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Editors’ Introduction

Teacher Education Programs: Design, Practices, and Resources

Reyes L. Quezada, Sandy Buczynski, Ricardo A. Medina, Suzanne Stolz, James Fabionar, & Rebekka Jez

In our Summer 2020 issue of Teacher Education Quarterly we reported that over 117,000 deaths had been recorded in the United States due to COVID-19. By the end of September 2020 there were over 205,000 deaths. In this latest wave those affected are younger as many institutions of higher education and k-12 schools implemented a return to school in September while others were due to open in October. Some universities and k-12 schools reopened only to close again to return to remote learning, as many students seemed to not follow health and safety procedures, therefore numerous students contracted the virus. For many teacher education programs the Fall of 2020 began just as the Spring and Summer sessions ended—teaching remote or as a hybrid model. In most teacher education programs

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teacher candidates continued to teach or student teach remotely in their clinical school placements. In many cases even if the schools reopened some institutions of higher education maintained a university policy where teacher candidates and student teachers were not allowed to be physically at their assigned schools with their master teachers. Some students deferred their fall student teaching due to not having the opportunity to experience an authentic face to face student teaching classroom setting.

Once again, issues of equity creeped into many education sectors. Equity in education is a national issue, influenced by many factors. Therefore, teacher education should interrogate equity in the design, practices, and resourcing of the experiences to be received by teacher candidates. Teacher education programs have had to design and redesign their programs to meet the needs of their teacher candidates based on local, state, and national mandates, even when in some cases they contradict each other. Depending on the fiscal situation of institutions and k-12 systems, some were able to reopen while others did not. In many cases school districts with greater numbers of ethnic minority students were unable to open their schools due to not having the finances to implement the health and safety requirements imposed by the local, county, or state regulations, thereby impacting student teaching placements.

The teaching practices also varied by school district and therefore student teachers placed in highly affluent districts fared much better as the connectivity to the internet for their k-12 students was superior and the resources for technology more abundant. Teacher candidates placed in low resource communities where families have less resources were further challenged to stay connected during their online teaching segments.

The resourcing of alternate methods of providing support to teacher candidates has also been a factor in providing online student teaching supervision and the use of technology for supervision. The use of video libraries to supplement teaching practices has also often been resourced through contracting with educational companies while other schools use free open resources. At times video might be of lower quality or older based on when the teaching episodes were filmed. If teacher preparation programs do not have adequate finances, faculty typically find themselves developing their own materials.

Therefore, equity in design, practices, and resourcing take different yet similar forms, which is the focus of this issue of Teacher Education Quarterly. The end result for teacher preparation programs is to make sure they provide their teacher candidates the opportunities and supports needed to be successful in k-12 classrooms. These include the promotion of and advocacy for an equitable design in their educational systems for all students, the promotion of culturally relevant teaching practices, and the provision of adequate resourcing to meet the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students in our k-12 schools. In this journal issue we therefore examine equity with respect to design, practices, and resourcing through the content of the four featured articles as well as in the concluding response article.
In the first article, “Creating Coherence in Teacher Preparation: Examining Teacher Candidates’ Conceptualization and Practices for Equity” by Carlos Sandoval Jr., Elizabeth A. van Es, Shanyce Campbell, and Rosella Santagata, coherence in a teacher preparation program is examined relative to equity. The authors used performance assessments and artifacts from coursework to determine and define equitable practices observed in field placements, and whether a teacher candidate can integrate their conceptualizations of equity into their practice. The study found that candidates’ conceptualizations of equity were characterized by five categories including: (1) leveraging students’ experiences and cultures in the classroom; (2) understanding the broader sociopolitical context on classrooms; (3) understanding the importance of creating classroom environments that promote broad participation; (4) Having an awareness of the biases teachers have toward students; and (5) identifying and examining specific supports students need to participate and succeed in classrooms. These conceptualizations were then compared to candidates’ equitable practices which surfaced three themes: attending to and eliciting student thinking, viewing students’ assets as coming primarily from the school and classroom, and using multiple representations. The authors concluded that these practices do not appear to align with candidates’ conceptualizations of equity. It is important to focus on “outcome measures”—what teacher candidates think and actually do in classrooms. Having an equity-based teacher preparation program is only as successful as their candidate outcomes. This study highlights the need to attend to these “candidate outcomes” in order to examine to what extent teacher preparation programs are coherent and to specify efforts to improve programs.

The next article by Tammy Mills, Ana Maria Villegas, and Marilyn Cochran-Smith, entitled “Research on Preparing Preservice Mainstream Teachers for Linguistically Diverse Classrooms,” examines equity in terms of practices by asking how we identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school due to language obstacles. The current trend is to place English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms; but how do we prepare teacher candidates to teach this population? This article analyzes current research on the pre-professional preparation of mainstream teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms and concludes that the vast majority of research studies leave unquestioned the power dynamics that sustain existing educational and social inequalities, thereby perpetuating the status quo. This conclusion was reached by a two-phased analysis process: (1) summarize each research piece using a template to capture key information such as research purpose, teacher learning outcome sought, theoretical/conceptual framework(s), methods, and major findings, and (2) give attention to how researchers constructed the problem they investigated, the questions they posed, who the researchers were, and their purposes and target audiences. The authors then looked across the studies to determine trends in the findings and how they were distributed along a continuum in which one end reflected social practices that tended to conserve existing educational and social inequalities and the opposite end that challenged
those inequalities. Overall this article sheds light on how teacher educators have responded over the past two decades to preparing general education teachers to teach ELLs as well as offering insight into how future teacher candidates might be better prepared.

The third article in this issue is by Kathleen Olmstead, Jenifer Randhare Ashton, and Christian Peter Wilkens, entitled “Do You Really Want to Do This? Teacher Candidate Perspectives on Imperfect Placements.” It addresses equity of program design in terms of student teacher placements. Teacher preparation programs do not structure clinical internship experiences (student teaching) with uniformity, rather teacher candidates are place in rural, suburban, urban, high and middle schools, and elementary schools with mentor teachers who love to collaborate and also with those who don’t. Some teacher candidates go to schools where teachers leave year after year and some do their practice teaching in more stable environments; some are in classrooms where students do not learn and some are in classrooms where students excel. What do teacher candidates take away from this clinical teaching experience? The authors focus on the less-than-ideal-placements in order to determine how teacher candidates negotiate the complexity of learning to teach effectively. Five main categories of imperfection in clinical internship emerged: overwhelming responsibility, a lack of support, negative mentors, overly controlled or constrained teaching contexts, and poor or negative feedback about teaching. The authors discuss what these findings might mean and suggest that inclusive coteaching models have the potential to ameliorate some imperfections, perhaps ultimately improving the work of the teachers our students will become.

The final article in this issue is by Lynnette Mawhinney and Carol R. Rinke and is entitled “Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting: The Case of Two Former Teach for America Corps Members.” This study is unique in that it examines “teacher leavers”—individuals who have left teaching prior to retirement, taught for at least one year within a public school, and taught in a secondary science or English classroom (higher workload courses). The study identified 25 teacher leavers, predominantly White females from urban schools in 14 states. Fifty-six percent of these teacher leavers were trained through traditional teacher education programs and 44% had attended alternative-route programs. Within the alternative-route group, the authors focused on two participants who left teaching to return to their previous professions. Using life history as a methodology, these women’s voices and experiences were captured as Teach for America Corps (TFA) members. Teach for America’s mission is to promote educational equity and, toward that end, calls it participants “members” rather than “teachers.” After the program is over, the members’ institutional identity shifts to TFA alumni rather than “former teachers.” Grounded in a conceptual framework of intersectional identities, specifically Gee’s notions of institution-identity and an affinity-identity, one participant maintained identity resistance and exited TFA identifying as a “teacher.” The other participant demonstrated identity acceptance and exited the program identifying
as a TFA alumni. The implications for teacher educators involves developing both institution-identity and affinity-identity in teacher candidates in order to promote pride in their work and connect them to the field of education over time.

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Creating Coherence in Teacher Preparation
Examining Teacher Candidates’ Conceptualizations and Practices for Equity

Carlos Sandoval Jr., Elizabeth A. van Es, Shanyce L. Campbell, & Rossella Santagata

Abstract
This study aims to examine coherence in a teacher preparation program relative to equity. Using performance assessments and artifacts from coursework, we explore how candidates define equity, what equitable practices they enact in their field placements, and whether a relationship exists between their conceptualizations and their practice. We found that candidates’ conceptualizations of equity were characterized by five categories; however, their conceptualizations were varied and wide ranging. Findings also show that candidates emphasized attention to student thinking in their teaching, a practice often described in frameworks for ambitious mathematics teaching. Lastly, we found little evidence of consistency between candidates’ conceptualizations and their instructional practices. The
findings suggest a need to examine the coherence among various features of the teacher education program design and the experiences offered to candidates in these programs.

Introduction

Creating coherence is a persistent problem for teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Zeichner, 2010). Preparation programs are challenged to align components of their programs—courses and field placements—to prepare beginning teachers for the profession. Many scholars have generated a range of principles for structuring teacher preparation programs to address coherence problems, such as articulating a common vision of teaching (e.g., Kennedy, 2006), placing a stronger emphasis on connecting theory and practice (e.g., Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), and centering teacher candidates’ development of core practices (e.g., Forzani, 2014). Additionally, many teacher education scholars have generated a range of outcomes to which teacher preparation programs should hold themselves accountable, such as developing teacher candidates’ knowledge of learners, content, and teaching (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001); making visible the major challenges teachers face throughout their careers (Kennedy, 2016); and developing commitments to equity and social justice (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2006b). There is no shortage of outcomes to which the field should aspire. What is needed is a connection between teacher preparation outcomes and understanding programmatic coherence relative to these outcomes.

In this article, we examine issues of coherence in teacher preparation by focusing on one of these outcomes: equity. We focus on this particular outcome because of the role teacher preparation programs can play in developing future teachers’ advocacy and instructional practice for promoting equity (Hollins, 2015; Nieto, 2000). We also focus on equity because of the variation in perspectives on equity in the field of teaching and learning, including critical perspectives that focus on racial, gender, and sexual identities; center broadening participation in classrooms; and focus on the experiences of marginalized learners, such as multilingual and exceptional learners (Esmonde & Booker, 2016). Moreover, many of the studies focused on candidates’ conceptualizations and practices for equity are situated within a particular course over a single semester using one source of data (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). Though insightful into understanding particular goals for promoting candidates’ commitments to equity, these studies often fail to take a systemic view of teacher preparation and situate candidates’ learning and development within the larger program (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015).

To date, teacher preparation scholarship has not focused on examining programs systematically to interrogate the extent to which they are coherent to advance particular aims. To systematically examine coherence, this study uses data collected...
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at two different time points that provide insight into how candidates conceptualize equity and the practices they enact to promote equity. The design of this study is guided by a broad, underlying conjecture about program coherence: If a program were coherent in its approach to addressing any particular outcome, then there would be evidence of alignment between candidates’ conceptualizations and practices. Thus we organize the study around three questions:

What are candidates’ conceptualizations of equity?

What equitable teaching practices do candidates enact, if any?

What evidence of coherence exists when examining the relationship between candidates’ conceptualizations of equity and their practice?

Together, these questions serve to provide insight into the alignment between how candidates come to conceptualize a core commitment of teacher preparation—equity—and then, later, whether and how those conceptualizations of equity are aligned with the ways in which they seek to enact equitable practices.

In this article, we narrow our inquiry to elementary teacher candidates’ conceptualizations of equity as it relates to their mathematics teaching. Persistent inequities in student achievement and access are well documented in mathematics education (Gutiérrez, 2009; Martin, 2009). Recent research has argued that elementary teachers continue to be underprepared to support underrepresented communities in mathematics (Aguirre et al., 2012; Bartell et al., 2017). We seek to investigate the nature of candidates’ understanding of broader concepts related to equity as they arise in the context of content-specific instruction, providing insight into the coherence between program commitments, designs for learning, and candidates’ beginning teaching.

Understanding Coherence in Teacher Preparation

Nearly a decade ago, Darling-Hammond (2006a) proposed a model of teacher preparation that challenged the field to examine how programs are organized for promoting teacher candidates’ learning. This model argues for a number of aims that teacher preparation programs should strive to achieve, primarily around developing commitments to, dispositions toward, and knowledge of diverse learners, curriculum and subject matter, and teaching. Others have identified aims that are aligned with and expand on those articulated by Darling-Hammond, most notably providing candidates with opportunities to develop a beginning repertoire of practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), develop skills and dispositions to learn from practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Santagata & Yeh, 2014; Sun & van Es, 2015), promote equity (Hollins, 2015; Nieto, 2000), and develop an understanding of and practice troubleshooting the challenges of teaching (Kennedy, 2016). These components
make up a vision for teacher preparation that is consistent with those set forth by state and national reform and policy documents (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016).

Darling-Hammond’s model also challenges teacher preparation programs to examine how programs are organized and, in doing so, illuminates issues of coherence, referring to the disconnects among courses and between university coursework and fieldwork. Grossman et al. (2009) located this issue, in part, in the separation of methods courses from courses aimed at providing candidates with conceptual or theoretical tools. They, and others (e.g., Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Zeichner, 2010), also articulate that the separation of coursework and fieldwork emerges from viewing student teaching placements as a space for candidates to enact or use theoretical principles or conceptual tools, as opposed to attending to the interplay between coursework and fieldwork. These studies highlighted the myriad ways in which (in)coherence may emerge in teacher preparation, motivating the need to study program coherence.

To date, however, the predominant forms of research in teacher preparation have not been conducive to examining program coherence. Research in teacher preparation typically does not examine questions across time points, often relying on data collected from single sources of data (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). Additionally, teacher preparation research has not had a focus on examining the outcomes of teacher preparation, including the ways in which candidates think about and enact practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Diez, 2010; Grossman & McDonald, 2008). However, some bodies of work have examined coherence in different ways. Some scholars examine the perceptions candidates hold and develop in relation to the aims of teacher preparation (e.g., Heggen & Terum, 2013; Smeby & Heggen, 2014). Others have studied coherence by examining the pedagogies of teacher preparation relative to programs’ stated goals and commitments (Rojas & Chandía, 2015). And still others have examined the relationship between the pedagogies of program graduates and program outcomes and curriculum (Hammerness, 2006). These studies of coherence, however, do not focus on specific teacher preparation outcomes and do not draw connections between candidates’ conceptualizations and their instructional practice.

Our study builds on Hammerness’s (2006) use of instructional practice for examining program coherence by centering candidates’ instructional practice in the program, as opposed to graduates, as it relates to conceptualizations they develop in their coursework. We draw on the work of van Es and Sherin (2008) to motivate the need to attend to the consistency between conceptualizations and practice, specifically drawing on their use of specificity in the context of teachers’ noticing. In their study, van Es and Sherin used as an analytic framework the ways in which teachers talk about specific events and the ways those events serve as “cases of” more general principles. We position this work as making visible alignment between candidates’ conceptualizations, as general principles without the particularities of
the event, and the ways in which candidates enact and talk about and make general specific events in their instructional practice.

In the case of examining candidates’ conceptualizations and practices for studying coherence, van Es and Sherin’s (2008) framework suggested attending to both general principles of teaching and learning that guide candidates’ thinking and the ways that they talk about these principles of practice specifically. We conjecture that programs that are more coherent would result in greater alignment between candidates’ conceptualizations of general equity principles and the ways in which they identify and articulate these equity principles in specific interactions in practice. We now turn to frame equity for this study to examine how candidates conceptualize and attempt to enact equitable instructional practices in their classrooms.

**Framing Equity in Teacher Preparation**

We draw on research that has conceptualized equity in the context of teaching, teacher education, and teacher preparation. This literature points to two broad dimensions of equity in teaching and teacher preparation. The first focuses on developing candidates’ and teachers’ awareness of and attention to the broader sociopolitical context of schooling. The second focuses on the kinds of practices candidates must begin to develop to advance equity in their practice. For the second dimension, we draw on mathematics education researchers because (a) mathematics education scholars have produced a wealth of knowledge about equity in mathematics and (b) candidates’ practices are embedded in mathematics lessons, as captured for a program-wide performance assessment (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2015).

**The Development of Sociopolitical Awareness and Dispositions**

Teacher preparation scholars have identified the development of candidates’ awareness of and attention to the sociopolitically situated nature of classrooms as a key aim in the work of teacher preparation (Hollins, 2015; Nieto, 2000), informed by research that documents that new teachers blame students, their families, or their communities for students’ low achievement (Sleeter, 2017). We frame equity in teacher preparation as an attention to and awareness of the sociopolitical context of schools and the implications for learning environments (Willey & Drake, 2013). We draw on the work of Bartolome (1994, 2007) in conceptualizing political clarity, or the process by which individuals become increasingly aware of the consequences that the political and economic context has on day-to-day conditions in classrooms and on students. For Bartolome, this entails candidates recognizing that students and classrooms are situated within politicized social, cultural, and historical environments that play out in moment-to-moment classroom interactions. Collectively, these interactions have consequences for students’ access, achieve-
ment, and forms of participation (Gutiérrez, 2009) and, Bartolome argues, require that teachers critically interrogate school and community policies that subordinate historically marginalized students.

This issue is particularly acute in mathematics education research, which has explicated the ways in which politicized social, cultural, and historical environments impact whether and how students are provided with opportunities to learn in math classrooms (Martin, 2009). For instance, Battey and Leyva (2016) offered a framework for understanding how Whiteness operates upon students of color in mathematics classrooms through the inequitable distribution of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral labor among learners. Martin (2007, 2009) also revealed the ways White teachers can damage Black students’ mathematical identities by restricting their access to advanced mathematical learning environments. He noted that many reform efforts in mathematics education motivate a color-blind and assimilationist orientation in their approach by deemphasizing and avoiding issues of race in mathematics, through the narrow focus on increasing participation in mathematics. Because these reform initiatives largely shape the curriculum experience in mathematics, the classroom learning environments come to reflect the politicized environments in which they are situated.

Enacting Practices for Promoting Equity in Mathematics

Research has documented efforts to disrupt the deeply entrenched institutional framings of mathematics instruction that arise in classroom practice by offering a range of constructs to understand teacher candidates’ practice in relation to equity (e.g., Bartell et al., 2017; Gutiérrez, 2009; Nasir et al., 2014). Using Hand’s (2012) model on equitable mathematics instruction, we focus on a set of key features to help organize the range of practices found in the literature on equitable teaching. This model centers the notion of positioning (see Davies & Harré, 1990) and providing opportunities for learners to take up space in classrooms, connecting and integrating mathematical and cultural activity, and making explicit to learners the existence of hierarchies and inequitable systems (Hand, 2012). Research on equitable instruction has highlighted the importance of eliciting and attending to student ideas and making in-the-moment instructional decisions that are responsive to students’ thinking. By focusing on and responding to student thinking, students can become positioned as capable of offering valuable insight that can shape classroom interactions (Aguirre et al., 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Typically, engaging students in collaborative group work around rich mathematical tasks has been viewed as an important way to make student thinking visible while also creating opportunities for students to take up space in mathematics (e.g., Boaler & Staples, 2008; Esmonde, 2009; Nasir et al., 2014). In Hand’s (2012) model, for example, engaging students in group work around rich tasks also offers opportunities for students’ behavior to become (re)positioned. That is, what might
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be viewed traditionally as off-task or disruptive behavior offers an opportunity for teachers to engage in dialogue with students to reposition their actions as mathematically productive. This model also seeks to reposition students’ behavior as mathematically productive by blurring the line between mathematical and cultural activity to broaden what it means to do mathematics.

Literature has also pointed to the importance of teachers making explicit inequitable systems to develop learners’ orientations to social justice and disrupting inequities. For Hand (2012), teachers ought to make visible aspects of mathematics education that are produced by the broader sociopolitical environment to help learners reframe their participation in mathematics. Others have argued that promoting the development of a social justice orientation helps learners reframe their participation in school (Freire, 1972; Gutstein, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Thus making systems visible and providing opportunities for learners to critically examine existing hierarchies and power structures affords learners the ability to view mathematics as a way to redress inequities and injustices.

Having framed equity, the purpose of this article is to understand the extent to which a teacher preparation program is coherent for advancing equity in its preparation of teacher candidates by focusing on key teacher education outcomes on equity: conceptualizations of equity and practices for equity. Thus we frame equity in these two ways—the development of sociopolitical awareness and the enactment of practices for promoting equity in mathematics—to inform the ways in which we analyze data on candidates’ conceptualizations and practices for equity separately. We then examine the alignment between conceptualizations and practice for understanding the extent to which the program was coherent for advancing equity. Specifically, we used two sets of data—a culminating written assignment from a course focused on culture, equity, and diversity and selected segments from the edTPA portfolio assessment of teaching (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2015)—to examine how candidates understood issues of equity as they pertain to the work of teaching and how these understandings were taken up in teaching. Our aim is to understand coherence in a teacher preparation program by studying the nuanced ways teacher candidates conceptualized the construct of equity and whether and how their conceptualizations arose in their instructional practice and reflections on teaching.

Method

Setting and Data Sources

This exploratory study took place in the context of an elementary education teacher preparation program at a large research-intensive university in the West. The program is 14 months long, including coursework and field experiences in the summer, three quarters during the academic year with students placed in school sites,
and a final summer quarter with coursework. The program is organized around five core commitments: promoting equity, knowledge of learning and learners, practices for teaching and learning in content areas, learning from teaching, and preparing candidates to become instructional leaders (see the appendix). Data for this study come from candidates (n = 53) seeking their multiple-subject teaching credential, in the first year of the enactment of the redesigned program. The candidates came from diverse ethnic groups, Chicano/Latino (n = 17), White (n = 12), and Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 15) making up the majority of the candidates.

We use data generated by candidates’ engagement in the program on their conceptualizations and practice to gain insight into program coherence. To that end, we position these data as outcome data. Two sources of data compose the data set for this study, one of which offers insight into candidates’ conceptualizations and the other serving as a window into candidates’ practice. The first, which served as our window into candidates’ conceptualizations, was a final assignment in the form of a written essay for a required course on diversity and equity that took place in the fall quarter of the program, when candidates began their first field placements. The second data source, which served as our insight into candidates’ practice, was a subset (n = 9) of the portfolio assessments that all teacher candidates complete as part of the credentialing requirement and that included video clips of instruction and written reflection. We describe each in detail.

The first source of data consisted of candidates’ final assignment for a course entitled Cultural Diversity and Equity. This course occurred in the fall quarter of the 2016–2017 academic year and coincided with students’ initial school-based field placements, where students were primarily observers of their mentor teachers’ classrooms. The course was designed to engage candidates in conversations around issues of diversity and equity and to develop candidates’ conceptualizations of equity. All multiple-subject candidates (n = 53) in the program were enrolled in one of two separate, but concurrent, sections of the course. The assignments took the form of written responses to questions about equity, and all multiple-subject candidates were required to complete the assignment, which became the focal artifact for analysis.

We used the final assignment because we wanted to understand how the conceptualizations candidates developed or held at the conclusion of the course were related to their subsequent teaching. The assignment required that teacher candidates write a two- to three-page essay answering three prompts: (a) What is your definition of equity? (b) What readings or other content from the course, such as discussions, video, and presentations, did you draw upon to come to your definition of equity? and (c) Did your conception of equity change since the beginning of the course? Candidates were encouraged to write about multiple facets of equity for each of the questions. The unit of analysis for teacher candidates’ conceptualizations included statements about how they defined equity and what equity meant to them. We did not take into account their responses to the third question because we were more
interested in their understanding of equity and less in their perceived change in their understandings over time.

The second source of data consisted of summative performance assessment portfolios that candidates were required to complete for certification in California, the edTPA, or Teacher Performance Assessment (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2015). Candidates submitted the portfolios in March, at the end of the second quarter, the quarter following the course on equity. The program administered the edTPA, which assessed candidates on three tasks: planning for and enacting a lesson and assessing student learning. The planning task required candidates to plan a series of lessons around specific learning goals, justify decisions, and reflect on how they plan for particular students or circumstances. The instruction task prompted candidates to submit short (15 minutes or less) video clips of instruction and reflect on the video they submitted. The assessment task prompted candidates to reflect on how they knew whether students met the specified learning goal.

All 53 elementary candidates in the program were required to submit a math-ematics lesson for their edTPA portfolios. After Phase 1 of analysis (described later), we selected a subset of candidate responses \( n = 9 \) to the edTPA portfolios for further analysis using three criteria: (a) All categories of equity conceptualizations generated from the first phase of analysis were represented; (b) the candidate gave permission to the program to access their portfolios for research; and (c) candidates were placed in schools with the highest proportion of students eligible for the free/reduced-price lunch program because they afforded opportunities for equity-oriented practices and reflection to emerge. We selected specific questions from Tasks 1 and 2 of the edTPA because they prompted candidates to consider the “variety of learners” in the class that may have required additional or differentiated supports, such as English learners and underperforming students. These included questions that asked candidates to describe what they knew about their students relative to their everyday language, cultural background and practices, and interests; how their instructional strategies were appropriate for the diversity of learners in their classes; and the changes they would make to better support individual learners. Because these questions most directly asked candidates about their planning and teaching for equity, they would likely elicit responses that articulated a rationale grounded in equity theories for informed instructional decisions. All candidates submitted lesson materials for a sequence of lessons; one to two short video clips from a lesson or multiple lessons, totaling no more than 15 minutes; and written commentary responding to prompts asking candidates to reflect on their planning and teaching. The unit of analysis for practice, then, comprised both candidates’ submitted video clips and their responses to a set of questions about their planning and instruction.
Data Analysis

Three phases comprised the analysis for this study. The first phase of analysis focused on uncovering the range of candidates’ conceptualizations of equity, using the responses to the equity prompts from the Culture, Diversity, & Equity class (n = 53). The second phase centered on surfacing candidates’ equitable instructional practices using the candidates’ portfolio assessments, primarily focusing on the use of group work (Boaler & Staples, 2008); incorporating students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Turner et al., 2012); attending to students' thinking (Cochran-Smith, 2004); and developing students' orientations to social justice (Freire, 1972; Gutstein, 2006). The final phase focused on finding connections between candidates’ conceptualizations and practice through analysis of both sets of data, and served as the primary phase of analysis for surfacing evidence of programmatic coherence.

For the first phase of analysis, we drew on a definition of equity centered on an awareness and understanding of the broader sociopolitical context and their impact on schools and classrooms (Bartolome, 1994, 2007; Martin, 2007, 2009). Analysis centered on candidates' definitions and explanations of equity, examining the content, depth, and specificity with which candidates elaborated on these definitions. Informed by the literature, the first author inductively coded a subset of candidates’ equity definitions and explanations and generated codes and descriptions from the data (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1967). The first author wrote an analytic memo describing what each candidate emphasized, and these memos were also coded. The first author then reviewed the codes and engaged in constant comparative analysis (Glaser et al., 1967) to generate a coding framework, reaching a point of saturation after coding 25 responses and associated memos, consisting of six revised categories and accompanying codes. This coding framework was then applied to the remaining 28 responses. Using this coding framework on the remaining responses, the first author then wrote brief memos characterizing the specific ways in which candidates conceptualized equity relative to the six categories in the coding framework. These brief memos were then clustered into like categories (Saldaña, 2013), resulting in five conceptualizations of equity. In a small number of cases, the category under which candidates fell was not clear. In these cases, we relied on the specificity and detail of candidates’ essays, as well as analytic memos and initial codes, to make decisions about the category to which they belonged.

The second phase of analysis focused on the second research question: What equitable practices do candidates enact? We first sampled nine candidates across each of the equity conceptualization categories generated from the first phase of analysis by selecting the candidates placed in the schools with the highest proportion of students who receive free/reduced-price lunch. The first author analyzed their edTPA portfolios, including both the written reflections and the video clips. The analysis was informed by research on equitable instructional practice organized around the use of group work (Boaler & Staples, 2008), incorporating students’
funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Turner et al., 2012), attending to students’ thinking (Cochran-Smith, 2004), and developing students’ orientations to social justice (Freire, 1972; Gutstein, 2006). While this framework helped develop theoretical sensitivity (Glaser et al., 1967), we generated themes from the data. For each candidate, the first author open-coded, line-by-line, the selected reflections pertaining to candidates’ lesson planning, wrote an analytic memo, and then coded their classroom video in 2-minute time segments (Borko et al., 2008; Sun & van Es, 2015; van Es & Sherin, 2008). Analytic memos were created for each video and instructional commentary response. Finally, analytic memos were also developed that focused on the candidates’ practice for equity across all documents and video clips. The analytic memos focused on the range of equity practices enacted and the particular practices that were most salient for each candidate.

The final phase of analysis centered on the relationship between the nine candidates’ practice and their conceptualization of equity and relied primarily on analytic memos generated from the first two phases of analysis. After examining analytic memos across the equity papers, the nine video clips, and reflections, we then wrote analytic memos for each candidate on the relationship between their conceptualizations and their practice. The memos centered on the extent to which aspects of candidates’ conceptualizations in their equity papers emerged in their practice, and vice versa. Analytic memos, then, focused on the similarities and differences between each candidate’s practice and conceptualizations of equity and whether their conceptualizations influenced their practice.

Findings

Our analysis revealed limited programmatic coherence, evidenced by the lack of alignment between candidates’ conceptualizations of equity and the ways in which candidates attempted to enact equity in their instructional practice. To highlight the alignment and misalignment that we observed, we first briefly describe (a) the range of candidates’ equity conceptualizations that surfaced in their essays and (b) the ways candidates attempted to enact equity in their instructional practice three months later. We then examine candidates’ conceptualizations in conjunction with their practice to understand the extent to which conceptualizations and practice are aligned, offering us insight into program coherence.

Candidates’ Conceptualizations of Equity

Our analysis revealed five categories of candidates’ equity conceptualizations (Table 1).

The first category centered on leveraging students’ experiences and cultures in the classrooms, where candidates defined equity as needing to understand students’ cultural backgrounds to leverage students’ cultural assets during instruction. The
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Conceptualization</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>No. of candidates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging students’ experiences and cultures in the classroom</td>
<td>Using different cultural backgrounds as assets to shape instruction is essential to learning. . . Students bring so much knowledge into classrooms that get ignored and brushed away because it may seem unconventional to do things differently.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the broader sociopolitical context on classrooms</td>
<td>Members of the LGBTQ community are often victims of hate crimes. Inside the classroom, a student who has been singled out as a member of this community is often also the victim of bullying. . . Equity inside the classroom means recognizing, acknowledging and acting upon the larger cultural contexts which perpetuate systems of bias and inequality and having ways for teachers and students to meet those systems.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the importance of creating classroom environments that promote broad participation</td>
<td>Another important aspect of equity is providing multiple opportunities for students to learn and show their learning. . . An example of having multiple opportunities is presenting material visually, providing opportunities for hands on learning, and also presenting material via auditory processing.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an awareness of the biases teachers have toward students</td>
<td>Many teachers will go into the classroom already assuming that certain students are not capable. . . This already creates an unlevel playing field from day one when the teacher does not believe in the student before they even have a chance to prove themselves.</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying and examining specific supports students need to participate and succeed in classrooms</td>
<td>Special education students are falling farther behind because they keep getting pulled out during important lessons. What the RSP and the teacher can do to prevent this gap is to collaborate with each other. . . [RSP teachers] can also involve the special education students to do more collaborative work with the other students.</td>
<td>8</td>
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Creating Coherence in Teacher Preparation

second category focused on understanding how the broader social and political context and power structures impact and shape the classroom environment. In these conceptualizations, candidates looked to make connections between inequities that existed in the world broadly and how they manifested in schools and classrooms. The third conceptualization revolved around the importance of creating classroom environments that promote students’ participation and engagement, with particular attention to broadening participation so students have access to conversations about the subject matter. The fourth conceptualization concerned being aware of teachers’ biases about students and the role these biases play in how teachers interact with and position particular students as capable or incapable. Finally, the fifth conceptualization foregrounded a need to identify and examine specific supports and resources students need to participate and succeed in the classroom. Candidates who emphasized this in their conceptualization of equity discussed the need to navigate additional resources for students with disabilities or students who are learning English. Consistent with prior research (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016), teacher candidates vary in their conceptions of equity.

As we consider these conceptualizations in light of research on equity as framed by a sociopolitical perspective, along with an instructional lens that features tasks and student positioning, we see that the candidates varied in their uptake of these constructs. While they all drew broadly on theories across these constructs, they varied in privileging a focus on the analysis of the sociopolitical environment and how that shapes classroom life, while others drew more attention to practices for enacting equity in practice, by, for example, attending to the ways that students’ cultural knowledge and resources can be brought to bear on their learning. In terms of examining program coherence, what is of particular interest to us is whether and how candidates enacted these conceptualizations in practice. We now turn to examining the nine candidates’ practices to investigate this question.

Candidates’ Practices for Equity

Our analysis of candidates’ equitable practices surfaced three themes: attending to and eliciting student thinking, viewing students’ assets as coming primarily from the school and classroom, and using multiple representations. We summarize these themes and offer examples in Table 2.

The most salient theme we observed was candidates’ emphasis on attending to and eliciting student thinking. All nine of the candidates asked students to share their thinking, either in whole-group discussions or using visual representations on whiteboards. When candidates were prompted to identify students’ personal experiences and cultural and community assets, eight of the nine candidates described students’ experiences in school (e.g., creating tasks that leverage students’ experiences using the school’s currency), while one candidate described how her students reference telenovelas that they watch at home, which she then used as the
Carlos Sandoval Jr., Elizabeth A. van Es, Shanyce L. Campbell, & Rossella Santagata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Viewing students’ assets as coming from the school and classroom</td>
<td>A candidate’s commentary on one of the video clips she submitted. Most of my students have attended this school since its opening in 2014. Thus, many of my students are familiar with one another and the school climate. The school emphasizes an environment that allows opportunities for students to take risks, persevere in their learning, and collaborate as students face challenges in both their learning and everyday lives. Similarly, our classroom culture is based on growth mindset and allowing students to show their thinking (through various means) as they take ownership of their own learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention to student thinking</td>
<td>Classroom interaction in one of the candidate’s submitted video clips. CANDIDATE: Okay, John see. What do you think our rule is? JOHN: I think about the three, about the four vertices. CANDIDATE: [gasps to show she is impressed] Can you say that nice and loud in your big kindergarten voice. JOHN: I think it is the four vertices. CANDIDATE: It’s the rule? Ah. That was the rule! So be . . . JOSE: For me it wasn’t. CANDIDATE: What was, what rule did you think it was? JOSE: The sides . . . they’re all equal sides. CANDIDATE: Ah, but, John can you tell why you thought the rule was vertices and not sides?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using multiple representations</td>
<td>A candidate’s commentary on one of the video clips she submitted. I [provided] multiple means of representation by including the use of visuals, gestures, graphic organizers, and oral definitions to introduce new vocabulary terms. . . . In addition to language supports, I included multiple means of expression to allow the variety of learners in my class to showcase their learning. For instance, in lesson 3, I planned for students to demonstrate their understanding of the tangram activity through manipulatives, drawings, and verbal responses.</td>
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context for a problem about fractions. Finally, candidates’ equitable practices frequently employed the use of multiple representations to broaden students’ access to content. For example, one candidate noted that she used “visuals, gestures, graphic organizers, and oral definitions . . . to allow the variety of learners in my class to showcase their learning.” Though this example provides different opportunities to represent one’s thinking, these strategies do not leverage students’ cultural forms of knowledge.

These practices do not appear to align with candidates’ conceptualizations of equity. Candidates’ enactments were narrowly focused on student thinking and how students experience school and the classroom, demonstrating limited attention to sociopolitical structures, students as cultural beings, and biases toward particular students’ capabilities, all of which were dominant themes that emerged from candidates’ essays on equity.

With the equity characterizations and predominant practices in mind, we turn to focus on the alignment between conceptualizations and practice for the nine cases and also examine the differences and variation between the two. In doing so, we aim to make visible what it looks like for a candidate to enact a conceptualization in practice as well as misalignment between conceptualization and practice. Together, these cases enable us to consider to what extent candidates’ conceptualizations do or do not align with their practice, to gain insight into programmatic coherence.

**Alignment Between Candidates’ Conceptualizations of Equity and Their Practice**

We first highlight two instances of alignment between conceptualizations and practice. The two candidates whose conceptualizations aligned with their practice, Aurelia and Marion, conceptualized equity as an understanding of the impact of the broader political context on classrooms and as being aware of teachers’ biases toward students.

**Aurelia.** We observed alignment between Aurelia’s conceptualization of equity and her practice with regard to the ways in which Aurelia conceptualized equity as focused on histories of oppression and the continued marginalization of students of color. She noted that these students’ experiences are discounted in schools, citing an example from Moll and colleagues (1992) in which a teacher tells a student of Mexican descent that his travels to Mexico “were not classified as educational experiences by his teachers.” She wrote that “this deficit way of thinking about students and their personal experiences is what does not allow the U.S. to have a just educational system.” Here she pointed out that this particular student’s travels are important to leverage because they position the student’s experience as valuable to the classroom and the content.

Evidence of this orientation to students as having cultural assets appeared in her lesson planning commentary as well, writing that her Latinx students “mention
telenovelas because it is a norm in their household,” and as a result, she constructed a word problem about fractions using telenovelas as the context. Here Aurelia paid attention to the students’ shared cultural experiences that are unique to the Latinx cultural experience and then incorporated this particular experience into the math problem as a context. By making telenovelas the context for a problem, Aurelia validated her students’ experiences as relevant to the work of doing mathematics. Aurelia’s conceptualizations of equity pointed out that leveraging students’ experiences from their homes and cultures was not normative and that students’ experiences were often seen as a deficit. We view her specific conceptualization of equity as the marginalization of the experiences of students of color and her attempt to bring those experiences into her instruction as evidence of alignment between conceptualizations and enactment of equity.

Marion. Our examination of Marion’s conceptualization of equity juxtaposed with our analysis of her practice revealed evidence of alignment between the two. Marion focused her conceptualization of equity on being aware of biases about students that position students as incapable compared to their peers. In her reflection, she commented,

I also believe a big part of having equity in the classroom is being unbiased about your students’ chances for success. Many teachers will go into the classroom already assuming that certain students are not capable. Teachers can be influenced by the student’s culture, looks, previous teacher comments, amongst many other factors.

Marion described the importance of addressing biases teachers may hold toward certain students to position all students as capable. The alignment between this conceptualization and her practice was found in the tasks for which she held students accountable, implying that both “struggling” and “advanced” students were capable of completing this task. In one instance, she did this by prompting students to use any strategy they could come up with to solve a problem. In response to an edTPA prompt asking candidates to justify how their instructional strategies were appropriate for the whole class and students with specific learning needs, she answered,

In my second lesson, the students will be allowed to choose any strategy they wish to solve the addition problems. . . . I have a wide range of learners in my classroom, and this freedom to choose their favorite strategy allows the higher students to choose a more advanced strategy (such as number bonds), and the struggling students and English language learners can choose one with a more tactile representation, such as building with base-10 blocks.

Marion offered this freedom so that students can enter into the task from a variety of abilities and framed this as an opportunity for struggling students to enter into the problem. In this case, she positioned students as capable of completing the same task as the “higher” students. Marion also found that her “struggling math students . . . [were] enjoying using representations to solve the problems” and that they
“believed in their own ability more and more to learn mathematics.” Our analysis suggested an alignment between (a) her strategy of implementing rich tasks with all students with no modifications for students who typically “struggle” and (b) her conceptualization of equity that centers a commitment to checking biases so that students are not positioned as incapable.

Though we saw evidence of alignment in these two cases, this was not the case for the additional seven cases whose teaching practices we analyzed. We provide cases of three candidates—Hannah, Magdalena, and Catalina—not only to represent the distinctions between conceptualization and practice but also to see what they came to privilege in their practices as a way to inquire about other aspects of the preparation program that may be influencing their teaching. We selected these three cases because each represented variation in its critical conceptualizations of teaching, yet the teachers did not enact them in practice.

**Hannah.** Hannah’s equity conceptualization highlighted the importance of interrogating resources and supports students receive and need, as they are situated in the institutional program aimed at providing support to students. In her equity essay, Hannah struggled with the services provided to students by the schools’ resource specialist programs (RSPs):

The in-class compare and contrast analysis of the way RSP students were “learning” math and the way the general ed students were learning math provided a glimpse of the way schools have failed to create an equitable learning environment for all students. . . . The RSP students were isolated, merely repeating and copying down procedural steps for math concepts. I’m still not sure I understand how this alternative RSP method is beneficial for these students.

This critique of the kinds of special supports students received highlights Hannah’s focus on both identifying and examining supports for particular students, but also how school programs are enacted to provide support. However, we saw little evidence in her practice related to interrogating or critiquing those supports. Instead, her instructional practice focused on attending to and eliciting student thinking while using visual representations (e.g., hand gestures, color-coded graphic organizers, and manipulatives) to support English learners. For example, Hannah commented on her lesson on naming and differentiating shapes that she color coded a graphic organizer she created with her students to “give English learners a visual indicator that there is a change in information.” In her video clips and commentary, we did not find evidence of Hannah interrogating how these strategies she employs to support her English learners ensure access for students.

**Magdalena.** We now turn to a case of a candidate, Magdalena, whose conceptualization emphasized leveraging students’ assets:

Teachers also view their students as funds of knowledge, in other words they realize that each student holds valuable culturally specific knowledge and skills.
... Teachers who really know their students have a better understanding of their needs and can create instruction that is relevant to their lives.

Magdalena’s equity conceptualization centers on the need to get to know students personally and draw from their cultural experiences to inform instruction. However, when the edTPA prompted Magdalena to justify how her understanding of her students’ personal, cultural, and community assets informed her instructional decisions, she responded by saying that she incorporated the “shapes... found in the area” surrounding the school because many of her students walk to school. She added that the lesson concluded with “a homework assignment in which the students were encouraged to look for shapes in their homes.” Although Magdalena’s conceptualization of equity centered on leveraging students’ cultural assets to inform instruction, her enactment of equity in practice appeared to be a perfunctory attempt to connect learning in school and students’ cultural knowledge and practice. The strategy of using a shape in the area and at home is not an authentic connection to cultural assets to understand polygons. In her instruction, Magdalena viewed assets as coming from students’ experiences in school, absent students’ home cultures. We view Magdalena’s equity conceptualization and practice as potentially misaligned.

**Catalina.** Catalina’s conceptualization of equity centered on broadening classroom participation by structuring classroom interactions so that all students, particularly ones who are shy and quiet, have opportunities to share their thoughts and contribute to the classroom conversation:

> If teachers only use whole-class discussions or only call on students who raise their hands, these shyer students don’t get the opportunity to share their thoughts and contribute. A way to help these students is to include smaller group discussions or think-pair-share, so that these students have a chance to contribute, but in a less vulnerable environment.

Catalina calls out the use of group work as one strategy for ensuring that “shyer students” are given opportunities to talk about the content in ways that work for them in a more supportive, less threatening environment. Much like the other candidates’ instruction we analyzed, Catalina used groups in her lesson. Catalina’s instruction focused on eliciting student thinking and pressing students for justification, both in group work and in whole-class discussions. However, her reflection did not provide evidence that she used group work to broaden participation. Instead, her commentary focused on the use of coins as a problem context since her students would become familiar with coins and because the students use classroom currency. Our analysis revealed little evidence of alignment between Catalina’s conceptualization and enactment of equity. The use of group work may have been aligned with Catalina’s equity conceptualization. However, we did not find evidence of Catalina reflecting on how her instruction did or did not try to broaden participation in her classroom.

The other four cases reflect the lack of alignment between candidates’ con-
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Sandra focused her conceptualization of equity on interrogating the specific supports particular students need to succeed in class, but her instruction focused on emphasizing students sharing their thinking with classmates while positioning students’ experiences as coming from their experience in school, particularly drawing on their knowledge of classroom currency. Kathy conceptualized equity as the need to understand the impact of the sociopolitical context within which schools are situated but emphasized the acquisition of academic language and making students’ thinking visible to the whole class. Beatriz also emphasized the need to examine the sociopolitical context of schooling but, like Kathy, emphasized the acquisition of academic language while also emphasizing group-worthy tasks to make students’ thinking visible to one another. Tonya centered her equity conceptualization on the importance of leveraging students’ experiences and cultures. However, her enactment positioned students’ assets as coming exclusively from their experience in school. Across these candidates, we see a focus on enacting high-quality tasks and attending to student thinking, with less attention to the substantive contributions of students’ cultural assets and the positioning of minoritized students in mathematics and schooling more broadly.

We contend that this lack of alignment suggests a lack of programmatic coherence as it pertains to issues of equity. We argue that coherent programs relative to a particular practice or outcome would be evident in what candidates come to understand about teaching, learning, and learners and what they enact in practice. We now turn to situate this finding within the broader teacher preparation literature and offer suggestions for future research.

Discussion and Conclusion

Issues of coherence continue to plague teacher preparation, while program coherence for advancing equity in teacher preparation continues to be underresearched (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). We argue for a need to examine the alignment between candidates’ understanding of teaching and learning and the practices they enact as a type of “outcome measure” to understand program coherence. In this study, we examined candidates’ conceptualizations and practices to understand the extent to which a program was coherent for advancing equity. The main findings are that candidates’ conceptualizations varied, that considerable overlap among candidates existed in their instructional practice, and, most importantly, that limited evidence of connections existed between most candidates’ conceptualizations and their practices.

The variation in candidates’ equity conceptualizations is consistent with research about the various ways candidates define and understand equity (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). Additionally, we found that candidates’ equitable instructional practices centered on (a) viewing students’ assets as coming from their experiences in schools, (b) attending to student thinking, and (c)
using multiple representations to broaden participation. Both attending to student thinking and using multiple representations are widely recognized as essential practices for advancing equity in mathematics (Bartell et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2014), though they are insufficient for addressing the racialized and politicized contexts that operate on mathematics education (Gutiérrez, 2009; Martin, 2009) because they do not attend explicitly to these contexts. It may in fact be the case that candidates’ attention to student thinking and task complexity is a reflection of coherence among other programmatic experiences, including other coursework they took prior to or while completing the edTPA.

Our finding that candidates drew on students’ experiences in school, rather than their experiences in their homes and communities, is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the challenges candidates experience trying to surface students’ knowledge bases to inform their instruction (Turner et al., 2012). These findings suggest the importance of programmatic alignment not only between courses and instruction but also between courses as they are experienced over time. That is, teacher educators, like practicing teachers, need to make visible to each other the theoretical underpinnings within and across courses and experiences and identify potential points of leverage for advancing teacher preparation toward programmatic aims. Such an effort would extend research on how programs develop knowledge and practice for teacher education and contribute to research on developing a pedagogy of teacher preparation (Grossman & McDonald, 2008).

Finally, our analysis provided limited evidence of alignment between how candidates come to understand equity and the practices they enact for equity. Previous research on coherence has largely examined (a) how stakeholders within programs perceive program components (e.g., fieldwork and coursework) to be aligned with one another (e.g., Heggen & Terum, 2013; Smeby & Heggen, 2014) and (b) the alignment in the ways different program components are enacted (Rojas & Chandía, 2015). Examining program coherence by attending to program components is an important strategy for gaining insight into programs as systems, as a form of what program improvement specialists call a *process measure* (Bryk et al., 2015). This study, however, centered its analysis on the *outcome* of program coherence: how candidates think about and attempt to enact equity in classrooms. We contrast this orientation to typical modes of research in teacher preparation that decenter the outcomes teacher educators care about most (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Diez, 2010). We contend that attempts to make programs more coherent should result in more alignment not between program components but in the way candidates understand, plan for, enact, and reflect on practice.

An important area for research concerns what programs’ successful attempts to be coherent look like in relation to candidate outcomes: how they think about and enact practice. In particular, we advocate for a need to attend to candidates’ understanding of teaching in relation to specific program outcomes (e.g., equity) in conjunction with practice. This involves inquiry into the connection between (a)
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program components—what Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) referred to as “process measures”—and (b) what candidates think and what they actually do in classrooms, what are referred to as “outcome measures.” Successful cases that highlight the impact program components have on candidate outcomes is critical for informing the design of teacher preparation programs and for specifying the outcomes around which efforts to improve programs can be organized.

It may also be the case that the program was aligned on other programmatic dimensions besides equity and our analysis did not capture these relationships. While we observed limited coherence in relation to equity, our analysis reveals that candidates were attentive to student thinking and the nature of tasks for supporting student learning. This raises questions about how candidates came to focus on these dimensions. Additionally, candidates’ attention to student thinking and tasks surfaces a need to learn how programs can integrate a focus on equity as tied to mathematics instruction as candidates assume responsibility for teaching. Research has found that teachers can come to frame teaching in terms of programmatic foci (Levin, Hammer, & Coffey, 2009) and connect mathematics instruction to students’ cultural knowledge and practices (McDuffie et al., 2014; Turner & Drake, 2016). Thus one limitation of our study is its focus on a single outcome of teacher preparation: the development of candidates’ dispositions and practices for equity.

Our study highlights the need to attend to what we call “candidate outcomes” to examine to what extent teacher preparation programs are coherent. Fulfilling programmatic aspirations requires defining and centering the outcomes teacher educators and teacher education scholars hope to see. We envision this study as a first step toward understanding how programs can cultivate collective improvement around explicit and shared outcomes.

References


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Appendix
Teacher Education Program Commitments
Research on Preparing Preservice Mainstream Teachers for Linguistically Diverse Classrooms

Tammy Mills, Ana Maria Villegas, & Marilyn Cochran-Smith

Abstract

Despite an increasing number of English-language learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools and a trend toward placing them in mainstream classrooms, relatively little attention has been paid to synthesizing and appraising the extant research on how future mainstream teachers are prepared to teach this student population. To shed light on this topic, the article analyzes the limited but expanding body of research on the preprofessional preparation of mainstream teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms. The authors found that between 2000 and 2018, teacher educators experimented with a variety of pedagogical strategies, most of which situated learning to teach ELLs in diverse classrooms, schools, and communities—both
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in the United States and elsewhere. The authors conclude that despite having equity goals and including a variety of pedagogically rich ideas for preparing future mainstream teachers to teach ELLs, the vast majority of the studies leave unquestioned the power dynamics that sustain existing educational and social inequalities, thereby perpetuating the status quo.

Introduction

Recently, public schools in the United States passed a major milestone. For the first time in history, students of color composed the majority of enrollments in elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). Accompanying this demographic shift has been a substantial increase in the number of children and youth who speak languages other than English at home. According to recent estimates, approximately one in nine students enrolled in K–12 schools speak a language other than English, up from about 1 in 20 students in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In fact, English-language learners (ELLs), as these children are often called, have become the fastest growing segment of the U.S. student population (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Before the 1950s, immigrant children in U.S. schools were largely from Europe; however, ELLs today are mostly from Latin America and Asia (NCES, 2017). Many have attended schools in their native countries, but a sizable number—especially those from war-torn nations and rural areas—have had little or no schooling prior to their arrival. Some are literate in their native languages, but many are not. And a large number have experienced extreme poverty in their homelands, with many continuing to live below the poverty level in this country (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). This broad range of background experiences can pose a challenge to teachers who are unprepared to address such diversity in student backgrounds.

From the adoption of the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 through the 1990s, ELLs enrolled in U.S. public schools were generally placed in bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) programs to be taught by teachers with specialized preparation in second language development. However, for reasons we discuss later in this article, an increasing number of ELLs are now mainstreamed into “regular” classrooms for longer portions of the school day or placed in mainstream classes full time. As a result, mainstream teachers, who historically have received no preparation for teaching ELLs (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008), are finding increasing numbers of these students in their classes. Despite the clear trend toward mainstreaming ELLs since the early 2000s, many teacher educators continue to struggle with how to prepare future mainstream teachers to teach this student population. To help address this problem, we reviewed the research literature, seeking answers to the following question: How are prospective mainstream teachers prepared to teach ELLs?

This article is organized into five sections. We first present the theoretical/analytic framework that informed our review. Then we describe the methods we
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used to locate and analyze the empirical studies discussed here. The third section summarizes and discusses what we learned from our analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between the research practices described, on one hand, and social, economic, and political power, on the other. The final section offers concluding comments.

**Theoretical/Analytic Framework**

This article is informed by the theoretical/analytic framework we recently developed for a major review of the empirical literature on the overall preparation of preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith, Villegas, Abrams, Chavez, Mills, & Stern, 2016). The framework combines ideas from the sociology of knowledge (Mannheim, 1936/1949) and from research as social practice (Bourdieu, 1977/1980; Heilbron, 2009; Herndl & Nahrwold, 2000). The sociology of knowledge, a field of study within sociology, owes much to Mannheim. In his classic text *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim (1936/1949) argued that thinking is an instrument of collective action. In his view, dominant modes of thought that flourish at a given historical moment are situated within and emerge from complex economic and social contexts. Building on this premise, he urged sociologists to take up the task of analyzing the relationship between patterns of thought that rise to prominence and the concrete historical-social situations that sustain those ideas.

Research as social practice, the second intellectual strand in our framework, offers a way to understand the connection between the economic and social forces at play in a society at a given time in history and ideas that ascend to dominance during that historical period. Informed by Bourdieu's (1977/1980) “theory of practice,” Herndl and Nahrwold (2000) argued that research is a social activity and that researchers’ social interests and commitments—not simply their methodological orientations—guide their research by influencing how they construct research problems, the range and variation of questions posed, the research designs and methods adopted, the researchers’ purposes and intended audiences, and other key decisions researchers make. Taken together, these two related sets of ideas offer a powerful lens for reviewing research, especially on a contested topic like the preparation of mainstream teachers for linguistic diversity given the growing anti-immigrant and nativist political forces in this country.

In this article, we argue that research on preparing mainstream teachers for linguistic diversity is a historically situated social practice, a process wherein differently positioned researchers with somewhat diverse aims and objectives engage in different research practices. Drawing on this thinking, we first discuss the complex social/economic context from which the idea of preparing mainstream teachers to teach ELLs—the central topic of this review—is historically situated. To make sense of the studies reviewed here, we then examine the social practices the researchers—who in most studies reviewed here were also the teacher educa-
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tors—engaged in, including how they constructed the research problem, the questions they focused on, the methodological decisions they made, and their intent and target audience. Building on our analysis, we identify trends in the findings and then show that although this body of research challenges the “business as usual” approach to teaching ELLs that prevails in mainstream classrooms, the studies are generally silent about the power dynamics that sustain existing inequalities in schools and society.

As our framework makes explicit, researchers use particular lenses to do their work, and this focus influences what they consider worthy of investigating and reporting and how they see those topics. This idea also applies to reviewers of research. Thus we want to acknowledge the perspectives we bring to our review of research on the preparation of teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms. The first author is a teacher educator with a literacy background and a former classroom teacher. Based on her experiences educating children of migrant farmworkers in the state of Washington, children of immigrant families in Arizona, and children of poverty in rural schools, she brings a strong investment in linguistically and culturally responsive teaching to this review. The other two authors are senior members of the professional teacher education community with established records as researchers and practitioners. Both are committed to studying issues of diversity and equity and have long been involved in scholarly critique of the complex political aspect of teaching and teacher education. All three of us are women; two of us are White, European American native English speakers; and one is a Latina who immigrated to this country as a child and learned English as a second language in urban public schools. Since our individual and collective orientations are inseparable from the review process, acknowledging our positionality, not just following the technical review methods described herein, is fundamental to ensuring the validity of our work.

Methods

We use the term English-language learners to refer to students who speak native languages other than English at home. We define mainstream teachers as those who teach early childhood/elementary grades (sometimes referred to as general education teachers) and those who teach a specific subject matter (e.g., science, mathematics) in elementary, middle, or high school grades but are not prepared as bilingual or ESL specialists.

Given the focus of this review, we sought empirical, peer-reviewed studies on the preparation of prospective mainstream teachers to teach ELLs published from 2000 through 2018, a period during which mainstream classrooms became more linguistically diverse. We limited our search to U.S. studies. To locate this literature, we conducted computerized searches through key educational databases, including Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete, Education Resources Information Center, and PsychINFO, using different combinations of
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keywords—English language learners, ELLs, English Learners, ELs, students of limited English proficient, LEP students, preservice/prospective teachers, teacher candidates, mainstream/general education/content area teachers, preservice teacher education, teacher education, teacher preparation. This strategy produced an initial pool of 187 articles. We eliminated the majority of those articles through a preliminary review. Many were excluded because they focused on the preparation of teachers for cultural diversity but gave little to no attention to issues of language. Others targeted inservice teachers (not preservice teachers) or included both inservice and preservice teachers but did not report results separately for these two groups. Several other articles addressed the experiences of specialists (bilingual and ESL teachers) rather than mainstream teachers, and others were vague about the research methods used. At the end of this process, we were left with 29 studies.

We approached the analysis in two phases. First, we summarized each article using a template to capture key information (e.g., research purpose, teacher learning outcome sought, theoretical/conceptual framework(s), methods, major findings). Informed by our framework of teacher education research as historically situated social practice, we then analyzed each study, giving attention to how researchers constructed the problem they investigated, the questions they posed, who the researchers were, and their purposes and target audiences. We then looked across the studies to determine trends in the findings and how they were distributed along a continuum in which one end reflected social practices that tended to conserve existing educational and social inequalities and the opposite end challenged those inequalities.

Preparing Preservice Mainstream Teachers for ELLs: Research as Historically Situated Social Practice

In keeping with the intent of our review, this section discusses the historical context that has shaped not just the education of ELLs and ongoing efforts to prepare mainstream teachers for linguistic diversity but also the research on this topic. In sections that follow, we scrutinize the social practices of the researchers whose works we reviewed to gain insights into this body of research.

Historically Situating the Topic

The topic of this review is historically situated in major economic and social developments of the past 50 years, which have profoundly shaped social life in the United States and elsewhere. The most fundamental of these developments was the shift from an industrial economy based on manufacturing and material goods to a global, knowledge-based economy organized around the production and distribution of goods and services related to information. In today’s global world, the rigid boundaries that previously separated countries have become more relaxed and fluid over time, and new technological developments have made travel easier, reducing
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geographic distances (United Nations, 2016). Of particular relevance to this review is the resulting mass movement of people across the world that has dramatically transformed the racial/ethnic and linguistic makeup of many developed nations, a pattern that is strikingly evident in U.S. schools. As we previously noted, the number of ELLs attending U.S. public schools has trended upward over the past 3 decades. While ELLs were previously concentrated in southwestern states like California and Texas, their presence is now undeniable across the country, even in states like Delaware, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Carolina, which previously served relatively few students of linguistically diverse backgrounds (NCES, 2017). Although the vast majority of ELLs continue to attend city schools, their numbers have also grown in recent years in suburban and rural schools (Kena et al., 2016). Given the overall growth of the ELL student population and its dispersal across geographic regions and school sectors, it is not surprising that issues of linguistic diversity drew the attention of educators, policy makers, and researchers during the nearly 20-year span of this review.

Beyond transforming the demographic makeup of the K–12 student population, the shift to a knowledge-based economy also focused unprecedented attention on the quality of educational systems worldwide (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). In the United States, this idea was initially brought to public attention by the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which linked the poor performance of American students in international tests relative to their peers in other developed nations to the loss of this country’s previously unchallenged global economic strength. Because educational success was equated with economic success for individuals and the nation, the quality of schools received unparalleled attention. Informed by neoliberal thinking, educational reformers developed accountability systems to measure the success of schools in meeting the more rigorous academic standards of the 21st century based on students’ scores on standardized tests, with serious consequences for those failing to meet expectations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). In terms of ELLs, this strategy is clearly evident in major federal educational policies adopted since 2000. Concerned that ELLs—a group accounting for a significant share of the U.S. student population—lagged behind their English-proficient peers in test scores, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required schools to include these students in state testing programs and report their scores as a separate subgroup. This represented a significant change in federal policy, which until then had excluded ELLs from accountability testing and reporting requirements. Schools were also required to show adequate yearly progress in ELL students’ reading and math test scores or suffer severe consequences. As a result, ELLs who had previously spent most of the school day in bilingual/ESL programs began to be “mainstreamed” for longer portions of the day or placed in mainstream classes altogether, to immerse them in English based on the belief that exposure to more English would improve their scores on standardized tests taken in English (Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodriguez, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2011). While the
Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced NCLB in 2015, authorized substantial increases in funding for ELLs, the accountability provision continued. This pressure on schools helps explain why mainstream teachers, a group that historically has received no preparation for teaching ELLs, are now finding these students in growing numbers in their classes (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

U.S. voters have also played a salient role in educational policies and practices related to ELLs. Although resistance to bilingual education has existed in this country since the Bilingual Education Act was adopted in 1968, the growing immigration—and, with it, the rising numbers of ELLs in U.S. schools—brought about a major political backlash. For example, the growth of the ELL student population in California during the 1990s resulted in the adoption of Proposition 227 in 1998, requiring all public schools in the state to conduct instruction in English, virtually eliminating programs of bilingual education. In so doing, Proposition 227 boldly ignored the *Lau v. Nichols* decision of 1974, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a lack of supplemental language instruction in public schooling for ELLs denied them of a meaningful opportunity to an education. (It should be pointed out, however, that in November 2016, voters in California passed Proposition 58, which repealed bilingual education restrictions enabled by Proposition 227 in 1998.) A similar English-only initiative was passed in Arizona in 2000, and then in Massachusetts in 2002. While supporters of English-only policies claimed that the United States needed a common language to avoid ethnic strife, critics contended that these initiatives were motivated, at least in part, by racist and anti-immigrant sentiments (Cammarota & Aguilar, 2012). As of 2020, 32 states had approved some form of English-only laws (Moore, 2018), helping to intensify the mainstreaming of ELLs in U.S. schools.

Interestingly, although the federal government—through the Every Student Succeeds Act—requires school districts to provide professional learning opportunities for mainstream teachers who work with ELLs, only 12 states require teacher education programs to provide preservice teachers some type of preparation (e.g., targeted coursework, bilingual education and/or ESL endorsement options, and English learner certificates) (Education Commission of the States, 2014). The developments discussed herein have put increasing pressure on preservice teacher education at colleges and universities to prepare mainstream teachers, not just bilingual education and ESL specialists, to teach ELLs. The studies reviewed here illustrate how some preservice teacher education programs have responded to this pressure.

**Constructing the Research Problem**

While the specific topics examined in the studies reviewed in this article varied somewhat, researchers typically constructed the research problems they investigated by situating the preparation of mainstream teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms in the context of the growing cultural and linguistic divide...
between teachers and students in the United States over the past 2 decades. Nearly all the studies used statistics to document that as the numbers of immigrant and native-born ELLs grew during this time, the teaching force remained predominantly White, monolingual English speaking, and middle class (e.g., Athanases & Wong, 2018; Colón-Muñiz, SooHoo, & Brignoni, 2010; Ference & Bell, 2004; Hooks, 2008; Hughes & Mahalingappa, 2018; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Pappamihiel, 2007; Pilonieta, Medina, & Hathaway, 2017; Pu, 2012; Ramos, 2017; Schall-Leckrone, 2018; Settlage, Gort, & Ceglie, 2014; Sugimoto, Carter, & Stoehr, 2017; Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, & Dalhouse, 2009; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009). Reflecting a sociocultural perspective, most researchers argued that the cultural and linguistic divide between teachers and the growing ELL student population often led to serious misinterpretations of these learners’ experiences outside of school contexts and of their academic needs.

In many of the studies, researchers were particularly concerned that the socialization most White, English-speaking teacher candidates received as members of dominant groups predisposed them to believing that students from linguistic and cultural minoritized groups lacked academic potential and/or motivation for learning, thus jeopardizing their school outcomes (e.g., Athanases & Wong, 2018; Bollin, 2007; Fitts & Gross, 2012; Hughes & Mahalingappa, 2018; Hutchinson, 2013; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Settlage et al., 2014). That is, an underlying assumption of the research is that preservice mainstream teachers hold deficit views of ELLs. Accordingly, study participants are seen as needing opportunities to inspect their beliefs about ELLs and linguistic diversity. Embedded in this idea is the assumption that a central role of teacher education is to engage prospective teachers in uncovering and confronting their beliefs about children who differ from themselves and the mainstream norm and to help them recognize the assets these students bring to school learning.

Other researchers worried that future mainstream teachers’ limited exposure to learning second languages, coupled with their general lack of knowledge about second language development, clouds their understanding of the central role language plays in teaching and learning, an insight considered essential for teaching ELLs (e.g., Bunch, 2013; Fitts & Gross, 2012; Galguera, 2011; Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Hutchinson, 2013; Settlage et al., 2014; Sugimoto et al., 2017; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Along these lines, some researchers emphasized that teacher candidates need to engage in the formal study of the English language, including its grammar and structure, principles of language development, and language variation and change (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Pappamihiel, 2007; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004).

Many researchers acknowledged that, for the most part, teacher preparation programs were working to prepare all teachers—not just specialists (bilingual and ESL teachers)—to teach a linguistically diverse student population by infusing attention to issues of language into existing teacher education courses, adding courses on
language diversity to the professional education sequence, and/or creating bilingual and/or ESL endorsements for mainstream teachers. Nevertheless, the researchers also maintained that more and broader experimentation with innovative practices and pedagogies was needed to effectively prepare mainstream teachers for teaching ELLs (e.g., Athanases, Wahleithner, & Bennett, 2013; Athanases & Wong, 2018; Baecher, Schieble, Rosalia, & Rorimer, 2013; Colón-Muñiz et al., 2010; Hughes & Mahalingappa, 2018; Hutchinson, 2013; Kelly-Jackson & Delacruz, 2014; Pappamihiel, 2007; Pilonieta et al., 2017; Ramos, 2017; Siegel, 2014; Sugimoto et al., 2017; Virtue, 2009; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004; Zhang & Stephens, 2013). Consistent with this line of thinking, each of the studies included in this review experimented with some type of innovation, as we detail next.

Questions Posed and What Has Been Learned

Broadly, the studies examined here asked one central question: What is the influence of the coursework and/or fieldwork opportunities provided to preservice mainstream teachers on their learning to teach ELLs? The studies fell roughly into three groups, distinguished by the specific type of learning opportunity offered. The smallest group examined the influence of innovative pedagogies/strategies used by teacher educators in campus-based courses. The second group, the largest of the three, focused on learning opportunities offered in courses with linked field experiences, in diverse schools and/or communities. The final group explored the outcomes of opportunities that were offered to future mainstream teachers for learning to teach students different from themselves (particularly as related to language) through cross-cultural/linguistic immersion experiences.

Campus courses with innovative pedagogies/strategies. Nine of the 29 studies examined the influence on teacher candidates of courses about teaching ELLs taught entirely at the university. Two of these studies (Gálguera, 2011; Settlage et al., 2014) used a language immersion approach to disrupt teacher candidates’ comfort with the dominant language and develop empathy for students who are simultaneously learning academic content and language while also modeling for them how to scaffold instruction for second language learners. For example, Settlage and colleagues (2014) set out to learn how “trauma pedagogy” works as a tool to disrupt preservice teachers’ preconceptions of ELLs and how to teach them. As part of a science teaching methods course, a guest instructor invited to model effective teaching practices for diverse learners delivered a lengthy physics lesson entirely in Spanish, a language few teacher candidates in the class understood. The instructor provided increasing amounts of targeted scaffolds as the lesson progressed. In the first segment of the lesson, she withheld linguistic supports, leaving preservice teachers on their own to make sense of the language and content presented. In the second segment, the guest speaker gave lesson participants only minimal linguistic scaffolding (e.g., a glossary of terms, a few diagrams, and some textual supports).
In the final segment, she modeled “exemplary language scaffolds and sheltered instruction methods” (p. 51). Drawing on multiple sources of qualitative data, including field notes focused on the communication efforts and levels of engagement demonstrated by the participants during the activity, a postimmersion class debriefing, and reflective essays completed by teacher candidates following the experience, the researchers found that even though the instructor used reform-based pedagogy (e.g., hands-on, problem solving, collaboration) throughout the entire lesson, the participants grew frustrated and struggled to learn without language-related supports. As the linguistic supports were gradually increased and became more responsive to the needs of the teacher candidates, they became less frustrated with the material. The researchers concluded that the immersion event jolted participants into understanding the importance of scaffolding ELLs’ learning and helped them become more empathetic of ELLs’ experiences in mainstream classes.

Along related lines, Galguera (2011) sought to help preservice teachers in his English methods class become more sensitive to the school experiences of ELLs and develop skills for teaching them English content. To this end, he exposed his students to a variety of experiential activities. For example, monolingual English-speaking teacher candidates were asked to read text in Spanish, a task that placed them in a position similar to that of ELLs in mainstream classes. He then modeled for the class two different teaching strategies to help make the Spanish-language text more accessible to the students. Based on his analysis of participants’ written reflections and in-depth interviews with a small sample of students, Galguera concluded that this “experiential teaching” approach helped teacher candidates in his class develop empathy for ELLs while giving them strategies to use in scaffolding language learning.

In four other studies in this group, digital technologies played a major role. In the Baecher et al. (2013) investigation, future English and TESOL teachers were brought together in a methods course to work on a project that involved blogging with high school ELLs enrolled in an ESL class at a nearby school district. Responses to a questionnaire completed by participants at the conclusion of the project revealed that the experience enabled preservice English teachers to increase their understanding of the challenges ELLs face with academic writing, and both groups unanimously agreed that the experience had encouraged productive collaboration across disciplines and helped develop their readiness for teaching ELLs. Using a similar approach, Walker-Dalhouse and colleagues (2009) and Hughes and Mahalingappa (2018) examined the use of digital pen pal projects. For example, preservice teachers in the Hughes and Mahalingappa study were enrolled in a course that aimed to develop their dispositions, knowledge, and skills for teaching ELLs. A central aspect of the course engaged participants in an exchange of E-Pal letters with ELL and non-ELL students in Grades 5 through 7 with whom they had been paired. Based on a qualitative analysis of teacher candidates’ digital letters, online journal reflections, and electronic discussion board posts over the semester,
the researchers found that participation in the pen pal project improved preservice teachers’ attitudes toward ELLs, increased their enjoyment in interacting with the students for instructional purposes, and enhanced their self-efficacy for teaching ELLs. Employing a somewhat different tack, Wade, Fauske, and Thompson (2008) used a critical stance to examine how two groups of teacher candidates in one multicultural education course discussed the problems of practice in a case focused on ELLs. To understand how the students framed problems and evaluated solutions proposed in their online discussion of this case, the researchers conducted a detailed discourse analysis of a print-out of a weeklong online discussion. While the researchers found some evidence of “reflective problem solving,” they concluded that few participants had actually engaged in “critical” reflection that fundamentally questioned the teaching practices in the case. In fact, data showed that some responses actually reflected deficit perspectives, stereotypical thinking, and technical-rational problem solving.

In two other studies in this set, teacher candidates were registered in a course that placed them in direct contact with ELLs at the university campus itself. For example, in an introductory teaching course, Fitts and Gross (2012) paired preservice mainstream teachers with individual K–8 ELL students who were transported from a nearby district to the university for an after-school program 1 day per week to receive tutoring. A central objective of the course was to help preservice teachers develop an understanding of ELLs. During their time together, teacher candidates and tutees worked mostly on academic support activities but also engaged in individual or group projects. In their qualitative analysis of data collected through surveys and interviews at various points in the course, the researchers found that participating preservice teachers developed a more nuanced understanding of ELLs and a new appreciation of issues these students face in learning.

Taking a different tack, the final study in this line of research, conducted by Schall-Leckrone (2018), explored the extent to which five secondary history teachers—three in their student teaching practica and two in their initial 2 years of teaching—used scaffolding practices they were taught in their preservice program. As the researcher described, the teacher education program at this private institution was designed to prepare future content area teachers to teach ELLs. The instructional sequence included two courses focused on scaffolding strategies. Schall-Leckrone’s analysis of her observation notes of study participants teaching revealed that all five consistently used visuals, vocabulary instruction, graphic organizers, and adaptation and/or annotation of texts to scaffold learning for ELLs in their classes.

Courses/seminars with linked field experiences in schools/communities. Fourteen of the 29 studies, nearly half of the total examined, focused on courses with linked field experiences. In 10 of them, the field experiences took place in schools with a large percentage of ELLs. Within the context of school-based experiences, teacher candidates engaged in a variety of activities, including completing an inquiry
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project focused on the writing skills of an ELL student (Athanases et al., 2013; Athanases & Wong, 2018), observing ELLs in schools/classrooms and providing individual support and/or tutoring (Hutchinson, 2013; Siegel, 2014; Zainuddin & Moore, 2004), conducting an action research project that used photovoice to identify science concepts that showed up in ELLs’ everyday lives (Kelly-Jackson & Delacruz, 2014), engaging in rounds of observations of middle school ELLs in an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class and mainstream content area classes (Virtue, 2009), carrying out a narrative inquiry reporting data gathered about an ELL student by shadowing that student throughout the day (Pu, 2012), writing and discussing narratives about observed classroom events involving ELLs (Sugimoto et al., 2017), and applying sheltered instructional strategies learned in the course in their fieldwork at a middle school (Zhang & Stephens, 2013). The action research study by Virtue (2009) illustrated this line of research. In this investigation, teacher candidates enrolled in a social studies methods class were asked to carry out an inquiry project that required them to observe an ESOL class at a diverse middle school and shadow an ELL student in a content area class. After receiving instruction on how to conduct classroom observations in the course, study participants carried out their fieldwork. For the most part, their observations focused on instructional strategies, learning activities, and classroom management techniques. They then debriefed the experience with the ESOL teacher whose classroom they observed and their course instructor, engaged in an online discussion with classmates about the experience, and wrote a reflection paper about what was learned. Data were collected collaboratively among the researcher and the participants, in keeping with action research protocols, and included shared field notes, observations of rounds, online discussions of the rounds experiences, and journal reflections written by the participants. According to Virtue, qualitative analysis of the data demonstrated that the classroom observations and interactions with real students challenged negative assumptions teacher candidates had about ELLs and also helped them understand the detrimental effect that content area teachers’ glaring lack of attention to ELLs in their classes had on those learners.

The other four studies in this group (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Hooks, 2008; Pappamihiel, 2007) examined courses linked to field experiences carried out in diverse communities, although one also involved field activities in schools. In the Bollin (2007) investigation, teacher candidates in a diversity course completed a 10-week service learning experience, tutoring ELL students in the students’ homes. As part of the project, teacher candidates kept a journal reflecting on their tutoring experiences. In their weekly meetings with the professor, participants discussed problem-based cases and professional text relevant to their service learning experience. Bollin found that by the end of the semester, most preservice teachers had become more empathetic of ELLs and gained confidence in teaching this student population. Similarly, preservice teachers in the Hadjioannou and Hutchinson (2010) study applied language teaching principles learned in a linguistic course
while tutoring adult ESL learners in a local community agency. Using results from pre- and postcourse surveys and course assessments, as well as data drawn from reflective writings, artifacts, and classroom observations, the researchers concluded that the practice teaching experience gave study participants a better understanding of how to teach ELLs. Taking a somewhat different approach, Hooks (2008) documented the impact of an assignment in a teacher education course that involved teacher candidates using a mock parent conference to interview adults in an ESL class at a community center. This study provided evidence that the majority of the participants developed confidence about their ability to communicate with parents who spoke languages other than English. The final study in this subset, by Pappamihiel (2007), examined the learning outcomes of a course required of preservice content area teachers on teaching ELLs in which participants were taught basic second language principles (e.g., the difference between basic interpersonal skills and academic language skills, the silent period second language learners often undergo) and completed a service learning experience tutoring ELL students at a community agency. Pappamihiel’s qualitative analysis of the reflective journals submitted by study participants revealed that many had begun to see themselves as teachers of ELLs rather than as teachers who had ELLs in their classes.

In brief, courses with field experiences—whether based in school or communities—targeted a wide range of teacher learning outcomes, including learning about ELLs and cultivating favorable dispositions toward them, having future mainstream teachers envision themselves as teachers of ELLs, gaining an understanding of the role language plays in learning, assessing ELLs equitably, and developing pedagogical skills and confidence to teach in schools with large numbers of ELLs. The majority of researchers reported favorable results, although the findings were sometimes uneven across participants within each study. As depicted in these articles, field experiences were anchored by the linked course, which prepared preservice teachers for their work in schools and/or communities and provided a space for making sense of those experiences through the lens of theories and principles studied in class. Thus field experiences typically helped participants better understand how key concepts studied abstractly in class applied in real-world settings, thereby bridging the theory–practice divide that often plagues teacher education. In nearly all the studies within this group, written reflection and feedback from faculty played a central role in helping teacher candidates interpret their fieldwork.

Cross-cultural immersion experiences. Of the 29 studies reviewed here, 6 explored the potential of preparing teacher candidates to teach ELLs through cross-cultural/linguistic immersion experiences, typically in international settings. These immersion experiences ranged from 1 to 13 weeks. Five of these studies (Colón-Muñiz et al., 2010; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Pilonieta et al., 2017; Willard-Holt, 2001; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009) investigated the experiences of U.S. teacher candidates placed in international field settings (Belize, China, Germany,
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Honduras, Mexico, Spain), where they spent time teaching English to children in schools, observing in classrooms, living with host families, visiting cultural and historic sites, and meeting to debrief those experiences with teacher educators from their preparation programs. The study by Zhao et al. (2009) illustrated this line of research. In this study, 10 preservice U.S. teachers completed the last 4 weeks of their student teaching in Chinese schools. This international immersion experience was designed to help student teachers develop skills for teaching in cross-cultural settings and gain insight into linguistic diversity in general and the experiences of second language learners in particular. While in China, the student teachers had a variety of carefully planned experiences, including living with host families; teaching English in an elementary school and being supervised by university faculty, one of whom was the lead researcher for the study; writing journal entries in which they reflected on their ongoing teaching and learning experiences; and completing a project in which they compared educational practices in the United States and China. Through their qualitative analysis of participants’ essays, interviews, blogs, teaching videos, and teaching projects, as well as researcher observation field notes and email correspondence with participants, Zhao and colleagues found that the immersion experience was highly effective in improving participants’ respect for linguistic diversity, deepening their understanding of second language learners, and developing empathy for the experiences of ELLs in U.S. schools. Participants also gained skills for collaborating with other teachers.

Using a somewhat different approach, the last study in this group—by Ference and Bell (2004)—focused on the experiences of 25 White, middle-class teacher candidates immersed in a 2-week field experience within a Latino community located 60 miles from the university they attended, thereby avoiding the cost associated with international travel. In preparation for the experience, which was linked to a diversity course the researchers taught, participants learned about similarities and differences within the Latino culture. As part of their immersion, teacher candidates lived with Latino families and participated in their everyday activities, worked with children at a community center, and learned about the work experiences of immigrants who resided in the community. They were also required to reflect on their ongoing field activities. Throughout the 2 weeks, teacher candidates were exposed to a variety of situations in which Spanish was used as the sole or primary means of communication. The researchers, who as participant observers collected field notes, listened to students’ ongoing discussions and comments, and observed students in classrooms, reported that the immersion experience improved teacher candidates’ attitudes toward Latino students and helped them understand why different pedagogical methods were needed to teach ELLs effectively. Many study participants commented that their experiences as linguistic and cultural “outsiders” had sensitized them to the experience of being an ELL in schools and the many barriers immigrants confront in their daily lives.

Overall, these studies suggested that cross-cultural immersion experiences—
whether conducted in international or U.S. settings—tend to have a powerful influence on teacher candidates, including raising awareness of their own cultural assumptions, developing empathy toward the experiences of second language learners, and cultivating skills for interacting in cross-cultural contexts. The researchers attributed these gains to the immersion of preservice teachers in social settings where they were positioned as the cultural and linguistic “other.” As was the case in studies focused on courses with linked field experiences, ongoing reflection was key to producing the desired teacher learning outcomes in cross-cultural immersion experiences.

Researchers and Their Purposes

As is true generally of the research on preparing teachers for diversity (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016), the studies reviewed here were conducted by university-based teacher educators, sometimes alone (e.g., Galguera, 2011; Ramos, 2017; Schall-Leckrone, 2018), but often in collaboration with other teacher educators at their own institution or elsewhere (e.g., Athanases & Wong, 2018; Hughes & Mahalingappa, 2018; Pilonieta et al., 2017; Settlage et al., 2014) or with practicing teachers involved in preparing preservice teachers in schools (Baecher et al., 2013; Zhang & Stephens, 2013). Researchers generally studied their own teaching, explored the influence of short- or long-term field experiences linked to courses they taught, and examined the outcomes of practica/student teaching experiences for teacher candidates they supervised. Typically, the researchers were positioned in the dual role of preparing study participants for linguistically diverse classrooms and studying the results of the practices under investigation. Thus they had two main purposes for conducting their studies—to improve their own practices and to advance the field’s understanding of promising pedagogies for preparing future mainstream teachers for linguistic diversity. That is, beyond immediate personal and program consumption, this research was conducted for the use of other teacher educators with similar professional interests and concerns.

Consistent with the self-study focus of these investigations, the vast majority of studies (24 of the 29 reviewed) employed qualitative research methodologies to examine the influence of opportunities provided to preservice mainstream teachers for learning to teach for linguistic diversity. With few exceptions, researchers used teacher candidates’ written course assignments as data sources. While the assignments differed across courses (e.g., unit or individual lesson plans, case studies of ELLs, action research reports, inquiry projects, digital pen pal letters, reading logs, web discussions and postings, blogs, capstone papers, portfolios documenting service learning experiences), reflective writing of some sort (e.g., journal entries, reflective essays, reflective memos, online journal reflections, tutoring logs, narrative reflections) was included in the majority of the studies. That is, reflection on experience/practice was used as the central tool to promote teacher learning but was also treated as an important source of evidence of that learning. Not surpris-
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In this article, reflection played a critical role in belief-related studies (to trigger teacher candidates’ self-awareness or help them make sense of unfamiliar experiences).

**Trends in the Studies**

As we have shown, over the 19-year period of this review, teacher education researchers investigated a wide variety of topics related to preparing prospective mainstream teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms. One clear trend in this research is the strong influence of sociocultural perspectives on teacher learning. In keeping with this perspective, preservice mainstream teachers were engaged in constructing new ideas about ELLs and how to teach them through a variety of activities that either put them in direct contact with ELLs or placed them in situations in which they were the linguistic “other.” Thus, instead of learning ideas and concepts about teaching for linguistic diversity solely in the abstract for future application, teacher candidates were provided opportunities that purposefully situated learning to teach in diverse classroom, school, and community contexts—both in the United States and internationally. Also reflecting a sociocultural learning perspective, the overwhelming majority of studies included some form of reflection.

A second trend evident in these studies is the emphasis given to teacher candidates’ beliefs about ELLs and linguistic diversity. The researchers were mostly focused on designing learning opportunities to promote candidates’ favorable views about ELLs. Those opportunities engaged future teachers in learning about people who were different from them (linguistically, racially/ethnically, and economically) through physical or digital contact with them or in the role of the linguistic “other” to help them develop empathy for second language learners.

Although mostly illuminating the role of beliefs related to learning to teach students from linguistically diverse groups, this research also gave some attention to the pedagogical skills teachers need to teach ELLs. In fact, several belief-oriented studies also addressed participants’ teaching practices (e.g., Athanases et al., 2013; Athanases & Wong, 2018; Galguera, 2011; Settlage et al., 2014). This dual learning focus is illustrated, for example, in the studies by Athanases and colleagues (Athanases et al., 2013; Athanases & Wong, 2018), both of which involved teacher candidates conducting inquiry projects to learn about ELLs and their writing strengths, preferences, and needs for purposes of improving the teacher candidates’ teaching of writing to those students. That is, by having teacher candidates identify ELL students’ strengths as part of their inquiry, they were helped also to develop asset-oriented views of these learners.

A few other studies focused more sharply on teacher candidates’ teaching practices. These included developing skills for differentiating instruction for ELLs (Ramos, 2017), using visual literacy strategies to help ELLs connect their lives to the topic of instruction (Kelly-Jackson & Delacruz, 2014), designing and enacting lessons that incorporated a functionalist approach to teaching grammar (Hadjioan-
nou & Hutchinson, 2010), creating equitable assessments for ELLs (Siegel, 2014), collaborating with TESOL teacher candidates to support ELL learning (Baecher et al., 2013), and interacting with immigrant adults/parents who were speakers of languages other than English to develop facility communicating with the families of ELLs (Hooks, 2008).

A final trend has to do with the nature of the research itself. As mentioned earlier, nearly all of the studies were conducted by teacher educators in their own classrooms or in the classrooms of other teacher educators, mostly at their own institutions. A major benefit of self-studies within teacher education is their potential to inform the researcher/teacher educator’ own practices. Since the studies in this review generally offered rich, detailed descriptions of the learning opportunities examined in relation to desired teacher candidate outcomes and how candidates experienced and responded to those opportunities, they also helped identify a variety of pedagogical options for other teacher educators to consider in their teaching. Overall, however, the studies were limited in three important ways. With one notable exception (see Schall-Leckrone, 2018), the researchers did not follow teacher candidates beyond the completion of the courses in which the pedagogies under investigation were examined; therefore little is known about the extent to which the reported learning gains persisted over time, if they did at all. Also absent from nearly all the studies were descriptions of the overall teacher education programs in which the courses and field experiences under investigation were embedded, so it was difficult to discern how those courses and field experiences were connected to other learning opportunities teacher candidates had in the programs. As a result, this body of research offers a disjointed understanding of how future mainstream teachers learn to teach for linguistic diversity. Still another problematic feature of this research is the relative absence of studies that attempted to establish connections between what teacher candidates learned about teaching ELLs in their preparation programs and their subsequent practices with ELLs, whether in the context of student teaching or beyond.

**Relationship Between Researchers’ Social Practices and Larger Sociopolitical Forces**

As previously discussed, researchers’ interests, commitments, and experiences, not merely their research paradigms, guide the research decisions they make. As Herndl and Nahrwold (2000) put it, researchers are engaged in social practices. This perspective offers an opportunity to examine how research practices relate to social, economic, and institutional power. One way to think about this relationship is to place the studies reviewed here along a continuum. At one end we would place studies that assume society and its institutions, including schooling, are meritocratic. In keeping with this view, teaching is seen as a technical and neutral activity. To
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teach ELLs, future mainstream teachers are perceived as needing to learn practices (other than those used in traditional mainstream classrooms) to give ELL students access to the school curriculum until these learners acquire sufficient proficiency in English to no longer require special support. From this perspective, the solution to the problems ELLs experience in mainstream classrooms is a temporary “fix” that can move students whose language (and culture) differ from the mainstream norm so they can participate in what could be characterized as “business as usual” in mainstream classrooms. That is, equity is defined as access to school knowledge, with no need to examine the broader social and material arrangements that created ELLs’ lack of access in the first place. This perspective assumes that deficiencies in the students are the fundamental problem and that if school practices can be manipulated, albeit provisionally, the problem will be solved. In framing the problem this way, broader societal arrangements and ideologies (e.g., nativism, ethnocentrism, segregation, poverty) are left unexamined, thereby masking and perpetuating existing social inequalities.

At the other end of the continuum we would place studies that assume that neither society nor schools are meritocratic. Instead, both are structured in ways that conserve existing social inequalities by systematically privileging the language and culture of the dominant group. From this critical perspective, teaching is viewed as a political and ethical activity whereby the actions of teachers are seen as either perpetuating or disrupting existing inequalities. From this vantage point, although traditional school arrangements are thought to place ELLs (and other students from minoritized groups) at a disadvantage in learning, schools are viewed as sites with the potential to bring about social transformation, and a central role of teachers is to contribute to that transformation. Teacher education studies that build on these assumptions are designed to engage future mainstream teachers in inspecting the connections between social arrangements outside and inside schools, scrutinizing how customary school practices construct minoritized students (including ELLs) as deficient, examining their own beliefs about ELLs and linguistic diversity and the social roots of those views; replacing deficit views of ELLs with affirming perspectives that acknowledge the many strengths these learners bring to schools; envisioning inclusive classroom practices that are respectful of linguistic and cultural differences while developing the skills needed to enact those visions; and cultivating a commitment to work, both individually and with colleagues, to make schools socially just spaces for ELLs.

Not surprisingly, we found that none of the studies reviewed here were located at either extreme end of the continuum; rather, they are mostly clustered in the area in the middle. As we detailed, the vast majority of the studies focused on learning opportunities that engaged preservice mainstream teachers in inspecting their beliefs about ELLs to help them become more conscious of their deficit views, replacing those views with affirming perspectives, developing sensitivity to and empathy for the challenges ELLs face when taught academic content in a language they do not
understand, challenging traditional conceptions of good teaching in mainstream classrooms, and cultivating teacher candidates’ willingness to broaden their teaching and assessment practices to give ELLs access to learning while developing skills to act on this goal. Without question, the personal and professional transformations participants in these studies underwent, as described by the researchers, challenge the linguistically insensitive approach to teaching prevalent in mainstream classrooms, where ELLs are placed with increasing frequency. At the same time, this body of research also has a conservative slant (i.e., conserving existing inequalities). For example, while promoting the value of linguistic and cultural differences, teacher candidates in these investigations are never engaged in questioning why the language and culture of the dominant group are assumed to be the valued standard in schools. Nor are teacher candidates involved in examining the origins of the English-only movement in the United States and its effect on teachers and their teaching and on ELLs and their learning. For the most part, the researchers (who are also the teacher educators in most studies) accept, at least implicitly, that the purpose of schools is to assimilate ELLs into the dominant language and culture. And in most investigations, equity is defined as access to school knowledge, with little to no attention paid to broader social structures and systems that silently but powerfully perpetuate inequalities in ELLs’ access to knowledge to begin with. Although many studies problematize standard teaching practices in mainstream classrooms, their critique is grounded on learning theory and its implications for teaching (the need to connect students’ prior knowledge and experiences to the content being taught) or on linguistic considerations (the importance of having teachers who know basic principles of second language learning to support ELLs’ learning), not on sociopolitical thinking that explicitly challenges the role of schools in reproducing existing social inequalities.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, there is a complex relationship between researchers’/teacher educators’ social practices and social power structures. In brief, the studies reviewed here can be thought as positioned in a large middle area of the continuum between conserving power relations at one end and disrupting them at the other. Collectively, the pedagogical innovations studied aim to prepare future mainstream teachers to make needed changes in classroom practices that have the potential to ameliorate the barriers to the education of ELLs, but they do not fundamentally challenge central aspects of existing power inequality.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we make three points. As our review shows, major gaps exist in the empirical literature on preparing preservice mainstream classroom teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms. We need more research that examines pedagogical interventions designed to give teacher candidates a clear understanding of the impact that social, political, and institutional factors have on teaching and
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learning. This could include studies that engage teacher candidates in critically appraising the widespread belief in meritocracy in light of existing inequalities in schools; deeply reflecting on the influence of their social privilege (or lack thereof) based on factors such as race/ethnicity, class, and language on their own schooling experiences and success; and developing consciousness of the sociopolitical dimensions of language use and language education. We also need research that addresses the major methodological limitations of the studies reviewed. Such research would include studies that explore the connections among teacher candidates’ beliefs about ELLs, the practices they adopt to teach them, and student outcomes of different types. Similarly, we need investigations that extend beyond a single course or field experiences and take a program-level approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers learn to teach ELLs. We also need longitudinal studies that will give teacher educators a clearer understanding of how future mainstream teachers learn to teach ELLs over time.

Second, despite the limitations of the studies, as detailed earlier, this body of research sheds light on how teacher educators have responded over the past two decades to calls for preparing mainstream teachers to teach ELLs. Collectively, the studies offer insight into how future mainstream teachers learn to teach ELLs in individual courses and field experiences. A noteworthy aspect of this collection of studies is the creative and varied learning opportunities used to engage teacher candidates in learning to teach through direct experiences with ELLs and by being placed as the linguistic other in different learning situations. Also of note is the use of reflection, evident in nearly all the studies, to unpack field experiences in light of ideas addressed in courses, a practice that strengthens the connection between theory and practice. In brief, this body of research offers teacher educators concerned with preparing preservice mainstream teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms a rich source of ideas on which to build their work.

Our final point is about the research as historically situated social practice framework that guided our review, which allowed us to see beneath the surface of the studies examined and connect practices in teacher preparation research to social, political, and institutional power. We argue that this framework could also serve as a tool to help us—teacher educators and researchers—become more conscious of the ways our own teaching and research practices conserve and disrupt existing educational and social inequalities.

References


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Do You Really Want to Do This?
Teacher Candidate Perspectives on Imperfect Placements

Kathleen Olmstead, Jennifer Randhare Ashton, 
& Christian Peter Wilkens

Abstract
The clinical internship—also called student teaching—represents one of the most important experiences of teacher preparation programs nationwide yet remains not well understood. This article focuses on the experiences of teacher candidates who have struggled in their schools. Here we present data from a survey administered to 107 undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates (49 in elementary grades, 58 in secondary grades); we find that 7/107 (6.5%) respondents indicated imperfect placements. We then present data from semistructured follow-up interviews with those who struggled, using a constant comparative method for coding and analysis. Participants described five main categories of imperfection in clinical internship: overwhelming responsibility, a lack of support, negative mentors, overly controlled.
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or constrained teaching contexts, and poor or negative feedback about teaching. We discuss what these findings might mean and suggest that inclusive coteaching models have the potential to ameliorate some imperfections, perhaps ultimately improving the work of the teachers our students become.

Introduction

Each year, teacher preparation programs in the United States send tens of thousands of teacher candidates out to schools and communities across the nation, ostensibly to learn how to teach (National Council of Teacher Quality, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). What happens when those teacher candidates arrive is critically important, because as Goldhaber, Krieg, and Theobald (2017) pointed out, “for most prospective teachers, the student teaching requirement is the single prolonged experience they will have in an actual classroom before the management and learning of students becomes their primary responsibility” (p. 326).

For the purposes of this article, we use the term clinical internship to represent the culminating experiences at the end of a teacher preparation program—often still described as student teaching. We use the term teacher candidate to represent students completing clinical internships; these teacher candidates are often described in the literature as student teachers. We also use the term mentor teacher to represent the primary school–based teacher educator—often referred to as the cooperating teacher in the literature.

The clinical internship represents the most substantial field-based component of teacher preparation programs nationwide; the U.S. Department of Education’s most recent Title II report indicates that teacher candidates spent an average of 525 hours on site in K–12 classrooms as part of their preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). We are also accumulating evidence that clinical internship experiences have an influence on eventual teacher effectiveness (Goldhaber et al., 2017). Although the mechanisms at work are not yet well understood, it appears that teacher candidates’ learning in schools with strong cultures of teacher collaboration, demonstrated student achievement gains, and high teacher retention rates are subsequently more effective at raising student achievement in their own classrooms (Ronfeldt, 2015). It also appears that the relationship between a teacher candidate and the mentor teacher has a powerful impact on the clinical experience (Bodger, 2016; Izadinia, 2017). The clinical internship experience, in a real sense, shapes what apprentice teachers become.

Yet it isn’t clear that teacher preparation programs structure clinical internship experiences with uniformity—nor do we have any reason to think they would, if given the chance. State standards for teacher certification vary widely, and our K–12 schools are locally run, diverse institutions by almost any measure—structure, standards, history and geography, funding and other inputs, student and teacher composition, and a range of student outcome measures (U.S. Department of Edu-
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cation, 2016). This is congruent with what the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2018) considers essential to a teacher education program’s success—maintaining local flexibility in clinical practice administration to meet the needs of each program’s unique community and context. The numbers alone suggest that there is little chance of common experience among teacher candidates in the United States. Furthermore, many teacher preparation programs deliberately emphasize preparation for teaching in specific contexts, for example, schools serving rural students or school systems without strong records of student achievement gains (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2016). Many teachers have expressed preferences to work in schools with demonstrated challenges for a range of reasons both personal and professional (DeBose, 2016; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Walsh, Putman, & Lewis, 2015). And it is undoubtedly true that there is little uniformity of mentoring skill among the United States’ estimated 3.5 million public school teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, Table 105.40).

It appears likely that teacher candidates facing different challenges develop different skills—yet we know little about the process from the standpoint of teacher candidates themselves and very little about what teacher candidates learn while in placements that are less than ideal. What does it mean to spend hundreds of hours (or more) with mentors who do not collaborate, or in classrooms where students do not learn, or in schools that teachers leave year after year? What do teacher candidates take away from the clinical internship experience? Our goal in this article is not generalizability but instead to add to our current knowledge base the voices and experiences of those teacher candidates who have gone out to learn to teach—and who have run into challenges along the way. Thus the research questions that guided this study are as follows:

How common are teacher candidate struggles—with mentoring, adult or student relationships, or classroom responsibilities in their clinical internships?

How do teacher candidates describe their learning in placements where students, teachers, or schools themselves struggle?

What are teacher candidates’ experiences negotiating the complexity of the teacher candidate–mentor teacher relationship?

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism is central to the authors’ understanding of teaching and learning and one framework that we believe allows us to explore theoretical and practical benefits of clinical practice as a collaborative apprenticeship. Social constructivism views the process of learning as developing through shared agency between the learner and instructor, who co-construct knowledge (Adams, 2006). A social constructivist framework for teaching and learning requires both parties
to have time to talk, listen, and observe (Adams, 2006). Because learners are positioned as active constructors of knowledge through social interaction, interpretation, and understanding, social constructivism views the creation of knowledge to be inseparable from the social environment (Vygotsky, 1962; Woolfolk, 1993). Last, we note that social construction of knowledge is facilitated when collaborators and knowledge are well matched; an expert cannot simply create another expert by telling a novice what they know.

Just as teachers must be prepared to teach, learners must be prepared to access new knowledge and skills. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) provides a useful lens for helping us to understand how a collaborative approach to clinical internship can either work or fall apart, depending on the match between co-constructors. Vygotsky (1978) described the ZPD as nascent functions that are actively in the process of maturing; we believe this view can prove useful in examining what happens to teacher candidates during imperfect placements. We return to consideration of active knowledge construction and ZPD in the analysis that follows.

Also influencing our thinking regarding teacher candidates’ learning is Lortie’s suggestion that unlike many other occupations, teacher candidates have experienced the apprenticeship of observation—many having spent a great portion of their lifetimes as students in schools observing and interacting with teachers (Borg, 2004). Teacher candidates both rely on and extend these experiences as members of a social community of students, learners, and, eventually, teachers (Wenger, 1998). It has also been suggested that mentor teachers become who they are as mentors as a result of their own social experiences as mentees and through their participation in a community of practice (Lunsmann, Beck, Riddle, Scott, & Adkins, 2019).

Review of the Literature

According to Stanford University’s 2014 edTPA Annual Administrative Report, more than 600 teacher education programs in more than 40 states participate in the edTPA, a performance assessment designed to measure effective teaching for beginning teachers. The overall edTPA passing rate reported (based on the recommended national standard of 42) is 72% (Stanford University, 2014). While almost 30% of students score poorly on the edTPA, we seldom hear of teacher candidates’ lack of success in the classroom during clinical internships. Indeed, only about 1% of teacher candidates in teacher education programs fail (Johnson & Yates, 1982)—yet we know that many of our students experience difficult clinical internship placements. However, the research on such placements is limited and, in many cases, outdated. Accordingly, in their call for more research, Wilkens, Ashton, Maurer, and Smith (2015) concluded that there is “little useful information just now about what sorts of imperfections and pressures allow a teacher to develop resilience and a healthy flexibility, nor what sorts are likely to be harmful” (p. 332). This information is
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sorely needed to inform teacher preparation programs, enabling them to better screen appropriate placements as well as support all teacher candidates—especially those who may struggle. So, what do we know about why teacher candidates may struggle and sometimes fail?

The work of Henry and Weber (2010) suggested that the brisk and challenging transition from student to teacher candidate can be troublesome, while Ritchie and Wilson (1993) proposed that the dichotomy between many teacher education programs’ constructivist stance and teacher candidates’ own personal enculturation into schooling can be a worrisome factor. Dresser (2012) suggested that “the dissonance between their own philosophy of education and that of their schools” (p. 77) can cause anxiety. Additional anxiety is created in this era of high-stakes testing and accountability where “as demands upon teachers have evolved, and the scrutiny increased, so have the expectations for teacher candidates,” causing even more pressure (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2018, pp. 7–8). Other researchers have argued that inadequate teacher preparation programs (Borko et al., 1992) or challenges with managing both instruction and difficult student behaviors (Doebler & Roberson, 1987) may be problematic elements of the clinical internship experience. However, Borko and Mayfield (1995) suggested that inadequate conversations—those often lacking deep discussion of teaching and learning—between teacher candidates and mentor teachers or university supervisors are troublesome. This is supported by the research of Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman (2009), who also argued that lack of feedback for teacher candidates has negative consequences in learning to become an effective teacher.

Additionally, Sudzina and Knowles (1993) have proposed three distinct causes of teacher candidate failure. The researchers concluded that these causes can be (a) personal, including conflicting personalities; (b) professional, including instructional differences; and (c) contextual circumstances, including philosophical conflicts. This is supported by the work of LaBoskey and Richert (2002), whose research highlighted the poor outcomes of what the researchers deem “discrepant placements” and the harmful implications these placements might have on both teacher candidates’ desire to teach and efficacy in teaching. Interestingly, in a literature review conducted by Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2014), the authors noted a troublesome lack of “invited participation” (p. 187) or shared authority between the university representatives and mentor teachers.

So, we have some variable ideas about why teacher candidates may struggle or fail. However, there is perhaps another larger element at work here, and that may be the model of clinical internship itself. While teacher candidates throughout the United States are typically compelled to participate in a variety of formative clinical internship experiences, these field experiences vary and are often disconnected from the culminating clinical internship, which is understood to be the hands-on practice with real students, in a real classroom (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). And over the years, the traditional clinical internship model has varied little,
usually proceeding from observation to gradually expanded (earned) autonomy in the classroom, culminating in sole classroom responsibility by the teacher candidate for some defined time frame—always bound by the judgment and supervision of a mentor teacher.

Consequently, researchers like Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury (2015) have suggested that this traditional clinical internship model “establishes a power differential between candidates and experienced teachers, and privileges independent teaching over opportunities to engage in professional discussions with colleagues” (p. 324). Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury suggested that one resolution of the power differential and isolation problems is a shift to a coteaching model during the clinical internship experience. Coteaching has been promoted as a model of praxis in clinical internships for almost a decade (Bacharach et al., 2010; Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2015; Soslau, Gallo-Fox, & Scantlebury, 2019). Other recent work has suggested that at least some of the problematic power differential/isolation challenges of the clinical internship may be mitigated by paired placements, with two clinical interns paired with a single mentor (Bodger, 2016).

Clinical Internship Within a Coteaching Framework

Originally used in inclusive education as a model for collaboration between general and special educators working together in the same classroom to meet the needs of an ability diverse student body, coteaching can take on a variety of different forms in practice. Friend and Cook (2000) identified six primary approaches to coteaching that range from minimally to intensely collaborative with varying degrees of shared responsibility that all require high levels of trust and commitment. Guise, Habib, Thiessen, and Robbins (2017), building on the work of others (Bacharach et al., 2010; Badiali & Titus, 2010; Friend & Cook, 2000), defined coteaching in the clinical internship context as an experience where “both the pre-service and cooperating teacher are engaged in student learning at all times through daily co-planning, co-instructing and co-assessing” (p. 370). The authors suggested that a strong model of coteaching can provide a positive impact on learners’ academic performance as well as provide greater support for teacher candidates over the traditional clinical internship model. Research has shown that students educated in a classroom with a teacher candidate as a coteacher outperformed those in non-cotaught classrooms (Bacharach et al., 2010; Emdin, 2007). Additionally, there appears to be evidence that coteaching works to alleviate wait time and enable students to “get help when they need it” (Bacharach et al., 2010, p. 12), therefore more effectively meeting the needs of the diverse learners in many of today’s classrooms. Because of the collaborative and inclusive approach that we take to teacher preparation here at the College at Brockport, we discourage the traditional “solo week” approach to clinical internships and situate our clinical internship as an apprenticeship with heavy reliance on collaboration and coteaching.
However, while research on coteaching is favorable, coteaching is not without challenges. Those who coteach must navigate and resolve issues like buy-in from both participants (Bacharach et al., 2010), equal voice (Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2015), and the allocation of sufficient needed coplanning time during busy school days (Howard & Potts, 2009). Furthermore, as in any successful professional relationship, coteaching requires good communication and a degree of compatibility (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Methods

This study was completed at the College at Brockport, one of New York’s original State Normal Schools (chartered to prepare teachers in 1866; Gigliotti, Leslie, & O’Brien, 2006). The college is located in western New York, near the city of Rochester; it has offered traditional teacher preparation programs for more than 150 years and has extensive ties to nearby rural, suburban, and urban school districts. Participants in this study included 107 undergraduate and graduate students of the Department of Education and Human Development, who completed semester-long (15-week) clinical internship placements in fall 2015, spring 2016, or fall 2016.

The College at Brockport places teacher candidates in dozens of different schools in rural, suburban, and urban environments within a radius of roughly 50 miles beyond the college. These schools, like the students they include, are diverse. As a broad descriptor, below we use the New York State Education Department’s Need/Resource Capacity Index. The index is intended to represent “a measure of a district’s ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources, [and] is the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage . . . to the Combined Wealth Ratio” (for more detail on the index, see New York State Education Department, 2012, p. 1).

Participants in this study were initially asked to complete a brief, 13-item survey during a midpoint (7-week) workshop provided to all teacher candidates (see Appendix A); they were recruited in person by the authors, with no incentives provided. This 13-item survey was co-constructed by the authors, with the intent to identify teacher candidates for follow-up semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). Readers should note that there is no extant screening instrument for imperfect clinical experience placements with published measures of reliability (nor do we publish any such measure for our own use here, as our intended use was not generalizability); our goal was simply to identify students for follow-up interviews. We administered the same survey and posed the same semistructured interview questions to teacher candidates from all three semesters studied. The final sample of participants represented 79% of all College at Brockport elementary and secondary teacher candidates between August 2015 and December 2016 (107/135 total). Participants included 49 teacher candidates preparing for certification in elementary grades (1–6) and 58 teacher candidates preparing for certification in secondary grades (7–12); the latter group included candidates preparing to teach
in a range of content disciplines, including mathematics, science, social studies, English, Spanish, and French. Because the college only runs inclusive teacher preparation programs, all participants were also preparing for teacher certification in special education at the appropriate level. Participants included 75 women and 32 men; average age for all participants was 24.3 years on the first day of clinical internship (range, 20.3–52.4 years). Of the full sample, most (n = 87, or 82%) participants were placed in average needs/resource capacity districts (this classification, made by the New York State Education Department, 2012, is intended to represent “a measure of a district’s ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources”).

Once consent to participate had been given, surveys were sealed and kept confidential from the authors, mentor teachers, college supervisors, and the college’s Field Experience Office during the remainder of the clinical internship semester. On completion of the clinical internship, these paper surveys were analyzed by the authors and used to identify prospective interview participants as part of the purposeful sampling procedure homogenous sampling—where participants who share a similar defining characteristic are selected to be invited to continue on in the study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). Participants who responded with a rating of 1 (never) for any of the following survey items were recruited for semistructured interview participation, as these participants could best provide information to help the researchers gain an understanding of clinical internship placements perceived as imperfect:

Q2: My cooperating teacher is a good teacher.
Q4: My cooperating teacher enjoys working with students.
Q5: My cooperating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction.
Q6: My cooperating teacher is optimistic about the teaching profession.
Q10: My cooperating teacher assumes responsibility for all learners.
Q13: My cooperating teacher is a good mentor.

Our rationale for selection of response ratings of 1 (never) rather than 2 (rarely) rests on clarity and concision. We chose to deliberately examine in depth only those placements where perceptions of a mentor teacher were easy to interpret and obviously negative. The meaning of a “never” response is commonly understood by both respondents and survey administrators—unlike “rarely” or “frequently,” whose meaning is often subject to individual interpretation. A placement featuring a mentor teacher perceived, for example, “never” to enjoy working with students was precisely what this article intended to explore.

These semistructured interviews (see Appendix B) were audiotaped to allow for accurate transcription and coding and, as with surveys, were kept confidential from mentors, college supervisors, and the Field Experience Office. Although participation in the semistructured interview was voluntary, participants were provided
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$5.00 gift cards to the campus bookstore following participation. The sample group of those completing semistructured interviews included seven teacher candidates, three in elementary grades and four in secondary grades. Those interviewed included six women and one man; average age for interviewees was 25.3 years (range, 20.3–45.9 years on the first day of clinical internship). Of the interviewed sample, six participants were placed in average needs/resource capacity districts (86%), while one participant was placed in a low needs/resource capacity district (14%).

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized grounded theory procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to conceptualize the data. Open coding, developed from ideas embedded in the data, and in vivo coding, which embraced participants’ voices, were both used to identify and interpret concepts as well as represent participants’ feelings, emotions, and perceptions of their clinical internship experiences (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). The researchers relied on the constant comparative method, an iterative analytic process, to discover themes and explore relationships that emerged from the coding and analysis of the data (Glesne, 2011). Olmstead carried out the initial and focused coding—reading and rereading transcripts, establishing initial codes, and reducing codes into emerging themes. Then, Olmstead met with Ashton, who checked for trustworthiness and authenticity to strengthen the integrity of the findings (DeCarlo, n.d.). Next, the researchers used memos, evolving diagrams, and researcher discussion to aid in further examining the interconnectedness of the emerging themes (Saldaña, 2009). To understand the researchers’ representation of the data, it is important to note that the researchers’ codes were meant to capture the essence of student conversation and that the inquiry was designed not for generative purposes but rather to build idiographic knowledge (Anney, 2014). Large quotes of teacher candidate dialogue were maintained and used both for the purposes of conserving student voice and illustrating the themes discussed. Thus block quotes may contain data that have been simultaneously coded, acknowledging that qualitative data do not always have precise boundaries (Saldaña, 2009) and that multiple codes may be entwined within larger quotes.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 indicates that, on average, mid-placement teacher candidate survey participants \( n = 107 \) were quite positive concerning aspects of placement safety, mentoring, optimism, inclusion, and mentor relationships. The vast majority of participants \( n = 78, \) or 73% of our sample) responded 3 (frequently) or 4 (always; on a 4-point scale) to every single prompt, allowing us to conclude that most teacher candidates in our sample reported that their clinical experience placements were supportive, good places to learn to teach. Mean responses for each item are also
quite high—evidence to us that teacher candidate perceptions of their placements were, on the whole, positive.

Table 1 also shows that the highest overall item response mean was for item Q1, “I feel safe in my placement” (mean of 3.9 on a 4-point scale); items concerning classroom responsibilities (Q3, “My responsibilities in the classroom are important”) and mentor relationships (Q11, “My SBTE [cooperating teacher] and I have a good relationship”) also generated high response means for the sample group as a whole. The lowest overall item response mean was for item Q7, “I was prepared for student teaching” (mean of 3.3 on a 4-point scale). This latter item, Q7, generated nine responses of 1 or 2 on a 4-point scale, but the item wording left us unclear whether responses were about the clinical internship placement or the teacher preparation program prior to clinical internship. Out of our 107 survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Mean of whole sample of teacher candidates</th>
<th>Mean of teacher candidates selected for semistructured interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: I feel safe in my placement.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: My cooperating teacher is a good teacher.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: My responsibilities in the classroom are important.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: My cooperating teacher enjoys working with students.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: My cooperating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: My cooperating teacher is optimistic about the teaching profession.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: I was prepared for student teaching.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: The curriculum used in my classroom is appropriate.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: I am knowledgeable about the content I am expected to teach.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10: My cooperating teacher assumes responsibility for all learners.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11: My cooperating teacher and I have a good relationship.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12: My cooperating teacher models good classroom management.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13: My cooperating teacher is a good mentor.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Authors recruited participants for semistructured interviews if they responded to any bold items with a score of 1. 4 = always. 3 = frequently. 2 = rarely. 1 = never. $N = 107$.

$\text{n} = 107$.

$\text{n} = 7$. 
responses, the most frequently reported low (1 or 2) rating was for Q5, “My co-
operating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction.” Here 18
teacher candidates (17% of our sample) responded “rarely” or “never.”

For those teacher candidates selected for semistructured interviews (n = 7),
Table 1 shows that mean item responses were lower across each item compared to
the sample as a whole. These lower mean scores were by design, as participants
were recruited for semistructured interviews on the basis of a 1 rating for any select
item (Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q10, and Q13). As with the complete sample group, the
semistructured interview group affirmed that their clinical experience placement
felt safe (mean response of 3.8 for Q1, “I feel safe in my placement”) but demon-
strated notably lower mean responses to several of the other items about mentoring,
feedback, good teaching, and responsibility for all learners.

Our selection rationale for the semistructured interview sample was that a
response of “never” for any of the above was evidence that, from a teacher candi-
date’s perspective, their experiences were not universally positive or supportive. We
sought, via the interview process, to understand their survey responses and to be
able to share their perspectives about the clinical experience, about their mentors
and schools, and about what they were learning along the way.

Semistructured interview prompts enabled teacher candidates to share their
experiences; our intent was to explore the perceptions of those who had expressed
challenge or disappointment. Readers are reminded that the vast majority of teacher
candidates reported positive experiences. In analyzing the data, we have identified
five factors related to teacher candidates’ expressions of disappointment with their
clinical experience placements and their unmet expectations of the clinical experi-
ence. The teacher candidates reported feeling (a) overwhelming responsibility, (b)
lack of support, (c) discouraged from teaching, (d) controlled and/or constrained
in the classroom, and (e) that feedback received was poor or inadequate.

Perceptions of Overwhelming Responsibility:
“It Was All on My Shoulders”

Several teacher candidates reported that they were overwhelmed by the chal-
enges of teaching, planning, and assuming classroom responsibilities. As Patrick,
a teacher candidate in a third-grade placement, explained, “It was literally all left
on my shoulders.” Patrick continued,

There were so many times he [the mentor teacher] just wasn’t in the classroom.
I want to say by the third week, I was running everything, which I mean, I don’t
know if that’s normal for other candidates, but also planning the majority of things.

Learning to be a teacher was a solitary and daunting experience for Patrick.

Similarly, Bella, a teacher candidate in first grade, talked of the overwhelming
stress. “I was taking on a huge chunk of the duties . . . and then it got to be more
and more, so like her [the mentor teacher] just kind of giving me stuff to do,” said
Bella. She continued to talk about the teacher’s lack of support, frustrated that her mentor teacher was “just sitting on her desk the entire day.” Next, Bella expressed her concerns about the unnerving responsibility. “A lot of stuff is put on me, like if something happened, it was my fault or it was something I wasn’t doing correctly, but I was still in my learning phase,” she explained. This internalizing of imperfections was addressed in previous work by Wilkens et al. (2015). The authors suggested that for many teacher candidates, “the failures of their schools become their own; chaotic classrooms become their fault; difficult or disappointing relationships with mentor teachers became evidence of general unworthiness,” thus leading to the isolation and discouragement reported by the teacher candidates we interviewed (Wilkens et al., 2015, p. 331).

We noted that the pressure that both Patrick and Bella describe was exacerbated by the expectations of the edTPA, a performance-based certification exam teacher candidates compose throughout their clinical internships. Patrick talked of this demanding time: “[It] was horrible in the beginning, because with the edTPA and, you know, all the requirements expected of me, it was just horrible.” Patrick felt he was unable to talk to his mentor teacher about being overwhelmed. “It’s kind of an awkward thing to do, like to talk to your teacher, your supervisor and say, ’You know, like you’re giving me too much work,’” said Patrick. “You know maybe you should do some of your own work, because I have my own work to do. . . . Like I have to do my own edTPA, [and] your work.”

Negotiating all of the responsibilities of the classroom while simultaneously fulfilling teacher certification exam requirements resulted in what was perceived as a challenging and stressful clinical experience for the teacher candidates interviewed. This finding corresponds with the work of Wilkens et al. (2015), who, building from Lazarin and Center for American Progress’s (2014) testing overload report, proposed that today’s accountability era, with its high-stakes testing and performance exams for teachers, has a dramatic impact on how teacher candidates learn during their experiences in classrooms. This simultaneous pressure from both the K–12 and higher education settings can be detrimental to teacher candidates’ experiences, as noted in our findings.

**Perceptions of Lack of Support:**

**“Thrown to the Wolves”**

In addition to feelings of immense responsibility—being responsible for planning for and running a classroom while negotiating the demands of the high-stakes testing—teacher candidates with imperfect placements reported that they were often left alone in the classroom and felt unsupported. Jodi, a teacher candidate in a ninth-grade science classroom, described her experiences: “His [the mentor teacher’s] philosophy was that I would take over classes pretty much immediately and start teaching.” Jodi described her mentor teacher’s “sink or swim” mind-set. Jodi said,
Do You Really Want to Do This?

I was thrown in with really very little sort of knowledge of what I was supposed to be doing. . . . It is tough going into student teaching if you are expected to be teaching right away if you do not know the curriculum you’re supposed to be teaching.

Likewise, Patrick was disappointed to work with a mentor teacher whom he felt “was not a good mentor.” Patrick described his experience as being “thrown to the wolves” because he had to “do everything on his own.” There were so many times Patrick’s mentor teacher was not in the classroom. Patrick recalled, “It’s like, what is he doing? You know, where is he? So I would say no, he’s not a good mentor.” Indeed, lack of support and lack of mentoring seemed to cause a lot of distress. Bella also talked of her unmet expectations and disappointment. “A lot of times I thought she’d [the mentor teacher] be there for me more than she was,” Bella said. “I thought, you know, student teaching was going to be this great co-teaching experience, which it should have been.”

Teacher candidates in our program may see the value in coteaching experiences, perhaps in part due to the special education methods classes required for all teacher candidates at the College at Brockport, which include robust discussions of the benefits of coteaching. This perspective may have led to expectations that the clinical experiences would include supportive, guided experiences where co-planning, coteaching, and cooperative reflection happen regularly, and perhaps an increase in frustration if that coteaching (and its related practices) did not occur, as indicated by Bella.

Feeling Discouraged About Teaching: “Spewing Negativity”

Unfortunately, quite often, the group of teacher candidates interviewed discussed being discouraged by their mentor teachers’ negative outlooks of the teaching profession. Marcy, a teacher candidate in a sixth-grade classroom, explained,

Honestly, almost every day I heard her make some sort of negative statement about the teaching career itself and what it’s become over the past few decades. There was actually even a point where her and the coteacher that I worked with throughout this placement kind of asked me, “Do you really want to do this?” I understand where they are coming from, but it is just disheartening to have the veterans that you’re with, that are supposed to be inspiring you, to really want to push you to go into this career kind of just spewing all this negativity all the time.

Similarly, Bella was disturbed by her mentor teacher’s attitude and recounted a particularly terrible moment when her mentor teacher told her, “See how stressful this job is? You definitely should second-guess going into this profession.”

Likewise, Patrick was also upset by his mentor teacher’s complaints about teaching. Patrick’s mentor teacher made comments like “I can’t wait to be done.” Though teacher negativity often comes from larger, dominant discourses (such as media coverage of teachers in unsafe schools, or those expected simply to teach to
various tests), most teacher candidates have been aware of such negative coverage for years and have chosen the profession anyway. Perhaps more corrupting than negative press about the work is when the negativity comes (unexpectedly) from mentor teachers, who are supposed to be mentors but may be, as Poth (2018) described, “disappointed and disillusioned teaching professionals who have felt let down, powerless, and/or blamed for any number of education-at-large’s collective failures” (p. 13). Frequent exposure to antiteaching comments and negative outlooks on teaching as a field served to demoralize and worry the teacher candidates.

**Feeling Controlled and Constrained in the Classroom:**

“*He’s Old School*”

Several teacher candidates mentioned that they felt controlled or constrained in the classroom environment due to philosophical differences in teaching pedagogy and practice, particularly the absence of a social constructivist perspective. This lack of a “shared vision of teaching” as well as the power differential inherent in the teacher candidates’ relationships with their mentor teachers denied teacher candidates their agency (Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2015, p. 335). Consider Marcy’s frustrating experience in a sixth-grade classroom:

> It’s a very business-like relationship for her [the mentor teacher], between her and her kids. There’s not a lot of room for fun. There’s not a lot of room for excitement. . . . I feel like our personalities just didn’t mesh. That our teaching styles just don’t go together, and that my beliefs about what the heart of actual teaching is are different from hers, and that made the placement very difficult. . . . She’s very tight with her classroom management. . . . There’s no room for talking out of turn. There’s no room for the kids having an engaging conversation . . . and that’s just not how I feel teaching should be.

Similarly, Serena talked about the lack of freedom in her student teaching setting and of feeling controlled. “So, it was a bit of a struggle to get control of the classroom, because he didn’t want to give it up,” said Serena. “And he was very old school, and ‘this is how you have to do it,’ so I didn’t really do how I would teach. I had to follow his model.” Serena explained that it was a great challenge to work in this rigid environment because her mentor teacher “has his own mind-set” and feelings about “this is how it has to be done.” Serena was discouraged that her mentor teacher “didn’t really welcome” her own mind-set. These perceptions of being controlled or constrained resulted in discomfort and lack of a sense of agency for many of the teacher candidates interviewed; they were unable to utilize their own teaching styles to “be themselves” in the classroom.

**Perceptions of Poor or Inadequate Feedback:**

“*She’s Incredibly Harsh*”

The last major contributing factor to influence teacher candidates’ negative
perceptions of their placements was the quality and quantity of feedback teacher candidates received from the mentor teachers. The following example is Marcy’s interview response to the researcher’s prompt—“my cooperating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction”:

Very rarely. And the reason I say that is because 9 times out of 10 her feedback was incredibly harsh with me. She didn’t treat me like a teacher candidate. She treated me as somebody who should already know all of the answers. . . . It was very difficult. It made the placement very difficult for me, because I felt there was very little that I was doing correctly and up to par.

Likewise, Serena described her experience working with a mentor teacher who repeatedly expressed that he “really didn’t want a student teacher.” Serena described the mentor teacher’s feedback:

He did provide constructive feedback to my instruction, but he never really gave me any positives. It was kind of, “You need to work on this, work on this, work on this.” And it didn’t come out until the end of the semester that I was actually doing something right. And it made for a long semester, just because I didn’t know really if I was doing anything right. And it would be like, “Well, they [students] didn’t do this. They didn’t understand this. They kept asking me this question,” so it kind of made me second-guess myself, if I knew the content or anything.

Although several teacher candidates experienced what they perceived to be extremely harsh criticism as illustrated by Marcy and Serena, Patrick was concerned about the poor quality of his mentor teacher’s feedback. Patrick found the feedback insincere and perhaps self-serving. Patrick believed his mentor teacher wanted him to do all of the “work” in the classroom. Patrick explained,

A lot of it [my mentor teacher’s feedback] was sugar-coated maybe. . . . I don’t think I’m the greatest teacher, so I don’t know if that was just because my lesson plans were good, or just because, you know the laziness [of my mentor teacher] or whatever, you know.

The teacher candidates we interviewed had unmet expectations of constructive feedback from their mentor teachers. These reasonable expectations of constructive feedback were articulated by Fisher and Frey (2015), who argued that all teachers deserve “honest, humane and growth producing conversations” (p. 53) on a regular basis. While humane and constructive feedback may seem like a basic element of the mentor teacher–student teacher relationship, Clarke and Elfert (2015) reminded us that many mentor teachers are poorly prepared to engage with teacher candidates and that professional development for mentor teachers is infrequent at best.

While our data suggest that teacher candidates with placements perceived as imperfect make up the minority of clinical internship experiences, we must carefully consider the thoughts of Wilkens et al. (2015) as a call to action to assist those teacher candidates who experience placement difficulties:
And when we fail to help teacher candidates successfully navigate even the worst placements with a shred of desire and optimism about their future work, we face an uncertain loss: Did we just lose a teacher who might have meant the world to one student? Hundreds of students? More?

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher candidates’ perspectives of imperfect placements, thus the data collected were limited to students’ perceptions of the events that occurred in their clinical internship placements; data from other agents like the mentor teachers and field supervisors were not taken into account for this study. Therefore we must consider questions of “respondents’ subjectivity” (Plano, Clark, & Creswell, 2015, p. 469). Further study incorporating triangulation of data sources like field observations as well as mentor teacher and field supervisor interviews could add greater dimension and diversity of perspectives to the study of student teaching placements perceived as imperfect.

Another limitation of the work is that teacher preparation programs have a limited set of demands they can reasonably place on school partners. While improved screening, training, or support of mentor teachers in the field may provide a partial answer to some of the problems of imperfect placements, it is not clear that the supply of strong mentors willing to host teacher candidates adequately matches the number of teacher candidates heading out to schools each semester. For the foreseeable future, it appears likely that teacher preparation programs will continue to send teacher candidates into imperfect placements. Teacher preparation programs will need to continue to identify mechanisms that improve candidate supports, mentor teacher relationships, and, ultimately, the experiences of students in P–12 schools.

Implications

While the vast majority of our teacher candidates report positive clinical internship experiences and satisfaction with their placements, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of placements perceived as imperfect. We have come to the realization that while our program promotes the coteaching framework of instruction, our clinical internship placements have continued to follow a more traditional apprenticeship model where after a short time of observation, the scaffold is removed, and teacher candidates are expected to go out on their own and “solo” teach. As Bacharach et al. (2010) suggested, “this model of learning to teach in isolation should no longer be an unquestioned practice” (p. 3). The voices of the teacher candidates amplified in this article have encouraged us to reconsider the problematic practices of this traditional clinical internship model.

While the preceding findings are specific to our program, the challenges are unlikely to be unique. In what follows, we consider implications for work preparing
Do You Really Want to Do This?

teacher candidates, with an eye toward improvement and, perhaps, avoiding the pitfalls and discouragements described herein.

Programmatic Improvement Suggestions

We identified social constructivism as the theoretical framework for this article; such a framework specifies that knowledge is built socially. Warford (2011) has argued that the ZPD is collaboratively produced in the interactions between a learner and more learned others and that the learning produced is, at its core, dialogic. We recognize precisely such a collaborative opportunity in virtually all clinical internship scenarios; there is a natural alignment between a social constructivist framework and the opportunities provided in these apprenticeships.

Yet our findings show that some teacher candidates—a small but important percentage—struggle with various aspects of their placements. These struggles tell us that we can and should improve what we do with teacher candidates. How? First, we must consider “changing the face of student teaching,” as Bacharach et al. (2010, p. 3) suggested. One option for a changed face of clinical internships could be the adoption of coteaching as an essential component throughout the internship experience. Coteaching can be, in a very real sense, the ZPD as outlined by Warford and can be seen as a tool to help us understand the complexity of the apprenticeship process as teacher candidates interact with classroom teachers within the context of the active school environment through collaborative planning, teaching, and evaluating.

Initiating a coteaching model with shared authority to build shared visions of teaching could have many benefits. While not without problems, research has confirmed that coteaching is mutually advantageous to both teacher candidates and students in the cotaught classrooms. Benefits include higher academic achievement and improvement in student behavior (Bacharach et al., 2010) as well as an alleviation of many of the challenges that arise during more traditional clinical internships (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015), described by our teacher candidates as “being thrown to the wolves” and having it “all left on my shoulders.”

Additionally, we must consider designing and providing professional development for mentor teachers new to the coteaching model to (a) train mentor teachers in the coteaching framework, (b) practice providing growth-producing and compassionate feedback, and (c) provide thorough discussion of disposition expectations for mentor teachers to mitigate the problem of “spewing negativity,” which serves to demoralize teacher candidates. Our final suggestion for improvement is implementing teacher candidate self-advocacy workshops to help teacher candidates (a) build their sense of agency, (b) communicate effectively yet professionally, and (c) build resiliency to mitigate “reality shock”—the overwhelming feeling many new teachers have when they confront the “significant discrepancies between what they envisioned . . . and what they are actually experiencing during their first year of professional teaching” (Kim & Cho, 2014, p. 67).
Lingering Questions

While we know adopting a coteaching framework for clinical internships is both a worthwhile and a necessary venture, we have several lingering, unresolved questions regarding the actual implementation of a successful coteaching model:

How can we identify partner schools with climates or structures that can provide a clinical internship experience that supports the development of coteaching?

How can we promote or provide professional development to partner schools/mentor teachers regarding tenets of the coteaching model?

If and when teacher candidates encounter the kinds of challenges discussed herein, how can we effectively and efficiently provide support? Which challenges are professionally productive, and which ones are toxic?

Our questions have, at their core, concern with relationships. Our findings indicate that, when teacher candidates struggle, they do so because relationships aren’t working. While we have suggested that a coteaching model may be a particularly productive approach for improved learning experiences during clinical internships, one clear take-away for any teacher preparation program is that nurturing good relationships—especially those between mentors and teacher candidates—lies at the core of improved work. So, if we cannot, in the end, prevent each instance of “being thrown to the wolves,” we can at the very least help our teacher candidates avoid the metaphor in the first place—to see the work as less a mortal than a meaningful struggle on the way to joining the profession we hold dear.

References


Do You Really Want to Do This?


Supervising student teachers the professional way. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.


Do You Really Want to Do This?


Appendix A

Student Teacher Survey

[Always] [Frequently] [Rarely] [Never]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe in my placement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher is a good teacher.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My responsibilities in the classroom are important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher enjoys working with students.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher is optimistic about the teaching profession.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was prepared for student teaching.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum used in my classroom is appropriate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about the content I am expected to teach.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher assumes responsibility for all learners.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher and I have a good relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher models good classroom management.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My cooperating teacher is a good mentor.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Random Identifier [for PI use only]:

Appendix B

Semistructured Interview

1. Please tell me about your survey responses.
   a. Q2: My cooperating teacher is a good teacher.
   b. Q4: My cooperating teacher enjoys working with students.
   c. Q5: My cooperating teacher provides constructive feedback about my instruction.
   d. Q6: My cooperating teacher is optimistic about the teaching profession.
   e. Q10: My cooperating teacher assumes responsibility for all learners.
   f. Q13: My cooperating teacher is a good mentor.

2. If you could describe your student teaching placement in one word, what would that be?

3. If you could describe your SBTE [mentor teacher] in one word, what would that be?
Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting

The Case of Two Former Teach for America Corps Members

Lynnette Mawhinney & Carol R. Rinke

Abstract

This article explores the development of teaching identity among Teach for America (TFA) corps members through the use of storied experience. Grounded in a conceptual framework of intersectional identities, specifically Gee’s notions of institution-identity and affinity-identity, we consider the storied experiences of two former classroom teachers (referred to as teacher leavers) who entered the profession through the TFA alternative certification pathway. Although both teacher leavers followed the TFA pathway into the classroom and ultimately left teaching, they constructed their identities in unique and at times opposing ways, with consequences for their ultimate career pathways. We consider issues of resistance and return in examining the implications of TFA’s identity model on the teachers themselves and the larger teaching profession.

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Introduction

As teacher educators, we are often consumed by the goal of teacher identity development. Teacher identity, defined as one seeing one’s self as a teacher, is of primary concern because of its central role in mediating job satisfaction and long-term professional engagement (Day & Gu, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006). Moreover, as demonstrated by Schaefer, Downey, and Clandinin (2013), teacher identity can frame not only a life in teaching but also a life outside of the classroom. Teacher educators, therefore, hold a pedagogical responsibility to facilitate the development of teacher identity among future educators (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2014).

To further unpack the vital link between teacher identity and teacher career development, we sought to capture the storied experiences of an often-silenced group within education: teacher leavers (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018, 2019; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). We define teacher leavers as those educators who voluntarily elected to leave the profession prior to retirement. We sought to highlight the voices of former urban teachers through their own perspectives and experiences because, although much is understood about pre- and in-service teacher identity development, knowledge of teachers’ perceptions of themselves and their careers virtually disappears once they leave a formal classroom position.

Within the sample of teacher leavers from across four U.S. regions, we included former teachers from traditional university-based teacher education programs as well as from alternative-route programs that follow an abbreviated model, such as Teach for America (TFA) or Teaching Fellows programs. The inclusion of alternate-route participants was essential, as 29% of teacher preparation programs in the United States rely on this model (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Identity development is a particularly complex issue for alternate-route teachers, who are not allotted the same time for pedagogical or professional preparation. Where traditional teacher education programs have a three-tiered identity development process beginning with preservice teachers, evolving into student teachers, and leading to in-service teachers, alternative-route programs like TFA must necessarily encompass all three identities simultaneously. If “novice teachers in particular face profound identity crises when transitioning from pre-service to in service contexts” (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2014, p. 251), then this dynamic may be further complicated by alternative-route programs that merge these identities at the same time. Consequently, TFA corps members historically leave teaching at higher rates than traditionally prepared teachers (Costigan, 2005).

This article seeks to understand how two participants within our larger sample, Susan and Kaitlin, made sense of their professional identities over time. Both Susan and Kaitlin were TFA corps members and earned their teacher certification through this program, thus their experiences and perspectives highlight the complexities that emerged during and following one specific alternative certification program. Whereas Kaitlin aligned herself and her identity strictly with TFA as an organiza-
Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting

Susan intentionally shifted her identity away from TFA and toward being a teacher (Schaefer, 2013a).

Programmatic Context

TFA was founded in 1990 by Wendy Kopp, based on an idea developed in her undergraduate senior thesis at Princeton University (Brewer, 2014; La Londe, Brewer, & Lubienski, 2015). The original intent was to “rescue and reform schools in America’s urban education centers from what was deemed sub-par teaching and teacher training as a result of a national teacher shortage” (La Londe et al., 2015, p. 3). The initial program goals have evolved over time, and TFA’s current mission is stated as follows:

We’re committed to expanding opportunities for children by effecting profound systemic change. We find, develop, and support a diverse network of leaders from classrooms, schools, and every sector and field in order to shape the broader system in which schools operate. (Teach for America [TFA], 2018)

Programmatically, TFA recruits undergraduate students from prestigious colleges across the United States to work in one of the 53 partner urban or rural communities (TFA, 2017c). TFA corps members (as participants are called) can work in any pre-K to 12th-grade classroom and across subject areas. Once accepted to the program, corps members make a 2-year commitment to teaching within their designated urban or rural community. Following a 5-week summer boot camp to learn teaching methodology, corps members are placed as the teacher of record in a classroom for 2 years. Brewer (2013, 2014), a TFA alumnus and current educational researcher, completed both a traditional education program and TFA’s accelerated program. He noted receiving a total of 1,206 hours of preservice preparation in his traditional teacher education program, as compared to 145 hours of preparation with TFA (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preservice observation hours</th>
<th>Hours spent in classrooms as a student of methods</th>
<th>Hours spent in leading teaching role</th>
<th>Total preservice preparation hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionally certified</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For corps members, program benefits are many, including (a) housing and transportation coverage during the 5-week boot camp, (b) a salary ranging from $33,000 to $58,000 (location specific), (c) full health benefits, (d) 403(b) retirement benefits, (e) master’s and teaching certification covered, and (f) possible student loan forgiveness (TFA, 2017b). Regarding these benefits, Maier (2012) noted, 

What is surprising is that this work is equated to volunteering and public service when they are asked to perform the same work and are paid the same amount as all 1st and 2nd year teachers in their respective districts. (pp. 16–17)

TFA has often been likened to the Peace Corps, as both maintain rigorous standards for admittance. Maier (2012) again noted that being a TFA corps member is “selective, high-status, and also networked. . . . [It] allows corps members to delay career decisions, and gives off the image of promoting social justice” (p. 13). Maier argued that TFA is frequently seen as “an initial rung in a more prestigious career ladder, not necessarily the career itself” (p. 19). Although the number of applications into TFA has fallen in recent years (Beard, 2016), the organization currently has 6,700 corps members and 50,000 alumni (TFA, 2017c). Moreover, the program has expanded internationally, with a sister program, Teach for All, currently operating in 46 different countries and on six continents (Teach for All, 2017).

In recent years, TFA has been the focus of both ideological debate and empirical research. The current research literature has explored TFA’s teacher preparation (Carter et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Labaree, 2010; Veltrie, 2008), recruitment methods (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Miner, 2010), teacher quality and effectiveness (Glazerman, Mayer, & Decker, 2006; Heilig, Cole, & Springel, 2010; Heilig & Jez, 2010; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; McAdam & Brandt, 2009; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011), corps member experiences (Brewer, 2013, 2014), and political influences (Lahann & Reagan, 2011; La Londe et al., 2015). This article’s intention is not to evaluate the program or its outcomes but rather to add to the research base through an exploration of identity development among former corps members and current teacher leavers.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In this study, we draw on the notion of identity as central to teachers’ professional growth. Professional identity development has previously been conceptualized in terms of how individuals makes sense of themselves in context (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), and our work is grounded in an understanding that this process of identity development is also central to career development. In particular, we align ourselves with the work of Savickas et al. (2009), who proposed a “life-designing framework” in which “individuals progressively design and build their own lives, including their work careers” (p. 241). A life-designing approach conceptualizes in-
individuals as active and empowered agents in constructing their own lives and careers and envisions career development as an identity-making process (Savickas, 2012).

Clandinin et al. (2015) took this understanding a step further to connect teacher identity development to the act of teachers leaving the classroom. In their work, the frequent phenomenon of early career attrition is understood as an identity-making process, in which teachers reconceptualize their identities outside of education. Others have reinforced the notion that identity development over time is connected to career attrition (e.g., Hochstetler, 2011; Olsen, 2008; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012) and noted that both personal and professional histories mediate that identity-construction process (Flores & Day, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, we look more deeply into forms of identity, drawing on Gee’s (2000) four-part conceptual framework, including (a) nature-identity, (b) institution-identity, (c) discourse-identity, and (d) affinity-identity. Nature-identity is “a state developed from forces in nature” (p. 100). This is an identity that is “recognized” by others as the “kind of person” they are (p. 102). Gee discusses how being an identical twin or a White woman would be the “kind of person” someone is dictated by nature to be. Institution-identity, “a position authorized by authorities within institutions” (p. 100), is considered “who I am” as an identity. Often this identity is set forth by an authority, such as a school board hiring someone as a teacher. Discourse-identity is an “individual trait recognized in the discourse/dialogue of/with ‘rational’ individuals” (p. 100). In essence, this identity is one that is individualized, such as a person being hilarious or passionate. This is dictated by how others “treat, talk about, and interact” with that person (p. 103). Lastly, affinity-identity comprises the “experiences shared in the practice of ‘affinity groups’” (p. 100). In this case, an affinity group is an “allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group’s members with requisite experiences. The process through which this power works, then, is participation or sharing” (p. 105). An example would be a “Trekkie” (a person who attends Star Trek events) or an activist teacher (a person who is a member of the New York Collective of Radical Educators). When taking these four identities into consideration, Gee explains that each is not separate; rather, all are interrelated, adding to the various complexities of an individual’s identity.

Methodology

As previously noted, life histories and the act of telling one’s storied experiences are critical, both conceptually and methodologically, to identity work (Chang-Kredi & Kingsley, 2014; Flores & Day, 2006). To fully capture the storied experiences of our teacher leavers, we utilized a professional life histories methodology, which focused specifically on the career aspirations, goals, and realities of a person’s story, rather than attempting to capture a full life history narrative. This allowed us to conduct an in-depth exploration around one focal point (in this case, enter-
ing teaching, being a teacher, and leaving the profession) and foster reflection upon the multiple layers embedded within each participant's storied experiences. Rather than taking a technical question-and-answer approach, we encouraged participants to synthesize their educational backgrounds, life choices leading to the classroom, careers as teachers, and pathways out of the classroom into one story (Costigan, 2005). In essence, we used this methodology to understand, illustrate, and guide the participants to make their own meaning from their career choices (Atkinson, 1998).

Cross and Ndofirepi (2015) explained the power of the storied experience:

Narrations of lived experiences offer opportunities to interpret the relations among past, present and projected events in teachers' lives, and in particular how they become teachers and remain teachers under unpredictable and changing circumstances. These include, for example, life history accounts, storytelling, and discourse analysis. (p. 99)

Foster’s (1997) concept of life history research with teachers parallels Cross and Ndofirepi's (2015) by arguing that “life history research offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives to society” (p. vxi). Goodson and Sikes (2001) used life history methodology as a way to encapsulate the career life-span, especially as teachers' stories are intertwined with their teaching approaches, philosophies, and pedagogical knowledge (see also Carter & Doyle, 1996; Clandinin, 1986). They continued by theorizing how life history research in educational spaces should be founded on three points of conceptual understanding:

1. It [life history method] explicitly recognizes that lives are not hermetically compartmentalized into, for example, the person we are at work (the professional self) and who we are at home (parent/child/partner selves), and that, consequently, anything which happens to us in one area of our lives potentially impacts upon and has implications for other areas too.

2. It acknowledges that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individuals' lives, their perceptions and experiences, and historical and social contexts and events.

3. It provides evidence to show how individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live. (p. 2)

The data collection and analysis processes were generated around these foundational concepts as we encouraged participants to make meaning from their contextualized experiences.

Data Collection

The process of identifying former teachers posed a unique challenge, as teacher leavers quickly become disconnected from their networks once they leave the field (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Thus we used snowball sampling as the recommended
Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting

approach for “hidden” populations (Browne, 2005). We recruited participants through our social networks, Listservs, and social media outlets. Specifically, we aimed to identify teacher leavers from all four regions of the United States (East, Midwest, South, and West) who met the following criteria: (a) left teaching prior to retirement, (b) taught for at least 1 year within a public school, and (c) taught in secondary science or English (language arts) classrooms. Our last discipline-specific criterion was based on the finding that secondary science teachers expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction with the profession (Ingersoll, 2003a) and were more likely to leave teaching to pursue the more prestigious and lucrative career alternatives available with a science degree (Hoyle, 2001; Murnane & Olsen, 1990). Furthermore, research has shown that English teachers struggle with significantly higher workloads than do teachers in other subject areas (Hancock & Scherff, 2010), owing to the large amount of student writing demanded in the subject area.

Once we had identified participants, we conducted interviews with a common semistructured protocol lasting between 75 and 90 minutes. As professional life histories focus on one particular area of a person’s life, it is considered standard to complete the interview within one sitting, with follow-up for minor areas of clarification as needed. The interviews themselves were conducted face-to-face if the participant was located within a 1.5-hour drive from one of the researchers. If this was not the case, interviews were conducted over Skype or telephone. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and member checked by participants.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were coded individually using intersectionality between within- and cross-participant analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, data were separated into participants’ professional life phases. Second, data were categorized using a coding process for each phase that encompassed meaning making, identity development, emotions, interpersonal interactions, and societal interactions. Eventually, we identified 27 a priori codes, organizing the chronology of professional life history events and the participants’ interpretation of the events. Third, researchers came together to refine the coding process and generate initial themes. This process also led to the development of emergent codes, particularly with respect to the participants’ perceived purpose and goals, for a total of 44 distinct codes. Finally, we reanalyzed the data using emergent codes, and the alternatively trained subgroup became an area of focus. Throughout the process, researchers maintained a focus on the life-constructing framework (Savickas, 2012) in which participants were seen as active agents in making meaning of their lives, which, in turn, shaped their career pathways.

Participant Overview

The study identified 25 teacher leavers from 14 different states across the nation, providing geographic and contextual diversity within urban schools. In order not to
fall into the “definitional gap” surrounding the word urban in the literature (Irby, 2015; Milner, 2012; Milner & Lomotey, 2013), we used Milner’s (2012) typology of urban education. All 25 teachers taught within an urban-intensive school (schools situated within large urban metropoles), an urban-emergent school (schools within small cities under a population of 1 million), or an urban-characteristic school (schools experiencing increases with challenges associated with the urban context; Milner, 2012).

The overall population of the larger study reflected the predominantly White and female teaching force in the country (Papay, 2007), with 84% female and 68% White. Fifty-six percent of the teacher leavers were trained through traditional teacher education programs, whereas the 44% remaining had attended alternative-route programs (e.g. TFA, Teaching Fellows, or another alternative-route program).

Among the teacher leavers from alternative-route programs, there were three primary models included. The largest representation was from TFA, with 54% of the alternative-route group, followed by 36% from geographic-specific Teaching Fellows programs and 9% from the university-based alternative teacher certification model. The teacher leavers in the alternative-route group taught, on average, for 6 years, twice the national average of 3 years (Ingersoll, 2003b) for urban teachers. When further segmented, the TFA group stayed an average of 4.2 years in teaching.

From the larger alternative-route group, 45% currently remain in education-related fields (e.g., community education) or in nonteaching roles within education (e.g., administration). The most interesting finding is that an additional 45% of the teacher leavers decided to return to their original career paths. This article focuses on this intriguing group of alternative-route participants who returned to an earlier profession. Specifically, this article focuses on 2 of the 25 participants (see Table 2), Susan and Kaitlin, both White women who taught within urban-intensive schools (Milner, 2012), Susan on the East Coast and Kaitlin on the West Coast. Together they represent the various stories outlined in the alternative-route pool of participants. Moreover, because we use life history as a methodology, we present each case study in full to honor each participant’s voice and experience. In the discussion and implications section, we spend time looking across both case studies in relation to Gee’s (2000) conceptual framework.

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<th>Participant Overview</th>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Kaitlin</td>
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Note. Nature-Identity Institution-Identity (prior) → Institution-Identity (now).
Susan’s Storied Experience

Beginning the Program: A Means to an End

As an undergraduate, Susan was highly committed to community work. She attended an urban Catholic university where she partnered with a nun on community work in an impoverished neighboring city. Susan was committed to this city of Hamilton and ran a program during her summers “that cared for children who had been victims of violent trauma.” Upon graduation, Susan realized that her goal was to find ways to deepen my relationship and contribution to positivity in [Hamilton]. . . . Maybe I have some skills but if anything in my college life had taught me, it was like, hey, practice humility and acknowledge that when you’re working in a community that’s not your own you likely don’t have nearly as much to offer as you might think. So take a step back.

Susan decided she wanted to find a job that would allow her to do meaningful work in this same city. She wanted to find a path where she could “be a foot soldier. Do something useful and learn from, continue to learn from the community that’s around you”; she decided to look for a hands-on community role. Susan further explained,

I found tremendous strength and tremendous resilience and power in moms, dads, grandparents, extended kinship networks in [Hamilton] that I was like huh. I was like this place has a really shitty reputation and it does not match at all to my experience. I am curious about this and deeply moved by this. What’s my in? How do I get to continue to learn this? . . . Teacher felt like a meaningful in.

This realization led Susan to apply to TFA. But she applied only to the Hamilton corps, as her primary commitment was to making a difference within that city. And, Susan mentioned, at that point in time, TFA “had a name for themselves, not the way they do today, like, so hoity-toity.” In short, Susan explained that “[in] TFA, I was just looking for a means to my own end.”

After Susan was accepted to TFA, a hiring freeze was instituted in Hamilton—the city budget was frozen and taken over by the state. The neighborhood schools were not permitted to hire; only the charter schools were hiring. Susan went on two “really tragic interviews” with charter schools, but “it was a disaster, because I knew, charter isn’t the solution. School choice movement doesn’t make sense as a sustainable choice for communities, especially communities that are underresourced. We’re just creating more artificial cleavages within an already struggling system.”

Susan began her time in TFA within the context of the hiring freeze. She discovered that although Hamilton did not have any positions, the neighboring Garden Brooks did have some placements. By chance, Susan had completed some of her undergraduate work in Garden Brooks as well. She explained,
Ultimately no one really understood if the ban gonna get lifted and it didn’t. So the first day of school came and went. And the second week of school rolls around and the TFA program management said, “Look, we’re not gonna be able to get you and probably 15 other corps members any placement in [Hamilton]. You can take a placement in [Garden Brooks] or you can reapply to TFA next year.” I was like, oh hell no. So I went to [Garden Brooks].

Identity Games: How Not to Be Outed

Susan made the move to the Garden Brooks TFA program. She explained that Garden Brooks “is a much bigger community and not one that I had ever really had any interest in, but again it wasn’t about building the TFA community it was about building skills and having resources to go seek out and be of use to a different community that did have meaning to me.”

Usually, TFA will put four or five clusters of corps members together in one school. But, since Susan entered a school after the academic year began, she happened to be placed at a school by herself. She preferred this setup so that she would not be “outed” as a TFA corps member to her colleagues. During Susan’s second year at the school,

a friend of mine who had also come over from [Hamilton] was working for TFA in the summer and rostering and called me. He was like, “Hey they’re gonna place a corps member at your school.” I was like, “No. They can’t do that. They’re gonna out me!” . . . I don’t know how much people knew or didn’t know but I wanted nothing, nothing to do with that. I was like, “Delete that spreadsheet. Get me out of there! If you’re my friend at all please, please, please find that kid somewhere else to work!” . . . He deleted the line on the Excel spreadsheet.

Susan’s friend saved her from being outed through the stroke of a keyboard. But Susan’s fears continued:

I just didn’t want that [to be outed] because I thought . . . it would make it harder to have a genuine experience of inclusion and I didn’t want this big name behind me, coloring how people saw my commitment to the school community. People were like, “TFA has revolving doors isn’t it.” I’m like, “Yeah.” I don’t want people to see me and think that I am like doing this flaky thing on my way to becoming a senator or a CEO of whatever.

Susan employed two primary strategies to maintain her anonymity and hide her affiliation with TFA. First, she never mentioned TFA by name. Susan had to be inventive with language around her colleagues. She would explain to colleagues, “I would be like, ‘Oh I’m in a teaching program.’ I wouldn’t even call it [by name].” Her second strategy was to lie about her TFA supervisor who came to conduct the required classroom observations. When an outsider came to visit Susan’s classroom, she noted that her colleagues would say, “They’d be like, ‘Who’s that lady who comes to your classroom sometimes?’ I’m like, ‘Oh I don’t have all my certs. It’s
for my teaching program. She’s observing me for my teaching program.’ They’re like, ‘That’s cool.’” Susan’s plan kept her TFA affiliation under cover.

**Coming to Terms With TFA**

Susan managed to keep her identity as a TFA corps member under wraps for quite a few years. Even after Susan completed her 2-year contract as a TFA corps member, she continued to teach within the same neighborhood for a total of 6 years. Susan finally decided to out herself after about 4 years. She realized, “I think eventually I was just like OK with it enough.” But this was after Susan had built a reputation as a hard worker with her colleagues:

“I think it was because I showed [my colleagues] I’m working so hard. . . . I earned my keep, not because I had any good ideas or had classroom management that was worth spit at all, at first. But it was like, “Oh really, you need 37 information packets collated so we can do this. I’ll make the crap. I’ll make all that stuff so that we can do it.”

Aside from helping colleagues and doing grunt work, Susan would also spend extra hours with students:

“I found other ways where I could actually help. Oh, the nice girls who need help memorizing their speech and it’s just gonna take hours and hours, I’ll work with them and then we’ll have a better talent show. Those kinds of things and gradually over time, I had something to offer more and more students. . . . I think my colleagues saw that and they were like, all right. She’s making an effort and she’s working.

In the end, Susan realized she did not have to worry about her affiliation with TFA. She explained, “It was just about finding a way to ingratiate myself and have something to bring to that team. That’s how I learned.”

**Moving On**

Susan’s identity was encapsulated in seeing herself as a community activist and “foot solider.” This idea of connecting deeply with and further engaging in a community was always at the forefront of her mind. She explained, “My attitude has always been that my vocation and my profession are in transforming communities the way they want.” Her curiosity around how to support communities started to grow around issues of homelessness. Susan shared,

“For a time while I was teaching, mostly in my second and third year teaching, I did some really preliminary research into what it would look like to pilot an open homeless shelter independently for people who are actively using drugs and alcohol.

During her research, Susan discovered three places in the city that already did this kind of work. This movement out of schools and into other areas of social services
came from her view of herself not as a teacher but instead as a community activist. Susan posited,

Again, my whole attitude is what do I see that a community is looking for and can I plug in? So I’m, like, OK, educational inequity seemed like an easy entry point perhaps and a meaningful entry point. But there’s also other social problems that are kind of fascinating and really urgently need work. . . . But, we could say flip the same thing on its side it would be like, what is the most pressing need? Even looking at basic, basic, basic needs. So more basic than education is, do you have a place to stay? Do you have shelter? That really intrigued me, and I went huh.

Eventually, Susan connected with one of the three organizations that supported the homeless in Garden Brooks. Over the next couple of years, she volunteered and connected with the individuals in the organization to make sure they did not have a “deficit mindset to thinking about making a contribution to a community.” For instance, the organization’s mission was very broad: “to end homelessness and interrupting the cycle of poverty in [Garden Brooks]. So I’m like, ‘Huh, that’s really broad. Are they full of shit, or are they really doing that?’” Susan realized the organization did practice what it preached and made “a proactive contribution to public dialogue and decision-making,” and she wanted in.

Susan decided that her sixth year of teaching was going to be her last, as the school district was positioning to close her school and lay off all teachers. Rather than pursue another teaching job, Susan decided she wanted to work for the homeless organization. Susan had already started to make connections at the organization as a volunteer. Furthermore, she told everyone, including her colleagues, about her plan. But Susan was realistic:

I also acknowledged to myself and anyone else who would listen to me, like well in advance [about the plan]. This might be a terrible, terrible idea and I’m gonna keep all my teaching stuff and I might get 1 year out, 2 years out, 5 years out and put my tail right between my legs and go right back to my classroom where I belong.

This career change also required a large cut in her annual salary. Specifically, she went from “making 70 grand a year [as a teacher]. The first year out [of teaching], I made less than 40 grand.” Susan carefully prepared for this financial change. The money was never her priority; instead, her priority was making sure that all aspects of her community activist identity were satisfied. For Susan, this was an issue about “peace of mind” and not looking back at her life and asking the question, “Should I be doing this other thing? Is my contribution actually something else? Because I was at the point where teaching felt good, but I wanted to make a contribution that seemed great.”
Kaitlin’s Storied Experience

Seeking Prestige and Service

Kaitlin, like Susan, went into teaching through the TFA program. Kaitlin received her undergraduate degrees in sociology and public service. Upon graduation, Kaitlin explained her next steps:

I was looking for some sort of volunteer or a job in a nonprofit or something that offered me more experience in communities that I wanted to serve in, in doing the community development work. And so I applied to TFA, I knew that it was like a prestigious program, and I knew that it was gonna provide me with that opportunity and be structured and supportive.

Owing to the prestige of the program, Kaitlin was very excited to enter TFA. Automatically, she was placed as a special education teacher. She reported, “I didn’t know at all what that meant but I was excited to get in. I think it was exciting to know that I had a job in March and that it was a field that I was really passionate about learning about.”

Even though Kaitlin was entering a program that, in theory, was designed to develop teachers, she acknowledged that even at the beginning, she did not know if teaching was going to be a long-term career path:

I don’t know if I ever started Teach for America thinking that I would be there forever, but I was very intrigued by it as a form of service. I knew I wanted to serve in some capacity, so I found it to be a job that required a lot of service and it was also very fulfilling.

This idea of service, for Kaitlin, came with the concept of trying to improve the ills of society. She explained that coming into TFA was about “becoming more and more familiar with how poor education was leading to major societal challenges. And so I wanted to try to address that for my own students and helping them improving their skills.” This was furthered by the cultural context of TFA. Kaitlin explained that programmatically, “Teach for America is extremely goal focused and you’re very much bought in to that culture, that you need to improve your students’ reading scores, you need to help them attain a bunch of skills.”

Corps Members Identifying as Leavers

Kaitlin’s foray into teaching was quickly met with struggles. She frankly stated, “This is a pretty impossible job.” She continued to explain, “I didn’t see it [the job] getting more sustainable. I didn’t see it getting more fulfilling, and I didn’t necessarily know that I was providing the students with the education that they deserved.” As a TFA corps member, Kaitlin had committed to stay on the job for 2 years and resolved to come back to fulfill her second year:
Well, I had wanted to stay [in the job]—I knew that I had made some progress and I had started my second year saying I really want to continue and I really want to give this a shot. I know how important this work is for, again, I think that educational inequality is the biggest issue in our society and I want to be a part of it. I want to stick it out.

Even though Kaitlin intended to continue on the job, the challenges were unrelenting:

I continued to really struggle even into my second year to balance everything, to feel successful, it ensured that each student was challenged, to manage behavior, all these things that were continuing to be really, really harmful—or challenging and I didn’t think were really benefiting the students to the degree they could.

This was complicated by the fact that fellow TFA corps members and her teaching colleagues automatically viewed TFA teachers as teacher leavers. Within the TFA organization, Kaitlin explained that

TFA gives you this guise that you’re only there for 2 years, and I think if I had been better at it or learned faster, I would have made it my career, and I really have no ties to the organization.

Kaitlin shared that everyone would just automatically ask, “What are you doing next year?” She was truly taken aback by this norm. She commented, “I think it was very standard [to ask the question]. It was this terrible question where you see someone from TFA and you’d say what are you doing next year?” She went on to critique this practice:

And I would be like, the question shouldn’t be that. It’s like it should be focused on how are the children or something not setting the bar and the expectation that we’re all walking out of this and that this is just 2 years.

Although Kaitlin said she was not a “super critic,” she did say that when it came to TFA, “I don’t think that they’re focused enough on the long term, which was getting a really high-quality teacher force in the country, versus giving people this short-term opportunity.”

Despite her discomfort with the short-term perspective, eventually Kaitlin too decided to leave teaching. She explained,

I left because I wasn’t very good and I hadn’t figured out some of these systems within 2 years, which I know is not a ton of time, and—but I felt it was both on myself and then I didn’t think the structure [of the school] was gonna serve those students well in that environment with one special ed teacher.

Furthermore, she equated her experience to lagging behind in a race:

I felt like I was sprinting behind something that I really needed to learn and had tons of pressure from my students or Teach for America. It was like how are you meeting your goals and myself . . . not really grasping it until it was too late.
Moving On

Eventually Kaitlin too decided that she was leaving teaching when she was confronted by a colleague:

A colleague was taking this form around that said are you leaving, and I just signed it one day. It was probably April. I had thought about it and I was mentally at that level, I wasn’t physically ready to do it. It felt a little bit impulsive, but it was the right thing to do and inevitably, our system was so terrible that they had sort of reserved these slots for other teaching programs versus again a teacher like this one.

Although Kaitlin’s decision was spontaneous, it was not easy: “I kind of battled with that situation, where I wasn’t necessarily exactly ready to leave my position and didn’t know what it meant to sign on that line—that I would be withdrawn from the school district.” However, Kaitlin eventually made peace with her decision to leave:

I think it was the right thing to do. I’m not sure if I was really cut out for it. I was intellectually stimulated by a lot of other things than teaching. . . . And I definitely had regrets. I mean, I was here for 2 years, why didn’t it get better or you know, could have made more progress or done things differently, but I was definitely mostly at peace.

Kaitlin then transitioned to working for an educational philanthropy foundation and later to managing the city council campaign for a local politician.

Discussion and Implications

Susan and Kaitlin both came to TFA with the hope and promise of doing “good work” within a community. As White women (nature-identity), they both sought out opportunities to provide service to marginalized communities. Their missions ultimately aligned with TFA’s focus on educational inequity, and this drew them into this particular organization. Yet, right from the start, both developed very different approaches to constructing their identities. Upon acceptance, both Susan and Kaitlin were considered TFA corps members through both an institution-identity and affinity-identity. However, Kaitlin embraced the TFA corps member identity, viewing it as filled with prestige and purpose, whereas Susan explicitly resisted it. At no time did Susan refer to herself as a TFA corps member, as she wanted her institution-identity to be “teacher” and her affinity-identity to be “foot soldier.”

Essentially, Susan’s resistance to being known, called, or labeled as a TFA corps member resulted in identification not as a TFA corps member but instead as a teacher. This private form of resistance was revealed only in semantics, but this subtlety belied a deeper agency by which Susan shaped her own identity (Glazer, 2018). Ironically, it was resistance that led to Susan’s identification as a teacher (Figure 1). This might account for the fact that Susan stayed in teaching for 6 years, almost twice the national average for an urban teacher (Ingersoll, 2003b). It was
only due to district circumstance that she decided to explore other opportunities as a “foot soldier” within the community. Even in her new position, Susan was not opposed to someday returning to the classroom. Essentially, Susan’s active resistance to identifying as a TFA corps member enabled her instead to identify as a teacher.

Conversely, Kaitlin embraced the institution-identity and affinity-identity of a TFA corps member. There were times of tension, as when Kaitlin discovered the accepted norm of TFA corps members leaving following their 2-year commitments. But Kaitlin continued to accept the identity of a TFA corps member and adopt the accepted TFA model of 2 years in the classroom. Kaitlin’s identity as a TFA corps member ultimately underwent what Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) referred to as praxis shock. She was confronted by the realities and expectations of a teacher, and since she did not see herself as a teacher, Kaitlin struggled to construct a professional identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Kaitlin instead adapted “strategic compliance” in terms of the program’s expectations and identity making (Flores & Day, 2006; Schaefer, 2013a). Schaefer explained that

alternative programs such as Teach for America and Teach First in the UK offer different routes into education. The multiplicity of teacher education programs offered makes it difficult to generalize how teacher education shapes beginning teachers’ experiences from different institutions. (p. 265)

He argued that, at the end of the day, beginning teacher attrition involves identity making and identity shifting. Susan’s and Kaitlin’s storied experiences show how, in these cases, the adoption of or resistance to identifying as a corps member shaped their career paths and illustrated the ways in which individuals negotiate their professional lives through those understandings (Savickas, 2012).

Organizationally, TFA promotes both an institute-identity and an affinity-identity among its members by identifying them as corps members rather than as

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**Figure 1**

*Participant Model of Identity Development*

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<th>Identity making</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TFA Corps Member</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFA Alumni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Savickas, 2012*
teachers or some variation thereof (e.g., preservice teacher, novice teacher). Thus, although corps members do teach students in a classroom, they are not designated “teachers.” Instead, the mission to promote educational equity appears to outweigh the focus on instruction by highlighting corps members as leaders rather than as teachers. For example, on its homepage, TFA defines itself as “a diverse network of leaders who confront educational inequity through teaching, and work with unwavering commitment from every sector of society to create a nation free from this injustice.” After the program is over, the members’ institution-identity and affinity-identity shift to TFA alumni, “whether they stay in the classroom or pursue a different career,” rather than to the identity of a classroom teacher.

To change that, TFA could begin calling its members “teachers” to emphasize the fundamental nature of their day-to-day work. Adopting language that identifies individuals as teachers, rather than as corps members, might facilitate an identity shift that could influence individuals’ career paths toward greater longevity in the classroom. We know from previous research that career development generally and early career attrition in particular are identity-making processes (Clandinin et al., 2015; Schaefer, 2013b). A simple change in language from “corps member” to “teacher” might support the development of a teaching identity as one of many steps toward reducing teacher attrition. Although this singular term does not encapsulate every aspect of a person’s identity, identity language is vital to understanding our societal roles, and the modification of this identity language may encourage those teachers to reconceptualize their roles and remain in schools.

Changing the language and, ultimately, the identification with teaching could be positive not only for TFA corps members but for the teaching profession overall. Maier (2012) noted that TFA provides a “selective, high-status, and also networked” (p. 13) career opportunity for its members. In essence, it is the nature of belonging to this empowered and interconnected group that gives TFA its strength, rather than the structure of the organization, the training, or the placements themselves. By identifying more directly with teaching, rather than amorphous social justice or equity themes, TFA might be able to use its power to raise the prestige of teachers in urban communities across the United States and internationally. Many voices have called for greater respect and status for teachers (e.g., Barber & Moursched, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Drudy, Martin, Woods, & O’Flynn, 2005; National Education Association, 2003), something that TFA corps members currently possess. By lending the selective, prestigious, and networked nature of its community to the larger teaching profession, TFA may be able to demonstrate its respect for teachers and the education profession more broadly.

Likewise, teacher educators may be able to learn from TFA’s methods to create a similarly selective, prestigious, and networked community within their own programs. Although numerous education policies have endeavored to raise the status of teaching through high-stakes credentialing tests, entrance requirements, and performance assessments (Zeichner, 2003), teaching today struggles with the
same low status it did a generation ago (Hargreaves, 2009). Teacher educators can use some of the selective and networked methods from TFA to facilitate an institution-identity and affinity-identity among preservice teachers that promote pride in the work and connection to the field over time. In this way, traditional preparation programs and alternative preparation programs can work collaboratively to share strengths and methods in the quest to foster teaching identities that will sustain and center educators over time.

Notes

1 Names of all study places and participants are pseudonyms.
2 See https://www.teachforamerica.org/
3 See https://www.teachforamerica.org/

References

Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting

Falmer Press.


Teacher Identity Making, Shifting, and Resisting


Examining Equitable Practices Within Teacher Preparation

Rebekka J. Jez

Abstract

The articles within this issue of Teacher Education Quarterly examined the role and impact of equity within teacher preparation. Each author described a commitment to preparing teachers with equitable, social justice minded practices to meet the needs of the diverse learners in U.S. classrooms, yet, demonstrated a need for a closer look at how teacher education programs are preparing educators for this work. This article poses the question: How are teacher education programs that identify as social justice leaders providing preservice teachers with opportunities to move theory into practice with integrity?

Introduction

policies and practices within teacher preparation to meet the needs of the increas-
ingly diverse population of learners within our school systems. Then in 2006, 
Darling-Hammond called for 21st century teacher preparation to include critical 
components such as coherence between coursework and clinical practice, peda-
gogies that link theory to practice, and intentional relationships with schools that 
effectively serve students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. 
Yet, as more and more programs claim a dedication to social justice and equity, 
evidence indicates there is a disconnect between the intentions of teacher prepara-
tion programs and how teachers are educating students from diverse backgrounds 
(Gay, 2013; Howard & Aleman, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The articles in this 
issue illustrate the ongoing commitment to and challenges with centering teacher 
training on appropriate content knowledge, pedagogy, dispositions, and equitable 
practices to effectively meet the needs of all learners. The following sections use 
the lens of equity to examine preparation of teachers to support diverse learners 
and the impact of teacher identity on retention.

Preparing Teachers

Many teacher education programs state their dedication to preparing socially 
just and culturally responsive educators who are ready to teach students from racially 
and ethnically diverse backgrounds, emergent bilinguals, and students with differing abilities. Whereas 82% of the teaching force is White, over half of the student population in K-12 schools are not White (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, there is an increase in learners who speak languages other than English, while the majority of teachers are monolingual English speakers (Bacon, 2020). Moreover, national educational policies call for teachers to implement practices to improve outcomes for low-achieving students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Which leads to the question, how are teacher education programs preparing preservice teachers to work with students from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse backgrounds?

Teacher preparation programs strive for programmatic coherence by providing 
a clear vision statement, connecting theory to practice, developing core practices, 
and outlining comprehensive outcomes for their teacher candidates (e.g., Darling-
Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In this issue of Teacher 
Education Quarterly, Sandoval, van Es, Campbell, and Santagata (2020) examined 
the coherence between how teacher candidates defined equity in an assignment at 
the beginning of their teacher education program with an examination of equitable 
practices demonstrated in their performance assessment at the end of their program. 
By comparing the two touch points during the teacher candidates’ teacher prepa-
ration program, the researchers sought to find a relationship between the content 
students learned in their courses and the application of equitable practices within 
their clinical placement. The authors’ examination of their program’s coherence,
Examining Equitable Practice Within Teacher Education

through the lens of equity, brought attention to the publicized programmatic commitment to equity from theory to task. Because equity is a major tenet within the philosophy of the program described by the researchers, it would be useful to carefully examine the extent to which equity is presented, modeled, and assessed in all courses, assignments, and field experiences throughout the program. It begs the question, to what extent are teacher candidates aware of the sociopolitical context of the K-12 schools in which they are placed and provided with contextual strategies for enacting practices to promote equity within the field placements? How is the program explicitly embedding practices for promoting equity throughout praxis?

The next article by Mills, Villegas, and Cochran-Smith (2020) further challenged the educational and social inequities found in the research focused on preparing teachers to work with the ever increasing population of linguistically diverse students. Through their exploration of the literature, they too found a disconnect between teacher preparation programs’ desire to address issues of equity and the implementation of this work. Mills and colleagues questioned research designs that aimed to address equity issues with a variety of pedagogical approaches without questioning the power dynamic that preserves oppressive anti-immigrant and White supremacist forces within our education system. As they noted, although federal law requires support of multilingual students, each state can determine their own requirements for training teacher candidates. One area that could be provided in their review of the literature is the locations in which the research studies were completed along with a summary of the states’ teacher education program requirements for supporting linguistically diverse students. Their work compliments the recent resurgence of attention for anti-racist pedagogy which calls for educators to not only acknowledge the historic roots of inequity, but also to explicitly incorporate race and inequities into course content, challenge constructs (White privilege) and context (institutions and interactions), and to move from ideas to outcomes that dismantle the current system and support historically marginalized groups (Kashimoto, 2018).

Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens (2020) continued to challenge teacher preparation programs in the context of clinical practice placements. They studied teacher candidates who struggled within their clinical practices due to feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities, not having enough support, negativity from mentors, a lack of autonomy in teaching, and/or imperfect feedback about their teaching. The authors proposed using co-teaching as a way to ameliorate the negative effects of an imperfect clinical practice experience. On the one hand, this solution engages preservice teachers and their mentors in co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing learners, which in turn provides additional guidance and feedback for the teacher candidate and the learners in the classroom have access to more help immediately. Research (Sailor, 2017; Williams & Ditch, 2019) has found that when co-teaching is used effectively, there are opportunities to increase equity for emergent bilinguals and students receiving special education services through increased access to strategies and support in learning content. That being said, co-teaching requires
buy-in, equal voice, co-planning time, and good communication skills. Although this practice could benefit those in precarious placements, additional training of teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and university supervisors is needed to ensure the implementation of such practices is smooth. Are schools and teacher preparation programs ready to integrate co-teaching within their programs? Simmons and Magiera (2007) found that when teachers are truly co-teaching there is equity within the roles for both teachers, increased individualized instruction and support for students, and compatibility between the educators. If implemented well, this synergy could be a solution to the inequities within the current models of teacher clinical experiences; however, additional training and support are essential in order for this approach to be successful.

**Teacher Identity and Retention**

The final article in this issue by Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) scrutinizes the Teach for American (TFA) teacher identity model. TFA is a program that partners with universities to provide alternative certification pathways for what they call corps members to earn a teacher credential while working in a high-needs school for two years. TFA is often seen as a stepping stone in a career as evidenced through the recruitment and retention data (more than half of the TFA corps members who leave at the end of the two year commitment). Mawhinney and Rinke examined the impact of the TFA identity of two corps members, one who taught for six years and initially shunned association with TFA and the other who embraced the TFA identity and only taught for two years. To their credit, both corps members were drawn to the TFA experience because of their dedication to addressing the educational inequities within society. Yet, similar to Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens’ (2020) description of teacher candidates who struggled with their imperfect clinical placements, the corps member with the brief teaching career described her job as having “unrelenting challenges” within her placement. This may be a result of the lack of teacher field experience prior to being placed as the teacher of record in a classroom (145 hours of preservice preparation in the TFA program versus 1,206 hours in a traditional teacher preparation program), the short-term TFA educational structure, or, as the authors suggested, the institutional identity of being a “corps member” versus a “teacher.”

For these reasons, alternative pathway teacher certification programs, such as TFA, need to determine whether the fast-track system with fewer clinical hours and condensed coursework structures create inequitable experiences for the teachers as compared to traditional pathways. What is the impact for the learners within corps members classrooms? In addition, how are the schools impacted by employing teachers who have not had as much training, experience, and may have less of a commitment to the teaching profession? How are these alternative pathway programs training educators on equitable teaching practices necessary to disrupt
Examining Equitable Practice Within Teacher Education

the oppressive educational systems within historically marginalized communities? Furthermore, how are programs like TFA equipping teacher candidates with the pedagogical skills necessary to sustain a career in education and shift the TFA narrative of being a resume-building stepping stone?

Recommendations

All teacher education programs, especially those that identify as social justice focused, benefit when they examine the coherence between what they say they do and what their teacher candidates actually do in the field. Beyond meeting accreditation bodies’ requests for evidence of coherence, institutions have an ethical responsibility to think critically about how they are preparing preservice teachers to address inequities within the education system. To this end, it is important for teacher preparation programs to define social justice. Within this issue, Sandovol, van Es, Campbell, and Santagata (2020) explained the need to connect aspects of education to the sociopolitical environments (Hand, 2012) by framing students’ orientation to and participation in the education system using social justice (Freire, 1972; Gutstein, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Whereas, Mills, Villegas, and Cochran-Smith (2020) highlighted the power schools hold in reproducing social inequities and the need for teacher training programs to prepare preservice teachers in pedagogical interventions designed to support learners in linguistically diverse classroom from a social, political, and institutional lens of social justice. Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens (2020) furthered the discussion concerning the impact of power within teacher preparation and proposed addressing parity between teachers and student teachers through the co-teaching model. Finally, Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) discussed the powerful impact of TFA corps members’ image of promoting social justice and equity themes outweighing the development of their pedagogy and identity as a teacher.

Despite social justice and equity themes appearing across various teacher preparation programs, how programs are executing this work varies. Equally important for teacher preparation programs is to explicitly define what they are doing to prepare teachers with skills to disrupt and dismantle systemic oppression. The power dynamics described in this issue within recruitment, clinical practice, pedagogical development, and program coherence all play a part in sustaining the status quo of educational, social, and political inequities. By following the recommendations on how to be an anti-racist educator presented by scholars such as Ibram X. Kendi (2019) and Dena Simmons (2018), institutions can start to challenge the current systems and truly live out the actions written in their mission and vision statements.

Researchers from teacher education programs need to challenge their adherence to the status quo through examination of power dynamics within future studies. Educators trained in pedagogy to support diverse populations help not only students
with individualized needs but all students and families within the community. Innovative models, such as co-teaching, have the potential to aid the development of preservice teachers and veteran teachers alike. Yet, buy-in, designated planning time, and communication skills are necessary to see these approaches succeed. In addition, schools and teacher preparation programs need to ensure training and support are a part of the transition from traditional teaching and learning systems. Finally, a reexamination of the impact of how third-party teacher preparation programs such as TFA construct teacher identity is needed to determine whether these programs are equitable for learners, their families, and ultimately the schools.

References


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within and beyond the classroom. Race Ethnicity and Education, 21(4), 540-554.
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