the students with harder material and I know how to handle them and their frustrations.

The ability to stay organized was important according to Mary.

On the other hand, a bad day was when Mary felt frustrated or at a loss.

> If I teach a concept that builds on itself and then when we review it the students were like we don't know how to do this. I was anticipating this prior knowledge and I would get flustered and the majority of the class would be like we don't remember any of this.

Mary happily reported that she had very few bad days second semester.

Towards the end of the school year, the school administrator offered Mary a contract to teach the same subjects the following year. "I wanted to stay here and just to be a second year teacher. I'm super excited about it." Mary had no desire to look elsewhere for a different teaching position. She was extremely happy at her present school and accepted the contract.

Sally. Sally was an over 40 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to be an elementary teacher. She had earned a BS in Theatre Arts many years ago. For the last nine years, she had been working in a local school district as a substitute teacher and as a long term substitute teacher. Sally was working towards her MAT at Midwestern University. She completed the required number of student teaching hours, her portfolio, and passed her PRAXIS II certification exam. Sally needed to take nine more credit hours to earn her MAT degree.

The student teaching assignment was for one semester in the same classroom. Sally chose to student teach at a school where she had been a substitute teacher. She asked to student teach under a teacher that she believed to be an excellent role model. This teacher agreed. Sally started teaching on her own at around six weeks into the student teaching assignment. She student taught in a third grade classroom.

Sally had high praise for her cooperating teacher, whom she felt was "fantastic and incredibly organized." Sally wanted her cooperating teacher to push her.

> She set the bar so high for what I should be accomplishing each day that I really pushed myself. We went over everything we taught, we talked about it, we picked it apart, we would find the smallest things that we needed to change, every lesson. There were times that I felt a little picked on but it was so good.

Sally chose this particular cooperating teacher after having worked with her while she was a substitute teacher. Sally believed that she learned a great deal during her student teaching experience.

The school district where Sally had student taught and where she had worked as a substitute teacher posted 14 open positions in elementary for grades 1- 6. Sally applied for all of the positions. She was called back and went for two interviews. Sally was offered a full-time contract teaching second grade.

Sally spent the summer months prior to school starting attending professional development opportunities provided by the school district and getting her classroom organized. She attended four days of new teacher training, and they were provided logins for their online gradebooks. The new teachers also attended meetings specifically for them once every quarter. Sally felt like some of the information was a little redundant since she had worked in the district as a substitute teacher for so many years.

Overall, Sally believed that she was prepared to become a full-time teacher. Her preparation, however, relied heavily on her substitute teaching experience.

> I definitely think that there is nothing like doing it [teaching] and I benefitted more from long term subbing than from the university classes. It's just one of those jobs that you just have to go in and do it to really learn how to do it well.

Sally rated her student teaching experience very highly.

Once school began, the teacher in the room next to Sally was assigned to be her mentor. While their working relationship was not as formal as the cooperating teacher relationship, her mentor was always available. Sally noted that she and her mentor were good at communicating with each other. The school itself was over-crowded with not enough classrooms and there were five other second grade teachers. Sally believed that the new teacher meetings and her team meetings greatly helped her get to know other faculty members at the school.

The district where Sally taught provided lesson plans that were already aligned with the Common Core State Standards. She did not have to write out any lesson plans. However, Sally adjusted the lesson plans that she was provided.

> What I do, is I take all of the stuff that they give us and I go through based on how I assess my class and the pace that we're going because there's a lot of extra stuff and there's optional things. I go through and I kind of tweak the lesson, I add to the lesson if I feel like I need to and I'll take something out if I don't feel it's necessary. I'll do different timing and things. It's more like we just kind of mold it to our class.

She was still using the strategies learned in her classes at Midwestern University, only instead of writing the lesson plans; she was modifying them to suit her needs.

A new teacher evaluation system was put into place the year that Sally started teaching. Instead of the traditional observations that were followed by a conversation between the teacher and the administrator, the new type of evaluations was numerical ratings. The administrator was looking for evidence of specific standards and the teachers earned points based on these qualifiers. The teachers were observed three times during the first 30 days of the school year. The administrators would

> come in with an iPad and they only stay for 10 minutes. You never know when they are going to show up. It could be a weird transition time or it could be in the middle of any kind of lesson. It made everybody nervous.

Sally had very high scores on her evaluations, which made her feel more confident.

Despite her confidence, Sally had a rough October. In addition to the new evaluation systems, the district was implementing a new data entry system, a new math program, and a new common core program. There were many new programs for the teachers to learn. Sally stated that it was just information overload. There were also parent-teacher conferences and with second graders, the beginning of the year was very challenging for them. Sally finally

> decided to let some stuff go, as far as my worry about it and just do what I could do. I stopped being so hard on myself. Then as a result it freed me up to really be more grounded and just a much better teacher.

Once October passed, Sally felt like her disposition greatly improved.

> Sally believed that her best days were when she felt accomplished. When I walk out of my room, the papers are graded, I feel like I taught something, I made a connection with my class, we started on a good note, we kept through it, we really

> persevered through the day, we did some real learning, we got a lot accomplished. Where I leave kind of tired but I feel so accomplished, like I can go home and just forget about it now because it was a good day.

Her bad days were not very often. One that stuck out in her memory was the day that she had to give a difficult standardized assessment to her students. The other teachers warned her not to worry about the results. "When they do poorly no matter what the issues are, I feel like I'm a bad teacher. I feel like I did not do something right. That I'm not doing enough, that's my lowest." But the next day Sally bounced back with her positive attitude and moved on.

Sally whole-heartedly believed that teaching was the best decision for her despite other obstacles.

> I had kids at home. I'm older. Going back to school after so many years I felt like a fish out of water. It was kind of intimidating. It was a lot of challenges for me. But just like anything, the more challenges, the more confident you come out of the other side. My husband says school just energizes me.

Sally had made a difficult decision to return to college and the rewards were great. The school where Sally taught offered her a full-time contract teaching second grade at the same school. She accepted the contract.

Amy. Amy was an over 40 year old, Caucasian female who wanted to teach high school English. She had earned a MAT from Midwestern University. Prior to that, Amy had completed a double major and earned a BA degree in English and Art History.

After completing around 30 hours of observations in her student teaching semester, Amy student taught in a high school English class for 12-13 weeks. During

this time, she was told by a couple of faculty members at that high school that she would not make a good teacher. This upset her because she had always wanted to be a teacher. Overall, Amy had a less than desirable student teaching experience.

> My cooperating teacher no longer works with the district and the last time that she worked for the school was the semester that she was my cooperating teacher. I felt like it would have been better for me to be with someone else. I should have been with a teacher that was more positive and more into the job. My cooperating teacher was always breathing down my neck.

Even though Amy's student teaching experience was not very positive, she was still excited at the prospect of teaching.

Amy passed the certification exams for English and Language Arts at the high school and middle school levels. She earned her MAT degree from Midwestern University then sent out applications and had five or six interviews. Some of these were urban schools and others were suburban schools in her local area. She also applied to Teach for America. She was called back for a second interview to teach English in Japan. Unfortunately, Amy was not offered a teaching contract by any school or organization.

As a result, Amy started substitute teaching and she went back to a different university to pursue a Master's of Education degree. She attended the university full-time to complete her second master's degree during the time of this study. Amy anticipated being offered a high school teaching contract from a school that had contacted her.

Alignment of Emerging Themes and Research Questions

Analysis of interview data resulted in 18 emerging themes. Each of the 18 themes seemed to align with either Research Question #1, Research Question #2 – Part A, Research Question #2 – Part B, or Research Question #2 – Part C. No themes emerged from the interview data that aligned with Research Question #2 – Part D and Research Question #3. A discussion of the interview data by research question and emerging theme when applicable follows.

Research Question #1

What are the first year teaching experiences of Midwestern University educator preparation program graduates**?** Analysis of the interview data from this research question resulted in three emerging themes. These themes were teaching different ability levels, teaching students with disabilities, and classroom management.

Teaching different ability levels. Of the five participants that taught in a classroom, four were assigned classes with students of different ability levels than what they experienced during their student teaching. Mary taught a variety of levels during her student teaching. She co-taught an Algebra I class that had 10 students with IEPs, a student who was repeating the class, and some students that could not add or subtract. She also taught a regular Algebra I class and an Honors Geometry class. Mary stated, "I think the variety was hugely helpful with the types of kids and even the levels of kids. I got standardized based grading and regular grading. I had seniors in Algebra classes." Mary's first year of teaching included teaching some low level and some honors classes.

Cassie also taught at the high school level. During her student teaching

experience, she taught only honors classes and she thought that it would have benefitted her more to teach different levels.

> It would have been beneficial to have some honors, regular and kids that are struggling. I had all honors classes but I didn't end up teaching honors classes. It would have been nice to get more of a variety in terms of the classes that I was working with. I don't know if it should be an eight week and eight week program. Mine was 16 weeks at the same place. Other students, the K-12 did eight weeks and eight weeks. I think it would be a beneficial aspect for high school teachers to do eight weeks and eight weeks and when you do that try to teach classes at different academic levels.

At the beginning of the school year, Cassie struggled with learning how to teach the lower levels. "It's just more of the struggle that I had with the lower kids. How do I adjust what I know down to their level?" She would have benefitted from a student teaching experience that included teaching different levels of students.

Sally taught at the elementary level. The class where she did her student teaching was for gifted students and the class that she taught her first year of teaching was mainly low students. She believed her many years of substitute teaching experience helped her cope with the different ability level. However, Sally also agreed that a more varied student teaching experience would have been beneficial.

> I remember them saying that if you were getting a K-12, you would split your student teaching and you would do six weeks in one and six weeks in another but they didn't offer it for my degree and I do think that it would be beneficial. Even in two grades. I think that it would be great to have maybe a few weeks in

> intermediate and a few weeks in primary because it's so different. If I had had six weeks in each, I think that it would be a really good opportunity and then when they go into their interview they would have experience at different levels.

I think that it would be beneficial to have a little bit more of a balance in teaching. Just like the high school teachers, Sally thought that the student teaching experience was an opportunity to practice with many different levels of students.

Elaine taught at the elementary level and saw a need for getting experience in both the primary and intermediate levels.

> I think that honestly the more experience you have in the classroom, the more prepared you are going to be when you are on your own. I think that I really had an awesome first year of teaching but I'm sure that there are ways that I could improve and maybe having more time in fourth or fifth grade, which is what I'm in now would have been helpful. A lot of my practicums were in first grade and my student teaching was in second grade. I didn't really get a lot of exposure to the upper grade levels. I think that it would have been helpful to have more of a range and even a little more time.

Elaine mentioned another person that was attending a different university. This university required two sets of 16 week student teaching experiences.

> In theory, having pretty much a full year under your belt not only would make you more attractive to a district and it would double your experience in the classroom. But then there's the financial side of it. I was working when I was student teaching so it was hard.

The practical reality was that some students had to work to support themselves through college. During their student teaching experience, they would essentially be working at least two jobs and this would be challenging for a full year.

Amy suggested "maybe a longer experience, such as a second semester at another school, different grade level, perhaps with ESL students." Kelley, however, had the most comprehensive suggestion for teaching observations.

> If they are going to observe in a school for 2 whole weeks, that person should spend a day in an AP or dual credit course, spend a day in ISS, spend a day in special ed or at least part of a day in the extremes classes. Spend a day in a gifted classroom. Go in to see other subjects. You might begin to see where you could do cross curriculum stuff. You might begin to say this I can handle, this I can't. The lady that I was observing, I barely spoke to her. She didn't have time for me. Observing the same teacher for two weeks is not beneficial at all. Watching different teachers, different circumstances, different levels of abilities and discipline, that would be beneficial.

Whether it was observations or student teaching, variety was a common theme. New teachers usually do not get the honors or gifted students, they get the classes that the other teachers do not want. These classes tend to be the lower level students.

Teaching students with disabilities. Most of the participants encountered students with major attention issues. Some of these students were also academically low as a result. The participants had taken a course entitled "Exceptional Child" while at Midwestern University. This course introduced the concepts of IEPs and students with disabilities. These participants had dealt with similar students during their student

teaching, so they were familiar with strategies to use. Cassie, however, had a different experience during her first year of teaching. She had student taught all honors level classes but her first year of teaching included a low level chemistry class.

> I have had to deal with student disabilities my first year in terms of IEPs, but I didn't have any experience with that in student teaching. I taught all honors. So I had no idea with implementing IEPs until my first year. I would have liked to have had some experience with the lower levels as far as actually implementing certain things.

Students with disabilities were found in all of the participants' classes.

Classroom management. Classroom management was the biggest issue with all of the participants. All of the participants felt ill prepared for managing their classroom. Elaine student taught a second grade class but was hired to teach a fifth grade class. "I'm learning as I go about classroom management regarding what works and what does not work," Elaine stated. Mary taught at a private all-girls high school, and she also had issues. She remarked,

> I encountered a wide range of students with their behaviors or challenges, even the honors students had some pretty blatant attitudes. I had one student that talked back to me and I had to pull her out in the hall to talk to her.

Sally believed a teacher just had to learn by trial and error. "Learning how to manage a class is best done by just doing it. It is totally different from writing up your classroom management plans" commented Sally.

Kelley had the most challenges with classroom management. She taught in a racially diverse urban high school in a poorer community. She was given very little

guidance from her administration and co-workers regarding classroom management.

> Midwestern University didn't talk about real difficult cases and I have difficult cases. They talked about classroom management but it was all about put up the rules, if the kids misbehaving go stand by his desk. All of that works when you have upper level kids or smaller kids that can be intimidated by an adult. When you have 17 or 18 year old boys who are bigger than you are, they don't care. There is a whole different style of discipline that needs to be applied in a high school. Almost every single one of my teachers was experienced teachers in the middle school or elementary. They had never taught in a high school. They didn't have any idea what we were going to face and they didn't talk about it. The school district I'm in didn't train for difficult(ies) either.

Kelley's inability to manage her classroom was a challenge for her all year.

Research Question #2, Part A

What do graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program perceive as the strengths of their ability to carry out their duties as a first-year teacher? Analysis of the interview data resulted in four emerging themes. These themes were small class sizes, cluster classes, summer reading camp, and teaching staff.

Small class sizes. The small class size of Midwestern University's educator preparation program was appealing to all of the participants. Sally summed up the benefits of small classes.

> The class sizes were small and I definitely felt that I could go to my professor and ask questions and talk freely and share and be open in class. That is very important because I think you just get more out of it. You get more conversations,

> more input, you build a relationship with the people in your class and your professor. You learn more. I wasn't sitting there listening to a lecture for four hours. It was more hands on.

Mary said she "loved the diversity of the people that were in my classes. People were my age and older. People were from different backgrounds." Amy liked that Midwestern University treated everyone equally. "They are really inclusive," she added.

Cluster classes. The MAT program offered cluster classes for their evening program. This enabled the students to cover three regular classes in one cluster class and complete the program faster. Cassie said that she "really liked the cluster classes, because I couldn't have done what I did without them. I was able to finish faster with the 3 in 1 program." Mary was aware of the cluster classes and knew that many of the students liked taking them, but she never took a cluster class. Still, for those wanting to complete their MAT degree quickly, the cluster classes were a viable alternative to the traditional classes.

Summer reading camp. Midwestern University offered a summer reading camp to local elementary students. Part of the program for elementary school teachers was a Diagnosis of Reading class. This class could be taken during the fall or spring semester and included visits to local elementary schools. Or the pre-service teachers could teach at the summer reading camp. It was a very intense three week camp. It was very hands on with the elementary students and there was a lot of interaction with the parents. Sally described the camp.

> They assign you to a student and you do all of these activities with them and you diagnose their reading issues and you work with them and you plan every single

> day, lesson plans, based on what you've assessed the day before and you try to make it fun because it's camp. So it was really a very fast paced, creative. It forced you to do a lot of very teachery things in a very real setting. It was just really intense and I just got a lot out of it. It was very stressful and I would not want to go back and repeat it. I was so glad that it was over. But in retrospect it was very beneficial. Summer reading camp was a beneficial class.

Elaine was the only other elementary educator in the study. She also found the camp to be a valuable experience.

Teaching staff. The teaching staff of Midwestern University educator preparation program was highly praised. Most of the professors were either former or current educators. Mary added, "They're very knowledgeable about what's going on in the local schools." Elaine remembered a specific teacher.

> My math methods professor would do these logic puzzles in class that involved the order of operation. That's one of the things that I do in my class. There were a lot of things that she talked about in her class that I'm using in my class.

Cassie stated that the teaching staff offered practical advice that was not all theoretical. Sally continued along that line with her poignant anecdote.

> Many of them are still teaching in the school system and just knowing that they survived these things and knowing that everyone's had that situation. When you've taught 20 years, at some point you've probably had every scenario that you could possibly have. You all live to tell the tale. They could give me a lot of real world advice. Those tips and what they said really paid off. The people that actually teach the courses were very valuable to me.

Elaine appreciated the differences between the professors, their teaching styles, and the different materials that they used or showed the class. "I think just the fact that it was a diverse faculty as far as personalities and teaching styles but it was also cohesive because everybody had a good rhythm and it just flowed well," Elaine concluded. Mary valued the professors because they understood who they were teaching in their evening classes. "The professors are very understanding of things that are going on in people's lives" remarked Mary. It was very clear that the staff of Midwestern University's educator program was highly respected.

One participant, Kelley, had a very difficult and challenging first year of teaching. When asked about a strength of Midwestern University's program she paused for a long time and finally said, "Honestly, I really don't know."

Research Question #2, Part B

What do graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program perceive as the weaknesses of their ability to carry out their duties as a first-year teacher? Analysis of the interview data resulted in five emerging themes. These themes were elementary versus secondary level classes, classroom management, IEPs, technology, and current terminology.

Elementary versus secondary level classes. Four of the six participants were taking courses to become certified to teach at the high school level. While the other two elementary education participants made no mention, the secondary education participants were very vocal about the need for separation of classes. Cassie stated that high school teachers should have more subject specific classes such as how to teach science or math or English. She continued,

> I kind of wish I could have taken more classes just in my particular emphasis, like in science. Because I know some theories go across all levels but like I think having a little more time to talk with future science teachers or science teachers who've been there to try to give you other things to think about.

Mary had a degree in math, and she thought that the Methods Class was the most valuable for her. "Basically it was a class on how to teach math," Mary concluded. Other classes were not given the same praise. Mary felt like some of the classes just brushed math aside or the professors used very simplistic examples.

> Professors would gloss over math because they didn't know what to do with it. They would offer ideas that were more geared towards elementary and I would have to try to figure out how to apply it to high school. Some of the assignments, I was like how do I translate this into a high school level. It would have been nice to have the separation between the elementary and high school. The differences of the students' ages were huge.

The four secondary level participants agreed that most of the classes at Midwestern University focused on the elementary and middle school level. They often felt like some of the instructors did not want to talk about the high school level courses. Kelley, a high school English teacher remarked,

> It's not good pedagogy in not talking about high school classes. All of the classes should be split from high school because high school is so different. Teaching a high schooler that's reading on a fourth grade level is different from teaching a fourth grader.

The lesson plans were also geared more towards the elementary level. The high school teachers noted that some of the lesson plans seemed childish for the secondary level. Kelley summarized the need for separation of elementary and secondary.

> I think that the high school and elementary and middle school teachers should be separated. The high school kids are almost adults and they have to be treated differently. They tell you how to deal with sixth graders and making them wear deodorant, but that's not what a high school teacher needs to hear. Most people going through the program are not getting K-12 certification. They are getting elementary or secondary education.

Clearly there was a need felt by the secondary teachers to separate some of the courses in the program.

Classroom management. Classroom management was the biggest concern of the participants as previously covered under research question one. Consequently, it was deemed as a weakness of the program. A better variety of student teaching assignments and a separation between elementary and secondary classroom management styles would have allowed the students to develop more successful classroom management skills.

IEPs. While some of the participants did not have many students with IEPs, all of the participants suggested that the program cover it more in depth. The Foundations class brought up how IEPs were written and that teachers must attend meetings, but there was never any discussion on how to read or implement an IEP. "That's something that they could add to their curriculum. Have a fake IEP and help us come up with strategies, if it says this, then this is what you have to do for that," proposed Cassie. The mentor of

some of the participants was able to help them but when that person was not available, the new teacher had to try and decipher the IEP on her own.

Mary had done her student teaching in the fall semester. She found this to be beneficial, particularly because of the IEP meetings.

> When I student taught, since it was in the fall, I was constantly going to IEP meetings. Half of my co-taught class had IEPs. My cooperating teacher gradually started adding things like IEPs to my plate when I was student teaching. She was very knowledgeable about the IEPs and we would work with the co-teacher. The co-teacher was huge because he was mainly the one implementing the IEPs.

Sally took a cluster course that included the SPED class but she still felt insecure.

> I have to be honest, that was something that when I got out of the program, I was very insecure about that. That would be something that could be strengthened. I didn't want to be certified in SPED but I think that every teacher is going to run into a lot of student disabilities issues and it would be good for them to know more about common disabilities like autism.

The only time that Cassie questioned whether she wanted to continue being a teacher involved IEPs. She admitted that she struggled a lot her first year with IEPs.

> I had to talk with a lot of people the first couple of months to figure out if it says this, what does that mean. I could definitely see them improving that a little more. It may be something that is more grade level specific conversations where they branched out sooner into the secondary versus elementary. Because

> elementary is going to deal with actually writing the IEP and high school is more about implementing it.

The need for a course that directly covered Special Education issues regarding writing, reading, understanding, and implementing IEPs would have benefitted the participants. This course could possibly provide students with sample IEPs to use when writing lesson plans so that the student gained experience with learning how to implement an IEP.

Technology. The use of technology in the classroom varied by the type of software program, but all of the teachers used technology quite a bit in their classrooms. All of the participants used an electronic grade book and either a SmartBoard or a Promethean board. The participants agreed that technology was not covered enough during their coursework. Amy saw the need during her interviews. "Another thing that kept coming up in the interviews was that I was behind in technology. So an educational technology class should probably be expected and required and it wasn't," Amy responded.

Sally acknowledged that she had learned to embed music, physical education, and art into her classroom, but her school strictly taught common core and there was no opportunity to use any of those skills.

> I can use music to teach something and I can add my little tidbits. But a lot of what we were learning in those classes, that was fine 10 years ago, but we're not even allowed to use it. So I spent this entire semester doing that but got zero technology training. Yet here I am in the classroom with a SmartBoard and I did know how to use it because I had that experience from substitute teaching but not everybody did. They just threw Apple TV in here and I have no idea how to do

> that and we're learning all kinds of new applications. We're doing devices in the building that we're supposed to be able to teach the kids to do. I'm fairly up on it so I can figure it out but we've got this new data system. All of these things to me would have been a much more beneficial class at this point because that's just another shift in education that they just need to kinda tweak I think.

Cassie taught high school science. She said that there was not a lot of technology training for her at Midwestern University. Cassie stated,

> I think some of the classes could have focused on the technology especially when you get more specified for how to teach science. Science has a whole bunch of simulation programs. I don't think that we learned a lot of those programs that we could have.

Kelley had very little technology knowledge when she started teaching. The school did not offer her any technology training either.

> There should be some kind of class to make you feel comfortable with the prevalent technology and software that the schools are using. [Midwestern University] didn't prepare me for that; they didn't talk about Chrome Books, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Power School software, and when a classroom functions like online classes.

On the other hand, Mary had become familiar with some technology such as SmartBoards when she was in high school. She obtained even more experience with the SmartBoards when she was a substitute teacher and during her student teaching.

> The major place that I learned technology was where I did my student teaching. They had all kinds of technology and my cooperating teacher used all kinds of

> technology in ways that I never really knew about. I learned how to utilize the SmartBoard, websites, and pulling information from the students' calculators, TI activities. It definitely would have been helpful to have a class about technology though.

It was obvious that technology played a large role in the teachers' classroom. From online gradebooks to using SmartBoards, teachers needed to know how to use those products. It did not matter whether it was an elementary or secondary classroom, technology was a vital component.

Current terminology. The terminology used in the past had been changed to align with common core at some schools and newer technology at other schools. Some of the textbooks and articles used in the educator preparation program were not as current as most of the participants would have liked. Cassie noted, "Some of the classes need to be tweaked so that they're not using books that are like 10 years old." Sally elaborated along that line of thought.

> They were using older less applicable lessons. They were teaching us the same things they were teaching before and now we're kind of somewhere else now. There was a big change over from standards to common core. There was a level of disorganization regarding the different parts of the portfolio. The teachers needed to decide who was going to work on which parts of the portfolio.

Cassie felt less than knowledgeable regarding the educational terms being used.

> There were a lot of terms that were being used currently all over the place today that I wasn't introduced to until my student teaching or first year of teaching. So

> just updating their verbiage and some of the language they are using with what is being used now.

Kelley also was unsure of some of the educational language.

> They talk about the curriculum and the standards, but the language of the standards and the language of the curriculum are just so vague and full of jargon. You read it and you just wonder what am I supposed to do with that. It's like doing word problems in math. I understand all of the facts. My problem is that I can't turn the words in the problem into an equation. I read the standard and I have no idea what it means. How do I make sense of that standard?

Updating the sources and explaining the commonly used terms in education needed to be done according to the participants.

Research Question #2, Part C

What are your suggestions for the program? Analysis of the interview data resulted in seven emerging themes. These themes were substitute teaching experience, cultural diversity, lesson plans, student teaching, job interviews, different environments for student teaching, and induction program.

Substitute teaching experience. Mary and Sally were very adamant about the importance of the substitute teaching experiences. They both ended up getting hired at school where they had been a substitute teacher. Mary responded,

I think being a substitute teacher was a huge experience for me. It was really nice coming back to a school where I had taught before because I didn't have to figure out the schedule since I had already lived through it.

Sally also stressed the importance of building those relationships between the students, parents, and the co-workers.

> These people that I work with every day, it's like you're in the trenches. When you have a bad day, they lift you up and when you have a good day, they celebrate you. We're all kind of going through all of this together. That is one of the major reasons that I like it and yet you still get to go into your own room and do your own thing and be your own person. So it's like the best of both worlds. Investing in those relationships, being positive, asserting yourself enough to pitch in and do things, and make sure that you take on your share and help, finding a balance when you first are new.

Sally continued by emphasizing the importance of these skills for a program.

> I think all of those types of skills, that would be something that would be really beneficial in the program to talk about because I think that especially maybe a younger generation of people that skill may be a little harder for them. You know they're all gung ho, they've been told all of their life they're hot stuff and then they come in and they have to kind of work with teachers that could be their mothers. I think that when you start out with those solid relationships it just makes your job easier and more fun. It's really what gets you through I think.

Cultural diversity. Midwestern University had a diverse student population. Many of the schools where the participants either student taught or taught their first year had diverse student populations. Yet Midwestern University did not provide many opportunities for diversity training according to the participants. Cassie and Sally went to a juvenile center to work with those kids as part of one of their cluster classes. Mary

thought that they read a couple of articles about diversity once in a class. Kelley student taught at Midwestern University and had students of different religions and from all over the world, but she never had any diversity training. Elaine attended a great deal of diversity training professional development days during her student teaching. She then added, "I wish that we could have a little bit more of that where I'm teaching now because we could use it." Diversity training was seen as something that could be added to the curriculum but it was not vital like technology.

Lesson plans. How to write lesson plans was learned by all of the participants. It was a key element in the curriculum. While those skills were important, they were not necessarily used in the same manner. Cassie lamented,

The lesson plans that we were taught to write in class are completely unrealistic. They would be two-three pages. At my school you have to have your learning targets because that's what our school emphasizes. My lesson plans now are like 1 page and it's more like summary than specific sentences.

Elaine also did not use the extensive lesson planning that she was taught, although her lesson plans contained many of the components. Sally's school district provided lesson plans that supported common core so she only needed to modify her lesson plans.

Kelley taught at a school that used a workshop model of teaching which was not covered at Midwestern University.

> There is a bell ringer activity, attendance, mini lesson and model in first 10 minutes. Then the students work on chrome books and teacher is supposed to wander around classroom checking on students. In last 5 minutes of class, do a turn in over into the next day and talk about homework.

In addition, Kelley did not know how to create lesson plans from a curriculum that was just a list of standards. She expected to be given a list of topics to use for lesson plans.

> There are individual resources that are discreet, there are expectations in the different disciplines. Even the idea of finding lesson plans online. I was reluctant to do that. I thought that I was not supposed to use other people's lesson plans. I thought that I would get penalized if I did that. So we teach the kids that they're not supposed to cheat but it's OK for us. That's what it felt like to me.

Kelley was under the impression that teachers must create unique lessons for every unit. While the need for lesson planning was definitely important, the participants would have benefitted from practicing different ways of writing lesson plans.

Student teaching. The length of time and the various ability levels experienced during student teaching was already covered in research question one. Elaine added that she really needed more observations and student teaching experience.

> I had two in school practicums and one summer camp. I really don't think that it was enough. I think that we could have used one more practicum before going into student teaching. As crazy as it would be on people's schedules if they're working, the full year of student teaching would be really helpful.

Kelley offered an idea that was used in her theatre teachers' classroom.

> When we stood up to give our 10 minute lesson, the rest of the students started being the "bad" students because we were all theater people. And we did it in different ways and we all did it spontaneously. Some people dealt with it better than others. One guy got so frustrated that he stopped and left and said that he couldn't take it any longer. So even just a few days of that role playing with each

> other, and give everybody a role to play and then have that student teacher try to teach and keep their focus.

Sally concluded by pointing out the importance of having a good cooperating teacher.

> My cooperating teacher was a really good role model but I have heard stories from my friends that were in other placements that were less successful where the teachers maybe just weren't into being a cooperating teacher and they just didn't get supported. They didn't have anybody guiding them. They were just in there teaching the lessons and that teacher just got to go out and take a break. I sometimes wonder if the cooperating teacher could really make or break you. If you don't get any support, you're going to flounder.

Of the six participants, Amy and Kelley had less than ideal student teaching experiences. Amy was unable to find a teaching position and Kelley entered the classroom unexperienced on several levels. More effort in finding better cooperating teachers for all of the students was needed.

Job interviews. With the competitive field of educators and fewer positions being open, the interviews proved to be an important part of being hired as a teacher. Cassie liked the Career Fair but did not feel prepared for the quick interviews. "There was definitely a lack of understanding with how to deal with interviewing. It would be nice to have practice interviews," stated Cassie. On the other hand, Elaine said that she did mock interviews in one of her classes. She also found the job fair to be helpful. "It familiarized you with other districts that you weren't aware of in the area," noted Elaine. While Sally relied mainly on contacts within the district to gather pertinent interview information, Amy wished that she would have been provided the information. She

wanted to know what the schools were looking for so that she could tailor some of her coursework to fit those needs. Mary had received the most varied student teaching experience regarding ability levels and grading systems. "It really helped me especially going into interviews because I could easily answer specific questions about grading and my preferences and what I had done in the past," Mary offered. Practice for the interviews appeared to be an element to develop in the future.

Different environments for student teaching. Best practices of student teaching suggested that students teach part of the time in an urban school (Levine, 2006). Mary thought that it would be interesting to observe an urban school just for the exposure. Sally agreed that it would be advantageous to have the different experiences but that it needed to be a choice.

> In my case, I knew that I was not going to go to an urban school. I was going to apply to the schools where I knew I would fit. I was able to focus my student teaching in a district where I wanted to work and make connections. I think that it would be beneficial to do some of those early observations in an urban school. Then you might think this is for me or it isn't.

Cassie thought the idea of visiting or student teaching in an urban school should not be mandated. "I would not have joined a program that made me go to different environments. Honestly, I would have had a big problem going in certain areas. If the program made me do it, I would be very against that program," emphasized Cassie.

Induction program. Stanulis et al. (2007) studied a program that had a university member serve as a mentor for the first year teachers. Four of the five participants in this study had good mentors at the school where they taught. Cassie and

Sally would not have used a university mentor. Elaine worried about the familiarity with the various schools.

> I think that it would be hard to implement it effectively. I think that you would want your university person to really be familiar with the culture of the school that you are at or at least the district. They are not going to be an effective go to person because they are really not going to be aware of the curriculum needs.

While Mary claimed that she would not have used such a mentor, she did acknowledge the possibility of a need. "It would be a really cool thing of having that additional resource if you didn't have the support at your school," Mary replied.

Conversely, Kelley did not have a good mentor. She struggled from the first day of class with classroom management, technology training, and general lesson planning. She thought that a university mentor would have helped her quite a bit. Kelley remarked,

> Most of my problems at the beginning of the year, the problems that I could have solved, which I have since solved, I couldn't solve because the discipline issue that I had to handle, I was so distracted and I couldn't focus on what I needed to do to teach.

The first year teachers that had a good mentor did not need a university mentor. However, the first year teachers that did not get a good mentor would have benefitted and used the university mentor.

Research Question #2, Part D

How do these perceptions change from August to May? Analysis of this data resulted in no emerging themes.

Kelley had the most challenging first year of teaching and she felt let down by Midwestern University. "Everything was geared towards kind of pie in the sky ideal situation, instead of the real world, because anybody can deal with a decent, hardworking, motivated kid," responded Kelley.

Cassie had rated the program around a 7-8 on a scale of 1-10 before she began teaching, although she did add that some of the classes seemed "extremely redundant, had a lot of talk but not a lot of practicality." After she started teaching though, her rating dropped to a 5-6 because of the IEP difficulties that she faced. "Now that I've been in teaching, there's the IEP stuff I wish I would have known," Cassie commented.

Some of Mary's friends attended similar programs at other universities. Her perceptions of the program remained high throughout the year, especially when she compared Midwestern University's program to others. Mary remarked,

> My friends were telling me about things that they needed to do for a class and I thought why would you need to do that, how was that going to help you be a teacher. All of the classes that I took were relevant. I didn't have any classes that I felt were unimportant.

Substitute teaching was an important way to gain experience and become a better teacher according to Mary and Sally. The substitute teaching experience was given a 10 by Sally and the program itself a 7-8. "I felt like there were a couple of holes and not every class was beneficial. But the ones that were, were very beneficial and they did stay with me and I still use some of those resources today," noted Sally.

Elaine always thought the program was strong. "But there's always room for improvement as with any program. In the overall picture, I was probably as well prepared as I was going to be," concluded Elaine.

In general, the program was highly rated with certain areas previously covered that needed to be addressed in the future.

Research Question #3

How do the responses of graduates to Research Questions 1 and 2 vary by type of school where they are employed, level and area of certification, and MAT or BA? Analysis of this data resulted in no emerging themes.

Kelley was the only teacher whose first year of teaching was in an urban school. She was also the only teacher to have very little support from her administration and no support from her mentor. She had more negatives to report about the program. Unlike the other participants, Kelley's student teaching experience was in one area of certification, Theatre Arts, and it did not align with her first teaching position, English, which was in her other area of certification. However, most of her comments were valid and corroborated by other participants.

The need for better classroom management practice or background was noted by all of the participants. They also stressed the importance of exposure to different ability levels during student teaching, whether it was elementary or secondary. The lack of a thorough understanding of the Special Education component, particularly the IEPs, were brought up by all of the participants.

While the elementary education participants made no mention of the need for separation between the elementary level and the high school level, all of the high school

level participants often commented about the need. The elementary educators did not notice that most, if not all of the examples were geared towards the lower grades. Everything was applicable for them. That was not the same for the secondary level. All of those participants saw a glaring weakness of their content level not being sufficiently covered.

Summary

The small class sizes and experienced faculty at Midwestern University were given high marks from the participants. There were areas in need of improvement though. Separation of the elementary and secondary levels, more experience and background on classroom management techniques, and providing a thorough coverage of Special Education, particularly IEPs were weaker areas. The need for improved technology training and updated resources were also mentioned.

Some suggestions were provided that might make the program even better. Substitute teaching needed to be a more integral part of the program and possibly required instead of simply strongly suggested. Cultural diversity training and different types of lesson plan writing were proposed. The participants believed that it would have been beneficial for all of the observation and student teaching experiences to be with a variety of ability levels and grade levels. There was a need for better information regarding the interview process. Other programs researched had their entire group of student teachers spend time in an urban school. This was not received positively by the participants of this study, although they suggested that it could be an option. Another program that was researched used an induction program to provide a university member as a mentor for the first year teachers. The participants of this study who had a good

mentor admitted that they would not have used a university mentor. However, a participant who did not have a mentor thought that a university mentor would have been a very useful addition to the program.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications, Reflection, and Conclusion

The participants where hired to teach at different schools, in different districts, in different parts of the same state. Yet the data from this study suggests that there are several emerging themes related to their first year teaching experiences. A discussion of these themes and their implications are explored in chapter five. In addition, my own personal reflection and a final conclusion are included to complete this study.

Discussion

The first year teaching experiences of Midwestern University educator preparation program graduates were varied, but all of the participants believed that it would have been advantageous to have taught students of different ability levels and grade levels during their student teaching assignment. None of the participants were hired to teach the exact same ability level or grade as where they student taught. Mary's student teaching experience included different ability and grade levels, so she was the most prepared for her first year of teaching. She also had the most successful year and the fewest transitional problems. These findings align with Darling-Hammond (2006) who found that well-constructed and coordinated field experiences significantly improved the teachers ability to serve diverse learners.

A common experience of all participants was teaching students with disabilities. Most participants had students with attention deficits or lower ability levels. However, Cassie had several students with extensive IEPs that needed to be implemented. All of the participants felt that they needed more preparation to fully understand how to best teach students with disabilities. This was congruent with research findings by Levine (2006), Scherff (2006), and Zeichner (2003).

A final common experience of the participants was their frustrations with classroom management. Mary and Sally had the fewest classroom management problems and they noted that was because of their substitute teaching experience. The other participants ranked classroom management as one of their biggest challenges during their first year. Fletcher (2013) came to the same conclusion after following three different groups of student teachers. Kelley had the worst experience with classroom management and felt like she was prepared for the ideal classroom. Berridge and Goebel (2013) had a participant in their study who asked why the university prepared them for the perfect classroom and not the real classroom.

At the end of their first year of teaching, however, the graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program found program strengths that supported their ability to carry out first-year teacher duties. They found the small class sizes and cluster classes allowed them to have more contact with their professors, develop deeper understandings of the material, and get more hands-on experience. The summer reading camp was an intensive emersion course that proved to be beneficial according to the participants. The teaching staff was highly rated for their personal classroom experience, diverse methods, and willingness to work with the university students.

Nevertheless, there were weaknesses of the program as perceived by the graduates of Midwestern University educator preparation program. The participants that taught at the secondary level all found the program to be geared mainly towards elementary and intermediate levels. There was an absence of instruction regarding how to teach their specific subject matter. This was also concluded by Feiman-Nemser (2001), Darling-Hammond and Ball (2004) and Hochstetler (2011). Classroom management was not

covered in a way that prepared the graduates for their diverse student population. There was a lack of significant instruction to prepare the university students for duties that involved teaching students with disabilities. Another weakness of the program was technology because students graduated without very much experience using the technology currently used in most classrooms, such as SmartBoards and online grading programs. Olafson et al. (2005) and Mishra and Koehler (2006) came to the same conclusions that technology needs to be covered and imbedded into the curriculum of educator preparation programs to fully prepare their graduates.

There were several program suggestions made by the participants of this study. A suggestion was to have more direct imbedding of cultural diversity into the curriculum, which was also suggested by Zeichner (2003) and Heineke et al. (2010). The way to write lesson plans needed to be more varied according to the participants. The student teaching experience needed to include different ability and grade levels while strongly suggesting that some experiences include schools with diverse student populations. With such a competitive market, job interview techniques and strategies were viewed as something to incorporate into the program. Another recommendation was for a university staff member to serve as a mentor for the graduates that were not provided an adequate mentor where they were hired to teach. Finally, Mary and Sally had the most successful first year of teaching and they claimed their ease of transition was because of their time spent as substitute teachers.

Research question #2 D asked if there were any differences of opinion from August to May regarding Midwestern University's educator preparation program. Cassie changed her opinion of the program after she had so many problems with implementing

IEPs. On a scale of 1-10, she dropped her rating of the program by 2 points. Kelley also changed her opinion after she had such a challenging year with classroom management and overall teaching. By the end of her first year of teaching, she rated the program poorly and felt Midwestern University let her down. The other participants' view of the program stayed the same throughout their first year of teaching.

Research question #3 asked if the study participants' responses to varied by type of school where the participants were employed and their level and area of certification. Kelley was the only participant to teach in an urban school and also the only participant to have extreme classroom management issues and lack of support from her co-workers. She had a challenging first year and her responses were more critical of the program than the other participants. All of the secondary education participants said that the program curriculum tended to lean more towards elementary and intermediate levels than secondary.

Recommendations for the Program

This study found Midwestern University's Educator Preparation Program to have several areas of strength. However, there were three areas of weakness: curriculum, student teaching, and substitute teaching. Recommendations are made for possible changes to address the weaknesses.

Curriculum. There was a clear need to separate the elementary level from the secondary level. Analysis of the current curriculum was needed to determine which classes might be differentiated. The secondary level also needed to have more subject specific classes or more subject specific models imbedded into other classes already in the curriculum. There was only one required course, "Exceptional Child," in Special

Education for non-Special Education majors. There was a resounding frustration with understanding and implementing IEPs. With so many students with disabilities being mainstreamed into the schools, every teacher needed to be knowledgeable about special education services. This meant learning how to write, read, and understand an IEP. This also meant being trained with successful means of implementing the IEPs for the elementary and secondary levels.

Technology was used by all of the participants in multiple ways. While there were different brands of software and equipment used, they were all fairly similar. Learning one type of online grading system would give the student teacher the fundamental skills needed to quickly adapt to a slightly different system if necessary. SmartBoards or Promethean Boards were commonly used by all of the participants. Learning how to use and present lessons on either one would have greatly helped many of my participants. With so much technology in all of the classrooms, whether at the elementary level or the secondary level, a technology course seemed to be a necessary addition to the curriculum. Fortunately, since the graduation of the participants in this study, technology was added to the curriculum at both the undergrad and graduate levels.

While my participants were not overly exposed to diverse populations, it was a growing issue among new teachers and their placements. Midwestern University had such a diverse population; those students could be utilized for a series of discussions and reflections over the course of the program. Diversity needed to be integrated into the curriculum. While undergraduate students had to take two “cross cultural” courses for a general education requirement, there was no such requirement for MAT students.

A common theme regarding interviews was a need for more practice with

different interviewing techniques. Mary was the only participant that was required to teach a lesson in front of a sample class of students or a group of administrators. However, this seemed to be a growing trend and preparing the student teachers for that possibility should be considered.

Student teachers needed to practice actual interviews with volunteer "principals". These were either actual administrators or possibly masters or doctorate level students that had five or more years teaching experience in the level and subject matter at which the undergrad was becoming certified. In addition, letting the student teachers practice doing an actual lesson in front of the volunteer principals was a suggestion. Attempts were made to find studies of best practices for incorporating a course into the curriculum about interviewing techniques, but they were unsuccessful.

Lastly, some teacher candidates needed more guidance with the basics. While Kelly was my only participant that needed this guidance, I presumed that she was not the only graduate of the program that fell into this category. As previously mentioned in Research Question Two, Part C, an induction program would have benefitted these graduates. It was suggested that a university faculty member be assigned to the graduates as a mentor for them to use or not use.

Student Teaching. The student teaching experience needed to be varied and longer, according to the study participants. There needed to be exposure to low ability levels, students with disabilities, and students with behavior problems. The different ability levels were especially needed at the high school level since often times the new teachers were assigned the low level students. Observations were used as a means to expose the student teachers to various types of schools whether they were public, private,

urban, suburban, or rural. Then the student teacher was able to identify with a particular personal learning weakness to develop or area to explore further.

In addition, the student teaching experience was rated as the most crucial element of the educator preparation program. What was learned or not learned often determined the success of the first year teacher. I recommended that the student teachers rate their cooperating teachers. The cooperating teachers that received low scores would not be used in the future. The cooperating teachers that received high scores needed to be acknowledged. The university needed to keep in contact with those teachers to use for future student teaching experiences. Unfortunately, Midwestern University is often at the mercy of school districts with assigning cooperating teachers. Building principals will often inform the university who the cooperating teacher will be, rather than the university requesting a specific teacher.

Substitute Teaching Experience. The participants of my study that had many hours of substitute teaching ranked it as their most beneficial experience. I would propose, as part of the practicum, several substitute teaching experiences. This would be done after observations and before the student teaching assignment. The student teacher would have a day or a half-day where she was a substitute teacher. Afterwards at the next university class meeting, those experiences would be used as a basis of discussion for classroom management, teaching techniques, and technology used. This class would need to be sorted by elementary and secondary. The participants in my study who had been substitute teachers had questions to ask and get answered when they went through the program. The participants that had no substitute teaching experience did not know what questions to ask because they had yet to have any real experiences in the classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

For the purpose of this research, my goal was to interview 30–40 participants. However, I had difficulty recruiting since research approval was received after graduates had completed the program. My original plan was to visit the graduates in their scheduled classroom and recruit participants for my study. If someone wanted to do a similar study, they should consider the timeline for getting IRB approval. In addition, it would be very difficult for one person to follow 30–40 participants, interview them, sort through their answers, and write the case studies. That would require a team of investigators. A group of 6–10 was a good size for one investigator while trying to keep a mix of participants.

Some of my participants did not complete their MAT degree. It would be interesting to find out of the people that start the program how many end up not completing their degree as well as their reasons. A study three or four years later could investigate whether the recommendations were acted upon and how that affected the new graduates.

The qualitative results of this study were consistent with the quantitative survey results from the state-administered first year teacher survey. However, Midwestern University faculty should continue to follow their graduates into the field to offer support and learn from the experiences.

Implications

Most of the research findings referred to in this study was based on longer studies that focused on large groups of participants from various schools and universities. This study chose to concentrate on a particular set of graduates from one university program.

In doing so, the information gained from the data highlighted specific strengths and weaknesses of Midwestern Universities educator preparation program. Consequently, the university was able to make adjustments to their curriculum and program. During the course of this study, technology was incorporated more into the curriculum. The findings of this study suggested this needed to be done. In addition, the data from this study was used to support a proposal to mandate substitute teaching experiences in the educator preparation program at Midwestern University. Previously, substitute teaching experiences were only recommended, not required.

The data from this study demonstrated that following a set of graduates in diverse settings could assist a particular department in assessing their program. This study not only benefitted Midwestern University but perhaps other universities with similar programs. Other educator preparation programs could use this data to help them critique their own program.

Personal Reflections

I found this study to be enlightening from both the research angle and the participant angle. I went back to school to get my BA in Elementary Education after I had been substitute teaching at my children's school. I found my experience as a substitute teacher and as a mother to greatly benefit me as a novice teacher, just like some of the participants in my study. I understood the parents' perspective and my time in the classroom as a substitute teacher helped to establish my personal classroom management style. When I later completed my MAT in Secondary Math and started teaching at the high school level, I soon realized that just passing the Praxis II certification exam was not enough. The teaching techniques that I learned during my MAT coursework and from

my co-workers improved my own personal skills with mathematics and made me a better math teacher. Kelley, a participant in my study, needed that type of guidance to be a more successful English teacher. I pursued my MA in Educational Administration and my Ed.D. in Educational Administration and I grew to better understand the complexities of educational administration. The traits of successful administrators and those that still needed improvement became evident during my study. Training educators was always an integral component of most major colleges and universities. There was always a need for teachers and training them well was the challenge for most programs.

The research showed that the best practices of successful programs used longer student teaching experiences that had more varied levels of ability and environments (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hitz & Walton, 2004; Levine, 2006). My research came to the same conclusions. Mary had multiple experiences of varied levels of ability and environments. She had the fewest issues with transitioning into a first year teacher. Mary and Sally had been substitute teachers and that experience helped them make a successful transition into a first year teacher. Mary highly valued the diversity of the students and the different ability levels that she taught during her student teaching experience. The other participants wished they had received a similar student teaching experience. I often wondered if Kelley would have had a more successful first year of teaching if she had decided to do her student teaching in an English classroom instead of Theatre Arts.

Classroom mangagement was something that all of the participants and most first year teachers struggled with during that first year of teaching. Someone studying to become a teacher could read a great deal of material and do various types of role playing,

but the best way to learn was by being in the classroom. Observations of classes with difficult students several times over the course of the program was my suggestion. When someone was studying to become a teacher, they did not know initally what questions to ask, particularly about classroom management. When they were exposed at various times to various classroom settings, they were allowed to develop those questions to which they could seek out answers. Substitute teaching provided a very good source for this early exposure.

The study participants taught in urban, suburban, and rural schools, which were either public or private. In addition, they earned different degrees and some were elementary while some were secondary. I was fortunate that I had a very good mix of participants. I would not have received the same information if the study participants were all elementary or secondary or if none of them had a bad experience.

I actually learned more from this study than I had anticipated. I planned to move into administration at the secondary level and eventually at the district level. This study showed me the crucial importance of providing student teachers with a variety of classes. It was important for them to be in a classroom with an experienced teacher who was leading a class of challenging students.

This study also showed me the effects that mentoring and leadership have on the success of novice teachers. The participants that were supported by their mentors, co-workers, and administers grew during their first year of teaching. They continued to learn and ended up a better teacher in the process. The participant who had no support from her administration or mentor struggled all year and they did not renew her contract. In my opinion, that school failed her. It was up to the administration and the mentoring

teacher to help her make that transition into a first year teacher. It was their duty to help her continue grow and become a better teacher. That emphasized to me how vital that support from the administration and mentor was for a novice teacher.

Conclusion

Even though this study focused on a particular university's education preparation program, the findings could perhaps relate to other similar programs. If a program offers secondary and elementary certifications, the findings from this study showed a need for separation between the two curricula. The data also suggested that the curriculum should focus more on training educators how to implement IEPs, provide more technology training, and provide more exposure to cultural diversity among student populations. Educator preparation programs routinely have student teaching experiences. Best practices of programs and results from this study pointed to a need for longer, more varied student teaching experiences. Finally, substitute teaching experience was viewed as the most important piece to making a smooth transition from a student teacher to a first year teacher.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY • ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Educational Leadership – IRB Protocol

Date ___May 12, 2014_____

Chair __Dr. Beth Kania-Gosche_____ **Student** __Christine Albers _____

Christine Albers,

Your IRB Protocol Draft has been approved. Please, work with your chair to upload documents into IRBNet for submission to the Lindenwood University IRB.

Thank you,

Sherrie Wisdom, EdD
Associate Professor - Education Leadership
Supervisor of Graduate Research

Appendix B: Informational Form

LINDENWOOD

"The First Year Experiences of One Cohort of Graduates from a Midwestern University's Teacher Education Program"

- The purpose of this research is to evaluate the first year experiences of novice teachers and attempt to determine if Lindenwood's educator preparation program could better prepare them or what is already being done well to prepare them.

- Your participation will involve an initial electronic survey detailing demographics and a few short questions, followed by a series of recorded interviews conducted either in person or over the phone, the participants choice. The questions will ask you to describe various stages of your first year of teaching, how you are progressing, and any issues that you have encountered as a novice teacher.

  June/July – short demographic survey

  August – Answer a few short questions prior to school starting

  October – Interview

  December – Answer a few short questions

  February – Interview

  April – Short Interview

  May – Short End of School Year Interview

- The amount of time involved in your participation will be between 10 – 20 minutes for each interview.
- There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

- There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about Lindenwood University's educator preparation program and will help the university to assess its program.

Please consider participating in my study.

In addition to greatly helping me with my dissertation study, as a fourteen year veteran teacher, I would also be a resource for your own questions about teaching.

Chris Albers
Principal Investigator
314 – 620 – 3464

Dr. Beth Kania-Gosche
Supervising Faculty
636-949-4576

Appendix C: Consent for Participation Forms

LINDENWOOD

"The First Year Experiences of One Cohort of Graduates from a Midwestern University's Teacher Education Program"

Dear _____ ,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I promise to keep the interviews brief! I'm really looking forward to hearing about your first year experiences. If at any time you ever have questions or concerns, please contact me.

Included are two consent forms. Please sign and return one to me and keep the other one for your records. Also included is a short demographic survey to complete.

I have included a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the consent form and survey to me.

Please email Chris - caa577@lionmail.lindenwood.edu to sign up. Thanks!

Appendix D: Demographic Survey

LINDENWOOD

"The First Year Experiences of One Cohort of Graduates from a Midwestern University's Teacher Education Program"

Name of Participant _____ **Date** _____

Please complete the following short demographic survey.

1. State your race _____ (Or you may decline)

2. State your ethnicity _____ (Or you may decline)

3. Location of your elementary school. (Circle one). Urban / Suburban / Rural

What type of school did you attend for elementary school? (Circle one)

Public / Charter / Private / Home-Schooled

4. Location of your secondary school. (Circle one). Urban / Suburban / Rural

What type of school did you attend for secondary school? (Circle one)

Public / Charter / Private / Home-Schooled

5. What type of degree did you receive in 2014 from Lindenwood University? (Circle one)

BA / BS / MAT

What was the content area of your major degree? (Circle all that apply)

Elementary Ed. / Middle School Ed. / Secondary Ed. / Special Ed.

6. What type of degree(s) did you have prior to completing this degree?
(Please write content area next to type of degree)

None - This was my first college degree

AA - _____

BA - _____

BS – _____

7. What grade level are you certified to teach? (Circle all that apply)

Elementary / Middle School / Secondary
K – 12 (please list) _____
Content Area or Add-on Certifications? _____

8. Generally, how much exposure have you had to culturally diverse groups? (Circle one)

A lot / Some / Not Much / None

9. Order the types of schools you would like to teach in with 1 being your most preferred.

_____ Public
_____ Charter
_____ Private

10. Order the location of schools you would most like to teach in with 1 being your most preferred.

_____ Urban
_____ Suburban
_____ Rural

11. What types of school did you do your student teaching in? (Circle all that apply)

Public / Charter / Private

12. What location of school did you do your student teaching in? (Circle all that apply)

Urban / Suburban / Rural

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. I really appreciate it. *Please return it with the signed Adult Consent Form in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope.* I will be contacting you soon. May I contact you via text message to set up interview times?

Yes / No

My cell number Chris Albers 314 – 620 – 3464 Your cell number _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. Why type of school did you accept a job offer to teach?

   Urban/Suburban/Rural – Public/Charter/Private

2. What type of contract were you offered?

   Full-time/Part-time/Temporary.

3. Tell me about your interview and application experience for this job. (ask probing questions as needed for more information) Did they ask for your portfolio?

4. How did your coursework prepare you for the interview and application process?

5. Did you do anything over the summer to prepare for your teaching position?

6. Did the school where you are employed offer any type of "new teacher" pre-service? If so, what did that consist of? Do you believe that you benefitted from this pre-service?

7. Tell me about your assigned mentor. (assigning a mentor is mandated by MO law for first year teachers)

8. How many other new teachers are there in your building? Have you gotten to know them at all?

9. How many other teachers in your building teach the same thing that you do? What support have you gotten from them?

10. What did you feel prepared for as school began? What did you feel unprepared for?

In January interview:

1. What was your biggest challenge with management of student behavior during your first quarter of teaching? Explain.

2. Was there anything that you learned either during LU's educator preparation program or during your student teaching that helped you handle the student behavior issues?

3. How was your school Open House and Parent/Teacher Conferences? Did you have any parent(s) that questioned your skills as a teacher? If so, how did you respond? Were you supported by your administrator? Why or why not?

4. If you had a mentor, did that person actively help you acclimate to the school environment? What was done that helped and what was not done but you wished had been done because it would have helped you?

5. Did you feel knowledgeable of the subject matter that you were teaching? Why or why not?

6. Did any of your co-workers offer any advice regarding your lesson plans or classroom preparation? If so, did you make any changes? Explain.

7. How comfortable were you using the technology (i.e. Smart Board, online grades, teacher website) of the school?

8. Was there anything that you learned either during LU's educator preparation program or during your student teaching that helped you with using the technology?

9. Describe one of the best days you had during your first months of teaching and why you consider it a "best" day. In your opinion, is there anything in the LU educator preparation program that affected that moment?

10. Describe one of the worst days you had during your first months of teaching and why you consider it a "worst" day. In your opinion, is there anything not currently in the LU educator preparation program that could have helped you more effectively cope with the negative situation?

11. Do you feel like you are a part of the school teaching community or do you feel like a new person looking in? Explain your reasoning.

12. Now that you have completed two quarters of teaching, what are your overall feelings about choosing the teaching profession? Do you feel like you made a good decision? Why or why not? Is there something that you wished that you knew, had done, or had asked about prior to starting teaching?

13. How would you rate the LU educator preparation program at this point in your career for preparing you to be a successful novice teacher? Explain your reasoning.

Last Interview:

1. How many hours did you actually teach during student teaching? How many did you observe?

2. Do you think that it would have been beneficial to have more / longer student teaching experience? Or experience in different environments – urban/ suburban, well- behaved kids / poor behavior?

3. How much exposure did you get either at LU or in student teaching regarding students with disabilities? Have you had to deal with many of those students in your first year?

4. How much exposure did you get either at LU or in student teaching regarding students that were culturally different from you? Were you offered any ways to try and understand their culture?

5. Do you think that it would have been beneficial if LU offered an induction component to their program? They would maintain contact with you during your first year of teaching.

6. How many times did your administrator or department chairperson observe you teaching? If you were observed, when did it occur and what were their comments?

7. Was there any situation(s) that came up during the school year that made you question whether you still wanted to be a teacher? If so, explain.

8. Did you feel professionally supported by your co-workers? Administrator? Why or why not?

9. Do you want to teach next year? Why or why not?

10. If you want to teach next year, do you want to stay at the same school? Stay in the same district but at a different school? Go to a different school and district? Explain.

11. Were you offered a contract to continue teaching at the same school for the next school year? If not, why in your opinion? If so, did you accept the contract? Why or why not?

12. Did you try to get a job teaching at a different school for the next school year?

13. What is / are strengths of LU program?

14. What is / are a weakness of LU program?

15. How would you rate the way that this study was conducted? Why did you continue to participate? Is there anything that you believe should have been asked or done to include in the study?

16. What kind of gift card would you like?

Vitae

Christine Ann Albers graduated in the top 10% of her class from Lindbergh High School in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1983, she studied a year at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri before transferring to Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri to study medical technology. Then in 1999, she followed her true passion to become an educator and enrolled at Saint Mary of the Woods University in Terre Haute, Indiana. She took distance courses to complete her BA degree in Elementary Education in 2001. She graduated Magna Cum Laude. For seven years she taught grades 4-8. She taught Math, English, and Social Studies for grade 4 and Math for grades 5-8. Wanting to teach at the high school level, she enrolled at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri to study secondary mathematics. In 2009, she earned a MAT – Secondary Math degree. For the next seven years she taught math at a private, college preparatory high school. While there, she decided to advance her interests in education and enrolled at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. Attending their satellite locations, she earned her MA in Educational Administration in 2012. She enjoyed the administration side of education and continued at Lindenwood University to pursue a doctorate degree. In 2014, she was a Mathematics Committee member for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education where she participated in validating and setting ratings for mathematics assessments. She will obtain a doctorate degree from Lindenwood University in Educational Administration in July 2015. Chris Albers relocated to Punta Gorda, Florida to teach mathematics at the local public high school while waiting for an administrative position to become available.