Going into the Field: Bringing The Experiences of A Teacher Education Field Placement to Life

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Abstract

This study explored the experiences of education students taking an introductory Historical Foundations of Education course with an in-field placement component. Research indicates that teacher education programs with experiential learning through in-field placements benefit students in eventual practice in a variety of ways. Despite these indicators, preparation programs vary a great deal in the actual use and timing of in-field placements, with most occurring at the end of teacher training, when students are too far into their intended field of study to change course. This qualitative study considered the experience of six students participating in an in-field placement in their initial education coursework. Their reflections provide insight as to their overall experience, with potential implications for teacher education programs. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations for practice and future research were described, including: early in-field placements, more hands-on and experiential learning, and multiple interventions throughout teacher education to empower student decision making.

Keywords: teacher preparation, field experience, in-field placement, experiential learning, reflection
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Studies have demonstrated that teacher preparation is a stronger indicator of student performance and achievement than class size, school spending, or socioeconomic and social conditions of the school or community (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Payne, 2008; Pappano, 2011). Legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and Race to the Top (RTTT, 2009) have acknowledged the need for education to be more inclusive, effective, and accountable for student success and have emphasized the role of the classroom teacher in achieving these goals. Because there is a direct link between student performance and teacher efficacy, a growing body of research has focused upon how best to prepare quality teachers, with a focus upon increased field experience in teacher education programs (Pappano, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007).

Traditional teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers for the diverse realities of the modern classroom, contributing to decreased teacher efficacy and confidence, and increased teacher attrition. Studies have shown that as many as fifty percent of new teachers will leave the profession after five years of teaching (Pappano, 2011). Additional research was needed regarding how increased field placement and experiential, hands-on learning effects pre-service teacher’s experience, classroom confidence, and aptitude for the field of teaching. While significant research exists regarding teacher education programs and the effect of increased field experience, there was a lack of research regarding in-field immersion from the beginning of teacher education. This study examined the experiences of six first-year education students’ who participated in an in-field experiential learning placement in their initial introductory education course; in particular, how participation in an in-field placement influences a student’s confidence and preparedness in continuing in teacher education.
Scholar-practitioners currently studying field experience agree that experiential learning through placement in actual classrooms is integral to pre-service teacher education for a myriad of reasons, including greater cultural competency, better understanding of pedagogy, meeting indices of quality teachers set forth by NCLB, and improved student performance (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005; Beeth, 2006; Bodur, 2012; Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wykoff, 2009; Chung & Hyunjin, 2010; Ledoux, Thurlow, McHenry, & Burns, 2007; Moyer & Husman, 2006). Currently though, experiential learning is concentrated toward the end of teacher education, which creates a disparity between the importance of this component and the actual practice of integrating this in-field placement into introductory courses. When examining this issue, it was important to both illuminate deficiencies, as well as to improve practice and training for future teachers.

While studies describe the importance of in-field placements, as well as hands-on and experiential learning, very few specifically examine student experiences and how they affect continuation in teacher education. Additionally, there is a gap in the literature regarding early field experience in teacher education, as existing research focuses on placements that occur typically during the final semesters of teacher education (Boyd et al., 2009; Ledoux et al., 2007; Boe et al., 2007; Bruce & Ewing, 2012; Chung & Hyunjin, 2010; Davis & Higdon, 2008; Lowery, Roberts, & Roberts, 2012). There is very little in the literature that considers early teacher training and introductory courses, and how integrating real-world learning might influence students’ experiences. The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of students in an introductory course who participated in an experiential in-field placement and to examine how this participation shapes their confidence and preparedness continuing in teacher education, as well as potential implications for improving teacher training in the future.
The topic. Teacher education is a field which has undergone changes over the years (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007). It used to focus on coursework in the first three years of the Bachelor’s degree, with student teaching occurring during the last semester of college coursework. Further, programs varied a great deal in whether or how many hours of experiential, in-class placement occurred. Teacher education programs focused upon learning classroom content, curriculum, and pedagogy through coursework, with limited if any hands-on application of learning until being immersed in student teaching. Because student teaching occurred in the final semester of college, it was more of a final requirement for degree completion, rather than a true opportunity to apply learning to practice.

Currently in New Jersey, it will take five years to complete a Bachelor’s degree in teacher education, and the number of clinical experience hours in the classroom are being increased, as are test scores, and GPA and other requirements (NJ Department of Education, 2016). Despite the challenges to becoming prepared for the job they want, many teachers will leave the field only a few years after getting into it. This is because teacher education has lacked experiential learning, the element of being in the classroom and developing a true understanding of what the career entails and being ready for it. In this study, it was important to find out whether increasing experiential learning in the very first course education students would take would provide them with a more clear vision of what their intended profession would look like, and whether it was truly the profession for them. Further, it was important to consider whether being in the classroom and engaging in experiential learning would facilitate greater confidence in pursuing their intended field of study.

Research problem. The research problem identified here sought to explore what happens during a fieldwork experience during an early course in teacher education. The problem was
articulated to analyze what happens during field work, and how these experiences influence students. The analysis of this problem examined whether early experiential learning in coursework facilitates a growth in aptitude and confidence in these teacher education students. While ample research indicates the importance of experiential learning, particularly as a component of teacher education, few if any research exists on integration of field experience early in coursework.

**Justification for research problem.** A study examining the experience of students in an introductory education course who participated in an experiential learning component is important for several reasons. While many students enter into teacher training with the intent to become a teacher, by the time they are actually in a real classroom experiencing the profession they have chosen, they are at the end of their teacher training and preparing for licensure. In New Jersey, teacher education occurs in a five-year program; and student teaching, the primary means of experiential, real-world learning, occurs in the final semester. Teacher education programs vary greatly in when and whether they include in-field placement, despite ample literature supporting its effectiveness (Boyd et al., 2009; Ledoux et al., 2007; Boe et al., 2007; Bruce & Ewing, 2012; Chung & Hyunjin, 2010; Davis & Higdon, 2008; Lowery et al., 2012). Considering both the effectiveness of experiential learning early in teacher training, as well as the role of the field experience in an introductory course, provided additions to the literature and potential improvements in practice within the field of teacher education.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Examining teacher education and how to make it more effective was believed to be important for several reasons, but there lacked evidence regarding how best to do so, particularly early on. First, teachers are undeniably important to student success, both immediate and long-term (Darling-Hammond, 2005). The success of U.S. students
is of national concern, and nurturing students who are globally competitive impacts our economy, society, and future. Second, while there is a push to produce more effective teachers and reduce attrition, there lacks clear guidelines or best practices to do so. This is frustrating for new teachers, who feel ill-prepared for the classroom despite meeting all requirements for the program meant to prepare them. Teacher education programs vary a great deal from school to school and state to state, despite sweeping state and federal requirements. While a great deal of literature and practice support the integration of fieldwork in teacher education, there lacks consistency regarding when it is offered and for how long. Finally, schools, students, and communities suffer when teachers are ineffective. Although the objective of teacher education is to prepare effective educators, not every student in a program is well-suited to become a classroom teacher. With more hands-on experience, college students would have the opportunity to make an informed decision about their eventual profession. This problem of practice is significant to teacher education, schools, students, communities; and ultimately, to our shared future.

**Relating the discussion to audiences.** The potential contribution of this study extends beyond training practices to eventual classroom performance by creating well-prepared teachers whose efficacy effects schools, classes, students, and families. The potential influence of a well-prepared, quality educator is emphasized in literature, media, practice, laws, and initiatives intended to transform education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Payne, 2008; Pappano, 2011; NCLB, 2001; RTTT, 2009). How best to prepare these individuals is of wide-spread concern, because their effectiveness has societal implications. For teachers, the pressure is on and the stakes are high. A new teacher who is not prepared for the diverse needs of a variety of learners, the myriad of demands of the profession, and the real-world pressures of the classroom will have
reduced efficacy, poor performance, and lack confidence in the classroom (Pappano, 2011). This contributes to an extremely high rate of attrition, with approximately one-third of new teachers leaving the profession within three years, and half leaving in five years (Payne, 2008). With education in the spotlight and the stakes to perform high, the implications for teacher education and preparation are considerable. How best to create quality educators is of national importance, and a study integrating existing research about the importance of including in-field placement with the experiences of students doing so early on could illuminate potential improvements in training and practice.

An additional implication exists in the practice of New Jersey colleges. Teacher education programs often are scrutinized regarding how best to prepare quality teachers, and while standards for student teaching are relatively consistent and reflective of the importance of experiential learning, there is a disparity regarding how best it should be incorporated. The timing and frequency varies a great deal from program to program. This can result in inconsistent preparation and missed opportunities to better prepare teachers or to illuminate their suitability for the profession before it seems “too late” to change paths. By examining students’ experiences, important implications for practice in teacher education were revealed (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Specifically, this research created a scholarly contribution to how best to prepare effective teachers to meet the demands of diverse, evolving classrooms, which is of national concern (Pappano, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Boe et al., 2007). For research to be transformational, it should contribute to both scholarship and practice; this was the goal of this research study.

Positionality
As part of the process of understanding student experiences regarding an in-field placement in their introductory education course, I needed to consider my relationship to the topic and to illuminate my potential biases. It was important that I thoroughly examined my biases so as to avoid their permeation into my research, compromising its effectiveness (Machi & McAvoy, 2009). This topic was personal to me, as I am a mother, teacher, and education coordinator, and creating quality educators speaks to my personal identity and professional motivation. Because of this, I acknowledged that while my personal bias and opinion will not be removed, they must be controlled (Machi & McAvoy, 2009). At the two-year community college where I teach and where this study took place, I am currently the coordinator of all education programs, as well as the coordinator of Service Learning. My job involves ensuring seamless transfer to four-year colleges, and making sure that teacher candidates are well-prepared for the rigors of these diverse programs. I work with colleges and universities to align our program with theirs, to improve retention and completion for transferring students. Further, my job involves using experiential learning as part of curriculum to create students who are better prepared and connected to the community in which they live and learn. It is essential to my job success that I facilitate programs that accomplish the objectives inherent in both my role as coordinator and that of professor, which are directly related to my research and study, as well as to the education profession.

I did not enter the education profession right out of college; in fact, I started as a police detective often working with child victims and their families. As my professional path continued, I consistently pursued opportunities to teach, eventually realizing that I wanted to be proactive rather than reactive. I wanted to have an effect on kids before they made decisions that could have negative life-long implications. I taught at several schools and in various grade levels,
eventually becoming a professor of Elementary and Secondary Education at Cumberland County College. To me, teaching is both a privilege and responsibility, and preparing teachers increases that personal responsibility exponentially. Good teachers change lives, and when I had my own children who now sit in our classrooms under the guidance of these educators, the motivation to figure out how to best prepare truly good teachers became all the more personal.

Both personally and professionally, I saw myself as a representative of parents, teachers, and community members who desire and demand quality education. I recognized that as teachers, we have the admirable yet daunting task of shaping children into globally competitive and socially responsible adults. I was guided by both research and common sense to know that the quality of the classroom teacher is the most important variable in facilitating student success. Again, I am driven to be proactive rather than reactive. If we can shape the training of teachers early on, we can provide the foundation for long-term effectiveness and create transformational change in our classrooms.

While I acknowledged that this area of study is indeed highly personal, I believed that I am uniquely situated to study this topic. I am closely involved with education students who hope to be teachers, which provided me with a perspective of this group in a way that “constructs a social identity that protects and serves the interests of the group” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 28). Although my personal biases brought forth the potential of egocentrism when viewing the study through my own personal lens, I mitigated that bias by seeing myself as a representative of the authenticity of the students’ perspective, not of my own (Fennell & Arnot, 2008). My goal in this study was to accurately analyze and reflect their experience, which facilitated my conscious avoidance of my own biases and experiences (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The study was certainly
personal, but ultimately, only those future teachers can really shed light upon what their experiences meant, and what potential implications they may yield.

Finally, I was careful not to prejudge the outcome of my study, or to assume that my preconceptions did not have the potential to color my perspective. It was important for me to consider my own perspective when creating an authentic representation of others’ experiences throughout my study (Jupp & Slattery, 2010). Because of this, I checked my own interpretations and reflections continually, to ensure the accuracy of my documentation and analysis of student experiences (Creswell, 2012). This topic is emotional and important, which made my own role in letting it organically yield information integral. If I remained aware of my positionality, I stayed better able to be intentional and reflective in my study.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question.** What were the experiences of an in-field placement for students in an introductory education class?

**Rationale.** The question was designed to help increase understanding of the education students’ experiences in an introductory education course with an in-field experience component. The purpose of qualitative research is to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon, and this question was intended to find meaning through respondents’ personal experiences (Creswell, 2012). This helped to discern how this experience influences the students’ confidence and readiness in teacher education, and how being in an actual classroom shapes their perspective.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory and in Schon’s (1983) reflection in action theory. Together, these created a theoretical foundation to consider
how students experience and reflect upon their learning. By combining these theories, there was greater opportunity to delve into how participants were affected by their experience, and how they later reflected upon it.

**Seminal Roots and Features**

Experiential learning theory was developed by David Kolb, an educational theorist. Kolb was heavily influenced by Dewey (1906; 1933), Piaget (1934), and Lewin (1946), eminent theorists in constructivist learning. Kolb considered learning a cyclical process combining experience, perception, cognition, and behavior, asserting that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p. 38). Experiential learning occurs in a transaction between the person and the environment, emphasizing the central role that experience plays in the learning process. Making sense of both subjective (pre-service teachers’ in-class experiences, biases, interactions, and perceptions) and objective (classroom dynamics, student and teacher interactions, lessons, coursework) experiences provides insight into a student’s learning process (Kolb, 1984, p. 37). The emphasis in Kolb’s theory is placed upon the process of adaptation, and that knowledge is a transformational process, continuously created and recreated to transform one’s individual understanding.

The theory is called “Experiential Learning” for several reasons. Kolb thought it was important to distinguish his emerging theory from the intellectual works which gave it origin. While the theories of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget influenced his work, Kolb was very interested in the central role that experience plays in the learning process. Kolb felt that actual experiences are the essence of the learning process, effectively shaping how people grow, learn and develop. His theory focused upon how one’s transformation of experience creates knowledge. Knowledge, then, results from “the combination of grasping and transforming experience”
Using cycles of learning through experience, Kolb examined how some perceive new information through that which is tangible, concrete, and felt; whereas others perceive through that which is grasped, analyzed, and conceptualized. While learners can do both, interchanging learning abilities and ways to perceive, Kolb emphasized that there is a constant interplay of the concrete and abstract. Through this interplay, we create meaning, which we eventually internalize as learning.

The emphasis in Kolb’s theory is in the process of learning, as opposed to behavioral outcomes. This meant that ideas are not fixed and unchangeable, but rather continually formed and re-formed through experience. This had educational implications, because inherent in this theory is the idea that learning is a continual process. Put simply, this meant that the mind is not a blank slate, but rather that all learning is relearning, framed by new experience. When a student goes into a new class, he or she would take in new information, assimilate it into concepts that make sense, and resolve conflicts regarding whether this fits with what he or she already knows. In this theory, the resolution of those conflicts and creation of new concepts results in learning. Kolb believed that learning is filled with these conflicts, and that they are approached using four different abilities: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Kolb’s theory of experiential learning is presented in a model of four cyclical stages, which are grounded in an experience, and follow a sequence. The learner has a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this study, participants first had the concrete experience of being placed in a classroom, and then had the opportunity for reflective observation, whereupon they were encouraged to engage in abstract conceptualization by applying their concurrent college
coursework (theory) to classroom experience (practice). Finally, they participated in active engagement, where they critically thought about and applied theory to the situations with which they were presented. This cyclical process occurred continually throughout the placement, with ongoing reflection and application encouraging transformational learning through experience.

The learning that occurred during the field placement provided a conceptual bridge across student understanding and adaptation to experience (Kolb, 1984). Learning involves continual interaction between the person and the environment, which is conceptualized by subjective and personal experience. In education, the tangible outcome is often of primary importance, such as performance on a test or remembering facts and information. In Kolb’s theory, the emphasis is placed upon how that experience affects the learner’s conceptualization and behavior in new situations in their future. Specifically, this theory centers upon resolving conflict between the known (class learning) and the unknown (placement), in a continual process that forms a new concept of what it means to be a teacher. Kolb emphasized that in learning, the development of meaningful knowledge is contingent upon the transformation of experience and is a continual process. In this research, the field placement provided the opportunity to reflect upon a new experience to raise conflict, facilitate adaptation, and refine knowledge.

Many of the studies informing this research discuss experiential learning through field placement (Bieler, 2010; Boyd et al., 2009; Bruce & Ewing, 2012; Davis & Higdon, 2008; Ledoux et al., 2007; Lesley, Hammon, Olivarez, Button, & Griffith, 2009; Nahal, 2010; Zientek, 2007). While none specifically name Kolb’s theory of experiential learning, the theories used are very much practitioner-oriented, and are grounded in the intellectual origins of Dewey, Piaget, and other constructivist theorists. These theories, such as Ball and Cohen’s (1999) theory of professional education, and both Roberts and Dyer (2004) and Ewing and Foster’s (2010)
theories of experiential learning, focus upon applying theory and learning through experience. They are much more specific in application, however, as they focus on professional development as it informs practice (Ball and Cohen, 1999) and on group reflection after exposure to a particular treatment (Roberts and Dyer 2004, and Ewing and Foster, 2010). Similarly, although based in experiential learning, Resta’s teacher fellows model (1996) and Granott’s notions of collaborative development (1993) theories were not included because their application refers specifically to the pre-service teacher/mentor relationship, while the application of Kolb’s theory allowed a more comprehensive consideration of the entire placement experience and how it informs learning.

Kolb’s theory of experiential learning was used in conjunction with Schon’s (1983) reflection in action. Schon’s theory added additional support to the framework created by experiential learning theory. It provided a more focused lens through which education students’ experiences were considered. Schon’s theory of reflection in action provides additional support that not only addressed cognitive and behavioral facets of learning, but distinctly illuminated the process of reflection as well (1983, 1987). Schon focused upon reflective practice in organizations, and was influenced by Dewey’s theory of inquiry. Schon asserted that reflection in action develops an intuitive understanding of ones’ experience, particularly that which is puzzling, troubling, or uncertain (1983). Further, he believed that instruction should encourage students to reflect upon their learning, through experimentation and hypothesis testing as to why events occurred and how they could be responded to in different ways. Schon believed that through reflection, a practitioner will come to utilize a variety of understandings and actions to consider a troubling situation in order to generate solutions. This self-questioning and examination created a premise for action, which transforms learning.
When considered with Kolb’s theory of experiential learning (1984), there is an emphasis on forming new concepts and creating subjective meaning. The students in this field placement were faced with new and sometimes unexpected situations, and had to reflect both during and after those experiences. Tenets of both theories, particularly taken together, emphasize that it is through this reflection that learning happens. Schon (1987) defined this reflection as knowing-in-action. He explained, "When the practitioner reflects-in-action in a case he [she] perceives as unique, paying attention to phenomena and surfacing his intuitive understanding of them, his experimenting is a once exploratory, move testing, and hypothesis testing. The three functions are fulfilled by the very same actions". (Schon, 1987, p.72). Further, when faced with a new and sometimes challenging situation, this reflection encourages the student to "...move into the center of the learning situation, into the center of their own doubts" (Schon, 1987, p.83). Students could then work through challenges, reflect upon them, and create new opportunities for learning.

The theory of reflection in action relies upon embedding reflectivity in pedagogical practice, to elicit critical thinking and transformational learning. While it shares several components of Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, including constructivism as an intellectual origin, experience as informing practice, and reflection embedded in transformational learning, its theoretical lens is more narrowly focused upon how reflectivity is developed and utilized in learning. For this study, the foundation of the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) was enhanced by a more thorough explanation of how education students develop a reflective process by asking and answering fundamental questions inherent in the practice of teaching (Schon, 1983). Specifically, the education students participating in this in-field placement reflected upon their experience and considered how it influenced their preparation to
become a teacher and their continuation in an education program. Although some studies about teacher education and fieldwork focus upon Schon’s theory, they concentrate primarily upon the development of reflectivity in teacher preparation as it will eventually inform practice (Beeth, 2006; Nahal, 2010). Used in conjunction with Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, there was potential to consider the process of experiential learning with particular focus upon the reflectivity inherent in that process during teacher education, prior to practice. This facilitated insight and understanding of these education students’ in-field experience, and its role in their teacher education.

Preparing quality teachers is of national concern, which made the implications of creating a proactive approach to effective teacher education of paramount importance. By creating a theoretical framework that is grounded in experiential learning and the development of reflectivity, teacher education programs can address problems that historically plague eventual practice, including teacher confidence, efficacy, and attrition. The research strategy herein considered how to mitigate these problems, by posing research questions focused upon pre-service teachers’ reflection of their in-field experience, exposing pre-service teachers to the diverse realities of a modern classroom, and encouraging application of coursework and individual understanding through reflection. In Chapter Two, existing research regarding teacher preparation was examined. Specifically, the following areas were considered: lack of consensus regarding how to prepare effective teachers, Identifying what teacher education reform should include, and determining the influence of in-field experience in teacher education. In Chapter Three, research methodology was explained regarding this research. Chapter Four examined the findings of this qualitative study, with implications and recommendations for future research discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Five also reconsidered the literature review and theoretical
framework as each applied to this study, as well as limitations of study, and my personal reflections.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Research consistently has indicated that the single most important indicator of student success is the classroom teacher (Pappano, 2011; Payne, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2005). Teacher education programs must address the need to better prepare and recruit quality teachers, and to expose them early and often to the realities and challenges of the classroom. Studies have indicated that there is a direct link between student performance and teacher efficacy, but teacher preparation programs vary greatly in quality and time devoted to actual hands-on learning and reflective practice (Payne, 2008; Pappano, 2011).

In most teacher education preparation programs, teaching candidates lack sufficient field experience in the beginning years of their programs. Actual placement in a classroom occurs during the end of the student’s education (typically final semester). As discussed, this makes it very difficult for a student to change direction or choose another profession, which causes problems for both the individual and the profession (Beare et al., 2012). Because there is a direct link between student performance and teacher efficacy, students would benefit from better prepared teachers, who have received foundational support and education in the diverse realities of the classroom throughout their training (Pappano, 2011). In reviewing the literature, three strands of existing research emerged which were examined: lack of consensus in teacher education, effective teacher education reform, and influence of experiential learning. Each of these strands was explored to thoroughly examine the issue and to identify any potential gaps in the literature. A review of the literature suggested that there is indeed disparity in teacher preparation programs, but that there has been success in programs that provide in-field placement, reflective practice, and exposure to the diverse needs of students and to the challenges inherent in a modern classroom. Current practices were considered, as well as trends
and innovations in teacher preparation; and finally, the consideration of a preparation program that incorporates these needs in a proactive, solution- oriented approach.

**Lack of consensus regarding how to prepare effective teachers**

A great deal of national, state, and local debate in education focuses upon quality teacher preparation and its effect on student learning. While much of this attention has been upon teacher quality and how it is a major factor in student achievement, what constitutes *quality* has remained a point of contention, as does how to achieve it. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) emphasized teacher quality, focusing upon strong preparation through requiring a Bachelor’s degree and certification, as well as content knowledge and demonstrated competence in subject area and licensure (Boe et al., 2007). Federal mandates and policies impact teacher education programs, but provide very little information regarding expectations or best practices. Brewer discussed teacher preparation and policy, asserting that there is much debate about what constitutes efficacy, and that this can result in too much focus on the “what” of teaching, and not enough on the “how” (2003).

The mandates set forth by NCLB and the impact of these mandates on teacher training is further echoed by Boe et al., (2007), who contended that the de-emphasis on pedagogy and teaching practicums raise significant concern about how to best prepare a sufficient supply of highly qualified teachers. This creates additional concern regarding how teachers should be prepared. If there is less practical and hands-on learning, teacher candidates are simply not ready for the job for which they have trained. The authors found that teaching practicums and hands-on experience made a significant difference in preparation and practice. Their research indicated that extensive preparation in pedagogy and practice teaching contributed to the achievement of
two key NCLB indicators (full certification and in-field teaching). Teacher candidates who learned more about actual practice and how to teach with experiential learning were more likely to successfully demonstrate these indicators (2007). Nonetheless, programs differ greatly in how much and how often practicums are integrated into teacher training.

While NCLB set forth the importance of teacher preparation, available literature indicated that federal mandates lack any clear indicators of how teacher preparation programs should prepare quality teachers. In fact, answering this question remains a point of contention, as practitioners consider how to create a culture of evidence capable of assessing and improving existing programs. Beare et al., (2012) focused upon the need to apply research and assessment when seeking solutions regarding how best to prepare quality teachers. This evidence-based education movement is a recent application to NCLB’s push for more licensure and increased content knowledge. But the researchers acknowledged that developing an evidence-based system is difficult, and that no proven methodology yet exists for accomplishing these objectives. Further, determining what constituted valid evidence is arduous as well. Despite these challenges, there was general agreement that a teacher’s positive effect on student achievement is a strong indicator of a preparation program’s success (Beare et al., 2012). Movement toward demonstrating an influence on student learning is emphasized in the approach implemented by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Cibulka (2009) delineated the NCATE requirements, which included strengthening a clinical focus, demonstrating an impact on learning, using research and development strategy to improve teacher education programs, and increasing the time spent in residency under the supervision of both a classroom teacher and university faculty. The focus on clinical experience has the objective of closing the gap between theory and practice, which supports the Obama
Administration’s focus on teacher quality, and furthers the emphasis on teacher quality asserted by NCLB in 2001. Additionally, the efforts put forth by NCATE hope to offer some kind of consistency across teacher education programs. Cibulka outlines these goals, focusing upon the need to increase pedagogical knowledge and application. Scheeler’s (2007) research also identified the need for pre-service teachers to apply their learning, reinforcing the need to correct the gap between theory and practice.

While Cibulka and Scheeler both studied teacher learning, particularly as delineated in NCLB and NCATE requirements, these prerequisites have evolved as NCATE informs the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). CAEP requirements focused upon new teachers knowing what to teach (content), as well as how to teach (pedagogy), to diverse students. Further, the Reauthorization of Higher Education Act hoped to retain effective educators, reduce attrition, and mitigate the barriers that prevent teacher efficacy in the classroom (Standards for Educator Preparation, 2013). These objectives were deemed instrumental in producing teachers that are confident and effective in the classroom. In an effort to differentiate highly qualified versus highly effective teachers, Scheeler’s (2007) research focused on a new teacher’s ability to generalize newly acquired teaching skills across time and in a variety of settings. She determined that there are several factors neglected or nonexistent in teacher education programs, including immediate feedback, practicing behaviors, and promoting mastery of critical teaching skills. Scheeler’s (2007) research asserted that there is a missing link between pre-service teachers’ preparation and their in-service application of skills. Her research reinforced the contention that effective teacher preparation yields more effective practice, thereby supporting greater success for student learning and achievement. Further, her research supported providing opportunities for education students (eventual teachers) to practically apply...
learned concepts and skills in a “real-life” setting, which would be facilitated by in-field placement.

In their study of teacher practice, Smith, Desimone, and Koji (2005) found that preparation and application also impact how teachers teach. Their research spanned geographic areas across the country, with samples coming from diverse schools and classrooms. Considering more than 2,700 schools, the authors found that new teachers who had been taught in a traditional teacher education program (with minimal and late classroom placement), were more likely to focus on procedural instruction, classroom management, and “learning the system” rather than conceptual learning that positively impacted student learning. This echoed the assertions of Yeo, whose 1997 work indicated that not only is pedagogy negatively affected by a lack of experiential learning through placement, but also pre-service teachers’ understanding of minority students, diversity, multiculturalism, and the challenges inherent in urban schools and communities. Yeo asserted that teacher education programs maintain and reproduce mainstream values and knowledge, thereby compromising pre-service teachers’ ability to work effectively in a diverse and modern classroom.

**Identifying what teacher education reform should include**

In a 2010 study of teacher education programs, Rust articulated the need to make dramatic and fundamental change, redefining teacher education. Rust contended that traditional programs produce immediate effects such as inspiring students or encouraging reflection in the classroom, but that these fade away and lack any kind of consequential, long-lasting impact on actual practice, because they are brief and inconsistent across training. While students are excited and inspired to become teachers, the reflection does not extend to practice. He asserted
that if teacher education was more consistent in the integration of experiential learning, the benefits of placement and reflection would be lasting. Rust’s research supported reform that is dynamic and sustainable, driven by inquiry, experiential learning, and collaboration. The need to dramatically change culture and practice was discussed in Perry and Power’s review (2004) of conventional format of teacher education. In it, they identified traditional programs as two-pronged, with knowledge and theory occurring in the college classroom, virtually independent from the knowledge application that occurs within the classroom in which one is placed. Both the works of Rust and of Perry and Power supported improving and increasing field experiences to better prepare pre-service teachers for the multiple roles and contextual realities of the classroom.

Considering how experience informs practice is examined in Russell, McPherson, and Martin’s work (2001), as they attempted to ascertain whether real learning is occurring and being applied in current teacher education programs. Concerned that new teachers are not adequately prepared based on the authors’ personal and research experience with teacher education programs, their study questioned what they termed the “drop and run” approach of traditional teacher education programs (Russell et al., 2001, p. 24). They described these programs as providing seemingly irrelevant textbook learning that is quickly left behind when classroom teaching begins, because students lack exposure to real-world experience and learning. Further, they asserted that reformed teacher education should consider teacher expectations, beliefs, and experiences, and should incorporate collaboration and mentoring to encourage reflective practice and stronger commitment. Considering a variety of teacher education programs, they found that successful programs had a thematic coherence among elements and collaboration. These encouraged preparation through connecting theory and practice throughout the program. The
authors asserted that if teachers are to become effective in the classroom, they must be challenged to see past the actions of teaching to the pedagogical foundations that inform their practice. To that end, they encouraged a program that facilitates reflective and intentional practice through real-world experience and application.

Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff (2009) acknowledged the importance of preparing reflective, high-quality teachers; but focused upon the sharp contrasts and arguments surrounding the best way ways to do so. They articulated a need for a strong research basis, highlighting the recurring argument that while the premise for improvement makes sense, the pragmatic solution is elusive. There are no clear indices regarding what constitutes a successful program. Indeed, existing literature focused primarily on case-study analyses with little indication of causal relationships that can be generalized. The authors asserted that change solutions should be long-term, and therefore must compare practices across institutions, be outcome-oriented, and have a longitudinal component to be relevant over time. Without this type of analysis, they contended that characteristics of a program that prepare effective teachers and influence student achievement cannot be adequately identified. One important finding that arose from their research was a positive relationship between field experience and actual teaching. A broad study of New York City schools provided telling information about features of teacher preparation that could make a difference in student outcomes. One primary characteristic that positively contributed was teacher education candidates’ fieldwork experience. In fact, the study indicated that, “teacher preparation that focuses more on the work of the classroom and provides opportunities for teachers to study what they will be doing as first-year teachers seems to produce teachers who, on average, are more effective during their first year of teaching” (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 434). The authors’ contended that learning that is grounded in
the practice of teaching facilitates effective teaching and improved student outcomes, creating change that is both immediate and long-term.

Using a national sample obtained from educational institutions about pre-service teacher preparation, Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, and Merbler (2010) considered teacher preparation reform as it is juxtaposed between creating highly qualified teacher educators and ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, make adequate yearly progress (AYP) to meet the mandates set forth by NCLB. Using a qualitative study to assess participants’ experience and a Likert-style survey for additional responses, the authors asked open-ended questions to ascertain pre-service teachers’ experience of teacher education program elements and their perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusion and collaboration through field experience. Respondents to the study indicated that field experiences offered invaluable benefits for actual practice. These included the opportunity to work with experienced teachers and with diverse students with varying needs, and to collaborate across disciplines and majors. The authors’ findings indicated that a comprehensive program incorporating extensive fieldwork has the potential to assist educators in meeting the goals of NCLB, achieving AYP, and creating high-quality teachers.

The research of Lowery et al. (2012) further supported early in-field placement of pre-service teachers, and also took into consideration alternative route programs. Echoing the research of Boyd et al. (2009), the authors considered the assertion that there are many ways to enter the teaching field, but few ways to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods. Further, they concurred that research primarily has focused upon the preparation process rather than the outcome, indicating that to understand how well the preparation works, it is important to garner feedback from teachers in practice. Lowery et al. (2012) contended that to be effective, teachers must not only possess content knowledge, but also should be able to relate to students and
diagnose their needs. Using a qualitative design, the authors sought feedback from teachers with varying amounts of experience, eliciting information regarding curriculum training, content knowledge, standardized teacher licensure exams, and pedagogical training. They also discussed classroom management, teacher education, and mentoring. Although both traditionally trained and alternative route teachers were included in the study, a common theme emerged from all respondents. The study indicated that while both methods of teacher preparation have effective elements, placing teacher candidates in the classroom as much as possible to gain experience is the best way to train future teachers, regardless of their preparation program.

**Determining the influence of in-field experience in teacher education programs**

Placement in the classroom also was analyzed in Bieler’s research (2010), which looked at the role of a teacher preparation program which is focused upon the growth of new teacher agency and how developing dialogic practice could facilitate transformational change. Specifically, she considered the mentoring process, with pre-service teachers immersed in the classroom but consistently provided guidance and feedback from a university faculty member. Her study indicated that providing opportunities for dialogue and reflection facilitated important opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving, and the development of context in classroom decision making. Like Lowery et al. (2012), Bieler (2010) acknowledged that future longitudinal research was needed to determine the potential for long-term change. She asserted that an innovative teacher preparation model could improve new teacher confidence and effectiveness, and reduce teacher attrition. Indeed, the new ideas currently being implemented, which incorporate more intentional, hands-on, and experiential learning, have the potential to create sustainable and transformational change in teacher education.
While research supported the need for a new approach and mandates necessitate it, how to implement lasting change has been challenging. Additionally, studies existed on successful, innovative programs; but often these were in one institution or district. This limits comprehensive application, as the changes implemented were very specific and not necessarily generalizable across teacher education overall. National initiatives such as Race to the Top in 2009 (RTTT) encouraged replicating successful models of practice. Still, there was much disparity nationally about best practices, and no clear indices as to what constitutes success. If these best practices yielded compelling data of student success, they could encourage standardization and innovation in teacher preparation. While the locations and approaches to teacher education varied, the inclusion of frequent classroom placement yielding positive effects was consistent throughout the literature. It was important to note that while the influence of in-field experiences was examined in the research, none of the studies examined placement occurring at the beginning of teacher education as part of reform efforts.

D’Aniello’s (2008) study asserted that teacher education reform should be developed in accordance with NCATE accreditation standards and federal mandates, and should be data-driven. She analyzed literature dating back to 1975 regarding teacher preparation and experiences of beginning teachers. Her review indicated that teacher preparation programs receiving high ratings from beginning teachers had common components, including clinical experiences and fieldwork linked to coursework and pedagogy. Her research indicated that beginning teachers who participated in five year preparation programs which incorporated more clinical experience and guided reflection felt that these facets were the most beneficial components of their teacher education. New teachers reported that they would have benefited from a more pragmatic teacher education program that better prepared them for the diverse needs
of their classroom. D’Aniello’s (2008) study suggested that teacher education that incorporated more hands-on components consistently produced highly qualified teachers who were better prepared to effectively meet the diverse needs of all students.

In a 2005 study, Kent considered the effects of teachers feeling under prepared to meet the diverse needs of students. She concluded that this unpreparedness perpetuates an increasing number of teachers who are considered ineffective or who choose to quit the profession within three years. In a university partnership in which education students were given increased field experience, Kent found that they felt better prepared and were more equipped to work with the most academically challenging students, which reduced teacher turnover and improved student performance. The study indicated that education students immersed in increased field experience, particularly in low socioeconomic schools, benefitted from a mentorship team, a university/school partnership, and added support in dealing with classroom challenges. The eventual teacher candidates reported feeling more confident and better prepared, and felt that they developed a deeper understanding of the integration of theory and practice than did the traditional teacher candidates. Finally, school district administrators were quoted as saying that the candidates given increased field experience were better prepared than traditional candidates.

Chesley and Jordan’s (2012) report also supported school and university partnerships. Following the progress of beginning teachers in their first years, they found recurring problems in their ability to motivate students, plan for instruction, and meet students’ needs. After examining the experiences and frustration of these teachers, they examined ways to better prepare education students/eventual teachers for the increasing demands of students and classroom teaching. They found that radically changing traditional teacher preparation programs to incorporate more field experience via school and university partnerships produced graduates
who could meet the professional expectations found in high-performing schools. The qualitative study of their new teacher focus groups indicated that more collaboration and mentoring during field experience facilitated greater reflection and eventual competence.

While collaboration and field experience is reportedly integral to effective teacher preparation, a 2000 study of a restructured teacher preparation program raised important considerations. While it focused upon university and school partnerships, it concentrated upon on the need for college faculty to provide constructive feedback to teacher-prep students, by maintaining a frequent and ongoing dialogue to better help students apply learning to eventual practice. Fite and Battle (2000) found that while placement is critical, supervision and mentoring are equally important. Their research preceded the more recent movement toward assessment. Further, it showed a gap in connecting field experience to assignments and activities. This suggested that while the movement toward increased field experience has grown, there were challenges in measuring student success which raised concerns. It is not enough to place students in schools; there also must be an effort for the partnership to incorporate measurable outcomes beyond achieving licensure. In a 2003 work, Mellander suggested that passing licensure tests promoted accountability, but that there must be other clear indicators of success if institutions are to responsibly graduate well-prepared teachers. Mellander considered Title II of the Higher Education Act, which required that all institutions of higher education report annually to their state and general public on the percentage of those completed their programs who have passed teacher certification or licensure assessments.

In Louisiana, teacher preparation programs aimed to connect fieldwork with outcomes and eventual effective practice. Honawar (2007) studied 22 teacher preparation programs which were developed in response to improve teacher training. These programs focused upon making
tangible the NCLB requirement to produce “highly qualified” teachers, by requiring more content-specific Praxis tests, achieving accreditation for teacher education programs, and aligning teacher preparation programs with state and national content standards. In Honawar’s analysis, it was found that teachers who had been educated through the newly adapted teacher preparation programs were more effective than those who had not, and in some cases, were more effective than veteran teachers. While the study showed that the redesign is working, Honawar acknowledged that the “highly qualified” distinction was primarily based on the Praxis passing rate, which had improved significantly. Looking at other states and other programs in his analysis revealed that many states are attempting to incorporate data on student achievement, teacher evaluations and experiences, and reports of supervisors and administrators. While ascertaining the efficacy of a teacher education program, particularly one involving several components, is challenging; the study indicated that it is both possible and desirable, in order to inform better practice.

Snow-Gerono (2009), examined the voice of veteran teachers in developing teacher preparation programs and school/university partnerships. Her research acknowledged that field-based experiences are integral to effective teacher preparation, which makes the views of the professionals leading learning in these initiatives significant. The research she conducted provided a new perspective on reform by exploring the perceptions of veteran teachers in a school/university partnership geared toward enhancing initial teacher preparation. Snow-Gerono wanted to consider what school-based educators view as imperative for teacher reform. The educators considered in this research (Snow-Gerono, 2009) served as mentors in the school/university partnership. They provided conversation and learning in lesson design, effective pedagogy, assessment of student learning, and the process of learning to teach. In this
phenomenological case study, veteran teachers described their experience, indicating that the real-world experience and collaboration afforded pre-service teachers was integral to their development as effective educators. The mentor teachers advocated multiple forms of collaboration, and the need to provide student-teachers a voice in their learning. Indeed, this supported a model of reflection which facilitated pre-service teachers’ opportunity to analyze challenges faced through their practice. These could then be considered with the guidance of university faculty and veteran teachers in applying knowledge and solving problems.

Ferrara and Ferrara’s (2005) research supported collaboration, but focused upon how better prepared pre-service teachers would be more effective in facilitating increased parental involvement. This research was unique in incorporating the role of parents in student achievement, and in considering how teacher education can better prepare future teachers to prioritize parental involvement. Indeed, Ferrara and Ferrara pointed out that increased parental involvement promoted better student attendance, increased graduation rates and less grade retention, higher parent and student satisfaction with schools, fewer discipline reports, and higher achievement scores. NCLB accentuated the importance of parental involvement, but it is often neglected in teacher preparation programs. Again, increased placement in schools has served as a solution of sorts, as the authors’ study indicates that education students immersed in classrooms that incorporate the role of parents and parental power better understand how it can improve and sustain student learning. This finding often is accentuated by graduates who are asked to evaluate their training programs, as teacher candidates report receiving minimal training (if any) in parental involvement concepts and strategies. Immersion into the classroom through field experience facilitates the opportunity to work with parents, create a parent-friendly environment, and make parents collaborative partners in learning.
There are a variety of programs that successfully have produced quality teachers, and each of these incorporated increased classroom placement and field experience. The way in which these were incorporated varied a great deal. Several studies considered the work of Darling-Hammond (2005) who asserted that U.S. efforts to improve teacher education have resulted in some excellent opportunities for educators to learn and refine their craft. While there are programs worthy of emulation, systemic reform has proven elusive. Disparity exists among teacher education programs in length, quality, structure and coursework, contributing to differences in effectiveness in producing quality teachers. Literature overwhelmingly indicates, however, consistent gains in programs that incorporated increased classroom placement and fieldwork (Boyd et al., 2007; Lowery et al., 2012; Scheeler, 2007; Smith et al., 2007). Further, teacher candidates reported feeling better prepared, which can impact teacher attrition and student performance (Bieler, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010; Kent, 2005).

**Summation**

Federal mandates and public expectation have looked to America’s teachers to better prepare students for the increasingly demanding society in which they will work, live and contribute. Teachers are expected to be highly qualified, but the programs which prepare them vary greatly in approach and outcome. A review of the literature supported the integration of field placement of education students/eventual teacher candidates into classrooms, but there remained a lack of consensus regarding how, when, and in some cases, whether to integrate experiential learning into teacher education programs. By placing education students into actual classrooms while they are engaged in their coursework, they were afforded increased opportunity to be reflective and prepared for the diverse reality of the classroom and a myriad of student needs. The need to create better teachers is clear, but how best to do so remains a challenge.
Darling-Hammond (2005) identified a growing U.S. consensus about the importance of teachers, with extensive reform focusing upon improving teacher education. Preparing quality teachers who can effectively teach a wide array of learners with diverse needs is essential to economic and political survival and growth. This consensus has contributed to the improvement of professional teaching standards, accreditation requirements, federal mandates, and reforms of teacher education. Although there is a need and drive to reform teacher education, there lacked clarity in how best to do so.

More extensive clinical work in schools has been recognized as contributory to new teacher confidence and efficacy, and has been linked to improved student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Lowery et al. 2012). While national mandates and expectations support the development of high quality teachers, a solution for doing so remained intangible (Boe et al., 2007; Beare et al., 2012). Despite the requirements of NCLB, RTTT, and NCATE/CAEP, the importance of developing practitioners who connect theory to practice has been a recurring challenge (Cibulka, 2009; Scheeler, 2007). Because classrooms are diverse and reflective of the communities and society in which they exist, developing practitioners who are effective at identifying and addressing the diverse needs of students is of great importance (Yeo, 1997; Rust, 2010, Smith et al., 2005).

For reform to be effective, it must be sustainable. Various studies considered how to create long-term change in teacher education and eventual practice, acknowledging that reform must impact significantly and comprehensively how teacher candidates are educated (Perry & Power, 2004; Russell et al., 2001). Boyd et al. (2009) and Harvey et al. (2010) considered how new teachers apply learning. The literature suggested that reforming teacher education to be more practical and applicable impacts the actual practice of new teachers, revealing that teachers
who graduate programs replete with fieldwork and classroom placements are more confident and effective, and are more adept at dealing with classroom issues. This supported the problem of practice, which contended that early and increased in-field placement improves overall experience and eventual efficacy of those in teacher education.

While disparity exists in teacher training programs, there were innovative and effective initiatives that incorporate increased fieldwork and placement. These programs are somewhat limited in generalizability, because there are only some that have changed how traditional teacher education is done. Their successes provided best practices that potentially can shape reform in teacher education. Studies of various teacher education programs and school/university partnerships revealed improvements in administrator’s reports and evaluations of new teachers, in teacher confidence and reducing attrition, and in student performance. The programs also demonstrated stronger collaboration in school and with the community (Bieler, 2010; D’Aniello, 2008; Honawar, 2007). Although existing teacher education programs vary in duration, coursework and delivery, and instructional practice, a review of the literature indicated that successful teacher education programs share a fieldwork component, but did not clearly indicate when and how often that component should occur. The fieldwork or practicum experience considered in these studies show innovation, effectiveness and success, but provided no formula or consistency in how to utilize this component (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Fite & Battle, 2010).

This literature review considered how to better prepare teachers, the push for “high quality teachers” by national mandates, how to facilitate pre-service and new teachers’ connection of theory to practice, and how to create long-term and sustainable change in teacher education. Various research and studies have supported increased field placement, and
innovative approaches have been proposed in different ways. These incorporated partnerships, collaboration, and tangible application of learning. Still, there was a lack of consensus and consistency in how best to prepare quality teachers, and to provide practical learning that will help them to be more effective in practice. The study proposed through this literature review focused upon early placement for education majors, concentrating upon reflection, feedback and enhanced student experience. Creating a model of teacher preparation that considered existing research, recommendations, and best practices supported systemic and sustainable reform.

Existing literature reviewed illuminated the need to incorporate federal requirements and considerations into current models of teacher preparation. It is important for educators of eventual teacher candidates to be involved in planning how we can accomplish NCLB goals of improving teacher quality through the attainment of degree and certification and knowledge of subject matter, as well as the push through NCLB, RTTT, CAEP, and the Reauthorization of Education Act. It is important to consider how to prepare teachers who are more knowledgeable about subject matter and pedagogy. How best to accomplish this through teacher preparation was explored, as well as how in-field placement can be used to enrich student experience and better prepare future teachers.
Chapter 3: Methodology

A study design focusing upon qualitative interview was used to explore students’ perceptions about their early in-field experiences through their initial foundational course in education. I sought to gain an understanding of the meaning made by the students in relation to these experiences, and whether they influenced their confidence continuing in teacher education, their decisions moving forward, and their understanding of how course material connected to real-world experience. A participatory qualitative design using interviews was appropriate to allow participants to share their reflections through semi-structured, open-ended questions. These responses were then examined and coded, with analysis facilitated by the combined framework of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1983) and Reflection in Action (Schon, 1983).

Central Question. What were the experiences of an in-field placement for students in an introductory education class?

Subquestions. What experiences in an in-field placement were most meaningful to participants? How did students describe their early observations in a classroom? Did this early observation experience influence their decision to continue in the field of teaching?

Paradigm

This study used a constructivist-interpretive paradigm of inquiry, and as such, the information obtained is subjective and contingent upon the experiences of the participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1994). In this paradigm, participants’ perspectives were examined to give them a voice, thereby encouraging them to build upon their own reality and create personal context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). My objective was to analyze this context and meaning by engaging in a conversation that would help me understand how they framed the experience in
their mind (Ponterotto, 2006). This allowed me to sift through their perspectives, in order to develop a rich understanding of their experiences.

A constructivist-interpretive paradigm builds upon the world of human experience, using the socially constructed reality of participants as its building blocks. This paradigm relies upon how participants view the situation being studied, and how their perspective is shaped by their own background and experiences. Qualitative data is integral to the analysis in this paradigm, as it provides greater depth and meaning. Using this paradigm, the researcher does not begin with a particular hypothesis, but instead allows the qualitative data to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003, p.9).

**Researcher’s Role within the Paradigm**

My role was to facilitate rich description, so as to accurately represent the participants’ subjective reality, which is influenced by the individual’s perception and interaction with the researcher (Ponterotto, 2006). This means that while I conducted the study, I interacted with the participants, creating a relationship that helped to construct and draw out their experiences and their meaning. As instructor for the introductory course, I had a pre-established relationship with participants. Although interviews did not occur until after the course was completed, I was very familiar with the experiential learning component and created the placements for each student. Further, students took notes throughout their placement, and discussed their experiences in class. As part of our course, we would discuss general observations about the placements as they related to course material. Having this comfort level and familiarity with the students helped to facilitate an easy and open communication in the interviews.
Research Design

The choice of a qualitative research design for this study supported a comprehensive yet general analysis, which allowed information to unfold naturally from the participants’ experiences rather than predetermined expectations (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative inquiry facilitated inductive interpretation, whereupon the open-ended responses provided specific information that were analyzed both individually and collectively to create general patterns. These patterns were then compared, and categories and then themes emerged. Analyzing this data qualitatively and inductively allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2012). This type of analysis facilitated the use of specific instances to inform the conclusions drawn.

The qualitative interview design of this study enabled participants’ experiences to be expressed in their own terms, by situating participants in their particular contexts and engaging in a detailed exploration of their perspectives (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This facilitated an examination of different facets of the problem, facilitating comprehensive data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Through the examination of participants’ experiences, I sought to develop an understanding about their reflections, and then to analyze how the common themes developed ultimately support the research question guiding this study. This approach was appropriate for my study as it is “an integrated approach allowing the researcher to develop an analytic interpretation of participants’ accounts which are grounded in but go beyond the participants’ own sense making and conceptualizations” (Ponterotto, 2006). By exploring context and personal perspective, it allowed me to get to the essence of the experience, illuminating how it influenced students’ learning and continuation in teacher education (Smith & Osborn, 2007).
In this study, the experiences of the six participants were first analyzed separately, which demonstrated different perspectives on the fieldwork experience. Then, emerging themes were analyzed, to ascertain how the data obtained inform the research question (Creswell, 2013). Using inductive analysis, I was able to start with the identification of salient and meaningful words and phrases from individual transcripts. Then I identified shared or common ideas, with the eventual emergence of themes to be grouped and analyzed across the data. In the chart below, the research design is summarized, including participant selection, interview process, and coding. The artifacts used upon completion of the course, including participant field notes and interviews, were integrated in analysis. These elements will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

Research Design and Implementation

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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Selection</td>
<td>Winter 2015 – Students in ED 101 Fall 2015 section were eligible; six (6) volunteered to participate</td>
<td>Researcher asked for six volunteers who had completed ED 101 to participate in a research study. All students in the course had experienced the experiential component (classroom placement). Six signed a form indicating their interest in participating, and provided their contact information. Based on their scheduling challenges and IRB recommendation, phone interviews were conducted. Researcher contacted participants at the number provided during winter break. 45-60 minute interviews were anticipated, although most were approximately 30 minutes due to participant...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview Process</td>
<td>All participant interviews completed within two months of recruitment to the study</td>
<td>Initial questions discussed demographics (student age, semester/year in college, etc.) and then focused upon participant experiences in their experiential placement and how they felt, what they noticed, and their thoughts going forward. Questions corresponded with Kolb’s experiential learning model, with questions formed to focus upon Concrete Experience, then on Reflective Observation, then Abstract Conceptualization, and finally on Active Experimentation.</td>
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| Analysis of Data and Coding | Interviews transcribed, Transcriptions verified with Audio – **1 month** Initial Coding, Second phase coding – **2-3 months** | Upon completion of all interviews, the digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. They were then verified for accuracy after all were complete, by returning to each audio recording and making any needed corrections to the transcript Initial Coding:  
  - Each interview transcript was thoroughly read  
  - Each transcript was read with notes taken in the margins  
  - Initial codes were identified and collected, and colored highlighters were assigned  
  Axial Coding: |
Transcripts were read again with highlighted key phrases identified collectively. Themes indicated by the highlighted phrases were identified. Overarching themes (identified by color, each color indicating a common theme) were identified and made into an outline. Key words and phrases from each colored section were identified, and included in the outline and eventually, subsections. An outline with themes and subthemes was finalized, reflective of the initial emerging themes (coded by color and then physically sorted into piles; pages color coded and corresponding to theme).

**Data Analysis**

For this study, data consisted of semi-structured interviews occurring at the end of the placement and course, as well as student-generated notes taken during the placement and reviewed upon its completion. The interview data was transcribed, then analyzed first using in vivo coding, and then using axial coding. In the first phase of analysis, short phrases or words were taken from the overall data that captured participants’ own language and meaning (Saldana,
I sought to understand the lived experiences of the students as they participated in an in-field placement. I read through the data several times, allowing meaning to emerge from their own responses, noting words or phrases that were particularly salient. These were noted individually, and then later across the transcripts comparatively. Through my own notes and organization by colors, I developed initial coding, finding words and short phrases that provided summative attributes that captured the language and essence of the participant’s responses (Saldana, 2013).

In the second cycle entailed axial coding. I identified relationships between these summaries, and color coordinated these emerging themes. This allowed me to rearrange the themes identified, relating them to one another in a process both inductive and deductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I could first allow the patterns to emerge without a theme, and then revisit the patterns once themes emerged. I was able to make connections between the initial codes, and organized them by colors, assigning common concepts or phrases a color and highlighting it throughout each transcript. Later, this highlighted data became the overarching themes that informed my analysis. Through this analysis of sections of data, both overarching and sub-themes were illuminated (Saldana, 2013). By analyzing these interviews and developing themes in this way, an in-depth understanding of participant experience was developed (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Participants

The in-field placement was a requirement in the participants’ introductory course, Historical Foundations of Education. All students in the course were required to complete the field placement, which was ten hours of observation in a local public school. The sites were selected based on student preference and existing relationships I have with local public schools.
Students were provided a questionnaire to indicate whether they preferred placement in an elementary, middle or high school. Sites were chosen based on proximity to the college for student convenience. I then contacted several schools, and their administrators assigned the students to a teacher’s classroom. Students received these placements, contacted the teacher, and arranged to visit the classroom as their schedules permitted for a total of ten hours. The hour requirement could be completed over the course of several weeks (3-6) depending upon when they contacted the teacher and started their observations. Students took notes during their experience.

**Recruitment and Access**

After obtaining approval by the IRB of both colleges, students were recruited from a section of ED 101 Historical Foundations of Education. Students were made aware that there was neither a penalty nor an incentive to participate in the study (aside from their own desire to do so). Their participation did not impact their course grade. Grades were submitted and posted weeks before participation occurred.

Students were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in a research study that would occur during winter break. This time frame was selected because most students attend minimal, if any, courses during this time frame. Of the fourteen students in the class, six students agreed to participate in the study. They were contacted in January, after the course was complete and grades had already been entered. As per IRB approval and recommendation, phone interviews were conducted at students’ convenience. Of the six participants, two were non-native English speaking. Three students identified themselves as male, and three as female.
Two were Hispanic and four were white. All were full-time community college students. Two students were placed in high schools, and four in elementary schools.

**Protection of Human Participants**

An “Application for Approval for Use of Human Participation in Research” was completed for Northeastern University and for Cumberland County College and these are attached as Appendix B. Also included are supporting documentation (Appendix C), interview questions (Appendix D), and consent forms (Appendix A).

This study prioritized protection of the participants involved, which is essential to responsible research (Miles & Huberman, 1984). It was important to engage in thorough planning to mitigate potential risk to study participants (Creswell, 2013). National Institutes of Health (NIH) training and IRB approval guided recruitment, participation, confidentiality, research and data collection procedures. In accordance with IRB approval, study participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix A), indicating that they had been apprised of the goals of the study, their role in it, and their ability to discontinue participation at any time. The confidentiality of participants’ identity was thoroughly explained, both verbally and in writing. Participant interviews were audio recorded with their knowledge and approval. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants, as well as any other individual or site specifically mentioned during the interview. This helped to ensure participants’ comfort and authenticity in responses to questions asked, and to minimize any discomfort in talking about the teacher or class with whom they were placed.

**Managing data**
All data was saved on a password protected, encrypted computer file; and in hard copy, which was maintained at a separate, locked location. Interviews were maintained (for back-up), on an USB drive, which was similarly password protected and kept in a separate, locked location. All transcription was done by me to further ensure the protection of participants. This careful and comprehensive approach prioritized protection of participants, alignment with IRB approval, accordance with NIH training, and my personal commitment to responsible research.

Confidentiality

Participants were assured that confidentiality was maintained regarding their identity. They were advised that their participation was for research purposes only, and pseudonyms were given for their responses. Knowledge of pseudonyms was only available to the principal researcher (NEU faculty) and to myself as the student researcher. Any identifying information was removed and pseudonyms were used at all phases of research to ensure and maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Trustworthiness

Achieving trustworthiness and verification were integral to the integrity and validity of this study. It was important to be continually aware of researcher bias throughout the study, which was accomplished through self-reflection which occurred throughout the analysis (Yin, 2003). As the researcher, I remained aware of my positionality and potential bias to ensure trustworthiness and validity was maintained. It was essential to ensure that study findings were congruous with participants’ responses, as well as the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2012).

Rich, thick description was used to represent participant experience. This facilitated a detailed exploration of the meanings that particular experiences and events held for the
participants, and how they made sense of them in the context of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). By providing this level of detail, trustworthiness was enhanced, facilitating findings which could provide information about teacher education (Creswell, 2013).

Internal validity was prioritized by addressing familiarity and bias. Interviews occurred at a location and time convenient and preferable to the participant, to allow participants a subjective experience through which they could derive their own meaning without influence from being in the placement site or classroom. The study was designed to increase internal validity, as interview questions were carefully developed, examined, and approved, so as not to elicit expectation of a particular response or outcome. Finally, participants were placed at diverse in-field placement sites, which facilitated authentic and individual responses, yielding more reflective and valid data for this study.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to consider the experiences of students as they participated in an in-field placement during their introductory education course. A qualitative interview design was used to consider the research questions, conduct interviews, and to provide a detailed examination of participants’ personal experience of the in-field placement and its meaning to them (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Using this data in careful analysis provided information and responses regarding the central question guiding this study. Through analysis, themes emerged regarding students’ integration of course learning and understanding of the teaching profession and their role in it. These themes will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Report of the Research Findings

In this study, six students participated in an in-field placement as part of their first education course. In order to consider this problem of practice, this chapter is divided into two main sections: (1) an introduction to each of the participants; and (2) a review of emergent themes from students’ own reflections, through notes taken throughout the in-field placement, and through interviews of participants.

Participants

Joy (a pseudonym; name changed for confidentiality) is a nineteen year old Hispanic female who is in her first semester of college. She expressed “she is interested in working with children and in being a leader.” Joy stated that in the “back of her head”, she thought she wanted to be a teacher, but was hoping to take the course to discern whether it would be the profession for her. She is a first-generation college student. Continuing her education is a priority, and she felt that learning about what she might want to do would solidify her path. She also has considered entering the legal profession and had the opportunity to do an internship related to that interest. Based on that experience, she was excited to have the opportunity to have “real-life” fieldwork in Historical Foundations of Education, as it would give her similar hands-on experience. These characteristics helped influence her decision to become a teacher. Joy was placed in a kindergarten class in a charter school.

Joy focused upon the classroom appearance, the students’ behavior, and the teacher’s teaching methods and style of discipline. She observed the way the classroom was set up, how it was organized, and how colorfully it was decorated. Joy applied her college learning to the importance of the environment, indicating that students appeared to be stimulated by the classroom. She noticed that students’ work was hanging on boards, and that their ongoing projects were displayed to support their learning. She further noted that the environment was
affected by the number of students in the class. Joy observed that while nineteen students is not a large class compared to others in this charter school, it was still a lot for one teacher to handle.

Joy also thought about the variety of teaching methods used in the classroom. She felt that there was a great deal of interesting and useful technology at the elementary level, and that it supported diverse student learning. Joy considered her conversations with the classroom teacher, who told her that her kindergarten students were reading at a second grade level, largely due to the technology she had incorporated. Although most of the teaching methods elicited a favorable response from Joy, some of the discipline used surprised her. Joy expressed that the teacher would often single out one student for discipline, or would punish the entire class based on one student’s behavior. She noticed that the teacher would become easily frustrated with the children. Throughout her observation, Joy thought a great deal about how the teacher handled discipline, and whether she thought these responses were appropriate or extreme.

In her interview, Joy further considered how the teacher taught and disciplined her class. She reflected upon how the teacher would use reward, punishment, and discipline. Placed in a kindergarten class, Joy observed elements of the classroom (décor, posters, reinforcement charts), as well as how the day was structured and scheduled. She was very cognizant of the methods used in the class, and continually compared what she observed the teacher doing to what she would do if she were in that classroom as the teacher. For example, Joy felt that the teacher could have embraced a more positive tone and reinforcement, and felt that she would have had a more favorable and productive response from her students. Joy thoughtfully considered what she would or would not do if she were the classroom teacher. She was adamant that she felt she had a lot more learning to do before she would be ready to assume the teacher’s role.
Joy felt that the field placement made her better understand the theories she learned in class. During her observation, she applied those theories to what she saw the teacher doing, and expressed that it helped her to better understand why the teacher made certain decisions or used particular methods. Joy discussed the experiential learning component with her cooperating teacher, who stated that she had not had a similar opportunity as part of her teacher education. Joy felt that this element was essential, and the teacher agreed.

Upon completing her observation, Joy stated that she felt more excited about continuing in teacher education. She stated that she was looking forward to putting “her own spin” on her own classroom, and hoped to have more opportunities to participate in experiential learning as part of her teacher education. While she is still considering many career options and “making everyone proud” (indicating her family, as she will be the first college graduate), she is now confident that teaching will be a part of her career plan and that she will continue in teacher education.

**Bella** is a twenty year old who identifies herself as a biracial female in her second year at community college. She took Historical Foundations of Education because it is a prerequisite to Educational Psychology, and she hopes to become a clinical psychologist and work with children. Bella expressed that she does not want to become a teacher, does not feel that she could “handle” a classroom every day, and came into this course and in-field placement knowing that she wanted to work with children one on one. She stated that she initially felt “awkward” because she was “the only one” in the course who did not want to become a classroom teacher. She was hesitant to complete the observational in-field placement, as she did not think it would apply to her intended path. Still, as part of the course, Bella was assigned to a third grade class in a public school.
During the classroom placement, Bella primarily reflected upon student behavior. Based on her previous interest of becoming a counselor, she sought opportunities to think about why students responded as they did. For example, she thought about why students seek attention, and what factors in their lives may contribute to their behavior in the classroom. Her observations were less focused on educational issues such as curriculum or classroom management, and more focused on environmental and behavioral factors that influenced classroom learning and success. As the holiday season neared, Bella noticed that students became increasingly rowdy, and she was interested why some were excited and others disruptive. She focused upon individual children and her own thoughts as to what forces shaped their behavior, as well as how well the teacher understood and handled these forces.

Bella reflected upon how the teacher handled motivation, conflict, and balancing responsibilities. She was very aware of environmental issues that affect children’s learning, including bullying, home-life challenges, and learning disabilities. Bella felt that the experience reinforced how much she wants to work with children individually. She said that seeing the children’s struggles in a classroom environment confirmed for her how much she would be “needed” in her intended profession. She said that the experience helped her to personally transform her course learning, as she was able to apply it to the job she wants to have, and that the theories that originally seemed relevant only to students who wanted to pursue teacher education now made sense to her intended path. Bella said that she realized how important it is to see kids in the classroom environment in order to have a better understanding of the problems they face. She felt that “my experience” (in the invention) “could probably help a child out”.

Bella stated that she initially believed the class would not apply to her at all, but was surprised by her experience. She said, “I really didn’t think that Education 101 would apply to
me at all, but being in the classroom definitely changed my mind about that because you can find things that can relate in all sorts of ways because even though it’s not exactly the course that directly applies to my major, it can definitely be applied in a way that can make sense to my interest in psychology.” Bella expressed that the experience solidified her initial path and gave her greater confidence in her decision.

Barry is a white male in his first semester at community college, returning to college at the age of forty-five. He took the Historical Foundations of Education course to get a better idea of what career path he wanted to take. His path to this point had been diverse and unclear, but tutoring a family member illuminated to him that he may have a propensity for teaching. He felt confident in his decision to pursue teacher education, stating that, “I’m 45 and maybe I’m not at liberty to investigate other paths, no time lines. It’s like make a decision now and not wait (until) when I’m fifty to have to become somebody.” He expressed feeling like it was “now or never” to pursue something that could “make him happy.” Barry wanted to confirm his instinct that he would be a good teacher. He was placed in a third grade class at a charter school.

Barry was very focused upon the classroom teacher. He felt that she was very competent and capable. In particular, he noticed how she handled disruption and discipline. Barry gave examples of various times the children acted out, but noted that the classroom teacher “let nothing interrupt learning”. He considered how the teacher accomplished this, indicating that she had consistent rules, clear expectations, and varied methods. He was very impressed with his cooperating teacher, but indicated that he questioned his own ability to be as effective. For example, upon noting that she “was in total control and involved the whole class in the learning process,” he reflected “I wonder if I would let them walk all over me”. Throughout his
experience, he indicated that observing the classroom teacher was the most influential aspect of his placement experience.

Both during and after his experience, Barry continued to be reflective about the classroom teacher with whom he was placed. He thought a great deal upon how she conducted herself professionally, as well as in her daily classroom activities and exchanges. He felt that she was very effective, efficient, and talented; and wondered if he would “ever be that good.” In an elementary classroom, he noticed that there were constant distractions and needs to both discipline and motivate. He was concerned about his own ability and confidence, and was afraid that he would be taken advantage of, echoing his observation notes. Barry expressed that the teacher’s preparation and control made him more committed to his coursework. He initially felt discouraged, as he thought he was more prepared to become a teacher, but stated that his observation made him reflect that he wanted “to become as prepared and confident to manage a classroom as she is.” He stated that the observation in-field placement both “motivated me and backed me up a little.”

Barry said that he came into the field experience “cocky and confident”, but that he felt less prepared upon reflection. Because of this, he felt that he had to work harder to really understand the coursework, which he previously was not doing. To Barry, the humbling realization and the increased work he now felt he needed to do in the course did not dissuade him from his eventual goal to become a teacher. He stated that he eagerly would be continuing in teacher education.

**Dante** is an eighteen year old white male who had just started his first semester in community college. Dante took the course because it is required for his major (Elementary/Secondary Education), and that he is “testing it out” as a career choice to “see if I
really liked it”. Dante had no specific previous experiences that influenced his decision to begin teacher education, but he recalled having some teachers in the past who had helped him, and he wanted to “do that too”. He expressed feeling “worried” about becoming a teacher, specifically about having to discipline children. His reflection in the experiential observation involved a great deal of consideration and thought about behavioral issues with various age levels, and he felt confident that he would be much more comfortable at an elementary level. Dante’s observation occurred in a K-12 private school. He had the opportunity to observe in several different grades due to the school’s small size and open structure.

Throughout his classroom observation, Dante focused upon how the teacher ran her classroom. He noticed that the high school students were able to work autonomously, and that the teacher’s methods facilitated that. He appreciated that high school students were more independent, and noted that the teacher gave activities which encouraged them to solve problems on their own. Dante felt that this allowed her to walk around and provide assistance, and he applied his own learning on motivational techniques he observed in the classroom. Reflecting upon his observation, Dante mentioned reinforcement, which was both positive and negative. While he observed that the teacher’s use of independent work reinforced problem-solving skills, he also observed that it promoted more talking and less classroom management. Further, Dante noted educational philosophies he had learned in his college class assignments, applying these to the methods used by his mentor teacher.

Dante was very observant of how the classroom teacher used various teaching methods, as well as how she managed her classroom. He felt that this made the coursework (and text readings) more “hands-on” and that “the philosophies of teaching, some of those jumped out at me, like watching the teacher in the classroom”. He continually expressed that he “definitely”
better understood what was being talked about in his college class and in his text readings because of what he was experiencing in the classroom.

The teacher Dante predominantly observed used varied techniques and provided him a lot of feedback as to why, and he said that this made him feel much more confident. He stated: “Before I was like, can I really do it, will I be able to do it, but after I saw how she did it and it made me think, yeah, I think I could handle it, yeah”. Upon reflection, Dante stated that he felt much more confident continuing in teacher education, and that “it makes me want to do it more, makes me more excited”. Dante expressed that he can picture himself as a classroom teacher now, stating that, “I definitely want to go through with this teacher education. I think I made the right choice. I can’t think of anything else I want to do”.

Sadie is a nineteen year old white female who is in her second year of community college. She took the course as a requirement for her major (Elementary and Secondary Education) and came into the course knowing she wanted to become a teacher based on the guidance she received in high school and her love of children. Sadie expressed a great deal of confidence in her intended career path, indicating that she wishes she could start “now”. She was placed in a first grade public school classroom, and reflected primarily on how the teacher conducted her class, and whether she would do so similarly or differently.

Throughout her observation, Sadie noted the daily schedule, and whether it promoted learning. She observed details such as how the teacher greeted each student in the morning, sang transitional songs, and provided positive reinforcement. Sadie was very cognizant of activities used that promoted engagement and enthusiasm. She noted each time the teacher used supplemental materials (videos, technology) that engaged the students. She realized the
importance of the daily schedule, observing that students responded well to its organization and structure.

Sadie’s reflection centered upon how she wanted to run her own classroom, and she expressed that she needed to be in a real classroom to discern “what to do and what not to do, and how to do it right.” She said that she valued the “actual experience, and to actually see how a classroom goes on day to day other than just talking about how it can go on and different possibilities, you had your own experience in the classroom seeing what could happen and stuff like that.” Sadie felt that being in the classroom made her think more deeply about her college coursework in Historical Foundations of Education, because she would talk to the teacher she was observing and other school personnel to get a perspective beyond the book to make it “real”.

Sadie integrated her college coursework with her reflection, applying theory she had learned to that which she was observing. She critically examined why the teacher made the choices she did, indicating in her notes whether she thought the activity and schedule were effective. Later, Sadie considered how this applied to her own eventual practice. She discussed what she learned in her coursework as being the ideal way to do things, versus the reality of an actual classroom. She thought about what this meant for her personally, and how she “pictured herself” as a classroom teacher.

Sadie said that she had “fewer doubts” moving forward and that she wanted to become a teacher “even more now.” She had the opportunity to really think about how she would respond to situations and work through them with the children, and about what skills she needed to improve to be a better teacher. Further, Sadie said she was now thinking more about the kind of school (public, charter) and grade she would prefer in the future. She stated that she was less sure before her placement, as she was nervous that the field experience may “make me not want
to become a teacher.” After the experience, she said, “now that it’s all over with, I feel more confident to go on and ready to further my education”. Sadie felt that the field experience was the opportunity to decide “is this really for me” and answered affirmatively.

**Mick** is a nineteen year-old white male and he took Historical Foundations of Education in his third semester at community college as a requirement for his major (Elementary and Secondary Education). Mick came into the course and program confident in his decision to become a teacher. Based on his previous experience of having inspiring educators and other previous opportunities to shadow teachers, he was confident that he wanted to become a high school teacher. Mick was placed in the 9-10 building of a local high school. Despite his early certainty, Mick indicated that after his field placement, he switched majors to business education.

Mick’s discomfort in the observation classroom was immediately apparent. Upon his first visit, he noted that the students’ reaction to his presence was immediate. He indicated that this attention made him uncomfortable. Mick indicated that he was surprised by how disruptive, argumentative, and unruly the students were. He wrote, “Yelling and arguing are the norm,” and “Mr. B. needs someone else to help watch over these kids!” Mike continually focused upon student behavior, and he observed how the subject matter contributed to disruption or focus. Although he liked the teacher as a person, Mick indicated that he was not particularly effective as an educator.

Mick felt that his cooperating teacher was very apathetic, which is something he had previously seen “far too often in teachers”. Mick reflected upon his own personality and background. He felt that it was quite likely that he would become the same, and he did not want to go down that path. He stated that despite his previous shadowing experience, this was his first time doing so as a college student, removed from the high school. Upon assuming that role, he
had the opportunity to see himself in the job. Because of that, he felt that he could picture himself becoming apathetic when students do not seem to care or when they seem desensitized to serious events and others’ feelings. Mick felt that “the class itself was fantastic. It was just the placement that really threw me for a loop and made me question myself”. Prior to this experience, Mick had never really considered his family’s business because he was certain he was “just going to become a teacher.” Upon experiencing the classroom and teaching role, he felt that he could accomplish his goals of “working one on one with people, teaching, delegating” in a way more aligned with his own personality.

Mick reflected upon whether a different teacher or school would have changed his opinion, and he stated that he did not think it would. While Mick was observing, there was a lockdown situation at his placement school, which became part of his reflection. He stated that: “everybody else in the room was just treating it so nonchalantly, like it was the norm. And, it just kind of shook me”. Mick felt that the experience showed him that tragic or serious events in school were just “too normal” and it “just kind of threw me off from it.” He felt that kids seem too apathetic. Further, he felt somewhat uncomfortable with his role as a teacher, being referred to as “Mr.” and being asked questions, and said that while it was not “bad” it was “strange for me” and not something he could imagine as his daily role.

Mick stated that he was very glad to have had the experiential placement, as he had previously assumed he would become a teacher without truly understanding what that role would feel like in a tangible way. He said that he was very glad to have taken the course, and felt comfortable with his decision to take another path. Mick expressed that he wished all of his courses had a similar component, so that he could have such clarity and experience sooner.

**Emergent Themes**
Themes and sub-themes were developed in analysis of participant data. The central question driving this study considered participants’ experiences in an in-field, experiential learning placement. Participants discussed how their learning evolved, in an internal to external progression. They revealed an evolution, to be discussed below, which brought their learning into being, through reflection, and ultimately to a transformational metacognitive awareness.

The following themes and sub-themes are identified and discussed in the section below:

- **Theme 1: Fieldwork as a vehicle for introspective opportunities**
  - Sub-theme 1: Inference from theory to practice
  - Sub-theme 2: “Real-world” decision making

- **Theme 2: Fieldwork as a vehicle for metacognitive opportunities**
  - Sub-theme 1: Shifting identity through participatory learning
  - Subtheme 2: Responding to challenges with confidence and preparedness

- **Theme 3: Fieldwork experiences as a vehicle for personal growth**
  - Sub-theme 1: Evolution of mindset regarding proposed path
  - Sub-theme 2: Growth capacity moving forward

**Theme 1: Fieldwork as a vehicle for introspective opportunities**

Participants indicated that the fieldwork served as a driving force in creating opportunities for introspection. It provided opportunities for application which would deepen their understanding of coursework, provide tangible “real-world” experiential learning, and substantiate or change their intended path going forward in their education. This application of learning facilitates prompted participants to think about theory, practice, decision-making, and what this meant to them as teacher education students.
**Sub-theme 1: Inference from theory to practice.** A theme emerged illuminating that the field work placement provided opportunities for learning and reflection. Participants expressed that their course learning was enriched by their field placement, as it became more “real” and applicable by example. Bella discussed her thoughts regarding how the in-field placement shaped her classroom learning:

When we were talking about certain like theories, vocabulary words in class, you know in class it’s just knowledge that you have to memorize, but when you’re in the classroom, it becomes more real. You can apply it to what you’re actually learning and get a deeper understanding of it like, ‘Oh, so this is what it means to use this certain philosophy of teaching’ or ‘this is what a charter school, this is what really sets apart a charter school from a public school or a private school’, things like that.

Bella’s statement made clear her improved ability to bring course material “to life”, facilitating a more practical understanding of the material. Further, being in the classroom provided greater opportunity to connect theory to practice, as the college coursework became more tangible with the application of real-world experience. Dante’s experience was similar:

It was more of a hands-on learning rather than just reading out of a textbook, so I think I learned a lot about teacher techniques and things like that. I remember like the philosophies of teaching, some of those jumped out at me watching the teacher in the classroom, like how she taught.

Dante felt that his college coursework was improved, because what was previously just theoretical became practical in the classroom. Although concepts such as “education
philosophies” previously seemed abstract, his classroom experience made these concepts more concrete and easier to understand and apply.

Joy similarly expressed that her understanding of theory and textbook were more tangible upon participating in the field placement, which made application more relevant:

The different learning methods and then the theories, I remember learning them in class, and so I applied them to the way the kindergarten teacher was teaching her class. And it helped, because it helped me realize, okay, there are different methods for teaching a child, it’s not always one way.

In addition to the opportunity to reflect upon observations, participants also expressed that being able to discuss their learning with an experienced teacher deepened their understanding of classroom material. They were able to make meaning from textbook material in a real, conversational, and tangible way by talking through theories and ideas with the teacher, and applying practical examples they were seeing in the classroom. This further influenced their coursework and learning overall. Sadie indicated that the in-field placement provided her the opportunity to talk with “real teachers” about what she was learning in class, stating:

I did ask about the teacher’s tenure to them, and they said like at Carter (school name changed as with pseudonyms to protect anonymity) they don’t use teacher tenure and the teachers actually said it was kind of pointless, like once a teacher always a teacher, and a lot of people say like even with tenure so, I think that being able to talk more about that and stuff like that I asked, yeah, that helped.

Sadie offered that while topics such as teacher tenure were part of her college coursework, she had a better understanding of them upon discussing them in her field placement.
In that context, she could better understand what they meant to the teacher, and why they were important in the school, and therefore in education.

Although participants’ applied their learning and even absorbed it differently, they were consistent in expressing that the field placement component was an important part of their overall course learning that they may not have otherwise experienced without the field placement. The fieldwork drove forth introspective opportunities that were meaningful and transformational for the participants.

**Sub-theme 2: “Real-world” decision making.** Participants discussed whether having the field placement portion of the course was necessary. The data illuminates the importance to participants of “real world” exploration. While participants were strongly in favor of having this experience, their reasons varied as to why it was important. Joy indicated that the classroom teacher, to whom she looked for guidance going forward, was adamant that she (Joy) should have experiential learning and placement early in her teacher preparation program and coursework. Joy stated:

This is definitely necessary. Cause like, I remember talking to the teacher and she was like, she didn’t get that opportunity to know if she liked it or not her freshman year or her first semester so it was definitely necessary and it was helpful too.

For Joy, this gave greater importance to the role of experiential learning in her own teacher training. She had greater appreciation for being in the classroom placement in her introductory course, based on the feedback from her classroom teacher. Joy felt fortunate that she had a component of her teacher education from which she believed currently practicing teachers would benefit.
Sadie indicated that the experience was helpful for her as well, but primarily because it allowed her to see what really happens in a classroom beyond what is discussed in class. She stated:

I think that it was better to have the actual experience and actually see how a classroom goes on day to day other than just talking about how it can go on and different possibilities. You had your own experience in the classroom seeing what could happen and stuff like that.

For Sadie, this personal perspective was integral. She stated that talking about what happens in a classroom is very different from experiencing it. Further, she believed that the fieldwork piece was individual to each student, and brought forth different perspectives that previously she might not have the opportunity to consider.

While both Joy and Sadie’s responses provided a more practical vision of what their future role as a teacher may look like, the responses given by students who did not plan to continue in teacher education gave important insight into this sub-theme. Their experience provided opportunities for reflection through real-world exploration. Although they did not want to become educators, two of the participants felt that the in-field placement was integral in determining this, and that it should be part of any education program, as it provided necessary and important experiential learning. Bella said:

I liked it. I mean, I thought that even though I’m not planning to become a teacher, I thought that some people don’t know what classroom experience really is like until later on, when they’re too much invested into their degrees so they feel like they can’t change out of it, so being able to get as much experience as you can early on was probably a
help. People realize, ‘is this really the profession for me?’ and so I think that, I definitely think that the sooner you can get into the classroom, the better.

The opportunity to make a more informed decision was a primary benefit to Bella. As a college student, there is a great deal of pressure to decide the future early on, and she believed that this would enable students to make a better decision with long-term certainty.

Further, both Bella and Mick expressed that the experience gleaned through this experiential learning could help them in their own intended profession. Bella explained:

It definitely did (help) because I got to see what about Education 101 applies to me and how children are in the classroom and how they might be affected in school by certain things. Even as a person who isn’t going to be a teacher, a clinical psychologist, it helps to know what’s going on in the classroom, because if there are problems like, originating in the classroom, we can start there to like solve the problems. I would already know a little of how a classroom should be run by my experience and so that could probably help a child out. I really didn’t think that Education 101 would apply to me at all, but being in the classroom definitely changed my mind about that because you can find things that relate in all sorts of ways.

Bella believed that her experiential field-placement would provide important insight into her career of choice that she otherwise would not have. Further, she felt more confident in the career she would pursue, as she would have unique and beneficial experience in education that she did not previously realize would enrich her professional efficacy. Mick also felt that the education in-field placement could help him in his intended profession, but that experiential learning should be integral in any program, stating:
I think it (experiential learning) would thoroughly help me. The work is kind of an unorthodox business, so I’m not exactly sure where I’m going to want to be at the end. So by the time I’m done, I’m going to want to work in retail, so right now I’m basically working construction, so I definitely think I want to be placed in retail as soon as humanly possible, like ASAP, just to make sure that, you know, this is what I want to do.

As Mick still struggled with deciding a career path, he was adamant regarding the importance of an experiential learning component. As he leaned toward a business major, he expressed concern that the program did not have fieldwork. Mick stated that he wished all programs would have experiential learning, and that it made this teacher education program worthy of emulation.

Although both have chosen another path going forward, they indicated that the skills learned in the classroom placement and in teacher preparation transcend programs and careers. Mick indicated that, “I still get to talk to people one on one, and teach people new things, and delegate work as necessary,” which he felt were qualities inherent in teaching and education, but that would aid him in his intended profession. This reflection facilitated more confidence in the career path they did choose, and to their aptitude for that career.

**Theme 2: Fieldwork as a vehicle for metacognitive opportunities.** This study uncovered themes regarding a shift in identity and personal understanding that occurred as a result of participating in the experiential learning experience. This shift was influenced by reflection that occurred both as part of the experience and upon responding to questions regarding the in-field placement. These facets of identity are broken down into sub-themes, which include how participants’ identity shifted through participatory learning, as well as how
classroom challenges influenced participants’ confidence and preparedness. These sub-themes will be further examined below.

Sub-theme 1: Shifting identity through participatory learning. Participants’ responses regarding the opportunity to interact with a mentor teacher (teacher to whom they were assigned to observe) and be a part of the classroom were illuminating. The data revealed that the mentor teachers provided a favorable role model which in turn nurtured confidence in the student teachers. Most responses indicated that a favorable role model supported confidence in teacher education, but that a negative role model can be equally influential in dissuading continuation. Mick felt that he “saw himself” in his mentor teacher, and that this unfavorable reflection changed his perspective on becoming a teacher altogether.

When I got to the class that I was supposed to be shadowing, um, I kind of saw something that I see far too often in teachers, in that I saw someone, who I don’t think really, I’m not going to say he didn’t care, but he didn’t seem as motivated as other teachers should be. He was content with allowing the students in the classes to perform under standards because he gave up on them. And I knew that if there was even the chance of that happening to me, and I will admit that I’m not 100% positive on it, but if there was a chance that I could have ended up like that, and I know that if I were to go into teaching and not give my full 100% to my students and didn’t expect 100% back, then there was no point in me becoming a teacher, because I would have been a cancer to the system.

Mick was bothered by the apathy he saw in his cooperating teacher, but largely because he saw similar traits in himself, and this was not the kind of teacher or person he wanted to be. He was concerned that while he would enter the profession with good intentions, he would likely
become much like his mentor teacher. This was a jarring realization for Mick, one that prompted him to reconsider his aptitude and suitability for this profession as well as one for which he might be better suited.

Mick’s response considered the importance of the role of the mentor teacher. He thought about whether a different or more effective teacher might have changed his perspective on continuing in teacher education.

I think that was a huge part of it. And I definitely think that if I had been placed with another teacher who like again, had the same background as me but maybe it turned out that they were like the best teacher or were like the most loved teacher in the school, I definitely think it could have turned out differently for me, but because of the negative experience I had in the school I was placed in, I really do think that I now have this big shadow of doubt in my mind and I don’t want to go back to it.

The experience with Mike’s mentor teacher changed his intention to continue in teacher education. The field experience provided other changes as well. Barry, who initially was quite confident in becoming a teacher, felt humbled by watching what he described as an effective teacher in his field placement. Although he realized he is not “ready” to become a teacher, the experience inspired rather than dissuaded him. He stated:

It discouraged me in the sense that I’m not as prepared as I saw her. I’m wondering, discouraged because I’m wondering if I can get as prepared and as confident as I thought she was. She was very good at it, very confident about it. And that’s what I feel that I should learn, how to manage a class and be confident about it as she was. She was confident and she had a plan, she was always planned what to do next, she was
scheduled. She never wavered what to do next. She was effective and she was good at it, and I’m hoping to become just as good.

Observing the mentor teacher prompted similar responses, indicating that the effectiveness of the mentor teacher was influential. Participants expressed that this reflection caused them to consider what it would be like to be the classroom teacher. Dante stated:

She had a good structure, like when they did talk she really got them under control quickly. All she had to do is like calm down she didn’t really yell or anything so that’s good. I think I would have handled it the same as her, cause she never yelled, she was just calm and she acted like, I don’t know, a real person.

Seeing how the teacher handled classroom management and challenges facilitated Dante’s reflection upon what he would do in similar situations. He felt that this let him see what it was really like, and what it would be like for him as an eventual classroom teacher.

Joy considered how her own classroom would be different from that which she observed, stating:

I think that I would try to have the children act like, in a way that would take the burden off the energy they have like appropriate my own curriculum and add a little bit of exercise, like say jumping in place and then going back to the curriculum, like, I don’t know; I want to make it fun but also like a learning experience. So I would have to see how to like ease in and balance that out.

Joy critically evaluated her mentor teacher’s methods, deciding that there were some she liked and some she did not. She further considered what she would do differently, as well as how her own choices corresponded with her coursework learning and best practices discussed.
Bella discussed how she would handle her own classroom differently from the professional teacher she observed, stating:

Of course there are probably things I didn’t always agree with, like I was saying there are things because you have to like keep the time management and there’s not enough time in the day to answer like every single question, but sometimes I would see occasionally the teacher would be on her laptop and at least five hands are raised and they’re like waving and waving and you can see the frustration in their faces as their arms get tired from holding them up for so long. And like occasionally she’ll look up from her computer and then continue whatever she’s doing on there, and like granted, I don’t know what she’s doing on there; it could be important stuff that she has to document for the classroom, but I just felt really bad for the children who are waiting so long because they could forget their question or like maybe just give up and stay confused for the rest of the class period or like maybe they’ll get rowdy because they’re frustrated from not being answered so I felt bad about that. I think if I was the teacher, I would probably clarify and try to answer as many questions as I could, not just ignore them (the students’ questions).

Bella thought about what the teacher did and could do differently, as well as how her actions affected her students. As she was immersed in the fieldwork experience, she became more confident in her own evaluations of what she would do in similar situations.

Similarly, Sadie thought about how she would behave differently from the teacher she observed. She stated:

I think I’d talk to the student like one on one and try to make them understand, like this is not how we do things in the classroom, like we have to use our listening voices, our
inside voices and stuff like that, just try to talk to them one on one as if they’re like an adult, like they’re one with you so that they don’t feel like they’re like, beneath you. I feel as if it’s a good way to talk to them, the kids, just being calm and making them realize, what you’re doing is wrong, but let’s try to get to things together. I’m good with patience, but I think I could use a little more; and the teacher I had was good, but I think she also needed a little more patience.

Through reflection, participants used their experience to consider how they would handle situations they had observed. Their perspective shifted from that of an education student to that of a teacher, and what they would do in that role. Considering their own evolving identity influenced their confidence and preparedness, as well as how they would face challenges in the classroom.

**Sub-theme 2: Responding to challenges with confidence and preparedness.** Mick described how it changed his perspective and confidence moving forward:

The one event that happened in the classroom that really just kind of shook me that probably was in the first fifteen minutes of class starting on my first day. We were all told that the school was on lockdown. It wasn’t like a lockdown situation, like there wasn’t an intruder in the school, but all the teachers had to stay in their rooms, all the students had to stay in their room, doors were locked, etc. But it was because there was a student who had gotten on the school roof and was threatening to jump. And it kind of shook me because when I heard that, when I heard the announcement over the loud speaker, I was kind of shaken by it, I was kind of like ‘wow, this is weird’, this shouldn’t be happening, and everybody else in the room was treating it so nonchalantly, like it was the norm, and it just kind of shook me.
Mick expressed a concern that he would become apathetic like the students and teacher he observed, and said that he continually reflected upon his own propensity to become this way. He expressed that in response to the challenges inherent in the classroom, he was surprised by how unaffected those he observed seemed, and how this environment and these challenges may not be the right choice for him. He stated:

“It’s just so strange to me that a situation so serious like wow, someone’s threatening to potentially end their life right now, people were treating it like no, this is kind of normal for us, like not necessarily someone jumping off the roof, but like serious situations where the room goes in lockdown. It just didn’t seem like the place was very nice. It didn’t seem like the school was as comfortable and welcoming as other schools and the kind of tragic events or very serious events that cause total school lockdown it kind of seems like that was too normal and it just kind of threw me off from it.

The challenges Mick faced made him less confident in shifting his identity to that of an eventual, professional teacher. Similarly, Bella, who came into the course knowing she did not want to be a classroom teacher, felt that the challenges she experienced caused greater reflection about what she did want to do. She felt more confident in her decision *not* to become a teacher, reaffirming the career path she had been considering and planning. She stated:

“I probably just don’t have the patience for so many children. One on one, I’m great, but like, the I guess bustle from all directions would probably overwork me or something. I think it would be overwhelming for me and just like seeing the composure a teacher can have about it made me realize that you need a lot of patience for a lot of children and like also, it’s a lot to balance because you have to know, you’re supposed to know each kid individually and things like that, and while you could learn about each kind and since you
have so many children, it’s hard to give them the attention like each of them needs. And I’m kind of like an individual person and like, I want to give so much attention to each of the children but there’s like, not enough time in the day so that would make me feel bad. It just makes me realize that I would rather work individually, giving each child as much time they need instead of like having to use your time effectively to get through the material you have to, things like that.

While Bella and Mick were more confident in their decisions to not become teachers, other participants responded to the classroom challenges with greater confidence toward their shifting identity as a teacher. Joy stated that, “I look forward to all of the challenges. I think it’s going to make me a better person in general and a better teacher”, while Barry responded similarly, stating, “I’m still prepared for it, cause I’m not a quitter and that’s what my strive is, to become as prepared and confident to manage a classroom as I thought this teacher was”. Regarding the challenges she saw in her placement and how it influenced her own readiness to face similar challenges, Sadie explained how her identity was evolving from student to eventual teacher, stating:

It made me want to teach even more. Just the other day I was in the store and I hear a little voice say, ‘Hi, Miss Smith (last name changed as well to retain anonymity)’ and it was one of the kids from Carter School and I was blown away! I mean I was there for like a few days and the kid actually remembered who I was so, I think this gives me fewer doubts.

In considering their doubts and response to challenges, participants had various
influential experiences. Although these were quite different for each person, they provided insight regarding their individual experience and how it influenced their confidence and preparedness continuing in teacher education.

**Theme 3: Fieldwork experiences as a vehicle for personal growth.** Participants’ discussed how the classroom experience brought forth opportunities to consider their future and what they wanted to do. They examined their proposed path of study, and whether they felt more or less confident in what they had previously planned. Further, they demonstrated growth capacity in becoming metacognitive about their own decision-making and learning.

**Sub-theme 1: Evolution of mindset regarding proposed path.** Data showed that the experience was helpful in confirming or altering participants’ decisions going forward. One student changed his plan completely, from teacher education to business management, specifically as a result of his classroom placement experience. The other participants similarly expressed that while they already had an idea of what they wanted to do, they felt more confident after their experience. Indeed, one student who started out *not* wanting to become a teacher felt more confident in that decision after the field observation experience. Bella stated:

> I didn’t think I’d be a teacher, but it definitely helped reinforce to stay on the path that I was originally thinking of. It was a really good experience for me. Even though it didn’t apply to directly to me being a teacher, it was still relevant to what I eventually want to do because like I said, children are in the classroom like half, like at least 180 days a year, some schools have it longer, and like what happens in the classroom definitely effects a child’s mental well-being, so whatever knowledge I can gain about what happens in a classroom will help me with my counselling techniques and let me shed some light on what could be causing some problems.
It was important to Bella to observe the diversity of problems faced in the classroom, as she realized how many would be relevant to the field she hoped to pursue. Prior to her in-field placement, she had not previously realized how many problems children face manifest in the classroom. She believed that having this knowledge would broaden her understanding as a counsellor or mental health practitioner.

While Bella came into the in-field placement knowing she did not want to be a teacher the experience was a much different one for Mick. He initially thought he wanted to become a teacher, but upon reflection, changed his path considerably. He said:

I would say pretty confidently that I don’t believe I’m going to become a teacher, like if I had a number value to it, I would say there’s like a 70% chance that I won’t go back to it. I mean, I still think about it from time to time and how much I enjoy it, but I kind of still have that shadow of doubt in my mind from the education experience that I had in ED 101. The class itself was fantastic, there was nothing wrong with the class, it was just the placement that really yeah, really threw me for a loop and made me question myself.

Mick’s personal reflection facilitated unexpected self-examination. He felt that really thinking about his suitability for teaching facilitated examining his own characteristics and attributes, as well as areas he was newly committed to improve. Mick saw the kind of teacher he feared he would likely be, and decided to make a change to be better.

While Mick’s experience made him doubt his aptitude and interest in teaching, other participants indicated that while the in-field placement confirmed their decision to continue in teacher education, it also provided insight concerning their preferences for grade level and kind of school going forward. Sadie stated:
I already knew I wanted to stay in the elementary school level, but I wasn’t sure about going up into the higher grades or not. I definitely still wanted to go into the elementary school grade level before this too. I think that elementary is definitely the main choice for me. I think I’d go up to eight grade, but I think I’d like to stay K-4th.

Sadie felt much more confident in her decision, as well as her ability to be successful in teaching elementary school. Her experience confirmed her comfort and confidence working with younger children, and she happily expressed feeling “at home” in that environment. Dante had a similar reflection regarding his future in teaching, indicating:

There was lot of like, when students were kind of bad, I don’t want to say bad, but they were real hard to control, and that kind of changed my viewpoint on wanting to do the upper grade levels and I would kind of do the elementary, lower school.

Dante thought a great deal about where he would be best suited to teach. While male teachers are more plentiful in secondary education and he initially felt he should therefore teach higher grades, he felt more comfortable and effective in lower grades. Dante felt that elementary school teaching was more aligned with his temperament and comfort level.

Participants, who were still in the beginning stages of the teacher education program, indicated gaining greater clarity moving forward, regardless of their intended path. They came into the experience with an idea of continuing in teacher education, and based on their responses and reflection, either confirmed that intention, clarified it, or changed it altogether.

**Sub-theme 3: Growth capacity moving forward.** As participants reflected upon their evolving perspective of becoming (or conversely, not becoming) a teacher, a theme emerged regarding their own growth capacity moving forward. Although they had different ideas for what their paths would entail, participants became more metacognitive in what they wanted to
do, and how they came to that decision. They were more confident in their choices. Further, they expressed more clarity about what they would be doing in the future. While some felt more certain that teacher education was indeed their “right” path, others became newly committed, or re-committed to a different course. Participants provided insight as to how this occurred, and to how they felt continuing on their intended path. Sadie reflected upon this evolution, stating:

I was a little bit nervous in the beginning, like not knowing whether or not the field experience was going to make me not want to become a teacher, but now that it’s all over with, I feel more confident to go on and ready to further my education.

Dante responded similarly, stating:

Before, I was nervous like, can I really do it, will I be able to do it, but after I saw how she did it and it made me think, yeah, I could handle it, yeah. It just makes me excited to be a teacher. I think I would have felt it, but now that I did this, I feel it more.

Joy expressed a similar increase in confidence, stating:

I feel really confident and I know I’m going to learn more and I feel like in the long run, I’m going to be like this was a nice experience and I’m like definitely this is my profession and I’m not going to go like look back into any other profession.

Joy, along with other participants, also expressed a change in her perspective and confidence in that the experience illuminated for her areas in need of improvement and continued attention. She expressed this insight, stating, “I would say that confidence wise I could do it for one day, and I could feel really great, but like doing it for the whole year round, I would need help, more practice, more knowledge”. Similarly, Barry said the experience both encouraged him and “woke him up”, stating: “It motivated me and uh, backed me up a little bit in a sense, you know.
Cause she was great in the class and can I be just as great? I want to go forward, but I have to strive to get ready”.

In summary, in the above section, I reviewed the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis of interview transcripts, observations, and notes. This information provided greater context to the in-field placement as it occurred, as well as upon reflection. Primary themes presented above comprised connecting opportunities for introspection, creating opportunities for self-reflection and cultivating opportunities for progression.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the six interviews informing this study have been explained in great detail, with illuminating quotes highlighted to provide context for the emergent themes articulated herein. In the first half of this chapter, background information for each participant was included for greater description and context. Next, emergent themes were clarified, with supporting quotes from participants included.
Chapter Five

Discussion of Research Findings

In this section, the implications of the results outlined in the previous section will be outlined and discussed. This study examined an experiential learning field experience as part of students’ introductory education course, Historical Foundations of Education. The examination comprised of six students participating in ten hours of observation at local K-12 schools as part of their course requirements. Supporting documents included their own observational notes, which provided insight into their observation and reflection as it was occurring, as well as thick, rich description in conjunction with my own notes. A summary of the problem of practice and a summary of the review of the results are presented. The results are then interpreted through a combined lens of the theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1983) and reflection in action (Schon, 1984). Existing literature on this problem of practice guides this study, and provides further meaning to the results. The limitations to this study are presented. Finally, implications and recommendations for current practice, future practice, and additional research are presented.

Summary of Problem

A growing body of research has focused upon how best to prepare quality teachers, with emphasis upon and support of increased field experience and experiential learning (Pappano, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007). While research and practice are supportive of increased field experience, most in-field placements occur at the end of a student’s teacher preparation program, which creates a disparity between the importance of this component and when it is actually integrated during teacher education.

In New Jersey, where this study was conducted, teacher education is a five year program, and the in-field immersion occurs during the last year of teacher education. At this point, it is
often “too late” to change direction after a student has already invested a great deal of time and money into his or her program, even if one decides that they are not suited for this intended profession. It was important to consider the influence of an in-field placement that would occur in the beginning of teacher education. Considering both the effectiveness of an experiential learning component early in teacher training, as well as the role of field experience in this introductory course, will provide additions to the literature as well as practical information to improve teacher education.

The research question guiding this study was: What were the experiences of an in-field placement for students in an introductory education class? Qualitative data was compiled using student participants’ observation notes, my own notes, and semi-structured interviews of each participant upon completion of the in-field placement and course.

From analysis of compiled data, three overarching themes were revealed, and then were further broken down into sub-themes. These overarching themes were: connecting opportunities for introspection, creating opportunities for self-reflection, and cultivating opportunities for progression. A brief summary of the results regarding each of these themes and sub-themes will be discussed, and are organized by both the over-arching themes and guiding research question.

Summary of Research Results

Research Question. What were the experiences of an in-field placement for students in an introductory education class?

Theme 1: Fieldwork as a vehicle for introspective opportunities. Findings indicate that students were prompted to reflect upon what occurred in the classroom and how it influenced them personally. The initial reflection occurred during the field experience and was represented by their notes (on coursework, what they were learning in their college course, events as they
occurred). Deeper and more personal reflection about their own emerging identity and intention to continue in teacher education occurred during their interviews, and was prompted by questions, time, and guided reflection.

**Sub-theme 1: Inference from theory to practice.** Findings indicate that participants felt that the in-field placement provided greater insight into their coursework. They were able to articulate specific examples of terms and theories learned in class that “made more sense” after “seeing it in action” in the actual placement classroom. Based on my own observation and notes, participants were able to apply the coursework material with greater proficiency and fluency after relating it to a tangible example they had experienced. When considering the research question guiding this analysis, participants had more confidence in their learning and were better able to articulate and apply it, which increases their confidence.

**Sub-theme 2: Real-world decision making.** In conjunction with the research question and with opportunities for application, findings indicate that the “real-world” aspect of the in-field placement provided greater reflection and personal application. Participants expressed that while they thought they knew what they wanted to do, actually seeing it and experiencing it provided greater clarity. Mick, who had planned to become a teacher, changed majors after the classroom experience, expressing that being there made him question his aptitude, confidence and desire to continue in teacher education. He felt that without the in-field placement, he would not have realized that he was better suited for business management. He stated that he wished his current course of study would offer real-world, hands-on experiential learning to provide clarity and confidence in his course and future.

Other participants deepened reflection by contemplating beyond “ideas in the book” to real experiences in the classroom. Participants articulated issues such as classroom management,
discipline problems, teacher inefficiency, and student risk factors among experiences they reflected upon as part of the in-field placement. Although their responses and subsequent decisions to continue in teacher education varied, each indicated that the field experience was integral in making decisions moving forward.

**Theme 2: Fieldwork as a vehicle for metacognitive opportunities.** As students reflected upon their experiences, they became increasingly articulate and specific in asserting their own role as a teacher or professional. Even those who would be continuing in another field of study had greater clarity in moving forward in that role. Bella, who had started the course thinking she would go into “teaching or law or both”, came out with greater certainty that she would be in education and could “see herself” doing so. Most other participants described “picturing themselves” as the classroom teacher, even articulating how they would decorate their classroom, discipline methods they would use, and how they would be addressed by their students. They reflected upon what they would do similarly and differently from the mentor teacher they observed. Mick, who decided *not* to become a teacher, felt more comfortable assuming a role in his family’s business. He said that while he is currently working in construction, being around teaching made him realize he does like working one on one, teaching others and delegating. Moving forward, he sees a shift in his professional role, albeit in a different field altogether.

**Sub-theme 1: Shifting identity through participatory learning.** Results indicated that the role of the mentor teacher was an important influence in their reflection, as well as in developing confidence and preparedness moving forward in teacher education. Because they were part of the classroom, they had opportunities to critically analyze what they experienced, and what it meant to them personally. As stated above, participants considered what the mentor teacher did
well, and what they would do differently. Further, participants were prompted to reflect upon how they would respond as a professional teacher if it were their classroom. For the most part, participants expressed overall positive responses to their mentor teachers, and a desire to emulate certain traits they possessed or ways in which they taught or handled their classes. However, when prompted to critically reflect upon how they might handle it themselves, participants made clear that the effectiveness of the mentor had a strong influence on their experience. When a mentor teacher was sometimes ineffective, participants expressed discomfort with how this impacted students. Mick, in particular, felt very negatively as a result of his mentor teacher, who he liked personally but questioned professionally. The effectiveness of the mentor teacher had a strong influence on participatory learning.

**Sub-theme 2: Responding to challenges with confidence and preparedness.** As stated above, how the mentor teacher handled challenges influenced participants own reflection, as well as their confidence and feeling of preparedness going forward. This occurred whether the response to the challenge was effective or ineffective. If the challenge was responded to effectively, participants reflected upon their own ability to handle a similar challenge, with more confidence if they felt they could. If they felt they lacked the attribute or skill to handle the challenge well, they indicated that they needed to work on and improve what was needed (“I need to work on my patience” and “I don’t think I could be as organized as she was; I have to improve that”). Conversely, if the challenge was handled ineffectively, participants typically showed greater confidence in their own ability. This was typically confidence building, as they articulated their own ways that would be more effective when they became the teacher, reaffirming that role.
Theme 3: Fieldwork experiences as a vehicle for personal growth. Responses revealed that the experiential learning component facilitated metacognitive growth for participants. They were able to think about their learning and decision-making with increased clarity and confidence. Whether they chose to continue in teacher education or not, participants felt more comfortable and aware of their decisions, as well as with the reasons they made the choices they have.

Sub-theme 1: Evolution of mindset regarding proposed path. One of the most illuminating findings addressed confidence and preparedness in continuing in teacher education. As stated above, participants were very vocal and assertive that the field observation was instrumental in deciding their path moving forward. When prompted to reflect upon how they arrived at their decision, participants were able to articulate specific experiences that confirmed or annulled their path. Five of the participants chose to continue in teacher education. One expected to confirm that which he had planned, and found himself changing course altogether.

Sub-theme 2: Growth capacity moving forward. The research question guiding this study encompasses students’ confidence and preparedness to continue in teacher education. Findings indicate that there is a shift in identity as students reflect upon their own role as a teacher (or not), and how prepared they feel to assume that role. As their perspective broadens and changes, they became more confident in their decision to choose this or another profession. For example, both Mick and Bella, who have chosen paths other than teacher education, felt more confident in their decisions not to become teachers, and were able to articulate clear reasons, with examples drawn from their observation experience. The other participants, who will be continuing in teacher education, reported not only greater confidence in doing so, but also a need for greater preparation. This insight was consistent, as each provided reasons and examples of what preparation they would need to be as effective as they hoped to be as a teacher.
Despite a lack of current preparedness, each expressed confidence in their decision to continue and their ability to become prepared in the career they have chosen.

Based on my observations, participants had various opportunities for reflection both throughout the in-field placement and upon its completion. Further, each experienced a shift in identity upon exposure to a “real” profession, which influenced their confidence and preparedness moving forward in whichever path they chose. The various ways in which participants experienced the cyclical process of experience, perception, cognition, and behavior by reflecting through action will be examined in more detail in the following section.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

This study used a theoretical framework which combined experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and reflection in action (Schon, 1983) as a lens through which to consider how students entering teacher education in an introductory course reflect upon their experiences after having participated in a field placement. Examining participant experience through this lens provided a multifaceted view of their cyclical process of working through a concrete experience and observation, forming abstract concepts, and testing new situations within this context. To do so required reflectivity throughout the experiential learning component, which facilitated insight into their confidence and preparedness continuing in teacher education. This study focused upon this combined lens to create a theoretical framework that would provide greater alignment with the problem of practice and research question proposed, emphasizing reflectivity as it is developed through experiential learning.

As explained in Chapter Two, Kolb’s theory of experiential learning is presented in a model of four cyclical stages, which are grounded in an experience, and follow a sequence. Combined with reflection in action, which focuses upon how reflection is embedded and used in
learning, a lens was created through which to consider participants’ experience as it occurred during the in-field placement and upon its completion. These properties will be examined in relation to this study’s findings in the following sections.

**Concrete Experience.** In this theory, the learner has a concrete experience, which prompts reflection. In this study, the concrete experience was the in-field placement which occurred as part of their coursework in Historical Foundations of Education, their introductory teacher preparation course. Students were placed in a K-12 classroom for ten hours of observation. Their role was that of observer, to watch what was occurring in the classroom, and to take notes regarding anything that seemed important or relevant to them. Upon completion of the fieldwork and of the course, they were interviewed, and asked to provide some examples of events that occurred in their observation classroom, and how they felt about those events.

Participants took field notes during the concrete experience. These were based on their own observations. The notes included observations about facets of the environment, such as the organization of the classroom, including desk arrangement, colorful bulletin boards, available technology in the classroom, posters, and general observations about the number of students, experience level and age of the mentor teacher, and conditions of the school facility. Initially, these notes were based solely on that which was tangible and observable, which was their reaction to a concrete experience (Kolb, 1984). As students spent more time in the classroom, greater reflection occurred, which is in accordance with Schon’s theory (1983, 1987) that through reflection, one will come to utilize a variety of understandings and actions to generate learning.

**Observation and Reflection.** As participants moved beyond the concrete experience of the classroom and the initial observations of the classroom, their notes showed an evolution of
reflection upon what these initial experiences meant. For example, Dante’s concrete observation included how the students’ seats were arranged, and then upon talking about it in the interview, developed into a consideration of classroom management and behavior, noting that students were separated or placed in accordance with how rowdy or controlled they were. Similarly, Mick initially made note of the technology available in the classroom, but then began to consider how it contributed to attention and motivation in the classroom. My own notes indicated an improvement in conceptualization and fluency in students’ college coursework, as they became more proficient in applying that which they were learning in Historical Foundations of Education to their classroom observations.

Participants also indicated that they better understood their college coursework after “seeing it come alive” in a “real” classroom. Both Joy and Sadie stated that they better and more clearly understood theory and teaching philosophy after watching their mentor teacher in action, which prompted greater reflectivity. While most participants took the course as a requirement for their major, they expressed feeling much more interested in the subject matter upon participating in an in-field placement. The experiential learning component enriched the understanding of the students, and influenced confidence and preparedness continuing in teacher education. Even those participants who came to the decision not to continue in teacher education expressed increased confidence in doing so as a result of participating in the experiential learning component.

**Forming Abstract Concepts.** Kolb’s theory (1984) supported self-questioning and examination as it creates a premise for action, which transforms learning. Participants were asked what the observation experience means for them as a future teacher, facilitating the conceptualization of this eventual role and the path to get there. This addressed the research
question, as reflection upon their experience influenced students’ confidence and preparedness continuing in teacher education. Conceptualizing what this would mean to them personally, and “seeing” themselves in this role prompted reflection and understanding in accordance with the theoretical framework. Kolb’s (1984) theory asserted that experiences are the basis for reflections, which are later assimilated into concepts from which implications for action can be drawn. Schon (1983) asserted that reflection in action, in this case through forming abstract concepts, develops an intuitive understanding of one’s experience, particularly that which is puzzling, troubling, or uncertain (Schon, 1983). Participants came into the experience with varying levels of confidence regarding their intended path and continuation in teacher education, and the reflection facilitated their questioning of aptitude, suitability, and continuation.

Students (participants) considered both their coursework and in-field placement in forming abstract concepts. For example, in Historical Foundations of Education, they discussed philosophies of education, and how these impact teachers as practitioners. They then applied this to the mentor teacher they observed, and then finally articulated their own philosophy. Through analysis of my own notes, I could see that what started as a thought process (I want to teach this grade, I would set up my classroom this way, I want to teach at this kind of school), became much more theoretical and abstract (I believe my role as a teacher should be, I believe that my responsibility to students is, I feel that my impact on the educational system could be). While students were prompted toward this evolution, it became more reflective and personal.

When considering the concept of “teacher” and how they saw (or did not see) themselves in this role, responses varied but indicated greater clarity in applying and conceptualizing personal meaning. Both Dante and Barry, who came into the experience relatively certain they wanted to be teachers, reflected extensively on their own capacity to teach effectively,
comparing and contrasting their own aptitude with that of the mentor teacher. Dante stated that eventually, his choice was confirmed, despite some initial uncertainty about his own abilities, stating, “I didn’t think I could at first, but now I know I can”. Similarly, Barry stated, “I thought of, can I do this?” but upon continued and ongoing reflection, decided that although he had a lot to learn and improve, he felt greater confidence in continuing in teacher education. These examples are indicative of how the inherent reflectivity developed in this process facilitates asking and answering fundamental questions to transform learning.

**Testing New Situations.** The final stage in Kolb’s (1984) cycle of experiential learning is testing new situations, whereupon the learner reflects upon his or her own experience and understanding and how it informs consideration of new challenges with which he or she may be presented. Participants were asked how they might respond as a professional teacher if it were their classroom. This facilitated their embracing the new concepts being formed, and applying it personally to transform their own learning and understanding (Kolb, 1983). Schon (1983) asserted that students should be encouraged to reflect upon their learning, through experimentation and hypothesis testing, as to why events occurred and how they could be responded to in different ways. Taken together, students developed their own personal concepts, and related these to the challenges presented, prompting new understanding (Kolb, 1983; Schon, 1984).

Participants used both course time and notes to reflect upon responses to situations with which they were presented in the classrooms in which they observed. They were prompted to consider alternate responses when interviewed. My own notes of observation indicated transformation in learning in accordance with Schon’s theory (1983), as it asserted that this testing of new situations informs practice, and participants actively reflected upon how they
would handle the situation if they were in the role of teacher. This showed an assumption of the role in practice, rather than theory. Initially, their conceptualization was abstract, with answers very general (I think it should have been handled differently or why would she do that?), but through class discussion after having participated in the in-field placement, the concepts and responses became more reflective and concrete (I would have handled it this way).

Participants also expressed more confidence in how they would handle situations if they were the teacher. Barry and Dante, who were initially very unsure whether they could handle classroom management, eventually felt increasingly confident that they could, but also provided alternative ways that they would handle it differently or more effectively. This also addressed the research question regarding preparedness, as most participants indicated that upon reflection of the field placement, they were not as prepared as they need to be, but confident that they are on the right path and hope to become so. The two participants who do not want to become teachers also internalized the conceptualization, but instead decided that the role of professional teacher was not suitable for them.

**Summary of findings in relation to experiential learning theory and reflection in action.** In the above section, the theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and reflection in action (Schon, 1983) were considered. Together, these provided a theoretical framework through which to consider the results of this study. Each of the components of the cyclical process of experiential learning were considered, with emphasis on the embedded reflectivity both inherent in and prompted by this experience. Results of this study were considered through this combined lens, filtered through the integral components of the theoretical framework, and conclusions were drawn. The next section will consider the results of the study in the context of the literature review examined in Chapter Two.
Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature Review

This section examines the results of this study as they relate to the literature review in Chapter Two. This section also addresses the results of the study in relation to the overarching themes of opportunities for application, shifting identity, and personal growth in teacher education.

Fieldwork as a vehicle for introspective opportunities. Studies have indicated that there is a direct link between student performance and teacher efficacy, but teacher preparation programs vary greatly in quality and time devoted to actual hands-on learning and reflective practice (Payne, 2008; Pappano, 2011). Literature reviewed for this study indicates a strong connection between experiential learning and reflective practice (Beiler, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010; Kent, 2005). Despite the consensus regarding the importance of experiential learning components, most occur at the end of teacher education training, which makes it more difficult to change paths if one determines that teaching is not a suitable or desirable choice (Beare et al., 2012). Although the literature review prevents a compelling and comprehensive consensus regarding the importance of “hands-on” and experiential learning in teacher education, there is very little information available regarding doing so early in teacher education.

Inference from theory to practice. Both federal and state mandates prioritize training quality teachers who demonstrate efficacy (Brewer, 2003). The findings of Boe et al. (2007) were corroborated by the findings in my study. They indicated that teacher education students who learned more about actual practice and how to teach with experiential learning had more confidence moving forward in preparation and in practice (2007). In my own observation and notes of participants, I observed that their fluency and familiarity with concepts and coursework was improved as they participated in and reflected upon their experiential learning in-field
placement. Cibulka’s (2009) study in conjunction with Scheeler’s (2007), provide further support for the need for teacher education students to apply their learning, and to correct the gap between theory and practice. In this study, students demonstrated greater ability to connect theory and practice, applying their college course learning to concrete experiences in their fieldwork.

The results of this study echoed Beiler’s (2010) findings. The influence on coursework and learning is further facilitated by guidance and feedback from the faculty member teaching the course with the experiential learning component. Beiler’s study indicated that the dialog prompted by the field experience and reflection provided important opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving and the development of context in classroom decision making. Part of the experiential theory inherent in the framework examined for this study focuses upon testing new situations and developing concepts, both of which occurred as a result of the in-field learning and reflection. This supports Beiler’s findings, as well as those of Lowery et al. (2012) which assert that this type of experience could improve new teacher confidence and effectiveness, and reduce teacher attrition. Finally, further support of the literature is evident through Chesley and Jordan’s (2012) findings, which indicate that an in-field placement such as the one utilized in this study which incorporated collaboration and mentoring, facilitates greater reflection and eventual competence.

“Real-world” decision making. This study supported the role of real-world exploration in providing opportunities for reflection and greater confidence and preparedness in one’s path. Scheeler’s (2013) findings assert that there is a missing link between pre-service teachers’ preparation and their in-service application of skills. Her research, like this study, supports opportunities for education students to practically apply learned concepts and skills in a “real-
life” setting, which would be provided by in-field experiential component. This study supports the literature provided by Smith et al., (2007) who, in a study of more than 2,700 schools, found that teachers who had been taught in a traditional teacher education program (with minimal and late experiential learning) were more likely to focus on procedural instruction, rather than conceptual learning that positively impacted student learning.

This study further supports the literature regarding the importance of “real-world” experience, as a study by Russell et al., (2001) found that these kinds of traditional teacher education programs provide less practical learning that can be left behind when real classroom teaching begins. Like this study, they support and encourage programs that facilitate reflective and intentional practice through real-world experience and application. They assert that there should be more focus on how to teach, building skills that will help new teachers in the classroom. When student participants reflected upon classroom challenges, they effectively articulated how they would handle them in a pragmatic and informed way.

Fieldwork as a vehicle for metacognitive opportunities. The literature review and study raised the question as to whether early classroom placement for education students would create increased opportunity for reflection and application, thereby influencing confidence and readiness. The study, viewed through a theoretical framework focusing upon reflection, illuminated ample opportunity for cogitation. As part of this, participants, who were education students at the start of the in-field placement, described a shift in identity that affected their confidence and preparedness. While most felt more confident in continuing in teacher education, several felt less prepared for their eventual goal. Two students felt more confident in the decision not to become a teacher. This supports existing literature on the importance of experiential learning in reflection and personal transformation of learning. Still, there is not a
great deal of existing literature about how early experiential learning and field placement provides greater reflection upon one’s suitability to become a teacher, as well as their likelihood in continuing in teacher education.

**Shifting identity through participatory learning.** Much research focuses upon teacher preparation and how best to prepare quality teachers, by looking at outcomes, test scores, federal and state standards, and research studies of teacher performance. Not much research exists incorporating the voice of teacher education students. This study was unique in that it was guided by and focused upon the experiences of teacher education students to inform teacher education. Indeed, they were not receiving the learning, but rather were part of it. Boyd et al., (2009) focused on the preparation process more than the outcome, using feedback from teachers in practice; while Lowery et al., (2012) utilized input from both traditional and alternate route practicing teachers. The findings of Fite and Battle (2000) highlighted the importance of supervision and mentoring, as did Snow-Gerono (2009) who asserted that veteran teachers should be a part of developing teacher education programs. Much of the literature reviewed emphasized the voice of practicing teachers and the importance of their mentoring role. This is further supported by this study’s findings, which indicated that the role of the mentor teacher is important and influential. This study is unique in that it utilizes the voice of the students to highlight the significance of this role.

**Responding to challenges with confidence and preparedness.** A complaint about new teachers addressed in the literature review considers their lack of preparation and confidence in handling classroom challenges and realities. This was a driving force in this study, to consider how increased confidence and preparedness might affect attrition and efficacy. Scheeler’s (2013) findings indicated that there is a missing link between pre-service (student) teachers’
preparation and their in-service application of skills. Her research further asserted that the lack of feedback, practicing behaviors, and critical thinking in traditional teacher education programs (with minimal or late experiential placement) contributes to ineffective practice. While this study did not follow students into eventual practice, it did support the findings of the importance of feedback, reflection about actual practice, and critical thinking.

Perry and Power’s (2004) findings further indicate that in traditional programs, knowledge application of that which is learned through college coursework is not effectively applied in the classroom. In other words, they asserted that the teacher education students are unable to connect coursework to practice without ever having the opportunity to do so. As a result, they are left frustrated and ill-prepared for the complexities of the classroom. Yeo’s (1997) findings indicated that not only is pedagogy impacted by a lack of experiential learning, but also understanding of minority students, diversity, multiculturalism, and the challenges inherent in urban schools and communities. In the study conducted, students reflected upon diverse variables, considering themselves in a new role, testing new ideas, and responding to challenges with feedback and application of learning, which both supports and adds to existing literature.

**Fieldwork experiences as a vehicle for personal growth.** This study took into consideration a variety of factors teacher education students need to consider, but with which they often become overwhelmed and discouraged. These include increasing GPA requirements, higher test scores, more rigorous course work, and increased field experience. This study asserted that in order to progress and be metacognitive in critical analysis and decision making, experiential learning is critical.
Evolution of mindset regarding proposed path. This study was constructed with consideration of the high rate of teacher attrition, as well as the great number of teachers who are not suited for the profession but proceed anyway because they are too far into it to change course. Bella articulated the role of the in-field placement in mitigating that issue, stating, “I thought that people don’t know what classroom experience is really like until later on, when they’re too much invested in their degrees so they feel like they can’t change out of it”. She stated that early experiences like this would help people make critical choices before it is too late. The literature reviewed also supports the role of experiential field placement in clarifying one’s proposed path. The findings of both Perry and Power’s (2004) and Rust (2010) support this contention, as they indicate that improving and increasing field experiences better prepare pre-service teachers for the multiple roles and contextual realities of the classroom. While a case can be made, and has been in the literature, that a lack of confidence and preparation increases teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Payne, 2008; Pappano, 2011), the evolution of one’s decision to become a teacher and one’s suitability for the profession is not considered extensively in the literature. This study contributes to a movement to be proactive in teacher education (Rust, 2010; Perry & Power, 2004; Russell et al., 2001; Boyd et al., 2009), but provides new insight in suggesting a pragmatic way to do so.

Growth capacity moving forward. Rust’s (2010) findings took into consideration teacher education and how to instill confidence and effectiveness in changing the culture and practice. His research, and this study, support reform that is dynamic and sustainable, driven by inquiry, experiential learning, and collaboration. Through experiential learning, guidance and feedback, Beiler (2010) further asserts that teacher education in this model could improve new teacher confidence and effectiveness, and reduce attrition. Both D’Aniello’s (2008) and Andrea’s (2005)
study further support this, as their contributing literature indicated that the highest rated teacher education programs had common components, including clinical experience and fieldwork linked to coursework and pedagogy. Andrea’s (2005) findings indicated that education students who were immersed in an experiential intervention felt better prepared and were more equipped to work with the most academically challenged students and in underprivileged schools. The candidates in her study, like this one, reported feeling more confident, better prepared, and with a deeper understanding of theory and practice.

**Summary of findings in relation to literature review.** The results of this study were considered in relation to the literature analyzed in depth in Chapter Two. In particular, the areas of connecting opportunities for introspection, creating opportunities for self-reflection, and cultivating opportunities for progression were analyzed. Considering the study’s results through the literature reviewed on this topic provided insight into the importance of opportunities for application early in teacher education, revealing that experiential learning influences a student’s confidence and continuation in teacher education.

**Study Limitations**

Within this study, the following limitations were identified:

- The study was conducted in one section of Historical Foundations of Education.
- The study included six students enrolled in one course in one community college, which could limit the generalizability of the study.
- The classroom placement assignment and mentor teacher were decided by the school district (K-12), which could limit the scope of representation of mentor teachers, as they may not be demonstrative of all teachers in the school or the overall professionalism and vision of the school.
• The participants had varying levels of involvement in their in-field placement based on the discretion of the mentor teachers. To that end, some students solely observed from a distance, whereas others interacted more with the teacher and students in the classroom. This lack of uniformity in the in-field placement could potentially influence their overall experience.

• Participants were asked to share their personal thoughts and feelings regarding the efficacy of the mentor teacher and their overall experience in placement. While their grades were not contingent on their participation or feedback and they were assured of their confidentiality, it is possible that full candor could be hindered by concerns over providing critical or negative feedback about the mentor teacher or school to which participants were assigned.

• There is a great deal of diversity in teacher education programs. This study was conducted in New Jersey, which is the only state with a five-year teacher education program. Changes are being made daily in programs, so comparing one to another may be difficult. The variables that influenced this study may be different in a four-year teacher education program, as well as in a different state.

• This study was conducted at a two-year, community college. Generalizability could be hindered, as student experiences could be different, at a four year school with a different format or student culture. Students may be more sure of their major, and may be representative of a different demographic from that which was studied (new students, first generation college, living in one geographic region).

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of students in an introductory
education course who participated in an experiential learning in-field placement. It considered the effectiveness of integrating experiential learning early in a teacher education program (in the introductory course). The goals included providing additions to existing literature on the topic and improving practice within the field of teacher education. Upon reflection on the results of this study, it is clear that the early experiential learning opportunities provided critical opportunities for reflection and greater confidence and clarity moving forward in one’s educational plan. Findings of this study support consideration of the following recommendations for practice and for further research.

**Early experiential learning.** The results of this study support the need for experiential learning early in teacher education. Students reported greater clarity in decision making, increased awareness of what they need to do to become prepared, and more confidence to continue (or not) in teacher education. As reported throughout this study, most experiential learning in teacher education occurs at the end of training, during student teaching. At this point, it is essentially “too late” to change course, and many go into a profession for which they are not well suited. This lack of confidence and uncertainty in one’s role increases teacher attrition (Pappano, 2011). This study supports the findings of both Cibulka (2009) and Boe et al. (2007), who found that teacher candidates who had more experiential learning were more likely to demonstrate effective teaching methods, know how to teach, and apply theory to practice. Scheeler’s (2013) study further asserts that “real-life” learning through classroom in-field placements promote the mastery of critical teaching skills, where there is currently a gap between preparation and later application of skills. In other words, current research indicates that the “missing link” in teacher education is extensive practical experiential learning. This
study supports starting teacher education with an introductory course integrating an experiential learning component.

**More hands-on learning.** The literature reviewed indicates that teacher education students benefit from more hands-on, experiential learning. This study further supports this, and in some ways that were unexpected in an introductory course. Most participants felt more confident in their decision to continue in teacher education, but two felt more confident in their decision *not* to continue in teacher education. The experiential component of this course allowed them to see beyond what they thought it would be like to the realities and complexities of the classroom. The real-world influence was significant.

The results of this study indicate that the role of the mentor teacher had influence on participants’ overall experience. Due to logistics and availability, the mentor teachers are often randomly selected based on availability and class size. The college has little say regarding this partnership, and logistical decisions are typically based on convenience. Participants would likely benefit from clarity regarding their own role, what questions they can/should ask of the mentor teacher, and what to expect from the partnership. The cooperating schools and the college should work together to form a better partnership to benefit all involved. Mentor teachers should be given notification, as well as the support and time needed to have a college student observe their class. The college (and this would be my role), needs to clarify expectations as well, so as to make the arrangement work better for the cooperating teacher, the school and the college student.

Participants would benefit from better communication with the mentor teacher, as it would facilitate their consideration of real-world issues inherent in the modern classroom that they otherwise may not consider. Often, the mentor teacher and college student observer do not
have the time to engage in discussion. Having this opportunity would facilitate discussion about important classroom challenges and potential solutions. Yeo’s (1997) study indicated that pre-service teacher’s understanding of minority students, diversity, multiculturalism, and challenges inherent in urban schools are diminished by a lack of experiential learning, thereby reinforcing mainstream values and knowledge. Ferrara and Ferrara’s (2005) study further supports that education students immersed in classrooms better understand the role of parental involvement and developing collaborative community partners in learning. Cumberland County College is located in a community replete with social and economic challenges, so experiential opportunities facilitating “real-world” exploration and understanding would better prepare students and align with the service mission of the college. Further, there is the potential to strengthen education students’ ties to their community, which could lead to sustainable, long-term change.

**Multiple Opportunities.** This study indicated that the in-field placement in the participants’ introduction course gave greater clarity and confidence in their decisions regarding their future. In Cumberland County College, and reflective of national averages, retention rates are of great concern, as many students do not continue or complete their course of study and degree program. If teacher education students had the opportunity to engage in experiential learning throughout their program, they could explore other opportunities, choices, and preferences. Further, increased confidence and certainty could facilitate continuation and completion.

In a study of 22 restructured teacher education program, Honawar (2007) found that teachers educated through newly adapted programs which included a multi-pronged approach prioritizing experiential learning, were more effective than those who had not participated in
these programs. In some cases, these new teachers were more effective than veteran teachers. Andrea’s (2005) study found that teachers with increased field experience felt more confident and better prepared in meeting the diverse needs of students. Conversely, those who felt unprepared perpetuated an increasing number of teachers who were ineffective or who quit the profession after a few years. The participants in this study felt greater confidence, and if in-field placements were consistent throughout their education, they could increase this confidence and preparedness over time. It is recommended that experiential learning occur early and throughout teacher education.

**Empower-decision making.** As mentioned above, retention and completion are of great concern in college, particularly in the community college setting. In Cumberland County College, students are given an educational planning tool as well as recommendations to continually meet with advisors, but they often make critical decisions on their own, with mixed results. As an advisor and coordinator of both Education programs and Service Learning, I see many students who have taken unnecessary courses, spending valuable time and money on the wrong course of study for them. With increased experiential learning, students are empowered to use their own experience and reflection to make meaningful decisions. Further, they develop context for what the decision will mean in a real and pragmatic way.

The students who participated in this study came into the course with varying levels of certainty regarding continuing in teacher education, but left the course with much greater confidence regarding their intended education path in the future. While some strengthened their desire to become a teacher, others realized or confirmed that it is not a suitable profession for them. As Education Coordinator, I can and have implemented in-field placements into two of the three courses required at community college for education majors. On a greater scale, I
would further recommend that students have the opportunity to explore experiential learning in-field placements in each field of study. As Service Learning Coordinator, I can and will make it a priority to integrate an experiential-based component to all courses. While there is limited research, particularly longitudinal, regarding the role of experiential learning on retention and completion, this study provides useful insight regarding the importance of an experiential learning experience. If it can make students feel more prepared and confidence, there may be greater likelihood that they will find the right course of study for them and continue it to completion.

**Summary of recommendations for practice and future research.** In the above sections, recommendations were made based on the results of this study. The following recommendations were made: (1) provide early experiential learning opportunities, (2) facilitate more hands-on learning, (3) employ multiple in-field placements throughout teacher education, and, (4) empower decision-making through experiential learning fieldwork experiences. The next section summarizes the study and results.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to consider the experiences of education students in an introductory course who participated in an experiential learning in-field placement. A qualitative interview study design was used to consider the experiences of participants. Observation notes and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data regarding experiences and reflection about various facets of the in-field placement. Data were examined and coded, using initial and in-vivo coding in a two-cycle approach to capture participants’ own language and patterns (Saldana, 2013). This led to the second open, axial cycle of coding to provide structure and visual data to the initial codes.
Results of this study indicate that an experiential, in-field placement in an introductory course provides opportunities for introspection, reflection and progression for students. Specifically, students gained increased and diverse insight into their own coursework and learning, which sets an important foundation in a teacher education program. It facilitates building upon meaningful learning, which further supports the literature review that teachers who are not proficient in coursework and pedagogy are less effective in the classroom (Lowery et al., 2012, Scheeler, 2007; Smith et al., 2005). The “real-world” exploration inherent in the placement in-field placement provided opportunity to consider facets of teaching that new teacher education students might not otherwise encounter. Participants reflected upon teaching techniques, classroom discipline and motivation, school structure, and more. While these areas may have been discussed in their college course, actually experiencing them prompted greater reflectivity.

The reflectivity facilitated by the in-field placement also aided students in deciding whether or not to continue in teaching. In this study, five of six participants came into the course fairly confident they wanted to become teachers. After, one changed majors and felt confident in his new course of study. The other four felt more confident in continuing in teacher education. The participant who came into the course knowing she did not want to become a teacher felt even more confident in her decision after the in-field placement. While this early experiential learning opportunity provided clarity in continuing one’s educational path, multiple interventions throughout one’s course of study may yield even greater benefit. Potentially, it could provide deeper insight into coursework, illuminate possible career opportunities, and potentially increase retention and completion.
Participants had more confidence in their decision, and also experienced a shift in identity in reflecting upon their preparedness moving forward. While they felt more confident, they recognized that they needed a great deal more preparation and education to become a teacher. Still, all expressed greater clarity in what they needed to do to become prepared, offering suggestions and plans. Even the students who did not wish to continue in teacher education demonstrated a more coherent vision of how they would advance to their career of choice. The findings of this study indicate that guided reflection encourages students to think more meaningfully about what they want to do and how to get there. Determining their own suitability for their intended profession seemed to relieve some ambiguity and indecisiveness about the future, which is integral for retention, completion, and college success.

The role of the mentor had significant influence on the participants, but was the least defined. In the future, it is recommended that the mentor relationship and expectations be considered. While I would not suggest more responsibility or demands upon a volunteering teacher, I would recommend that students ask critical questions, seek feedback and explanations, and even evaluate strengths and weaknesses and how they would do things similarly and differently. When students considered challenges, they were increasingly empowered and confident regarding how they would handle things in their own classroom. This supported a shift in identity from student to eventual practicing professional for some.

**Personal Reflection**

My history with hands-on, experiential learning has been diverse and important in my evolving role as a professional. Fresh out of college, I started a career as a police detective in which I had no experience, and was immediately responsible, yet ill-equipped, to make life or death decisions. As my career evolved and my desire to be proactive grew, I chose a path for
which I was likely better suited: education. Again, I entered the profession with limited experiential learning, not prepared for the inherent challenges and decisions that would, in a different way, impact lives. Now, as coordinator of both Education and Service Learning, I find myself responsible for creating a pathway for young people to become effective educators. Based on my own personal experience, research, and the existing literature, I realize that a program that prioritizes experiential learning benefits not only education students, but also the children they someday will teach. It is an awesome privilege and responsibility.

The findings of this study support my earlier belief that experiential learning should occur early in a teacher education program. It does influence confidence and preparedness, in more diverse ways than I had originally realized. This study is particularly timely, as New Jersey changes teacher education, which now requires a 3.0 GPA, a five year teacher education program, higher Praxis scores, and more student teaching. I see students become overwhelmed and discouraged by these requirements. They are afraid to balance so many demands; and their initial reasoning for entering teacher education, “because I love kids”, suddenly seems insufficient. It is contingent upon me to illuminate a clear path to their goals, and this study supports doing so by empowering students to make decisions based on their own reflection and experience.

Finally, as a mother of two children, the experience of conducting this study has committed me to look beyond the curriculum and requirements of becoming a teacher, and to truly examine how best to create innovative and effective educators. Considering reflections of the participants of this study highlighted for me the obligation to ensure that one is suitable and confident in whatever path he or she chooses. As a result of this study, my roles as Coordinator of Education and Service Learning, of professor, and most importantly, as a mother, situate me in a position to
integrate my own reflection with theirs to empower young people to make important decisions to improve the future for all of us. I am humbled and honored by this responsibility, but certain that as a dedicated scholar-practitioner, I will be part of the sustainable and transformational change.

References


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Higher Education Journal, 8(8), 1-19.


APPENDIX A

UNSIGNED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Northeastern University, Department of Education**

**Name of Investigator(s):** Dr. Karen Harbeck, principal researcher; Kathleen Felice, Student Researcher

**Title of Project:** Improving What Works: Examining the Effectiveness of a Classroom Placement Intervention in an Introductory Education Course

**Request to Participate in Research**

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to improve teacher education.

**You must be at least 18 years old** to be in this research project.

The study will take place at your convenience, as it will be a telephone interview and will take about sixty minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to discuss and answer questions about your field experience in ED 101 Historical Foundations of Education and your teacher education experience.

**There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. Final Grades have been submitted.**

**There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study.** However, your answers may help us to learn more about teacher education.

**Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner.** Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

**The decision to participate in this research project is up to you.** You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

**You will not be paid for your participation in this study.**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Kathleen Felice (609) 377-0097 email- felice.k@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Karen Harbeck (781) 572-4628 email- k.harbeck@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

Kathleen Felice
APPENDIX B

For NU IRB use:

Date Received: _______10/23/15 reviewed 11/5/15____NU IRB No. CPS15-10-06

Review Category: __________________________ Approval Date ________________

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Before completing this application, please read the Application Instructions and Policies and Procedures for Human Research Protections to understand the responsibilities for which you are accountable as an investigator in conducting research with human participants. The document, Application Instructions, provides additional assistance in preparing this submission. Incomplete applications will be returned to the investigator. You may complete this application online and save it as a Word document.

If this research is related to a grant, contract proposal or dissertation, a copy of the full grant/contract proposal/dissertation must accompany this application.

Please carefully edit and proof read before submitting the application. Applications that are not filled out completely and/or have any missing or incorrect information will be returned to the Principal Investigator.
REQUIRED TRAINING FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Under the direction of the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Northeastern University is now requiring completion of the NIH Office of Extramural Research training for all human subject research, regardless of whether or not investigators have received funding to support their project.

The online course titled "Protecting Human Research Participants" can be accessed at the following url: [http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php](http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php). This requirement will be effective as of November 15, 2008 for all new protocols.

Principal Investigators, student researchers and key personnel (participants who contribute substantively to the scientific development or execution of a project) must include a copy of their certificate of completion for this web-based tutorial with the protocol submission.

☐ Certificate(s) Attached
☐ Certificate(s) submitted previously – on file with the NU's Office of Human Subject Research Protection

A. Investigator Information

Principal Investigator (PI cannot be a student) _____ Dr. Karen Harbeck

Investigator is: NU Faculty _____ X _____ NU Staff _______ Other _______

College: Choose an item. _____ Professional Studies

Department/Program Education (Ed.D. Doctorate Program)

Address _____ 20 BV

Office Phone _____ 781 572-4628 faculty _____ Email _____ k.harbeck@neu.edu

Is this student research? YES _____ X _____ NO ______ If yes, please provide the following information:

Student Name ___________ Kathleen Tumelty Felice _______ Anticipated graduation date 2015

Undergrad _____ MA/MS _____ PhD _____ AuD _____ EdD ____ X _____ DLP _____ Other Degree Type ____
B. Protocol Information

Title ______ Improving What Works: Examining the Effectiveness of a Classroom Placement Intervention in an Introductory Education Course

Projected # subjects ____ 6 ____

Approx. begin date of project 9/30/15       Approx. end date 12/30/15

It is the policy of Northeastern University that no activity involving human subjects be undertaken until those activities have been reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

• Anticipated funding source for project (or none) ______ n/a ________

Has/will this proposal been/be submitted through:

- NU's Office of Research Administration and Finance (RAF) no
- Provost no
- Corp & Foundations no
C.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will Participants Be:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Does the Project Involve:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (&lt;18)</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Blood Removal?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern University Students?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Investigational drug/device?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized persons?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Audiotapes/videotapes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prisoners?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitively Impaired Persons?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non or Limited English Speaking Persons?</td>
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<tr>
<td>People Living outside the USA?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnant Women/Fetuses?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other? (Please provide detail)</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please answer each of the following questions using non-technical language. Missing or incomplete answers will delay your review while we request the information.

D. What are the goals of this research? Please state your research question(s) and related hypotheses.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of students in an introductory course in education (ED 101 Historical Foundations of Education) who participate in an experiential learning intervention to examine how this experience shapes their confidence and preparedness continuing in their program, as well as potential implications for improving teacher training in the future.

The following questions guide the direction of this study:
Central Question. How do education students’ in-field experiences in an introductory education course influence his or her confidence and preparedness to continue in teacher education?

Subquestions. What experiences do participants relates as they reflect on the in-field placement? How do education students describe their early placement and observation in a classroom? How do education students’ reflections regarding their field-placement influence their learning experience and confidence to continue in the field of teaching?

E. Provide a brief summary of the purpose of the research in non-technical language.

This study explores the experiences of education students taking an introductory, Historical Foundations of Education course with an in-field placement component. Research indicates that teacher education programs with experiential learning through in-field placements benefit students in eventual practice in a variety of ways. Despite these indicators, teacher education programs vary a great deal in the actual use and timing of in-field placements, with most occurring at the end of teacher training, when students are too far into their intended field of study and path to change course. This study considers the experience of six students participating in an in-field placement in their initial education coursework. Their experiences will provide insight as to their overall experience in teacher education, with potential implications for teacher education programs.

F. Identify study personnel on this project. Include name, credentials, role, and organization affiliation.

The principal investigator would be NEU advisor for EdD students, Dr. Karen Harbeck; Northeastern University Faculty located in Northeastern University College of Continuing Studies.

The Student Researcher would be Kathleen Tumelty Felice, NEU College of Professional Studies Doctoral student, and coordinator/professor of Elementary and Secondary Education at Cumberland County College in Vineland, New Jersey.

A professional transcriptionist may be used (not yet determined). Each time interview transcription is mentioned in this study, the possibility of using a professional transcriptionist is
also mentioned. If used, this person would be asked to sign a “Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study” Form. The name of this transcriptionist or service will be provided to Northeastern IRB before any recordings are shared.

G. Identify other organizations or institutions that are involved. Attach current Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals or letters of permission as necessary.

Student participants would be from Cumberland County College, a two-year community college in Vineland, New Jersey.

H. Recruitment Procedures

Describe the participants you intend to recruit. Provide all inclusion and exclusion criteria. Include age range, number of subjects, gender, ethnicity/race, socio-economic level, literacy level and health (as applicable) and reasons for exempting any groups. Describe how/when/by whom inclusion/exclusion criteria will be determined.

The participants are students from Cumberland County College who are enrolled in an introductory education course, Historical Foundations of Education. The age range of these students vary, although most are first-year college students. Many are in their late teens to early twenties, but there are many returning students that provide a more diverse age range. This is also reflected in other demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and literacy level and health. While the college is located in a low SES area with a diverse racial and ethnic population and with predominantly first-generation college students, this does not necessarily represent the sample to be selected for this case study, as they will be included based on their enrollment in this course, which will necessitate their placement in a local classroom as part of the course requirements and assessment.
Describe the procedures that you will use to recruit these participants. Be specific. How will potential subjects be identified? Who will ask for participation? If you intend to recruit using letters, posters, fliers, ads, website, email etc., copies must be included as attachments for stamped approval. Include scripts for intended telephone recruitment.

Subjects will be identified by their enrollment in the introductory course, and by their placement in the in-field placement requirement and consent to participate in the study. After final grades have been submitted for the course, students will be emailed asking for volunteers to participate in interviews. Form attached. There will be NO mention of interviews during the class time. The email will be the first notice any student has that interviews will be scheduled.

What remuneration, if any, is offered?

No remuneration will be offered.

I. Consent Process

Describe the process of obtaining informed consent*. Be specific. How will the project and the participants’ role be presented to potential participants? By whom? When? Where? Having the participant read and sign a consent statement is done only after the researcher provides a detailed oral explanation and answers all questions. Please attach a copy of informed consent statements that you intend to use, if applicable. Click here for consent form templates.
If your study population includes non-English speaking people, translations of consent information are necessary. Describe how information will be translated and by whom. You may wait until the consent is approved in English before having it translated.

Informed consent will be obtained via a comprehensive unwritten consent form, which will explain that as part of the in-field placement, their consent would indicate their willingness to participate in an interview conducted after the placement and course ends by this researcher, which will have no impact upon their grade (which will already be submitted) and will not be shared with their cooperating teacher (at the placement site). They will be advised that their responses are for research purposes only, will be anonymous and their identifying information carefully respected and later destroyed, and are contingent upon their continued comfort with the interviewer and consent to participate. They will be advised verbally that their participation is voluntary and for the purposes of research. Further, they would be apprised of the research goals and purposes. This will be done at the beginning of the telephone interview and the telephone interview will only be conducted if informed consent is provided via the submitted unwritten consent form.

If your population includes children, prisoners, people with limited mental capacity, language barriers, problems with reading or understanding, or other issues that may make them vulnerable or limit their ability to understand and provide consent, describe special procedures that you will institute to obtain consent appropriately. If participants are potentially decisionally impaired, how will you determine competency?

N/A
*If incomplete disclosure during the initial consent process is essential to carrying out the proposed research, please provide a detailed description of the debriefing process. Be specific. When will full disclosure of the research goals be presented to subjects (e.g., immediately after the subject has completed the research task(s) or held off until the completion of the study’s data collection)? By whom? Please attach a copy of the written debriefing statement that will be given to subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J. Study Procedures</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a detailed description of all activities the participant will be asked to do and what will be done to the participants. Include the location, number of sessions, time for each session, and total time period anticipated for each participant, including long term follow up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants will be part of an experiential learning intervention (a ten hour observation) as part of their ED 101 Historical Foundations of Education course. All students are aware of this component of the course, which is included in their syllabus and reflected in their assignments. Further, they hand in field notes taken during their observation. This is part of the course, and helps to inform teacher education at Cumberland County College. After the placement (after grades are submitted and students have completed but are no longer enrolled in the course), approximately six students will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded with the consent of the participant, and he or she will be aware of the starting and stopping of the recording. The interviews will occur on the telephone, at the convenience of the participant, and upon first
obtaining consent via the submitted unwritten consent form. The interviews will be scheduled at the participants’ convenience (regarding time of day, etc.). This would be explained to the participant in advance.

Who will conduct the experimental procedures, questionnaires, etc? Where will this be done? Attach copies of all questionnaires, interview questions, tests, survey instruments, links to online surveys, etc.

The interviews would be conducted by Kathleen Felice, on the telephone, upon obtaining consent of the participant. Interview questions are attached.

K. Risks

Identify possible risks to the participant as a result of the research. Consider possible psychological harm, loss of confidentiality, financial, social, or legal damages as well as physical risks. What is the seriousness of these risks and what is the likelihood that they may occur?

Appropriate measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality (see Section L: Confidentiality). Other than ensuring participants’ comfort through confidentiality, there are no other projected risks associated with participating in this study. Careful measures will be taken to ensure that they know participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.
Describe in detail the safeguards that will be implemented to minimize risks. What follow-up procedures are in place if harm occurs? What special precautions will be instituted for vulnerable populations?

The efforts made to avoid risk will be in ensuring confidentiality, by using pseudonyms and by maintaining data (only available to principal investigator and this researcher) in a stored and locked facility. Further, participants will be advised that they are free to decline to answer any questions they choose, and to withdraw from the study at any time. They will be provided this information verbally at the beginning of the telephone interview, using the attached non-written consent form.

L. Confidentiality

Describe in detail the procedures that will be used to maintain anonymity or confidentiality during collection and entry of data. Who will have access to data? How will the data be used, now and in the future?

Each of the interviewees will be given a pseudonym on transcripts to assure anonymity. The transcripts will be kept in a locked drawer in the investigator’s office, to which no one else has access. Only Dr. Harbeck (advisor) and Kathleen Felice (student investigator) will have access to these documents. If it is necessary for an expert to review data for triangulation purposes or cross-checks, all data will be maintained by Kathleen Felice, and will be anonymous. If verification of their own answers is needed, student participants would be able to read only their own responses and transcripts. Finally, the data will be maintained in a stored and locked location throughout the research, and for a period of three years after it ends.

The data obtained will be used for the Student Researcher’s doctoral thesis project, and potentially could contribute to future journal articles, presentations, or research. If this were to occur, confidentiality would still be maintained carefully for all participants. All confidentiality efforts will be shared both verbally prior to the interview process.
How and where will data be stored? When will data, including audiotapes and videotapes, be destroyed? If data is to be retained, explain why. Will identifiers or links to identification be destroyed? When? Signed consent documents must be retained for 3 years following the end of the study. Where and how will they be maintained?

The data will be stored in a locked storage drawer that is not used for any other purpose. The data will be maintained for a period of three years, and then destroyed. The signed documents will be stored separately (in a locked storage container) to assure confidentiality. These documents will only be accessible to the Principal Investigator and Student Researcher.

Electronic recordings and saved data will be stored on an encrypted, password protected USB flash drive and personal hard drive storage account. These files would be encrypted and password protected, and only accessible to the student researcher. Interviews will either be transcribed personally by the student researcher, and if an outside professional transcriptionist is used, he or she would sign a “Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study” (Appendix A). At the completion of the study, documents will be maintained in a locked storage drawer in the office of the student researcher, which is not accessible to anyone else and is only accessed with a key. After three years, the information will be destroyed.

M. If your research is HIPAA-protected, please complete the following;
Individual Access to PHI
Describe the procedure that will be used for allowing individuals to access their PHI or, alternatively, advising them that they must wait until the end of the study to review their PHI.

N/A

N. Benefits

What benefits can the participant reasonably expect from his/her involvement in the research? If none, state that. What are potential benefits to others?

None to the participant. To others, the results of this study could impact the teacher education program at Cumberland County College, as the incorporation of experiential learning may occur contingent upon study results.

O. Attachments

Identify attachments that have been included and those that are not applicable (n/a).

- Copy of fliers, ads, posters, emails, web pages, letters for recruitment *
- Scripts of intended telephone conversations*
- Copies of IRB approvals or letters of permission from other sites
- Apx A: Informed Consent Form(s)* (see our templates for examples)
- Debriefing Statement*
- ApxB: Copies of all instruments, surveys, focus group or interview questions, tests, etc.
- Signed Assurance of Principal Investigator Form (required)
- NIH Human Subject Training Certificate(s) (required if not already on file at HSRP)
Transcriber Confidentiality Statement in a Research Study

*(Approved forms must be stamped by the IRB before use)*

P. Health Care Provision During Study

Please check the applicable line:

___x___ I have read the description of HIPAA “health care” within Section 4 of the Policies & Procedures for Human Research Protection. I am not a HIPAA-covered health care provider and no health care will be provided in connection with this study.

_____ I am a HIPAA-covered health care provider or I will provide health care in connection with this study as described in Section 4 of the Policies & Procedures for Human Research Protection. This health care is described above under “Study Procedures,” and the Informed Consent and Health Information Use and Disclosure Authorization form will be used with all prospective study participants.

If you have any questions about whether you are a HIPAA-covered health care provider, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection at n.regina@neu.edu or (617) 373-4588.

Completed applications should be submitted to Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection with the exception of applications from faculty and students of the College of Professional Studies, which should be submitted to Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator for CPS.

Nan C. Regina, Director
Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection
360 Huntington Ave., Mailstop: 960 Renaissance Park
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Phone: 617.373.4588; Fax: 617.373.4595
n.regina@neu.edu

CPS applications only
Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator
Northeastern Univ., College of Professional Studies
Phone: 617.390.3450; k.skophammer@neu.edu

The application and accompanying materials may be sent as email attachments or in hard copy. A signed Assurance of Principal Investigator Form may be sent as
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Dear [Click here and type Participant's Name]:

As a doctoral student at Northeastern University working on my thesis research, I am writing to let you know that a research study is being planned that may be of interest to you. It is possible that you may be eligible to participate in this study. This study will examine the experiences of students in teacher education.

Please be aware that, even if you are eligible, your participation in this or any research study is completely voluntary. All final grades have been submitted to the college, which means there are no consequences for you if you decide not to volunteer for the study. There will be no consequences to you whatever if you choose not to participate. If you do choose to participate, the study will involve one phone interview regarding your experiences in your field placement in ED 101. We will have a phone conversation at your convenience, which will be recorded for research purposes only and will be kept confidential. This will be explained at the beginning of the phone conversation, and the interview will only occur upon your consent. If you wish to
participate in this study, you can respond to the email only if you do. Further, I will only contact you at this time regarding this, and at no other time.

If you have any questions, or would like to volunteer for this study, please email me at my student email address, felice.k@husky.neu.edu. This will be the only time I reach out to you regarding this study. If you do not contact me, I will assume that you do not wish to participate and will respect that decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kate Felice
EdD Student
Northeastern University
Appendix D

Interview Questions

Background Questions

Initial Questions (background):

How long have you been a student at CCC? Age?

Why did you choose an Education course?

Why do you wish to become a teacher?

What experiences have influenced your decision to choose to become a teacher?

How do you feel about continuing in teacher education?

How do you feel about becoming a teacher?

POST-Intervention Questions

1. Tell me an/some example(s) of events that occurred in your observation classroom (intervention)? Concrete Experience (1) How did you feel about this/these?
2. How did this event(s) shape your learning and experience continuing in education (becoming a teacher)? *Observation and Reflection (2)*

3. What does this mean to you as a future teacher? *Forming Abstract Concepts (3)*

4. How would you respond as an intentional and professional teacher if it were your classroom? *Testing New Situations (4)*

5. How do you feel about continuing in teacher education? About becoming a teacher?