Second Career Adults' Views of an Accelerated Teacher Education Program

By

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate students’ feelings of preparedness after completing an accelerated teacher education program designed for second career adults. Through a case study design, the researcher explored how a program’s design impacted students’ feelings of preparedness to enter the field, their views of the effectiveness of the components of the program, and how these graduates viewed the profession as novice teachers. The use of a questionnaire and interviews provided the researcher with descriptions of the participants’ perceptions of the accelerated program. Observations of graduates in the role of teacher showed the researcher if participants utilized the skills they developed during the education program and provided an opportunity to interview them individually. The study suggested that strong entrance requirements, in-depth training in pedagogy, and extended supervised time in the field increased students’ feelings of preparedness. Outcomes of this study may inform the design and implementation of future accelerated teacher education programs.

Keywords: teacher education, adult learners, second career teachers, alternative certification, accelerated programs
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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Many states are struggling to fill classrooms with highly qualified teachers to teach upper level math and science classes. One option that states have pursued is an accelerated path to certification to increase the pool of candidates by targeting mid-career professionals desiring to enter the teaching profession (Hawley, 1990). This study focused on a program attracting second career adults to the profession and was designed to evaluate its effectiveness in preparing future teachers in an accelerated time frame. The accelerated MAT in this study was developed by a university in response to a community need. A local manufacturing plant had closed leaving many employees with math, science and engineering backgrounds looking for work.

The university was approached by a workforce training alliance dedicated to providing retraining for these displaced workers. After agreeing to the terms of the contract, the university redesigned the MAT to a twelve-month program to expedite these second career teachers’ transition into the schools. The program was organized in a way that allowed this cohort to complete seven education and theory courses in the fall, student teach in the spring, and then finish the last three education courses online during the summer term. This format ensured that these pre-service teachers received the education pedagogy courses prior to entering the classroom in the role as teacher rather than through an alternative route in which teachers begin work prior to completing certification requirements (Nation Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance [NCEE], 2009).

The majority of the adults in this study entered the MAT program with undergraduate coursework in the areas of math and science with two students having majors in the social sciences. All students had at least ten years of work experience outside of the field of education. Nine of the fifteen students in the cohort enrolled as a result of layoffs from a local GM plant.
They were offered retraining as a part of their benefits package that included tuition assistance. The remaining five participants were attracted to the program due to the locale in which the classes were offered, the reduced tuition cost, and the accelerated format of a twelve month degree plan which could lead to teacher certification.

Unlike alternative certification programs (ACPs) where students acquire knowledge of the teaching profession through on-the-job training, this program was organized so students completed the education theory courses and then a one semester student teaching experience as part of their degree plan. This sequence allowed them to be exposed to the ideas, beliefs, and practical knowledge about teaching and then work with a mentor teacher who could offer immediate feedback and reinforcement. This experience also provided these students with the opportunity to put into practice the skills and concepts they had observed and learned during the first semester of the program. It was during this first fall semester of coursework that students began to see and experience the true nature of the teaching profession.

It is this premise that puts the accelerated MAT in this study separate from ACPs. An ACP bypasses typical teacher credentialing steps and allows a new teacher to acquire knowledge of the profession after employment has begun often through “…truncated programs that short-circuit essential elements of teacher learning” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 11). The accelerated MAT highlighted in this study is considered a conventional route to certification since candidates completed a student teaching semester and became certified prior to being hired as the teacher of record in a classroom. For this cohort, this was a crucial difference when it came to employability. The state’s highest rated school district, as determined by Tennessee’s Department of Education annual report card, is located within their employment area and the desirability for teaching in this county often means there may be over a dozen applicants for each available position. This allows the district to use alternative certification as an initial way to
weed out prospective teachers (WCS employee, personal communication, January 10, 2012). For the graduates in this study, this route to a teacher credential was not only designed in a way that would move them quickly through the pipeline but also hold intact their ability to acquire a paid position. An additional benefit is that it has been shown that graduates from a master’s level teacher education program “… were more confident, appreciated their program more, got teaching jobs, and kept them longer” than baccalaureate graduates (Thomas & Loadman, 2001, p. 197).

Practical and Intellectual Goals

The intellectual goal of this study was to critically examine an accelerated teacher education program that followed the traditional format of pedagogy instruction followed by a supervised student teaching semester and assess its effectiveness. In the future, this knowledge could be used to determine if teacher preparation programs should be restructured based to meet the unique needs of second career adults who want to enter the field of education. A thorough investigation of the issue utilizing unbiased research techniques acquired through the process of creating and conducting this study informed the results of this study.

The practical goal of this study was to determine whether or not the unique structure of this accelerated program was successful at meeting the needs of adult learners when preparing them to enter the teaching profession so that they felt competent in their new role. In addition, the study examined if their preparation impacted participants’ plans to persist within the field. Attrition has led to a teacher shortage in certain areas with some estimates showing that almost fifty per cent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Stanley & Martin, 2009) with higher rates for those who enter with less preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Another practical goal was that future cohorts of students could be enrolled in this type of program to help ease not only the transition to the field of teaching from other professions, but
also the need for more teachers in the STEM areas. As one of the first recipients of Race to the Top funds, Tennessee allocated funds to both of these issues ("About Tennessee first to the top," 2010). With money being used to support ACPs, it is important to understand what types of programs are the most cost effective way of acquiring and retaining new teachers.

A final goal of this research was to show if an accelerated program designed specifically for second career adults could help to meet the needs of all parties involved – pre-service teachers who enrolled in the program and the university education department that offered the program. It is anticipated that the results of this study can help to promote the development of accelerated programs so that the teaching profession can be infused with capable and competent adults who have chosen to enter the field from other professions.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is framed by adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973). Due to the fact that the teacher education program focuses on students who have undergraduate degrees and many years of professional work experience, it is important to understand the context within which they learn new skills. In conjunction with their unique learning styles, it is also important to understand how participating in the task of teaching prior to acquiring a paid position impacts their transition to the field and their feelings of preparedness in this new role. Adults who return to school bring with them a wealth of life experiences that provide a basis for how they make sense of new information that is presented to them. Adult students have specific needs when it comes to learning. Adults need the information presented to be relevant to their previous experiences, they need the information to be presented through more than one modality, and they need to be able to practice what they are learning (Knowles, 1973, Chapter 3).

*Adult Learning Theory.* With the discussion focusing on what it is that teachers need to know and how they learn best; adult learning theory was the lens through which the problem was
analyzed. This theory helps to clarify the conditions that increased an adult’s capacity and desire to learn, and was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the students’ experiences. Four areas of research have emerged in relation to adult learning: self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning and learning to learn (Brookfield, 1995).

Self-directed learning is when the student takes responsibility for their learning (Brookfield, 1995). This is often seen in programs with a constructivist viewpoint. Constructivism is when a student combines what they already know with new information and draws conclusions (Martin & Loomis, 2007, p. 14). It is during this process that adult learners get back into the role of the learner and become a student again. As adults are learning the nature of teaching, they have to take in new information but also be open to change when it comes to prior perceptions they may have had about the acts of teaching and learning.

Because of their in-depth professional experiences, many adults are used to having to adapt previously held notions and are usually open to learning new ideas so critical reflection is not new to them. Brookfield (1995) explains how critical reflection is used by adults to make sense of the new knowledge they are acquiring. His processes can be seen as how adults question and change a previously held assumption and how they view an alternative perspective to an earlier conviction. The difficulty of teaching these students arises when, due to these experiences, they will not accept all information given to them at face value. An important aspect of Brookfield’s work is the emphasis he puts on adult learners not being viewed only by their age but also as a product of their culture, ethnicity, and personality (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1).

Brookfield’s ideas follow the work of transformative learning as presented by Jack Mezirow. Mezirow (2003) states that “transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change (p. 58). One of
the frames of reference often found with adult learners returning to school is that of occupational habits of mind (Mezirow). These occupational habits can affect an adult learner either positively or negatively. On one hand, a professional may be accustomed to having to evaluate and judge their own work, and as a student, they will be open to feedback. Others, because of their previous professional positions, may have been expected to follow specific guidelines without deviating or questioning the reasons why something is being done a specific way. This could make the learning process more difficult if it is presented in a constructivist format where the student takes the lead for his/her own learning and is expected to construct knowledge based on information they have acquired and used.

Adult learners also tend to look for a mentor to help guide them in the learning process. The impact the mentor can have on the pre-service teacher (PST), both positively and/or negatively, is well documented in the literature (Giebelhaus and Bowman. 2000; Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen and Bergen. 2008). As Daloz (1986) states, “… mentors are important at the beginning of people’s careers or at crucial turning points in their professional lives (p. 20). Preparing for a second career can be viewed as both a beginning and a turning point. Mentors may come in the form of a university professor, a school supervisor or even another student in the program. Mentors can have great impact on the education of adults and the positive effects of mentoring on new teachers are well documented (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002).

It is often while working with another adult already acculturated in the profession that adults make the connection with their new knowledge. It is as engaged participants that adults take part in the learning process and constructing what they are learning as they learn (Dirkx, 1998). Adult learners must see the new information as significant and, by putting into action what they have been taught; the new knowledge is then reinforced. Experiential learning can be
viewed as “a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). In this work, Kolb (1984) describes learning viewed as a process. Ideas are formed and reformed through experience. Through this process, adults make sense of their experiences by reflecting on what has occurred and reframing their ideas to align with their objectives.

Lave and Wenger (1991) focused extensively on the impact “legitimate peripheral participation” had on how people acclimated to a new role. They define legitimate peripheral participation as the interaction between newcomers and old-timers and how newcomers become part of a community of practice (p. 29). Many professionals take part in communities of practice when they are entering a new or different field. Most notably, blue collar professions incorporate apprenticeships to provide on-the-job training with new skills being gradually introduced. What is important to understand about the value of this type of learning-by-doing is that it not only provides the new entrant with experience under a mentor but it also acculturates the person into their new role. When spending time in the environment of the new profession, the apprentice is hearing the vocabulary of the position, participating in conversations with others in this community, and becoming aware of the tasks involved with this new identity. Lave and Wenger (1991) believe, “an extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs” (p. 95).

In line with this concept is the idea that student teaching is an apprenticeship. Pre-service teachers are placed with a mentor teacher who provides an induction into the profession. The mentor initially models for the student and then slowly allows them to engage in the practice of teaching. At some point, full control of the classroom is handed over to the student teacher. The advantage of this model is the opportunity for the student to receive immediate and ongoing feedback and “saving” if necessary. The student teacher is in a position to evaluate what has
occurred, reflect on it and then discuss it with a mentor who can help him/her make sense of it and in the end learn from the experience. “Mentors give us the magic that allows us to enter the darkness: a talisman to protect us from evil spells, a gem of wise advice, a map, and sometimes simply courage” (Daloz, 1986, p. 17).

Research Questions

The core foundation for this study was based on the following: understanding how the program was adapted to meet the needs of adult learners, the value of incorporating experiences in the classroom, and maintaining the program’s high expectations for preparing future teachers. This foundation also formed the basis for the research questions –

1. How did an accelerated teacher education program designed with separate semesters of coursework, both in-class and on-line, and a student teaching semester impact career changing adults’ feelings of preparedness to enter the profession?

2. How do pre-service teachers who are experiencing a career change view the components of the Belmont University accelerated teacher education program?

3. What are the graduates’ views about the field of teaching now that they are working in the profession?

The study was designed with the expectation that a clear picture would emerge of these second career teachers’ experiences within the accelerated MAT program. By understanding how these adult learners’ experiences and previous work situations impacted future learning and development, the researcher made sense of their reactions, frustrations or concerns with the program. It also helped to elucidate any components of the accelerated program that either did or did not meet their needs as they entered the teaching profession.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review focuses on three areas related to this study: teacher preparation, second career adults who enter the teaching profession, and the value of the student teaching experience. These components look at how a teacher education program’s design impacts the effectiveness of its graduates and what leads a second career adult to choose the field of teaching. It also examines how career changing adults’ experiences impact their learning and then their application of theory into practice. Specifically, the literature on the student teaching experience, including the mentor relationship, is reviewed.

Teacher Preparation

For many years in the United States, the job of selecting and “certifying” teachers fell to each community and most notably, in the early years of teacher education, to clerics. By the end of the nineteenth century there were four different forms of teacher education: state and private normal schools, high school training programs or normal schools, teachers departments in colleges, and institutes that trained teachers for rural schools (Angus, 2001). During the twentieth century, state control of certification programs took hold with forty-one state systems in place in 1937 (Angus, 2001). As history has shown, the question of who should manage teacher education and all of its components is not one that has recently emerged.

To evaluate teacher preparation programs, it is first important to decide what teachers need to know and then, what is the best way for them to learn it. This is where the debate over content versus pedagogy comes in to play in much of the literature surrounding teacher preparation programs and their effectiveness. A lack of understanding of what happens behind the scenes leads to a public perception that anyone with knowledge of the subject can teach (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The value of preparation prior to teaching has been established by numerous researchers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Darling-Hammond,
2006; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Boyd, et al (2009) found that teacher education programs that provide a strong focus on teaching knowledge and a supervised student teaching experience produce more effective first year teachers.

From a historical perspective, authors discussed a paradigm of teacher education where the idea that teaching was “… a craft passed down to prospective teachers by expert teachers” (Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008, p. 266). The model of a PST’s placement in an apprenticeship-like situation is most common. It is understood that through this relationship, PSTs will develop skills and begin to understand the realities of the profession. The concern with this model is that it has been described as a triad – student, mentor, university supervisor – where the quality of supervision is inconsistent and the philosophies of the mentor and the university may not align (Wilson, 2006). Both of these issues can cause a PST to experience such a poor first impression of the field that continuation in teaching is questionable (Wilson, 2006).

How and what pre-service teachers need to learn has long been a discussion both inside and outside the field of education. Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Grossman, Rust & Shulman (2005) discuss three types of knowledge that teachers need to develop:

1. Knowledge for practice – knowledge of subject matter content, content pedagogy, learning/development theories, effects of various teaching strategies
2. Knowledge in practice – knowledge in actions as shown by a teachers’ practice, reflections on their experiences and in their situation by observing students, putting plans into action
3. Knowledge of practice – the theoretical aspects of knowledge and practice as developed through continued learning and development (p. 382).
They stress that it is within this community that new teachers become a member of the profession, although it begins with the teacher candidate and his/her work with peers, university faculty and student teacher mentors.

By being cognizant of and using these types of knowledge not only affects their ability, but having a lack of self-efficacy in teaching may also directly impact student achievement (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009). In a study focusing on the teacher’s value-added to student test scores, results show that teachers who are prepared in programs that incorporate the practice of teaching – utilizing a capstone project, oversight of student teaching and studying curricula - show positive gains during their first year of teaching (Boyd, et al, 2009). It is important to remember that a number of teachers who are trained in ACPs are going into the most challenging schools, in the most challenging classrooms and in subjects that are often hardest to teach such as math and science (Adcock & Mahlios, 2005). When pre-service teachers are able to “practice” before being left in a classroom alone, they are more apt to feel prepared and able to get down to the business of teaching rather than learning classroom management skills (Zientek, 2007).

**Alternative Teacher Preparation**

The notion of alternative certification began in the early 1980’s due to the increased demand for teachers (primarily in urban areas) and the lack of graduates from traditional teacher education programs (Hawley, 1990). Alternative certification can be defined as a “process whereby an individual may be given an initial certificate to teach, without completing a college program in teacher education” (Descamps & Klingstedt, 1985, p. 258). These programs can differ in entrance requirements, hours of instruction, and fieldwork prior to entering the classroom. In 2010, forty-eight states and the District of Columbia report having some form of alternative certification (National Center for Alternative Certification [NCAC], 2010). Even if
ACPs provide a person with a “fast track” into the role of teacher of record, it does not necessarily do the same when it comes to becoming a credentialed teacher with this process often following the same guidelines as traditional routes (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

During the 1990’s, teacher education program guidelines came under close scrutiny and as a result guidelines were tightened (Angus, 2001). During this same time period, AC policies were relaxed leaving doubt as to whether these programs are really the answer to the teacher shortage since they do nothing to improve the attractiveness of the profession compared to other options (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Rubino, Soltys, Wright & Young, 1994; Shen, 1997; Whiting & Klotz, 2000). One of the primary arguments against the earlier forms of licensing rested on the idea that standards were too low and preparation was not adequate to meet the needs of students. This conversation is still occurring but especially in light of the growth of ACPs. Created as a way to relieve the teacher shortage in the mid 80’s, ACPs are now in direct competition with traditional college-based teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Shen (1997) compared traditionally certified (TC) and AC teachers utilizing data from a 1993-1994 National Schools and Staffing Survey. One of his findings was that TC teachers had higher academic qualifications than the AC teachers with 2.4 % of them having no degree at all (Shen, 1997). This led to questions about the people who are attracted to ACPs with some suggesting they do so as a way to circumvent traditional teacher education program’s guidelines. Not all of Shen’s results were negative. He also found that ACPs were more likely to attract males, minorities, and professionals from the STEM fields (Shen, 1997). Zientek (2007) partially corroborates these results by showing that TC programs are more likely to attract teachers with undergraduate math degrees and ACPs more likely to attract those with a science degree but they are often recent graduates with no real-world experience.
In a more current review of seven ACPs from across the United States, Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) concluded that the complexity of evaluating these types of programs comes from the wide variance among them and idea that both proponents and opponents overstate their view when presenting study results. By examining the characteristics of the participants, the program components and the context of the school placement, these researchers were able to see how all of these factors affected the participants’ expectations and outcomes. Their evaluation showed that only a small number of participants were career changers from the math and science fields, the racial make-up of participants tended to match the districts’, and many of them had prior experience within a classroom setting (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

Another way that alternative programs are categorized is by what factors contribute to their context. Many programs can be identified as either a top down approach in which the model’s context focuses on being able to serve multiple clients, which could include a funding source or a bottom up design where program efforts are focused at the grass roots level to meet the needs of local schools and constituents (Scribner & Heinen, 2009). Both formats contain inherent issues when trying to meet the needs of all interested parties but this provides controlling agencies with the flexibility to be able to market to a specific clientele (Scribner & Heinen, 2009).

Another argument against ACPs is participants’ long-term outlook of remaining in the profession. Shen (1997) found that more AC teachers did not view teaching as a lifelong career. These results are confirmed in a study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow (2002). They evaluated the results of a survey conducted with over 2300 New York City teachers that focused on teacher’s feelings of efficacy. Teachers who were prepared through alternative pathways rated their feeling of preparedness significantly lower on twenty-five of the forty items compared to traditionally trained graduates (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). These
results directly related to their views of teaching as an occupation. These results are not indicative of all ACPs. Except for one program whose goal is short-term recruitment, one study found that over half of the participants expected to remain in the field (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

Understanding the discrepancies and hurdles often faced by ACPs, a university in Georgia created their own program. By utilizing a research-based approach to design a program, the university focused on strict entrance requirements such as GPAs, interviews and writing performance. They also included intensive classroom instruction, supervised field experiences, and a strong mentor component within the program (Stanley & Martin, 2009). The results showed that the research-based program’s attrition rate was 6.2 percent compared with the state’s 35 percent and the national average of 46 percent (Stanley & Martin, 2009).

One of the most prominent alternative certification programs is Teach for America (TFA). TFA states that its mission is to eliminate educational inequity by developing leaders today who will continue to fight for students tomorrow (Teach for America website, n.d). In a review of the impact TFA corps members have in schools, Heilig and Jez (2010) found the results were both positive and negative and often depended with whom the TFA teachers were compared. When compared to beginning credentialed teachers, students of new TFA teachers performed significantly lower in reading and math (Heilig & Jez, 2010). The study does show that with experience and certification, TFA teachers are comparable with TC teachers with similar experience. The concern is that since the commitment period is only two years and less than twenty per cent of TFA recruits remain after three years, the results may be due to experience or the attrition of less effective teachers (Heilig & Jez, 2010).

Similarly, a 2005 study found that when teacher experience, degrees and student characteristics were controlled, TFA recruits were less effective than certified teachers and
performed comparably to other uncertified teachers (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). Because TFA recruits are often placed into lower performing schools, it is important to mention that districts do benefit even if only for the short term. In most instances, the students at least are no worse off when placed with an academically advanced teacher with little or no teacher practice (Glazerman, Mayer, & Decker, 2006).

**Second Career Adults**

Creating a clear pathway to teacher licensure was the goal that led Southwest Texas State University (SWT) to create a teacher preparation program that incorporates the positive aspects of both traditional and alternative certification programs. SWT boasts that the program is both *comprehensive* in that students complete all requirements for initial certification prior to employment and it is *efficient* in that training is completed in two semesters (Huling, Resta, & Rainwater, 2001). This program was designed to offer mid-career change professionals a speedy but effective route to teacher licensure. Collected data shows that the program is able to recruit minorities, professionals from high-need subject areas, and students whose undergraduate GPA is above a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. When participants were asked to rank factors that influenced their enrollment in the program, acceleration of program and convenient location scored the highest (Huling et al., 2001). These themes occurred in another study looking at career-change professionals and showed that it is the program format that led them to a specific campus (Castro & Bauml, 2009). This type of flexibility is important to these adult students who may have family responsibilities that can make returning to school a challenge.

Most studies in the area of second career teachers look at the reasons adults choose teaching and how their preceding careers impact their new role. It has been found that often times these professionals were directed toward their previous career either by family, commitments, or a desire for success; whereas now they are choosing the profession in which
they want to belong (Chambers, 2002; Crow, Levine & Nager, 1990; Mayotte, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2005). Because it is now their choice, their commitment and motivation to succeed remains high even though they encounter challenges along the way.

One of the greatest challenges for adults returning to the classroom is that of having to become a student again. Going back into the role of being a student causes some adult learners to question why this is needed. Many second career teachers feel that since they have the content knowledge of the subject matter, it is not necessary to go through a credentialing program (Grier & Johnston, 2009). Mayotte (2003) also found that these pre-service students felt it hard not to be in a leadership role, as many were in their previous positions, and they were frequently not given the support they needed due to the misperception that their age and experiences did not really classify them as novices. She cites this as an area of focus needed by teacher education programs that may not provide mentor training for supervising teachers.

This challenge also highlights the need to revise how second-career adults are taught. Because of their extensive professional experience and background knowledge, these adults need to see the connections not only between their previous role and their new one; but also how to shift those skills to the field of teaching (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008). By providing concrete examples of how to transfer these competencies, second career adults can make the best use of their skills while adapting them to the new situation. Tigchelaar, Brouwer and Vermunt (2010) suggest four ways to encourage adult student learning:

- Tailor preparation in advance which includes using case studies, clinical experiences and course work with special themes.
- Take into account their special needs by teaching them in a cohort fashion and differentiating their learning for individuals.
- Integrate previous career experiences with new ones by starting with their current
competencies and use research to help integrate new knowledge.

- Integrate theory and practice by ensuring strong relationships between university and school personnel and by providing mentor training (p. 175).

It is important to career change students that their previous skills and knowledge be valued during the pre-service learning process and taken into consideration when the program is being planned and implemented. It has been found that those adults who found continuity between their past role and their future one were more successful in this endeavor (Crow et al., 1990).

**Student Teaching**

Student teaching is one of the primary components of a teacher preparation program that affects a pre-service teacher’s sense of self-efficacy toward the teaching profession (Hoy, 2000). The integration of theory and practice often falls to the supervising teacher (mentor) during the student teaching component of the teacher education program. Although the university supervisor may assist in this process, it is the mentor who is with the pre-service teacher day after day and most often takes the lead. Through interaction with a supervising teacher, the student teacher begins to see the hierarchical barriers between them recede and their feelings of legitimacy increase (Cuenca, 2011). The opposite of this is also true. Should a mentor not allow the student teacher access to the “tools of the trade” feelings of being a teacher may not develop.

It is important to understand and remember that although pre-service teachers have years of professional experience, they are new to the profession of teaching and need the same support and guidance as first career teachers (Mayotte, 2003, p. 692). It falls to the teacher education program to locate and train mentors in adult learning theory to help ensure that these students’ unique needs are met.
Research has shown that there are aspects of self-efficacy that can either increase or decrease during student teaching (Hoy, 2000). When a PST believes that they have been successful in the classroom and with the school, they will often have the expectation of being successful in the future. The same case can be made with a negative perception (Hoy). This is where the value of a mentor becomes apparent. They are in a position to use social persuasion by giving positive feedback that can enhance a PST’s feeling of self-efficacy (Hoy). The value of the student teaching experience can be explained by understanding the idea that you haven’t really learned something until you can put it into practice (Harlin, Edwards, & Briers, 2002).

The significance of the student teaching experience cannot be overemphasized as found in the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2003) report which shows that those who have this opportunity are twice as likely to remain in the profession after their first year. It is during this period that pre-service teachers become integrated into the practices of the profession. The mentoring that occurs during student teaching helps these adults, new to the profession, improve their practice by providing immediate and insightful feedback, aiding in the transfer of knowledge, and encouraging in the socialization within the culture of the school environment (Jorissen, 2002).

Challenges that arise during this experience occur when those who are selected as mentors are not trained or not made aware of the university’s objectives. A study in which over one hundred teachers were surveyed concerning the practices they were expected to model for students found that these teachers rated themselves higher than the university personnel who observed them in the classroom (Sands & Goodwin, 2005). This discrepancy can cause problems when the student, acting as the lead teacher, is evaluated by university personnel. Parker-Katz and Bay (2008) found that the mentors they interviewed felt their role was to help pre-service teachers understand the profession and how to understand the learning process of
their pupils. This understanding can come in several ways. A 2006 study which focused on the perceptions of mentor teachers concerning their role found that these mentors could be grouped into two categories – the maestros and the mentors. Maestros orchestrated their teaching and expected that the student teacher would replicate it. Mentors on the other hand felt the student teacher needed to create their own “teaching self” through reflection and ongoing conversations (Graham, 2006). A strong recommendation from the study is that departments need to ensure that these student teachers are being placed with mentors who understand their role in the development of new teachers. This is especially true with second career students who are looking closely to the mentor for direction but may feel they themselves have beneficial skills that can be incorporated into the classroom.

The student teaching component of teacher education programs is shown to enhance the growth of pre-service teachers as they work directly with professionals in the field and can impact their future role as a teacher. Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) found that new teachers aligned with the culture of the school during their first year of teaching and then returned to the skills they were taught during their pre-service trainings in subsequent years. They hypothesize that this may be due to the challenges first year teachers face in managing the classroom. Since second career teachers are expected to remain in the profession past the first year, it is hoped that once they become acclimated to their new role, critical reflection will be used to define their own method of teaching and classroom management rather than following the teacher next door.

Situated cognition entails that the learner learns as (s) he interacts within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students who are spending full semesters in a school setting get immersed into this community and are privy to its tools and resources. It is important to remember that teaching can be a very isolating job. New teachers especially, are in a classroom most of the day by themselves and may not have the opportunity to spend time in the teacher’s
lounge to get involved with others in this community. Planning and preparing for the next lesson can, at times, be overwhelming so the prospect of participating in socialization as a learning tool may not exist. It is through this socialization that many adults acquire the skills needed to make sense of the information they are receiving within the context of the learning environment (Hansman, 2001). In teacher education programs, this is most often completed during the student teaching or internship semester. Darling-Hammond (2010) ponders how we can ask new teacher recruits to either do what they have never seen before or do the opposite of what they have observed. The need for pre-service teachers to experience the role and responsibility of being a teacher under the tutelage of a veteran before sending them into what is often called “shark infested waters to either sink or swim” has been written about at length (Baines, 2006; Cuenca, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Whiting & Klotz, 2000; Zientek, 2007).

Another aspect of how the student teaching experience aids in the growth of the teacher identity being developed by second career adults is how this profession is different from previous ones they may have held. Having an opportunity to experience first-hand that teaching can be exhausting, demanding, and challenging with little ego-stroking can be an eye-opener to professionals who are used to receiving praise for a job well done (Haggard, Slostad, & Winterton, 2006). Learning how to teach and develop the needed relationships in the classroom are skills that these adults look for most in the school experience (Montecinos et al., 2011). Cuenca (2011) found that student teaching gave pre-service teachers an opportunity to take ownership of the routines that are an indelible part of teaching – collecting homework, grading papers, etc. By seeing these rituals modeled and then “stepping in” for the teacher, student teachers often begin to think like a teacher (Cuenca, 2011).

Understanding what it takes to be a successful teacher and acquiring the skills needed to navigate halls filled with students and other professionals are the crux of what second career
adults need in an education program. Prior to entering the field, these seasoned professionals may have had their own ideas of what teachers did, but not until they were placed in that role did they value the time spent preparing for it. As Darling-Hammond (2006) states, “…schools of education must design programs that help prospective teachers to understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students…” (p. 3). By appreciating adult learners for who they are, providing them with a strong understanding of pedagogy and incorporating an opportunity to practice the skills and tasks of being a teacher, second career teachers will be in the best position to succeed in their new role.

**Summary**

Traditional teacher preparation programs provide students with the pedagogy of how to teach and the time with a mentor to be able to practice this new skill. Conversely, alternative programs rely on a person’s content knowledge and desire to learn while on the job within a specific school’s context. Second career adults transitioning to the field of education may select one program over another based on their needs, locale or funding sources (Huling et al., 2001). Both types of programs have to look at their mode of presenting the information and how they support this student population to ensure their unique learning styles are being addressed. Adults learn best when programs incorporate their experiences, encourage them to reflect on these experiences, and then try out this new knowledge (Green & Ballard, 2010-2011).

Programs that prepare teachers often vary in the levels of support provided to the student-teacher during their time in front of the classroom. Most university models create arrangements that form a triad which includes the student, the mentor and the university supervisor; while ACPs rely on the guidance offered through the school where the participant is employed. Either situation can create an experience where the novice teacher is in a supportive environment or a
chaotic one, which ultimately impacts the new teacher’s feelings of efficacy and desire to remain in the profession (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

Teacher education reform is a contested topic with one side pushing to professionalize the field through standards and certification and the other wanting to deregulate it by removing control from teacher education departments and giving it to local schools (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Research has shown positive results for both sides but many agree that work needs to be done by each group to strengthen not only public perception but actual teacher quality (Adcock & Mahlios, 2005; Baines, 2006; Whiting & Klotz, 2000).

Chapter III: Research Design

Research Questions

The following questions are those that guided this study and the purpose behind them:

1. How did an accelerated teacher education program designed with separate semesters of coursework, both in-class and on-line, and a student teaching semester impact career changing adults’ feelings of preparedness to enter the profession?

2. How do pre-service teachers who are experiencing a career change view the components of the Belmont University accelerated teacher education program?

3. What are the graduates’ views about the field of teaching now that they are working in the profession?

By investigating the first question, this study evaluated if students who already had a content area degree felt the components of a teacher education program that were taught in a condensed format adequately prepared them to enter the profession. This information helped to elucidate the notion that theory acquired prior to practice increases feelings of preparedness for the novice teacher. The purpose of the second question was to highlight the effectiveness (or not) of the individual components that comprised the education program including: course format (online,
condensed scheduling), field experiences, gateway exercises (program assessments), student teaching semester, assignments, course offerings and location. This information helped to clarify if any of the teacher education components were viewed as more worthwhile than others or if students felt more time should have been spent on any of the components to increase their feelings of preparedness. The final question looked to provide evidence of novice teachers’ perceptions of the profession once they became a part of it.

**Methodology**

The researcher examined what components of an accelerated teacher education program second career adults felt best met their needs as they prepared to enter the teaching profession. To do this, a qualitative case study was conducted so that rich detail within the data could highlight participants’ perspectives of the accelerated MAT program. The case was a cohort of adult students enrolled in a year-long program that culminated with graduates receiving an MAT degree and, if all requirements were met, qualifying for teacher licensure in the state of Tennessee. In-class courses were taught at the General Motors training facility located approximately forty miles south of the University’s campus. Over half of the participants in this study had been employed at this plant with the others living in close proximity.

With the research questions focusing on *how* participants viewed a teacher education program after they experienced it, Yin (2009) posits that a case study approach be used to understand the events since no manipulation of the variables occurred (p.11). She also states that a case study is an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon, contains many interest points, relies on multiple sources of data and is based on a theoretical framework (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This study meets this definition in that it focused on a teacher education model designed for second career adults that evaluated participants’ views and reactions to the program through observations, interviews, and other collected information. In addition, the study used adult
learning theory as a theoretical framework. A qualitative study shows how each participant’s reality compared to the others’ within the examined case (Creswell, 2007).

**Site and participants**

The study focused on a cohort of MAT graduates (the case) who completed a one-year accelerated teacher education program offered by a private, liberal arts college located in the South. The graduates (n=14) enrolled in the program in August, 2010, and graduated in August, 2011, with a Master of Arts in Teaching with the option of applying for state certification. A grant opportunity, offered in conjunction with the University and a local training alliance, was advertised in a community which recently experienced the closing of an auto-manufacturing plant. The plant provided classroom space and laptop computers during the course of the program. The students, who comprised the cohort, were all at least forty years old with a minimum of ten years work experience in a career other than teaching.

The accelerated MAT in this study included weekly field experience opportunities during the fall semester to introduce the teacher education students to the role of the teacher. Only one member of the group came to the program with classroom experience, although several of them had taken on the role of a training facilitator in their previous positions. The participants all completed a full semester student teaching experience with eight weeks at a middle school and eight weeks at a high school. The pre-service teachers were given a schedule in which they slowly took on more responsibility of the classroom until they eventually had full control for several weeks during each placement.

The researcher was hired through the grant to be a faculty member whose responsibilities included teaching six courses within the MAT program and acting as the university supervisor for seven of the participants during the student teaching semester. Prior to conducting the study,
the researcher procured authorization from the University to engage the graduates in a dialogue concerning their experiences in the program and to utilize program documentation.

The sample consisted of the fourteen graduates of the teacher education program. The researcher chose to exclude a fifteenth student who completed two semesters and was eligible for certification but upon being recalled to the auto manufacturing plant, chose not to complete the final three courses and did not graduate with the MAT degree. Due to the small sample size from which to draw, purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling involves selecting specific people who can provide important information (Maxwell, 1996) about the topic being studied.

An introductory letter (Appendix A) was sent to the fourteen graduates inviting them to take part in the study. Since several of the participants had relocated, email was the primary form of communication prior to data collection. As a faculty member who spent a great deal of time with these adult students, email conversations continued even after the culmination of the program. This relationship afforded the researcher easy access to the graduates. By engaging with the graduates both individually and/or in small groups, a clear understanding of how they viewed the teacher education program in relation to their needs as adult learners emerged. The participants were asked to examine their feelings about the program’s effectiveness and for those who have entered the profession, their views now that they are in the classroom.

Data Collection

To ensure that the data collected was aligned with answering each research question, protocols were created for each type of data to be included (Creswell, 2007). Yin’s (2009) principles of data collection were followed:

1. Use multiple sources of evidence.
2. Create a case study database.

To answer the research questions concerning the program components and the students’ feelings of preparedness, the author collected detailed records of participants’ responses to a variety of questions. This data was compiled through an open-ended questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was the first piece of data collected with the results impacting the interview protocol.

The study began with an online questionnaire (Appendix B) to introduce the study to the participants. This gave the participants an opportunity to read about the purpose of the study and their role in it. Because of the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, this anonymous questionnaire provided a baseline set of data to which other data could be compared. The researcher felt that the age and maturity level of the participants would not inhibit their truthfulness but wanted to provide one avenue of soliciting data anonymously.

Focus groups were conducted to meet the needs of participants. A schedule with varying dates, times, and places was offered so participants could choose the most convenient option for them. The two focus group interviews were conducted as guided conversations (Yin, 2009). This allowed a line of inquiry to be maintained but remain fluid enough to allow participants to consider the process as open-ended (p.106). See Appendix C for the focus group protocol.

A document analysis was performed on data from the program and used as another form of evidence. The document analysis included reviewing department applications, course evaluations, student teaching evaluations, Praxis scores, and Gateway scores (departmental evaluations). Yin (2009) states that this type of documentation is powerful because it can be reviewed repeatedly and because it was not created as a result of the study (p. 102). This information, once triangulated, provided insight into any responses that appeared aberrant and corroborated recurring themes.
Research question number three relied most heavily on observations of the participants in the role of teacher. Observations provide researchers with a first-hand look at participants in a natural setting and another source of evidence (Yin, 2009). The researcher acquired permission from those participants who gained employment in a school system and then from their administrator prior to scheduling an observation. The same observation form was used as during the student teaching experience (Appendix D). This information provided the author with evidence of the students’ continued use of specific skills that were taught and evaluated throughout the degree plan. During the observation the author was in the role of non-participant observer; having no involvement with the situation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

At the end of each observation, the researcher followed up with individual focused interviews (Yin, 2009) that allowed the observed participants an opportunity to clarify or expand on what was noted during the observation. A set of loosely structured questions was used to guide the interview (Appendix E). Original papers were stored in a locked file box to maintain the chain of evidence.

Data Analysis

After each stage of data collection, transcriptions were evaluated. A description of the facts collected was stated and then analysis consisted of separating the participants’ responses into the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2007). Analyzing qualitative data requires the analyst to look for content that fits together by connecting thoughts and ideas back to an underlying concept (Patton, 1987). The author not only looked at what is similar among the responses but also for relationships that connected the information within the context of the study (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79). Creswell (2007) suggests that while reviewing the information a researcher should look for codes that one would expect to find, ones that are surprising and not anticipated, and ones that are unusual. Throughout the coding process, the researcher met with an education
faculty member to discuss and review the analyses. After each reader analyzed the data separately, results were compared so that discrepancies were discussed and a consensus reached. Although many software programs have emerged that assist with coding, Yin (2009) proposes that studies that utilize an array of data may not benefit from these tools since the diversity of information cannot be adequately evaluated out of context. Following Yin’s (2009) principles the researcher:

1. Attended to all of the evidence.
2. Addressed all major rival interpretations.
3. Addressed the most significant aspect of the study.
4. Used prior experience and expertise to evaluate the information (p. 160).

Analysis occurred after each stage of data collection and incorporated the multiple sources of information. By referencing the different types of data that were collected, the validity of the analysis was strengthened. During analysis of the data, the researcher consistently returned to the initial research questions to ensure the focus remained on the central issues identified at the outset of the study (Patton, 1987). A final reading occurred at the completion of data analysis so that any perceived biases or misinterpretations could be eliminated.

Validity and Credibility

Validity describes how well a measure actually assesses what you want it to (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990, p. 150). By ensuring the interview protocol was designed with specific questions that direct responses toward the primary research questions, this premise was met and obtained the results intended for this study. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, questions were carefully constructed so that they were open-ended and not leading. This ensured that participants could reveal their own perspective (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89). The site in which interviews were held was carefully considered so that participants would be able to attend to the
situation at hand rather than focusing on what was occurring around them. In addition, interview and observation notes were sent back to the participants for member checking to ensure the researcher’s interpretations were accurate.

Even though the sample size was small (N=14), the detail gained from the extensive time that was spent with the participants allowed descriptions of their experiences within the accelerated teacher education program to be included that are both insightful and vivid for the reader. The relationship between the researcher and the participants allowed for ease of access but also placed the researcher in a position of needing to control for researcher bias. The researcher ensured that any predetermined views were kept out of interpretations by utilizing member checking and a second reader in the interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 1996). The following highlights many of Creswell’s (2007) strategies to increase validity and states how the researcher incorporated them into the proposed study:

- Triangulate – information from interviews, questionnaires, observations and program documents were used to justify themes that emerged
- Member checking – interpretations were presented to participants so that verification of the analysis occurred
- Rich, thick descriptions – the author provided enough information so that readers see the perspectives of the participants within the setting
- Bias – using self-reflection allowed the author to clarify how personal experiences shaped interpretations
- Negative information – any data that was contrary to what emerged in the data will be presented and discussed
- Time in field – the author’s knowledge of this case helped to support the analysis of the data by showing how personal experiences within this case increased the
detail of information presented

- Peer debriefing – utilization of another education faculty member who analyzed and reviewed the study helped to eliminate personal bias (p. 191-192).

Protection of Human Subjects

Yin (2009) affirms that participants in a study should be made aware of the objectives of the study and that no deception should occur. Due to the nature of this qualitative case study, participants volunteered to participate and had the option of ending association with the study at any time. With no experimentation involved, participants were not at risk of danger and involvement in the study posed no risk either personally or professionally. Since the cohort had graduated, the researcher could not have altered grades or other program requirements that may have caused participants to be concerned about involvement in the study. Participants’ privacy was maintained by not using real names within the study report and ensuring strict access to and confidentiality of all collected documents.

It is imperative that all participants be treated with respect (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). In this case study, the researcher’s role was that of professor in the cohort’s MAT program. It was the researcher’s position that any information presented by participants that may be deemed as negative would be evaluated both fairly and objectively. At the outset of the study, participants were assured that any and all information gathered would only be used to create a solid report and would have no bearing on current or future relationships between the researcher and the participants. It was the goal of the study to only use the results to support the development or continuation of effective teacher education programs.
Summary

The ability to recognize and understand the components of an effective teacher certification program for second career adults could provide useful information for institutions of higher education in the state of Tennessee. The goal of this study was to look at one MAT program and glean from recent graduates their perceptions of its value. Taking into consideration the theoretical framework of adult learning theory, the researcher looked at how this cohort of graduate students acclimated to being students again and retrained for a new professional identity. By analyzing their experiences and reflecting on not only their words but their actions, the resulting story is insightful for both the participants and the researcher.

Through a case study approach, a variety of data was used to assemble a rich description of the participants’ views of an accelerated teacher education program. Interviews and observations formed the basis of the data but the researcher included program documentation and a questionnaire to supplement this information and as a way to triangulate the data. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher analyzed the data and highlighted the themes that emerged in an effort to develop an understanding of the participants’ perceptions of the program. Member checking and peer review were the tools that the researcher increased the validity of the results. The researcher also followed all IRB guidelines for ethical considerations involving the participants and the study protocols.

Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

Program Context

In the Fall of 2009, General Motors (GM) placed its Spring Hill Saturn plant on idle. The plant, in essence, shut down. Employees were relocated, retired, or laid-off. For this community, the effects reached beyond the walls of the company to many businesses in the area that also lost revenue due to the economic decline. As a way to offset some of the job losses, a
local training alliance offered a private university a grant to provide a teacher education program to displaced auto-workers who had undergraduate degrees in math or science. The purpose was two-fold— to provide retraining to displaced GM employees and to help meet a teacher shortage in high-need subjects.

The University in this study, streamlined their two-year Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree into a one year format. It was designed so that students would attend education classes in the fall, student teach in the spring and finish with on-line courses in the summer. Typically, the university required students to pass the content area PRAXIS exam prior to enrollment in the MAT, but the policy was waived so this cohort could begin in an expedited time. Students were recruited through the training agency and by advertising in local papers. The training agency provided classroom space and computer technology in a facility on the site of the GM plant with the University providing the faculty to teach the courses and supervise the students’ progress. This researcher was hired under the grant as a full-time faculty member. Since the University was located approximately forty miles north of the plant, every attempt was made to meet the students’ needs at the plant location. In an attempt to keep costs low, students were only required to buy two textbooks. All courses were taught using online resources and supplemental materials that were gathered by the education faculty.

**Participants.** Fifteen students enrolled in the program, with nine of them coming from GM and six enrolling from the community. Program data showed that all participants were over the age of forty and had at least ten years of work experience outside of the education field, except for one student who had five years of military experience. Eight participants were female and seven were male. Non-GM participants’ backgrounds included experiences as a small business owner and an insurance adjuster, among other private sector jobs. Table 1 shows the participants prior work experience.
Table 1

*Participant Background Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Prior Career</th>
<th>Years in Prior Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curt</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Program Design.** Classes began in August, 2010, with the Associate Dean of Education teaching the first course in Educational Psychology. As shared in the online questionnaire, the Dean’s laid back nature and “…warm and folksy style…” put the students at ease to transition them back into the role of student. Information collected from the program also showed the average number of years since undergraduate graduation was twelve for this cohort. In line with
the theoretical framework of adult learners, this made it imperative that they be acclimated in their role as new students so as not to feel overwhelmed or dismayed by the process of returning to school.

Each of the first seven courses lasted for four weeks with students completing two courses each month by attending class from 8am until 3pm every day. Each course was supplemented by a weekly practicum experience in which students visited a school selected by the faculty. During this visit, students completed three hours of observation with directed topics of focus. These experiences were planned by the faculty so that students were introduced to a range of educational programs. Students visited middle and high schools in both rural and urban settings; alternative placement schools; private, single-gender schools; and Christian-based schools. This exposure helped to provide the cohort with a well-rounded view of the different education contexts where they might choose to seek employment. It also served as a way to broaden their views, both as students and parents, of how educational programs operate.

The first semester concluded with the students completing seven education courses and successfully passing a departmental gateway. This gateway consisted of a small group interview where students were asked a series of questions on topics that were covered during the semester. Students’ responses were recorded and then analyzed by a panel of education faculty. Program data shows that the average score for students in this cohort was a 2.8 on a 3 point scale for this gateway. These satisfactory scores along with acceptable grade point averages allowed everyone to register for the student teaching semester in the spring.

Each participant began student-teaching in a middle school placement then after eight weeks, students moved to a high school placement. Both placements followed the same format – students observed for the first week, took control of one class during the second week and full control during weeks four through six. Giving back partial control during the last two weeks
gave students time to visit and observe other exemplary teachers within the school system. During the student teaching semester, students were observed by university faculty a minimum of six times. Pre and post conferences were used to exchange information and give feedback or answer students’ questions. A reflective class met bi-monthly so students could share their experiences with each other and work with faculty on a required action research project, another gateway for the program.

Throughout the second semester and continuing into the summer term, students were taking the PRAXIS exam in their content area and the general Teaching and Learning exam. Although the state of Tennessee has a minimum score criteria for certification, passage of the exams was not a requirement of the MAT degree. The content area for math certification seemed to prove the most challenging with most of the math teachers taking the exam three or four times before passing.

Near the end of the spring semester, three students were recalled to General Motors. One female participant completed her student teaching two weeks early and moved to Ohio to work. Two male participants left their schools at 1pm, worked a 2pm to 10pm shift at GM, and then returned to the schools at 7am each morning until the semester concluded. One of these men chose not to enroll in the summer classes or complete the MAT degree but remains eligible for certification upon passage of the content area PRAXIS exam. He was not a participant in this study.

The summer courses consisted of three on-line directed electives within the education department. These courses were taught concurrently with this researcher being assigned two of the classes to teach. The platform used for the on-line courses was not designed specifically for this function, but was utilized by the education department as a data collection tool for
accreditation purposes. Because the students had already purchased the license and were familiar with submitting assignments in this location, it was decided to continue with its use.

In August, 2011, fourteen students attended a graduate hooding and commencement ceremony. The hooding ceremony was exclusive to the education department and provided participants an opportunity to address their friends and family, and the program faculty. Each participant spoke of the challenges of the condensed program but more importantly of the pride they felt in completing such an endeavor in a short time span. The ceremony proved to be emotional for students and faculty alike. It was during this event that family members were able to share their perceptions of the program and how they felt about the transition to a new career. Conversations during the event were overwhelmingly favorable about the process and there was a feeling of excitement about future prospects within the field of teaching.

Over the course of the next year, those graduates who had acquired certification began to apply for and accept positions within the teaching profession. Two graduates continued with GM but expressed a desire to seek a teaching position upon retirement. Others were still working on certification requirements or chose not to enter the field of teaching. Student records showed that not every student registered for the PRAXIS exam in their content area. These same students did not participate in the focus groups for this study. General conversation among the participants did not provide any clear information on the current status of these MAT graduates. Table 2 provides specific data on each participant, including current employment status, and whether or not they have received state certification through teacher licensure.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Certification Area/Certified</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Math/No</td>
<td>GM Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Field/Completion</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Math/Yes</td>
<td>HS Math Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Social Sciences/Yes</td>
<td>Adult Ed. Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Social Sciences/Yes</td>
<td>HS Economics Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Math/No</td>
<td>Substitute Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Math/Yes</td>
<td>MS Math Teacher*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Math/No</td>
<td>MS Math Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Math/Yes</td>
<td>MS Math Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>Science/No</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Math/Yes</td>
<td>HS Teacher/Engineering**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bev</td>
<td>Science/No</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Science/No</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curt</td>
<td>Science/Yes</td>
<td>HS Physics Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Science/No</td>
<td>GM Employee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

* Student completed an undergraduate course of study to qualify for middle school endorsement without having to pass the secondary math PRAXIS.

** Student applied for an apprentice license and is teaching in a Career & Technical position based on her undergraduate degree.

The next section of this chapter looks at how the graduates of the MAT viewed the program and its effectiveness. Each research question will be followed by the data that was collected and organized by the themes that developed throughout the analyses of interview transcripts, observation notes, information gathered through the online questionnaire and program documentation.
Research Question #1. How did an accelerated teacher education program designed with separate semesters of coursework, both in-class and on-line, and a student teaching semester impact career changing adults’ feelings of preparedness to enter the profession?

The following themes emerged from the information gathered from the questionnaire and focus groups:

1. The value of the student teaching experience
2. The strength of the program content
3. The relationships with the faculty
4. Ways in which the participants did not feel prepared

The value of the student teaching experience. The student teaching semester is often considered the culmination of an education program. These second career pre-service teachers entered this component with high expectations. Although he always presented with a successful demeanor, one man shared that no amount of student teaching was sufficient. He stated that even after teaching for one year he still didn’t know what he was doing but that “at some point you just have to jump in.” He received a few chuckles from the focus group members, but mostly comments of ascension.

It was during the focus group discussions that the topic of student teaching showed consistency. What makes it all the more interesting is the fact that the participants were divided by gender (not by design) and still the comments were almost identical. The females shared the above philosophy and one expanded on it by saying that the experience helped it to become real. “It’s not just a perfect lesson plan. You have to actually present it.” The other nodded and added that seeing her plans through made her care that the kids learned.

The online questionnaire allowed the participants to break down their perception on the student teaching component by asking how it affected their views of the profession and what role
their prior work experience played in their student teaching experiences. Consistently the responses referred to the variety of roles that teachers have in their students’ lives. The most poignant response stated,

> It is extremely tough and rewarding. Unless anyone has taught in a classroom, with students, they have very little knowledge on what happens on a daily basis. Teachers are educators, surrogate parents, best-friends, counselors, leaders and disciplinarians all at the same time. All of this must be balanced with trying to deliver the subject matter during a typical school day. Anyone who thinks teachers are overpaid and underworked are fools.

Not every response was so emotional but the common theme of teachers wearing “many hats” was reiterated by five of the nine participants who completed the questionnaire. They also spoke of how much effort went in to being an effective teacher. One student teacher was surprised at the hours her mentor put in both before and after school. At one point, she even called the associate dean to inquire if she had to follow the same schedule as it was causing a hardship for her family. This notion was one that was new to them as they were accustomed to hearing that teachers only worked from 8am to 3pm. One student who had also observed the longer work days shared how he was now putting in 12-14 hour days as a first year teacher saying, “Only the lackadaisical and inept were hitting the door at 3:00.”

Another positive aspect of the “practice” which occurred during the student teaching semester, is that it gave these prospective teachers the opportunity to learn more about a new career before they obligated themselves to it long term. Programs such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project require a two year commitment during which novice teachers are introduced to the profession at the same time as independently managing the classroom. With the accelerated MAT in this study, the students were able to experience the profession first-hand before deciding to commit to the field of teaching as a new career.
The strength of the program content. One participant commented that the semester of theory gave them a “heads up” compared to other new teachers he had seen come through alternative programs. He continued by sharing that by giving them a solid base in the field they were in a position to understand why and how things worked within the profession before they were expected to perform. Others nodded and added that the initial courses did so much to help them understand how the profession has changed since they or their children were students. One shared, “it opened my eyes to everything that it takes to be a good teacher and how you have to try to meet every student’s needs.”

Even though everyone thought the content was valuable there was also consensus on the fact that it was intense and challenging. These types of words were used by four of the nine participants who responded to the online questionnaire. In the questionnaire, one participant noted:

The courses that were offered were very intense. I found myself at a disadvantage at first because I had not been in a college classroom for quite some time. I had to re-learn how to learn again. After the first class, I began to become more comfortable with the pace and work necessary to be successful. I truly expanded my knowledge and ability to process information at a much higher level.

The reflection class was facilitated by the researcher in this study. It was during these sessions that the students were able to begin to clarify their ideas and feelings about becoming immersed within the profession. The students often spoke of being surprised at how schools and teachers have changed. It was not uncommon to hear, “I can’t believe kids talk like this,” or “I am surprised teachers are allowed to dress like that.” These weekly sessions allowed the students to talk freely about their feelings about becoming a teacher and express their concerns about being successful in this new position. During the initial reflection sessions, those who had
been in management positions talked about the similarities between their role now and their previous one. This connection helped several students gain confidence in what they were doing in the classroom since they had been successful in their first career and felt their skills could carry over to their second career.

**The relationships with the faculty.** When the participants were asked to share their views on how prepared they felt to enter the profession, many of them referred to their first day in class and how they were initiated into teacher education. Dan spoke of how the opening professor introduced them to the field by modeling it. Curt agreed and stated that had this first class not been viewed as an on-going conversation between co-workers, it may have been the only one that many of them completed. It became clear early in the program that the cohort developed a strong bond among themselves and the faculty members. The extended class time allowed the students and professors to be able to engage in a dialogue that often carried through lunch and into the afternoon class time. For these older students, this flexibility seemed to have helped them make connections to each other and the faculty which became a strong factor in most of them continuing in the program.

When discussing if they felt prepared, one student summed it up best by sharing that he knew no amount of preparation was enough, “eventually you just have to jump in feet first.” Others remarked how they couldn’t believe how much they accomplished in the last year and they knew that the program gave them the groundwork to enter the profession but it was time in the profession that would make them successful. Overall, there was a positive reaction to the participants’ feelings of preparedness. One comment received multiple nodding of heads when spoken, “not until you are left alone do you know if you are ready or not.”

**Ways in which the participants did not feel prepared.** When asked if they felt prepared, inevitably someone would comment on something they did not feel the program was
providing. During the focus groups, and then reiterated during the individual interviews, participants noted their surprise at the number of special education students in their classes and expressed more emphasis in this area was needed within the program. Even though they were trained in creating individualized instruction, the act of doing it for a seemingly large number of students at once seemed to overwhelm them. It was stated more than once that they did not feel they had the time or experience needed to devote to creating differentiated lessons that met the needs of the special education students. This was the most common area that participants voiced a lack of preparedness in, although one participant commented that he was not sure it was something that could be taught effectively within the content of one three credit hour course.

Responsibilities outside of the classroom including extra-curricular activity responsibility and working with parents were another recurring theme. They were surprised at their required attendance at homecoming dances and the push to sponsor after-school activities. The participants who were working in schools said they were not prepared for the “bureaucracy” and “politics” of the school environment. More than one participant spoke of the needless rules and the “long way of getting things done” within the district. Most of these professionals were used to seeing a problem or a need and responding to it. It was especially difficult for the small business owner to fathom why all the different channels required input into something he felt was a simple request such as a technology repair.

The lack of parental support surprised many of the participants. One participant even described the relationship with some of his parents as hostile. He stated that while talking with parents he often got the “us versus them” feeling, with him usually on the side of the student. Coming from the perspective of parents themselves, this was an unexpected reaction for most of the participants. They thought that their role would be more valued by the parents and that together they could provide support and guidance to the students.
Summary of Research Question #1 Analysis

Overall, the students showed a consensus when it came to feelings of preparedness to enter the field. They expressed that the student teaching experience helped them to put all the strong content knowledge into practice by giving them a hands-on format to experiment and try out what they had learned. Every participant through one form of data or another talked at length about the positive aspects of the faculty. Whether it was the varied experiences they brought to the program or the interactions with each student, the cohort felt that this one component was vital to their success as second career adults entering the field. Inevitably, all programs have weaknesses and the participants shared those with the researcher. Although listed as weaknesses, most of the topics were issues that all teachers face and are things that cannot be taught in an education program.

Research Question #2. How do pre-service teachers who are experiencing a career change view the components of an accelerated teacher education program?

The primary themes that emerged from the data to answer this question were the following:

1. Becoming a student again

2. Negativity toward online coursework

3. The value of assignments

4. The student teaching component

Becoming a student again. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the participants viewed the accelerated program positively. Two focus groups that randomly ended up divided by gender, echoed the same thoughts as the other group. When asked for details, most participants stated the program location and the condensed time frame were the major issues on whether to enroll or not in the accelerated program. One participant even stated that he
was on the fence about enrolling and the fact that it was being offered on-site was the deciding feature. Several students echoed this thought by stating that because they were coming to a “known environment” they felt more comfortable taking on this endeavor.

The fact that they would not be in class with traditional college students was also important. It was mentioned that participants were unsure how younger students in the classroom would have impacted conversations and the group dynamics. As one participant expressed,

Since our cohort was made up entirely of second career students, we had extensive conversation relating what we had previously done with what we were hoping to do. Certainly, many of my previous professional experiences contributed to an effective learning experience. This would have been far different if I had been sitting in a class of nineteen year olds.

It was common for these adult learners to bring in their previous work and life experiences into the discussions and they voiced that this may have been hampered if more traditional students, who did not have these kind of experiences, were in the same classes as them. Others added that the cohort dynamic made them feel connected to the program and encouraged them to continue even when they felt overwhelmed or unsure about the decision to return to school.

The faculty was all viewed positively with their diversity of experiences being named as important both in the focus group sessions and in the online questionnaire. Participants felt that each faculty member brought a different perspective of the education system and encouraged divergent thought on how different aspects of day-to-day issues could be managed. Many times participants referred to their close relationships with each other and the faculty as the most important component keeping them on track within the accelerated format.
Throughout the questionnaire, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews, participants spoke of how much new information they gained during the first semester of courses. It was here that they stated they first became aware of thinking like an educator and viewing things from this perspective. Statements about how things had changed since they or their children were in school were common. After the initial adaptations necessary to be in the mindset of a student again, several participants commented how much they enjoyed gaining the new information. The readings were relevant to what they were going to be doing and challenged their views. Because of their age and maturity, speaking their mind or stressing their views was not intimidating to them.

What was challenging for many of these adult students was the intensity of the accelerated program. With many of them not actively participating in an academic setting in the past decade, the coursework and the time involvement was demanding. In the questionnaire one student wrote,

I found myself at a disadvantage at first because I had not been in a college classroom for quite some time. However, the fellow students and instructors were very patient and helpful. I had to “re-learn” how to learn again.

Several of the participants noted that the faculty helped to put them at ease by explaining and modeling the ideas they were explaining in more than one way. The participants shared that their comfortableness with each other and the faculty put them at ease when they felt the need to ask for more direction on assignments or when they had questions about what was being taught.

Being a student again also brought pleasure to many of the participants. More than one stated that they enjoyed learning about the concepts involved in the first semester of classes and especially liked being able to share their views on the topics coming from the perspective of
outside the field of education. They also enjoyed being in the position of having to find information rather than just having it given to them. As one stated,

By integrating the internet, classroom interaction and direct instruction was a completely new way of learning from me personally. This method allowed me to discover new information on my own, while at the same time be able to learn from my peers.

Others also noted that the “team” like atmosphere helped aid in their feelings of success within the courses. Having each other for support and encouragement was common among the aspects of the program design that positively affected their learning.

**Negativity toward online coursework.** Of all the topics discussed, the students were most consistent in agreement about the on-line format not working for the cohort. Although the flexibility was a positive aspect, the time commitment increased for many participants. One participant explained his views,

Online courses are not a panacea – they have pros and cons along with face-to-face classes. Anyone who thought that they were going to skate through these classes without working at them was either disappointed, or did a terrible job. I believe I put in more hours working on the on-line stuff than I did when we were having the traditional face-to-face classes.

Another participant followed by stating that if they had not been enrolled in three on-line courses at the same time it might have been more manageable. Others felt that it was too big of a change from the previous format of all day class sessions working together or in small groups to working independently with minimal interaction.

Another challenge arose when trying to complete group assignments within the online component. Participants commented on difficulty in managing group dynamics and a concern that they would be letting the other group members down. The online technology proved
stressful for many of the students as stated in the questionnaire and focus group interviews. During the summer term, the group chose to get together weekly to work on assignments and assist each other even though this was not part of the schedule. One student even met with the instructor (the researcher) independently for assistance on an assignment and commented during the focus group that this was the difference between succeeding and failing for him. The lack of a group setting during the online courses diminished their feelings of connectedness and support so they recreated it themselves.

A common theme among the participants was their frustration with the technical aspect on-line instruction. For many, it was the issue of the discussion board, a large component in on-line course work. The participants stated that the platform did not encourage a dialogue as it was hard to follow the thread and they were never sure who or what they were responding to. For some, the lack of direct instruction from the faculty in facilitating the course was too great of a change for them to feel that learning was occurring. One participant called online courses “a necessary evil” in that he understood that it helped them to complete the program in an accelerated time frame but did not feel that their design met their needs as future teachers. When asked to explain he stated,

I was trying to convey that the on-line courses were crafted to deliver a certain amount of material, in a certain style, in a certain time-frame. No one has to meet at any set times, which should be more convenient, in theory. But in my opinion, this led to a different kind of tyranny of the clock. Rather than attending class at a set time, you had to chain yourself to the computer to jump on a quality post. Often when someone does offer a quality response you are not there to respond to them and when you do return you have to digest everything again to get back up to speed. A good class discussion can take the whole class to areas of thought that they might not have ever reached alone. I did not see
this on-line. Many times, it was a series of monologues, or non-sequiturs that never really had much of a flow.

In all, the convenience of not having to drive to a campus everyday did not outweigh the technical issues and loss of contact among the group for this cohort to feel the online component was successful.

**The value of assignments.** It was surprising to the researcher that the participants spoke so highly of the different assignments that they completed during the first semester in the program. Even though more than one participant pointed out the need to offer adult learners returning to school a re-introduction to reading and writing at the academic level, most respondents valued the variety and usefulness of what they were asked to do. The course on Diverse Learners received accolades from at least a third of the questionnaire respondents. As a current teacher stated, “I never considered that I would be teaching students with special needs, and it allowed me to see that modifications to help these students were not a burden and most likely would help all of the students.”

Other assignments that were reflected in the responses were the observations that students completed weekly. Often participants referred to the extended conversations that most often happened on the day following a practicum visit as an important aspect of feeling prepared. Everyone remembered something unique that others may not have noticed or did not attend to until it was brought up during the discussion. From the focus group feedback, these extended conversations were the times that reassured the students that they were beginning to think like a teacher and could evaluate the school environment from this perspective. As one participant stated, “It was the demeanor of the professors that made it feel like peer–to-peer communication and that I should be here.”
Participants stated that the type of activity where they were collecting information and analyzing it according to what they had been taught reinforced their feelings of readiness to enter the field. The final gateway in the program was an action research project that the students designed and implemented at one of their student teaching placements. Program data shows that the students received an average score of 3.0 out of 4.0 on this project. Student reflections on the project allowed them to see how their planning and implementation affected student outcomes showed them the value of utilizing data to make decisions as a teacher. Several students commented that they would continue to use this tool when they became a teacher.

Practicum visits were most often referred to in the data as having an impact on what they thought a “good” teacher looked like. It was during these times, the participants stated they really started watching the kids and their reaction to the teacher. As Curt explained, “I viewed a three-ring circus and was told it was good teaching, whereas my idea of good teaching was the kids sitting quietly and listening.” These visits made the participants re-evaluate their concepts about what teaching entailed and some were not sure they liked the changes. Even those participants with school-aged children commented that they only viewed the school environment from the perspective of a parent and now to look at it from the teacher’s perspective made them somewhat uncomfortable. They had to look at the choices and decisions they made for their own children and sometimes they wished they had done it differently. Several participants commented that they had always felt that their children had received a quality education but now that they knew a standard by which measure, they weren’t so sure. It was expressed,

During practicum, I saw a lot of teaching where nothing was happening versus educating where the students were involved. I didn’t know before that this is the way it is supposed to be and now I almost feel bad as a parent what I expected my own children to do and how to learn.
It took several site visits for some participants to acknowledge that the format now being utilized by teachers could be effective. By asking questions and listening to how professionals in the field used direct instruction but added various methods to reinforce the concepts, these second career teachers began to believe the results that were being shared with them.

**The student teaching component.** The discussion of the student teaching semester elicited the most remarkable impressions of the program with many participants stating that the mentor/student-teacher relationship was the most important aspect of this component. One participant shared “… it helped to clarify the role of teacher for me. Two good mentors who taught me a lot. One let me lose control of the classroom which was a good learning experience.” Several participants shared that their mentors met with them after they taught a lesson and helped them evaluate how it went. They were able to point out what worked and the areas where they could improve. As one stated,

> We review everything I did, right or wrong, everyday during planning. She talks about my progress over time and what I’m doing right. I don’t think I do too well but she tells me she can see a difference from when I started to now.

This immediate feedback helped the student teachers reflect on what they were told and then they were able to make changes before their next presentation. This was one of the most valuable experiences as expressed by the majority of the participants.

Other comments were expressed by participants who felt that some mentors were in a rut and it showed in how they treated the students. One student teacher stated that she liked the experience but she also saw things she did not want to do once she entered the profession. A number of participants responded that more emphasis should have been placed on the mentor selection process. Four of the five males in the focus group had negative comments about their mentors. It was stated that some mentors seemed ill-prepared for a student teacher and acted as
if it was another obligation tacked on to their role. Phrases used to describe mentors were “not excited” and “needing guidelines.” Others expressed surprise at the differences between their mentors. One exclaimed, “It’s funny how they are on the extremes. They are either superstars or not and the kids pick up on it. The profession is crazy.” Although some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with a placement, there were no students who voiced negatives about both the middle and high school mentor that they worked under.

As a university supervisor during the student teaching semester, the author heard comments from mentors expressing wariness about supervising someone who was older than them. None of the student teachers viewed this role reversal uncomfortably. Their perspective was one of being relative to experience rather than chronological age. What was discouraging to some student teachers was that more than one mentor commented that they were not sure professionals coming from other careers would have the content knowledge needed to teach. Even with reassurance from the university that these students had to meet all certification requirements, some mentors still viewed the students as outsiders. For some participants, getting to know the mentor and working with them on other activities helped to ease the perceived gap. The students were required to shadow the teachers and participate in all activities and meetings required for faculty. Because of their professional experience, these second career adults knew how to manage these personality differences and didn’t let it dictate how they interacted within this environment. One participant’s views,

My prior work experience in handling stress and diversity helped in that I was quick to adapt to the needs of the classroom. I was and am able to add a different perspective with real life examples to the students. I think I was able to combine new knowledge of teaching, my mentor’s styles, and my own experiences. I think in some ways we mentored each other.
One mentor in particular made so many overt comments that the student teacher requested a new placement. It was discovered that the student teacher had not been introduced to the classes and was given a student desk to work from. The university supervisor (the researcher) met with the principal who agreed to intercede in a way that would not cause harm to the relationship. Through diligence on the part of the student and extra visits by the university supervisor, the placement ended on a pleasant note. Most participants shared that even if their assigned mentor did not seem suitable to the position, someone else in the school often took them under their wing and helped them to acclimate to the environment. It should be noted that principals were responsible for locating the mentor teachers and this was one of the first times that the university placed student teachers in several of these systems due to the distance from the campus.

Not every participant had a negative experience with their mentor. Many stated that the daily feedback and guidance served to move them toward acclimating to the profession and they appreciated having someone there to step in and take control if needed. Participants shared how some mentors would meet with them at the end of each day to go over what they had observed and offer ideas and suggestions. The participants felt that the opportunity to practice their new skills in a safe environment was the most meaningful aspect of the student teaching component. All participants expressed the value of having both a middle and high school student teaching placement.

Although strong likes and dislikes were noted, they felt the experience served to solidify their areas of strengths and interest. One area of particular note across participants was the opportunity to observe outside of their assignment gave them valuable insight into the methods utilized by veteran teachers. They stated that the ability to compare what they were seeing each
day from their mentor teacher to someone else within the same school system expanded their views on what they thought was “effective” teaching and/or classroom management.

**Summary of Research Question #2 Analysis**

The participants focused on interpersonal interactions in their evaluation of the various components of the accelerated MAT program. They expressed the support from each other as being a key component with their persistence in the program and being successful in completing the assignments. The location and compacted time frame enhanced their feelings of reliance on the relationships that they built with each other, the faculty and their student teaching mentors. Although the variety of assignments increased their understanding of the profession, none of the participants felt the online semester of coursework met their needs as adult learners returning to school after such a long hiatus. They were all in agreement that the student teaching component was the true introduction into what it is like to be a teacher and expressed appreciation that the program included this opportunity but felt that more emphasis should be put on mentor selection and preparation.

**Research Question #3. What are the graduates’ views about the teaching profession now that they are working in the profession?**

The two primary themes that emerged from the data to answer this question were:

1. Surviving the first year
2. Job satisfaction with the career change

**Surviving the first year.** As is typical for novice teachers, the first year can seem overwhelming. Two of the MAT graduates in teaching positions, did not feel comfortable scheduling an observation for this study. One participant wrote, “I just can’t help. I am barely keeping my head above water and couldn’t handle one more thing to prepare for!” Barely keeping ahead of the students was a frequent statement during the interviews when discussing
the challenges of being a new teacher. Several participants stated that they felt the stress of needing to be successful not only for personal satisfaction, but also for their evaluations and job stability.

Of those who were observed, a commonality was the reliance on skills utilized in their previous careers to get them through their first year in the classroom. These participants expressed how they felt comfortable working with others and managing situations that popped up unexpectedly because that was a large part of their prior work. Unlike other novice teachers, these teachers’ age and maturity prevented the students’ attitudes and quirkiness from becoming bothersome so often times small disruptions did not escalate. There was also the benefit of experienced teachers viewing them more as an equal since they entered the field with many years of professional practice rather than entering right out of college. These traits seemed to help the graduates become part of the school community more quickly.

When it came to the hands-on work, many of the participants stated that the university’s curriculum aligned with local standards so they did not have to stray far from what they were taught and had practiced during the MAT program. In the first observation, it was noted that one new teacher adhered strictly to the University’s format for lesson planning and implementation. When mentioned during the one-on-one interview, he stated that the district’s format was almost identical to what he was taught so there was no need to deviate. He did share with the researcher that after the first few weeks of school, he noticed he was losing ground in how much content he was presenting each class period. Utilizing his management skills, he created an Excel spreadsheet to delineate minute by minute how much time he should spend presenting each aspect of the lesson. After several weeks, he was able to effectively present and stay on target without his daily timeline. Although his format sounds regimented, the observation showed students who were engaged and on-task the entire class period.
This participant incorporated humor and hands-on experiences to explain a challenging concept. Both of these strategies were incorporated into the MAT curriculum and are in line with the University’s constructivist approach. Following the University’s student-teacher observation guide, he appeared as confident and capable as a seasoned teacher. When asked about why he thought this was, he stated that he was used to presenting in front of a group but knew that this age group would respond better if he made the lesson as concrete as possible. He and the students enjoyed the activities he incorporated to reinforce the content he was covering. He shared, “Learning to know is different from learning to teach. There are new concepts that I have not used in previous situations that I have to get across to the students.” As a former GM employee, he had access to a variety of mechanical components that he brought in to enhance his lessons. Since many of his students were about to be “driving” age, this was a strong engagement strategy.

In contrast, one of the other observations included a classroom with many students missing. A video was shown so as not to move forward in the unit until the students returned the next day. When questioned, the participant noted that the district’s focus was on student pass rates so he was often changing his plans due to the students’ involvement in other school functions. He explained,

I know this is not conducive to teaching effectively, but it is out of my control. The district focuses so much on pass rates that I have to adapt my schedule to ensure the kids are getting the content so they can pass the benchmarks.

When asked about lesson plans, he said that he was required to turn them in using a weekly format which was hard for him to use as a daily guide when teaching. He felt this showed a lack of concern for his needs as a novice teacher, but since it resulted in higher evaluations for him, he complied. Previous observations of this participant showed a very knowledgeable
professional whose love of the content was exhibited in his teaching and in his interactions with the students.

When asked about acclimating to their new role, several participants expressed shock about the variance of teacher adeptness within the school system and weren’t sure how to align this with their goals of being successful. It was stated, “Who you sit with at lunch affects your attitude toward the students and the profession.” This was a hard concept for this second career professional to tolerate. Having spent years in a fulfilling career, negative teachers were viewed harshly and with the expectation that they should choose a different job in which they would be happy.

What participants said during the one-on-one interviews and what they did during the observations did not always align. One participant spent most of the observation time watching the students interact with hands-on materials. After presenting the topic for the day and answering any questions, interactions with the students ended for the most part. She could comment and recite to the researcher what was appropriate to do in the classroom (interacting and questioning students) although she herself did not show these traits during the observation used for data collection.

When asked about lessons plans, the participant stated that those were easy to complete since she had been taught how. She said the hardest part for her was all of the extra requirements that were placed on her outside of the classroom. She was not prepared for the evening and weekend responsibilities that went along with a high school program and expressed concern that this may impact her family commitments since she was working in a different system than where her children attended.

**Job satisfaction with the career change.** With studies showing that teacher attrition rates are high within the first five years, the researcher was interested to hear the perspective of
participants concerning their views on the career change. One participant stated that he was very happy, especially since teaching allowed him the flexibility to continue a part-time job in his previous occupation. He repeated several times how much he liked the kids and was hoping to have a positive impact on them. He said this was the biggest emotional benefit he didn’t get from his first career and could see himself remaining in the field for a long time.

Even though one participant’s principal did not view her as a new teacher and commented on her effectiveness, it did not enhance this second career adult’s feelings toward the profession since that is exactly how her pay was being calculated. It was stated that the salary was the biggest deterrent to remaining in the field since none of her 20+ years of prior professional experience counted toward anything with the school district. She stated in a somewhat defeated manner that she did not know where she would be in the next five years. She did reflect positively about getting satisfaction in sharing life experiences with the students and showing them how different skills and concepts are useful outside of the classroom.

The participant who received the Outstanding Graduate award for this cohort held a completely different view of his new role. When asked about his thoughts on the profession he stated,

I had no idea how much work it takes. I work 12-14 hour days just to get ready for the next day but the success of one student keeps me coming back. I had a girl who didn’t think she could master the concepts even though she tried so hard. I incorporated reflections into the test corrections to help them see their mistakes. After the last test, she came up to me so excited because her grade had improved and she was getting it! I had to turn around because it made me cry. That made the long days worth it.

Not all participants receive the same satisfaction from teaching. When asked if he was having fun, one stated, “Some days.”
Summary of Research Question #3 Analysis

Overall, as is common with first year teachers, the priority was on “getting through the day” as remarked by one participant. The participants who were observed were unanimous in their feelings of being overwhelmed and unsure of themselves. What they were not unanimous about is being happy in their decision with this new career choice. The extreme pay decrease as compared to compensation in a previous career was a major point of contention for one participant. There was the feeling that having to start over at the bottom of the pay scale as a beginning teacher did not take into account many years of professional experience. At the time of the interview, this participant was unsure of how long the field of education would be a career choice. The other participants who had secured teaching positions did not feel this way. One had been able to retire from GM so his teaching salary was supplemental and the other was able to maintain a scaled back version of his small business that had been affected by the downturn of the economy. They both expressed deep satisfaction in their new career choice.

Summary of Data Analysis

Participants in this study viewed the accelerated teacher education program positively even if they did not have the same view of the teaching profession upon graduation. Feelings of preparedness were rated as high but tempered with the knowledge that there was still much to learn as a novice teacher. Entering a new profession was not as daunting as it may have been for a recent college graduate since these adults had already experienced success in a previous profession. They expressed the format of the program as a whole increased their feelings of preparedness to enter teaching since they had a strong foundation in the field and resources to call upon if needed.

The participants stated that the condensed time frame met their needs as adult learners due in part to the cohort style enrollment and the relationships with the faculty. The reduction of
continued support in the summer block caused many participants to view the on-line coursework less favorably although they all admitted to its convenience. As far as implementing learned competencies into their teaching, observations of employed teachers showed wide variances. Each participant could state what the appropriate thing to do in the classroom, but not everyone exhibited those characteristics on the day of the observation.

An interesting finding that does not directly address any of the research questions but was echoed by more than one participant concerns the issue of students within the MAT program and their genuine desire to enter the profession. During an observation, a participant stated that it was not surprising that several of the GM employees had not entered the field. The participant stated that if I, the researcher, were to look, those participants who were hourly GM employees entered the profession at a lower rate than those participants who were in management positions. When asked to explain, it was stated that hourly workers would take advantage of any training they were offered regardless if it was useful to them or not. Along the same lines, in one of the focus group sessions, another participant (non-GM) commented that it was clear that not all participants took the program seriously and did not view it as a chance at a second career. It was expressed that since some of the participants “…had no skin in the game” they did not have as much to lose or gain as those who did. This issue will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

This study focused on a program designed to attract second career adults to the field of teaching. The majority of these adults came to the program with backgrounds in math or science; both high need content areas for area middle and high schools. A local university restructured their MAT degree into a one year format so graduates could complete the program
and enter the profession in a timely manner, meeting both their needs and those of the community. This program differs from alternative teacher certification programs in that students complete licensure requirements prior to entering the classroom as a paid professional. This allows them the opportunity to learn about the field and practice what they have learned under the guidance of a seasoned teacher, increasing their chances of being successful (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002).

With accountability at the forefront in school systems, it is important for teachers to be effective in planning and presenting quality instruction. Having the content knowledge in addition to personal characteristics that enhance skills as a teacher is considered invaluable (Lesley, Gee, & Matthews, 2010). What is shown to make an impact on student achievement is teacher quality, specifically, ability and willingness to engage students (Harding & Parsons, 2011, p. 53). The MAT in this study proposed to address both of these qualities through intensive coursework that focused on content-specific teaching incorporating a constructivist approach to interacting with students.

Review of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an accelerated teacher education program designed for second career adults. The following research questions formed the basis of a case study of one university’s attempt to meet both the students’ needs for an efficient program and the community’s need for teachers in the science and math fields:

1. How did an accelerated teacher education program designed with separate semesters of coursework, both in-class and on-line, and a student teaching semester impact career changing adults’ feelings of preparedness to enter the profession?

2. How do pre-service teachers who are experiencing a career change view the effectiveness of components of an accelerated teacher education program?
3. What are the graduates’ views about the field of teaching now that they are working in the profession?

To answer these questions, a qualitative case study was conducted on a cohort of 14 second career adults enrolled in an accelerated MAT degree program. An anonymous online questionnaire was used as the initial data collection tool followed by focus group interviews. The questionnaire resulted in nine responses with a total of seven participants attending the focus groups sessions. This data was coded for emerging themes. Observations, which concluded with individual interviews, were completed on three graduates currently employed in the teaching profession. The researcher examined program data as an added data collection point. After reviewing the specific data from participants, a summary of their responses was sent to each of them so they could provide clarification and/or correct any inaccuracies in the researcher’s evaluation.

It should be noted that the researcher of this study contributed data as a faculty member and a field supervisor. To increase the validity of the data, multiple sources of evidence were gathered and triangulated. Peer review and member checking was also utilized to ensure accurate and non-biased interpretations were made.

This remainder of this chapter will look at the summary of the study’s findings with the understanding that due to the nature of case study research and the small sample size, findings cannot be generalized to other teacher education programs. It is suggested that these findings be taken into consideration when planning and preparing second career adults to enter the field of teaching. The findings will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review, followed by a final analysis and recommendations, the significance of the study, and the conclusion.

**Summary of Study’s Findings**
When analyzing the data, a number of themes emerged from the various sources. These second career adults evaluated the accelerated teacher education program in relation to their needs as adult learners entering into an unknown profession. The following themes were most prevalent throughout the data:

1. Program design and implementation had an impact on graduates’ feelings of success.
2. Prior professional experiences aided in the transition to a new career.
3. Key relationships affected persistence and preparedness to enter the field of teaching.

Program design and implementation had an impact on graduates’ feelings of success. Participants in the study commented repeatedly that the location of the program and the condensed time frame were the initial elements that brought them into the program. After classes began, it moved to the hands-on nature of the classes and the extended time in the field that helped to ease them into the transition of being a student again. For this group of second career adults, not being in class with traditional college students improved their comfort level. They felt their ability to communicate with others who were starting out on the same maturity level and who had similar life experiences led to more in-depth conversations concerning the issues of teacher education.

Although most of the graduates did not like the on-line component of the degree plan, they did like the variety of instructional practices and faculty members who taught within the program. One participant stated, “The well-rounded views of the faculty and their different teaching styles led us to create our own teacher persona.” The area of greatest consensus concerns the value of the student teaching experience. Every participant remarked that this semester had the biggest influence on their feelings about becoming a teacher, what a good teacher looked like, and if they felt they could be successful in this role.
Prior professional experiences aided in the transition to a new career. Having been successful in a previous career, many of the participants created a “can do” attitude when it came to preparing for and entering a new one. It was common to hear statements such as, “I know how to handle stress and diversity” or “In management, I knew I had to motivate; it’s the same with teaching.” These second career adults used many of the same principles they utilized in business to be effective as an adult learner and then proceeding into a new job. The small business owner knew how to prioritize his responsibilities when it came to completing multiple assignments. A retired GM manager incorporated varied presentation techniques when introducing a new concept to students. By transferring an established skill set, these novice teachers were able to walk into an unknown environment with some semblance of proficiency in managing a group. This made it easier to focus their attention on the aspects of teaching that were new to them.

Key relationships affected persistence and preparedness to enter the field of teaching. Early in the data analysis, it became apparent that an important aspect of the participants’ success was connected to their relying on others for support and direction. Throughout the questionnaire and interviews, the participants reflected on how someone else in the cohort reassured them they could do it, or a faculty member took the time to ensure they understood an assignment, or their mentor’s feedback and guidance helped them to improve in their teaching. The relationships amongst themselves, the faculty, and the school mentors were the cornerstone that allowed them to continue when they weren’t sure they could or provided the validation that they were doing it right. Knowing that “someone was in my corner” helped one student teacher go back day after day when she wasn’t sure she was connecting with the students.

Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework
Adult learning theory is the lens that was used to evaluate the perspective of these second career adults. Adult learning theory is based on the premise that adults return to the role of student with specific needs – opportunities to practice what they are learning, knowledge connected to previous experiences, and mentors to reinforce and promote their development (Knowles, 1973). Being able to put into practice new skills, aids in the acculturation of those entering the teaching profession. It is also as engaged participants that these adults take an active role in the learning process and construct what they are learning as they learn (Dirkx, 1998). For second career adults entering the teaching profession, it is the opportunity to work closely with another adult in the profession that helps them make the connections between their old and new experiences. During this process, it is valuable for adults to build strong relationships and the positive effects of mentoring on new teachers are well documented (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002).

The accelerated program in this study provided many opportunities for the students to create their own learning and to share their views about the ideas and theories presented to them within the coursework. During the initial courses, students debated the pros and cons of current educational practices. By not allowing the students to choose which side of the issue they would debate, all students were required to research and validate the positions they were assigned whether they agreed with them or not. This experience created an environment where the students had to get into the habit of looking at all sides of a situation; often resulting in them rethinking the basis for personal beliefs about teaching and education.

In this study, participants assessed the various components of the program and reflected on their feelings of preparedness to enter the profession. Beginning with the first semester, students were initiated into the field of teaching by the learning opportunities provided by the faculty. These opportunities included having to reflect on their views of education, creating a
professional philosophy and incorporating it into their assignments. This self-directed learning is shown to be an important aspect for adult learners who value taking responsibility for their acquisition of new knowledge (Brookfield, 1995) even though it may not be easy. An example of this occurred when the students enrolled in this accelerated program were given topics related to the field of education to explore and then present the information to the rest of the class.

Unlike earlier educational experiences where a professor gave information, this program expected the students to develop their own ideas through readings and discussions. This proved difficult for several of them as they were constantly looking for feedback and validation of their work prior to completing and submitting assignments.

When it came to design of the program, the most common aspects participants cited were the modeling that they observed during practicum visits and the time to practice what they were learning during the student teaching semester. As adult learners, these are the types of experiences shown to help adult learners develop new skills and retrain their thinking to that of the second profession (Mezirow, 2003). It also aligns with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of “peripheral participation” that states the opportunity to practice with a seasoned professional in the new environment helps acclimate them to their new role. As one participant stated, “Student teaching showed me the true life of a teacher – long days, not easy, lots of preparation and many roles to fill.”

Even though the program was offered in a condensed format, the university did not minimize the amount of time the students had in the field. Using weekly practicum visits during the first semester of the program and spending a semester “practice teaching,” the program helped to improve their feelings of preparedness. These components, along with the education department’s Gateways (interviews, action research projects, etc) provided students with an opportunity to highlight their new knowledge and gave the faculty time to evaluate the students’
dispositions and practical abilities. These types of practices are considered paramount in helping new teachers not only feel prepared, but also helping them achieve gains during their early years of teaching (Boyd et al., 2009).

When looking at how their prior work impacted their learning, participants often cited their ability to get along with others and manage various roles at once. Many of the narratives echoed this participant’s views,

Having perspective helps. Other teachers respond to me differently and there is some stuff I don’t have to deal with from students because of my age and maturity. I have more to draw on when presenting lessons and it gives me credibility to say I’ve had other jobs.

Brookfield (1995) stressed the need to view adult learners within the context of all of the experiences that they are bringing with them. For adult learners, making the connections between the information and experiences that they have and the new information that they are receiving and then using is vital to their success as a student.

For this cohort, the data suggests that it was the relationships that were created throughout the accelerated program that most impacted the participants’ views. Many comments appeared that referred to another adult within the program who supported or validated a participant’s progress. Some of the ways in which the faculty were described were “warm and folksy,” “brilliant,” and “leaders.” By developing bonds within the cohort and faculty, these adult learners found support and encouragement to assist them in being successful in their new role, not only as students, but also as teachers. As Dirkx (1998) found, it is this engagement with others that helps adult learners apply what they have learned and reinforce the new knowledge.

During the course of the program, the students worked closely with two university professors who taught the majority of the coursework and also supervised the student teaching
experience. This set up the first mentor-mentee relationship as the students often came to these professors with questions and concerns about how the program was progressing. These close ties provided much needed reassurance for the participants in this study. After the semester of theory courses, the students moved into the schools for the student teaching experience creating the next mentoring opportunity.

Findings in Relation to Literature Review

The literature review in this study focused on how teachers are prepared, how second career adults adapt in teacher education programs, and what impact the student teaching experience has on these adults. These areas relate directly to the questions that are at the heart of this study. The following chapter will look how the data in this author’s research reflects the results of previous studies by highlighting common themes among them.

Teacher preparation. The data analyses show that with the program of study following the traditional teacher education program design which included understanding pedagogy and including a student teaching semester, these second career adults would be at an advantage when they entered the profession. Darling-Hammond (2006) focused extensively on the need for teachers to understand the why behind what they are doing not just knowing the content. In this accelerated MAT, the focus of the degree plan was to acculturate these pre-service teachers into the field of education since they entered the program having previously completed their content areas. For most of these students, it was learning how to teach that was new to them.

Unlike alternative route teachers who often felt unprepared to manage a classroom and teach content (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2002), the novice teachers in this study entered the classroom much more at ease with the management aspect of education so they could focus more on the teaching of content component. As one new teacher put it, “Teaching co-workers was
transferred to teaching students. I wasn’t bothered by standing in front of the class as much as I was worried about getting the lesson correct. It helped that I could explain to them that we are on the same side with the same goals.” This shows the value years of professional experience and time spent in a successful career provides these second career adults when transitioning to a new position.

Having a strong mentor component increases the likelihood that a pre-service teacher will feel successful toward entering the profession (Stanley & Martin, 2009). Within this study, the participants’ results were mixed when it came to their views toward mentors within the program. Every participant commented positively when it came to the faculty support they received, but several felt that their student teaching mentor did not always meet their needs. The data does not show any lasting negative impact was perceived by those participants who felt their mentor did not provide them with the best experience during the student teaching placement. Those who have entered the profession did not express that any strong relationships were being utilized within their current school system to aid in their acclimation to the field.

**Second career adults.** One of the biggest advantages of the accelerated program as expressed by the majority of participants is that of the duration of the degree plan. Like many adults, these students had obligations that created both financial and time restraints. As shown in a study by Huling, et al., (2001) a program can be both comprehensive and efficient when entrance requirements are set to ensure strong students are entering the program. This cohort entered the advanced degree with an average grade point of 3.15 in their undergraduate programs and all completed the MAT with a 3.0 or higher grade point. Although the participants completed the degree with acceptable grades, several commented that they would have felt better prepared for returning to school if some time had been given to reorienting them to reading and writing on an academic level.
With several participants not meeting state certification requirements, the researcher questions whether the number of licensed teachers would have been higher if the university had maintained the entrance condition of passing the content area PRAXIS exam prior to being admitted into the MAT. Many reform efforts have focused on this issue to ensure that those entering teacher education programs start off with an advantage and are in a better position to succeed both within the program and the field (Hall & West, 2011). In this cohort, at least one participant felt that the differences in academic levels among students held everyone back. He expressed that the entrance requirements should have been higher to maintain the credibility of the program.

This concern also relates to the issue mentioned in the previous chapter where several participants posited the notion that some students enrolled in the program just because it was offered by GM. During an observation, it was expressed, “Not everyone took the program seriously. Some looked at it as another training rather than an opportunity.” Did prior experience put these participants in a position where they would be inclined to enroll whether they viewed teaching as a second career choice or not? To be successful in a teacher education program, a second career adult must be committed and motivated (Chambers, 2002; Mayotte, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2005). Giving up a prior professional identity to what may be seen by some as a lesser one (GM manager to teacher) has been found to effect second career adults choice to enter the profession of teaching (Grier & Johnston, 2009) and may have been a factor here. A number of data points leads the researcher to conclude that not all participants viewed this program as an opportunity at a second career but the reasons why would need to be investigated further.

**Student teaching.** As the component of the accelerated program receiving the most positive reflections, student teaching proved to be a valuable experience for these participants.
This cohort spoke of the benefit of two school placements which allowed them to evaluate their skills and comfort level with different age groups. One participant expressed,

I did not particularly care for my middle school student teaching assignment probably due to the fact that I didn’t feel comfortable teaching 7th and 8th graders. I really enjoyed teaching at the high school level, and my mentor was an expert. I would have to say learned as much or maybe even more in that 9 weeks than I learned in all the previous MAT program combined.

This statement aligns with Hoy’s (2000) findings concerning student teaching’s affect on a pre-service teacher’s feeling of self-efficacy. Study results also showed that the students appreciated the feedback and support from university supervisors throughout this semester. The faculty offered suggestions on how student teachers could make changes in their plans and implementation of lessons. Through regular evaluations, the students were able to see the growth in their skills as a teacher.

Throughout this semester, the participants were given the opportunity to practice what they had been taught and were put into an environment where they could see other experts in the field and incorporate these experiences into their schemata (Harlin et al., 2002). This learning often reinforced the theories they were introduced to in their first semester of classes. The reflection class that met during the student teaching semester allowed the participants to share any challenges they were facing and look to others in the cohort for advice. As is common, these pre-service teachers found out that teaching can be a lonely endeavor and one without praise (Haggard et al., 2006). This experience was new for many of these second career adults as they were used to working in environments with other adults and receiving daily feedback about their work.
The relationships developed throughout the student teaching semester varied by participant. Several participants felt that their mentors were not pleased with this added responsibility, so they did not go out of their way to assist these students with learning the tricks of the trade. Other participants commented that their mentor viewed them as an equal and they acted as “co-teachers” during the placement. One of the goals of the student teaching component is for pre-service teachers to anticipate success when they assume the role by themselves (Cuenca, 2011). Some of the factors that seemed to impact negative relationships were: age differences, content level ability and personality conflicts.

**Final Analysis and Recommendations**

Overall, the results of this study show the participants in the accelerated MAT viewed the program as positive and meeting their needs as adult learners. It became clear throughout the data analysis, as is common with adult learners; relationships were a key aspect in this degree plan’s success in preparing second career adults to enter the teaching profession. The most prevalent theme was the value felt in the interactions among the students, faculty and school mentors within the program. With the data showing mixed results when it came to participants’ views of the student teaching mentors, the university might consider implementing mentor recruitment, selection and training programs. This could increase the positive influences that student teachers often receive from strong mentors who value their role and see it as a service to the profession.

For these adult learners, adapting to a new profession was challenging but not overwhelming. It was expressed that they can see the value of the theory they learned but it is hard to implement during the first year when they are trying to learn the culture of their school. Several participants stated that the environment impacted what they actually do in the classroom – school expectations, other teachers in content area, evaluation requirements. Brouwer and
Korthagen (2005) found this to be true but lessening in later years as the novice teacher becomes acclimated to their role. It is anticipated with time; these teachers will grow in their self-confidence and be able to teach in ways that enhance their skill set as a second career teacher. One recommendation is that the university provides a mentor during the first year of teaching. This could be someone from the department or within the school system who closely monitors and supports the novice teacher.

Most often, the shortfalls of the program cited by the students were in areas that cannot be taught in an education class. More experience working with IEP’s, school politics, lack of parental involvement, forethought of students about life issues and expectations – these things are not often covered in-depth in education programs due to individualistic nature of school systems and time constraints within university courses. Based on the results in this study, it is suggested that more time be spent with these older adults engaging in conversations about the realities of today’s youth and families and how it impacts the school environment and their role as a teacher.

According to program data, several graduates do not appear to be working toward receiving their teaching credential. It would appear that they do not view teaching as a viable profession in the future but the reasons why remain unclear. In addressing this issue, the researcher poses that the relaxed entrance requirements may be in part responsible for this phenomenon. Had the prospective students had to pass the Praxis exam in their content area prior to beginning the program, the author hypothesizes that some of them would not have persevered in this endeavor. Anecdotal evidence shows that those students who entered the program, either from a GM management position or from an outside company, were more inclined to become certified teachers. Is this because these students were internally driven to succeed or was this program looked at as an opportunity during a period of unemployment for
the others? This dilemma arose after the data collection was in the final stages and could not be addressed by the participants.

It should also be noted that those graduates who have not continued in the field are also those who did not actively participant in the data collection phase of the study. Taking into consideration the feedback expressed throughout the various forms of data collection, the university should maintain their strong entrance requirements as a way to ensure that those students who begin the program are more inclined not only to finish the degree but also make every attempt to acquire certification and job placement within the field.

**Significance of the Study**

Understanding how graduates view a teacher education program is valuable to faculty and administrators who analyze and modify program components. In this study, graduates expressed three main views: program design and implementation had an impact on graduates’ feelings of success, prior professional experiences aided in the transition to a new career, and key relationships affected persistence and preparedness to enter the field of teaching. Knowing this information puts this university and others in similar environments in the position of being able to improve their methods and policies as it relates to second career adults returning to school to enter the field of teaching.

In terms of program design, this study found that weakened entrance requirements may have impacted the number of participants who received certification. One recommendation is that although it is important to make programs accessible to interested students, the desire to increase enrollment numbers should not outweigh the need for the highest quality applicants to be admitted. The study also shows that an accelerated time frame can meet adult learners’ needs both personally and professionally by moving them through the pipeline in an expedited manner. No data indicated a negative impact due to the accelerated format. It is this researcher’s opinion
that universities should take advantage of this knowledge while still maintaining strong coursework and a student teaching component.

The knowledge that adult learners bring a specific skill set with them into any new career, teacher education programs would be remiss by not incorporating these skills into the learning process. By focusing on aspects of an adult’s previous career where he was successful and translating it in to the new career, faculty members may be able to ease the transition into the new field. This study showed that valuing the student and what they brought with them to the program increased their feelings of preparedness to take on a new role.

The value of relationships formed throughout the program were cited as being the primary component participants expressed as instrumental to their success, and it is therefore recommended that education programs work to ensure these relationships are solid. The cohort format was successful due to the nature of this group and education programs should build upon these relationships. Although a less homogenous group would have increased the students’ experiences, for these second career adult learners, their similar backgrounds and ages helped to solidify a strong bond. Selecting faculty who understand the unique nature of adult learners and have experience incorporating atypical examples and activities may enhance the student/teacher relationship. Most importantly, this study’s data highlighted the need to ensure the student teacher mentor is prepared for and trained in working with second career adults who are in teacher education programs.

By respecting and valuing second career adults for who they are right now in their life, teacher education programs can ensure not only the student’s needs are met, but also education systems. These professionals bring with them a wealth of knowledge and practical life experience. Being able to provide real-life examples of how the content knowledge being taught
will be used is a skill that is critical for connecting with younger students who often don’t find value in the curriculum being presented.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this case study are related to the nature of a qualitative study. The small number of participants (n=14) did not allow for the study to be generalizable. Although the small sample size allowed for an in-depth exploration of student experiences and programmatic design, it did not allow for the breadth of a large scale study. Another consideration is the understanding that the use of interviews relied on the ability of participants to articulate their thoughts and feelings adequately and for the researcher to interpret them accurately. Researcher bias is also a limitation that must be acknowledged as possibly impacting the results due to the fact that the researcher had a pre-existing professional relationship with the participants and the university.

**Validity**

The researcher employed the use of protocols and procedures designed to ensure the resulting data had not been compromised. During data collection, the researcher followed the included interview and observation protocols so that a consistent set of data would be analyzed and to limit researcher bias during both data collection and analysis. Throughout the data analysis, the results from individual and focus group interviews were summarized and then submitted back to participants for review. If any discrepancies existed, the researcher and the participant continued the dialogue until resolved. By collecting data from multiple sources, the researcher was able to triangulate the data and validate recurring themes. Throughout the examination of data, another teacher education faculty member was used to verify the researchers’ analyses and resulting themes, thus decreasing errant results.

**Conclusion**
With 14 students graduating with the MAT degree and eight of those currently employed full-time in the field, the university should view the program as having a positive impact on the field and the community. It should also be noted that several graduates, who are not currently teaching, spoke highly of the profession and state that they look forward to entering the field either upon retirement from GM or when certification requirements are met. This research reinforced previous studies that showed adult learners returning to the classroom can be successful when their knowledge and skills are used as a starting point for learning new information.

**Future Research**

The following is a list of recommendations for future studies that could help to answer lingering questions concerning accelerated teacher education programs for second career adults:

- A study looking at the relationship between Praxis scores and success in student teaching.
- A follow up study at 3-5 years to see how many of this program’s graduates remained in the field.
- A study that examines value added scores for the teachers in this cohort.
- The impact of a mentor training program on student teachers’ feelings of preparedness to enter the field.
- An action research project where teachers are mentored by university faculty during their first year of teaching.
- A study that examines the impact second career adults’ prior professional positions have on their commitment to enter the teaching profession.
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http://epicpolicy.org/publication/teach-for-america


http://www.eric.ed.gov


Appendices

Appendix A

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education

Name of Investigators: Dr. Sara Ewell, Principal Investigator, Julie Williams, Student Researcher.

Title of Project: Second Career Adults’ Views of an Accelerated Teacher Education Program

Request to Participate in Research

I would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to help me understand your experiences in an accelerated MAT program. This survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. I am asking you to participate in this study because you are a graduate of the program. The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time. By completing the survey, you are also agreeing to take part in focus groups, individual interviews and observations as a part of this study. Again, you are free to refuse participation at any point or to opt out of any component of the study. The researcher is also requesting permission to use documentation from your university program (course evaluations, PRAXIS scores, etc) for additional data. At no time will individual’s names be used in the publication of materials and any participants will have the opportunity to review any transcripts or interpretations of interviews.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, your responses may help us learn more about designing teacher education programs for second career adults. You will not be paid for your participation in this study. Your part in this survey is anonymous to the researcher. However, because of the nature of web based surveys, it is possible that respondents could be identified by the IP address or other electronic record associated with the response. Neither the researcher nor anyone involved with this survey will be capturing those data. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions regarding electronic privacy, please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, IT Security Analyst via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Julie Williams at 615-585-4913, the person mainly responsible for the research.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.7570, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish. By clicking on the survey link below you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your time.
Julie Williams
Appendix B

On-line questionnaire:

Please refer to the first semester of classes in the MAT program when answering the following questions.

1. How did the format of the courses impact your learning?
2. In what ways did the faculty affect your learning of the content?
3. In what ways did the location and time frame of the courses meet (or not) your needs?
4. Describe any courses or assignments that influenced your views of the field of education.
5. How were your previous experiences reflected in the teaching?

The student teaching experience:

1. Reflect on your student teaching experience.
2. What role did the student teaching supervisor have on your development as a teacher?
3. How did student teaching change your views of the teaching profession?
4. In what ways was your student teaching experience affected by your prior work experience?
Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Protocol:

- What role did the location and one-year format of the MAT program have on your decision to enroll in this program?
- How did the first semester of courses impact your view of the teaching profession (Educational Psychology, Human Development, Classroom Organization & Development, Practicum, etc)?
- Describe how the student teaching experience affected your professional identity.
- Were there things you encountered that you were not prepared for?
- What are your thoughts on the online coursework?
- What are the strengths of the program?
- Weaknesses?
- Did your previous professional experiences enter into your role as a student? As a new teacher?
Appendix D

Clinical Experience Evaluation Form

Below are six major categories with specific behaviors listed under each. Place a rating to the left of each behavior using the following scale: 4-above expectations, 3-at expectations, 2-below expectations or 1-no evidence. If you have not observed a particular behavior or the behavior is not appropriate for your classroom setting, place an x to the left of that behavior. Judgments should be made on the basis of the traits of candidate teaching performance, not on the basis of comparison with teachers who have experience.

I. PERSONAL QUALITIES
   _____ A. Wears clothing appropriate for teaching
   _____ B. Is well groomed
   _____ C. Uses speech that is grammatically correct
   _____ D. Speaks clearly and distinctly with volume appropriate to the setting
   _____ E. Displays enthusiasm through verbal and nonverbal expressions
   _____ F. Has sufficient stamina and energy to complete assigned tasks
   _____ G. Demonstrates self-confidence
   _____ H. Demonstrates emotional stability
   _____ I. Is dependable and punctual
   _____ J. Considers feelings and needs of others before acting
   _____ K. Is cheerful, congenial, and displays a sense of humor

Comments:

II. PLANNING SKILLS
   _____ A. Plans for long range goals
   _____ B. Prepares sufficiently detailed daily lesson plans
   _____ C. Plans for individual differences in students
   _____ D. Plans activities that will involve all students
   _____ E. Develops alternatives to cope with various student responses
   _____ F. Prepares measuring devices consistent with stated objectives
   _____ G. Develops an appropriate rationale for assigning grades

Comments:

III. INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS
   _____ A. Utilizes a variety of appropriate teaching strategies
   _____ B. Makes effective use of a variety of material
   _____ C. Demonstrates knowledge of the subject
   _____ D. Uses introductory techniques to gain attention and promote interest
   _____ E. Makes associations between present content and past learning
   _____ F. Provides reinforcement throughout the lesson
   _____ G. Paces the lesson around logical priorities
   _____ H. Culminates lessons by summarizing major points or ideas covered
   _____ I. Makes clear assignments

Comments:
IV. EVALUATION SKILLS

A. Builds evaluation into each lesson
B. Uses a wide variety of evaluation procedures
C. Attempts to evaluate accurately and fairly
D. Draws conclusions from evaluative data collected
E. Returns corrected evaluative instruments to students as soon as possible
F. Encourages students to self-evaluate
G. Evaluates own teaching performance using all appropriate feedback

Comments:

V. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

A. Knows and acts within the boundaries of the established school policies
B. Maintains an attractive and comfortable classroom conducive to learning
C. Manages routine classroom matters well
D. Uses class time economically
E. Utilizes preventive measures to avoid classroom disruption
F. Demonstrates ability to analyze situations to determine problem sources
G. Applies corrective discipline appropriately

Comments:

VI. PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES

A. Is highly motivated to begin teaching
B. Establishes and maintains rapport with students
C. Works cooperatively with supervising teachers
D. Establishes appropriate relationships with administrators, teachers and parents
E. Accepts and incorporates constructive criticism into his/her work
F. Cooperates in promoting the total school program
G. Keeps accurate records and maintains confidentiality when appropriate
H. Refrains from using the public school to promote religious or commercial activities

Comments:
Appendix E

Individual Interview Protocol:

- How did the university’s requirements align with your employing school’s when it comes to:
  - developing lesson plans
  - classroom management
  - assessment
- How did your expectations prior to being hired compare with your actual teaching experience?
- In what ways does your previous career impact your teaching?
- Other questions that arise from the observation will be included – actions or behaviors that align or contradict what were taught in the education program.