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MANAGING EDITOR
Elda E. Martinez

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Debby Shulsky

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Elda E. Martinez is the Director of Teacher Education and Professor at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. Elda earned a Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Trinity University and a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University. She completed ten years of classroom teaching in both general education and special education settings. Elda's work in teacher preparation is focused in special education, learning disabilities, and teacher induction. She also serves as copy editor for *The Texas Forum of Teacher Education*.

Elda served CSOTTE as TxATE President (2011-2012), TDFE Secretary (2015-2017), and as the TxEP Managing Editor (2017, 2018).



Debby Shulsky, Associate Professor in Curriculum and Instruction also serves as the Program Coordinator for Teacher Education at the University of Houston-Clear Lake in Houston, Texas. Her scholarship explores social studies education and has been published in international, national, and state journals. Debby's numerous service roles have included ATE Award and Honors Committee membership, TxATE board member, and editor of the 2016 TxATE publication, *The Texas Forum of Teacher Education*.

Debby served CSOTTE as TxATE President (2017-2018) and the Associate Editor of the 2018 TxEP.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

TxEP: Texas Educator Preparation is the official publication of the Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education (CSOTTE) and was established to continue disseminating research associated with the preparation and development of Texas educators. The 2018 edition includes invited contributions from 2017-2018 CSOTTE Board Chair, Marlene Zipperlen. Every year, one of the CSOTTE organizations is invited to include an article addressing relevant work the organization is addressing. The Texas Association of Teacher Educators (TxATE) contributed to the journal this year. Six additional peer-reviewed manuscripts provide pragmatic and research-based insight.

Marlene Zipperlen's reflection presents a context for the conference theme, "Progressive Discourse: A Time for Leadership". This theme challenged us to engage in discourse and to act. Dr. Zipperlen provides an overview of recent issues impacting Texas educators and students. Specifically, she mentions Pre-Kindergarten programs, dual-credit courses, and high-stakes testing.

For this year's publication, Debby Shulsky, 2017-2018 President of the Texas Association of Teacher Educators (TxATE), in conjunction with TxATE board members, brings forth the importance of advocacy. This piece outlines TxATE advocacy groups and their continued efforts. Texas teachers and faculty members are invited to join this organization and to contribute to TxATE's advocacy efforts.

Betty Coneway, Sang Hwang, Leigh Green, Jill Goodrich, and Emilee Egbert present "Early Educational Intervention for At-Risk Students: A Preliminary Report of the Long-Term Impact of the Opportunity School Preschool Program". They share the results of a collaborative longitudinal research project which examines long-term impact of early childhood educational interventions.

Beth Garcia and Betty Coneway's article, "Using Baseline Assessments to Better Prepare Preservice Candidates for State Certification Exams", examines the implications of using baseline assessment data to drive purposeful instruction and targeted use of supplemental intervention to impact teacher candidate growth.

Rebecca Putman, Anna Fox, Lisa Colvin, and Melissa Becker discuss preservice teachers' use of professional texts in their article, "Marrying Theory and Practice: Using Professional Learning Communities to Connect Preservice Teachers with Professional Literature".

Maria de Lourdes Vilorio and Selina V. Mireles provide a theoretical framework for the investigation of after school activities and an analysis of current standards-driven exams in their article, "Teachers and School Leaders Coalescing to Balance the High-Stakes Assessment Field for Underprepared and Underrepresented Mexican American Students in Mathematics".

George Willey, Stacy Hendricks, and Scott Bailey's article, "Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Evaluations Prior to Clinical Teaching", investigated the perceptions of aspiring teachers at a regional university regarding the teacher evaluation process prior to beginning clinical teaching placements.

Kevin Williams examines new teachers' perceptions of their readiness to use technology in his article, "Technology Preparedness of PK-12 Teachers in Texas: Satisfaction Level of Technology Training in Teacher Preparation Programs".

The editorial team is pleased to present the 2018 TxEP and we invite Texas teachers, practitioners, and researchers to contribute to the 2019 edition of TxEP.

Elda E. Martinez, Ed.D.

*University of the Incarnate Word
Managing Editor 2018*

PROGRESSIVE DISCOURSE: A TIME FOR LEADERSHIP

The CSOTTE Chair's Reflection

Marlene Zipperlen, Ed.D.
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
CSOTTE Board Chair, 2017-2018

We left the CSOTTE Conference one year ago with the challenge that Texas Education must advocate for education by communicating to our critics: 1) who we are and 2) the importance of education for the future of Texas. It is a time for Progressive Discourse: A Time for Leadership. I hope that you felt you contributed to the efforts within your sphere of influence since the meeting in October of 2017.

While our organizations are teacher preparation centered, we must be aware of the events in Texas that may influence those who choose to enter the teaching profession. Two immediate issues that loom over the state deals with educating migrant children housed in federal residential facilities and a statewide pattern of delay or denial of special education services for many students because of a decade of setting a benchmark of 8.5 percent identifying indicator. Both issues are tied to funding from the state and federal dollars, and they could influence those who seek certification in these fields of study.

Other issues in the state of Texas that may influence recruitment and are ripe for progressive discourse include:

Pre-K Programs - In 2015, the lawmakers approved a pre-kindergarten grant program aimed at improving the quality of early childhood education. The question for lawmakers in 2017 is whether to continue the grant, including the funding in the school formula, or scrap it entirely. The temporary funding keeps many districts from hiring staff to reduce class size.

Dual Credit Courses - Raymund Paredes, Texas' Higher Education Commissioner, expressed concern that dual-credit courses are not challenging enough. There have been problems with dual-credit courses automatically translating into college credit at the state's public colleges and they have been reported to count as electives.

High Stakes Testing - The committee ordered by the 2015 legislature to study assessments and accountability recommended several changes in an August 1 report. The committee's proposal included allowing the use of locally developed writing exams, instead of the standardized exams that are part of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. The STAAR writing exams are given in grades 4 and 7 and in high school. There are no definitive recommendations at this point.

As I stated in my introduction to the conference last year, it is indeed a time for leadership, and leadership does not have to wear a title. Make sure you are involved in the issues that represent the future of education in Texas.

TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHER EDUCATORS: THE ADVENT OF ADVOCACY GROUPS

TxAATE: Representing the CSOTTE Organizations

Debby Shulsky

TxAATE President, 2017-2018

Contributors:

Gina Anderson, Sheila Baker, Kimberly Dickerson, Karen Dunlap, Veronica Estrada, Becky Fredrickson, Jim Van Overschelde, Elizabeth Ward, and Patrice Werner

Empowered advocacy has been a central theme of many educational conferences over the course of this last academic year. Beyond the conference circuit, we have seen teachers, teacher unions, and educational organizations advocate for the profession through marches, petitions, legislation, political races, and policy development. This “movement” of advocacy in education is a clear sign that a collective understanding has mobilized, and an amplified voice is needed to make a difference in education.

Within this context, many professional organizations have elected to engage in professional conversations that explore ways in which educators can strengthen the impact of their collective voices within the political sphere. In Texas, the Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education (CSOTTE) is the epicenter for such an endeavor. Comprised of 10 state organizations, CSOTTE offers a powerful forum in which individual organizations, with very unique purposes regarding effective teacher preparation, can unite behind common causes. The Texas Association of Teacher Educators (TxATE) facilitates a specific forum for the voices of teacher educators in regard to practice, leadership, and policy.

TxAATE is the only state organization for individual teacher educators that is affiliated with a national association, the [Association of Teacher Educators \(ATE\)](#). This partnership has supported our ability to work toward improving teacher centers, preservice preparation and practice, teacher certification, as well as state and national education programs. More specifically, TxATE focuses on the following objectives:

- actively promoting high standards for the professional preparation of teachers;
- actively assuming a public relations function in keeping members of the teaching profession, and lay citizens in general, informed as to the most desirable current standards in teacher education; and
- striving to maintain a high professional development of teachers and other staff personnel in the field of education.

Membership is diverse and inclusive to professionals who are concerned with improving the education of teachers in both the university and EC-12 contexts. We seek and embrace perspectives of college faculty and administrators, education students, school and regional service center staff developers, school-based teacher educators, classroom teachers, school librarians, district curriculum specialists, and school administrators.

This past year, TxATE was recognized as the ATE Outstanding Unit of the Year. This accolade is, in large part, due to the intentional focus and action of member-designed and -facilitated advocacy groups on topics imperative to our profession. The TxATE advocacy groups include:

Data, Evaluation, Accountability, and Research (DEAR) Group, led by Jim Van Overschelde of Texas State University. The purpose of this group is to support educator preparation programs (EPPs) with obtaining and analyzing the highest quality data to facilitate continuous program improvement decisions thereby increasing the quality and

effectiveness of new Texas teachers. The current goals guiding this group are:

- improving the quality and efficiency of data reporting to TEA;
- increasing the access to the high-quality data EPPs need for continuous program improvement;
- increasing the quality and effectiveness of Texas teachers.

Dispositions for Teaching Group, led by Patrice Werner of Texas State University. The purpose of this group is to share resources, critically examine advocacy initiatives, and develop appropriate advocacy actions related to the assessment of teaching dispositions for Texas educator preparation programs. The current goals guiding this group are:

- critically reviewing literature related to current theory, research, and practice regarding dispositions for teaching;
- creating a repository for resources and information of practice;
- proactively organizing and participating in conversations about state level expectations for dispositions assessment;
- organizing professional development regarding dispositions and dispositions assessment for Texas teacher educators;
- publishing and presenting work in state and national venues;
- making recommendations to state agencies and legislature.

Recruitment Group, led by Gina Anderson of Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this group is to collaboratively address how EPPs can improve recruitment efforts and increase enrollment in colleges and schools of education. The current goals guiding this group are:

- creating a recruitment strategy database and survey its use and effectiveness;
- establishing a professional forum to share information regarding recruitment;
- seeking ways to promote the profession of education as a career choice for those with strong academic records;

- seeking ways to increase the diversity of candidates;
- increasing enrollment in EPPs and documenting statewide successes.

Policy Group, led by Becky Fredrickson of Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this group is to be included in conversations at the state level regarding policy to make an impact in the profession. The current goals guiding this group are:

- building consensus regarding educational policy;
- becoming more informed on how to advocate for policy;
- developing relationships with key stakeholders including elected officials and appointed officials;
- becoming more vocal in contexts of influence.

TxATE advocacy groups offer an opportunity for educators in the state to collectively gather and take action for making a difference in the profession in ways that matter. As educators, we in TxATE encourage you to consider joining us in the conversation. Beyond the work of the advocacy groups, there are other ways you can be a part of this imperative dialogue:

- join TxATE ([Click here to join.](#));
- present at the annual TxATE conference every June in Austin, Texas;
- publish in the TxATE journal, *Texas Forum of Teacher Education*;
- attend TxATE general meetings at the CSOTTE and TxATE conferences;
- seek a leadership position in TxATE;
- engage at the national level as a member of ATE. ([Click here to join.](#))

Remember the wisdom of Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” (as cited in Lash, 1980, p. 489). Individually, we do great things, but now is the time to create critical mass and be the leading voice of education in Texas. We invite you to join TxATE in this gratifying and critical work!

EARLY EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

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Opportunity School

Abstract

Early childhood education is beneficial for all children because it can support children's perceptions of themselves as learners and facilitate a positive outlook on education. Early intervention is critical for at-risk students and may help overcome some of the disadvantages caused by poverty. This article shares the results of a collaborative longitudinal research project examining the long-term impact of early childhood educational interventions in a local area. The purposeful sample was taken from approximately 2,500 former preschool students who attended a private non-profit preschool between 1969-2000. The 98 participants included 68 former students and 30 parents. The findings from this mixed methods study provide insight into best practices associated with early childhood education. Conclusions from the study may support general preschool initiatives, guide early childhood provider decisions, and direct the path of programs who prepare future early childhood educators.

Keywords: best practices, early childhood education, teacher preparation

A child's early school experiences can inform their perception of themselves as a learner and help them develop a more positive outlook on education (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, & Rupiper, 2015). Children who attend preschool learn valuable social skills, acquire early literacy and numeracy skills, and gain important school readiness capabilities (Lasser & Fite, 2011). Both the short-term and long-term positive effects of preschool attendance for students of all income levels have been well-documented; however, these early educational interventions remain vital for at-risk students. An analysis of early childhood education revealed that only 40% of three- and four-year-olds in low-income families are enrolled in preschool, compared with 56% from more affluent households (Education Week, 2015). Several investigations highlight the positive benefits of early education intervention and its power to overcome some of

the disadvantages of poverty (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Campbell, et al., 2012).

Two of the oldest and most well-cited U.S. early childhood interventions were conducted in the mid- to late-1960s and early 1970s. The High Scope/Perry Preschool study investigated both the short- and long-term effects of high-quality preschool education programs for young children living in poverty (Schweinhart, et al., 2005). The Abecedarian Project, started in 1972, provided educational child care and high-quality preschool to children ages 0-5 from very disadvantaged backgrounds in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (The Carolina Abecedarian Project, n.d.).

Both the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project conducted initial and multiple follow-up studies of their students to discover the power of preschool intervention programs for low-income children and their families. The longitudinal results from these two

intervention programs reveal that high-quality early childhood intervention positively impacts students' readiness for school and their subsequent educational success; as well as their economic success into early adulthood, and reduced criminal activity throughout their lives (Campbell, et al., 2002; Schweinhart, 2003). Tucker-Drob (2012) reports preschool attendance can significantly reduce the achievement gap between rich and poor students at the state level. Reports from these national and state studies have been widely shared, but few longitudinal studies about early childhood education in local areas have been conducted. This collaborative research study sought to fill the gap by investigating the impact of preschool interventions on low-income children and their families in a targeted area of the Texas Panhandle.

One of Governor Greg Abbott's emergency legislative agenda items was "to improve early education opportunities in the state of Texas and to prioritize funding initiatives for early education" (Hope, 2015, para. 7). Additionally, the Texas legislature via House Bill (HB) 4 seeks to strengthen pre-kindergarten programs geared toward students from low-income populations, non-English-speaking homes, foster children, and military families (Svitek, 2015). In today's political arena, universal preschool initiatives are frequently being discussed or debated, and ongoing research is needed to examine the long-term benefits and outcomes on individuals who have experienced early education.

Opportunity School, located in Amarillo, Texas, was started by members of the First Presbyterian Church Sunday School at about the same time the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian Projects were launched. The school began in the winter of 1969 with a group of 15 young students from low-income families, one teacher, and an assistant teacher. Opportunity School has been in continuous operation since that time and has served approximately 4,000 students over the past 49 years (Opportunity School, 2018). The school previously conducted informal investigations to: identify two high-impact strategies that are utilized to help students be more successful; serve the whole child based upon his or her individual needs; and provide support to the student's family in understanding how they can best help their child learn (Opportunity School, 2018). However, no formal

research had been conducted to discover the lasting effects of attending this private, non-profit preschool.

To provide insight on this research topic, a mixed methods design was used to explore the impact of early childhood education on at-risk students in the Texas Panhandle. Conducting this study presented numerous logistical challenges; yet also revealed several positive outcomes of attending Opportunity School. Findings were extrapolated to make beneficial recommendations for early education initiatives, early childhood providers, and educator preparation programs (EPPs) that train new early childhood educators. This research study was unique because a wide variety of stakeholders worked collaboratively to collect and analyze the data in order to identify best practices in the field of early childhood education. University faculty, staff/board members of the Center for Learning Disabilities, administrators and teachers of the Opportunity School, former preschool students and parents, and university student researchers all worked on this project to discover the enduring influences that early childhood education has on a local community.

Literature Review

Ensuring that all youth are equipped and ready for educational success from an early age is a worthy goal. According to Lee (2014), poverty is an early indicator of potential educational problems regardless of race. Lee's (2014) study illuminates one dimension of this complex issue which is the timing of exposure to poverty. Research has shown that the impact of low socio-economic status in early childhood is detrimental due to young children's tremendous cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development during this sensitive-critical period (Lee, 2014; Magnuson, 2013). Lamy (2013) also provides a rationale for these gaps in school readiness and suggests that "preschool can provide the developmentally stimulating experiences that many children growing up in poverty lack" (p. 33).

Investigations have been conducted to determine the long-term influences of preschool programs. Lamy (2013) discusses the results of longitudinal studies reporting the long-lasting influences of three high-quality preschool programs: the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project study, the Abecedarian study, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. The results of these investigations found that

students who attended the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project scored higher on standardized tests, graduated from high school at the expected time at higher rates, were less likely to have been convicted of a crime, and had projected lifetime earnings that averaged approximately \$150,000 higher than the control group (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Students who participated in the Abecedarian Project also scored higher than control-group children on standardized tests and attended college at higher rates; while the females in the treatment group became teenage parents at almost half the rate of those in the control group (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Campbell, et al., 2002). The 2007 longitudinal study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) revealed that these Chicago preschool participants had greater rates of educational attainment, were more likely than their comparison counterparts to have higher-skilled jobs and presented overall lower rates of criminal behavior. These CPC students also exhibited a significantly lower rate for one or more symptoms of depression (Reynolds, Temple, & Ou, 2007).

Preschool attendance has been shown to be of benefit to all students, not only those coming from low-income families. Mashburn (2008) explains that high-quality early education is associated with overall academic, language, and literacy skill development. Park's (2008) research adds that early and direct preschool intervention provides the most positive benefits to children and their families. Our review of literature revealed many short-term and long-term advantages of preschool interventions; however, much of the research cited the well-known national studies of the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project. Limited literature was found regarding the long-term impact of state-funded preschool programs. Barnett, Lamy, and Jung (2005) reported that state-funded preschools across five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia) produced an increase in children's vocabulary and early math skills. They acknowledged that participants who attended the state-funded preschool programs also had a stronger understanding of print concepts and letter-sound associations; but there was no significant effect on children's phonological awareness skills. In our literature review, we were unable to locate research studies that focused on a specific geographic area, such as the Texas Panhandle, or reported on 40+ year longitudinal data from

a particular local non-profit preschool, such as Opportunity School.

Methodology

Research Design

The purposeful sample for this research study was selected from a database of approximately 2,500 former Opportunity School students who attended the school between 1969-2000. By contacting students who attended the Opportunity School before 2000, we ensured that the participants included in the study were currently at least 18 years of age or older. To examine the experience through different lenses, we also contacted the parents of these individuals. A mixed methods research design was utilized for this research study. Former student and parent surveys were conducted via telephone calls with past Opportunity School students and their families in order to ask questions and receive information related to the individuals' educational attainment; their employment, income, and marital status; their criminal history; school memories, and perceptions of the impact of the Opportunity School experience. The collected survey data was examined using basic statistics for the quantitative analyses. Responses to the open-ended interview questions were analyzed using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Merriam, 2009) to identify overarching themes and patterns of response.

The purpose of the study was to identify the long-term benefits and outcomes for individuals who experienced early preschool intervention at the Opportunity School. The specific research question addressed was: What has been the lasting impact of the Opportunity School on former students' lives?

Data Collection and Analysis

One of the most challenging aspects of this research study was locating the possible participants. Since the existing contact information for the former students was up to 48 years old, most of the original phone numbers and addresses were incorrect or no longer in service; therefore, the researchers and their assistants had to be very creative in locating the potential participants. After a preliminary attempt at calling the phone number listed in the student database, the researchers began using other means to find the former Opportunity School students. Some of their

investigative work included word of mouth; email blasts; Facebook messenger; the Opportunity School newsletter, website and Facebook pages; paid people search websites; and following up on a variety of connections and leads from family and community members. This investigative process took over a year to complete.

When a potential participant was located, a research assistant would then call to ask if the individual would be willing to participate in the 10-15 minute research survey. Using an IRB approved script, the research assistant would then explain to the former student or parent that their participation in the study would be completely voluntary and they would have the option to either skip questions or stop the interview at any time. If the participant agreed to take part in the study, the researcher or assistant would then pose each survey question to them. The participant’s responses were audio recorded and then transcribed into the Qualtrics survey software for secure storage and subsequent analysis.

After working on the task of locating and contacting potential participants for over a year, 98 surveys were eventually completed (68 former students and 30 parents).

The collected information was then organized and examined using a mixed methods research design. Basic statistical analysis was applied to evaluate the quantitative data. Qualitative research methods were used to determine themes and patterns discovered in the participants’ responses to the open-ended interview questions. Both data sets were organized, analyzed, and synthesized to report the findings.

Findings

The 98 surveys (68 former students and 30 parents) were completed by individuals ranging in age from 18 to over 50 years of age. The majority of people completing the surveys were African-American females.

The survey results revealed that most of the research study participants had attained some type of post-high school education (Figure 1), with the majority attending some college classes. Most respondents were currently employed in either a full- or part-time job (Figure 2). The approximate average annual household income of the student participants was below \$75,000 per year (Figure 3), and the majority of participants had not ever been convicted of a felony (Figure 4).

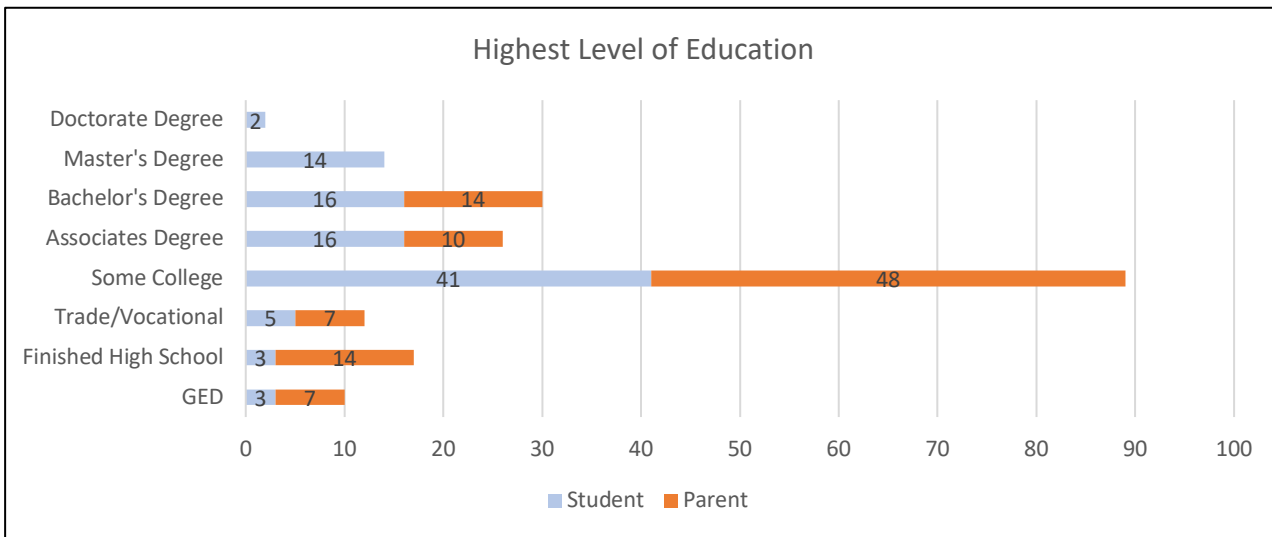


Figure 1: Study participants’ highest level of education.

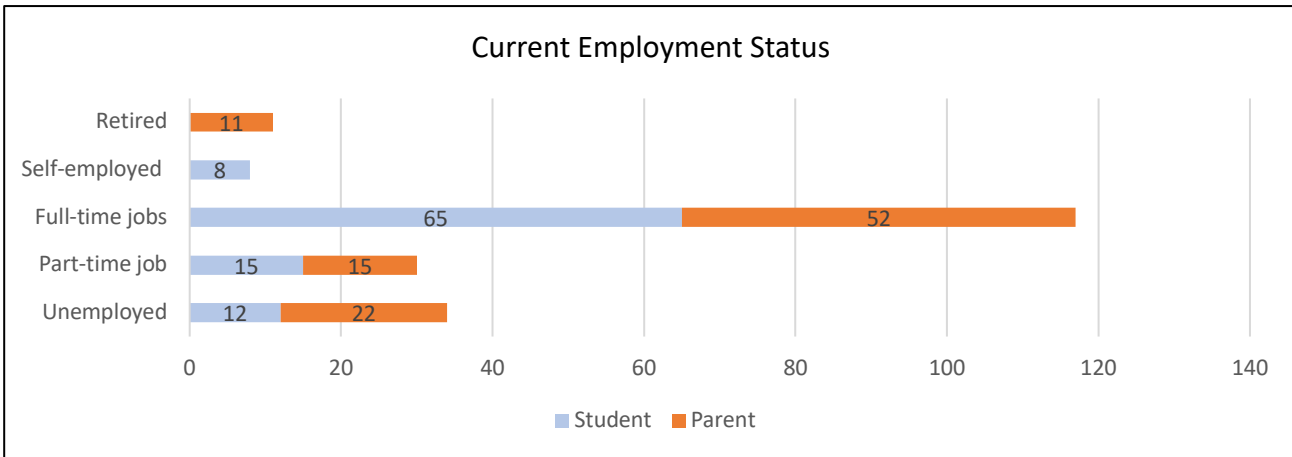


Figure 2: Study participants' current employment status.

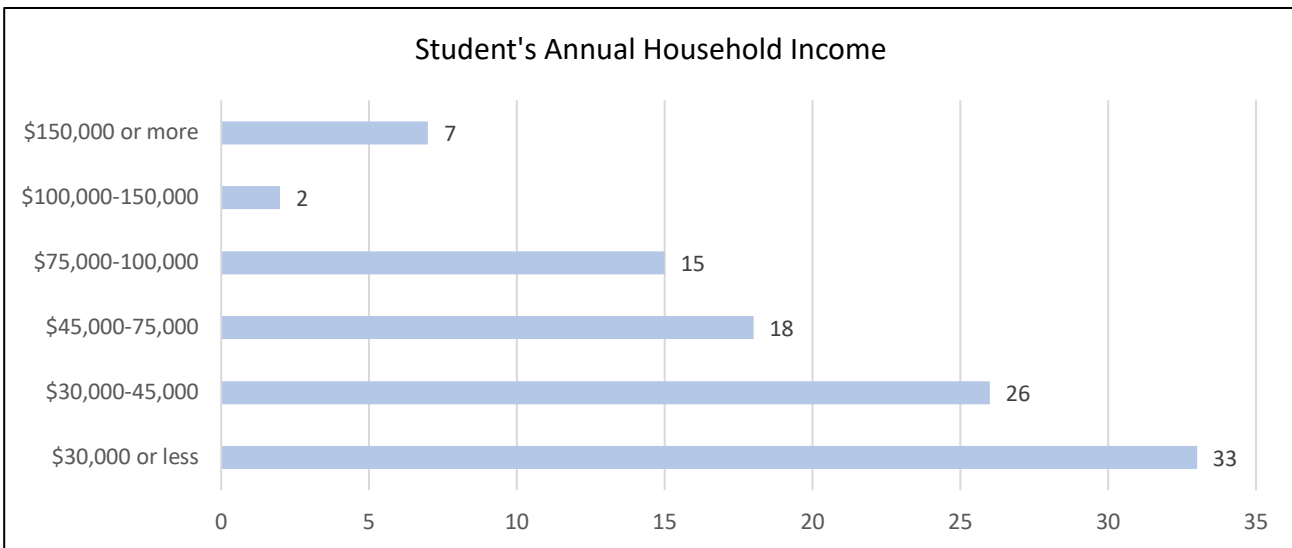


Figure 3: Study participants response to the student's annual household income.

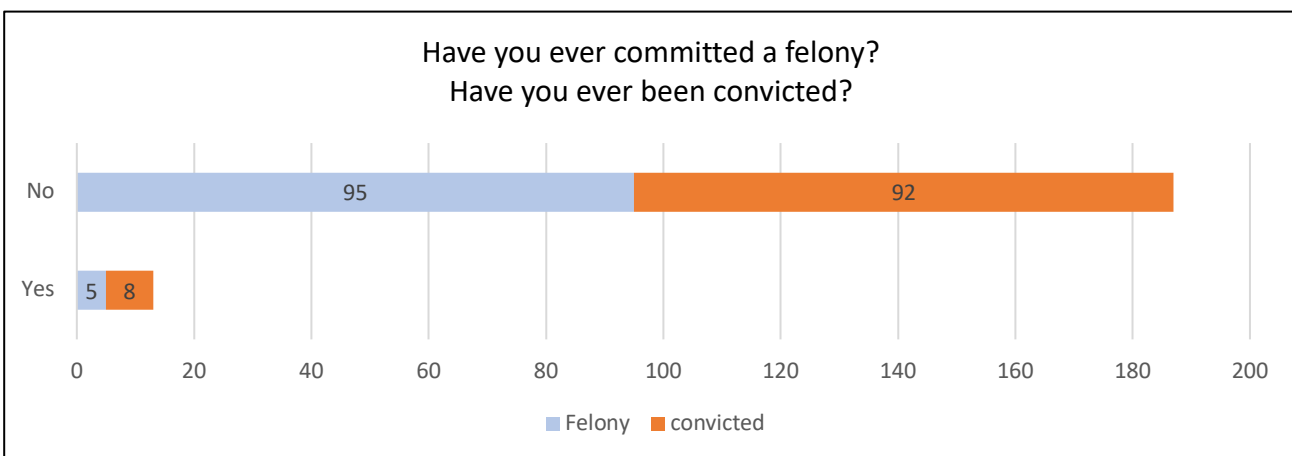


Figure 4: Study participants' response to felony convictions.

When participants were asked how influential the Opportunity School was in their lives, the majority of participants answered, “somewhat influential” or “very influential”. Survey respondents reported that the preschool supported them and their families by providing a safe and engaging learning environment, and through the development of caring relationships with both students and parents. Other important areas of influence cited were the provision of child care, meals, and transportation. Figure 5 presents all themes of support mentioned.

When asked about their memories of attending Opportunity School, many students recalled a social achievement, school event, or a fun school-sponsored activity. Many remembered cooking activities and riding the “bumpy blue and brown bus with a bunch of non-white children” (survey response). The Opportunity School teachers were mentioned positively many times. For example, one participant expressed, “She made sure I stayed on track and did what I was supposed to do in school. She was very influential in my life” (survey response). From the researchers’ field notes, it was noted that many former Opportunity School teachers were still in contact with former students and their families. Figure 6 presents all themes of participants’ memories.

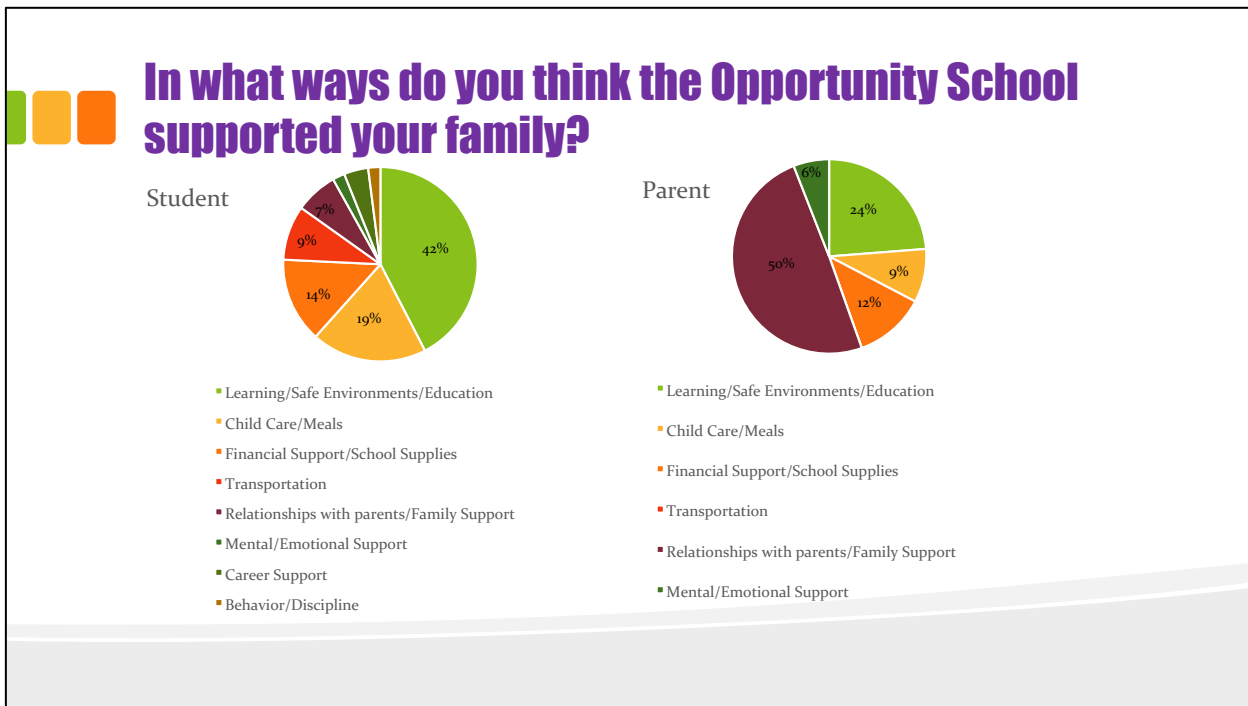


Figure 5: Themes of opportunity school support.

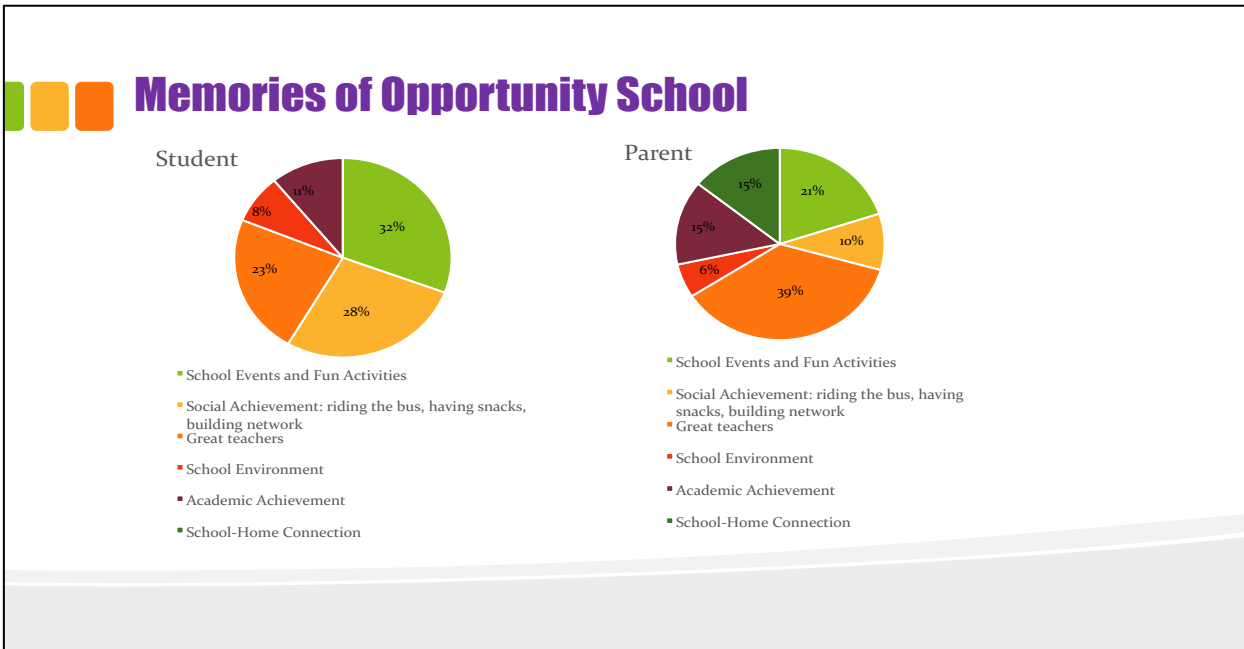


Figure 6: Memories of Opportunity School.

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study show that the Opportunity School has offered an ongoing and positive educational experience for this sample of former students and their families. The school leadership can use this research information to maintain the meaningful and memorable events and activities from the past and use the data to help guide program decisions that will continue to support at-risk students and their families in the future.

In more widespread terms, the conclusions drawn from the findings can be extrapolated to provide support for preschool initiatives, impact decision-making for early childhood providers, and influence university early childhood educator preparation programs (EPPs) by informing course learning outcomes and ongoing continuous improvements to their early childhood education program. Each of these general areas will be discussed.

Support for Preschool Initiatives

The results of this longitudinal research study can be added to other voices calling for more support and funding for preschool initiatives. With 66% of Hispanic children and 60% of African American children living in low-income households in the state of Texas (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2016), early childhood education

remains a critical component of assistance for economically disadvantaged children and their families (Coombs Richardson, Vafa, & Litton, 2017). Therefore, we concur with other researchers, such as Stephen Klineberg, co-director of Rice University’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research, in asserting that universal prekindergarten is vital and necessary (Baird, 2015). In response to this overwhelming need, government, public, and private entities will be called to address the overwhelming educational needs of at-risk children from poverty and immigrant families.

Impact Decision-Making for Early Childhood Providers

The findings support the lasting effects of providing engaging, hands-on, and interactive activities for preschool children. Activities such as cooking in the classroom, trips to the library, music programs, science and construction centers, and engaging outdoor learning spaces enhance the quality of early childhood programs. These types of developmentally appropriate practices are not only memorable, as suggested by the participants in this study, but vital to young students’ continual growth and learning (Kostelnik, et al., 2015).

Participants in this study frequently recounted ways the Opportunity School supported their families. They mentioned transportation, meals, scholarships, translation

services, and intergenerational educational supports. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, students’ and families’ basic needs must be met before significant learning can occur (McLeod, 2017). Consequently, the physical, safety, and psychological needs of students must be clearly addressed when making program decisions.

Parental involvement is another key area to address because it is essential to the success of any early childhood program. Many researchers concur that ongoing efforts to involve the entire family in the early education of a child will reap greater benefits (Slaby, Loucks, & Stelwagon, 2005; Park, 2008; Joo, 2010). Positive home-school relationships should be developed and continually nurtured through clear and consistent two-way communication.

Influence University Educator Preparation Programs

Preservice early childhood teacher candidates need to participate in specialized training and explicitly observe the developmental progression of young children, beginning with their future students’ first school experiences. We contend that early field-based experiences and observations should occur in a variety of settings, including child care centers and prekindergarten classes. These types of experiences will increase candidates’ understanding of young children’s development by highlighting their unique characteristics and the progression of human development. According to the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Preparation Standards (2010), “Research shows that when early childhood professionals have specialized training and education, children benefit” (p. 9).

To dependably prepare new early childhood professionals, programs must continually seek out innovative ways to develop candidates’ repertoire of teaching strategies. We recommend that preservice teachers expand their understanding of engaged learning to foster early educational motivation in all content areas. EPPs need to

enhance candidate knowledge of developmentally appropriate expectations, research and evidence-based assessments, and instructional practices relating to the growth of foundational literacy learning and early numeracy skills. Additionally, programs that train early childhood teachers should emphasize the importance of oral language development. Since oral language is the base of literacy development, teacher candidates must have a clear understanding of both primary and secondary language development, as well as knowledge about effective ESL teaching strategies.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

One of the greatest challenges to this research study was contacting former Opportunity School students and families that were scattered around the country. Therefore, the research sample was limited to those former students and parents that we were able to locate and contact. We acknowledge that the results may have been different for a different sample of participants. Another limitation of this study was that we did not have data from a control group in order to compare our findings. As a suggestion for future research, we could ask the survey questions to a random group of people who did not attend the Opportunity School preschool in order to compare the results. This data comparison could then be used to strengthen our findings.

Early intervention for at-risk students is a positive and effective way to impact individual students, their families, the local community, and society. The results of this longitudinal study confirm that Opportunity School has positively influenced the trajectory of the former students and parents contacted during this study. Thus, this research team echoes Duncan, Ludwig, and Magnuson’s (2010) statement, “All in all, we conclude that investing in selected early childhood interventions appears likely to be a very cost-effective way to reduce poverty over the long-term and . . . investments in such programs appear to have helped in this regard” (p. 28).

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USING BASELINE ASSESSMENTS TO BETTER PREPARE PRESERVICE CANDIDATES FOR STATE CERTIFICATION EXAMS

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Abstract

Refining the use of baseline data and targeted interventions to increase teacher candidates' performance on TExES certification exams has proven beneficial for one educator preparation program. Two faculty members highlight some of their course adjustments and program changes implemented in response to the new testing standards. The faculty members implemented baseline assessments to first ascertain which competencies their candidates needed the most direct instruction. The faculty used purposeful, explicit instruction to address candidates' needs according to the baseline scores. However, each faculty member utilized a variety of other resources to supplement their teaching and evaluations throughout two semesters of data collection. This article examines the implications of using baseline assessment data to drive purposeful instruction and targeted use of supplemental intervention to impact teacher candidate growth.

Keywords: Educator Preparation Program (EPP), testing, certification, accountability

In the new era of accountability in educator preparation, the adage, “test early and test often” no longer holds true as we prepare preservice teacher candidates to pass state certification exams. On September 1, 2015, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) implemented the five-test rule for certification exams to address changes to Texas Education Code §21.048 in response to House Bill 2205, 84th Texas Legislature (2015). Before this rule, Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) across the state of Texas encouraged preservice teacher candidates to prepare for required certification exams by taking the tests as often as possible until they obtained a passing score. Admittedly, this may have caused issues in certification where teacher candidates were taking the required exams before they even took college courses designed to prepare them for certification. When considering the consequences of these changes on undergraduate institutions and future educators, Angrist and Guryan (2008) found that, “Although state testing requirements are associated with an increase in the use of teacher tests and with higher teacher wages, there is little evidence that this translates into better teachers, at least along the quality dimensions we can measure” (p. 495).

To ensure that Texas classroom teachers are well prepared to teach and competent in the various content areas, they

must now pass all required certification exams in five attempts or less to be able to certify (TEA, 2017). The logic behind this is that Texas desires highly qualified teachers in each classroom and not those who finally pass an exam after many attempts. While this reasoning is understandable, and the outcome is worthwhile, House Bill 2205 has greatly changed the way EPPs prepare preservice teachers for certification exams.

Literature Review

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) exist to prepare effective teachers who will go on to impart knowledge to future generations of students; however, as Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009) point out, “teaching is complex work that looks deceptively simple” (p. 273). Adding to the intricacies of preparing new educators, we must acknowledge that preservice teacher candidates bring with them a myriad of prior educational experiences and have already been observing and watching teachers for over 12 years (Fajet, Bello, Leftwich, Mesler, & Shaver, 2005). Their previous student experiences leave an indelible imprint in their minds that may positively or negatively impact their philosophy of teaching or confound misconceptions when teaching specific content. Therefore, it is helpful to capture each teacher candidate’s

understanding of specific pedagogical and content knowledge at the beginning of a course in order to document their growth toward desired course learning outcomes, inform instructional foci throughout the semester, and authenticate student learning by comparing pre- and post- test data.

In our initial review of the literature, we found few articles that specifically addressed the use of baseline data at the course- or program-level in university educator preparation programs. Most of the research we examined seemed to be concentrated on using data in K-12 school systems or focused on documenting change or growth in more specific areas, such as special education or technology use.

After a deeper dive into the literature on this subject, we found that the discrepancy in the literature review may be because the term “data literacy” is now being used more often than “baseline data” to explain this process. Mandinach and Gummer (2013) describe data literacy as “the ability to understand and use data effectively to inform decisions” (p. 30). These authors highlight the importance of incorporating tangible evidence to make instructional decisions, while pointing out that there is a “growing need for data-driven decision making in programs in schools of education” (p. 30). The use of data literacy in education follows a trend established by the disciplines of medicine and business (Madinach & Gummer, 2013). Mandinach and Gummer (2013) identify and discuss four areas which may be driving the demand for more data-driven decision making within the field of education: “1) federal policy issues, 2) statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS), 3) local data systems, and 4) standards and accreditation processes that address data literacy” (p. 30).

This practice is also discussed in the literature using the catchphrase “data-driven decision making” (DDDM). Mandinach (2012) explains that DDDM is a generic process that can be used across all levels of education and uses a variety of data sources. An increased emphasis on rigor has made DDDM more important than ever over the past few years because “it is no longer acceptable to simply use anecdotes, gut feelings, or opinions as the basis for decisions” (p. 71). This is especially true in the area of special education. Brownell, Griffin, Leko, and Stephens (2011) examined collaborative educator preparation programs to determine the effectiveness of the special

education candidates’ preparation. These authors assert that teacher effectiveness depends on tighter linkages among theory, innovation, and expected teacher outcomes. They state, “Researchers must be able to define and measure the knowledge, dispositions, and skills underlying effective inclusive teaching, both for general and special education teachers” (p. 239). This type of measurement and linkage begins with collecting valid and reliable data at the course level.

It was noted that a highly researched sub-topic area of using baseline data had to do with the use of different technologies to support the development of preservice teacher candidates’ learning (Kennedy, et al., 2016). Perhaps, since data is more easily generated through the use of multi-media technologies or Internet software, there were many research studies located on this topic. For example, Kennedy, et al. (2016) reported on a study which examined the use of podcasts in teacher education. The study compared participants from three different universities who participated in content acquisition podcasts (CAP) to learn about curriculum-based measurement (CBM) strategies. The data collected from pretest, posttest, and maintenance assessments indicated that the teacher candidates who participated in CAP scored significantly higher on the CBM test items compared to the group who received text only instruction.

Dunlap, Piro, and Wang (2016) used action research methodology (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009) to study their own instructional practices to better understand how their teacher candidates were experiencing data literacy instruction in a preservice teacher education course and how their experiences might impact their future instructional choices. As a result of participating in an instructional intervention entitled “Data Chat”, four qualitative themes emerged: “pre-intervention beliefs, understanding and analyzing data, classroom data and instructional practices, and contextual uses of data” (p. 9). Similarly, this research study investigated the experiences of our own students and how the results will be used to monitor teacher candidates’ progress in content area knowledge, while informing instructional decisions in our teacher preparation courses and programs.

Background

Various teacher educators at a regional university in West Texas began using official, released TExES assessments as their final exams in methodology courses for preservice teachers in the educator preparation program (EPP). Soon, they realized that using these assessments, as the final exams for the courses did not provide enough data. The professors needed to see how much growth occurred due to targeted instruction and intervention opportunities provided by the EPP, and to what extent this instruction was effective. This highlighted the need for collection of baseline data followed by intentional and purposeful teaching based on the results of the pre-test.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was three-fold: a lack of data, a need for more intentional instruction, and limited documentation concerning student growth. The first area of need stemmed from the lack of data that the professors had concerning how their instruction was directly impacting student performance on state certification exams. While the professors made every effort possible to teach necessary content in a purposeful manner, without the data indicating areas of need, it was more of a guessing game as to what competencies and topics needed more instruction or focus. Additionally, without a baseline assessment, even if students passed the released practice exam, professors did not know how much growth a candidate had made as a result of course instruction; or, if a student failed by only a few points, it was unclear what growth was made during the semester.

The Process

Considering the empirical study conducted by Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2008) as a theoretical framework, the EPP at the regional university has reevaluated how to better prepare their preservice teacher candidates for certification exams. The faculty members have also reconsidered their role in providing interventions during different phases of exam preparation. As a result, this EPP started providing certification preparation events. During the 2016-2017 academic year, brown bag lunches and Certification Boot Camp were implemented to scaffold candidates' efforts in preparing for certification exams. Brown bag lunches were conducted once a week during each semester. Between

five and twenty-five preservice teacher candidates met with different professors each week during lunch. The professors reviewed content and test taking strategies during this time. Certification Boot Camp was offered near the end of each semester as well. This was a half-day preparation endeavor where multiple professors shared their expertise with candidates. Seventy-nine candidates registered and attended various sessions.

While these preparation activities were highly attended and very successful, the authors found that they needed to collect data that would document candidates' growth from both required coursework and the additional preparation activities. This study explains some of the certification preparation activities that the regional university engaged in during the 2016-2017 academic year and focuses on the on-going research being conducted in this area.

The authors found that they needed to institute a baseline exam to document where candidates began in their content and professional knowledge. They wanted to establish which areas of certification preparation ought to be enhanced and show a significant amount of growth from the baseline assessment to the point that candidates took the official TExES certification exam. To establish a baseline, the authors restructured two courses to more clearly align to the TExES competencies. At the beginning of these courses, candidates took an assessment such as the TExES practice exam, an exam on Certify Teacher, or an instructor created assessment before any content was taught. This established a baseline score and helped the professors understand the specific needs of their students. Several trends emerged from these baseline assessments. Two of the most significant trends include: 1) the need for more direct teaching on certain competencies, and 2) tailoring instructional interventions to small groups based on individual needs.

Once a baseline score was established, the professors analyzed the candidates' needs and tailored direct instruction throughout the semester to address these needs. In addition to professor instruction, study programs have been included such as Certify Teacher, PACT-Tarleton, and a variety of others. After the inclusion of direct teaching based on the needs illustrated in the baseline assessment, a similar version of the baseline assessment was given at the end of the semester as the final exam of

each course to show candidate growth. Throughout this research, the authors found significant growth from the baseline to the final assessment in the highlighted courses.

First Steps towards Data Collection

Initially, the researchers began collecting scores of the course final exams and documented how many candidates passed or failed. They soon realized that a baseline assessment was also needed to document growth. Each professor used direct teaching methods and a review unit to prepare candidates for the final assessment. Currently, the researchers have implemented a pre-test in each of their classes before the content learning takes place in the semester. Then, they teach the content of the course, include online study sites such as T-Cert or Certify Teacher, and offer half-day boot camp for candidates.

The boot camp was initiated as an intensive review before candidates took a certification exam. Professors from the university volunteered their time to teach intensive review sessions on particular testing topics. Each session lasted about one hour fifteen minutes, and candidates could take up to four sessions during the boot camp. Candidates verbally discussed this as helpful and felt they benefitted from the boot camp; however, specific data on improved TExES scores has not been correlated at this time. Candidates voluntarily attended the intervention event and received a free lunch after their sessions. This type of supplemental review takes a great deal of coordination and participation on both the faculty and candidates to make it successful. Therefore, the professors also began directing

more concentrated efforts into course re-alignment and data collection to indicate growth.

EDPD 4388: ESL Teaching Methods

Findings from the ESL Methods Course

Pre-Assessment. Practice TExES exams were given at the beginning of each semester on Certify Teacher before content was taught in the class and before candidates engaged in online study sessions.

Post-Assessment. Another version of the practice TExES exam was given as the final exam at the end of the semester using Certify Teacher. During the semester, candidates engaged in a learning unit created by the professor and individual study time on Certify Teacher. The professor then tracked how long the candidates studied on this program and in which activities they engaged.

Semester 1. In the fall semester of 2016, data was collected only from the final exam. No pre-test or baseline assessment was given to the candidates; therefore, growth could not be established in this semester. The professor gave a lengthy review at the end of the semester based on content she found relevant and necessary for the exam. Time used for individual study could not be measured or recorded, and more than half of the students failed the final exam using the minimum passing score of 240 and would have failed the official certification exam by a range of 10 points. Figure 1 illustrates the final scores from the first semester included in this study.

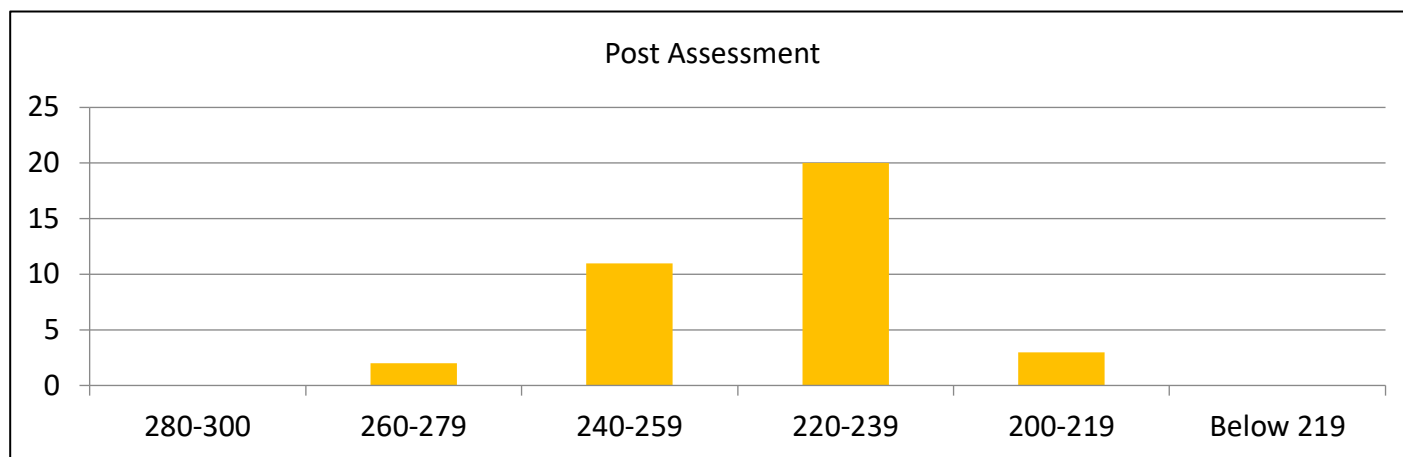


Figure 1. Post-assessment scores, fall 2016.

Semester 2. In the second implementation of data collection, a baseline assessment was given at the beginning of the semester, then a different version was given as the final exam at the end of the semester. Growth patterns were established in this data collection and more candidates passed the final exam. Figure 2 demonstrates

the growth pattern established in the second semester of data collection using more purposeful instruction and Certify Teacher as a supplemental study aide. Baseline scores are juxtaposed to the final scores on the assessment in this chart.

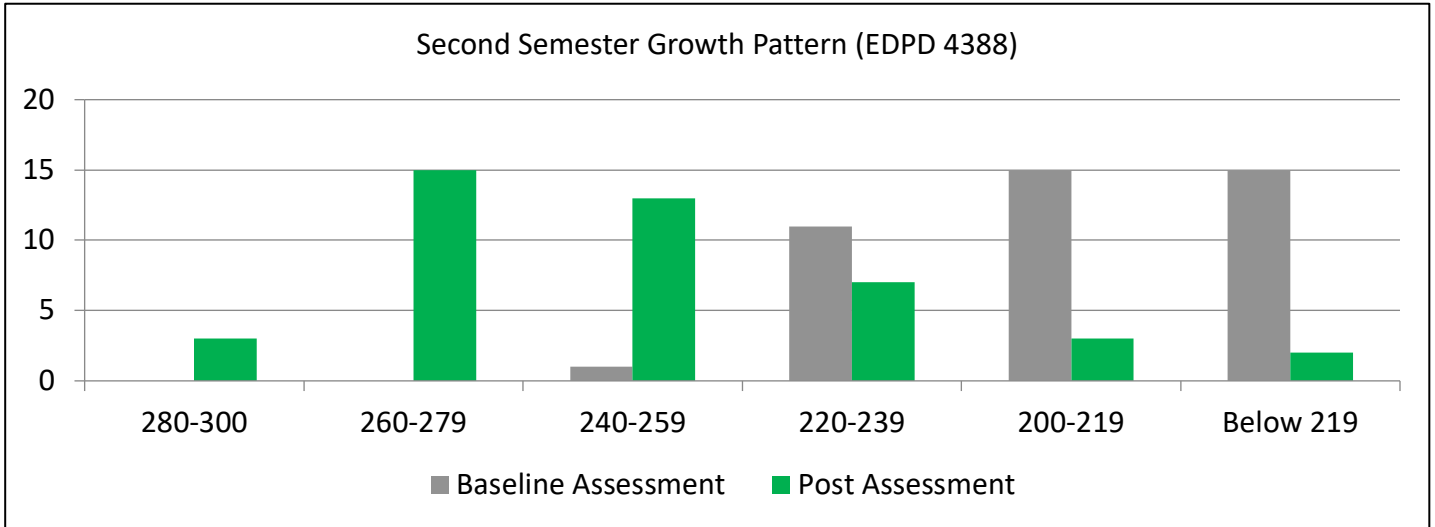


Figure 2. Baseline and final assessment scores, spring 2017.

Figure 3 is a comparison of the post assessment scores between the two semesters (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017) of data collection. This data clearly indicates higher scores and a more natural bell curve and distribution of candidate scores after the implementation of purposeful instruction based on candidate needs and supplemental resources.

Minutes spent in individual study directly correlated to better scores on the final exam. The researchers found that even a couple of hours of individual study time made a large difference in the growth of a candidate’s score as long as the study was spread over multiple days. Figure 4 shows a correlation between the time spent in study over multiple days to test scores on the post assessment.

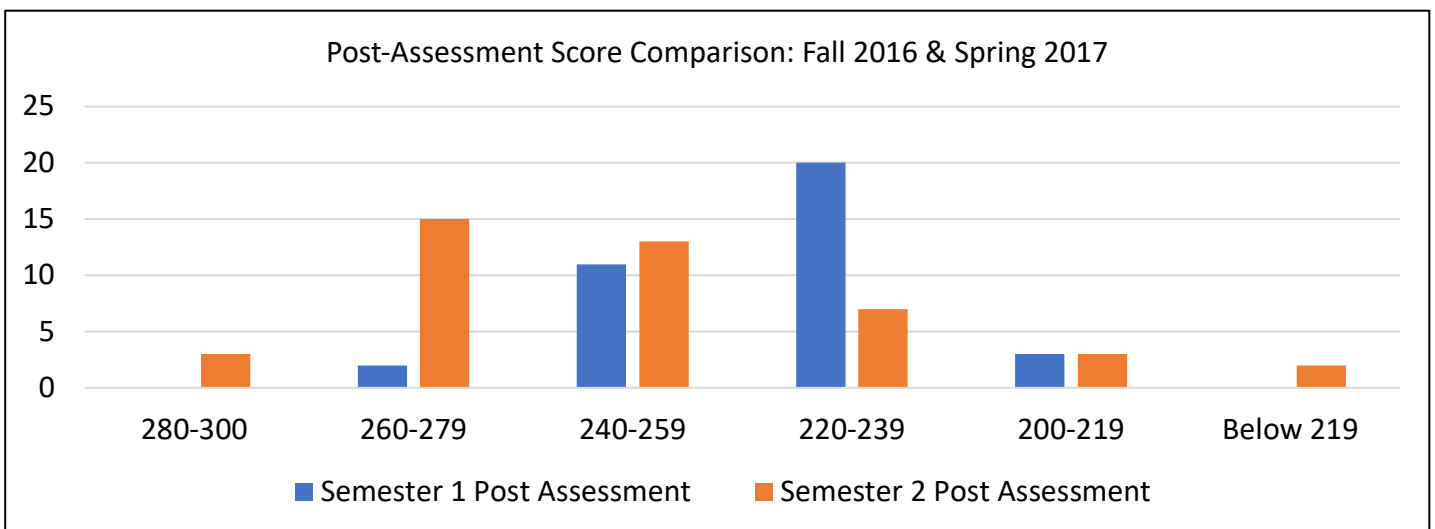


Figure 3. Comparison of post-assessment scores, fall 2016 & spring 2017.

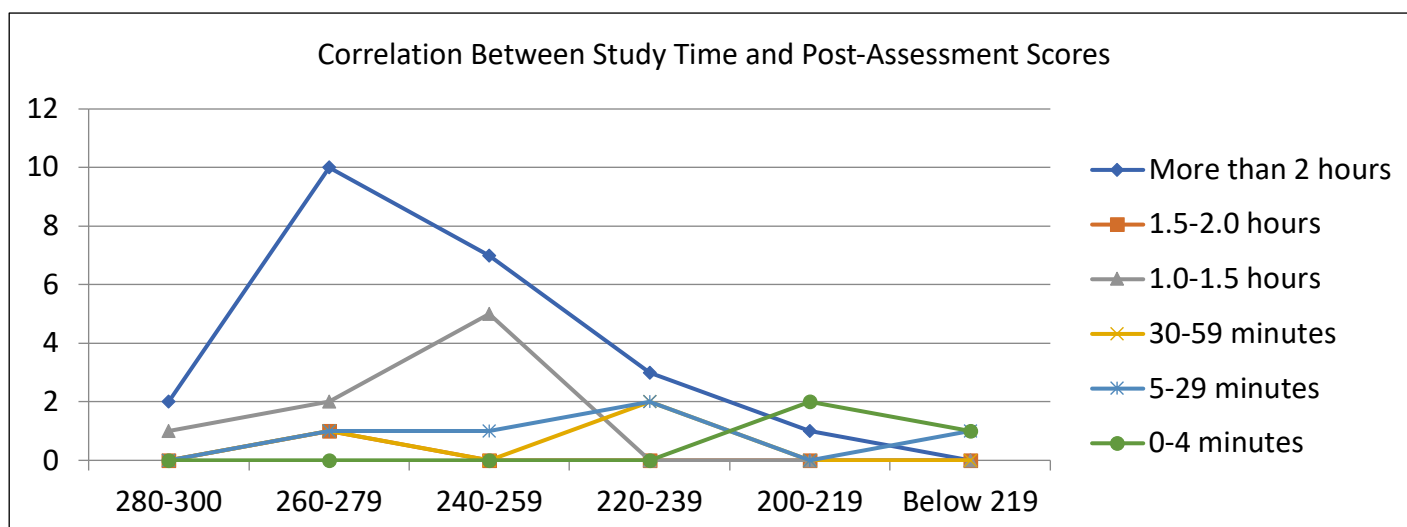


Figure 4. Correlation between study time and scores on post-assessments.

In the first semester, fall 2016, thirty-six total candidates took the post-assessment and no candidate took a baseline assessment. Fourteen of these candidates (38.9%) passed the assessment and would have passed the TExES ESL Supplemental #154 certification exam. Twenty-three candidates (63.9%) failed the post-assessment. Twenty of these candidates (55.6%) were within 10 points or 1-3 questions of passing. The second implementation occurred in the spring semester of 2017. Forty-three total candidates tested; forty-two took the baseline assessment. Only one candidate received a score equivalent to passing the TExES exam on the baseline assessment. On the post-assessment, thirty-one candidates passed (72.1%); twelve candidates failed (27.9%). However, thirty-eight scores increased even if the candidate did not receive a passing score. Only five scores (11.6%) stayed the same or decreased.

Of those who failed, only one candidate spent more than one hour over multiple days studying, and this student had a +52-point gain. Three candidates spent three or more hours studying the material but only over one-two days. Six candidates spent less than one hour studying in the period of one day, and two candidates had 0 minutes of study time. One candidate did not take baseline assessment and only spent 54 minutes studying the flashcards, so this participant saw no practice questions and did not pass the post-assessment.

Five scores actually decreased from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment; of those who decreased, all spent zero-one day studying and none spent more than 23 minutes in study beyond the unit in class. Two of these candidates had 0 minutes in 0 days of study time, and one had 1 minute in 1 day of study time.

Implications from the ESL Methods Course

Considering the data from the second semester, only one candidate would have been able to pass the official TExES exam without the modified course curriculum and implementation of Certify Teacher as a study and testing aid. Compared to the initial implementation of the practice exam in the previous semester that did not have a baseline, the students scored significantly higher on the second implementation with the added resources and more purposeful instruction. The professor could identify the competencies students struggled with on the baseline assessment and then used direct teaching methods concerning these concepts in class during the unit review. The professor of the course stated, “Analyzing the results from the baseline assessment took the guesswork out of preparing students for the final exam and the certification test. It allowed me to tailor the instruction to student needs”.

Considering Mandinach and Gummer’s (2013) data literacy, the use of an online supplemental resource such as Certify Teacher allowed collection of specified data such as

time spent in individual study. This allowed the researchers to correlate how much time a candidate spent studying, and over how many days, to a specific score on the assessment. The online, supplemental study tool created individualized study plans for each student and allowed candidates to practice on areas of need before retesting based on their baseline assessment performance. There was a direct correlation between time spent studying and an increase of scores to passing. There was also a direct correlation in spreading out the study time over multiple days versus cramming in one-two days of study right before taking the final assessment. There was no set amount of time or days required to study before the final assessment beyond the professor's direct instruction in class. Future consideration is to require a minimum of two hours of individual study time over the course of the final two weeks of the semester to be able to take the final exam. This finding is supported by Lotfolahi and Salehi (2016) who found in their research,

The spacing effect is a ubiquitous phenomenon, whereby memory is enhanced for the information that is learned across different points in time rather than being learned at once. A considerable amount of research has focused on the nature of the spacing effect, and there is general acceptance that spacing learning events out in time promotes learning. (p.1)

EDRD 3304: Structured Literacy

EDRD 3304 is a reading course designed to help teacher candidates learn about the prevention, intervention, and remediation of reading difficulties. Course content includes phonology and phonological awareness, sound/symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax, and semantics (University Undergraduate Catalog, 2017-2018). This course correlates to several Texas Education Agency (TEA) English Language Arts and Reading standards (4th-8th) and the Science of Teaching Reading for EC-6 certification. After noting weak areas on previous years' TExES practice tests, the instructors created a pre- and post-test, which specifically targeted these weaker competencies.

Findings from the Structured Literacy Course

The first baseline data was collected by the researcher for the Structured Literacy course during the summer 2017 semester. The researcher used a previously constructed pre-test developed for the course and it was administered to twenty-five undergraduate teacher candidates. At the end of the summer semester, the final exam was given as the post-test, and significant gains were noted for all skill areas. Aggregate data for the targeted literacy skills was calculated and the growth results were analyzed. The EDRD 3304 summer 2017 results of the pre-test and post-test can be seen in Figure 5 below.

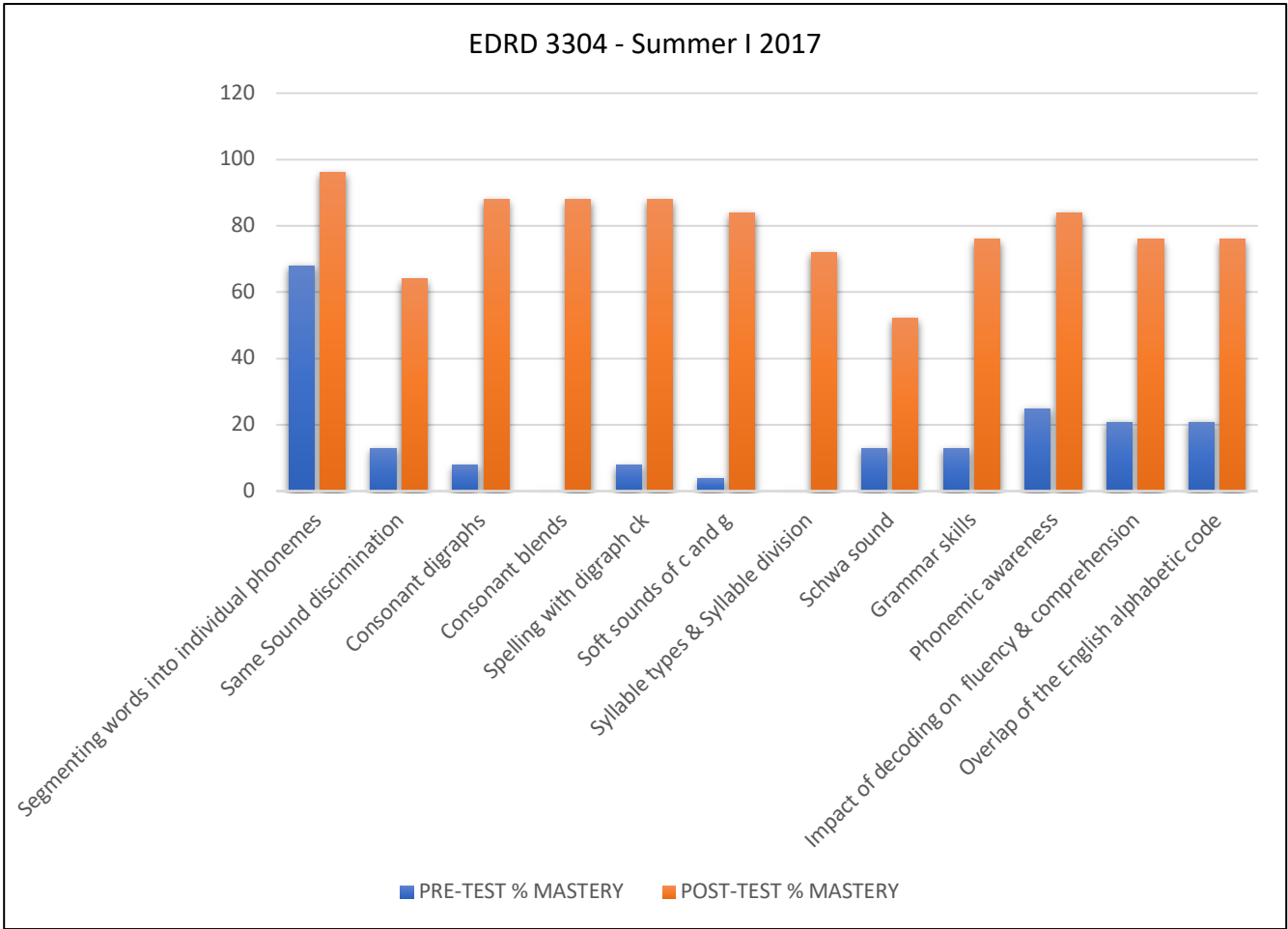


Figure 5. EDRD 3304 summer I 2017 comparison of pre- and post-test mastery levels.

For the fall 2017 semester, another course instructor and the researcher amended the pre-assessment and administered this revised exam to thirty undergraduate teacher candidates. At the end of the fall semester, the final exam was given as the post-test. Gains were documented

in most skill areas by analyzing the aggregate data associated with the targeted English language arts and reading skills. The EDRD 3304 fall 2017 results of the pre-test and post-test can be seen in Figure 6.

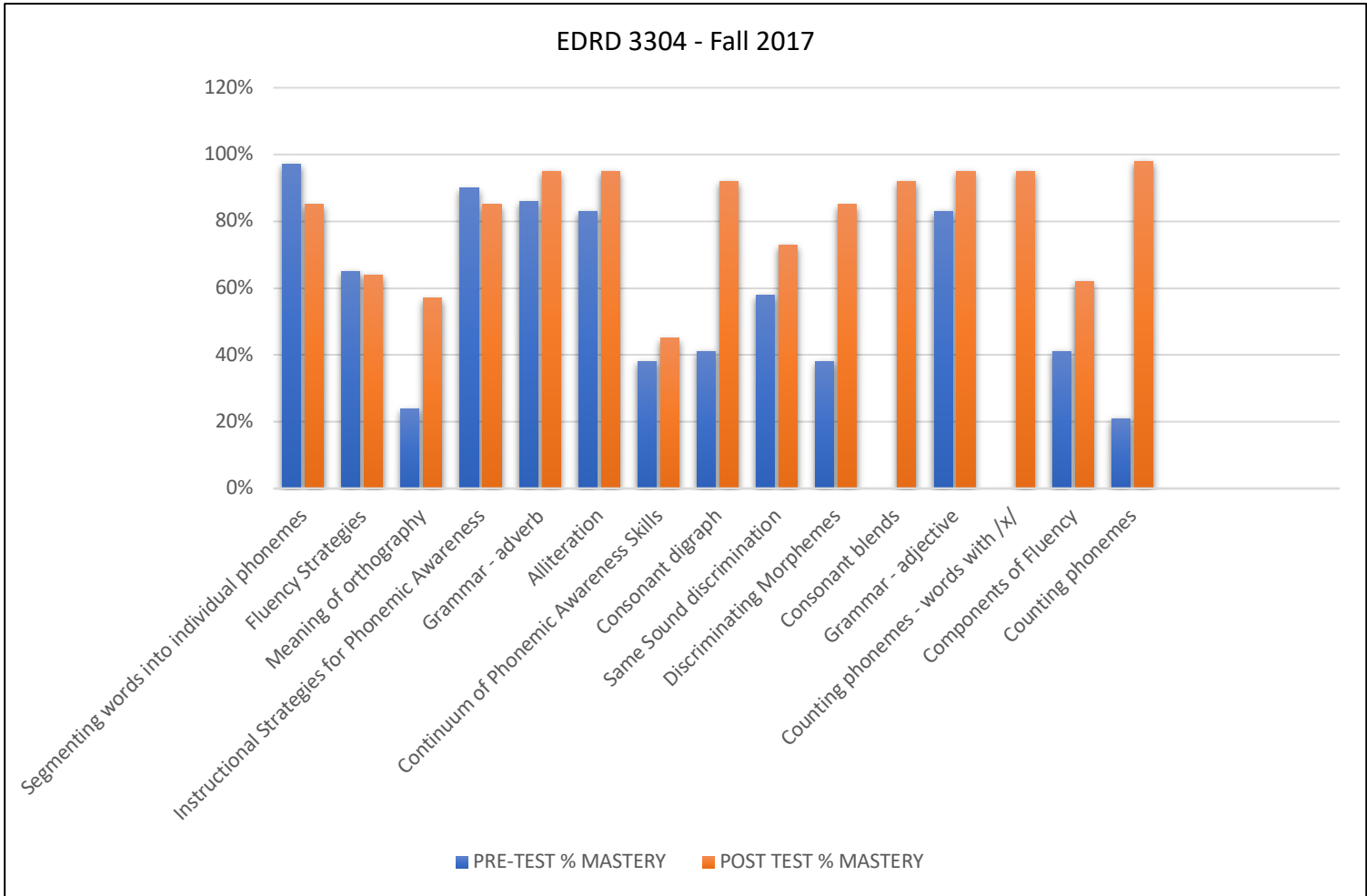


Figure 6. EDRD 3304 fall 2017 comparison of pre- and post-test mastery levels.

Implications from the Structured Literacy Course

The pre- and post-tests for the Structured Literacy course were instructor created. This poses both benefits and problems for this study. Making revisions to the pre- and post-assessments has been helpful in homing in on the most critical skills to include on the assessments for this course. For example, in the summer, the soft sounds of *c* and *g* were included in the assessments; however, when revising the tests, the decision was made to remove this skill from the fall tests because it was an uncomplicated skill that most candidates easily learned. These inclusion and exclusion criteria can be difficult to determine since there are so many skills included in the English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) competencies and they cannot all be included on the pre- or post-assessments. The creation of the assessments and manual data disaggregation can be time consuming as well. However, the researchers assert

that the benefits of obtaining course level baseline data targeting specific skill areas and using it to make thoughtful and evidence-based decisions, will reap greater benefits for our teacher candidates.

Study Conclusions

Based on the data collection over two semesters for the indicated courses, the researchers were able to draw some initial conclusions concerning this study. Using a baseline assessment to formatively drive instruction, created more authentic and relevant course content due to the purposeful instruction. Baseline assessment drives instruction. Using the baseline assessment to drive instruction allows for necessary changes in course content according to student needs and allows for academic freedom for the professors of each course. Focused instruction reaps positive benefits,

and distributed practice showed the most impact on student results on certification exams.

Limitations and Plans for Future Study

This study was limited by a small amount of data and a limited number of professors collecting data. The researchers have only been collecting data for two semesters in two individual courses. Future plans include expanding this data set, to include more courses collecting data and more professors sharing and utilizing this data to improve candidate preparation and certification scores. The researchers also plan to longitudinally track candidate results from their TExES exams and candidates' perception of preparedness for the certification exam due to implementation of baseline/summative assessments in courses.

Importance of Curriculum Alignment

Seminal work by English (1992) identified three components of curriculum—the written, the taught, and the

tested factors. For purposes of this article, the written curriculum refers to the Educator Standards and TExES competencies. The taught curriculum occurs when the written curriculum is delivered through actual course instruction. The tested curriculum is the evaluated portion of the curriculum that ends up on the assessment (Squires, 2009). The framework of aligning all three components in order to guide decision-making at all stages of instructional design is critical to student progress and success (Biggs, 1996).

As research progresses in this area, it is critical for teacher educators to more thoroughly understand the assessed standards, develop cohesive curriculum maps for their programs, and become more proficient in data literacy practices. We have only begun to scratch the surface of using baseline data to inform instructional decisions at both the course and program levels; however, we are hopeful that these efforts will help teacher candidates perform better on state certification exams.

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MARRYING THEORY AND PRACTICE: USING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES TO CONNECT PRESERVICE TEACHERS WITH PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores the use of professional texts in the undergraduate/preservice classroom to address course content and model best practices in the field of teaching. Face-to-face discussion groups, literature circles, and reflective responses are often used in the classroom; however, the authors discuss the use of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) model (Kagle, 2014) to facilitate authentic reflection and hold students accountable for course content. Social networking tools can be used to create online PLCs and engage preservice teachers further. In addition, the article presents the voice of preservice teachers as they reflect on reading of professional literature and development of pedagogical knowledge and professional persona.

Keywords: preservice teachers, professional texts, professional learning community (PLC), social networking tools

As instructors of preservice teachers, it is essential to make course content not only relevant, but also based on best practice. The content of coursework should certainly be built on the foundation of educational theory. Moreover, the design of curriculum should reflect current education standards and student learning outcomes. To that end, the constant evaluation and reevaluation of texts and materials used to develop and offer courses to students is imperative (Moirao, Morris, Klein, & Jackson, 2012). This article explores the use of professional education literature to complement course content in multiple undergraduate reading and professional development courses for preservice teachers. The intent of using professional literature is to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to read, discuss, and examine current literature written for teachers in the field. It is essential to weave together the importance of foundational theory and research with best practices (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015). While traditional textbooks provide preservice teachers with the foundation of educational theory, professional literature provides students with practical knowledge and a picture of best practices in

current educational settings. Best practices for the elementary classroom in the professional literature include reader's workshop, small group instruction, reading strategies, classroom management, professional best practices, and teachers engaging struggling students (Bailey, 2015; Boushey & Moser, 2009; Jensen, 2005; Kagen & Kagen, 2015; Miller, 2010).

This article will outline how professional texts were used in undergraduate courses within the context of a professional learning community (PLC) model and how the preservice teachers were held accountable for their learning. The authors then present reflections from students regarding the use of professional texts in their classes. Lastly, the authors provide a listing of several sources of professional literature that can be incorporated into various teacher education courses.

A Professional Learning Community Model

This article is based on the experiences of four instructors who teach general education and literacy courses to preservice teachers. Approximately 150 preservice

teachers enrolled in several different education courses during 2016-2017 are the focus of this article. The instructors collected descriptive data and anecdotal notes based on the students' use of professional texts in professional learning communities within these various courses.

Kagle (2014) suggests that structuring PLCs for undergraduate students can allow preservice teachers to build skills and grow as reflective practitioners and be a means to orient students to the profession of teaching. When using professional literature, preservice teachers have the opportunity to be exposed to current teacher practitioner concepts and ideas (Vaughn, Allen, Kologi, & McGowan, 2015). For the courses in this study, preservice teachers participated in PLCs in both face-to-face interactions and in online activities. Students were asked to participate in online communities and social networking to reflect on their readings. PLC activities in the literacy courses included social media posts, blogs, book discussion groups, literature circles, and discussion posts. The preservice teachers developed into a community of learners and enhanced their own professional growth. They engaged in professional discussion as they juxtaposed their readings with their observations from public school field-study.

The instructors' intent, when structuring course content, was to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect and respond to readings from the professional literature. Opportunities included face-to-face interactions during class meetings such as book discussions. Research has shown PLCs to be successful in bringing together inservice teachers to build a culture of collaboration (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Building a culture of collaboration is beneficial when reading and discussing professional literature in connection with theory and field-study in schools. Therefore, modeling a PLC using professional literature or teacher texts allows the preservice teacher to see the link between theory and best practices in the field.

DuFour and Reeves (2016) wrote about the importance of authenticity of the PLC in schools. The authors refer to common problems in implementation as "lite" - often what occurs is not the creation of a culture of collaboration and learning but rather, simply a renaming of faculty meetings

as PLCs. When implementing this approach within a teaching classroom, it is important that it is done authentically and with purpose. Kagle (2014) identified four components when structuring and designing a PLC for undergraduate preservice teachers:

1. Build the basic pedagogical skills necessary for a beginning role in the classroom;
2. Orient preservice teachers toward becoming a reflective practitioner;
3. Facilitate the transition from student to building an identity as a teacher; and
4. Confront the realities and compromises of the actual classroom. (p.2)

The idea is not to add content to a course, but rather to design a classroom culture that strives to develop extraordinary teachers. With respect to using professional texts, and with these four components as objectives, thought should be given to questions such as, "What do we want preservice teachers to learn?", "How can we encourage preservice teachers to reflect on professional literature?", "What professional literature can supplement course content?", "How can professional literature help preservice teachers build their identities?", "How will professional literature help prepare them for the realities of the classroom?", and perhaps most relevant, "How will learning be assessed?".

Professional Learning Communities in Action

Making course content relevant and based on best practices is a primary goal of preservice teacher education; however, the reality is that we must find a way to hold the preservice teachers accountable and evaluate their knowledge in the courses. Ideally, the process of evaluating students should be authentic, should model best practices, and should include the four components of PLCs for undergraduate students (Hilton, 2016; Kagle, 2014).

PLCs are one way to provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to "build and manage knowledge...[and] create shared language and standards for practice and student outcomes..." (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.5). This shared environment is a professional practice that will be expected once the preservice teachers enter a school-based learning community. Encouraging preservice teachers to participate in PLCs around professional texts allows instructors to scaffold students' learning and, at the same

time, evaluate their knowledge of theory, research, and field-based experiences in authentic contexts. This participation aligns with Kagle's (2014) components of a PLC for preservice teachers by allowing them to build their pedagogical knowledge and professional capacity. Most importantly, the PLCs around professional texts make the process of transitioning from being a teacher candidate to becoming a professional practitioner more visible and concrete.

When used with preservice teachers, PLCs can take on many forms. As McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) noted, the goals of undergraduate preservice teacher PLCs include building pedagogical skills, encouraging reflective practice, building teacher identity, and confronting classroom realities. Most of these goals can be aligned with current teacher standards and learning outcomes and evaluated in the PLCs. Adapting the PLCs to the needs of both preservice teachers and teacher education instructors requires a 21st century mindset in which evaluation methods encourage collaboration, learning, and the creation of knowledge. Many social networking tools are ideal for creating a more participatory and interactive experience for preservice teachers and encourage learning connections across time and place.

Social networking tools can provide an online PLC in which students can interact with others and communicate their knowledge. Several studies have examined the use of online communities in higher education including blogs, Twitter, microblogging, and Google + Communities (Churchill, 2009; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Ebner, Lienhardt, Rohs, & Meyer, 2010; Gao, Luo, & Zhang, 2012; McPherson, Budge, & Lemon, 2015; Mills & Chandra, 2011; Prestridge, 2014). These studies have found that social media tools encourage autonomous, self-regulated, informal learning where students can create, organize, and share content and knowledge (Cain & Policastri, 2011; Hall, 2009). As Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) note, "There is strong evidence that social media can facilitate the creation of [PLCs] that help learners aggregate and share the results of learning achievements, participate in collective knowledge generation, and manage

their own meaning making" (p.3). These online communities can serve as an introduction to PLCs for preservice teachers and simultaneously allow the instructor to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of the course content.

Blogs

Blogs allow students to think about class topics beyond the weekly class meetings and apply the knowledge from the professional texts to build pedagogical skills, to reflect on their field experiences, and to build their teacher identities. For example, in one of our early childhood courses, preservice teachers were allowed to self-select a topic presented in one of their professional texts and relate it to their field experience in a 500-800-word post in our class blog on the KidBlog.org platform. The goal was for the preservice teachers to combine theory, practice, and reflection in their blog post. Students chose topics ranging from play in the classroom, to the effects of poverty on learning, to classroom management. One student noted her mentor teacher's use of strategies from *The Daily Five* in her blog, saying

My first visit to Mrs. Smith's first grade classroom gave me confidence that I could meet the needs of a classroom full of unique learners. I left that day no longer thinking, 'How am I going to make this work?' Instead I felt at peace, knowing there is a practical, authentic way to meet my students' needs and plan instruction accordingly.

In addition, students had to tweet out a link to their blog and tag another teacher who they thought should read their blog. Often, their tweeted blog started a professional dialogue around their blog topic. Their classmates were also required to read and respond to at least half of the posted blogs. Through the students' blogs, the instructor was able to evaluate their depth of understanding about the topic and their ability to make connections among theory, practice, and personal reflection. To address the reality of having to evaluate students and assign grades, the instructor created a rubric (Figure 1) that emphasized the construction of knowledge and participation in a community of preservice teachers.

	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Meets Expectations	Exceptional Work
Ideas and Content	The ideas expressed are not original and are not connected to discussions around education or teaching.	The ideas expressed are not necessarily original and are not usually connected to discussions around education or teaching.	The student expresses some original ideas. The majority of ideas are related to education or teaching.	The student has many original ideas and expresses them clearly. The blog makes connections among theory, practice, and personal reflection. Blog encourages thoughtful reflection and understanding by your classmates.
Writing Quality	Posts are of very poor quality. There is little to no evidence of reading other information in order to form new understanding or connections to the topic.	Posts show a below average, overly casual writing style with a lack of attention to style or detail. Students pay little attention to other reading and mostly regurgitate previous personal views.	Posts show above average writing style. The content demonstrates that the student read and attempted to synthesize information for new understanding.	Posts are well-written and are characterized by a strong writing style. The content demonstrates the students has a depth of understanding about the topic.
Community	Student shows very little, if any, participation in the blogging community.	The student rarely participates in the blogging community (between 5-10 comments).	The student participates moderately in the blogging community (between 10-14 comments).	The student actively participates in the blogging community via comments on classmates' posts (15 comments required).
Use of Enhancements	The student did nothing to enhance or personalize the weblog space.	There is very little evidence of multimedia enhancement and the student blog is primarily text-based.	The student enhanced their blog to some extent using audio, images, or other add-ons.	The student enhanced their blog using video, audio, images, or other add-ons.

Figure 1. Rubric for evaluating preservice teachers’ knowledge of topics from professional texts in blogs, Twitter, and microblogging.

Twitter

Another way that preservice teachers can respond in authentic ways to professional texts is through Twitter. Twitter allows students to participate in a PLC that will last beyond their days in the preservice classroom and will also allow them to create a personalized learning experience by following experts and leaders in their field and in their areas of interest. In several courses, the instructors asked the students to compose tweets each week that synthesized

their learning from the chapters in the professional texts. Their tweets were directly related to the chapter topics and could include something they learned, a question they still had, or a link to a helpful resource related to the topic along with their original thoughts about the resource. The assignment rubric required that the tweets add value to the conversation around the topic and show considerable thought. For example, students were asked to tweet their most important take-away from *The Conscious Discipline* professional text (Figure 2).

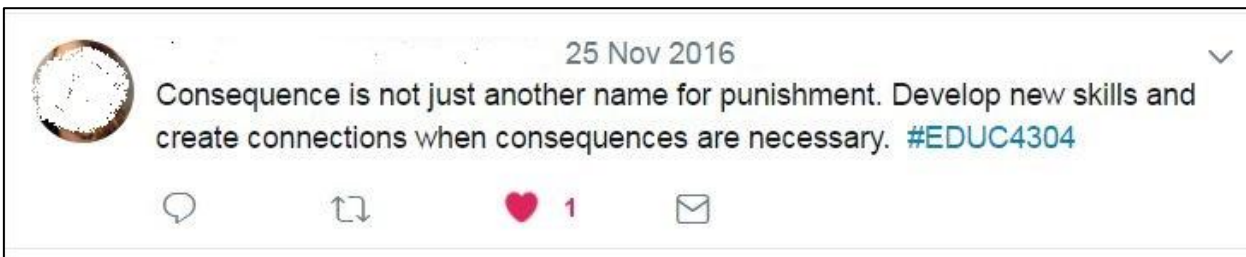


Figure 2. Student tweet about the content in the *Conscious Discipline* professional text.

While instructors were able to evaluate their students’ understanding of the professional texts through their weekly tweets, a more important function of the tweets emerged. Preservice teachers’ connections with others through Twitter encouraged them to adopt new perspectives, debate points of disagreement, and present

new knowledge, which ultimately helped them build pedagogical knowledge and their teacher identity.

Similar to Twitter, microblogging is a way to instant message that allows users to share information in real-time or asynchronous communication with 140 characters or less. For the purpose of our courses, we used the Today’s

Meet microblogging platform. The instructor opened up a private chat room on Today's Meet and asked students to discuss topics from their professional text. Because of the 140-character limit, students had to be intentional about synthesizing their thoughts and knowledge for others. The instructor found that students demonstrated five functions while microblogging, including asking questions, sharing opinions, exchanging ideas, sharing resources, and reflecting. Through these five functions, the instructor was able to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of the professional text and hold them accountable for their learning.

Google+ Communities

Another way to interact with professional texts and hold students accountable is through the creation of a Google+ Community. These online communities are a great introduction to PLCs for preservice teachers because

membership can be restricted to the preservice teachers in the course and can be monitored by the instructor. For the purpose of our courses, we set up Google+ Communities to encourage our preservice teachers to participate in a PLC around our course topics. The community serves as a conduit through which students can post links, articles, resources, blogs, ideas, and reflections related to the course content and the professional texts. An example of a connection one student made to *The Book Whisperer* included a link to Donalyn Miller's blog (Figure 3). These posts encourage collaboration, increase pedagogical knowledge, and help build their identities as professional practitioners. Through their posts, the instructor was able to evaluate students' abilities to interact with the content from the course and their abilities to connect theory and practice. While students were required to post a minimum number of times in the Google+ Community, every student posted more than the minimum.

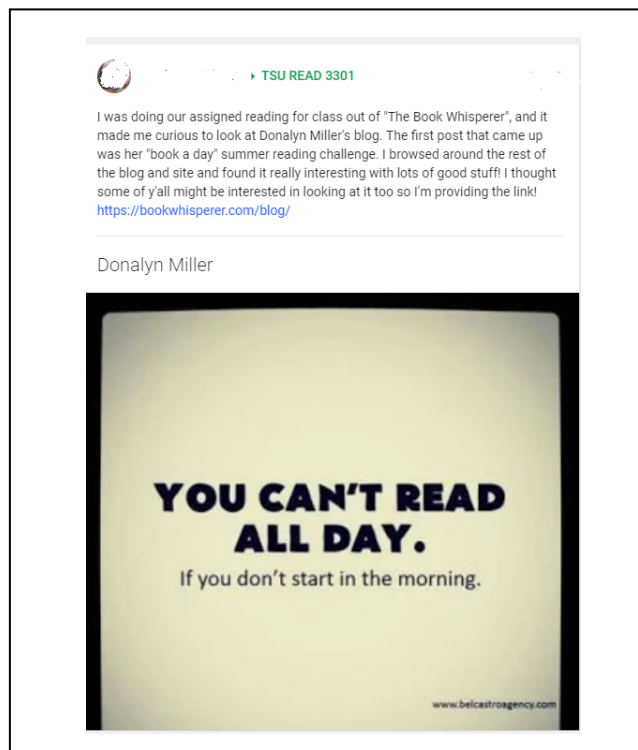


Figure 3. Example post from Google+ Community for the Introduction to Children's Literature course and *The Book Whisperer* professional text.

When asked about participating in the Google+ Communities, students spoke in depth about building their pedagogical skills and gaining new perspectives. One student appreciated the resources and ideas that the

community provided, noting, "I like Google+ Communities because it gives our class a chance to connect and share ideas that we stumble across throughout the semester that relate to the text and the course content. I like exploring

my classmates' posts." Another student said, "I like Google+ Communities because it provides a plethora of resources and, within those resources, I get to see my peers' multiple perspectives."

The use of online PLCs allows instructors to scaffold students' learning around course content and, at the same time, encourages the preservice teachers to build their pedagogical knowledge, reflect on their experiences, and build their teacher identities in an authentic environment. These online communities encourage students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of theory, research, and field-based experiences in a context that makes their learning collaborative and meaningful.

Student Reflections on the Use of Professional Literature

Instructors who incorporate professional literature to complement textbooks, and then hold students accountable for understanding the content, offer additional depth from the educator's point of view. Including professional literature requires planning on the instructor's part so that foundational theory and research supports and balances practical application. In order to gain perspectives from the students on the use of professional literature in PLCs within their courses, students were asked to share their opinions on how this material affected their learning in a variety of contexts: during the course, in field placements, and in preparation for their jobs.

When asked how professional literature benefitted them during their education courses, students commented this added a practitioner perspective to the foundational information provided in textbooks, making the content real-world and relatable through the use of reader-friendly language, authentic examples, tips, and lessons. Furthermore, they understood that being held accountable for reading these books is important and commented on methods of interacting with content and peers they found most valuable.

One student shared the following:

The daily interactions with my peers, in which we broke down each section of the book and discussed it, were some of my favorite ways to keep myself accountable for reading teacher texts for my classes. It was one thing to read these and make sense of it in

my head, but it was so much better to talk about them with my peers and hear their perspectives about the subject as well. We also did a lot of communicating with each other through discussion boards, which at first sounded a bit boring because they usually were in other traditional text-based classes, but these discussions were more interesting because we were talking about texts we actually enjoyed reading. Lastly, testing some of the advice and activities included in our teacher texts to practice on each other during class was fun, too. Our professors did a good job of modeling strategies and expecting us to do the same with each other. We used knowledge from our texts to plan in-class lessons, group projects, and challenged ourselves to keep practicing what we learned during our field experiences. (Preservice Teacher, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

Another student echoed the value of discussions adding to the acquisition of the course content and added, "In-class discussions were beneficial to support and extend my understanding of the teacher texts we used in our courses" (Preservice Teacher, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

Students participate in field experiences and expect to be able to apply their university classroom content and see those practices being modeled by their mentor teachers. They report that teacher texts have increased their understanding of concepts and practices and have given them a preview of what they should be doing and what they should be seeing.

Students' reflection comments included:

These texts were instrumental in the knowledge I carried with me in our field placements. When I was in the field, I would look to see if my mentor teachers were using the practices taught in these texts and how they implemented collaborative structures, knowledge of the students, and instructional models throughout their instruction of the curriculum. (Preservice Teacher, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

I think the fact that the texts we used were written by experienced educators made me feel a lot more confident and willing to try the tips and solutions the authors had found worked for them. It definitely felt like I had a good starting point and then I could

change things as I went and figure out what worked for me and my students. Most importantly, I never felt like I did not have resources. If I was ever unsure of something or was having a hard time coming up with ideas, I would most likely be able to find something to help that had already been successfully tried. (Preservice Teacher, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

A goal for any program is for graduates to feel as prepared as possible with a full toolbox based on quality university classroom instruction and field experiences, and ready to lead their own classrooms. As already identified, one way to connect the university classroom and field work is through the use of professional literature. This material gives students more of the “how” rather than just the “why” of best practices for educators. Students noted several professional writings as highly influential in providing professional development value, including Kagan & Kagan’s, *Cooperative Learning* (2015), Jensen’s, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* (2005), and Boushey and Moser’s, *Daily 5* (2014) and *The CAFÉ Book* (2009). Student comments regarding each of these texts are included.

Kagan & Kagan (2015), *Cooperative Learning*

“Kagan’s text provided me with a plethora of formative assessment structures to help my students to work collaboratively” (B. Cranfill, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

“*Cooperative Learning* has been one of the most helpful resources since the beginning of studies in the teaching program. I have learned the value of group-based work, the importance of keeping student engagement through hands-on activities, and how to break up the monotony of traditional school settings” (S. Cid, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

Jensen (2005), *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*

“Jensen’s, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, taught me the importance of understanding both physical and mental development of students in order to achieve the most student engagement” (B. Cranfill, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

“It gave me an entirely new perspective on the way the brain of a child works to learn. Through this book, I also

learned how students’ brains develop as they grow and how to engage them at every stage of development” (S. Cid, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

Boushey & Moser (2009), *Daily 5 and The CAFÉ Book*

“Boushey and Moser’s, *Daily 5* and *CAFÉ*, texts provided information on how to effectively manage my classroom instruction as well as implement a well-run literacy block” (B. Cranfill, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

“The *Daily 5* was helpful because it was written as a step-by-step guide for how to structure the literacy block framework. Even though we did not get to actually use it with children in our placements, I feel that I could easily use the authors’ suggestions to implement the *Daily 5* in my own classroom” (S. Cid, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

A summary comment described how professional literature used in the coursework assisted in gaining employment and being ready to be a literary leader:

Now that I am getting ready to teach on my own, I am planning take my favorite teacher texts with me and referencing them for lesson planning, classroom management, and everyday issues that might arise. The knowledge that I have acquired from these texts has also helped me create new friendships and network with other teachers who have also read and implemented these text concepts in their classrooms. I have even used my knowledge about writer’s workshop from the teacher texts to get a job! During a job interview, the principal was impressed to know that I had some knowledge about writer’s workshop and we ended up having a good conversation about it. While I was not officially trained in writer’s workshop, I was offered that job because he appreciated that I had studied it and learned it. He expressed that he was confident I would be able to implement it in the classroom and, needless to say, I was very thankful that many of the teacher texts we used included something about writer’s workshop. Now that I have impressed my future boss with the knowledge I have acquired from teacher texts, I am thinking it will benefit me to go back and read a lot of them as a review before I start. From my conversations with other teachers during my field

placements, continuing to use these texts will benefit me because many of the teacher friends that I have made have expressed how much teacher texts help them throughout the year. I have seen many of the teacher texts we used in their classrooms and am always excited to point them out. It is almost like a nerdy but professional way to bond with each other and discuss our experiences. (S.Cid, personal communication, June 15, 2017)

A Sampling of Professional Literature for use in Teacher Education Courses

Table 1 contains a sampling of the professional literature the authors have used in various courses. Table 1 provides a listing of these materials, as well as the course(s) in which they are used, and a brief description of how they are applied in these courses.

Conclusion

This article presented the practice of using professional literature within a PLC structure for preservice teachers. Providing preservice teachers opportunities to read and make connections to professional literature is not only important for coursework, but also aids in the development of future teachers. As stated, there is a need to weave together theory, research, and best practice (Hallam, et al.,

2015). Preservice teachers need to practice discussing current educational issues to grow professionally. Additionally, participating in the PLC allowed the preservice teachers to collaborate with peers and gain perspective. Kagle (2014) stated a PLC model not only orients preservice teachers “to the profession but also promotes the disposition and beginning skills to become reflective practitioners” (p. 240). One objective of using PLCs with preservice teachers is, as they transition into inservice teachers, they will continue to seek collaboration in a wider professional community.

This article addressed the question of how to hold students accountable for their learning from the professional literature. Examples included face-to-face discussion as well as various uses of social networking. The use of social networking tools is participatory, interactive, and can allow connections across time and place. In other words, connections do not always need to take place in the brick and mortar classroom. Lastly, the article presented reflections from students who had read professional literature and participated in PLC activities in both the classroom and their preservice experience. The students considered these experiences to be very positive, preparing them for their profession and strengthening their commitment to learn and grow as a teacher.

Table 1
A Sampling of Professional Literature used in Teacher Education Courses

Professional Literature Source	Course(s) Applied	Relevance
<i>Teaching with the Brain Mind</i> by Eric Jensen (2005)	Understanding Learners	brain friendly strategies
<i>Kagan Cooperative Learning</i> by Spencer Kagan & Miguel Kagan (2015)	Understanding Learners	cooperative learning planning, instruction to engage students
<i>Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms</i> by Becky A. Bailey (2015)	Early Childhood Environments	discipline, classroom management
<i>The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child</i> by Donalyn Miller (2016)	Introduction to Children's Literature	reading engagement, reader's workshop, genre study
<i>The Cafe Book: Engaging All Students in Daily Literacy Assessment and Instruction</i> by Gail Boushey & Joan Moser (2009)	Literacy for the Early Learners	engaging readers, importance of literacy opportunities in the classroom
<i>Igniting a Passion for Reading: Successful Strategies for Building Lifetime Readers</i> by Steven L. Layne (2012)	Literacy for the Middle Years	engaging struggling readers, a schoolwide focus on literacy
<i>The Writing Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Writers</i> by Jennifer Serravallo (2017)	Reading & Writing Across the Curriculum	resource for writing strategies
<i>The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy in the Elementary Grades</i> by Gail Boushey & Joan Moser (2014)	Concepts of Literacy Classrooms	reader's workshop, reading, classroom routines and procedures
<i>Teaching Reading in Small Groups: Differentiated Instruction for Building Strategic Independent Readers</i> by Jennifer Serravallo (2010)	Concepts of Literacy Classrooms	engaging readers, helping readers find their reader identity, small group instruction
<i>The Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers</i> by Jennifer Serravallo (2015)	Concepts of Literacy Classrooms	resource for reading strategies

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TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS COALESCING TO BALANCE THE HIGH-STAKES ASSESSMENT FIELD FOR UNDERPREPARED AND UNDERREPRESENTED MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN MATHEMATICS

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Abstract

Principals' evaluations are directly associated with students' performance on high-stakes exams (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). In fact, principals frequently experience didactic pedagogical self-reflections related to factors outside of classroom instruction that play a role in educating students. This is especially true for educationally underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students of the South Texas borderlands whose academic performance challenges in high-stakes exams can be associated with mathematics (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). In this study, researchers will provide a theoretical framework for the investigation of after school activities, like tutoring and after school clubs, and an analysis of current standards-driven exams such as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Furthermore, the results of a two-year case study conducted in two border elementary schools will be presented.

Keywords: teachers, mathematics, Mexican American, students

This study is relevant to the post-secondary matriculation of educationally underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students. Researchers at the forefront of Mexican American students' educational advocacy posit that there is "powerful evidence across the world that higher education is critical to the competitiveness and creativity of society, and that the historic advantage of the United States is rapidly deteriorating in terms of students completing postsecondary education" (Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, p. 260, 2005). In fact, recent research studies highlight serious concerns regarding the quality of the educational programs and the teachers Mexican American students have in their classrooms (Oh & Cooc, 2011; Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010; Ayscu & Orfield, 2015). At the forefront of discussions about quality and access is high-stakes testing, many states, including Texas, are factoring high-stakes exam results when "grading" school leaders, and schools for that matter. Relatedly, national and state accountability standards evaluate all students uniformly without consideration to

their diverse academic and language needs (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Gutiérrez, 2010).

Schwartz (2012) suggests that having test-taking skills may be the key to improving underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students' mathematics test scores. However, policies related to high-stakes testing may yield an atmosphere of teaching to the test (Jennings & Bearak, 2014). That is why creating an educational environment where mathematics fostering and evaluating problem solving students' strategies is the end goal of such initiatives like the (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Center, 2009). Furthermore, Rhone's (2006) study focuses on students' benefits of conducting in-class preparation tests, noting: (a) it helps students focus on what is important when they take the actual test; (b) it helps build vocabulary; and, (c) it helps students build test-taking skills. On the other hand, Rhone (2006) notes that there are at least three disadvantages to this technique including (a) student burnout and heightened fears and test anxiety; (b)

teacher and student frustration with classroom climate entirely centered on test preparation; and (c) labeling.

Literature Review

For educationally underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students, a confounding factor is that educational enrichment consists of other experiences outside of the classroom. Sadly, 90% of elementary Mexican American students have working parents, suggesting that during the hours of 3:00-6:00 pm these students are under some type of alternate care (Kremer, Maynard, Polanin, Vaughn, & Sarteschi, 2015). Through a public agenda survey, Gault, Reichlin, and Román (2014), interviewed low-income and minority parents and documented that they are much more likely than higher-income and white parents to say they have trouble finding high-quality, convenient, and affordable activities for their children. There is evidence to support the fact that high-quality after school programs are correlated with statistically significant gains in standardized tests, stronger work ethic, reduced behavior problems, higher class grades, more homework completion, and class participation (Mahoney, Parente, & Zigler, 2009; Clifford, 2010; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). Moreover, supplemental academic support, such as mandatory tutoring, has proven to have a significant impact on academic performance in underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students (Viloria, 2018, Mireles, Acee, & Gerber, 2015).

Alternatively, James-Burdumy, et al. (2005), concluded that after school programs did not have the anticipated impact in the academic achievement of elementary students' reading scores, and only a two-point impact on English grades (scale of 100). In the same study, researchers concluded that homework assistance after school programs did not have a positive impact since 90% of elementary students already received help from family members, or teachers (James-Burdumy, et al., 2005). Nevertheless, one positive finding from the same study was that 93% of students who attended the after-school programs reported feeling very safe (James-Burdumy, et al., 2005). By contrast, Black, Somers, Doolittle, Unterman, and Grossman (2009) concluded that one year of enhanced instruction produced positive and statistically significant impacts on students' achievement in

mathematics. On the contrary, Kremer, et al. (2015) indicated that despite substantial resources funneled into after school programs across the United States, surprisingly few rigorous evaluations have been conducted to examine effects of afterschool programs. Consequently, based on the contradicting findings regarding the positive or negative effects of after school programs and absence of studies focused on underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students, this two-year study will positively impact the underserved and underrepresented Mexican American students who are likely than white students to attend segregated schools that have insufficient educational resources (Ayscue & Orfield, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Nieto (1994; 2013) affirms that it is too convenient for some educators to fall back on deficit theories and continue to blame the students rather than focus on the institutional policies and practices that promulgate oppression. More importantly, Nieto (1994; 2013) suggests that educators need to take a good look at their educational practices and beliefs. Furthermore, it is imperative to note that some educators are simply following the functions of historical societal and institutional structures (Nieto, 2013). Relatedly, in this study, researchers seek to identify instructional and organizational strategies to assist teachers and school leaders balance the high-stakes assessments field for Mexican American students. The researchers' contention is that educationally underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American learners from low social economic backgrounds can improve academic performance as measured by high-stakes exams by addressing the factors outside of classroom instruction like tutoring and after school activities that play a key role in educating students.

In that case, the researchers' intent is to share their findings with teachers working with underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students across Texas. The research homes in on student mentoring, peer groups, teachers, school leaders, and parental support. The purpose of this research is to share culturally relevant teaching practices that will help teachers foster underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students' understanding of the importance of their educational attainment and post-secondary preparation not only for

themselves, but for the economic improvement of their community.

This paper follows a systematic analysis of the after-school activities of two South Texas borderlands elementary schools. The researchers' goal is to contribute to the translation of research to practice for teachers of underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students by sharing some of the successful after school activities that the teachers participating in this two-year study have identified as successful evidenced-based practices (EBPs). According to Santangelo, Ruhaak, Kama, and Cook (2013), teachers are so pressed for time and overwhelmed with information that they are "unaware of what practices are and are not evidence-based practices" (pg. 224). "Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are instructional programs and techniques supported by sound research as having meaningfully positive effects on student outcomes" (Santangelo, et al., 2013, p. 222).

Methods

This paper seeks to provide insight obtained from initial principals' interviews, teacher surveys, and students' high-stakes exam data. The researchers conducted follow-up, on-site after school activities observations, as well as follow-up principal conversations, and three formal teacher observations. Ultimately, the researchers systematically analyzed high-stakes exam data for the students participating in after school activities. The researchers then attempted to analyze current standards-driven exams such as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and to determine the possible impact that after school activities have on the students' academic performance. For this paper, the researchers specifically analyzed two years of mathematics high-stakes performance data for the 2016-2017 fourth grade cohorts at two South Texas borderlands elementary schools. The researchers worked with school personnel to identify the fourth graders that have participated in mathematics after school activities like math tutorials, math clubs, chess clubs and other school-based after school programs.

Research Questions

This study investigates two research questions.

1. What is the correlation between the students' economic status and access to "after school activities?"
2. Do after school activities positively impact the students' academic performance?

Researchers investigated Mexican American students' access to after school activities in two elementary schools to capture the didactic pedagogical self-reflections related to factors outside of classroom instruction that play a role in educating students; specifically after school activities such as academic tutorials, and extracurricular activities such as sports.

Demographic Information

Two elementary schools were selected for this study using the following criteria. First, researchers found two elementary campuses that had the same STAAR mathematics results for the 2015-2016 third grade cohort. Second, schools had to be located in two distinct economic areas; one in the more affluent part of the South Texas community where this study was conducted, and the other school in the less affluent part of this community.

Pseudonyms were used for this study- School A and School B. School A had the following demographic characteristics: 799 students, 98.7% Hispanic, 47.2% economically disadvantaged, 33.4% English language learners, and 47.9% at risk students (TEA, 2015-2016a). School B had 893 students when this study began, 99% Hispanic, 87% economically disadvantaged, 74.7% English language learners, and 83.1% at-risk (TEA, 2015-2016b).

STAAR Three-Year Assessment Data

The 2015-2016 Campus Performance Report results for the students' third grade STAAR mathematics results were used as a baseline for this study. At both schools, A and B, the students' results were 75% mastery (TEA, 2015-2016a; TEA, 2015-2016b). Respectively, Campus Performance Report results (TEA, 2016-2017a/b) for the second year of this study for both schools, A and B, were 78% mastery in STAAR mathematics (TEA, 2016-2017a; TEA, 2016-2017b).

Overview of School A and School B

Based on data collected from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Campus Performance Reports and principals' and teachers' interviews, the researchers were able to make some preliminary observations. For example, according to the School B principal, her daily challenge is to improve the students' high-stakes exams results (TEA, 2016-2017b). The school administrator at School B had only been at that campus for one year when this study began, although she has more than fifteen years of administrative experience. During her interview, she was concerned with the enculturation of nine new teachers at that campus. She needed to ensure that the novice teachers were well trained and supported in order to ensure strong scores on the students' high-stakes assessments. In addition, 48% of the teachers at School B have between 5-20 years of teaching experience.

In contrast, a fourth-year administrator leads School A and 93.4% of the teachers have between 10 to more than 20 years of teaching experience. Whereas, School B is working to improve test scores, School A is focused on maintaining the established strong scores on the high-stakes exams (TEA, 2016-2017a). Additionally, School B has less than 15 registered parent volunteers and School A has more than 50 parent volunteers.

After School Activities

Based on the data collected from thirteen fourth grade teachers' surveys at both schools, the researchers were able to capture the following data pertaining to the description and types of after school activities at both schools (Tables 1 & 2).

The after-school activities and extracurricular clubs available at both schools appear to be quite extensive and similar (Table 2). Nevertheless, both schools encountered a similar challenge of minimal participation in after school activities by students who depend on school transportation. Consequently, students who depend on district sponsored transportation cannot take advantage of the after-school clubs. In addition, while School A selects students for extracurricular clubs based on students' leadership skills, good behavior, and academics, School B defers to teacher nominations. In additional interviews with both school principals, the researchers asked about the reasoning behind their distinct selection processes. Accordingly, the principal at School A stated that the reason why club sponsors select students based on students' leadership skills, good behavior, and academics is that they do not have enough sponsors to meet the demand for after school clubs. The principal at School B stated that they defer to nominations because teachers know the academic standing for each student best.

Table 1

Description of After School Activities for School A and School B

Survey Questions	School A Responses	School B Responses
Describe your after school tutoring program (e.g. days, times, duration).	2 days per week for 1 hour for reading and mathematics	2 days per week for 1 hour for reading and mathematics
How are students participating in the tutoring program selected?	Based on students' academic needs identified in-house benchmarks and content-based assessments	Based on the disaggregated data from content-based assessments by quintiles
What curriculum, if any, do you follow for tutorials?	Research-based curriculum	Forde Ferrier Work Books
What curriculum, if any, do you follow for mathematics tutorials?	Mathnasium Excel Math Think Through Math Motivational Math Forde-Ferrier Material	Lone Star Rigor Work Books
What types of clubs do you sponsor at your school?	National Honor Society, Positive Behavior Intervention Club, Student Council, Tomorrow's Teachers Club Envision & Number Sense	Art Club, Student Council, Tomorrow's Teachers Club, Drama, Choir, Library Club National Honor Society, Courtesy Service Club (4 th only)
How are students chosen to participate in these clubs? Are after school clubs offered for bus students?	Students are chosen based on academics and behavior, well-rounded students, and leadership skills Not available for bus students unless they have transportation	Students have to be nominated by their teachers.
What grade levels are targeted? Is the club part of a community organization?	Grade level sponsored clubs, not part of the community	Mostly fourth and fifth grades
Please provide disaggregated demographic information like grades, ethnicity, STAAR mathematics results, and course grades for participants and non-participants of after school activities in you school.	This question will be part of the second phase of this two-year study	This question will be part of the second phase of this two-year study

Table 2
After School Activities for School A and School B

School	Mathematics Tutorials	Chess Club	Tomorrow's Teachers' Club	National Honor Society	Positive Behavior Intervention Club	Student Council	Envision & Number Sense	Art Club	Drama Club	Library Club	Courtesy Service Club
A	Tuesday & Thursday	Friday	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Monthly	Wednesday	Monday	Friday	Monday	Friday
B	Tuesday & Thursday	None	Monthly	Annually	None	None	None	None	None	None	Friday

Analysis of the After-School Mathematics Activities

The characteristics of after school activities at School A and School B have some similarities and differences (Table 2). For instance, both schools allocate two days for tutorials, one day for mathematics, and one day for reading. The schools differ in the mathematics curriculum used for tutorials (Table 1). Fourth grade teachers' surveys conducted at both schools revealed that teachers at School B were not well acquainted with the mathematics curriculum compared to the teachers at School A. For example, a teacher at School B made the following remarks, "New teachers at our school are still becoming familiar with mathematics resources better suited for tutorials". In a follow-up visit, one of the researchers conferred with the school principal from School B who suggested that new teachers at the school were assigned teacher mentors as a strategy to support increased rigor in teaching as well as teacher retention.

A summary of the data collected from three observations of each of the thirteen teachers is presented in Table 3. The researchers summarized the observation data using three culturally relevant teaching strategies frequently observed during the after-school tutorials' observations. First, teachers at both schools A and B used student-centered teaching, focusing on closing instructional gaps by

differentiating lessons. Teachers dedicated more time to individual students' progress by positively reinforcing students' participation in the mathematics activities using verbal praise and positive eye contact. Second, teachers at School A scored higher in the use of higher-order thinking skills strategies like think-aloud, collaborative student groups, and teacher encouragement for problem solving via teacher modeling and peer to peer modeling with teacher guidance and monitoring. Finally, teachers at both schools used teacher as the leader strategies with students who were experiencing the most academic difficulties by working with those students on a one-to-one basis, the most recommended culturally relevant teaching strategy for underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students (Nieto, 2013; Vilorio, 2018).

Table 3 describes the results of the three formal after-school tutorials observations at schools A and B. The remaining columns are dedicated to the three teaching strategies frequently observed during the after-school tutorials' observations during the observations. In that case, the denominator is the total number of teachers observed at each school during after school tutorials and the numerator indicates the total number of teachers using each of the teaching strategies. Overall, teachers at both School A and B used the student-centered interaction more frequently.

Table 3
Individual Schools' Observation Data for After School Mathematics Tutorials

After School Tutorials Observations	Group-Leader-Centered	Student-Centered	Collaborative
School A: Observation 1	4/6	6/6	5/6
School B: Observation 1	2/7	5/7	3/7
School A: Observation 2	5/6	4/6	4/6
School B: Observation 2	3/7	3/7	5/7
School A: Observation 3	5/6	6/6	5/6
School B: Observation 3	4/7	6/7	6/7

Discussion

This study is the beginning of a critical investigation of after school activities that supplement and/or complement the regular classroom instruction. It is safe to assume that all schools have extra learning opportunities, even if on the playground during recess. However, this study begins to shed light on what some of these after school activities are, the context in which they are offered, to whom they are offered, and who engages in these activities. Initial results show that correlations between academic performance as measured by high-stakes exams is worthy of analysis. This study further informs future studies in order to learn more about the academic nature and influence of after school activities. Methodologies can then be established for research that can yield generalizable results for academic preparation of underprepared and underrepresented Mexican American students so that these students can enroll and complete a post-secondary preparation.

This study attempted to determine the correlation between the students' economic status and access to "after school activities. The findings of this study suggest that there was

a correlation between the students' economic status and access to after school activities since the students in School A had more options for after school activities than the students in School B. However, since both of the schools had exactly the same STAAR mathematics results a year after the study was initiated, the data does not suggest that after school activities have a significant positive impact on students' academic performance. Furthermore, in an effort to determine if after school activities positively impacted the students' academic performance, the researchers did not find that students' access to increased one-to-one attention from the teachers resulted in an increase in students' academic achievement. This was true for both schools A and B.

Consequently, teachers who participated in this study's survey noted a positive effect of students' participation in after school activities. However, the researchers contend that a longer study needs to be conducted in order to determine if the positive student outcomes, academic achievement, behavior and social and emotional development can be sustained through secondary school matriculation.

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS PRIOR TO CLINICAL TEACHING

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Abstract

The state of Texas fully implemented a new teacher evaluation process during the 2016-2017 school year, which contains a student performance component. The Texas Education Agency has focused on orienting existing principals and teachers, as well as field supervisors operating under Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), on the content and processes of the new evaluation system. This research investigated the perceptions of aspiring teachers at a regional university about the teacher evaluation process prior to beginning their clinical teaching placements. The results indicated that students had varying perceptions about how they would be evaluated and how information collected from the evaluation process would be utilized. The implications of this study are important toward informing EPPs on how to better prepare aspiring teachers about the evaluation process prior to their entering the field.

Keywords: clinical teaching, teacher evaluations, principals, teacher induction, field supervision

The importance of clinical teaching goes almost unchallenged, even by the strongest critics of teacher education programs. Clinical teaching as a final stage of the teacher preparation process has been in existence virtually since the inception of teacher preparation (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Knoblauch and Hoy (2008) found that clinical teaching resulted in greater self-efficacy as related to preparedness to enter the classroom. Part of this transition process into the field should include orienting teachers to the teacher evaluation process, reflecting a backward design model, where the state evaluation system is the final assessment and is well-defined.

Background

The state of Texas fully launched a new teacher evaluation system during the 2016-2017 school year referred to as the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The system is based upon the six Texas Teacher Standards: 1) Instructional Planning and Delivery, 2) Knowledge of Students and Student Learning, 3) Content Knowledge and Expertise, 4) Learning Environment, 5) Data-Driven

Practices, and 6) Professional Practices and Responsibilities. The new system was designed to foster and promote continuous improvement in teaching practice through a combination of administrative observation, teacher goal setting and professional development, as well as analysis of student growth measures. Full implementation followed a select group of districts piloting the new system during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. During the 2017-2018 school year, Texas school districts utilizing the new system were required to either pilot or fully implement the student growth component of the instrument (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

All field supervisors of clinical teachers are required to complete T-TESS training prior to supervising students who enrolled into their respective preparation program after December 27, 2016 (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The training orients field supervisors in structuring a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference in the same manner that schools will implement the T-TESS process. These steps closely mirror the clinical teaching model,

which has proven effective in providing objective feedback on instruction and collaboratively developing methods to improve practice (Acheson & Gall, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Policy Implementation

Fullan (2001) emphasized that, even though the technical implementation of a policy is difficult, the social dimension of a new policy is even more complicated. He identified need, clarity, complexity, and practicality as four dimensions that are related to humans' willingness to accept a new policy. Fullan reported that educators must see the need for new policies and receive clear instructions on those policies. Also, he stated that new policies must not be so complex that teachers feel concern about their competency to implement them as well as see how the new policies can be practically implemented within the context of their current working environments.

The Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall, 1976) interplays with educators' implementation of new policies as they desire to know more about the impact on the new policy on them personally and manifest themselves in three stages: awareness, informational, and personal. During the awareness stage, Datnow (2000) reported that educators sometimes ignore policies that do not align with their personal beliefs. In the information stage, Fullan (2001) indicated that it is essential for the communication of clear information about the new policy. As educators move into the personal stage, he indicates that more complex policies often are met with resistance due to concerns that they will not be able to successfully implement the requirements. If this occurs, these feelings can be mitigated through offering tools, strategies, and support on how to successfully accomplish the requirements of the new policies.

Educator Preparation Programs have historically had difficulty implementing effective clinical teaching experiences. According to Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), Standard 2, "The provider works with partners to design clinical experiences of sufficient depth, breadth, diversity, coherence, and duration to ensure that candidates demonstrate their developing effectiveness and positive impact on all students' learning and development" (CAEP, 2015). Therefore, it is essential that EPPs work with partner school sites to create a

successful, clinical learning experience. In doing so, there may be obstacles to overcome and administrators should anticipate problems during the implementation stage. If at all possible, the administration should take the necessary steps to ensure anticipated obstacles do not hinder implementation. For example, Temperley and Robinson (1997) emphasized that teacher evaluation implementation is often problematic because it often originates with government rather than at the local level. Therefore, school administrators need to take intentional actions to be proactive in order to ensure that the evaluation process reaps the desired results.

Clinical Teaching

A new teacher evaluation system is often referred to as an organizational attempt to improve teaching and learning and such changes must result in new learning by teachers (Anderson, 1997; McDougald, Griffith, Pennington, & Mead, 2016; U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Nias (1996) found evaluation to be a highly emotional process for teachers because teachers develop their self-esteem and self-fulfillment through their work. Therefore, the evaluation process is one that results in teachers feeling very vulnerable in that they might discover that they are teaching poorly at the conclusion of the process.

While learning in the classroom is important, the clinical teaching experience tends to be more transformative in the overall development of the pedagogical skills (Zeichner, 2010). Therefore, the role of the field supervisor is essential in providing feedback in the development process during the student teaching experience. Louis (2007) noted the importance of relational trust in effectively implementing a teacher evaluation system. Candidates will be more likely to react on the feedback provided in the teacher evaluation process if they trust the one providing the feedback. Therefore, she recommends evaluating the level of trust between the teacher and supervisor prior to implementing an evaluation system. Field supervisors are provided training on methods to use toward establishing trust during their orientation on their roles while implementing the T-TESS model with their teacher candidates.

The clinical supervision model is based on the T-TESS system. Field supervisors of clinical teachers use a three-step process of a pre-conference, observation, and post-

conference. The Texas Education Agency requires a minimum of three observation cycles during the candidates' clinical teaching experience. Acheson and Gall (2010) recommend increased cycles for clinical candidates who are experiencing significant challenges in any areas of teaching proficiency during the clinical experience. They state that the preconference should be used as a time for the candidate to state personal concerns and for the supervisor to clarify a desired state of classroom instruction. During the post conference, the candidate is encouraged to share his/her views of the effectiveness of the lesson observed with the supervisor working with the candidate to form a plan for any areas of needed improvement. Such practices are closely aligned with research that shows that clearly planned clinical experiences are much more effective than loosely planned models in better preparing clinical teachers (Zeichner, 2010).

Lyle (2003) found it important for the field supervisor to reduce anxiety and limit judgment in stabling an effective clinical teaching model. The clinical teacher's anxiety may be reduced if the field supervisor facilitates the clinical teacher's comfort with the observation process. The field supervisor, through the effective framing of questions, can limit/minimize the perception of judgement during the post conference with clinical teachers. For example, rather than telling a clinical teacher, "Your students were not engaged", the field supervisor might reflectively ask in a post conference, "What was the level of engagement of the students throughout the lesson?" thereby leading clinical teachers to examine their own practices. The ability of the field supervisor to frame questions during the post conference is connected to scripting during observations. During classrooms observations, the field supervisor must script both the behaviors of the clinical teacher and the students in the classroom. Direct statements made by the clinical teacher or students are considered high-quality evidence which allow for the framing of effective questions by the field supervisor during the post conference.

Acheson and Gall (2010) share that the intended outcome of the clinical supervision model is to develop emerging teachers' abilities to reflect on their practice. For the relationship between field supervisor and clinical teacher to flourish, trust must be established. Trust is developed when the clinical teacher views the field supervisor as someone who has their best interest at heart and will not

use data gathered during an observation against them. The authors view the initial pre-conference as a critical time for trust to be established and to set the stage for effective clinical supervision. Due to the isolated nature of teaching, the pre-conference may provide the only venue for student teachers to share concerns and unique aspects of their classes.

Problem

University-based and alternative educator preparation program (EPPs) in Texas are orienting program participants and their field supervisors in the expectations of the newly-implemented teacher evaluation system. Field supervisors of clinical teachers play a key role in training participants on the new evaluation system. Clinical teachers need to be versed in the current evaluation system, so they can practice the skills required for success as determined by that system upon their subsequent employment.

Purpose

This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of candidates from one regional comprehensive university who are entering their clinical teaching experience. Teaching candidates were asked to reflect on what they currently know about teacher evaluation as related through a personal impact level (Hall, 1976) and a policy implementation level (Fullan, 2001).

Significance

Understanding current candidates' perceptions related to the evaluation process will inform and assist educator preparation programs in designing curricula and training materials to better prepare future candidates to be knowledgeable and successful as measured by the state-adopted evaluation system.

Methods, Data Sources, and Analysis

This exploratory study was designed to investigate the perceptions of clinical teaching candidates about to enter the clinical teaching phase of their preparation, with particular focus on the formal evaluation and appraisal process they will experience as full-time teachers. Questions were designed to assess candidates' procedural knowledge of the evaluation policy (Fullan, 2001) and their perceptions of the anticipated personal impact of the

evaluation process as evidenced in the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall, 1976).

The first round of data collection consisted of a survey delivered to all candidates (N=199) at the beginning of their first semester of clinical teaching at the host university during the spring 2018 term. Post survey, five phone interviews were conducted with randomly selected candidates to verify and triangulate the researcher-developed themes.

Instrumentation

The survey developed for this study consisted of five open-ended questions and was piloted with a convenience sample of prospective teachers and field supervisors who were asked to talk through their thinking while completing the survey, so the researchers could attend to any areas of difficulty or confusion and ensure alignment between the researchers' intent and the teaching candidates' understanding. The revised survey was administered via paper format to the candidates at a meeting on January 5, 2018. Of the 199 surveys distributed, 194 were returned, for a response rate of 97.48%. The survey asked the participants their perceptions on five open-ended research questions. Those questions were as follows:

1. How do you believe your job performance will be evaluated as a teacher?
2. What areas of your job performance do you feel are important to be successful on our evaluation?
3. How do you feel your school administrators will use the information gathered from the teacher evaluation process?
4. How do you plan to use information gained from your evaluation?
5. At this point, what support do you need in preparing for the teacher evaluation process?

Data Analysis

Though more difficult to analyze (Shuman & Presser, 1996), the survey questions were purposefully designed as open-ended, intended to generate unfiltered responses and to leverage the "nonreactivity" described by Iyengar (1996). Utilizing a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006), the purpose of which "is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data" (p. 238), the researchers

collapsed the individual survey responses into two or three generalized themes for each question, developed from the actual words chosen by the candidates, reflecting common language and terminology. Using open and axial coding (Merriam, 2009), the interview responses were spiraled into the survey results.

Findings

Survey Question 1: How do you believe your job performance will be evaluated as a teacher?

The clinical teachers' responses to this question strongly fell under the categories of administrative observation (N=90) and student performance (N=98). Statements such as, "It will be evaluated by a supervisor (like a principal) sitting in the room while I am running my class" and "An administrator will come in and observe my classroom, [to] see if I am following a lesson plan, and if my lesson plan follows the TEKS" reflect perceptions that job performance will be evaluated through administrative observations. Responses such as, "By the students' performance and their reaction to my teaching" and "Student progress and STAAR scores" represent views that teacher evaluations will be based upon student performance. Another student in the follow-up phone interviews responded, "I feel as though testing, of course, is a big factor into how well you are performing in your classroom and how well your students perform".

Survey Question 2: What areas of your job performance do you feel are important to be successful on your evaluation?

The most common responses to this question can be associated with classroom management (N=59). One example is the statement, "Classroom management is key to success. With this skill your students can learn knowledge from you as an educator". The importance of classroom management was reinforced in a phone interview where a student teacher shared, "I think that classroom management is probably the number one thing that you have to be effective in first before you can even get across any type of content". Responses associated with classroom management were more than twice than other areas to include communication" (N=23), content knowledge (N=22), and planning (N=25), which all

received virtually equal identification as aspects associated with being successful during a classroom evaluation.

Survey Question 3: How do you feel your school administrators will use information gathered from the teacher evaluation process?

The student responses to this question were virtually equal in the two classifications of continuous improvement (N=67) and employment decisions (N=68). Clinical teacher responses such as, "[Observations] show you what areas to work on in the classroom," and "Make changes to help teachers be more successful in the future" substantiate the view that teacher evaluations are used as part of a continuous improvement process. Responses such as, "I think they'll use it to determine whether to rehire me/keep employing me" are aligned with the view that teacher evaluation is a means by which employment decisions are based. In the follow-up phone interviews, unlike in the written responses, no respondents mentioned the importance of classroom management. However, several students spoke of the information being used for continuous improvement such as the response, "...to help us gather up resources or new information of how we can better succeed in our classrooms because the more resources and help we get, we do better in our classroom".

Survey Question 4: How do you plan to use the information gained from your evaluation?

The most prevalent response to this question can be classified as "to guide self-improvement" (N=95). Clinical teachers repeatedly made such statements as, "I plan to use the information gained from my evaluation to adjust and better my teaching to students" and "I will learn from it and become a better teacher". This view of using evaluation to guide self-improvement was shared by all phone respondents and was supported by the statement, "I would just use it in order to definitely make myself a better teacher if there's something they think that I could work on. In order to be better for my students, I would be more than happy to do that". To a much lesser extent, the respondents indicated that they would use information gained from the evaluation as a means to clearly identify strengths and weaknesses (N=30).

Survey Question 5: At this point, what support do you need in preparing for the teacher evaluation process?

Understanding the process and expectations (N=73) was the most common classification of response from this question. Clinical teachers responded such as, "Lots of resources, in paper or online. A rubric or explanation of what I am being evaluated on", and "I would just like to know, specifically, what they look for when evaluating you". A phone interview respondent supported this finding by sharing, "I have still been struggling with what exactly is expected of me when setting my goals within T-TESS". To a much lesser extent, clinical teachers identified mentoring and support (N=42) as an area that would assist them in preparing for the evaluation process.

Conclusions

Clinical teaching is an integral part of the preparation of teachers. It is important that teacher education programs incorporate the teacher evaluation process in all practicum courses as well as clinical teaching. From the survey results in this study, it is apparent that clinical teachers understand that their job performance will be reviewed using an evaluation process. However, from their responses, they are unsure of the complete process and how it impacts their work in the classroom. From the results, four major conclusions can be drawn.

First, as noted throughout the survey responses, clinical teachers have a basic knowledge and limited understanding of the evaluation process. However, as the aspiring teachers begin clinical teaching, they need a deeper, more thorough, understanding of the evaluation process and criteria or guidelines. Unfortunately, those surveyed, who are beginning their clinical teaching at this regional university, do not seem to fully grasp the teacher evaluation system. The perception of the clinical teachers' knowledge of the evaluation process is surface level at best. The student teachers know that they will be evaluated by their field supervisor, and when hired, the principal. However, they are unsure about the criteria of the evaluation and how the actual process works.

Next, the clinical teachers surveyed at this regional institution believe that the content is important. Many of the students believe that it is their responsibility to teach content in an engaging manner for all students to learn.

When asked what areas of the job performance he/she felt were important on the evaluation, one student stated, "...how engaged the students are, how they understand the information, and making sure the students understand enough to apply the information". Moreover, several students went a step further, noting the importance of assessing the content. Another student noted, "that it is my responsibility to teach the subject content and know whether my students understand it through informal assessments".

As the students enter the student teaching semester, it is obvious they are entering the teaching field with two mindsets regarding how administrators will use the information gathered from the teacher evaluation. First, about half of the respondents believe administrators will use the information as a learning or growing experience for the teacher. In other words, the students believe the administrator will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher with the opportunity for professional growth. As one noted, "The school administrators may use the gathered information to help identify areas I could improve and motivate me by identifying something I'm doing right". However, the other half of those surveyed believe the administrators will be using the information as an employment decision. A student noted, "I think they will use the information to decide if action needs to be taken on whether to renew my contract. They could also move me to a different classroom/position". While the students have two completely different mindsets regarding teacher evaluations, it is clear that those entering clinical teaching understand the importance of evaluations

Lastly, those surveyed recognize that results matter. As one student noted earlier, teachers are using informal assessments to determine if students are learning the material and then adjusting lessons accordingly. The clinical teachers comprehend the fact that part of their evaluation will be focused on student achievements. It is difficult for the clinical teachers to completely grasp what will be used for the evaluation; however, most realize that student achievement is essential. Clinical teachers often view student achievement as state testing results. One student noted, "I believe my job performance will be evaluated as to whether or not I'm meeting standard test requirements for my district". However, student achievement may be seen in a variety of ways. In some

classes, it may be met by local academic or benchmarks scores or possibly state testing results. However, in other classes, it may be how well students performed in a musical performance. Since there are diverse concepts taught throughout public education, the teachers must be evaluated on the varied accomplishments of all students through a variety of methods.

Recommendations

While teachers have a basic understanding of the evaluation process, the clinical teachers surveyed realize that they will be evaluated by an administrator. However, they are lacking an in-depth knowledge of the evaluation process. All clinical teachers should have a complete familiarity with the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), the state evaluation instrument, as well as the evaluation process. The clinical teachers should know the six areas within the Texas Teacher Standards and how these are evaluated using T-TESS. In order for this to happen, it is recommended that educator preparation programs explicitly teach the evaluation process. This process would need to be incorporated throughout the education courses and should be taught prior to field experiences and used throughout those experiences. Then, when an aspiring teacher begins clinical teaching, he/she will have the depth and breadth of the evaluation system and will not be surprised by the format of the evaluation.

Next, in order for the evaluation process and guidelines to be taught in the education courses, all faculty in the education programs would need specific professional development on the T-TESS. In doing so, the faculty members would gain an awareness and understanding of the T-TESS. Then, they could incorporate this material and knowledge to their students through their coursework in their education classes. Moreover, faculty members could incorporate T-TESS replicated evaluations throughout the field experiences leading up to the clinical teaching experiences. Finally, as noted by many clinical teachers surveyed, there is a desperate need for novice teachers to be provided a mentor. When asked what support was needed in preparing for the evaluation process, one topic that surfaced was the need for a mentor. This teacher mentor could provide reminders, resources, and constructive criticism which would allow the new or developing teacher to be more confident during the administrative evaluation.

It is important to build trusting relationships within the education culture. Creating a trusting relationship will “increase(s) the mentor’s ability to work with, and support, the new teacher in a positive manner” (Sowell, 2017). If the teacher was supported with a positive school culture and a trusting mentor, he/she may possibly continue in the profession for a longer period of time. However, this requires support from campus administrators because it is a huge time commitment for mentor teachers

Clinical teachers are excited to begin their clinical teaching experience. The results of this survey provided insight into the perspectives of approximately 200 preservice teachers. While the aspiring educators have a surface level foundation of the evaluation process, they do not yet possess the extensive knowledge regarding the evaluation system needed to be successful in the classroom.

Obviously, it is important not to set these aspiring educators up for failure by unintentionally withholding information regarding the evaluation process; therefore, it is imperative that faculty members within the educator preparation programs provide the knowledge and experiences needed. The demanding environment in which teachers serve, demands an evaluation process that appropriately addresses the complexities of the job (Xu, Grant, & Ward, 2016). Quality evaluation provides teachers with support, recognition, and guidance needed to improve the quality of instruction delivered to an increasing diverse student population. As teachers continue honing their teaching skills through the evaluation process, their teaching will continue to improve. Consequently, students will also benefit from this process.

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TECHNOLOGY PREPAREDNESS OF TEXAS TEACHERS: NEW TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM'S TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

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Abstract

While teacher preparation programs across the state are tasked with the preparation of teacher candidates for Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES) exams, a myriad of other skills must also be developed. Teacher candidates must develop a level of knowledge and capacity to incorporate technology into the curriculum. This study investigates the perceptions of 2015 program finishers regarding how their preparation program prepared them to use the technology in their classrooms.

Keywords: teacher preparation programs, technology preparation for classrooms, teacher candidate perceptions

In the state of Texas, individuals who wish to obtain teaching certification must complete a baccalaureate degree from an accredited university, satisfy requirements of a teacher preparation program, pass the TExES certification exams for the fields in which they wish to teach, and apply for certification. Teacher preparation programs are governed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and are deployed in a variety of outlets, with university providers being the most common. While teacher preparation programs across the state prepare teacher candidates (TEA, 2017), this study specifically examines the perceptions of program finishers in 2015 regarding how their preparation program prepared them for the instructional technology expectations of their schools.

Framework of Study

Technology integration is integral to success in 21st century classrooms. Whether working with digital natives, millennials, generation-z students, or alphas, new teachers face a level of expectation from students regarding use of technology in their learning. As educators, we may, at first impulse, dismiss their expectations. One could assume the classroom belongs to the teacher, but in fact, the classroom belongs to the teacher and the students. November (n.d.) explains that there are organizational design issues that face educators. Students need to take a more active role in

creating assessments, the creation of knowledge and community building (November, n.d.). In order for the classroom to be a conducive environment for learning, both the teacher and students must work together.

Students are not the only group with expectations. School administrators and the Texas Education Agency also have expectations of these new teachers regarding teaching and teaching with technology. Bull, Spector, Persichitte, and Meier (2017) state,

We are also creating an expectation that in order to learn a new technology, they [preservice teachers] need to take a technical skills course. That is not how it works in the classroom. In the classroom, teachers need to be able to learn things on the fly, they need to teach themselves new technologies as they come out and they need to have a very courageous and adventurous attitude about technology in classrooms. (p. 4)

Expectations are one thing; reality is often another.

In order to alleviate high attrition rates for educators, teachers' morale must be considered. Baylor and Ritchie (2002) discuss that a teacher's openness to change technology use and availability of professional development affects teacher morale. In academic year 2015-2016, the state of Texas employed 352,361 classroom

teachers, with attrition rates of 10.34% or 35,931 teachers; a slight increase over the year before. Of these teachers, 41,093, or 11.65%, were new hires (Ramsay, 2017). The Texas Tribune reports that “the average teacher has 11.2 years of experience, with 23.8 percent of them having advanced degrees” with one in six teachers leaving each year or 16.2% attrition (Ramsay, 2015). There are many reasons that teaching has a high attrition rate. Dove (2004) suggests that the reasons for such high attrition rates include teacher pay and the quality of teacher preparation programs, as well as other factors.

In addition to content specific standards, the Texas Education Agency (2016) requires the following technology standards for all new teachers:

Standard I. All teachers use and promote creative thinking and innovative processes to construct knowledge, generate new ideas, and create products.

Standard II. All teachers collaborate and communicate both locally and globally using digital tools and resources to reinforce and promote learning

Standard III. All teachers acquire, analyze, and manage content from digital resources.

Standard IV. All teachers make informed decisions by applying critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Standard V. All teachers practice and promote safe, responsible, legal, and ethical behavior while using technology tools and resources.

Standard VI. All teachers demonstrate a thorough understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations.

Standard VII. All teachers know how to plan, organize, deliver, and evaluate instruction for all students that incorporates the effective use of current technology for teaching and integrating the Technology Applications Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) into the curriculum. (p. 2)

The expectation of these standards is that, once new teachers complete their respective teacher preparation programs, they will be prepared with skills and knowledge necessary to integrate available technologies into the classroom learning environment.

Study Context

The TExES Certification Exam Review for Teachers (T-CERT) was developed in 2010 with funds provided by TEA. T-CERT was created by the Tarleton School Leadership Alliance, in conjunction with the Texas A&M University System, to help teacher candidates, novice and experienced alike, pass the TExES (Texas Examination of Educator Standards) discipline content exams. Due to funding needs, the System has commercialized the site. Convenience sampling due to access of registered of T-CERT participants was employed.

In order to determine how prepared new teachers felt with their level of preparedness of classroom technologies, a survey was administered to individuals who registered for T-CERT and who took a Texas teacher certification exam in 2015. In order to capture as many respondents as possible, the survey was sent out twice in the fall of 2017. A total of 13,967 surveys were sent electronically, and 60 were returned undeliverable. Of the approximate 13,000 surveys delivered, approximately 8% responded. Of the surveys sent, 959 individuals attempted the survey with 719 completing which yielded a 75% completion rate.

Survey Population Demographics

Data was collected on age, gender, region in which the participant is employed, grades the participants teach, and whether the participant received their first teacher certification or an additional certification. This study did not ask if the participant attended a university-based educator preparation program or an alternative certification program.

Age and Gender

Survey participants were asked to identify their age for the study by selecting an age group. The following age groups were used: 24 or younger, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, and 75 and older. The distribution of age among the research survey participants was organized by age groups.

It is interesting to note that 74.03% of the participants in this study were under the age of 45 (Figure 1).

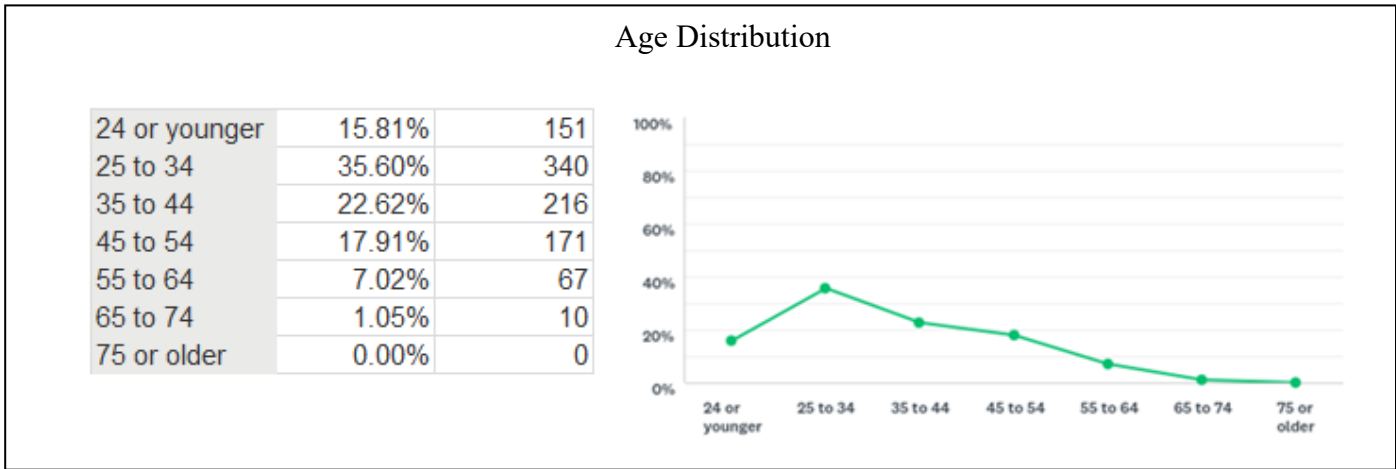


Figure 1. Age distribution of participants.

Gender of participants was categorized by three options: female, male, and prefer not to answer. Females made up 80.76% of participants while males composed 18.60%. Six individuals chose that they preferred not to answer this question. This survey data is consistent with national

trends for PK-12 classroom teachers. Ramsay (2016) states that, of the employed teachers in 2014-2015, 77% were female and 23% male. Figure 2 provides numerical and graphical information on survey participants' gender.

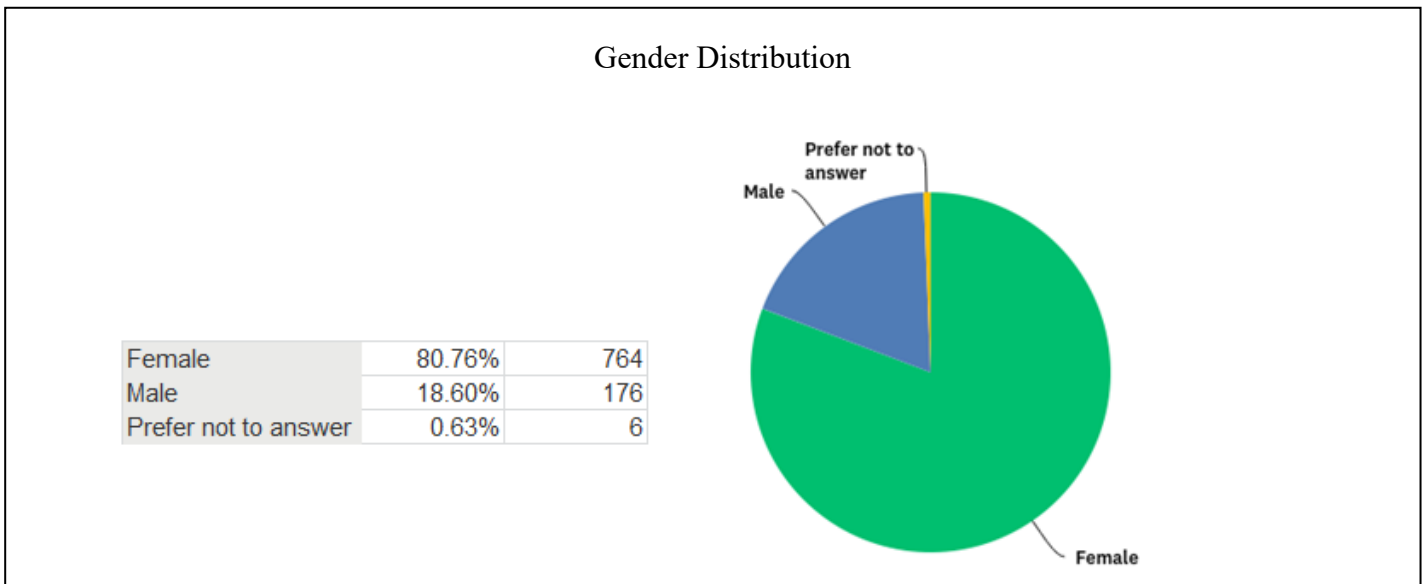


Figure 2. Gender distribution of participants.

Grade Level and Location

Survey participants were asked to indicate what grade levels that they were primarily teaching. The survey responses yielded the following information: 49.25%

(N=460) indicated grade levels PK-5, 25.48% (N=238) indicated grade levels 6-8, and 25.27% (N=236) indicated grade levels 9-12 (Figure 3). Prior to collecting the data, the researcher's aim was to gather an appropriate representation. To determine an approximate estimation

among the three grade level distributions, the number of grade levels represented in each category was divided by the total number of grade levels, yielding an approximate number of participants in each grade level. Based on this calculation, approximately 50% of participants from PK-5,

approximately 21% from grades 6-8, and approximately 29% from grades 9-12 was expected. The projected participation percentages reflect the actual participation percentages (Table 1).

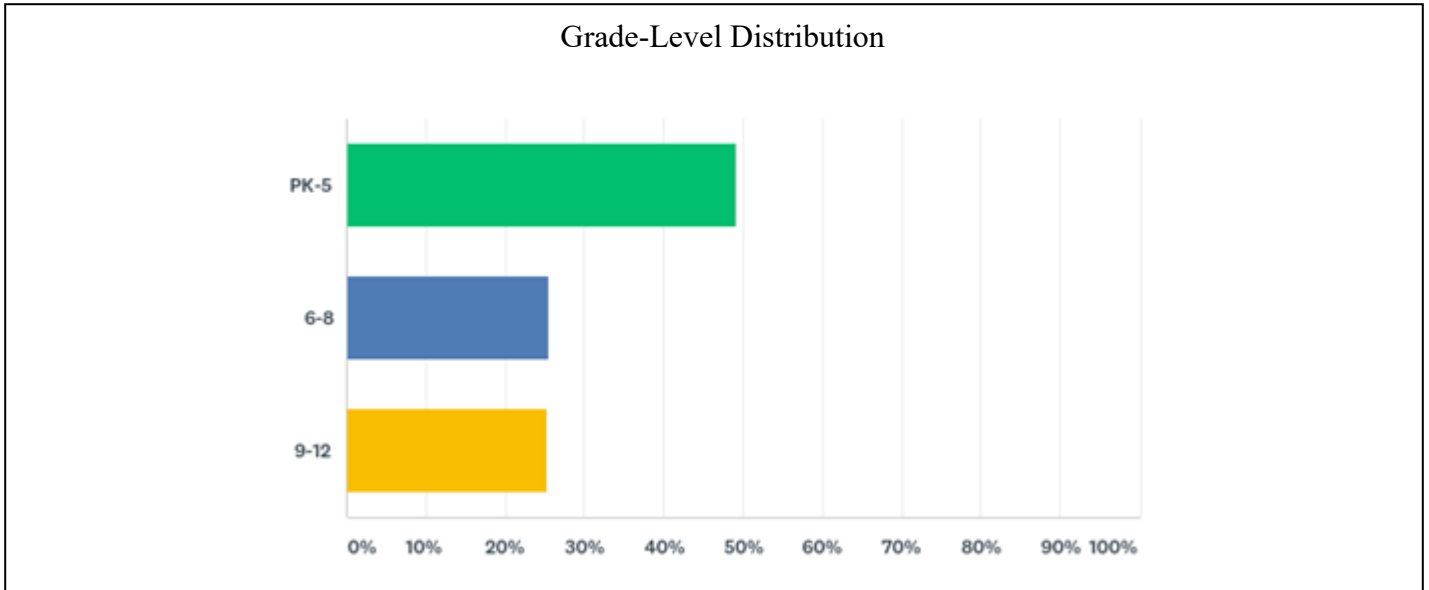


Figure 3. Participants’ grade level distribution.

Table 1
Comparison of Projected and Actual Participation Percentages

Projected Participation	Actual Participation
PK-5: 7 grade levels out of possible 14 levels: $7/14 = .50$	49.25% (N=460)
6-8: 3 grade levels out of possible 14 levels: $3/14 = .214$	25.48% (N=238)
9-12: 4 grade levels out of possible 14 levels: $4/14 = .286$	25.27% (236)

Every region in the state of Texas was represented in this survey, although some regions were more significantly represented. TEA has divided the state into twenty regions, served by Education Service Centers. Participants from

Region Four and Region Ten provide almost 42% of the data. Figure 4 presents the analysis of survey participants by region in order to add to the demographic description of the survey participants.

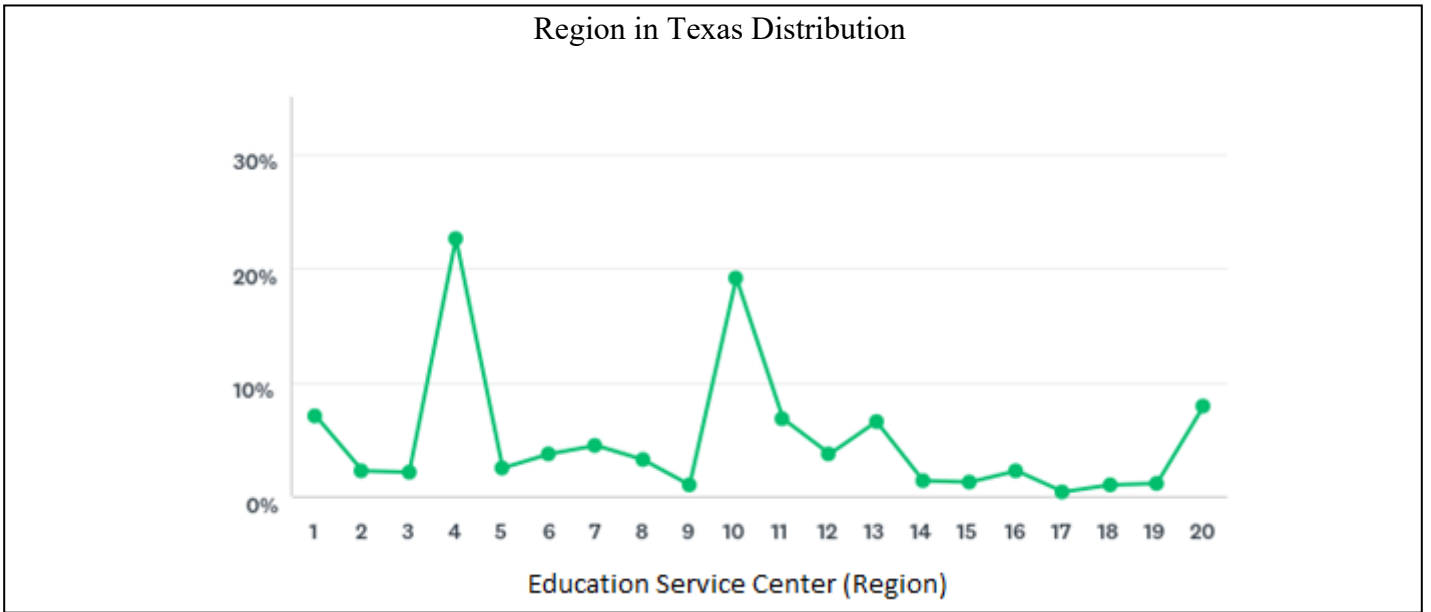


Figure 4. Participants’ distribution by TEA region / regional service center.

Findings

For this study, survey participants were asked a series of Likert scale questions regarding their satisfaction level of their preservice training in a variety of technology-centered arenas. Weights for satisfaction levels consist of the following: 1-strongly dissatisfied, 2-dissatisfied, 3-neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4-satisfied, and 5-strongly satisfied. Participants were asked to respond with their satisfaction level regarding how well their teacher preparation program prepared them to utilize the following items:

- Technologies that can be used to ‘flip’ a classroom
- Communication skills for online media
- Technologies to deliver instruction in virtual schools
- Word processing spreadsheets and presentation software
- Software for storing student grades
- Smart boards
- Ipads and/or other tablets
- Troubleshooting hardware and software
- Web resources for their subject matter
- Web 2.0 technologies
- Storing, organizing, and recalling files on PC/Mac

Table 2 shows the distribution of survey participants’ answers.

Table 2
Survey Items

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total	Weighted Average
technologies that can be used to 'flip' a classroom	6.81% n48	15.6% n110	30.5% n215	33.33% n235	13.76% n97	705	3.32
communication skills for online media	4.84% n34	13.37% n94	26.17% n184	40.97% n288	14.65% n103	703	3.47
technologies to deliver instruction in virtual schools	9.13% n64	19.83% n139	32.38% n227	28.67% n201	9.99% n70	701	3.11
word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software	5.83% n41	12.52% n88	23.33% n164	38.83% n273	19.49% n137	703	3.54
software for storing student's grades	8.81% n62	20.74% n146	27.7% n195	28.27% n199	14.49% n102	704	3.19
smart boards	12.41% n87	20.11% n141	30.24% n212	24.54% n172	12.7% n89	701	3.05
iPads and/or other tablets	10.84% n76	17.55% n123	28.53% n200	30.81% n216	12.27% n86	701	3.16
troubleshooting your hardware/software	11.95% n84	21.34% n150	38.26% n269	21.34% n150	7.11% n50	703	2.9
web resources for your subject matter	8.55% n60	12.82% n90	21.37% n150	38.89% n273	18.38% n129	702	3.46
web 2.0 technologies	10.43% n73	14.57% n102	43.57% n305	23.43% n164	8% n56	700	3.04
storing, organizing and recalling files on PC/Mac	8.84% n62	14.55% n102	32.67% n229	30.39% n213	13.55% n95	701	3.25

Likert items were compared using chi-square (χ^2) to determine if significant differences exist between expected and observed rates. Responses of all participants were analyzed and are presented in Table 3. Dissatisfied columns were combined, and satisfied columns were

combined; the 'neither' column was ignored for the calculation. Three statements showed significance, with the first two most significance: smart boards, troubleshooting hardware/software, and web 2.0 technologies.

Table 3
Analysis of Likert-Scale Survey Items

	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	Chi-Square
technologies that can be used to 'flip' a classroom	3.00	3.32	1.10	0.00000
communication skills for online media	4.00	3.47	1.05	0.00000
technologies to deliver instruction in virtual schools	3.00	3.11	1.11	0.00178
word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software	4.00	3.54	1.11	0.00000
software for storing student's grades	3.00	3.19	1.18	0.00004
smart boards	3.00	3.05	1.20	0.13583
iPads and/or other tablets	3.00	3.16	1.18	0.00000
troubleshooting your hardware/software	3.00	2.90	1.09	0.10267
web resources for your subject matter	4.00	3.46	1.18	0.00000
web 2.0 technologies	3.00	3.04	1.06	0.02370
storing, organizing and recalling files on PC/Mac	3.00	3.25	1.13	0.00000

SMART Boards

Regardless of the brand, interactive whiteboards, synonymous with SMART Boards, are important tools in many classrooms. An interactive whiteboard is defined as “an interactive display screen that is connected to a computer and allows for viewing, input, and collaboration by multiple users” (Interactive Whiteboard, n.d.) thereby enhancing classroom interaction and instruction. Interactive whiteboards can be intimidating to a new teacher without proper training. New teachers should be given ample instruction on pedagogical advantages of these tools as well as techniques for usage.

Troubleshooting Hardware/Software

Understanding how to troubleshoot individual hardware and software issues can also be intimidating to a novice. Simply telling someone to “Google” an issue will not teach the concept. Individuals need to understand the basics of troubleshooting hardware and software along with interpreting results of a “Google” search when necessary. New teachers should also become familiar with the technology support staff at their local campuses.

Web 2.0 Technologies

Web 2.0 technologies include usages like social networking, blogging, podcasting, and wikis, and are used to create, edit, and/or collaborate on content either asynchronously or synchronously (Exter, Rowe, Boyd & Lloyd, 2012). Web 2.0 technologies are becoming ubiquitous in the lives of online life, but many university instructors have yet to integrate these technologies into their courses; reporting access problems, technical glitches, openness, time and lack of technical support as barriers to integrating and using Web 2.0 technologies in teaching (An & Williams, 2010). Because of Web 2.0 technologies, the line has blurred between consumers of information (content) and producers (Brown & Adler, 2008). These technologies are often used to create and educate; educators, and future educators should be well trained in these tools. Instructors in teacher preparation programs have a challenging and important job: educate the next generation of teachers to educate the next generation of children. Equipping these new teachers with the right technology tools is critical to this being successful.

Discussion

While the Texas Education Agency governs the minimum standards that should be taught in teacher preparation

programs, we, as teacher educators, should see these standards as what they are: minimums. We should strive to exceed the standards in ways that will foster success in our new teachers and arm them with knowledge and skills that will nurture life-long learning, for them and for their future students. Teacher preparation programs should prepare new teachers to understand that they are NOT experts in technology but need to be open to technology; to embrace the new technology rather than to be afraid of it.

Teacher Preparation Support

This study shows that participants felt that they were not trained well enough on SMART Boards, troubleshooting hardware and software, or Web 2.0 technologies. Universities and other programs offering teacher certification should be diligent in learning what technologies are available in their area PK-12 schools and should develop curriculum aimed at exposing preservice teachers to what they may find in their future classrooms. These programs should also follow the standards put forth by TEA: minimum technology standards, TAC 229. Following the standards put forth by the Texas Education Agency is a start but should only be the beginning of a greater effort. We must strive to produce the best future educators.

District Level Support

School district administrators should not assume that new teachers have gained all of the technology skills and knowledge needed from their teacher preparation programs. Each PK-12 classroom is different and has different tools

and technologies available. It would be impossible for a teacher preparation program to train new teachers in every possible scenario of technology usage and integration. Instead, districts should consider providing technology trainings for their new and experienced teachers. If districts lack the expertise and cannot pay outside experts to conduct trainings, they should consider inviting university faculty to conduct these trainings. Another possible solution would be to connect with the district's regional education service center to request training. Districts should also enact mentoring programs for new teachers to include technology integration along with classroom management issues and pedagogical assistance.

Conclusion

Educator preparation programs can never do enough to prepare new teachers for their future classrooms. Meeting minimum technology standards is simply not enough; we must be diligent in exceeding the standards in order to train the best teachers possible. This survey confirms what is evident in the classrooms—minimum technology standards are not enough. Teachers must be equipped with the ability to handle a variety of tools, to embrace new technologies as they are introduced into the classroom, and how to meet the inevitable trouble shooting scenarios that are sure to come. Moreover, these survey results confirm that leaders in educator preparation programs must continue to advocate for the teaching of technology as a fundamental skill to prepare new educators. As we continue to prepare educators, our reliance on technology will surely increase.

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