BRIDGING GAPS IN 21ST CENTURY TEACHER TRAINING

A thesis presented by
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Abstract

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis presents how student teachers experience teacher training in the 21st century. Through semi-structured interviews, this investigation explored the lived experiences of five undergraduate students undergoing secondary education teacher training in order to answer three research questions: How do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)? How do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums, and what learning experiences did they have during their internships that best prepared them to teach? How do student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from coursework to classroom? Findings indicate that teacher training programs can better support interns’ professional identity formation by leveraging their feelings of accountability for their pupils, increasing opportunities for them to practice teaching during pre-practicum observation hours, and nurturing the reciprocal learning they experience with both their mentor teachers and the other professionals in their site schools. Implications for teacher training program reform include aligning practicum start to secondary school schedules, increasing opportunities for practice during observation hours, formalizing reciprocal learning between veteran and student teachers, establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of university and placement school personnel, extending the seminar course to a full year, and integrating theory, practice, and discipline-specific content and habits of mind. With these reforms, we can bridge the gaps that exist in 21st century teacher education so that novice educators are better prepared to educate a diverse student population.
**Keywords**: secondary education; teacher training; student teaching; practicum; Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis; professional identities; observation hours; reciprocal learning; veteran teachers; collaborative opportunities; Professional Learning Communities; placement school; internships.
DEDICATION

For my husband,

Jeff Cormier,

whose love, friendship, strength, and support

inspire me daily.

Thank you for always believing in me,

and for sharing with me a love that is unconditional

and eternal.

For my children,

Seth Daniel Clemmer, Bliss Auburn Clemmer,

Chelsea Rae Clemmer, and Katelyn Mae Cormier.

You are symbols of all that is beautiful, true, and good in this world.

To my mother,

Barbara Jean Andrade Guerard.

I honor your memory.

We will be together again one day. In this, I have faith and find courage….
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Cheers!
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Bridging Gaps in 21st Century Teacher Training

Chapter 1

In the 21st century standards-driven educational landscape, teaching has become increasingly more complex. Teachers’ roles in student lives are expanding; external change agents have implemented national standards, assessments, and public accountability; and more demanding higher-order thinking concepts have been embedded into ever-changing curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Add to this the increased diversity of student populations who need educators to help them meet these higher standards and attain new literacies, and you have the educational canvas of the 21st century. Not only does this complex educational climate place increased challenges on veteran teachers, it also makes learning to teach more difficult than ever.

Background of the Problem

Educator training programs must prepare teachers to conduct the increasingly demanding work of their profession in the changing world of the 21st century, and to manage the unpredictable problems that arise due to the changing roles they play in students’ lives (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teachers must be trained to prepare students for more complex learning, yet only one third of secondary educator preparation programs nationwide “are preparing candidates in content at the level necessary to teach the new Common Core State Standards now being implemented in classrooms in 45 states and the District of Columbia” (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2013, p. 2). Teachers need a strong knowledge base in content, pedagogy, technology, and differentiated instruction in order to reach diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Yet, in the wake of these and many other changes in education, the methods by which we train aspiring teachers have remained constant. As we look to a future that moves beyond the test-driven No Child Left Behind (NCLB) age into uncharted Every Child Achieves Act, ECAA,
territory and its focus on resource-equity (Walker, 2015), we must consider that the greatest resources we can provide for our students are their teachers, and teacher training should be at the forefront of educational reform and improvement.

The Educational Climate of the 21st Century

Bouwma-Gearhart (2010) determined that training programs should account for the obstacles that interns may encounter in contemporary classrooms and aid them in developing "pedagogical savvy" (p. 38) to meet those challenges. The practices and skills they need to develop include concerted academic study of the driving forces behind educational movements, the lived experiences that play out at the local level, and research-confirmed best practices (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2000). The following is a discussion of how the shifting role of the teacher, external change agents, changing student populations, and new literacies have shaped 21st century education and have made teaching and learning to teach increasingly more complex.

Changing role of the teacher. Those in the profession understand that teaching is not easy. Learning how to best address unique learning styles while creating rich classroom environments where students feel safe and respected are foundational challenges that teachers have faced long before 1938, when John Dewey wrote about teachers having to adapt the curriculum to meet the population they had in front of them. However, the role of the 21st century teacher has evolved—they have become counselors, coaches, mentors, mandated reporters, and more (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Current accreditation standards for secondary schools in Massachusetts call for more student-teacher interaction outside of the classroom and beyond the prescribed curriculum; therefore, teachers are required to provide counseling, advising, and guidance to address the needs of their students (NEASC, 2014). In addition,
Massachusetts law stipulates that teachers are mandated reporters (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013), meaning they are personally culpable for students’ safety in and outside of their classrooms. These complex demands reach far beyond content and pedagogical training, and teacher education programs must prepare teachers to meet these increased challenges.

**External change agents.** Education reform has contributed to the increasing challenges that those in the teaching profession must face. The Common Core State Standards as well as high-stakes standardized assessments such as MCAS, SATs, and AP exams, hold individual students, teachers, and districts publically accountable for student performance; veteran teacher evaluations have been restructured; and new initiatives such as District Determined Measures (DDMs) further increase the demands placed on teachers and link performance reviews to employment longevity (BESE, 2012). The influx of technology and social media, and the fact that, “information has been globalized, digitized, and sped up to move at the speed of thought” (Morrell, 2012) has also changed the manner in which we educate students; therefore, teachers need diverse skills in order to meet these varied demands.

**Changing student populations.** Another 21st century challenge to both veteran and novice teachers is that student populations are becoming increasingly more diverse. Demographic changes create student populations that are culturally and linguistically varied, and students are entering classrooms at multiple ability levels (Rueda & Stillman, 2012). Inclusion classes and an influx of English Language Learners (ELLs) require teachers to diversify instruction to meet the demands of a variety of learning styles (Dee, 2011).

In addition, high school students are becoming more open and more vocal about issues of sexuality and gender identity, especially those students who view themselves through multiple
social identities, including culture, religion, and race (Banks, 2007). Social justice issues add to the complex challenges that teachers encounter on a daily basis (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Jupp and Slattery (2010) encouraged teachers to ponder their personal and cultural backgrounds as they work with increasingly diverse student populations in order to promote individual achievement, especially when students hail from different cultural backgrounds than themselves. Teachers must relate to and connect across these various identities when building relationships with their students (Banks, 2007). Also, they must learn to benefit from and embrace students’ differences rather than tolerating or managing them (Hooks, 1994). Veteran and novice teachers alike must learn the appropriate skills they need to reach the increasingly diverse student populations that inhabit 21st century classrooms.

**New literacies.** Teachers are preparing students for demands of a new world, one where they will need different literacies than did generations past. Our pupils need the skills necessary to continue to be learners and to access volumes of new information; they need to understand, manipulate, and communicate information through technology; and they need to collaborate with colleagues at local, state, national, and global levels (Morrell, 2012). Thus, we need to prepare educators to utilize education-specific technology and to use that technology to teach these new skills to their future students.

**Current Two-phase Teacher Training Program Structure**

Secondary educator training in Massachusetts is comprised of two distinct phases. The first phase is the undergraduate experience, during which aspiring teachers take courses to learn pedagogy and content surrounding teaching and learning. Many of these classes are unrelated to the work they will do later in their own classrooms as they are based on theoretical situations and hypothetical curriculum rather than on practical application (Darling-Hammond, 2006).
**Observations.** One requirement of undergraduate pedagogy, or methods courses, is that students log a number of hours performing classroom observations in various secondary schools, usually during the fall semester of the senior year of their undergraduate program. Researchers differ on how observations should be structured, including the number and length of time that observations are conducted as well as how much, if any, actual teaching will take place during those observation hours (Southgate, Reynolds, & Howley, 2012).

**The Practicum.** During the subsequent semester (usually the spring term of their final year as undergraduates), student teachers are assigned to a host school for an entire semester while they teach under the guidance of a Supervising Practitioner. Student teaching placements are usually randomly assigned, are not necessarily linked to prior observation hours and/or the school in which the interns performed those hours, and do not always require screening or training of the mentor (veteran teacher) under whose tutelage the practice teacher will work.

Once placed in a host school, student teachers begin by logging more observation hours, usually performed in the mentor teacher’s classroom prior to interns gradually assuming teaching responsibilities. While curriculum is certainly a focus, student teachers must also learn the routines and protocols of the new setting: ascertaining the bell schedule and building layout; establishing classroom expectations and management routines; making acquaintance with Guidance, Special Education, and other support personnel; and becoming familiar with students’ individual needs, skill sets, and in some cases, learning disabilities. They begin the practicum lacking knowledge of the placement school’s (and its district’s) mission and expectations for student learning, grade-level curriculum, school-specific standardized assessments, school wide rubrics, and resources for learning. In addition, in most Massachusetts teacher preparation programs, students complete the practicum while concurrently taking a seminar course in the
evening through the university. There, they are required to submit homework, write journal entries about their experiences, and create lesson plans, all while developing unit and lesson plans that they are actually using while student teaching, rather than ahead of time with foresight and guidance (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Transitioning.** This study examined student teachers’ experiences with one program’s two-phase model of teacher preparation. The focus was on how participants experienced the transition from their undergraduate coursework to their first experiences teaching during internships in order to better understand the connection between the two stages of the teacher training process, and to offer support to interns undergoing this process.

**The gap between the two phases of training.** The problem that exists within this two-phase model is that there is no connection between the coursework/observation phase of training and the internship, and this disconnect results in crops of new teachers launched into their first experiences in front of their new pupils ill-prepared for the work they have to do. In order to prepare competent and highly qualified educators to meet the unique challenges of 21st century education, reform is needed to tighten the connection between these two phases of learning.

**Bridging the gap.** As a means of bridging this gap between the coursework and internship phases of training, interns must have more opportunities to begin lesson planning and other curricular work during the undergraduate phase (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This would foster greater coherence between coursework and practice teaching, and new teachers would have more time to focus on learning the role of teacher and formulating their own professional identities (Shultz & Ravitch, 2013) during the internship phase of the student teaching process.

**Strengths in teacher training.** “We have learned a great deal about how to create stronger, more effective teacher education programs” (Darling-Hammond, 2006). While this
study was built on the assumption that reforms to educator training are needed to comply with the increased demands placed on secondary educators in Massachusetts, it also identified strengths in the current structure. This research study explored the lived experiences of novice educators in order to understand what they identified to be the most effective skills they learned in their training, as well as to determine what they tell us about gaps in their training in order to promote improvements in the process of learning to teach.

**Statement of the Problem**

The increased challenges of 21st century, standards-based secondary school education (CAEP, 2013), call for matching revisions to educator training programs. Learning to teach at the secondary level is becoming more challenging, and there exists an increasingly wider gap between what a novice teacher learns during their undergraduate program and what they experience once they begin student teaching. Interns transition from being undergraduate students themselves to being educators-in-training without ample time and support to adequately perform observations, practice teaching, peruse curriculum, and begin fostering relationships in the secondary facility in which they are assigned to practice teach (Darling-Hammond, 2006). It is no longer sufficient to learn content and pedagogical skills in the separate and distinct world of academia and then enter the classroom and attempt to become a teacher in a practice-makes-perfect model—there are too many facets to teaching that are not being adequately addressed through this existing process (NCTQ, 2013).

The current training model does not foster or promote student teachers’ understanding of the school-specific curriculum and standardized assessments, school wide mission and expectations, departmental standards, and District Determined Measures (DDMs) of the secondary institution in which they will begin teaching (BESE, 2012). Therefore, during the
practicum, they must juggle learning the protocols of the host school while writing unit and lesson plans and teaching for the first time in their own classrooms. According to the National Council of Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (2013), beginning teaching is “the equivalent of fraternity hazing” due to its premise of “on-the-job’ training of novice teachers” (p. 4). Freese (2006) demonstrated that there is a vast range of emotions that interns face as they begin teaching and argued that understanding and supporting interns as they experience these feelings will improve teacher preparation programs. This study sought to explore how teacher training programs might improve if we were to allow more time for curriculum planning and increase time in the classroom practicing the art of teaching during the undergraduate phase of teacher training.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis research study was to understand how student teachers experience the process of learning to teach in a contemporary, standards-based classroom. In particular, this study focused on what interns reported about transitioning from the undergraduate to the internship phases of teacher training. An in-depth exploration from the student teachers’ vantage provided an untapped perspective of the strengths and limitations of the process they were undergoing. Hearing their voices as they experienced this transition firsthand may help us to further foster program strengths, inspire recommendations for program reform, and highlight areas for further research on secondary education teacher preparation programs in Massachusetts.

**Audience**

While the size and scope of this project was limited and the implications were intended to inform a particular context, I present findings in such a way that others might find what I learned transferable to other contexts (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). The information
presented in this study may be useful to aspiring teachers, university personnel working in educator licensure programs, faculty supervisors, mentor teachers, administrators, and others involved in the training of new teachers. It may be used to inform university-level decision-making regarding undergraduate education programs and practicum experiences, as well as secondary-level decision making and protocol establishment within institutions that act as host schools. The study may also be of interest to parents and community members whose children are learning in student-teachers’ classrooms, and it may be useful to novice teachers who have begun their own journeys in education, and who would benefit from hearing the voices of others who report on similar experiences learning to teach in their own classrooms for the first time.

Context

Over the past five decades, there has been increased attention to teacher quality and accountability. At the same time, there is increased understanding of how pupils learn, and what diverse student populations will ultimately need to know and be able to do once they graduate from Massachusetts schools (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). This research sought to identify the elements of teacher training that interns experienced in one teacher training program and to make recommendations for program reforms based on what they identified as strengths and gaps in their training. This study set out to understand how aspiring teachers described transitioning from their undergraduate programs to their practice teaching internships to determine what elements of the program they found to be most beneficial in preparing them to teach, and where they thought that the process did not offer them adequate support and/or enough preparation.

Justification for the Research Problem

The significance of this problem is that while veteran teachers are educating their pupils, they are concurrently learning the tools and skills essential to handling the complex demands
placed upon them in 21st century classrooms, and teacher training programs must begin preparing
student teachers to meet these challenges before they enter their own classrooms for the first
time. The learn-by-doing or “hazing” (NCTQ, 2013, p. 4) model in teacher training is
antiquated, and continuing to train teachers in this manner is doing them a disservice. Factors
that require more from our educators include changes to the scope and job description of
secondary school teachers, the standards movement and its impact on curriculum and
assessment, and changes in overall contemporary student populations. Recently, NCTQ (2013)
determined that pupils taught by novice teachers face achievement gaps. The significance of this
research lies in the fact that programs need to ensure that quality teachers are in front of our
students at all times. There can be no gaps in pupil learning while interns practice teaching.

Program reform is needed to adequately prepare teachers to meet the increased challenges
found in 21st century education (Lampert & Ball, 1999; Freese, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006).
The first indicators that reforms were needed occurred in 1996 when the National Commission
on Teaching and America’s Future concluded that teacher training programs were not
restructuring of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and the 2004 No Child Left Behind Act,
(NCLB), mandated that states implement teacher qualification requirements to licensure
programs, including state licensure examinations (D’Agostino and Powers, 2008).

Since then, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, BESE,
implemented the Common Core State Standards, CCSS, which call for an increase in the amount
of non-fiction texts students read and for higher-order thinking and writing skills to be “pushed
down” into the curriculum at younger grade levels (BESE, 2013). In addition, the national
government is raising the stakes for student learning at the same time that the supply and
retention of highly qualified teachers is in question (NCTAF, 2003; Sandoval-Lucero, Shanklin, Sobel, Townsend, Davis & Kalisher, 2007). And with the passing of the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), we enter new territory in education reform with a greater focus on implementing and funding equitable resources (Walker, 2015).

These and other internal and external pressures place a unique set of demands on today’s educators, and the methods by which we train teachers must align with these changes in order to prepare teachers to meet these challenges. It is no longer sufficient to learn content and pedagogical skills without connecting that coursework to the real-world, high school setting in which student teachers will soon be placed. The model is outdated—the new educational climate of the 21st century calls for better methods to equip teachers to perform successfully in Massachusetts’s ever-changing classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Although many studies have been conducted on teacher training, few have highlighted the voices of interns as they first learn to teach in contemporary classrooms. Research has demonstrated that teachers who are trained in pedagogical knowledge and who are able to bring their students to higher order thinking and problem solving skills are rated higher and more effective than those without such preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, these studies have focused on performance outcomes rather than attempts to understand how student teachers make sense of learning these new skills.

Newton, Poon, Nunes, and Stone (2013) stipulated that better teacher training would result in improved pupil learning and found that current research was limited in its focus on which programs are more effective rather than questioning *what features* make a program effective. Again, they focused on training programs rather than on how student teachers
experience the training that those programs provide. Further research is needed from the perspective of the interns themselves in order to determine what exactly constitutes “better” in teacher training and how we go about making sure “better” is happening in classrooms.

Newton, Poon, Nunes, and Stone (2013) and George (2011) combine to indicate that by identifying essential elements in the training process and expounding upon them, the quality of teacher training will improve. The NCTQ (2013) found that preparation programs are not delivering new teachers with needed skills, forcing districts that hire new teachers to spend money on professional development to support them. Yet, as far as I can see in the evidence, researchers have not thoroughly explored student teachers' motivations, considerations, and experiences in the first months they are teaching their own students (Dee, 2011).

Further inquiry into student teachers’ experiences in this study has yielded information about what they report to be the necessary or missing skills they did/did not experience in their training. More research is needed to understand the experiences of interns who are learning to teach for the first time in order to pinpoint exactly what they report are the essential elements of training and how training programs can leverage these strengths to improve (Reusser, Butler, Symonds, Vetter, & Wall, 2007; Brabeck & Dennis, 2003; Rust, 2010).

In addition, Darling-Hammond (2000) demonstrated a need for tighter integration between coursework and clinical practice and determined that traditional program models focus primarily on theoretical coursework that is unrelated to internships. More research is needed on the connections or gaps that interns experience between coursework and curriculum and between pedagogy and content; in particular more research is needed on what interns report about the transition from being pupils to becoming teachers, and how best to support them as they make this complex transition.
Positionality Statement

I arrived at this particular area of inquiry because I have been in education for over twenty years in many different roles, beginning as a student, and then entering my career as a student teacher and moving forward through teaching and chairing a department to my current position as an administrator. Thus, my perspective on this problem is multifaceted. Growing up attending suburban schools as a white, middle class student, I found that my early educational experiences adequately prepared me for my profession.

However, in the past four decades, I have witnessed myriad changes in the job description of “teacher,” as the educational landscape and student diversity have changed dramatically. I have worked with a number of student teachers throughout the years, and in my current position, I work with teachers across all disciplines (including vocational educators) who possess a range of experience, from first year educators to those preparing for retirement. Learning to teach has never been easy, but today more than ever the challenges have increased exponentially. My background has allowed me to explore how a group of contemporary student teachers faced these challenges, and more importantly, to gain understanding from their stories what it was like learning to teach in today’s dynamic educational climate.

Background as a former student teacher. I entered this research from the perspective of once being a student teacher, albeit many years ago, and this perspective is the foundation of my understanding of the practicum experience. I recall feeling overwhelmed on a daily basis. I was not prepared for the sheer volumes of paperwork I would be facing, let alone the complexity of establishing my own “teacher persona” in the classroom while planning lessons and assessments, correcting papers, and learning building protocols such as which hallway passes to use for which student activities, how to take and send attendance, who to see in Special
Education (and how to work with paraprofessionals in the room)...the list—and the learning curve—was endless. I was fortunate to have had two exceptional mentor teachers, and their guidance had a positive impact on me when I was learning to teach. In fact, we remain in contact all these years later and I was able to celebrate with one of them on the day of her retirement. My experiences were extremely fruitful. I brought to this research project a first-hand knowledge of the difficulties that new teachers face, as well as an understanding of the profoundly important role that supervising practitioners have on interns (Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010).

**Background as an educator and mentor.** I have eighteen years of experience as an English teacher in a central Massachusetts high school. During my career as an educator, I have mentored many student teachers, and I have witnessed—without exception—their struggles in meeting the unexpected challenges they faced when first learning to teach. During the typical practicum, I worked with a student teacher for an entire semester and he/she taught under my guidance during that period of time. Interns wrote curriculum and lesson plans while they learned classroom management and other pedagogical skills. They were forced to jump right into the difficult world of teaching, and they were not prepared for its complexity.

This system was frustrating for me when I was a Supervising Practitioner under whose license aspiring teachers practiced in the classroom. I found interns to be unfamiliar with the departmental standards and protocols for which I was responsible to adhere. I believe that I was a passionate and effective teacher, my students’ standardized test scores were consistently excellent, and I fear that it may have been a disservice to my students to have had them taught by a novice during the practicum period. I see a need for change based on this understanding.
Background as a department chair. For several years, I was an English Department Chair. I had the responsibility of overseeing teaching and instruction, and monitoring how all facets of the curriculum were addressed. I was ultimately called to task if our students’ standardized test scores were not at or above par, and these included MCAS, SAT, AP, even PSAT scores. Add to that the insurgence of the Common Core Standards, which changed the types of skills students were required to develop. Further complicating this work were mandates for District Determined Measures (DDMs), which required teachers to pre- and post-test students and linked students’ scores to teacher evaluations. Pedagogy alone occupies much of the novice teacher’s time and energy. From my perspective, replacing a master teacher with someone learning on the job is an outdated model. I found that not only were student teachers inadequately prepared to face these challenges when they took over my classroom, the difficulties were exponentially increased when they worked as interns under members of my department.

Ultimately, all of these factors influenced how our high school students were learning. Supporting this claim is Carlton-Parsons’ (2008) determination that all interactions within institutions surrounding pupils influence how they grow and access knowledge. Based on this understanding through experience, I see that teacher training program changes are needed to ensure that pupils are best supported in their learning while they are being taught by interns.

Background as an administrator. I have recently entered administration as a Curriculum Coordinator, and for the first time in my three-decade stint in education, I find myself in a vocational technical high school. In that role, I evaluate teachers, and that brings me in and out of classrooms on a regular basis and in multiple disciplines, including vocational shops and related theory classrooms. This is a new and multi-tiered perspective on education—
the vocational component as viewed through an administration lens. But at the end of the day, teaching is teaching—and the vocational educator faces the same struggles as the academic teacher. When learning to teach, there is too much going on at one time. We are still requiring teachers to learn-as-they-go, and while some aspects of that are essential to professional improvement, much of this work could be supported—even nurtured—during the early stages of learning to teach, when novices have mentors and supervisors to whom they can go for support.

**Positionality summary.** Briscoe (2005) determined that the researcher is less likely to be trusted when not part of the group. My experiences certainly made me relatable to novice teachers participating in this study, and my background undeniably shaped my perception of the world, my research, and my ability to process the information gleaned from this research. In every capacity, I have seen more of the same—we need to do a better job preparing teachers for the challenges they are facing in today’s classrooms.

There is much I have learned from my interactions with the participants in this study. Current student teachers face challenges that teachers of my generation did not face when we were starting out, making the perspectives of current interns invaluable to the reform process.

**Research Questions**

According to Creswell (2013), the central research question is the overarching question to be explored in the research, and it should be open-ended in order to allow participants to respond based on their own perspectives. Using a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis approach for this study yielded rich and nuanced data rather than quantifiable data regarding the student teacher participants’ life world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Their stories about the transition from pupil to teacher will help us to understand what it is like to teach in contemporary classrooms, which may inform program change and improvement. The following research
questions sought to understand student teachers’ first experiences in learning to teach in order to determine what they found to be the most effective elements, as well as the missing elements or areas in need of improvement, within their teacher training program. The questions focused on coursework, the practicum, and making connections between the two.

**Essential question one.** *How do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)?* This question addressed the pedagogical skills preparation that undergraduates experience during the first phase of teacher training. It sought to foster understanding about what student teachers believed best prepared them to begin teaching, and what they suggested might improve training methods to better prepare future student teachers for the transition from pupil to teacher. One measure of how well their training prepared them to transition from pupil to teacher was to document their experiences in the areas of content and pedagogical preparation. NCTQ (2013) found that “a strong sentiment exists among many public educators that preparation programs are not delivering new teachers with needed skills” (p. 5). What those skills look like in the classroom, and how they are translated by novice teachers as they begin in front of their own classrooms will inform and strengthen training programs.

**Essential question two.** *How do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums, and what learning experiences did they have during their internships that best prepared them to teach?* When student teachers begin the practicum, they establish their own classroom protocols and expectations for student learning while they learn the routines of the host school, create curriculum “on demand,” and replace a master teacher. Support models offered to student teachers during the practicum have an impact on their success as student
teachers and increase the likelihood that they will remain in the profession (NCTQ, 2013). This research question sought to determine the impact that mentors and other supports had on interns during their student teaching practicums.

**Essential question three.** *How do student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from coursework to classroom?* This question sought to understand how student teachers experienced moving from the coursework phase of training to the internship phase, in order to explore whether they felt prepared to commandeer their own classrooms, and to determine whether the two phases of their training were or were not connected. This question also sought to identify how interns described how they applied the knowledge they learned in courses to the tasks they were actually asked to perform while practice teaching.

**Theoretical Framework**

David A. Kolb’s Theory of Experiential Learning is the theoretical framework that situates this study. According to Kolb’s (1976; 1981; 1984) Theory of Experiential Learning, adult learning is a cyclical process: adults acquire new knowledge, and then they solidify their learning by using new information and reflecting upon its use. Kolb’s (1976; 1981; 1984) theory of Experiential Learning was chosen to frame this study because of its focus on adult learners’ internal cognitive processes during their progress through what Kolb has determined are the four stages of learning. There are connections among these four stages as one builds upon and overlaps with the other. The four stages of Kolb’s theory are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Smith, 2001, 2010).

**Rationale for using experiential learning theory.** The rationale for using Experiential Learning Theory is that the theory purports learning to be based on gaining knowledge and then
applying that knowledge in a cyclical process, so that the more practice you have, the better you are able to perform (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984).

Through *concrete experience*, a new situation is encountered, or new material is learned. During *reflective observation*, adult learners process this new information by observing others and considering how they use, manipulate, or define that new material. During *abstract conceptualization*, adult learners reflect on the material and the observations, both of which foster deeper understanding and solidify the new knowledge. Finally, during *active experimentation*, adult learners apply their knowledge through practicing it in new situations, which further solidifies the learning (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984).

Kolb’s (1976; 1981; 1984) theory suggests that adult learners may begin learning a new skill or acquiring new knowledge at any stage, that the cycle must continue in the same progression, and that one stage leads to and supports the other stages in the process. The latter stipulates an important factor in understanding the teacher training process: each phase or stage of the training must be connected to the one prior and the one following the current stage. Observing interns’ progress in student teaching through Kolb’s lens fostered understandings about coursework (concrete experience), observation hours (reflective observation), abstract conceptualization (visualizing themselves actually teaching and voicing their expectations going in), and practice teaching (active experimentation). The proposed study is designed to consider whether there are gaps in the process as teachers move from undergraduate work to the practicum. Thus, Kolb’s theory is an appropriate framework through which to view this transition and ascertain if gaps do, in fact, exist.

**Theoretical framework summary.** The research questions presented in this study were designed to determine what content knowledge and pedagogical skills aspiring teachers learned
through coursework during their undergraduate experience that most helped them during practice
teaching, as they gained new understandings of their academic learning through application and
practice. While this study sought to identify the strengths of the current teacher training
program, it also set out to identify possible gaps in training as undergraduates transitioned from
coursework to internships.

Kolb’s theory focuses on learning as an integrated, cyclical process of acquiring new
knowledge, reflecting upon that knowledge, applying that knowledge, and repeating the cycle;
each stage of learning leads to and supports the next (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984). Therefore,
hearing the voices of interns while experiencing the process of learning to teach, and then
analyzing the rich data their stories provided through this lens will help us to better understand
and support this process. Because experiential learning suggests that learning is cyclical and
experienced through stages that interconnect, identifying gaps in training would indicate that
there are gaps in learning as well. By modifying programs to close those gaps, teacher training
and learning to teach would improve.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Twenty-first Century education is comprised of myriad and seemingly disjointed initiatives: state and national curriculum standards, daunting amounts of standards-based assessments, a technology mega-boom, and global competition. We are the catch-phrase generation (at least in education), with gurus in the field spouting off “college and career readiness,” “what students should know and be able to do,” “power standards,” and “life-long learners.” Any study of educational trends and practices over the years begins with some statement about change. One thing we can always count on in education, things change.

Introduction

The many and varied modifications in the field of 21st century education beg the question: how has teacher training changed in an effort to prepare aspiring teachers to meet the challenges of contemporary reform? This literature review examines current practices in educator training in order to situate this study in existing understandings about learning to teach. Understanding today’s educational climate and what it takes to teach in the 21st century will foster specific understanding of the participants’ experiences learning to teach for the first time and greater understanding of how training programs can best support that process.

Literature Review Organization

This literature review examines research on what supports interns as they learn to teach, both in the undergraduate coursework phase and the practicum/internship phase within the current teacher training structure. It begins with a section that defines key terms for clarification. The literature review then leads into a discussion of 21st century schools and what learning to teach looks like in today’s educational climate. The background section introduces current standards used to evaluate teacher training programs, then divides the elements of teacher
training programs into preparation in the undergraduate experience and training during the practicum experience. The undergraduate experience section discusses both pedagogical and content knowledge instruction. The subsequent practicum section includes an exploration of the support models available to student teachers, and it also includes a discussion of the connections between the university (that houses the training programs) and the secondary school (where student teachers complete their internships). The literature review closes with a summary of findings, and a conclusion which outlines the implications for teacher training programs and recommendations for further research.

**Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, *preservice* refers to all of the training that student teachers currently experience, from four years of undergraduate coursework to practice teaching at the host school (Piwowar, Thief, & Ophardi, 2013). *Host school* and *placement school* both refer to the secondary education facility in which the practice teacher is placed to perform the practicum (Kirbulut, Boz, & Kutucu, 2012). *Internship* and *practicum* are interchangeably used to refer to the student teachers’ practice teaching experience in the host school (Daniel, 2009). The study focuses on teacher preparation in secondary education with a *humanistic approach*, meaning that the study takes into account the unique, preconceived understandings that each student teacher brings to the teaching experience (George, 2011). Included in this study are the following undergraduate training elements: *content knowledge*, which in secondary education is training and coursework in a specific field or discipline (English, math, science, etc.); and *pedagogical skills*, which refer to training and coursework in instruction, classroom management, and teaching methods (NCTQ, 2013).
The study also examines two elements of the practicum: *undergraduate/host school relations*, which is the interaction between the university in which the student teacher is enrolled and the high school in which the teacher performs his/her student teaching practicum; and *current evaluation tools*, which are current measures of competence used by university program coordinators and host school supervisors to evaluate student teachers during the licensing process (Kirbulut, Boz, & Kutucu, 2012). *Professional learning communities* are collegial groups of educators who have a vested interest in working together to achieve common educational goals (Hargreaves, 2008).

**Twenty-first Century Schools and Skills**

Rigelman and Ruben (2012) discussed the need to educate teachers in the manner that research has suggested we educate all students, taking into consideration their self-image in the role of teacher, their habits of mind in acquiring new knowledge, and their engagement with content, all of which contribute to their instructional practices. “Powerful teaching is increasingly important in contemporary society… [thus] the demands on teachers are increasing” (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 300). Many of the challenges that veteran, contemporary teachers face require them to adapt a new type of pedagogy to meet the increased demands of the work that they must perform in today’s classrooms (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010). While they are redefining what it is like to teach in the 21st century, teacher training programs must concurrently redefine what student teachers learn during training in order to meet those same challenges in the future (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Contemporary Educational Climate**

Twenty-first century education has changed exponentially: teachers have taken on expanding roles in their students’ lives; external change agents have implemented modifications
to curriculum and instruction, making the what and how of teaching more challenging; the profile of the 21st century student population has diversified; and the literacies that students must learn require a unique set of skills. All of these forces combined to make teaching and learning to teach increasingly more complex. Interns need a new type of preparation that will allow them to learn the skills and to develop the practices that will help them to succeed in contemporary classrooms (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

**Increased teacher responsibilities.** Teachers’ responsibilities have expanded to include counseling, coaching, mentoring, and, when necessary, mandated reporting (Darling-Hammond, 2006; NEASC, 2014; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). These complex demands reach far beyond content and pedagogical training, and teacher education programs must prepare teachers to meet these increased challenges.

**State and national mandates.** Education reform has made 21st century teaching more challenging than in decades past. The Common Core State Standards, high-stakes standardized assessments; school wide academic standards and civic expectations for student learning; and demands for increased higher-order thinking and performance-based tasks all further increase the challenges that today’s educators face (BESE, 2012). The onus is falling on schools and teachers to foster this new type of learning, and typical interventions and structures often exacerbate rather than mitigate the problems so that contemporary educators need new and diverse skills to meet these varied demands (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Changing demographics.** Not only do outside mandates call for teachers to acquire a new type of pedagogical repertoire, so do the students whose backgrounds and learning styles are far more diverse than ever before (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Demographic changes have diversified school populations, and today’s students hail from culturally and linguistically varied
backgrounds and perform at multiple ability levels, and classrooms are often comprised of both traditional and special education students (Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Banks, 2007; Morrell, 2012).

There is also an increased focus on social justice issues. Today’s students are truly different from the middle class, homogeneic student populations that teachers educated in past generations, which makes building relationships and fostering a classroom climate of trust increasingly more difficult than ever before (Banks, 2007; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In order to meet the needs of this new population of students, embrace rather than tolerate differences, and mentor new generations of teachers whose students may be very different from themselves, teacher preparation and practice needs reform (and for veterans, this means that what has been “working” for years also needs to change) (Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Hooks, 1994).

**New literacies.** Teachers are preparing students for the demands of a new world, one where they will need different literacies than generations past. Students need skills to be eternal learners and to access volumes of new information; they need to understand, manipulate, and communicate through technology; and they need to collaborate with colleagues at local, state, national, and global levels (Morrell, 2012). The influx of technology coupled with the demands of learning new competencies have changed what and how we teach, and the new culture of schools has a different focus from whether students are performing to establishing the levels at which they are performing (Morrell, 2012).

**Background**

Systemic change is needed in order to align all of the elements of education, including curriculum, standards, assessments, teacher preparation, and professional development (Stewart, 2012; Rust, 2010) to ensure that we are truly raising standards and closing achievement gaps.
The National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) determined that while the national government is raising the stakes for student learning, the supply and retention of highly qualified teachers is in question (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2007). There are many factors that contribute to the low retention rate, including increased demands, expansion, and intensification of teachers’ work in the 21st Century (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005); a need for sustained and effective supervision and support during the practicum (Darling-Hammond, 2006); and a need for improved professional development and increased opportunities for collaboration (Rust, 2010; Daniel, 2009; Kirbulut, Boz, & Kutucu, 2012), not only during new teacher training, but throughout teachers’ careers.

The climate of 21st century education and the role of the educator have changed exponentially over the past few decades (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Educational reforms are abundant, national standards and high-stakes assessments place increased challenges on educators and hold them publically accountable (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005). Practice teachers, along with their veteran supervisors, are answerable for their students’ standardized test scores. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has mandated implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which demand that teachers restructure curriculum to increase rigor and to embed higher-order thinking skills into classroom practice (2013). In addition, the evaluation process of veteran teachers has become more stringent, increases the demands placed on teachers, and links performance reviews to employment longevity (Ribas, 2011). The “spectacular array of things that teachers should know and be able to do in their work” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 300) has changed the nature of that work and has altered the roles they play in their pupils’ lives. Teachers have become coaches,
mentors, counselors, role models, and mandated reporters in their efforts to educate the whole child, in spirit as well as in knowledge acquisition (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

The trickle-down effect is that teacher training programs must be revised in order to prepare teachers to meet these increased challenges in order to best support and foster their pupils’ learning and individual growth (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013). Veteran teachers are defining the skills they need to diversify instruction to meet the demands of this new population, and training programs must follow suit to ensure that novice teachers are prepared to meet the challenges of educating all children (Dee, 2011; NCTAF, 2003).

Aspects of teacher training programs have been criticized over the past decades as ineffective and inept at meeting the increased demands of the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, there are many effective components to be found in current teacher licensure programs in the areas of content and pedagogy, support models, and opportunities for collaboration (Brabeck & Dennis, 2003; Rideout & Morton, 2006; Chalies, Bruno-Mead, Meard, & Bertone, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006). This literature review is intended to capture how programs can leverage and currently do leverage these elements to prepare student teachers as they make the transition from undergraduate coursework to practice teaching.

**Overview of Educator Training**

For years, policy makers have been calling for the redesign of teacher education in order to promote greater connections between theory and practice and to toughen training standards that would effectively develop good teaching strategies and strengthen the reputation of the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Prior to Newton, Poon, Nunes, and Stone (2013) and George (2011), there had been extensive quantitative studies conducted in the field to measure
pupils’ test scores, but research on teacher training was outdated and focused mainly on methods courses or general performance during field experience.

Two studies conducted in 2013 by the NCTQ and Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) included changes to educator training standards and recommendations for teacher training programs. Both NCTQ (2013) and CAEP (2013) recognized the need for, researched, and created standards in order to evaluate educator training programs, but the standards they produced are not aligned, either with each other or with the Common Core State Standards. In addition, both the NCTQ and the CAEP included only one standard to evaluate the internship phase of teacher training: NCTQ (2013) defined the standard as “institution had a strong student teaching experience,” (p. 8), while CAEP (2013) defined the standard as “clinical partnership and practice,” (p. 2). Neither standard defined what elements of the student teaching program were the most useful in preparing teachers to commandeer their own classrooms.

NCTQ (2013) established 18 standards to measure the quality of teacher training programs in the areas of Selection of Candidates (one standard evaluating academic aptitude), Content Preparation (eight total standards, but only one in Common Core High School Content), Professional Skills Preparation (seven standards, including Classroom Management, Lesson Planning, Assessment and Data, Equity, Student Teaching, Secondary Methods, and Special Education), and Outcomes (one standard measuring data on program graduates and one on Evidence of Effectiveness as measured by impact on pupil scores). In addition to similar standards measuring content, pedagogy, and outcomes, CAEP (2013) included Clinical Partnerships and Practice, and Provider Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement in its five standards and recommendations for teacher training programs.
Accreditation agencies have imposed a shift in philosophy from an input-based approach, to a standards-based, outcomes approach. Add to that the unknowns that ECAA brings to the 21st century educational climate (Walker, 2015). These shifts challenge teacher training programs to systematically evaluate and adjust teacher preparation modes in order to improve novice teachers’ performance (Reusser et al., 2007).

**The Impact of Teacher Training**

How effective are teacher training programs overall? Quality teacher candidate training has a positive effect on pupils’ learning in K-12 classrooms (Brabeck & Dennis, 2003; Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013). By identifying essential elements in the training process and then leveraging those strengths to generate program changes, the quality of teacher training will continue to improve (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013; George, 2011). Further examination of the transition from learner to teacher is needed to determine what core skills student teachers need to leave college having acquired and how those skills may be translated to the practice of teaching (Zeichner, 2012).

Other factors that contribute to the process of learning to teach include teachers’ characteristics and school contexts (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). Teacher preparation must also include a humanistic approach by considering the unique characteristics (strengths and weaknesses), backgrounds, ethical views, and personal experiences that individual student teachers bring to their training (George, 2011; Rust, 2010; Langlois & Lapoint, 2010; Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013). Further research on the relationship between interns’ background and program features would foster an individualized approach rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to training (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014).
Learning to teach is a complex process oftentimes invisible to or misunderstood by lay observers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). More research is needed to determine how interns actually “learned to teach—that is, what they learned from early entry into classrooms, what practices they took up, what knowledge they drew on, or how their interpretive frameworks mediated their work” (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014, p. 17). Since the better the training, the better the pupil learning, continuing to improve training to address educational reforms will yield the most productive and effective educators, who will then have a positive impact on pupil learning.

**Structure of Current Massachusetts Training Programs**

The traditional undergraduate student who enters a teacher training program in Massachusetts spends three full years plus one semester as pupils working in classrooms on curriculum that is designed to prepare them to teach. Undergraduates major in their chosen content area and minor in education. As part of the academic major, aspiring teachers take courses to learn the knowledge and skills they will need in their specific disciplines. In their minor programs, they take education courses designed to foster classroom management skills, adolescent psychology, and instructional methodologies (NCTQ, 2013).

Following the coursework phase of educator training, aspiring teachers become interns in a secondary host school where they begin their first experiences teaching. They are assigned to work with a mentor, a veteran teacher employed in the host school who teaches in the discipline in which the undergraduate has majored.

The following sections of this literature review explore what research has been done regarding the skills, content, and pedagogical training that student teachers experience as they progress through both the undergraduate coursework phase and the internship phase of their
teacher training programs. Emphasis is placed on determining the connections that currently exist between these two phases of teacher training.

The Undergraduate Coursework Phase of Teacher Training Programs

The undergraduate experience for aspiring secondary educators includes seven semesters of coursework. The curriculum is designed to foster student content knowledge and the general pedagogical skills that they will need to move from pupil to educator. Those who seek secondary educator licensure are required to select a major in a specific content. They then minor in education. As part of the academic major, aspiring teachers take courses to learn the content knowledge and skills they will need to become proficient in their specific disciplines. In their minor programs, undergraduates take courses in pedagogy in order to become proficient in instruction. The following sections of this literature review are divided into sections that focus separately on admissions standards for teacher training programs, content knowledge preparation, and pedagogy instruction.

Teacher Training Program Academic Standards

Raising the bar for admission into teacher training programs in order attract more qualified students to education in the first place would strengthen the profession (Stewart, 2012; Schultz and Ravitch, 2013; NCTQ, 2013; Reusser et al., 2007; Phelan, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006). The United States should take a lesson from high performing nations that admit undergraduates who are in the top third of their classes rather than the top half, or at the least use academic aptitude and grade point averages, GPAs, as standards in evaluating and admitting high quality teacher candidates into training programs (NCTQ, 2013). Preservice teachers' performance in college (GPA) more accurately predicted their performance in the classroom than did their scores on standardized tests (for teacher licensure) (D'Agostino & Powers, 2008).
Schools of education should also ensure that the coursework they experience is sufficiently rigorous, appropriately demanding, and linked to clinical practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Content and Pedagogy Instruction**

Much debate has centered on the distinction between content knowledge and pedagogical skill training while learning to teach. In attempts to create national standards, NCTQ (2013) devoted a disproportionate one standard to secondary content and seven to measuring professional skills; while CAEP created one standard that combined both content and pedagogical knowledge. According to Schultz and Ravitch (2013), there is a need to differentiate between preparation in content knowledge and pedagogical methodologies, especially in secondary education where educators teach in specific disciplines. George (2011) determined that teacher educators must be effectively trained in the areas of content, pedagogy, curriculum, and technology in order to be successful, but did not indicate whether balance among these training elements or an emphasis on some rather than others would best support the process of learning to teach. In other studies, content knowledge was shown to be important, but pedagogical training in curriculum, knowledge of how pupils learn, and teaching methods were shown to be more effective indicators of good teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

**Content instruction.** There is a link between increased student teacher content knowledge competencies and improved student learning (Reusser et al., 2007; Phelan, 2009). While the literature suggests that the connection between content knowledge and effective teaching exists, further research is needed to determine the relationship between a practice teacher’s mastery level of discipline knowledge and his/her capacity to impart that knowledge to students (Reusser et al., 2007; Phelan, 2009; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013; NCTQ, 2013).
And how does the level of content knowledge one acquires ultimately translate to better teaching. Does simply knowing something guarantee one’s ability to impart that knowledge to others? Further research is also needed to determine if there exists a fissure between the knowledge gleaned by student teachers in their undergraduate coursework and their pupils’ performance, including their pupils’ scores on various standardized tests (MCAS, PSATs, SATs, AP exams, etc.).

Student teachers must work toward applying content knowledge to the work of educating pupils using core teaching practices (Zeichner, 2012). Yet, NCTQ (2013) determined that only 26 percent of undergraduate programs require at least one three-credit course in subject-specific methodology. Greater connectedness among courses offered in undergraduate programs, as well as increased integration between content and pedagogy coursework and between overall coursework and practice would improve teacher training (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Further research is needed on the impact that more preparation in content-specific instructional skill development would have on student teachers’ performance in the classroom.

**Pedagogy instruction.** Pedagogical instruction must meet the increased demands placed on 21st century teachers, including national competency-based standards and a work context that extends beyond the classroom due to increased participation of a wider range of stakeholders in curriculum decision-making (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005). One factor repeatedly studied in pedagogical preparation is training in classroom management strategies, which had a positive impact on teacher-to-student interaction, student engagement, and pupil learning (Piwowar, Thief, & Ophardi, 2013).

Bouwma-Gearhart (2010) determined that pedagogical training is necessary for successful teaching, including training in what educators should expect to encounter for
obstacles and challenges in the classroom that will help them to be successful teachers and ultimately to remain in the field. What is considered to be core instructional practices fluctuates among various individual schools of education (Zeichner, 2012), but the general consensus is that these skills include concerted academic study of the driving forces behind educational movements, the lived experienced that play out at the local level, research-confirmed best practices, and the interpersonal skills that incorporate their praxis with central discipline content knowledge that will be assessed through their students’ high-stakes standardized assessments (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010). These results suggest that further research focused on strategies to improve skills in classroom management and pedagogical skills at the secondary level would be a valuable contribution to the field and would improve teacher education and pupil performance.

Sims and Walsh (2008) used a Lesson Study approach to measure student teachers’ preservice instruction in pedagogical strategies such as questioning techniques and wait time, anticipating student response, and lesson flow. The study determined that pre-service programs should examine and evaluate both the lesson plan and the teacher’s delivery of the lessons because developing curriculum and instructing in the classroom are two very separate skills, and both are needed for effective teaching (Sims & Walsh, 2008).

According to NCTQ (2013), current practices in teacher education are mistakenly based on “preparation” rather than on “training,” the difference being that “preparation” suggests that teachers will find their own style, “training” implies that programs can teach novices the skills necessary for them to become competent teachers: “By abandoning the notion that teacher educators should arm the novice teacher with practical tools to succeed, they have thrown their field into disarray and done a great disservice to the teaching profession,” (p. 93).
Taken together, Rideout and Morton (2006), Sims and Walsh (2008), and NCTQ (2013) confirm that quality pedagogical instruction is essential to producing competent teachers. The combined research from these studies offers understandings about practicing teachers’ education, background, and experiences that training programs may incorporate into their curriculum. However, NCTQ (2013) cautioned that leaving the pedagogical training “up to individual discretion denies novices access to what is actually known about how children learn best,” (p. 93), supporting the idea that pedagogical training must be formalized as part of the secondary education training program. There are political obstacles in the way of standardizing training, but among individual schools of education there are overlapping skills identified as core practices that interns should learn in order to teach effectively (Zeichner, 2012). Among them are a strong knowledge of learners, an understanding of curriculum and goals, and an understanding of core skills that blend content and pedagogical knowledge in order to teach increasingly more diverse student learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**The Practicum Phase of Teacher Training Programs**

During the final semester of Massachusetts undergraduate programs, student teachers are assigned to internships in secondary schools. They first meet and observe their mentors. Gradually, they assume individual classes until they have a full teaching schedule. This section of the literature review examines research on aspects of the practicum phase of training, including the length of time spent practice teaching; opportunities for self-reflection, the impact that their mentor has on the quality of the training, and the collaboration that occurs between the university from which the student teacher hails and the secondary school which is the host site for the internship (Darling-Hammond, 2006).
**Practicum Length**

Freese (2006) determined that more time is needed in the classroom for students to learn to teach in the practical setting of a host school, rather than in the undergraduate classroom and through theoretical coursework. Finan and Sandholtz (1999) supported a lengthening of the practicum, determining that the greater the length of time that student teachers were immersed in the host school’s culture, the more confident they were in their own abilities to teach. The proportion of time that novice teachers spend practicing in classrooms has begun to increase in the last decade (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2008), but full teacher preparation restructuring is needed, including extending the length of the practicum (Rust, 2010; MacIver, Vaughn, & Katz, 2006). Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2007) determined that student teachers should be immersed in a longer, more thorough practicum, rather than the one-semester practicum that is currently the norm in Massachusetts. There also needs to be greater connectedness between coursework and the internship (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**Alternative model of practicum length.** There are many alternate program models that are successful. Chalies, Bruno-Mead, Meard, and Bertone (2009) studied an alternative teacher training model in Toulouse, France whereby prior to working in any capacity as a practicing teacher, students first had to attain their Bachelors’ Degrees. Only when the undergraduate degree was earned were they eligible to enroll in a one-year program at a teacher training university. This one-year program was designed to support teachers in training by alternating between seminar-type coursework and student teaching under the guidance of a Supervising Practitioner in an outside placement school. The governing principle of the program was that students would use prior learning to inform classroom practices while alternately constructing
meaning of their practical experiences with classroom support. The study offered alternative training protocols that allowed for practical application of learning.

Although Chalies et al. (2009) found that alternating between classroom and teaching was too rapidly scheduled for practicing teachers to achieve the gains that the model was hypothesized to bring, the program still provided two valuable data for consideration. The first was that student teachers earned their undergraduate degrees prior to student teaching, and the second was that internships lasted one full year. The study’s contribution lies in its experimentation with practice blended with theory whereby student teachers are processing, discussing, and learning from their actual classroom experiences during the practicum rather than from hypothetical situations. Further research is indicated to determine how a restructuring such as was found in this program might inform change in current training methods.

**Practicum Standards**

Miller and Carney (2009) determined that current evaluation standards must be challenged, especially mandated performance assessments used by Supervising Practitioners who have not been adequately trained to implement them. The study suggested a need for improved Supervising Practitioner support in performance assessment, as they are critical evaluators in the process of teacher preparation. The study also suggested that alternative, more accurate measures of assessment are needed, and it examined the use of video annotation software as one performance assessment instrument.

In Massachusetts, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education implemented a new teacher evaluation system to assess teacher performance at all stages in their careers: novice teachers are evaluated yearly, and veteran teachers with three or more years of experience are evaluated biannually (DESE, 2013; Ribas, 2013). Further research is needed to determine
what impact the new teacher evaluation process will have on teacher training programs and program standards.

**Practicum Expectations and Experiences**

People who are not educators believe that because they have been students themselves, they would face little difficulty in becoming teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Likewise, student teachers embark on their journey in education with expectations about themselves in the role of teacher, anticipating that teaching will be far easier than they find that it is (Cole & Knowles, 1993). During practice teaching, novice teachers experience trepidation and overcome obstacles symbolically similar to those that a hero’s journey would model, indicating that student teachers enter classrooms not as prepared to teach as they thought they were at the outset, that internships were far more difficult than they had imagined, and that the reward at the end was not as expected (Goldstein, 2005).

This discrepancy between new teachers’ preconceived notions about teaching and their actual experiences has been the subject of substantial research, but Cole and Knowles (1993) created a powerful metaphor to illustrate it: “Preservice teachers have hopes, images, and expectation that all too often are quickly shattered by exposure to certain realities of schools, classrooms, and teaching,” (p. 457). The preconceived ideas that new teachers have regarding the fulfillment of their roles as teachers include notions of themselves as competent educators who effect positive change in their students’ progress (Cole & Knowles, 1993). Whether the root of student teacher’s individual misconceptions about the difficulty of the profession are the result of personal experiences or course work is unclear, but there is potential for these discrepancies to negatively affect student teacher performance and possibly influence whether
they remain in the field if they become discouraged when their high expectations do not come to fruition (Kirbulut, Boz, & Kutucu, 2012).

**Interns’ Prior Experience**

Schools of education must address the changing roles of the 21st century teacher, and how an individual’s background, experience, and personal values influence their teaching (Langlois & Lapoint, 2010). Today’s educators need a strong moral compass to guide students in personal as well as curriculum issues because they are often coaches, counselors, and mentors as well as instructors. Student teachers’ preconception ideologies, background, and experience influence their pedagogical effectiveness, especially in the area of classroom management (Rideout & Morton, 2006; George, 2011).

In order to foster their students’ academic success, interns have to rethink their personal frame of reference as they work with diverse student populations, pupils with multiple learning styles who hail from varied cultural backgrounds (Jupp & Slattery, 2010). Wong, Chong, Sylvia, Choy, Doris, and Lim (2012) determined that the values and skills taught in a preservice education program should be relevant and universal, and should be based on six factors: student learning, lesson planning, instructional support, accommodating diversity, classroom management, and care and concern for students.

**Strengths of Current Training Practices**

The following section of this literature review discusses several strengths found in current teacher training practices. Among them are the use of self-reflection to improve student teachers’ understanding of the process of learning to teach and as tool for cohorts of student teachers to use in collaborating with one another; the role and impact of quality mentors; positive relationships between schools of education and secondary schools that act as host sites for
internships; and the use of professional learning communities to further strengthen connections among all stakeholders in teacher training programs.

**Self-reflection in the practicum.** Much research has been done on the effectiveness of self-reflective in teacher training. Randi, Corno, and Johnson (2011) determined that self-regulation skills improve the performance of pre-service teachers as they make the transition from undergraduate to teacher, and that opportunities for self-reflection support self-regulation and improve performance. Conway (2001) measured the abilities of six pre-service teachers to self-reflect on their expectations about teaching prior to entering a classroom for the first time, and determined that such reflection need not only be looking back, but may be anticipatory. The study also demonstrated that when simultaneously viewing the discrepancy between student teachers’ expectations and their actual experiences, practice improved: the interns’ “surprise, shock, and sense of dislocation really only make sense when one knows what they anticipated,” (p. 102).

**Self-reflection and expectations versus realities.** Kennedy (1997) and Conway (2001) explored the use of self-reflection to measure student teachers’ preconceptions about teaching against their actual experiences, and found that student teachers’ preconceptions were erroneously positive: they held optimistic images of themselves as future teachers, and they felt confident in their own abilities to succeed at the outset of their internships. However, the role and duties of an educator are far more difficult and complex than novice teachers anticipate; learning to teach effectively is dependent upon changing those early, overtly positive misconceptions about teaching in order to adequately prepare teachers for challenges, which will ultimately aid in retaining them in the profession (Kennedy, 1997; Conway, 2001; Gonzalez & Carter, 1996; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Finan & Sandholtz, 1999; George, 2011).
Freese (2006), Finan and Sandholtz (1999), and Goldstein (2005) combined offer insight into the role of self-reflection as a tool for program directors to understand the complexity of learning to teach as a means of improving that process. Freese (2006) determined that student teachers develop better practices and gain greater self-confidence when they are able to self-reflect on the complexity of their experiences, and that their self-reflections revealed how preservice teachers thought about their training, how they measured their own fears during conflicts, and how they processed what they experienced during their internships.

Ronfeldt and Grossman (2008) used guided self-reflection to measure practicing teachers’ understandings of teaching and learning and determined that self-perception at the onset of internships is different from that at the conclusion, and this expectation vs. reality view of the difficulty of learning to teach was further substantiated by Cole and Knowles (1993).

**Self-reflection and professional identity.** Using self-reflection supported positive professional identity formation, which in turn improved instruction (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). When evaluation was placed in the hands of the intern rather than with either the cooperating teacher or the program supervisor, student teachers reported feeling empowered and their practice improved because they were at the center of their own learning (Paris & Gespass, 2001).

**Self-reflection and collaboration.** Finan and Sandholtz (1999) concluded that the issues and patterns that evolved in their professional development were unique and personal from one student teacher to the next. Student teachers have a complex ability to self-reflect on their own practices, and through collaboration and sharing of these unique self-reflections, groups of student teachers felt supported in their learning (Goldstein, 2005). Goldstein (2005) examined the intern’s personal journey and the use of a common language through which groups of interns
might collaborate and share their personal experiences in learning to teach. Campbell (1949) theorized that when a hero embarks on a journey, he experiences a separation from what is familiar, an initiation or challenge that he must overcome, a reward due to the lessons learned from the experience, and a return to the familiar with deeper awareness of self. Goldstein (2005) used the lens of the hero’s journey to add another layer of discovery to self-reflection, demonstrating that by providing a framework for teachers self-reflection, they were better able to glean meaning from their experiences, thus improving their competence in the classroom.

Formulating a common structure for students’ self-reflection promoted collegiality among groups of new teachers, and provided them with a sense of community when they shared their experiences with one another (Goldstein, 2005). Ronfeldt and Grossman (2008) also demonstrated that guided self-reflection—in this case, the common language used was a series of images—was fundamental to the professional development process and empowered teachers to express their feelings and gain clarity about their experiences, much like the hero’s journey framework established by Goldstein (2005). LeFevre (2010) also found that giving preservice teachers the opportunity to share their autobiographical stories with one another was a powerful opportunity for them to begin understanding the process of learning to teach. Combined, these studies indicate that self-reflection should occur during the act of teaching, thus supporting this skill as a viable support model with which to process the obstacles that novice teachers face in real classroom experience. These studies also demonstrate that coupling self-reflection with collaboration is another opportunity for programs to improve pre-service teacher preparation, and that identifying cohorts is valuable mode of support for interns when they were placed in the same host school and the same collaborative group (Daniel, 2009).
The Mentor

A key feature of any practicum is the mentor. Supervising Practitioners provide psychological, emotional, and social support and guidance for practice teachers; and now, the mentor’s role in the training process may be more impactful in contemporary classrooms than ever before (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2008).

In the climate of the 21st century, this relationship between the mentor and the intern has become one of reciprocal learning, and the relationship and communication between student teachers and their supervisors influenced the development of student teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and effectiveness in the classroom (Gonzalez & Carter, 1996; Rust, 2010; Daniel, 2009; Freese, 2006; Goldstein, 2005; Gonzalez & Carter, 1996; Miller & Carney, 2009; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010).

Although members of a student teacher/supervisor dyad may experience the same teaching events, they remembered and described them differently, which may inform the understanding of how new teachers process classroom experiences and how important communication between novice and mentor may be (Gonzalez & Carter, 1996).

Autonomy. Rideout and Morton (2006) offered suggestions for future research on understanding the conflicts that preservice teachers face in terms of supervisors’ expectations vs. their own inclinations and beliefs and suggested that longitudinal studies of student teachers/supervisors expectations and experiences would validate their initial findings and provide a greater foundation for program improvements. Bouwma-Gearhart (2010) applied the theory of self-determination to education and concluded that student teachers experienced a loss of autonomy as a result of pedagogical aspects of teacher preparation programs, and that this loss was linked to decreased student-teacher performance. In the context of the training, student
teachers lacked the support models necessary to perform tasks and make decisions on their own, and they relied heavily on their Supervising Practitioner for guidance in decision-making, leading to a feeling of dependency on the Supervising Practitioner.

**Intern/mentor pairings.** According to Carlton-Parsons (2008) the influence that mentors have on practice teachers is significant, and the formulation of mentor/student teacher relationship is critical to student teachers’ success. NCTQ (2013) advocated for placement policy standards to ensure that student teachers work with highly qualified veteran teachers (rather than those who are simply willing and certified), and the study also recommended that student teachers work with university faculty that offer appropriate support and quality feedback throughout the internship.

**Mentor training.** Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen (2010) determined that the impact that mentors have on practice teachers’ competencies is higher when they themselves are trained. Better mentor training is essential to quality educator training (Crasborn, et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Daniel, 2009). Effective mentor training will ensure that aspiring teachers receive the highest quality preparation through intensively supervised clinical work during their student teaching placements (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Rideout & Morton, 2006; Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010).

**Mentor roles.** Miller and Carney (2009) examined the problem of having the Supervising Practitioner perform a dual role as both coach and evaluator. Hennissen et al. (2010) and Kirbulut, Boz, and Kutucu (2012) call for further research and program modification to improve the effectiveness of these partnerships, and to provide the mentoring teacher training in the skills and expertise needed to offer the best support for their mentees. As part of that training, the role of mentor must be clearly defined: student teachers should be offered a balance
of support and encouragement so that they begin to form their own professional identities and gain greater autonomy and confidence in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

**University and Host School Collaboration**

A cultural shift must occur to accommodate a collaboration model between schools of education faculty and secondary school teachers (Reusser et al., 2007) in order to get all of the stakeholders together on the same team in support of the teacher-candidates with whom they are working. Such collaboration methods are politically messy and the work is exhausting, but the payoff would be fruitful (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Essential elements in successful programs that improved teacher candidates’ performance on content knowledge and instructional practice measures included, among other elements, candidate-faculty collaboration and administrative involvement (Reusser et al., 2007; Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002).

The 21st Century Workforce Commission recommended that closer linkages between secondary schools and colleges would serve to motivate student teachers toward higher personal goals and improve the quality of teacher training (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Haymore (2002) demonstrated the importance of forming relationships between schools of education and secondary schools that host interns during the practicum, and that if a dichotomy exists between the host school and the university, then the training is less effective. A strong relationship between the personnel from the university training program and the host secondary facility is critical to a successful practicum (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Kirbulut, Boz, and Kutucu (2012) determined that harmony between the expectations and experiences of practice teachers in regard to the faculty and other elements of the host school influenced student teachers’ opinions about the teaching profession as well as determined whether they would remain in the field.
Brabec and Dennis (2003) demonstrated a need for strong university/host school partnerships, suggested that further longitudinal research be conducted on student performance to ascertain the effectiveness of instruction, and determined that collaboration among university faculty from differing disciplines is needed to ensure pedagogy/content balance. Also, collaboration focused on accountability in the areas of learning context, objectives, instructional plans, assessment, instructional decision-making, analysis of student learning, and reflections strengthened programs (Reusser et al., 2007).

**Professional Learning Communities**

Another avenue of collaborative support that the research suggests may be beneficial to teacher learning is the establishment of Professional Learning Communities, PLCs. PLCs enrich the learning culture of a school because teachers model continued learning and collaboration to their pupils, share best practices, and support one another’s teaching (Hargreaves, 2008).

According to Schultz and Ravitch (2013), content knowledge is improved through student teachers’ membership in a range of knowledge communities. Freese (2006) determined that student teachers develop better practices and gain greater self-confidence when they are able to work under the guidance of a variety of mentors, and in particular, when they are members of PLCs that provide opportunities for them to share and process their experiences (Sim, 2005).

**Reciprocal learning.** There would need to be a shift in teacher education that diverged from the traditional hierarchy of university professor, supervising practitioner, and student teacher in order for this new structure of PLCs to be meaningful and to encourage career-long professional inquiry and collaboration (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). Such PLCs implementation would allow student teachers, supervising practitioners, and university supervisors to enter into a partnership of learning that is based on reciprocity of learning; is mutually beneficial; is designed
to prepare, evaluate, and retain quality teachers; and that works to ensure that the practicum is of sufficient length and substance to have the best possible impact on pupils (CAEP, 2013).

Further research is needed to determine what effect PLC formation would have on teacher training programs, on individuals learning to teach, on the continued professional growth of veteran mentor teachers, and on secondary placement schools.

Summary of Findings

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that effective elements woven throughout several programs may be leveraged and strengthened to fashion productive reforms to teacher training programs. Strengths found in current training include practices that provide opportunities for interns to self-reflect on their practice; strong mentors who offer a balance of support and autonomy for their interns; and collaboration, which takes many forms and allows for reciprocal learning among novices and veterans.

Reform is needed in the following areas: for consistent standards to evaluate teacher preparation programs and define what elements of student teaching programs are most effective in preparing teachers; for higher standards of acceptance into teacher training programs; for balanced preparation in pedagogical and content knowledge, especially at the secondary level where teachers seek certification in specific disciplines; for lengthening the practicum stage of training; for frameworks that guide self-reflection in order to provide intern cohorts a common language with which to discuss their experiences; for strong support models during practice teaching, fostered through collaboration with highly qualified, trained mentors and strong connections between the university and the host school; and for professional learning communities that would break down the traditional hierarchy of student teacher/supervising
practitioner/university supervisor and allow aspiring teachers the opportunity and support to reflect upon and process training experiences.

Conclusions

The literature presented in this study demonstrates a need to synthesize best practices from a variety of teacher training models in order to improve training. The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012) published guidelines to ensure that educators are properly trained to handle the demands of the Common Core curriculum. Their recommendations for quality teacher training include strong clinical practice to develop effective teaching skills, and entry-level teaching support provided through residencies and mentored induction. These guidelines support the research outlined in this review, which sought to identify what “strong clinical practice” looks like, and how educational leaders may improve training practices to ensure that new educators are appropriately prepared for the increased demands of teaching in the 21st Century.

Skills of the 21st Century Educator

The educational climate of the 21st century calls for teacher preparation in learning how to play the multiple roles that future educators will be required to perform outside of classroom teaching; how to manage the multiple initiatives currently driving change in contemporary schools; how to identify the multiple diversities of student populations and how to differentiate instruction to best meet their needs; and how to foster student learning of new literacies (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006; NEASC, 2014; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; BESE, 2012; Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Ashford & Mael, 1989; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Morrell, 2012).
Program Strengths

Several core elements emerged throughout the research as “strong clinical practice,” among them are: practical preparation in both content and pedagogical competencies; self-reflection structures whereby teachers evaluate themselves, write about their experiences as they learn to teach, and share those experiences within cohorts of interns like themselves; improved support models, including mentors in the host school who are competent, highly skilled, and trained to work with student teachers; and the formation of Professional Learning Community comprised of university and host school personnel working together in support of interns.

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that a restructuring of the practicum to allow more time and preparation to transition between the undergraduate coursework phase and the practicum phase would improve teacher training. Indications are that undergraduate coursework in methodology might be supplemented with more opportunities to practice teaching, ideally within the placement school. This would allow student teachers to create lesson and unit plans, assessments, and rubrics to align with both the curriculum standards of the host school and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This proposed pre-practicum emerged from the observation that the transition from the undergraduate phase of training to the practicum is a complex one. Further research is needed to determine exactly how effective such a pre-practicum would be and what impact this process would have on pupil performance, but indications are that the proposed pre-practicum component added to teacher education would indeed provide productive training for those learning to teach in the 21st century.
Chapter 3: Methodology

I used a qualitative study employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine student teachers’ experiences as they transition from the undergraduate coursework phase of teacher training to the internship phase as practice teachers in central Massachusetts high schools. The problem of practice explored in this research focused specifically on identifying the strengths and gaps that exist within one teacher training program. Using a qualitative approach served to generate rich data regarding student teachers’ lived experiences as they learned to teach, and helped me to gain understanding of the “themes of the lived daily world” of teaching from the perspective of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, p. 24, 2009).

Using phenomenology, the study explored the complex phenomena of learning to teach for the first time. Through interns’ thick descriptions of their experiences, this research sought to identify effective pedagogical and content preparation elements used in current teacher training, and to propose recommendations for future program reform based on the themes that emerge and the best practices that are identified. The interpretive paradigm allowed me, the researcher, to become an integral part of the study whereby the participants shared their stories with me, together in partnership we discussed their respective journeys in learning to teach, and we co-created their stories through this process (Butin, 2010).

This chapter begins by discussing the research questions and arguing the case for using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach to qualitative inquiry. Following that is a discussion of the participants, data collection methods, and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the process of obtaining IRB approval.
Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the ongoing story told and refashioned by the individual participants who were learning to teach for the first time (Butin, 2010). Using an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher sought to understand the results of the investigation to answer the following three research questions. First, how do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)? Second, how do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums, and what learning experiences did they have during their internships that best prepared them to teach? And third, how do student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from coursework to classroom?

Because the methodology was qualitative with an interpretivist paradigm, the data resulting from interviews was rich with the interns’ descriptions regarding their experiences and their understandings of events as they progressed through their teacher training program. The foundation for these research questions was Kolb’s Theory of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1981; 1984), which outlines the progression of adult learning as a series of stages that are interconnected and dependent upon one another. The chosen methodology provided a unique perspective through which to understand interns’ experiences as they transitioned from one stage of training to the next in learning to teach.

According to Kolb’s (1981; 1984) Theory of Experiential Learning, adults learn through concrete experiences. In teacher training, concrete experiential learning takes place during the undergraduate phase. The research questions sought to determine what content knowledge and pedagogical skills aspiring teachers learned through their coursework, how their observations contributed new understandings to that learning, and what gaps existed in their training. In
addressing both the reflective observation and the abstract conceptualization phases of Kolb’s (1981; 1984) theory, these research questions sought to determine whether and to what extent coursework and mandatory observations fostered deeper understanding in learning to teach.

These research questions also sought to determine what aspects of the internship and what support models were most effective, with a focus on opportunities for reflection (Finan & Sandholtz, 1999; Freese, 2006), quality of mentors Gonzalez & Carter, 1996), and opportunities for collaboration (Hargreaves, 2008), as found in extant literature. Support models offered to student teachers during the practicum have an impact on their success as student teachers and increase the likelihood that they will remain in the profession (NCTQ, 2013).

Opportunities for reflection, mentors, and collaboration are some of the contributing factors identified as supports for student teachers during their training (Reusser et al., 2007; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013; Phelan, 2009). Hearing how these supports contributed to student teachers’ experiences through their own voices will inform us as to which helped them most in the process of learning to teach. These research questions are connected to the active experimentation stage of Kolb’s (1981; 1984) Experiential Learning Theory because adult learners gain knowledge while undergoing authentic experiences.

**Role of the Researcher**

IPA centers on the interaction between the researcher and the subjects (Ponterotto, 2005), therefore, as the researcher, I positioned myself in the study and collected data through interviews with student teachers. Since I have intimate knowledge of teaching, I was a co-creator of the interns’ stories and a participant in their journey (Creswell, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) as they told about their experiences interning in secondary schools.
I randomly selected the participants, and I conducted semi-structured interviews of each, during which they reflected on their experiences teaching for the first time (see Appendix D). Through this qualitative interview process, the interns constructed meaning behind their own experiences through self-reflection (Finan & Sandholtz, 1999). I did not serve as their supervising practitioner, mentor, nor evaluator. They had freedom to respond to inquiries without fear of repercussion in terms of teacher evaluations (see Appendix B for the teacher Consent-to-Participate Form outlining these protections). I employed complex reasoning in data analysis and inductive coding (Saldaña, 2013) to allow themes and subthemes to emerge.

**Qualitative Methodology Rationale**

Qualitative research through discourse analysis has become the predominant mode of social research since the 1980s (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and this methodology complemented the focus of this study. The rationale for using a qualitative approach was multifaceted. The focus of this study was to hear student teachers’ narrative accounts about their experiences in order to understand learning to teach in the 21st century. The qualitative approach provided personalized information about student teaching programs from those in the trenches who are experiencing this phenomenon for the first time—what aspects they deemed effective and what elements they believed need modification—and, it yielded rich data that offers greater understanding of what it is like to transition from being a student to being a teacher.

A quantitative approach would not suit this study because it did not seek to quantify data; rather, it sought to garner the types of nuanced understandings that individual interviews would provide and to formulate a narrative text based on those findings (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2011; Clissett, 2008; Walsh & Downe, 2006). The focus of this study was on how teachers
describe their experiences, and qualitative interviews were the best approach to collecting this type of open-ended data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The initial plan for research shifts and changes when new understandings emerge, and such was the case in this study, where I used a holistic approach to developing a larger understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2013). I collected interview data in a neutral setting. The data was comprised of participants’ stories as they made sense of their experiences (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2011). Themes and patterns emerged through inductive analysis of interview data, which required me to be flexible in my interpretation (Creswell, 2007).

**Research Tradition**

Qualitative methodology served to generate rich and nuanced data regarding student teachers’ lived experiences learning to teach. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the best method of understanding the lived, personal experiences of the subjects as they shared their stories—upon reflection, they constructed meaning of the phenomenon in which they found themselves (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I first immersed myself each individual’s story through saturation of data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I then searched for patterns of meaning (Butin, 2010), particularly regarding how interns individually and collectively experienced the phenomenon of learning to teach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology’s main premise is to describe without using preconceived frameworks in order to allow themes within the data to emerge (Groenewald, 2004).

**Interpretivism**

Paradigms guide the researcher’s understanding of the problem, the data collected, and the lived experiences of the participants involved in a particular study (Anafara & Mertz). Using Interpretivism in this study allowed for individual student teachers to socially construct their own
reality (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2011) and for individual truths to emerge after much reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, it fit well with this study which focused on details and descriptions of individual student teachers’ experiences in their first role as teachers.

In this case, five student teachers each shared their unique understandings of what it was like learning to teach. I collected and examined the data from each individual’s story, then analyzed this data. Later, once all individual data was analyzed, I began to view the data collectively in order to identify emerging themes to form a more robust picture of the phenomenon of learning to teach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interpretivism allowed me to play a role in co-constructing the participants’ stories (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2011).

**Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, suited this study because it allowed for the examination of a few individual’s experiences and did not seek to establish a generalizable model. A qualitative approach with a focus on collecting semi-structured interview data provided understanding of interns’ feelings, and these emerging truths will inform program leaders about what best supports student teachers while they learn to teach (Butin, 2010). IPA allowed me to make sense of participants’ stories, while they themselves were trying to make sense of their own experiences during the telling of those stories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). My positionality allowed me to understand, analyze, and search for patterns of meaning in the data collected from the semi-structured interviews (Butin, 2010).

The problem addressed in this study was the gap that exists between undergraduate coursework and teaching internships in educator training. IPA was the best approach to use in order to understand participants’ perspectives and what they felt needed to change to ensure a
smoother transition from the classroom to the internship. Participants had a stake in what material was covered and what data was collected (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Participants and Access**

Participants were student teachers enrolled in the same central Massachusetts teacher training program who were placed in local high schools for their teaching internships, thus the sampling strategy was homogeneous (Creswell, 2013). This study sought to understand how each student teacher felt about him/herself in the role of teacher for the first time, how prepared they felt when their practicums commenced, and how they described the transition from being an undergraduate to a teacher. It then told their collective story of the common lived experiences that they shared as they transition from coursework to classroom teaching.

**Access.** Student teachers had access to the research materials they provided to me, and they were able to ask questions and review protocols and procedures at any time during the study (Creswell, 2013). After data was collected, they had opportunities to review their responses and make edits as they deem necessary (Creswell, 2013) (see Appendix B). Individual student teachers did not have access to other interns’ data results in order to maintain each participant’s privacy and to protect their identities. Since there was a small pool of participants, neither the university nor the high school had access to raw data, again as a measure to protect the participants. Neither the university’s nor the placement schools’ names or locations were revealed. Only myself, as the single researcher for this study, and my advisor had access to data.

**Recruitment.** The first step in recruiting candidates was to contact the teacher education program supervisor from a local, central Massachusetts university in order to seek her permission to solicit students as volunteers for the study (see Appendix B). Briscoe (2005) determined that the researcher is less likely to be trusted when not part of the group. This is of particular concern
because the university may have been hesitant to have its program reviewed by one who is not an employee. However, it was not difficult to gain IRB permission to conduct the study because I clearly delineated that the purpose of the study was to understand individual student teachers’ lived experiences while learning to teach and the perceived meanings they assigned to those experiences, rather than on evaluating the quality of any one institution’s particular program. I also protected the university by making their institution anonymous (see Appendix B).

The second step in gaining permissions was to contact student teachers directly to request voluntary participation in the study. I used the Consent-to-Participate Form found in Appendix C to explain the purpose of the study, the timeline for data collection, the access that participants would have to me to ask questions and review findings, any known risks that may have been involved, their right to withdraw at any time, the means by which their confidentiality would be protected, and the expected benefits of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Participation in the study had no impact on student teacher evaluations, participation was completely voluntary, and all participants were assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy (Appendix C). No incentives were offered to participants. According to Patton (as cited in Puhlick, 2014), offering incentives may actually be misconstrued as an ethical violation in that it may be perceived that interns were gaining favor because of their participation. Precautions were taken to ensure privacy and propriety (see Informed Consent, Appendix C).

**Data Collection**

The data for this study was derived from one semi-structured interview with each participant (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) (see Appendix D for interview protocol). The semi-structured interviews took place during the practicum and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable, private
location in the Media Center/Library of the school where the student teacher were undergraduates. Interviews were double-recorded using the Voice Recorder application on my iPad and iPhone, both of which are password protected. Original interview recordings and subsequent transcriptions are stored on my password protected personal computer. Notations on participants’ pauses, body language, and hand gestures were handwritten and recorded by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The data collected illustrated how student teachers view learning to teach and their own abilities to teach, based upon the preparation they have received in undergraduate training as well as practice teaching internships. Interviews sought to understand how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Since the interviews allowed for interpersonal interaction between participants and me, they generated unique knowledge about the complex process of learning to teach from those who experience it firsthand (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interview data will be stored in my locked home office desk.

**Data Storage and Management**

By using an inductive analysis approach that included detailed readings of raw data, I sought to determine common themes (Thomas, 2006). The inductive analysis approach aided in summarizing data results and establishing clear links within each interview and among interviews of data-driven, open-ended, themed outcomes (Thomas, 2006).

All data is stored on my personal computer in my password protected Dropbox account. A master list of types of information gathered is also safeguarded by password (Creswell, 2013). My handwritten notes taken during interviews are stored and locked in my home office desk. Transcriptions and other study-related typed documents and interview recordings are stored on my protected personal computer, and will be burned or shredded after three years.
Data Analysis

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the researcher who employs IPA must have the combined qualities of, “open-mindedness; flexibility, patience; empathy; and a willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant’s world” (p. 55). During this study, I focused on each participant’s experiences, immersed myself in each individual’s story, and learned about the phenomenon that he/she was experiencing (which, in this case, was learning to teach)—what it meant to him/her and how he/she made sense of what was happening. Thus, the data from each interview was analyzed as a separate entity from the other interviews.

Once all interviews were completed and data was individually analyzed, I then compared the participants’ stories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Data-driven, open-ended, themed outcomes emerged (Thomas, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). Common themes centered on what interns reported were strengths and gaps in their training, all of which will aid in fostering change to make teacher training more productive. This general inductive analysis allowed for summarization of data results and the establishment of clear links within multiple data sources (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo coding ensured that unforeseen themes emerged, and triangulation ensured validity because the process of analyzing multiple data sources through myriad perspectives allowed for cross-validation of research findings (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2013), the researcher must allow for data to emerge from the participants’ own experiences. The informed consent carefully outlined the role of the researcher, emphasized that participation was voluntary, and clearly stated that it was not linked to student teacher evaluation and/or licensure (Appendix C). It was also stated that the researcher will keep all information discussed during interviews strictly confidential, and no
mention of the interviews will take place outside of the interviews. The interview site was the school in which the interns are undergraduates.

**Trustworthiness Criteria**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) established four trustworthiness criteria that provided a basis for this study: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (as cited in Guba, 2014). Truth value is concerned with establishing credibility in interpretations. For this research, member checks were performed after interviews, whereby members were able to review and clarify data provided to ensure internal validity and accuracy of interpretation. Applicability is concerned with external validity and transferability of results. For this study, I formulated a working hypothesis that may be transferred from one student teaching program to another (provided both have similar requirements as well as standards for evaluation and licensure). Consistency is concerned with demonstrating reliable results that may show a variance, but these would be explainable changes based on individuals’ shifting perceptions. For this research, perceptions did indeed change as interns shared their experiences (Cole & Knowles, 1993). However, I tracked variances for dependability. Finally, neutrality deals with analyzing data and the researcher’s biases. In this study, participants each had their own perceptions of the reality of learning to teach, thus I had to reconcile the multiple realities found and interpret those findings separately and then collectively (Creswell, 2013).

**Internal Validity**

Subject characteristics were consistent: student teachers were from the same undergraduate program, and all were performing their student teaching in a secondary host school. Participants were randomly selected. Triangulation in data collection ensured a valid analysis of themes, which supports verification and transferability (Creswell, 2012).
During and After Inquiry

During inquiry, I used prolonged engagement to establish structural corroboration and coherence (Guba, 2014). Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour. Member checks ensured accuracy in participants’ meanings and researcher’s analysis of findings in order to substantiate the relevance of the data (Merriam, 2009).

Protection of Human Subjects

According to the Northeastern University Human Subject Research Protection website (2012) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Belmont Report (1979), the most important aspect of research involving human subjects is protection: to do no harm, to ensure informed consent, to ensure that subjects are participating on an entirely volunteer basis, and that the researcher fully discloses any potential risks. This study of teacher education programs was comprised of student teachers enrolled in a central Massachusetts undergraduate program who were placed in a host secondary school for student teaching internships. Their participation was completely voluntary, they were able to cease participation at any time during the course of the study, and their participation was in no way linked to performance reviews, undergraduate grades, or student teacher evaluations for licensure.

Gaining Permissions

I first obtained IRB approval from Northeastern University’s IRB. I then gained IRB approval from the central Massachusetts higher education institution in which the interns were enrolled. That IRB approval is not included in the Appendix in order to protect the identity of that institution. I next sent a letter to student teachers, and followed that with a Consent-to-Participate form (see Appendices E and D). Those documents informed the participants of the purpose and scope of the study and its commitment to protecting their privacy (see Appendix C).
Informed Consent

The Consent-to-Participate Form (see Appendix C) outlined the purpose of the study, when data would be collected, what access participants would have to ask questions and review findings, any known risks that may be involved, the right to withdraw at any time, how their confidentiality would be protected, and the expected benefits of the study (Creswell, 2013).

I informed subjects that their participation in the study would in no way influence their student teaching evaluations, that participation would be voluntary, and that I would assign them pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. I stored and locked all of the data collected throughout the research process, and will destroy this material after three years. I protected all transcriptions of interviews and other computer-generated data by double passwords. According to Creswell (2013), creating data backups and developing a master list of types of information gathered are critical steps in the data storing process.

I was committed to being a respectful and open-minded observer and listener to protect the integrity of the participants’ feelings about their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A thorough analysis of each individual’s interview data, followed by a collective analysis of common and emerging themes, ensured that an overall understanding of the phenomena that is learning to teach has resulted (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Obtaining IRB Approval

As part of a human subjects research study, a review of the college’s human subjects review board was required prior to commencing research. The Northeastern University (NEU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this study (see Appendix B).
Chapter 4: Findings

“Student teaching is weird…it’s just difficult. There are so many moving parts,” said Jeff, one of the interns interviewed in this study. What makes student teaching so challenging? What supports are there for young interns who enter classrooms for the first time as teachers, rather than pupils?

Voices from the Practicum

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how student teachers transition from being pupils in an undergraduate classroom to being teachers in 21st century high school classrooms. The following three research questions were the foundation for this investigation:

1. How do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)?

2. How do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums, and what learning experiences did they have during their internships that best prepared them to teach?

3. How do student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from coursework to classroom?

In order to answer these questions, I interviewed five student teachers who were completing their practicums. In talking with each of them and listening to their stories, I learned about their first experiences teaching and how they felt about themselves in the role of teacher. While their stories are nuanced and unique, several common themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected during interviews with them. The following is an explanation of these major themes. The first section is an introduction to the five participants in the study, followed
by a presentation of research findings by research question. Each research question section closes with a summary, and the chapter concludes with an overall summary of findings.

**The Interns**

I am privileged to echo the voices of the student teachers here, and I thank them for their time and honesty in talking with me. I hope that I do them honor in presenting and interpreting their stories. In sharing their unique reflections and rich understandings about what it was like for them to teach for the first time, perhaps we can inform teacher training practices and increase support for interns who are starting out on their own journeys toward becoming educators.

The following sections introduce the student teachers who participated in this study. Included in each introduction is a brief description of the school where the intern was practice teaching, as well as a synopsis of the personal reasons that each intern gave for entering the profession. I have changed the participants’ names to protect their privacy.

**Erin.** I met Erin on a Wednesday evening, just after her seminar course got out, which means she had taught all day, then went to class, and then met me for our interview. I would have been exhausted, but Erin seemed to have taken it all in stride and still managed to look polished (and unwrinkled!) in her floral-patterned skirt and professional-looking pumps. With her thick, long blond hair and green eyes, she first appeared young (mid-twenties) and a bit unassuming, but once she began speaking, an intrinsic strength and maturity emanated from her.

Erin was student teaching in a small school situated in a remote rural setting. The student population was predominately middle class and white, and the faculty mirrored this demographic. Erin spoke highly of the facility and the people she had met there.

Erin’s mother is an elementary school teacher, and Erin attributed listening to her mother’s stories as her initial reason for considering teaching as a vocation. She recalled, “As
long as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher…I never wanted to be anything else.”

Her mother’s inspiration led her in the direction of teaching, but it was her “couple of great teachers” in high school that sealed the deal on her future. Erin spoke about the history teachers she had in high school, and specifically about one whom, “all the girls loved, but I really loved him for the way he taught.” His inspiration fostered in her a passion for history itself, and that along with her mother’s influence, became her calling to education as a profession, and specifically to teaching history at the secondary level.

Erin spoke about her background as a substitute teacher in an elementary school, which she said informed her teaching practice. When she eventually stepped into her own classroom for the first time, her experience in front of students proved to be an asset. She said, “I substituted in the elementary school—that definitely helped me with practical experience…being in front of the class.” When asked how this work experience translated to student teaching, Erin sagely responded, “Even though they were five year olds, five year olds and fifteen year olds are not that much different.”

Jeff. Jeff is in his mid-twenties. He arrived at the interview wearing a dark green fisherman’s sweater, jeans, brown leather shoes, dark-framed glasses, and a big smile. His smile, and once he warmed up a bit, his laughter, became infectious, and it was clear to me that his humor must be an asset in the classroom, especially in building rapport with his students. Jeff was interning in a large urban school with a diverse student population, one he described as simply, “violent.” However violent it may have been, Jeff said he hoped to teach there full time after graduating from his teaching program.

When asked to describe the reason he chose to enter the profession, Jeff responded, “The difference you can make in a kid’s life…I wasn’t a good student, I didn’t care about school, one
teacher made that difference for me…and I want to be able to do that same thing that he did for me, for somebody else.”

Jeff said that he knew some of his students before he began the practicum through his employment in an after school program. He said this work experience prior to student teaching helped him in his early days of teaching, “It’s the after school program, I bring it with me.”

**Tom.** When asked what Tom’s students must have thought when they first met him, he responded, “That I’m really good looking…” and he chuckled—clearly his good-naturedness must be a strength when interacting with his students. He is lean, soft-spoken, and polite. He wore jeans and a light gray, long sleeved shirt. He walked with his head bent—humble, modest.

Tom was teaching Spanish in a predominately white, middle class, remotely rural community. Tom described the school as small, with a close-knit population where everyone knew everyone else in and out of school. He said that he would eventually like to teach in a city, where the student population would be more diverse and he could focus more on school culture.

Tom’s journey toward the profession began in kindergarten and continued throughout his school career, “My kindergarten teacher, I wanted to be just like her…then, in high school, [I had] an amazing English teacher, I can’t tell you what an impact she had on me. Once I took Spanish, I thought, this is it.”

Tom was a Spanish tutor in high school, then worked again as a tutor again in college, “It was amazing to see, to watch people grow, and to watch them apply something that I taught them. It’s so rewarding, that’s what made me want to be a teacher.”

**Ali.** Ali is an athletic-looking young man in his mid-twenties. He has a round face and kind eyes that lit up when he spoke about his work as a student teacher in a predominately white,
middle class, mid-size high school. The school ran on trimesters, which made Al’s teaching schedule a bit different from the others’.

When I asked Al why he chose education, he said that his mother was a pre-school teacher, but he originally began his undergraduate studies in sports management at another college. It wasn’t until a few years in to that program he realized he wanted to teach and coach, “Once I did that, I was comfortable.”

John. John is soft-spoken and pleasant, with brown eyes and short brown hair. His intrinsic kindness is evident the minute you begin speaking with him, which must have been attractive to his students, as his manner is clearly positive, friendly, and nurturing.

For him, teaching was a bit of a culture shock. He described the high school in which he completed his student teaching as urban, multicultural, and like Jeff’s, violent. He also spoke fondly about the 81 flags flown at the school, representing the 81 nationalities of the student body. He described how one would walk down the halls and hear three of four languages being spoken at any one time.

When asked why he wished to become an educator, he said,

Years ago, I thought that would be something I would enjoy doing. Foolishly, I thought I would be some kind of erstwhile Mr. Chips. Now, I find out what it’s really about. Some of it is really appalling: the documentation, the evidence gathering, things for the state and all that stuff, but when you get right down to it…I really wanted to just do something that at the end of the day, I could say, You know what, I just did something today. I’m just looking for a little relevance.
Results

This qualitative study used the data generated from semi-structured interviews with each of these five participants in order to understand what it is like to transition from pupil to teacher. This data helped me determine how teacher training programs may leverage program strengths to best support interns who are making this transition as part of the process of learning to teach. The following is a presentation of research findings by research question, and the chapter ends with an overall summary of findings.

Research Question One: Undergraduate Coursework

The first research question I sought to answer in this study was: How do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)? Undergraduate secondary educator training programs require students to declare a major in a discipline of study and a minor in education. The student teacher participants in this study report a clear distinction between content coursework and education coursework. Thus, in discussing the themes that emerged in response to this research question, the first two sections are divided into content coursework results and pedagogy coursework results. The last section is devoted to discussing findings regarding blending content with pedagogy during undergraduate coursework.

Content knowledge raises confidence. The first major theme that emerged in data analysis describes the learning that took place in content-specific coursework. Interns reported that content knowledge learned in coursework had a positive impact on their overall feelings of confidence while student teaching. Moreover, they also reported that electing what courses to take within the major discipline was an important factor in how prepared they felt in teaching the material to their pupils, which in turn influenced the level of confidence they felt.
Participants reported that the confidence they felt in their own content knowledge translated to feelings of being more effective educators during the practicum. They spoke about feeling able to draw on content knowledge, both during lesson planning and when directly instructing students. One intern, Erin, expressed how content knowledge learned in coursework supported her efforts to respond to students during whole class discussion:

If I don’t have an answer, I try to make connections in my head…I try to think about why are they asking that or what are they thinking or how are they making those connections, so I try to answer with that in mind. I think back more on the history side of it, than the teaching side of it… because they are questioning the content.

According to Jeff, “Content classes helped a lot... If didn’t know content, I couldn’t teach.” John also discussed content preparation as being applicable to his teaching: “I took four or five English courses that came in handy… [they were] almost immediately transferrable.”

Tom said that he felt content-specific coursework made him feel confident in speaking Spanish to his students. He said, “I began right away speaking Spanish.” He said his consistent use of the Spanish language allowed for students’ vocabulary to improve, “[It is] …amazing to watch how quickly their vocabulary grows,” which he said improved his confidence. He added, “Confidence is a huge aspect of teaching. If you’re confident that you’re doing your best, then you probably are and your students will pick up on that.”

Course selection. The subtle distinction that qualified the interns’ feelings about content coursework emerged after further inquiry. Interns reported that content knowledge gleaned from coursework had a positive impact on their feelings of confidence as new teachers, but they specified that the selection of which courses to take was an important factor in the degree of content-relevance, which they could in turn utilize in instructing their pupils.
Some interns expressed concern that the content knowledge from which they were drawing had been embedded in coursework not required as part of their major. Al said he was fortunate to have randomly selected an elective course that was outside of the requirements for his major, and he stated that it was more helpful than those content courses that were required:

“In content classes—English classes—there is a lot of material, not a lot of it is relevant to high school…the writing class [I took] wasn’t a requirement at all, but I took it because I knew I was going to be a teacher, and I wanted to understand the writing process. It turns out that that one class…has been more beneficial.

Jeff thought that the college courses one takes should mirror the content and grade level curriculum one would ultimately be teaching, based on their level of certification. He explained, “I love Latin history, so I took that… [I] don’t regret taking it. However, it would have been more of a career focus to take all my courses geared toward the curriculum that I would eventually be teaching.” He gave examples such as secondary school educators taking World and U.S. History in college because they would go on to teach those courses in high school, while he recommended that middle school teachers would be better served by taking Geography and Ancient Civilization courses because those courses are aligned with the Common Core middle school curriculum frameworks. “So the content is always important, it’s just what content you take should depend on what you plan to do,” he clarified.

Tom found that although he had taken courses that technically fulfilled his undergraduate requirement to be able to teach in his major area of study, he judged himself to be in need of more preparation in order to gain confidence in teaching that particular content. Tom had taken two French courses that qualified him to teach that language, but because he did not feel as prepared as he should, he said he would not feel confident teaching French to students. “As a
requirement, I took French, but I would never teach it…. I wouldn’t want to teach it—it would be a disservice to students because I don’t speak it very well.”

In general, content knowledge that was directly related to what the interns’ were teaching in the placement school proved to be the most beneficial to their practice and fostered the greatest sense of self-confidence that they experienced during teaching. Jeff summed it up thus, “You have to take certain number of…classes, then you have options. It falls on you as a person, are you going to take the courses that you’ll need to be successful in your career?”

**Lessons in Pedagogy**. The interns reported that two required aspects of pedagogy coursework, observation hours and the seminar course, had requirements that included applicable lessons which they deemed beneficial for use in their practice. They also reported that opportunities for them to collaborate within the seminar course were some of the most beneficial experiences they had in preparing them to teach and helping them to make sense of the challenges they were facing. However, interns also reported that these authentic activities occurred too infrequently and too close to the time when they were student teaching to offer maximum benefits.

Interns described pedagogical coursework as predominately theory-based, and they reported that they would have benefitted from more integration between theory and practice. They felt that they should have had more practical experience and classroom management training embedded in pedagogical coursework.

The following sections first describe themes that emerged regarding observation hours, then the seminar course, and finally the overall pedagogical experience that interns described through their education-specific coursework.
Observation hours. A certain number of observation hours are required during coursework. Student teachers go out into the field, sit in classrooms in various high schools, and observe veteran teachers at work. The interns are usually required to reflect on some aspect of the teaching they witnessed (such as the strategies the teacher used, the student engagement level, and the lesson plans) depending on the university professor’s instructions for them. According to Jeff, “[We were] instructed to look for things: How did they differentiate instruction?—look for that, or, How did they set up the classroom?—we looked for that…. You’d have different things to look for and would write up reports.”

An emerging theme that occurred in analyzing the data that focused specifically on observation hours was that student teachers used the techniques they observed, but then modified those techniques to suit their own practice. As novice educators, they recognized that they must begin to establish their own teaching styles, and they learned that their instruction would ultimately become unique from any other teacher’s, even when the curriculum is the same.

Tom formulated a plan for organizing student work in his various classes based on an observation he performed prior to beginning his internship. He described how he liked the veteran teacher’s use of folders to organize student work by class period, but he knew that her exact method would not quite work for his own teaching repertoire. He said that he thought to himself, “You know what, that’s a good idea, but she doesn’t really follow through with it.” Tom said that her students did not view the folders as an expectation. Therefore, he used the observation, but “took it further,” and made it his own through personal modifications, such as outlining expectations for folder use at the outset of class, then periodically reminding students that when they were absent, they should take responsibility to retrieve make-up work from their corresponding folders.
Jeff also explained how he used observations to glean various teaching strategies that he could then modify for his own use when he began teaching. He said he had observed a teacher who displayed Facebook pages that the students had created for historical figures. He said, “I thought that was really cool…[and] had it in the back of my mind—if I get to that point in history during my student teaching, I’m doing that—it’s going to be awesome.” Jeff also said that he tweaked the lesson to suit his own emerging teaching style by involving his students in the initial planning. He said, “[I] talked with kids about it: I have this idea, what do you think?” He went on to say that the kids wanted to create a Twitter account rather than Facebook, because it was “way cooler.” Together, they created a template for the requirements that would be included on the Twitter page, and pairs of students had to select a figure from the historical time period they were studying. The criteria required students to include three tweets—two initiated by their chosen historical figure, and one that someone else tweeted to that person. Jeff reported, “This lesson was phenomenal! Kids were way more creative than I would have imagined. [They created] funny names…. [The] twitter handle for Ralph Waldo Emerson was like, @findingwaldo…. (He laughs)…it was really great, they made it funny.”

Observation hours are an important aspect of teacher training, especially because they allow interns to view teaching from a new perspective, one as an emerging educator rather than as a pupil. Because the interns reported that they adapted lessons and instruction they witnessed during observation hours to use in their own practice, this data indicates that interns learn early on that they are not just learning to teach, they are learning to establish their own personal and unique teaching styles. Further, modifying lessons to suit their own developing teaching approach was beneficial in formulating their thinking about themselves in the role of teacher.
Opportunities for practice. Although student teachers found observation hours to be beneficial, they clarified that more time should have been spent on actually teaching rather than passively observing veteran teachers. Jeff reported not having taught a lesson at all during his observation hours. Tom was concerned that because he only taught one lesson, it was taken out of context, and with no opportunity to foster any rapport with the students, it was not well-received. He said, “[I] taught a lesson…and the students were petrified.” He spoke about how after that, when he began his formal student teaching with the same group of students, he had to work “extra hard” to foster a relationship with them to combat that first impression.

During his observations, Al recalled, “[We were] required to teach two lessons, two short lessons…so you’d have an idea what it’s going to be like, but that was just before student teaching. There wasn’t too much experience going in,” which speaks to the idea that in most cases, there were opportunities to teach lessons, but just not enough. He went on to say, “Even with all the observations, it’s different when you’re going up there. And one of the things the observations can’t really do is show you what it’s like to be the one doing it.”

In Jeff’s account of the time he spent performing observation hours, he said,

It wasn’t until last semester that we were asked to actually do something, and I really wish that that were different. Even if you were just helping kids out with a worksheet or something, it would be better, you’d be in it. I mean, there were definitely, definitely positives, and definitely going out in the field is a good thing, so there were positives, and you do get something out of it. I just think in an education program, it’s crucial to be more hands-on, less passive.

Erin reported feeling that this lack of practical experience left her unprepared for the work she was required to perform at the start of the internship, “I needed a lot of guidance at first, I wasn’t
sure… *If this happens, what do I do? If that happens, what do I do?*” Al voiced similar concerns. He said that the theory was helpful, but more practice prior to student teaching would have given him a greater sense of what to expect. He said, “We teach maybe one or two lessons total…. It’s close because we have to plan it out, but the actual implementation of it is different.”

Although interns reported that observation hours had a positive impact on their teaching, especially in gaining ideas that they could then modify as a means of formulating their own unique teaching styles, they also qualified the benefit of observation hours to suggest that more time should have been spent practicing the art of teaching rather than passively observing the practice of others. A combination of theory with practice within coursework and before student teaching would have been helpful to them when beginning to teach.

*The seminar course.* During their semester-long internships when they are learning to teach in a high school, student teachers are also required to participate in a weekly seminar course at the university. This course is taught by a professor who is usually not the practicum supervisor. During the seminar course, interns are required to submit documents such as journal reflections of their experiences teaching, sample lesson plans, and classroom management plans, all of which would be reviewed by the seminar professor.

The data indicated that most student teachers found the seminar course to be beneficial in helping them to establish their own unique teaching styles. They felt that the seminar offered valuable opportunities to collaborate with other interns; and it supported certain practical elements of learning to teach, especially when the seminar course requirements were immediately applicable to the work they were doing during internships or toward their future careers as full-time educators.
Practical application. The requirements of the seminar course that interns reported to be beneficial and directly related to teaching were homework assignments, including creating lesson plans and classroom management plans; journal writing, which allowed them to reflect upon and ultimately learn from their first teaching experiences; and assigned readings, which fostered understanding of how to actually begin the process of student teaching. Jeff said of the seminar course, “You make unit plans, teach a couple of lessons, and write lesson plans…. *that* prepared me the most.” Tom also discussed the homework required in the seminar course, including writing a tiered lesson plan, as being beneficial to his teaching, and even more beneficial to his impending search for teaching positions in the job market:

What I like about the seminar is that everything you do has a practical application. I can take that homework, that classroom management plan, and hopefully when I get a job next year, say to the principal, *Here’s my classroom management plan; Here’s my letter home to parents*…it’s all there, and I can use it.

According to Tom, a positive aspect of the seminar course was the requirement to keep a journal, which he ultimately transformed into a published blog and shared with colleagues. He discussed how beneficial the process of reflective writing was to his emerging practice, “Putting [it] in writing made me think about it more—this is what I did, and this is how I would change it.” Erin also commented on how reflective writing had a positive impact on her teaching. She said, “I look for things that worked, things that didn’t work, activities that stuck out that students really responded to. For the things that didn’t go well, I know I need to modify [and] try to improve….”

Tom mentioned that another positive aspect of the seminar course was the required reading, which he said was helpful in the early days of his practicum: “[The] book I was reading
said [we were] supposed to show them that you mean business. Not necessarily stern and strict, that has a negative connotation to it. But, ‘um, setting expectations and following through.” He said that the required reading was helpful with establishing protocols and with forming his own identity as a teacher during the early days in the classroom, but that it was difficult to attend the seminar while concurrently completing his practicum.

Peer collaboration. Participants reported that one of the greatest strengths of the seminar course was the opportunities it provided for collaboration. They reported feeling supported and gaining valuable insights from other interns facing similar situations during student teaching. The data suggested that while the seminar course provided a venue for that type of interaction to occur, offering interns more opportunities for collaboration within the seminar experience and/or in preparation for the seminar course would serve to strengthen training programs.

Jeff said, “[We] exchanged ideas as student teachers…here’s how to handle it, here’s what works….” He explained that this type of collegial sharing made even specific incidents, such as dealing with cell phone use, far more manageable. Erin also explained that the collaborative aspect of the seminar course was beneficial. She said, “[We need] more sharing…more of that—[would be] helpful.” She also said that through collaboration with her peers, which sometimes entailed “just bouncing ideas off each other” in an informal way, she gained an understanding that the challenges she was facing were common among new teachers and not unique to her personal skills (or lack thereof) as a novice educator. She reported feeling less isolated and less overwhelmed when able to discuss her experiences with others who were facing similar challenges. Erin noted that more of this type of interaction with fellow interns would improve the experience of learning to teach.
Although the interns completed their practicums in multiple and varied secondary schools, they had many common experiences and shared similar frustrations. The data indicated that peer collaboration was a valuable aspect of teacher training and provided a system of support for interns. These benefits occurred whether that collaboration was formal or informal.

Timing of the seminar. Interns reported that where there were many experiences in the seminar that they found beneficial, those strengths needed to occur sooner and more frequently prior to beginning teaching. Participants reported that because the seminar ran simultaneously with the internship, the work they were required to perform was difficult to complete. Seminar experiences would have been more valuable and better timed had they occurred prior to student teaching as well as occurring simultaneously with it.

Erin said, “The worst part [was] the work on top of student teaching…. It is beneficial, but tough on top of what we’ve been doing.” Tom concurred, adding that he felt “exhausted” with all of the work he had to do between the seminar course and the actual internship.

Interns also expressed frustration that they had not received feedback ahead of time and before student teaching on the work they were required to perform during the seminar course. Current practice had them submitting lesson plans, management plans, and other course requirements while they were using them in student teaching, so by the time they received feedback on their work, they had already taught the lessons or establishment classroom management protocols in their internships. Jeff reported his concern, stating, “The first time I got feedback…was like week nine.” John said, “I submitted [lesson plans] to my seminar instructor, but that was after several weeks of teaching.” Tom voiced a similar concern, stating that there was only one tiered lesson plan for which he was offered commentary from his college instructor prior to using it in his teaching. He said that for the most part, they simply collected
and accumulated lesson plans as they went along in student teaching and simultaneously submitted them to their seminar instructors.

The data indicated that although student teachers were creating relevant assignments as requirements of the seminar course, oftentimes those exercises would go without feedback or support prior to their implementation in the classroom. Interns reported that the feedback they did receive was productive, but felt that it should have occurred before they used the materials during practice. They felt that they would have modified accordingly and the lessons would have been stronger as a result.

From this data, we may conclude that more timely feedback on lesson planning prior to student teaching would yield more productive written lessons and better classroom practice. Had the seminar course taken place the semester before student teaching, interns would have had the opportunity to submit lessons, gain feedback, modify based on that feedback, and then implement the lesson during the internship.

By the Seat of Your Pants

More opportunities to learn practical classroom management skills prior to student teaching would benefit interns. Participants reported feeling that when courses focused on practice as well as theory, the courses were more beneficial in preparing them for the types of decision-making they found themselves facing when they were in the classroom working with their students. All agreed that more time practicing the art of teaching during coursework would have better prepared them to handle classroom management issues. Furthermore, they reported having inadequate preparation in the skills they needed to deal with spontaneous situations that arose in their classrooms. They also felt they needed more preparation in instructional strategies within their discipline.
According to Al, “We do a lot of theory… but it’s never scenario-based stuff. It’s mostly… your classroom management plan, your educational philosophy… but it never really prepares you for: *Okay, this one kid says this to you, what do you say back to them in front of the class?* … there’s never really any of that, anywhere, it’s experience.”

Tom explained that he thought it was imperative to learn about classroom management ahead of time, rather than having to act on instinct during the early days and weeks of teaching. He said, “The first few days are so crucial, and I thought ‘Oh no, what if I mess this up?’”

According to Jeff, “That’s one thing that I feel has been left relatively untouched in my education. But how do you teach that? The only way you teach that is by experience, I think.”

John found that classroom management was directly related to how well you planned your daily lessons. He explained,

> The kids really have the upper hand in the power struggle, and so you have to understand going in that you have to give them what they’re going to be willing to accept, and in a package that they will digest. It took me a while to understand…I thought I would just be able to speak, and they would just listen.

Participants repeatedly highlighted instances where split-second decision-making left them guessing as to how they *should* have handled certain classroom management issues; they wondered how more applicable training could have better prepared them for making such decisions. Erin said, “[I] needed more hands on…to know how to handle certain situations, when things come up—behavior issues, certain things, questions—all in the moment, and you have to just so quickly think of something to do or say.”

Al described having “…approximately two seconds to come up with some form of answer or decision” and worrying that “…it has to be sound, and it has to be like that’s been
there the whole time.” He explained that he was not prepared for that type of quick reaction ahead of time, and he felt that sometimes he made mistakes in his immediate responses to students. For example, he related a story about assigning homework, and discovering that only one student had read the material. Instead of holding the others accountable for not completing the assignment, he decided in the moment that he would go over it with the whole class and help them to take notes on it. He said, “The girl who had done it was incredulous, she was looking at me like ‘Why, but I did it?’…so my reaction [was to] just kind of shrug my shoulders….” He explained that upon hindsight, he realized that he should have praised her for completing the assignment, especially in front of the other students. Upon further reflection, Al said, “There’s always a sound way of doing things, but it takes a lot of thinking to figure it out, and the first time, you don’t really know.”

Such split-second decisions require practice, and theory alone cannot prepare one for the complexity or the immediacy of such interactions. Pedagogy courses that focus on scenarios, role-playing, and the “what-ifs” of classroom management would benefit novice educators so that they aren’t, as Erin so aptly phrased it, “…learning to fly by the seat of their pants.”

**Connecting Content with Pedagogy**

In addition, there was no evidence presented that demonstrated that the teacher training program included instruction in how to teach within your discipline (or content major). There was no mention of any type of coursework in the teacher education program that connected content with pedagogy—in other words, the history teachers did not report that they took a course on teaching history specifically; the foreign language instructor did not report having had a course specifically designed to teach him how to instruct the languages; and the English teachers did not report on taking courses that focused on how to teach reading or writing. Tom
expressed it thus, “I knew a lot about content before, but not about strategies and techniques…I wish we studied more technique.” Teachers-in-training would benefit from learning pedagogical strategies within their content areas, rather than experiencing content courses and pedagogy courses as two separate entities.

**Summary of Findings for Research Question One**

In response to the first research question regarding the undergraduate coursework phase of training, the findings indicated that observation hours benefit student teachers because this is where they begin to discern what types of practice will suit their emerging teaching styles. Also, findings indicate that the strengths of the seminar course would prove to be more beneficial if interns could gain feedback on authentic experiences prior to student teaching as well as during student teaching. The findings further show that opportunities for collaboration with peers have a positive impact on interns, and that greater integration of theory and practice and of content with pedagogy would better support interns as they learn to teach.

**Research Question Two: The Practicum**

The second research question that this study sought to answer was: How do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums and the learning experiences they had during their internships that best prepared them to teach? Through careful analysis of the data, three themes developed in answer to this research question. Interns reported having learned through the practicum experience that the first critical step in educating their pupils was to foster relationships with them. Interns also learned that relationships with their mentors was crucial in not only learning how to teach, but more importantly in understanding how to cope with the complexities of the day-to-day workload of an educator. Finally, interns reported that through their collaboration with veteran teachers, they became part of a reciprocal learning process,
whereby they were able to contribute to the learning environment of the placement school rather than merely taking something from it. The following sections are devoted to explicating how these three themes emerged through data analysis.

**Building Relationships: Do a Little Dance**

Interns reported having learned on their own that building relationships with their pupils was a critical first step in teaching them. Some interns reported being successful with this, while others felt that they learned by making mistakes in this area. All agreed that while they made connections with their students in order to foster pupil engagement and interest in the material, they also learned to accept that sometimes they could not successfully reach every student. Interns reported that this process taught them that the most valuable lesson of all was not to take things too personally, especially when they were unsuccessful in connecting with some students.

Erin described an incident where students had created projects, and she got so excited she could not hide her enthusiasm and reacted by “doing a little dance.” Her students were caught off guard at first, stating that they had never seen a teacher do that for them before. Erin reported that eventually, it inspired them to do even better on future tasks, and they came to ask Erin if assignments were dance-worthy, which she found to be a positive step toward fostering a relationship with them. Erin also found that using a pre-lesson icebreaker was a way to make connections with her students. She explained, “You get to find out a bit about the kids. I can still remember who does dance, who has an older brother, who plays tennis….” Joe explained that he learned to foster relationships with students through casual conversations—talking with them one-on-one—often when they first entered his classroom and before the bell rang.

For John, building relationships with pupils started with engendering a sense of what he described as, “Working toward the same goal,” which placed him on the same team as his
students. Planning lessons together, for example, inspired his pupils to work toward pleasing him as well as themselves. Jeff also described how he learned to include students in decision-making. He said, “Students actually take ownership. It’s not, ‘You’re disobeying my rules,’ [rather] it’s, ‘You’re not obeying your own rules.’” By involving students in classroom rule-setting, Jeff was attempting to establish a classroom climate of mutual respect, whereby teacher and pupils would become co-creators of the decision-making that drove the learning.

When pupils were able to view their teachers as individuals who cared enough about their progress to do a “little dance” for them, it fostered a desire to work harder to please their teachers on a personal level. Making connections with students and learning about their interests outside of the classroom motivates them to achieve at higher levels.

**Pitfalls.** Interns reported that although they felt it important to foster relationships with their pupils, they cited many challenges to that process. Some of the difficulties derived from the fact that their student populations were comprised of individuals who were different from them. They found that their pupils had a variety of social justice issues, and they reported having difficulty building trust with pupils who perceived them as different. Other interns reported achieving success in fostering relationships, but still finding that they were unable to inspire pupils to perform in the classroom.

**Social justice.** Interns reported that issues of social justice, such as differences in culture, gender, or age, made it difficult for them to make connections with their pupils, who were reluctant to overcome perceived barriers and trust their teachers.

John recounted an issue regarding race, “I probably had one or two white kids in each of my classes…and the majority of the kids were looking at me like, ‘Who’s this guy?’” He further discussed the students’ perceived notions about him that made his efforts to connect with them
even more challenging. He explained, “It was a little bit of a rude awakening to me… I realized that there’s a lot more work to be done than to just kind of say ‘Here’s what we’re doing today, and you can either do it or not.’ You definitely have to build that bridge first.”

John also spoke about overcoming stereotypes regarding gender that he encountered from his students,

A lot of these guys, they have single moms, and they look… at the way guys have treated their moms, and they resent that type of authority figure—especially a white guy like me. [I] may not have been the right fit… you just have to look at these kids, and you have to realize that they’re mainly trying to kind of pull your chain just to see what you’re going to do. Typically speaking, they’re definitely not malicious, but they’re just going to pull your chain, yank it, and kind of kick you around a bit and see what happens….

When I asked John whether he felt that he succeeded in fostering trust with his students by the end of the practicum, he said, “I definitely did not do that.” He said, “[I didn’t realize] … how far away from them I was.” He continued, “It’s appalling to learn half way through the semester… [that while] I’m trying to work with these kids, they’re thinking I’m the biggest fool on the planet (he chuckles)—and they’re not far off the mark!”

Age differences can also pose obstacles in trying to make connections with pupils. Jeff gave the following account,

[When in] confrontations with students, I need to be able to be the adult. They’re not that much younger than I am … and so it’s difficult to be the adult when someone’s an adult (laughs)… and you still have to take that role no matter how intimidating that might be, no matter how uncomfortable that might be, and the only way you’re going to do that is through practice.
Erin also discussed having difficulty with some of the older kids, “[They were] disrespectful, maybe [it was] just their age. [It is] definitely something I will remember and possibly know how to handle better. But, I learned not to take things so personally….”

This data indicated that student teachers need support in dealing with social justice issues within their classrooms. They need to learn the skills that will best position them for success in breeching the barriers that students may erect due to preconceived notions about them, especially when those opinions are based on outward differences. Conversely, interns also need to learn how best to interact with and support their pupils, no matter what the demographics of their schools. Fostering skills to support teacher-pupil identity understandings will aid educators in building authentic relationships with their pupils.

Why can’t we just do nothing? Working toward fostering pupil motivation was reported to be another challenge that participants faced during their practicums. Interns reported feeling frustrated when students simply refused to do something—whether it be an assignment, a teacher request for behavior modification, or a classroom protocol, and they felt unprepared to defuse these situations. However, if they ultimately were successful, they reported it to be one of the most rewarding aspects of their student teaching experience.

Al said he was surprised by his pupils’ lack of motivation. He mentioned how theory learned in classwork began with the assumption that students were motivated, rather than teaching techniques on how to motivate them. He reported this to be, “The real world of teaching, of just trying to get students to buy in and just do it.” He explained that classes operating on this assumption went right to best practices, where in student teaching he learned that he needed to first find a way to motivate students to do the work. He said, “How do [you] get them to just read the book so that we can then form a cool lesson around it? If they’re not
reading the novel, then you can’t really do anything with the book. That was a surprise to me.”

He went on to explain, “I wasn’t thinking of that—the whole need of getting students to buy in—that was never addressed, and I had never experienced it, so I never thought about it. There are students who flat out do nothing, and they let you know that they’re doing nothing.”

John also reported having issues in motivating students to do the homework he had assigned. He said he tried to combat this issue by accepting late work, rationalizing that he would rather get something late than not at all. Erin felt similar frustration, so much so that she found herself in tears. She explained,

One kid, smart, knows he’s smart…I was giving notes before a project. [In the] middle of my talking, [he said] ‘No one is listening to you, I’m not listening to you, this is stupid.’ Once he started, a couple others joined in, ‘Why can’t we watch a movie, why can’t we get into groups, why can’t we just do nothing?’

Erin explained that she let it go that day and finished the lesson by ignoring their comments. However, the next day, the complaints continued. She reported saying to students, “You’re being very rude.” She then described how upset she felt, “I could feel myself starting to get emotional. [I] didn’t want to cry in front of him, [so I] called my mentor teacher and stepped out. For some reason, that triggered me, it was just enough.”

These findings suggested that interns need more support and preparation in classroom management skills. More practice and more experience would aid them in handling difficult students or situations that occur too quickly to ask someone for assistance.

**How can it not be me?** Interns reported that no matter how well-prepared their lessons were or how much they demonstrated that they cared about their pupils, sometimes that was just not enough and students simply refused to do the work. John reported, “You just can’t put too
much stock in one day. Take the long view. If a kid comes in and puts his head on the desk…if he’s having that kind of day, you just let it go. I learned that the hard way.”

Erin said that she learned reluctantly that she could not reach every student. She explained, “I would try as hard as I can, [but] some of them just don’t want to do it.” At first, she thought it was her teaching, and she asked colleagues for advice, “…because I was worried that I wasn’t reaching them the right way.” However, she realized, “Other teachers have similar problems… it’s just them. Some kids just won’t do the work.”

John also learned that he could not reach every student. He said, “I kind of realized that it was just kids being kids…. You have to shrug your shoulders after a while…. [My] mentor kept saying, ‘It’s not you, it’s not you,’ [but] I was thinking, how can it not be me?”

**Summary of relationship building.** This data indicated that student teachers instinctively understand that they need to try to make connections with their students before they can find success in teaching them. They reported that sometimes they had difficulty in fostering student-pupil relationships, especially when social justice issues created barriers between themselves and their pupils. They reported that sometimes even after they were successful in building connections with pupils, they still faced challenges in motivating them. This was especially disconcerting, but many of the interns learned that they could not reach every student, and they could not take this lack of motivation too personally. Interns also described how coursework was based on the assumption that they automatically have willing pupils in front of them, and classes did not prepare them with skills to motivate reluctant learners.

**Mentors**

Interns reported that the most critical learning that took place during the internship was in collaboration with their mentors. The intern-mentor relationship had an enormous impact on
their progress in learning to teach. Most interns reported that their mentors were their most immediate resources for feedback. However, not all of them felt the same way about the amount and/or the quality of the feedback they received. In addition, some interns reported that they felt they had a lack of autonomy in establishing their own teaching styles because their mentors were instructing them to teach in the same style as they did; these mentors did not support interns in fostering their own professional identities.

**Positive mentor-intern interactions.** Tom summed it up by saying, “My Supervising Practitioner made me feel…prepared.” Al concurred, stating that even when he felt that his lessons went well, his mentor offered constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement. He explained, “Some of it was things I hadn’t been thinking about at all…so that was really useful.” Al also reported that his mentor guided his practice, but still allowing him to figure things out for himself.

Tom reported having a positive relationship with his mentor, who had been teaching for 42 years, “[She was a] great person to mentor me…. If I had gone to any other school, I wouldn’t be as good as I am now. She’s good at letting me do something different, [but] she’s collaborative.” Erin also reported having a positive relationship with her mentor, whom she had met during her observation hours,

[It’s the] perfect combination of letting me go…, but then helping me with what I need.

[It’s a] perfect match—[I] don’t think it could have been better. I could tell when I observed him, but seeing him every day really helped evolve that relationship.

Al reported that his mentor offered support and made him feel confident, even when he knew he was making mistakes,
My mentor said, “You’re here to make mistakes. You need that time. Do things over again, draw on what went wrong. But it takes a few years. You’re not going to be the best, you’re not going to be the worst.” [That] made me feel good, that I could figure it out over time.

John described his mentor as, “a delightful woman, with a grandmother kind of routine.” He reported that although she and he had dissimilar teaching styles, he was able to learn a great deal from her. He said,

I’m a little different, I’m more laissez faire, …. It was a strange, strange relationship for the first couple of weeks. God love her, she stayed quiet while I struggled through…and I learned the hard way. She gave me feedback. It was funny because my first dozen or so handouts were written at the college level. She berated me for that!

Tom also spoke fondly about his mentor and her genial way of interacting with him and with her students. He said that he appreciated her candor and her laughter.

**Do this my way—negative mentor-intern interactions.** What happens when the fit is not so perfect, and mentors are more interested in having interns teach in the same style that they do? How do interns form their own identities as educators?

Jeff explained that he had no guidance as to what his and his mentor’s roles would be when he began student teaching. Jeff described that when he attempted to use his own lesson plans rather than his mentor’s, his mentor told him that he could be creative in some ways, but that he really had to follow the curriculum in the manner that his mentor had laid out. Jeff went on to explain,

I live in his house, and you have to respect the teacher…his methods. [He] lets me explore…but then he also wants me to do what he does. Like I said, it’s his house, I have
to respect that. Ultimately, it’s on him if these students are successful, although I think my lesson plans make them more successful.

Al also described that while he felt he had eventually established a good rapport with his mentor, things did not start out so agreeably. He said that at the outset, his practice had initially been dictated by his mentor. He said that early on, his mentor suggested that he model his style of teaching. Al said, “I tried to do things exactly like him, minute to minute…that didn’t work out too great.” Fortunately for Al (and unlike what Jeff experienced), his mentor did loosen the reins and allow him to progress in his own way. He said, “Once I was finally able to go off script, off his script, it was so much easier to do. It made so much more sense.”

**Summary of mentor relationships.** These findings demonstrate that the most productive relationships that interns had with their mentors was when mentors offered frequent check-ins and ample support, balanced with freedom and guided practice. Problems arose when mentors forced interns to mirror their teaching styles rather than encouraging them to find their own. Overall, mentors are the professionals who work most closely with interns and have the most influence over their teaching. Interns reported that mentors provided more guidance and feedback on their work in the classroom than did any other stakeholders in the training process, including university personnel. Mentors are most successful when they offer interns a balance of guidance and freedom.

**Reciprocal Learning**

Through data analysis in response to this research question, I found that interns were unexpectedly part of reciprocal learning dyads. Interns reported having been surprised and pleased that they contributed to the learning of veteran teachers. The collaboration that took place among them became a confidence building, positive influence on student teachers.
Along with creating a blog that he shared with colleagues in the host school, Tom shared lesson plans with his mentor. He said, “I really like that she takes lessons from me, and I take lessons from her, and I feel like it’s a collaboration rather than, ‘No, here’s my lessons, you have to do it my way.’” Tom also reported that he collaborated with colleagues throughout the placement school, sharing technology such as google docs and google voice. He said that teachers from other disciplines also reached out to him.

Jeff referred to colleagues in the placement school as personal relations. He said, “Our side of the hall, [was] like a little family.” Emily also described positive interactions with colleagues, describing their relationships as “awesome,” and describing playing a “Little game on the phone with one other teacher.” In general, she said, “Everyone has something nice to say, [they] give me advice, ask me how I’m doing—nothing negative.” And in turn, she spoke about sharing her ideas and lesson plans with those same colleagues, and finding that collaboration with them had a positive impact on her feelings about her own teaching abilities.

Al described how he observed several teachers on his own during the practicum, and how he built relationships with them. Eventually, he collaborated with a veteran English teacher (not his mentor), and even taught one of her classes. He explained, “One teacher has a little bit of trouble with the writing part. I work in the writing center here (at the college), and I have a few writing lessons that I like, so I went in there and taught a peer review class with her.”

**Summary of reciprocal learning.** Findings here suggest that interns have a great deal of learning and expertise that they impart to colleagues within the placement school. They are usually technology-savvy, they are fresh out of universities with the most updated training in content and pedagogy, and they are professional, albeit young and inexperienced, with their own creative ideas about educating youth. They are also young themselves, which means they are
closer to students in terms of interests and experiences, and can bring such insights to veteran teachers. The finding that reciprocal learning takes place between interns and veteran teachers at large within the placement school was one I did not anticipate at the outset of this study.

**Summary of Findings for Research Question Two**

The second research question of this study sought to understand how student teachers described their student teaching practicums and the learning experiences they had during their internships that best prepared them to teach. The findings demonstrated that fostering relationships with pupils and collaboration with mentors were critical to interns’ success in their ability to motivate their pupils and in their formulation of professional identities. The findings also demonstrated that student teachers enter into a reciprocal learning process whereby they act as colleagues to host school peers, which supports their own learning and the learning of veteran teachers. Through this process, interns become contributing members of the learning environment within the placement school.

**Research Question Three: Experiencing the Transition from Pupil to Teacher**

The third and final research question this study considered was how student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from learner to educator. Two themes emerged through data analysis in response to this question: the first is that interns described feeling overwhelmed and unprepared for their early days as teachers; and the second was that they reported having received conflicting instructions from mentors, college professors, and personnel in the host school. The following sections expound on these two themes.

**The Overwhelming Early Days of Teaching**

When interns described the transition from undergraduate coursework to their internships, they reported feeling unprepared to begin teaching. They described feeling nervous,
overwhelmed, and lacking in practical experience when they first took over their own classrooms, and they explained that beginning the internship halfway through the high school year was a disadvantage.

During the first weeks of student teaching, Tom reported, “My first day, I was nervous, stumbling and bumbling, never wanting to come back. That type of feeling.” Al said, “There wasn’t too much experience going in, so you have no idea what it’s going to be like.” Erin described her first experiences, “I was all gung-ho, you know, I had about two months planned in advance…it took me about two weeks and that was all out the window (laughs). I learned quickly that you can’t do that.” Al also described feeling nervous, but he said, “I wouldn’t let myself worry about it…I just had to kind of ignore it.”

After further inquiry, Erin reported feeling unprepared for the questions that students would ask, and she realized that she did not know some of the answers to her pupils’ inquiries, which she reported unnerved her. She said, “[You]…realize you’re going to have those students who ask you things that you don’t know, or you don’t think you know. Sometimes they know more than you.” She went on to describe how she learned to deal with this eventually, “[You] have to be able to say ‘I don’t know’ or ‘Hey, why don’t you find that for us?’ or some way to cleverly say, ‘I have no idea.’”

Erin’s comment speaks to how the transition from coursework to teaching was too abrupt for interns to have truly prepared for the types of experiences they would have when they began teaching. Interns were, as Erin phrased it, “throw in” meaning they began to have experiences with their pupils that they were ill-equipped to handle. Eventually, they gained experience through the practicum itself, but the coursework prior to their internships did not adequately prepare them for their first days and weeks of teaching.
Erin had advice for new interns starting out. She said, “Don’t be overwhelmed. It definitely is overwhelming, but it gets better.” She also advised, “Don’t take things so seriously. You’ll get it. It doesn’t seem that way, but it will come.” Despite their undergraduate courses and observation experiences, interns reported feeling nervous and unprepared. None of the training they had received prepared them for the scope of the work in terms of how time-consuming and challenging it was.

**Starting mid-year.** Interns reported that beginning the practicum in January is problematic. Secondary schools do not operate on the same type of semester schedules that universities do. High school students are halfway through their school year when interns enter their classrooms to begin teaching. Therefore, when interns begin student teaching, their high school pupils are already accustomed to the veteran teachers and to the protocols that were in place in September when they first began their school years.

Both John and Jeff discussed how starting the practicum in the middle of the high school year was a disadvantage. They explained that one of the reasons the transition to teaching was difficult was because the classroom norms, expectations, and boundaries had already been set without their input. John described feeling like an interloper in his own classroom. Jeff’s experience was similar, and as a result, he felt that he struggled with classroom management throughout most of the semester. Jeff said, “The norms were set before I got there, before I ever entered the classroom.” He went on to add, “Not setting boundaries at the beginning of the year, not being there for that process, not having authority once I first got there…the norms were out of my control.” John reported learning from this experience. He explained, “I missed the boat in setting up the expectations and boundaries…how they should be prepared for class, what their
binders should look like, what they should be doing when we are talking, what kinds of notes they should be taking, all of that.”

**Summary of early days of teaching.** These findings suggested that interns were unprepared to begin teaching because they were not afforded ample opportunities to practice teaching prior to immersion in the practicum itself. They described feeling nervous, overwhelmed, and lacking in practical experience. In addition, I found that the timing of the internship was problematic. Interns commence practicums midway through their pupils’ high school year of study, when veteran teachers had already established classroom expectations and norms. Establishing those protocols and setting the tone in their own classrooms is essential to interns’ success with their pupils.

**Mixed Messages**

Participants in this study reported that they had received valuable and constructive feedback and experienced many positive exchanges with professionals from their student teaching program and/or their host schools, but that oftentimes the advice or instruction they received was conflicting. Their positions as student teachers made it extremely difficult to determine to whom they should defer—who has the final say on what is the right or wrong course of action—the college professor, the mentor, or the administrators in the host school?

For Jeff, he felt the mixed messages were confusing when first learning to teach. He said,

> You have so many people you report to: you have the teacher you work with directly, you have the professor of your class, you have the person who comes in and observes you—and they’re all telling you to do different things, and it’s like, you’re trying to juggle all of it. Sometimes your professor is telling you what you should be doing, and
it’s like, ‘I’m working with this guy, in his classroom, and he doesn’t want me to do that, so I don’t know what to tell ‘ya (chuckles), you know what I mean? I’m not telling this guy that I’m doing what I want to do in his class, it’s his class. I can’t do that.

Al described a similar feeling of frustration with the multiple people to whom he had to answer. He explained that all of his supervisors were offering valuable feedback, but they also seemed to be “doing their own thing.” He added, “[There are] mixed messages. It’s confusing… [and] there was a little bit of miscommunication.”

Erin discussed how the mixed messages were difficult to adjust to, especially when some of them were contrary to her own ideas about her emerging teaching style. She said,

My mentor…kind of gets me in trouble in my classes a little bit. He doesn’t let students get away with things…. I liked it. My instructors said, ‘There’s a need to be mean.’ [But] I don’t want to be mean. Others tell me to be stern. One professor said to use a motherly voice, be nice. [But, I] see myself trying to be more stern. I want them to take me seriously. Especially because I’m young.

Erin went on to discuss how the messages received from the college personnel and her mentor were not only inconsistent among them, the instruction was sometimes inconsistent with her own philosophies as an educator. One college professor was urging her to be nice and give out treats and candy as rewards. She said, “I agree—if they’re doing well. But I’m not going to reward them for doing the wrong thing or for being average. [It’s] not something I really believe in—not as a future parent, and not as an educator.” Erin also discussed how messages from administrators in her host school conflicted with those she was getting from both her mentor and her college instructors. She said even the principal commented on her style of discipline, which was contrary to what the college professors had been saying about incentivizing.
Tom said that he learned to discover what was comfortable for him, and that advice given to him early on just didn’t fit his style of teaching: “My Supervising Practitioner said don’t smile, but of course I’m going to smile!”

**Collaboration needed.** This data indicated that more coordination is needed between the university and the host school. As Erin aptly phrased it, “I just wanted some type of collaboration among them so that I knew exactly what to do…. [I was] looking for something that all works together—teachers, administrators…all together.” From the college training program, interns have seminar instructors, supervisors, evaluators, and the professors who have taught them throughout undergraduate courses; and from the host school, they have administrators, mentors, and other veteran teachers. The interns identified a need for these stakeholders to collaborate and to work cooperatively in order to ensure that the same messages were provided throughout the training.

Collaboration amongst these professionals would allow for clear delineation of roles so that interns who are being evaluated know which professionals have the final say on what is to be done during the practicum. However, it is important to note that a variety of feedback is essential to the formation of one’s professional identity, as interns can decide which advice suits their emerging teaching styles and which does not.

**Responsibility and Accountability**

An unexpected theme that emerged through analysis of the interview data was that student teachers immediately felt ownership for the work they were doing (none felt it to be “practice” even though they were considered “practice teachers”). They believed that the work they were performing was much more than merely a job, and they felt a great sense of responsibility to get it right.
Jeff used the analogy of being in his mentor’s “house” to mean that he was a guest in the veteran teacher’s classroom. Despite the fact that he would only be teaching that particular group of students for a few weeks, he still reported feeling responsible for his pupils’ learning. He explained, “You have to take ownership.” He went on to add, “Their minds are in your hands, even if it’s just for a few short weeks.” Despite Jeff’s acknowledgment (through the “his house” analogy) that he was operating as a guest in someone else’s classroom, he still felt a powerful sense of ownership and obligation toward the students, referring to them as “my kids” on several occasions.

Erin also reported feeling a great sense of responsibility for the pupils in her charge. She said, “You just realize…it’s on you, you’re in front of them, they’re all looking at you, they’re staring at you. They’re all waiting for you.” She realized,” I have to be in charge of these students now, it’s a big, it’s a big deal.”

**Summary of responsibility and accountability.** Interns felt a great sense of ownership and responsibility for their new pupils. Despite feeling that they were guests in their mentors classrooms, they still felt that they were solely responsible for their pupils’ learning. These feelings of ownership and responsibility were not learned in coursework, but all interns had similar feelings.

Maybe it speaks to the profession being more of a calling than a career. Maybe it hits some interns more profoundly than others. Regardless, these experiences of responsibility and ownership were important to the participants and integral to the formation of their professional identities. Interns are, and recognize that they are, responsible for the learning of the youngsters in their charge.
Summary of Findings for Research Question Three

The third and final research question this study sought to answer was how student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from learner to educator. The findings demonstrated that interns feel overwhelmed and unprepared for their early days as teachers. They reported feeling that they had not had enough opportunities to practice teaching prior to commencing internships. They also reported that better collaboration among stakeholders in the process—university professors and supervisors; host school mentors, veteran teachers, and administrators—would have strengthened the training process for them, especially when roles were not clearly delineated.

In addition, the findings indicated that student teachers felt a great sense of obligation for their pupils. Even though they saw themselves as guests in their mentors’ classrooms, they felt that the progress and ultimate level of achievement that their pupils experienced was under their purview, and they took ownership of and responsibility for their own accountability.

Overall Summary of Findings

From my analysis of the empirical data, I learned a great deal about undergraduate coursework, the practicum, and the transition between the two in teacher training programs. The following is a summation of what I have learned after having conducted this qualitative study.

The findings suggest that interns form their professional identities as they build relationships with their students, complete observations of veteran teachers, and participate in reciprocal learning experiences with various teachers in their placement schools. Student teachers understand that there is a need to connect with their students, especially when attempting to motivate reluctant learners. Despite the fact that interns felt they were commandeering veteran teachers’ classrooms midway through the year, they still began
internships with a great sense of responsibility for the pupils in their charge. They did not view their students as the responsibility of the mentor—they identified themselves as accountable for their pupils’ learning. Learning strategies that support them in forming relationships with their pupils, especially when issues of social justice arise, will promote better practice.

More opportunities to practice the art of teaching prior to commencing internships would promote better practice because student teachers would have more experience going in.

Reciprocal learning occurs among interns and veteran teachers within the placement school. More frequent opportunities for and strategies to foster this type of collaboration would better support interns learning to teach and aid them in establishing their professional identities, not simply as educators of the pupils in front of them, but also as colleagues within their schools. More opportunities for interns to collaborate with one another and with the multiple professionals who are working to support them would improve the process of learning to teach.

In addition, integration of content within pedagogy instruction would foster the skills and strategies that interns need to teach within their disciplines, which would increase student teacher confidence and instill a greater sense of competency in them. Greater integration between theory and practice is essential to support interns through the process of learning to teach, especially when they are first transitioning from pupil to teacher.

Analysis of empirical data indicated that the transition from learner to educator continues to be overwhelming, despite all that we know about teacher training. A major reason that interns felt that this transition was challenging was that internships began in the middle of the high school year, when pupils were already accustomed to the instructional styles, classroom procedures, and classroom management protocols established by veteran educators.
In summation, the three overarching conclusions that I have drawn from an analysis of the findings are:

1. There are three major factors that influence interns’ formation of their professional identities as educators. First, they define their relationships with their pupils early on in the training process as one of ownership and responsibility. Second, during observations of veteran teachers, they determine for themselves what constitutes good practice and what pedagogical strategies best suit them by critiquing, selecting, using, or modifying the lessons they witness in order to inform their own practice. Third, they recognize that they are valuable contributors to a reciprocal learning process between themselves and the teachers at large in placement schools.

2. Collaboration is essential to establishing best practices in teacher training. Partnerships among stakeholders from both the university and the placement school—program supervisors, professors, mentors, veteran teachers, administrators, and interns—would yield rich collaboration whereby reciprocal learning would be fostered and consistently sustained. Multiple opportunities for formal or informal collaboration with peers before and during the practicum would best serve interns learning to teach.

3. Greater integration of theory, practice, and content; and more opportunities to practice teaching prior to internships would improve teacher training. Interns do experience a gap in transitioning from learners to teachers. Better support of those learning to teach is needed to smooth this transition and bridge this gap so that interns commence internships competent to educate the pupils in their classrooms.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis study was to understand how undergraduate student teachers enrolled in the same secondary education teacher training program in central Massachusetts experience the process of learning to teach in order to improve teacher training in the 21st century. At the inception of this investigation, I initially sought to answer three fundamental research questions:

1. How do student teachers describe their undergraduate coursework experience, and what aspects of that learning best prepared them for their classroom internships (student teaching)?

2. How do student teachers describe their student teaching practicums, and what learning experiences did they have during their internships that best prepared them to teach?

3. How do student teachers describe the experience of transitioning from coursework to classroom?

In order to answer these questions, I collected data through semi-structured interviews of five student teacher interns who were completing their practicums. Although they were enrolled in the same undergraduate institution, they were placed in a variety of secondary schools for their internships. All participants were seeking licensure in education with a minor in a specific content area (three were minoring in Social Studies and two in English). Because this was an in-depth exploration from the interns’ vantage through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), it provides an untapped perspective of the strengths and limitations of the phenomenon of learning to teach. IPA provides an approach that highlights the differences among the
participants’ perspectives while also seeking similarity and commonality, ultimately making room for a more complex understanding of a phenomenon (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

The findings from this investigation indicate that teacher training programs must support interns’ professional identity formation by leveraging their feelings of accountability for their pupils, increasing opportunities for them to practice teaching during observation hours, and nurturing the reciprocal learning that occurs between interns and veteran teachers. The findings also indicate that training programs must work toward increasing the number of opportunities that student teachers have to collaborate with professionals in the field and with their peers. Finally, this study demonstrates that program reform is needed to allow for greater integration of theory, practice, and content among all program elements. With these reforms, we can bridge the gaps that currently exist in 21st century teacher education so that student teachers commence internships competent to educate the pupils in their classrooms.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the overarching conclusions I have drawn from the findings of this study, which I summarized in Chapter 4. This chapter will address how these conclusions relate to extant literature, to the conceptual framework that guided this study, and to current educational practices. This chapter also presents a discourse on the implications for practice that these conclusions indicate, and provides recommendations for future research that will build upon and expand these findings.

**Theory of Experiential Learning**

This section provides a background for Kolb’s (1976; 1981; 1984) Theory of Experiential Learning to which I will refer within the subsequent sections. Kolb’s work helped me to focus the investigation and understand and interpret the data gleaned through semi-structured interviews with the five participants as they completed their practicums.
According to experiential learning theory, adults progress through several stages when they are mastering new material (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984). One stage is *concrete experience*, when new knowledge is acquired; the next is *reflective observation*, where adults learn by observing experts; another stage is *abstract conceptualization*, where adult learners reflect on their experiences in order to foster new and deeper understandings; and finally, during *active experimentation*, adult learners apply their knowledge to new situations (Smith, 2001).

Experiential learning theory purports that the most fruitful adult learning takes place in a progression through the stages that is both overlapping and cyclical (Smith, 2001).

Adults construct meaning and gain knowledge through a process of acquisition, observation, practice, reflection, and back to acquisition, observation, and so forth—in essence, the more you ponder, observe, and practice something, the better you are able to perform it (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984). When applying the theory to our understanding of the teacher training process, this stipulation is a helpful framework that aids us in determining whether each phase of training is connected to the one prior as well as to the one following (Smith, 2001, 2010). Where we identify gaps in connectivity, we may conclude that optimal adult learning may not be taking place, and these would be areas in program structure that would need modification in order to better foster new teachers’ learning and development.

The premise of moving through overlapping and repeated stages of learning is an important lens through which to view teacher training because it indicates that an amalgamation of practice, theory, content, observation, and reflection must occur in order for the highest levels of learning to take place. Applying experiential theory to teacher training helps us to understand that the iterations of learning and practice experienced through the cycle are what support adult
learning. Where we tend to dichotomize theory from practice or coursework from practice in current training programs, we miss critical opportunities to support interns as they learn to teach.

**Discussion of Findings**

Learning how to teach in contemporary classrooms has become progressively more complex due to increased demands placed on educators, which include high stakes assessments, national standards, the expanding roles that teachers play in students’ lives, and higher-order thinking concepts embedded into curriculum (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Add to this the increased diversity of student populations who need highly qualified educators to help them meet these higher standards and attain new literacies, and you have the educational climate of the 21st century (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Banks, 2007; Morrell, 2012). I began this project seeking to explore teacher training in the 21st century—to identify program strengths, to ascertain where there may be gaps in training, and to determine how training may be reformed to best support novice educators.

I conducted this study with five student teacher participants in order to hear directly from them what it is like to learn how to teach in this complex 21st century educational environment. Using the IPA approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the five participants who were completing their internships in central Massachusetts secondary schools. IPA was the best approach for this particular study because it allowed for nuanced data and rich themes to emerge during careful analysis of interview data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Butin, 2010). The student teachers’ unique and collective experiences and stories may not have come to light had I taken another approach.

I presented three overarching conclusions at the end of the fourth chapter:
1. There are three major factors that influence interns’ formation of their professional identities as educators. First, they define their relationships with their pupils early on in the training process as one of ownership and responsibility. Second, during observations of veteran teachers, they determine for themselves what constitutes good practice and what pedagogical strategies best suit them by critiquing, selecting, using, and/or modifying the lessons they witness in order to inform their own practice. Third, they recognize that they are valuable contributors to a reciprocal learning process between themselves and the teachers at large in placement schools.

2. Collaboration is essential to establishing best practices in teacher training. Partnerships among stakeholders from both the university and the placement school—program supervisors, professors, mentors, veteran teachers, administrators, and interns—would yield rich collaboration whereby reciprocal learning would be fostered and consistently sustained. Multiple opportunities for formal or informal collaboration with peers before and during the practicum would best serve interns learning to teach.

3. Greater integration of theory, practice, and content; and more opportunities to practice teaching prior to internships would improve teacher training.

This investigation demonstrates that under the current system of teacher training, interns experience a gap in the transition from learner to teacher, mainly because this structure compartmentalizes and dichotomizes various aspects of learning to teach. We know that the manner by which we train teachers must be modified to ensure that we are preparing them to meet the challenges and complexities of teaching in contemporary classrooms (NCTQ, 2013).
This study suggests we can reform teacher training by leveraging what is already working well, strengthening and supporting best practices, and restructuring program elements so that they are most beneficial to student teachers.

Through experiential learning theory, we understand that optimal learning is cyclical, overlapping, and repeated (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984; Smith, 2001). As seen through this lens, the process of learning to teach should be a more balanced integration of theory, practice, observation, professional collaboration, and reflection in order to best support teacher learning. Such a structure would blend all of the elements of training into a cohesive whole so that they would not be so distinct and separate, and this model would ensure that learning would be more meaningful and sustainable. The following sections elucidate my conclusions and discuss how they relate to extant literature and to the conceptual framework that guided this study.

**Forming Professional Identities**

We know from the literature that forming a professional identity is a key component in teacher training. It establishes student teachers as authorities in their field, builds confidence, and improves the quality of their instruction (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). Many people believe that teaching is simple, and that because they have been students themselves, they would face little difficulty in performing the work of an educator (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Similarly, student teachers tend to underestimate the degree of difficulty they will face as they undertake the challenges associated with becoming educators, and they enter classrooms not as prepared to teach as they thought they were at the outset (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Goldstein, 2005). This study demonstrated that the means by which interns face these challenges and what they learn from them are contributing factors in how they form their professional identities.
The findings indicate that there are three major factors that influence interns’ formation of professional identities. First, they define their relationships with their pupils early on in the training process as one of accountability and responsibility. Second, during observations of veteran teachers, they determine for themselves what constitutes good practice and what pedagogical strategies best suit them by critiquing, selecting, using, and/or modifying the lessons they witness in order to inform their own practice. Third, they recognize that they are valuable contributors to a reciprocal learning process between themselves and the veteran teachers at large in placement schools.

**Teacher-student relationships as a component of professional identity.** The educational climate of the 21st century requires veteran and student teachers to identify with their pupils to best meet their needs and motivate them in learning new literacies (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006; NEASC, 2014; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013; BESE, 2012; Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Morrell, 2012). At the same time, teachers are working with diverse student populations resulting from changing demographics and varied social identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Rueda & Stillman, 2012). This study demonstrates that interns face difficulties when they attempt to make connections with their students, especially when issues of social justice create barriers between them. In addition, there is little training in how to build relationships with students. Yet, despite these challenges, student teachers instinctively understand that building relationships with their pupils is an essential first step in becoming a skilled educator and in building a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and accepting of differences. This realization, and the successes and failures that interns experience as they begin the process
of making personal connections with their students, contribute to formation of interns’ professional identities.

Interns do not view their students as the responsibility of their mentors—they identify themselves as accountable for their pupils’ learning. This in turn influences how they view themselves as educators—more so than when they feel that a lesson went well or when they receive praise from mentors or supervisors regarding their instruction. The participants in this study recognized that they were guests in the placement school—one intern even described himself as an “interloper” in his mentor’s classroom; however and without exception, they identified their students as their own and held themselves personally accountable for their pupils’ learning. They consistently used phrases such as “my kids” to describe their students, they were invested in forming personal relationships with them, and they were discouraged when they were not able to motivate students. Conversely, they were elated when they could find a means of engaging reluctant learners. When interns are successful in forming relationships with all of their students, regardless of the differences between them, they have better success in motivating them (Rueda & Stillman, 2012).

There were no data that indicated that someone had taught them to feel this sense of accountability, and yet each of the interns reported having similar feelings for the students in their charge. Participants nurtured this feeling by building relationships with their students on a personal level. Interns reported that they first had to break down barriers with students in order to establish those connections and to build trust. One participant in this study described beginning units of study with “games” that allow students and the teacher to reveal basic personal facts about themselves; another involved the students in classroom decision-making in order to ensure investment. Each intern recognized the importance of relationship development,
and this should not be left to chance, nor should we assume that interns already know that this foundation needs to be laid before optimal learning can occur.

Further, teachers need to fully understand their pupils’ cultural and language differences, temperaments, and personal interests in order to make good decisions about their students’ learning (Banks, 2007; Rueda & Stillman, 2012). Two interns in this study reported having trouble establishing a trusting climate in the classroom because cultural gaps existed between themselves and their pupils. Two others reported situations where gender differences affected relationships with students, and a few reported that age was a factor. Student teachers need to learn skills and strategies to foster relationships across difference and build trust with their pupils, and it is critical that training programs educate them on how to go about this work as part their preparation before they commence teaching in their own classrooms.

Each intern’s journey toward establishing rapport with pupils is different, but interns innately feel a need to do so. In the process, they learn about themselves and begin to form their professional identities. Students can no longer enter the classroom without understanding the multiple ways of knowing and being that their pupils represent (Banks, 2007). They must also understand how to engage students’ differences (and their own) so that all students feel like they belong and have something to contribute to the learning experience (Hooks, 1994). Leaving this important element out of training does a disservice to student teachers and makes the transition to the practicum unnecessarily overwhelming, especially when interns must use a trial-and-error methodology to accomplish it.

Observing veteran teachers as an aspect of forming professional identity.

Observations are effective in improving practice, but until recently, it has been unclear exactly how observations improve practice (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012). This study indicates that
required observation hours in the undergraduate phase of teacher training have a positive impact on student teachers’ professional identity formation. During observations, interns begin to envision themselves in the role of teacher. They also evaluate the instruction they witness, and they instinctively critique, select, use, modify, or discard the instruction they witness during observations of veteran teachers to inform their own practice.

Student teachers need time to adjust to the routine of teaching and to practice teaching strategies before they are immersed in internships (Freese, 2006; Prior to Newton, Poon, Nunes & Stone, 2013; George, 2011; Finan & Sandholtz, 1999; Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2008; NCTQ, 2013). However, there are inconsistencies in the research as to when and how often observations should be performed (Southgate, Reynolds, & Howley, 2012). This study shed light on some of these discrepancies. While observations are critical to early professional identity formation, more practice during observations would improve teacher training. Since experiential theory helps us to understand that cyclical iterations of learning and practice best support adult learning (Kolb, 1976; 1981; 1984), we can apply this theory to improve the structure of current observation practices. Rather than dichotomizing interns’ progress in establishing their professional identities as a series of steps in a linear process, we need to understand that the progression is far more complex. Separating observations from the opportunity to practice what they witnessed, students describe a lost opportunity.

Interns reported feeling that they should have been active participants in classroom activities, even if they were merely interacting with students during group work or independent learning activities set up by veteran teachers. Interns need opportunities prior to student teaching to process and reflect upon new information, which in this case is information gleaned through observing veteran teachers, and they need more opportunities to practice the art of teaching prior
to beginning their actual internships (Darling-Hammond, 2006). They need to “try on” their professional role as educators and then return to their college or graduate classrooms for support, collaboration, reflection, theoretical context, and feedback. Restructuring observations so that there are more opportunities for practice teaching would ease the transition to student teaching, increase student teacher confidence, and strengthen practice.

**Reciprocal learning with colleagues in the placement school as a component of professional identity.** Interns form their professional identities as educators early on in training through a process of reciprocal learning with veteran teachers at large in their placement schools. Interns reported that they did not anticipate that they would contribute to the learning of veteran teachers. They were pleased and surprised to discover that their contributions mattered when working within the placement school community. The reciprocity of learning they enjoyed with veteran teachers allowed interns to establish a new facet of their professional identities, one where they viewed themselves as colleagues rather than merely learners. They were contributing members of the professional culture within the larger school community.

Interns share lessons and experiences with mentors, but additionally, they also find that they are sought out for collaboration with veteran teachers within and outside of the disciplines they are teaching. Interactions and reciprocal learning with professionals other than mentors within the placement school foster interns’ feelings of being colleagues rather than students. Conversely, the veteran teachers with whom they collaborate viewed them as peers rather than rookies or novices.

When first conducting research for this study, I had not considered this type of reciprocal learning. My focus was on collaboration among interns and their mentors. This type of collaboration encourages career-long professional inquiry and collaboration and is beneficial to
prepare, evaluate, and retain quality teachers (Rigelman & Ruben, 2012; Hargreaves, 2008; CAEP, 2013; Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2008). While these findings were supported in this study, it was also demonstrated that collegial collaboration and reciprocal learning can and does occur among interns and veteran teachers who were not their mentors within the placement school. Often, this reciprocal learning occurred informally and on a consistent basis.

Working alongside veteran teachers and participating in reciprocal learning activities with them, interns establish their professional role in the host school community. They learn that they have something to give back, and they feel that they are members of a team rather than guests in the building. Leveraging reciprocal learning by fostering and formalizing it would improve the process of learning to teach and would increase its benefits for both interns and veteran teachers.

**Summary of professional identity formation findings.** Learning to teach also requires interns to determine how they see themselves in the role of teacher. By building relationships with their pupils, they determine what classroom climate is most conducive to optimal student learning. By observing veterans in practice, they determine what teaching style works best for them. Finally, through collaboration with veteran teachers, they learn to view themselves as professional colleagues. From these varied and fruitful experiences, student teachers begin to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities, and build a solid sense of professional identity.

**Essential Elements of Collaboration**

The idea that collaboration has a positive impact on teaching is certainly not a new one. It is an essential component of teacher training, and more opportunities for interns to collaborate with professionals, veterans, and each other would improve practice (Reusser et al., 2007; Peel,
Experiential learning theory purports that adults learn information, process and reflect upon it, observe experts at practice, and repeat the process in order for sustainable learning to take place. Providing increased opportunities for interns to interact with and discuss practice with professionals and their peers would enhance their learning through an iterative process.

**Professional partnerships and collaboration.** Professional partnerships among members of the university, interns, and educators from placement schools would further the reciprocal learning that is already occurring informally within placement schools, as established in this study as contributing to professional identity formation. Here, an even more robust reciprocal learning would be fostered and consistently sustained, and the collaborative practice that would ensue would contribute to the ongoing experiential cycle of learning for everyone involved (Kolb, 1984). Veteran teachers and interns would share their recent experiences and challenges, which would inform university personnel of contemporary classroom issues. Conversely, veteran teachers would benefit from university personnel sharing the most recent training strategies and educational trends.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one type of collaborative model of professional learning that have sprung up in schools around the country, and they have been found to encourage sustained professional inquiry; be mutually beneficial to all involved; improve teacher training and practice; and retain quality teachers (Morell, 2012; Rust, 2010; Kirbulut, Boz & Kutucu, 2012; Hargreaves, 2008; CAEP, 2013; Rigelman & Ruben, 2012; NCTQ, 2013). While a study of PLCs is beyond the scope of this study, I am going to use the term PLC to refer to collaborative partnerships within the k-12 context.
Implementing collaborative placement school/university PLCs would involve a breakdown of barriers that currently exist among all of the stakeholders involved in training teachers, which would be a systemic and philosophical change (Stewart, 2012; Rust, 2010; Hargreaves, 2008; Reusser et al., 2007). This study shows that more collaboration would foster greater support of the interns and allow for all professionals involved to learn from one another. Implementing placement school/university PLCs would become a unique form of professional development that would keep veterans current and support novices teaching for the first time. Coordination of partners and professionals from both the university and the placement school is critical to ensure that interns are best positioned for success, meaningful and consistent guidance is given, and optimal learning is occurring.

Currently, there is no structure in place for the professionals from both institutions to meet at any time during the training process. Thus, interns reported that the various stakeholders would often give contradictory advice, which made it difficult for them to determine whose authority or which advice they should heed. Of course, there is value in hearing multiple perspectives and deciding for oneself what is suitable practice and what is not. However, discrepancies in understanding to whom they should defer when situations arise, and the lack of clearly delineated roles established in concert, make training difficult, especially when interns disagree with or have difficulties in relationships with their mentors.

**Collaboration among interns.** The seminar course benefits student teachers for a variety of reasons, among them are opportunities for interns to collaborate with one another. Interns explained that when discussing their experiences with peers, they gained valuable feedback and insight on the planning aspects of teaching, including: how to manage make-up
work, how to create lesson and unit plans, what to include in a parent letter, how to create a classroom management plan, and how to motivate reluctant learners.

Collaboration is particularly beneficial when interns are learning to deal with classroom management issues during the practicum. Having a cohort of peers and a group of veteran teachers to whom they may turn and with whom they may share classroom triumphs is essential in preparing new teachers for classroom experiences (Goldstein, 2005; Daniel, 2009). Interns in this study reported that sharing classroom management successes and frustrations with others promoted a greater understanding of their experiences and helped them grow as educators.

**Integration of Theory, Practice, and Content Across the Teaching Experience**

When teacher training experiences integrate theory, practice, and content, interns are better prepared for the types of decision-making they find themselves facing when actually teaching in their classrooms (Kolb, 2006; Zeichner, 2012; Bouwma-Gearhart, 2010; George, 2011; Phelan, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Interns described these integrated experiences as aiding them in increasing confidence, strengthening their practice, and making sense of the “moving parts” that exist in training.

However, interns also reported that they did not experience enough of these types of integrated experiences. In particular, there was a lack of content knowledge training integrated with pedagogy and practice. Currently, only 26 percent of undergraduate programs require at least one three-credit course in subject-specific methodology (NCTQ, 2013). Interns need to learn instructional strategies *within their discipline*, especially at the secondary level, where novice teachers would benefit from skill instruction in teaching the advanced levels of content and habits of mind that high school pupils need to learn (Reusser et al., 2007; Phelan, 2009).
Interns in this study indicated that these areas were left relatively untouched in their teacher training experience.

Student teachers need to make sense of the theory they learn in coursework with frequent opportunities to practice it, and they need to learn how to teach within their major fields of study, from a variety of approaches, and with a complex understanding of what we currently know about how students learn. Without such theoretical and content understanding behind their teaching and opportunities to practice and reflect as they learn, teachers risk employing simple principles of practice without understanding their purpose and how they relate to the rest of the learning endeavor.

**Implications for Practice**

Based on the empirical data, literature, and theoretical framework that guided this study, educator training programs should support student teachers as they develop and strengthen their professional identities; they should foster opportunities for robust collaboration, including forming PLCs comprised of interns, university instructors, and placement school professionals; and they should integrate theory, practice, and content rather than dichotomizing instruction in each. Particular reform to teacher training would include teaching future educators how to build relationships with their students, and giving them the tools they need to successfully teach within their chosen content area. Specifically, program changes that would support these understandings are as follows:

- In 21st century context, we need to support student teachers as they learn to build relationships with their students in order to create classroom environments where everyone belongs and everyone feels safe, so that optimal learning may occur. We now know that relationship building with students requires that teachers honor
and are curious about student world views and home cultures. Without adequate support and without a framework for understanding what it looks like to build an environment that makes space for multiple ways of being, we risk preparing teachers who fall back on the practices that were built within the context of assumed homogenous populations.

The interns whose stories are captured in this study feel accountable for their pupils and responsible for their success or failure, and we need to better train them to leverage these feelings so that we prepare them to navigate the complex social justice issues that they will face in contemporary classrooms. Programs need to include a component to training that would instill the strategies and techniques that interns need to build appropriate relationships with their pupils. Rather than having interns attempt to build relationships with their students by happenstance during the practicum, university programs can offer interns guidance and support before interns commence student teaching. Such training practices will build interns’ confidence and strengthen their practice, making the transition to teaching smoother for interns and pupils alike.

- As we redefine what teaching and learning look like in the 21st century, we must include a different type of instruction that melds theory, practice, and content. Student teacher candidates need to learn the theory and pedagogical skills and strategies they need to teach within their disciplines, especially at the secondary level when content concepts and texts are more complex. We now know that content knowledge has a positive impact on interns’ performance in the classroom because it directly affects their self-perceived confidence levels. Interns reported
that their ability to draw on content knowledge, both during lesson planning and when directly instructing students, made them feel more confident and more effective as educators. Data in this study demonstrated that interns took only one or two courses within their undergraduate experience that were directly related to the content they were instructing in their classrooms, and in most cases these were not requirements of their programs, but courses they had individually elected to take. The one-size-fits-all model of teacher preparation is no longer adequate to prepare teachers to teach content at particular grade levels. And content preparation should not be happenstance. We need more mindful curriculum planning that pairs content-specific courses to the grade levels that students will eventually be teaching. This practice would improve student teacher effectiveness and increase their confidence when instructing their pupils.

Training programs must examine current curriculum and embed course requirements that are aligned with Common Core State Standards for secondary schools to ensure that student teachers have the content background they need for the courses and the grade levels they will eventually teach. For example, those who will teach at the middle or elementary school levels will need different training than those who will teach at the secondary level.

- Programs should increase opportunities for interns to practice teaching during pre-practicum observation hours, especially if those observations are conducted in what will become the intern’s placement school. A conclusion reached in this study was that more practice prior to student teaching would promote student teachers’ identity formation, increase teacher effectiveness, and ease the transition
from coursework to teaching. Practice that is supported by further theory, content knowledge, reflection, expert support, and pedagogy instruction in an iterative and amalgamated process is optimal for student teachers’ success in learning to teach (Kolb, 1984). Training programs offer opportunities for collaboration, but they would improve by increasing the frequency with which interns are able to capitalize on these interactions. Also, synthesizing these experiences and repeating them, rather than offering them as disjointed and sequential, would improve the process of learning to teach.

- Beginning the seminar course in the *semester prior* to student teaching would best support these collaborative practices. Students would have more time to get to know and begin to trust one another. They could try out lesson plans and other course requirements ahead of time and gain support and feedback from college professors and peers *prior to* implementing them in classrooms, rather than after, as is the current practice. This study demonstrated that the seminar course benefitted student teachers, especially in providing opportunities for them to collaborate with their peers. Interns need opportunities to share, commiserate, celebrate, learn, and grow with their peers. Peer collaboration is embedded in the seminar, and interns in this study reported that more opportunities for collaboration within the seminar would be beneficial. As interns transition from coursework to teaching, having the seminar continue from the semester prior and then into the internship would leverage seminar strengths, especially in providing increased opportunities for interns to collaborate. Student teacher cohorts would have increased access to this supportive collaborative community in which they
could share experiences and reflections, all of which would support them in the process of transitioning from coursework to teaching. Student teachers need increased opportunities to experience these types of interactions throughout their undergraduate experience as well as during student teaching. Because the seminar course currently meets during the semester of student teaching only, much of the benefits are lost in the chaos of the practicum. Everything is rushed, and there is not ample time for feedback on and modification of materials prior to implementation.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Further research is needed to determine how we may continue to foster interns’ professional identity formation; how we can accomplish changing the timing of internships and what that would mean to training; how increasing opportunities for practice during observations would strengthen practice; what steps we might take in formalizing and fostering reciprocal learning; how extending the seminar into the start of the semester prior to internships would leverage seminar strengths; and how establishing large-scale university and host school PLCs would improve training.

**Professional identity and fostering interns’ feelings of accountability.** The 21st century educational climate places increased demands on educators, and a main concern is that they are required to educate more diverse student populations and must take on multiple roles in their students’ lives. More research is needed on how programs can support interns as they establish their professional identities, appropriately and effectively build relationships with students, establish classroom protocols and norms conducive to fostering optimal learning, and learn to motivate reluctant and/or diverse student learners. Research in this area should target the
link between relationship building with the accountability to pupils that interns feel, and how these contribute to establishing classroom environments that make space for everyone. Research in this area would help us to understand why interns feel this innate responsibility for their students despite the fact that they acknowledge that they are working “under” a mentor, and how we can nurture this sense of accountability in novice teachers’ practice.

**Practicum start and placement high school schedules.** While I have some evidence that suggests that aligning the start of internships to the placement school’s schedule (i.e. a new term, semester, or trimester) would allow student teachers to establish their own classroom protocols and strengthen their abilities to build relationships with their students, more research is needed to determine how universities would facilitate this alignment and whether this structure would improve training.

**Increasing opportunities to practice during observation hours.** More research is needed to determine how programs could increase opportunities for students to teach, and whether these experiences could be alternated with theory, pedagogy, and content instruction. Such a structure would follow the cyclical pattern that Kolb (1984) has suggested would be most beneficial to understanding new material and sustaining learning.

This study determined that observation hours were beneficial in fostering student teachers’ professional identity development through witnessing the practice of others and through envisioning themselves in the role of teacher. The present structure mandates that student teachers complete a certain number of observation hours, but does not stipulate how these hours are spent. This study determined that observation would be more meaningful and more beneficial to those learning to teach if they included more opportunities for interns to practice the art of teaching rather than simply observing the practice of others. Increased
opportunities to practice teaching during observation hours would improve student teacher confidence and strengthen instructional practice, which will better prepare them for internships.

**Formalizing reciprocal learning.** Reciprocal learning among interns and educators within the placement school was an unexpected finding of this study, and proved to be mutually beneficial to veteran and novice teachers alike. Case study research is needed to determine how these relationships may be established, nurtured, and monitored in a more formalized and deliberate process; how both members of the reciprocal learning dyad benefit from it; and how programs can improve upon this collegial-type of partnership. More research is needed on the types and scope of reciprocal learning that has and will continue to take place among novice and veteran teachers within placement schools.

**Extending the seminar course.** Peer collaboration is embedded in the seminar, and interns reported that more of this type of interaction would be beneficial during the process of learning to teach. The current structure includes a seminar course that meets during the time when interns are concurrently completing their practicums. More research is needed to determine whether holding the seminar course before and during practicums would foster greater continuity in transitioning from one phase of training to the next. More research in this area would help us to determine the best structure and the most appropriate curriculum requirements that would support interns as they learn to teach.

**Investigating large-scale PLCs.** Collaboration between universities and host schools would better support student teachers, smooth the transition from university coursework to practice teaching in host schools, and provide opportunities for reciprocal learning to occur. More research is needed to investigate how professional collaboration could be supported and sustained.
This study demonstrated that opportunities for novice and veteran teachers to collaborate promote reciprocal learning. Fostering connections among universities and secondary schools would ensure that both remain current in training practices. More research is needed to determine how best to implement PLCs, and how membership in PLCs of this nature might serve as professional development for veteran educators. More research is also needed to determine how such university and host school PLCs would ensure that mentors are best supporting their interns with a balance of support and professional autonomy.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included aspects of the mentor relationship, content knowledge preparation, and the mixed messages that interns’ reported experiencing in their training.

This study focused on program structure rather than quality of mentors or mentor training. There was limited opportunity to determine how mentors are assigned by placement schools, and it was assumed that the participants’ mentors would engage with their interns. There was limited opportunity to determine how the inter/mentor role structure was established by the university or the placement school. Therefore, this study did not discuss mentor/intern pairings or mentor training.

A second limitation of this study was that none of the participants had already obtained undergraduate degrees in the discipline they were teaching. All were seeking licensure in a new field. This affected data regarding content knowledge. Data may have been different had participants earned degrees in their subject area prior to student teaching.

A third limitation of this study is that while findings indicated student teachers’ received mixed messages from professionals who were supporting them, there was no exploration of how this varied advice may actually have improved practice. Observation data indicated that interns
were able to decipher what did and did not suit their own practice, and the same may have held true for mixed messages, where interns may have strengthened their sense of professional identity through the process of determining which and what types of instruction best suited their own styles of teaching. This study did not address the aspect of mixed messages that addresses its potential for positive impact on teacher professional identity formation.

**Final Thoughts: It is Time to Change the Outdated, Whack-a-mole Approach to Teacher Training**

Teaching and learning in the 21st century have changed dramatically, and training programs must adapt to those changes in order to best prepare student teachers for the work they will do in contemporary classrooms. One of the participants of this study, John, described his student teaching as a “whack-a-mole” experience, meaning everything happened rapidly and intermittently, with many moving parts that created challenges he had to face in random sequence. Most of the other interns used terms like “overwhelming” and “exhausting,” to describe their first experiences teaching. This study sought to discover what aspects of training supported interns in dealing with the challenges they were facing, as well as to determine how we could improve the aspects of training that were rapid-fire and on-the-job in order to better prepare student teacher interns for their work as teachers during internships. In capturing the lived experiences of five intern participants, this study demonstrated that some of the stressors associated with internships, especially the process of transitioning from pupil to teacher, can be alleviated by leveraging identified program strengths and modifying them to meet 21st century educational challenges.

Conclusions drawn from this research suggest that modifications to current program structure must include greater emphasis on aiding interns in the formation of their professional
identities; more opportunities for collaboration; and an understanding that we compartmentalize and dichotomize various aspects of student teacher training and must work toward integration of theory, practice, and content. Such modifications will strengthen preparation programs; provide student teachers more coherent, meaningful, and sustainable teacher training; and bridge the gaps that currently exist in 21st century teacher education; all of which will ensure that programs produce the highest quality educators to teach America’s future students.
References


Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five*


Appendices

Appendix A:  Northeastern University IRB Approval Request Form

Appendix B:  Teacher Education Program Consent-to-Participate Form (university name removed from document)

Appendix C:  Student Teacher Consent-to-Participate Form

Appendix D:  Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Appendix E:  Letter Requesting Participation of Student Teachers
Appendix A

Northeastern University IRB Approval Request Form

For NU IRB use:

Date Received: 3/6/15 reviewed 3/9/15  NU IRB No. CPS15-03-02
Review Category: APPLICTION FOR APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

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. 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.

X 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. Jane Lohmann
Investigator is: NU Faculty X NU Staff Other
College: College of Professional Studies
Department/Program Education
Address: Northeastern University: 360 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02115
Belvidere 20

Office Phone: 617-756-3237
Email: j.lohmann@neu.edu

Is this student research? YES [X] NO [__] If yes, please provide the following information:
Student Name: Bethann G. Cormier
Anticipated graduation date: May 2015

Undergrad [__] MA/MS [__] PhD [__] AuD [__] EdD [X] DLP [__] Other Degree Type [__]

College: College of Professional Studies

Department/Program: Doctor of Education

Full Mailing Address: 65 Suomi St., Paxton, MA 01612

Telephone: 508-450-8023
Primary Email: cormier.b@husky.neu.edu

Cell phone: 508-450-8023
Secondary Email: bgcormier5@gmail.com

B. Protocol Information

Title: Bridging Gaps in 21st Century Teacher Training

Projected # subjects: [X] 7

Approx. begin date of project: February 2, 2015
Approx. end date: April 4, 2015

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) [X] None

Has/will this proposal been/be submitted through:
- NU’s Office of Research Administration and Finance (RAF)
- Provost
- Corp & Foundations

C.

Will Participants Be:  

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<td>Northeastern University Students?</td>
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<td>Institutionalized persons?</td>
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<td>Prisoners?</td>
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<td>Cognitively Impaired Persons?</td>
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<td>Non or Limited English Speaking Persons?</td>
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<td>People Living outside the USA?</td>
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<td>Pregnant Women/Fetuses?</td>
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Does the Project Involve:  

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<td>Investigational drug/device?</td>
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<td>Audiotapes/videotapes?</td>
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D. What are the goals of this research? Please state your research question(s) and related hypotheses.

The goal of this research is to understand how student teachers experience the transition from the undergraduate phase of teacher training to the internship in practice teaching, and to identify program strengths and areas in need of reform in order to improve the process of learning to teach.

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

The purpose of this research is to determine what interns describe as their first experiences in learning to teach in a contemporary, standards-based classroom in order to learn about what aspects of their teacher training they describe as useful as they transition between being pupils themselves to being teachers. I will also explore surprises they encounter during the transition and any ideas about what might have better prepared them to meet those challenges. The purpose is not to evaluate intern teachers, nor is it to evaluate teacher training programs. Rather, the study’s focus is to understand students’ experience of learning to teach in order to continue improving the methods by which we support novice teachers through that process.

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

Bethann Cormier, graduate student at Northeastern University, is the only researcher involved in this study, and she is working with her advisor and the Principal Investigator, Jane Lohmann. Ms. Cormier will conduct the research, including interviewing participants and transcribing the interviews. She will analyze the data derived from the interviews and write the subsequent narrative based on data collected from those interviews.

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

Participants will be recruited from Worcester State University in Worcester, MA. WSU is requesting NEU approval first, at which point I can submit their Institutional Review Board approval form. The WSU application form is attached for your review (Appendix B).

H. Recruitment Procedures

Intended participants will be recruited from Worcester State University on a volunteer basis. Criteria used for participation will be that recruits are traditional track, undergraduate students enrolled in WSU’s secondary education program. Age, gender, ethnicity, literacy level, socio-economics, etc. will NOT be criteria for participation.

Participants will be randomly selected based upon their willingness to participate. In no case would their grades or evaluations be linked to participation in this study. No groups would be excluded from the study. Inclusion in the study will be on a first come basis until the desired sample of 5-7 participants has been reached. The only criteria would be that the students are undergraduates enrolled in WSU’s secondary educator training program.
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.

The researcher sent a written request to WSU requesting permission to recruit students from their undergraduate secondary education program to participate in this study. They requested that I complete an application to recruit WSU students, which is attached (Appendix B). Once approval is given, the researcher will contact all undergraduate students enrolled in WSU’s secondary education program via email. The contents of that email letter are attached (Appendix E).

In the letter to student teachers, I ask for volunteers to participate in this study, which seeks to understand how student teachers experience their first days and months as classroom teachers. I will explain that their participation is voluntary, is not linked to any of their course grades in the program, and is not linked to their evaluations for educator licensure. They will be informed that their participation is completely voluntary, and that they may leave the study at any time without any repercussions whatsoever.

What remuneration, if any, is offered?

No remuneration, reward, or compensation 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.

In a written letter that will be emailed to participants (Appendix E), the researcher will explain that student teachers will be asked to participate in one interview where they will be asked about their experiences in learning to teach for the first time.

The researcher will review the informed consent with participants before the interview begins, and once participants understand its contents, I will ask that they sign it to confirm their understanding (Appendix C). The consent form explains that participation in the study is voluntary, and that participants may opt to leave the study at any time. The researcher will also explain that NEITHER the participants, the supervising teachers, nor WSU are being evaluated in the study. There will be no judgments made as to the quality of the program or the level of teaching exhibited. The study is intended to understand the process of learning to teach, and specifically to outline what aspects of the training process are most helpful to new teachers. The study does NOT seek to evaluate teacher performance and is NOT linked in any way to participants’ grades or evaluations for licensure. The participants will be informed that they can ask questions of me, and they can review their own answers to interview questions at any time.

The candidate pool will be comprised of English-speaking intern teachers. Therefore, no translations will be needed.

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?
*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.

N/A

J. Study Procedures

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.

Each participant will be asked to participate in one interview. The interview will last between 60-90 minutes, and the interview protocol is attached for your review (Appendix D). During the interview, participants will be asked to describe their experiences in learning to teach for the first time. They will be asked to reflect upon the learning that took place prior to the internship, and to describe the skills and experiences they gained during their undergraduate coursework that best prepared them to teach.

Interviews will take place in person, at a location that is most convenient for participants. Follow-up may include a brief interview if I need more information or greater clarification about the participant’s answers to questions presented in the original interview protocol.

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 researcher, Bethann Cormier, will conduct the interviews. The interview protocol is attached (Appendix D). Again, interviews will take place at a location that is most convenient for participants.

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?

There are no anticipated risks to participants. There is no threat of psychological harm, loss of confidentiality, financial, social, or legal damages, nor are there potential physical risks. There is no risk to participants in terms of their evaluations or grades in the program, as the research will not involve judgments or evaluations of student teachers’ performance.

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?

Precautions will be made to ensure that participants remain confidential. Their privacy will be maintained by assigning each intern a pseudonym. No one other than the participant, the researcher, and her advisor, Jane Lohmann, will have access to interview data. Participants may review their answers to interview questions and make corrections/additions/changes. Participants will not have access to any other interview responses other than their own. The institution, WSU, will also remain confidential and will be referred to as a “central Massachusetts teacher education program.”
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?

Only the researcher will have access to data collected during interviews. Participants will be asked to give their permission to have their interviews recorded, and these recordings will be conducted on the researcher’s iPad, which is password protected. The researcher will assign a pseudonym for each intern.

Written interview data, and all handwritten notes, will be stored in the researcher’s locked desk, which is located in her home office. Typed transcripts, notes, and subsequent narrative that capture data synthesis will all be conducted on the researcher’s private laptop, and all material will be password protected.

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?

There are no anticipated benefits that participants may reasonably expect from involvement in this study, except perhaps gaining greater clarity about their own experiences in the classroom for the first time. The potential benefits to others may include a greater understanding of the process of learning to teach, and with that, reforms to teacher education programs in order to best support that learning.

O. Attachments

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nan C. Regina, Director</th>
<th>CPS applications only</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection</td>
<td>Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360 Huntington Ave., Mailstop: 960 Renaissance Park</td>
<td>Northeastern Univ., College of Professional Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA 02115-5000</td>
<td>Phone: 617.390.3450; <a href="mailto:k.skophammer@neu.edu">k.skophammer@neu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 617.373.4588; Fax: 617.373.4595</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:n.regina@neu.edu">n.regina@neu.edu</a></td>
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</table>

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 a scan, via fax or in hard copy.
Appendix B
Teacher Education Program Consent-to-Participate Form

Request for Administrative Review to
Recruit University
Research Participants

Reference Policy: Administrative Review for External Investigators

Instructions: Investigators who are not affiliated with this university but who wish to 1) recruit university students, staff, or faculty for participation in social, behavioral, or educational research projects or 2) request institutional data on students, staff, or faculty must complete this form.

Contact information for individual requesting this review
Title: Mrs.
Last name: Cormier
First Name: Bethann
Role: Doctoral Student
If you selected “Other” above please describe: Click here to enter text.
Institution Name: Northeastern University IRB FWA Number: Click here to enter text.
Phone Number: 508-450-8023 E-mail: cormier.b@husky.neu.edu

Information regarding this request:

1. Title of the proposed project Bridging Gaps in 21st Century Teacher Training

2. Description of the goal, hypothesis, and purpose for this study: The purpose of this research is to explore how interns describe their first experiences in learning to teach in a contemporary, standards-based classroom and to explore what aspects of the teacher training experience best support novice teachers as they transition between being pupils themselves to being teachers. The purpose is not to evaluate intern teachers, nor is it to evaluate teacher training programs. Rather, the study’s focus is to understand how student teachers experience and describe the process of learning to teach in order to better understand how teacher educators can support novice teachers through that process. The purpose is not to evaluate WSU’s teacher training program. Rather, the intent is to understand the student teaching experience in general and the students’ transition from the college classroom to their first secondary teaching experiences.

3. Description of the participants (age, race, ethnicity...). The researcher seeks to include five to seven participants from the same four-year bachelor degree granting institution who are
studying English and preparing to be teachers. Participants will be randomly selected with no limitations regarding age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

4. **What is the role of the participants (e.g., what will they experience as participants that they would not experience without your project; include recruitment and data collection procedures)? You may provide an attachment to answer this question.** The researcher will ask participants to participate in one 60-90 minute interview that will take place in a location that is convenient for them, such as in the library of the university. During the interview, participants will be asked to describe their experiences while learning to teach. I will ask them to describe both their undergraduate/coursework experiences, their internships in which they are teaching for the first time and their experiences of their transition between the two. The researcher plans to email students, inviting them to participate in the study while transitioning from their last semester of undergraduate courses to student teaching. I plan to interview each participant about his/her experiences throughout the process. I will conduct member checks after interviews, during which I will check my understanding with the participants to ensure internal validity and accuracy of interpretation. Participants would have access to review their responses and make edits (Creswell, 2013).

5. **What data will be collected about or from the participants? Be specific and attach any surveys or questionnaires that will be used.** Data collected will be from interviews. The study seeks to understand interns’ experiences learning to teach. The study does not seek to evaluate student teachers, NOR does it intend to evaluate the student teacher training program in which they are enrolled. The data collected will be used to better understand what experiences, skills and preparation interns describe as helpful to them as they learned to teach. Each interview should last approximately one hour. **Please see attached interview protocol.**

6. **How will consent be obtained? Attach your consent forms and any relevant scripts for the consent process.** Researcher will invite students to participate in the study via email (Appendix E). After students have agreed to participate, I will review the attached informed consent form with each student prior to conducting the interview to further clarify the purpose of the study and their right to stop participation at any point (Appendix C).

7. **Who will see the data?** Only my advisor, Jane Lohmann, and I will have access to the data. Participants will have the opportunity to review their own responses and make edits (Creswell, 2013). Interviews will be double-recorded and password protected. Notations will be recorded (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and stored locked.

8. **How will the data be reported? (presentations, publications, etc.?)** Doctoral Dissertation, though it is possible that other presentations and publications could emerge from that process.

9. **If you are requesting access to student records describe your plan and time period in which the data and information will be returned or destroyed.** N/A

*Submission Instructions*
Complete this form and e-mail it with your local IRB approval letter and documents to Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Researcher’s Signature: Click here to enter text. Date: Click here to enter text.

FOR OFFICE USE:

Project Number: Click here to enter text.

Comments: Click here to enter text.

Signature Designated Institutional Officer: Click here to enter text. Date: Click here to enter text.

Document History:
  Created by: Research Advisory Board
  Date created: September 16, 2014
Appendix C

Student Teacher Consent-to-Participate Form

Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Jane Lohmann, Bethann G. Cormier
Title of Project: Bridging Gaps in 21st Century Teacher Training

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask me any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell me if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep. You will be free to stop participating at any time during the process, and you do not have to answer any questions with which you’re uncomfortable.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are inviting you to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate student enrolled in a student teacher secondary education preparation program. The goal of this research is to understand how student teachers experience the transition from the undergraduate phase of teacher training to the internship.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to learn from student teachers what the experience of learning to teach is like. The study seeks to understand and describe students’ first experiences in learning to teach in a contemporary, standards-based classroom and to help inform changes to teacher training might better help novice teachers transition between being pupils themselves to being teachers. The purpose is not to evaluate intern teachers, nor is it to evaluate teacher training programs. Rather, the study’s focus is to understand the process of learning to teach in order to help support novice teachers through that process.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in one 60-90 minute interview that will take place in a location that is convenient for you, such as in the library of the university where you are completing your undergraduate training. During the interview, I will
ask you about your experiences learning to teach. Questions will address both your undergraduate/coursework experience as well as your internship teaching for the first time.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take between one hour and 90 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no anticipated risks, harms, discomforts or inconveniences that you may experience. There are no legal, financial, social, psychological, or physical risks associated with your participation in this study. Your participation is in NO way linked to your grades for undergraduate coursework, NOR is participation linked to evaluations of your performance during your internship. Your name will not be associated in any way with your responses, and I will refer to you only using a pseudonym. The name of the college you attend will also be withheld, and the university will be referred to as “a central Massachusetts secondary educator training program,” or “the university.”

Will I benefit by being in this research?

No remuneration, reward, or compensation will be offered. There are no anticipated benefits that participants may reasonably expect from involvement in this study, except perhaps gaining greater clarity about their own experiences in the classroom for the first time. However, the potential benefits to others may include a greater understanding of the process of learning to teach, and with that, the information gleaned in the study may result in reform to teacher education programs in order to best support that learning.

Who will see the information about me?

Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. Only the researcher will know that the answers you give are from you. Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher conducting this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications that result from this project will use information that can identify you in any way.

Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to data collected during interviews. Participants will be asked for permission to have their interviews recorded, and these recordings will be conducted on the researcher’s IPAD and IPhone, which are password protected. The researcher will assign a pseudonym for each intern, and I will use the pseudonym on the transcripts of the interviews.

Written interview data, and all handwritten notes, will be stored in the researcher’s locked desk, which is located in her home office. Typed transcripts, notes, and the subsequent narrative that synthesizes data will all be conducted on the researcher’s private laptop, and all material will be password protected.
Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to data collected during the study. Data will be destroyed after three years.

Audiotapes will be used to record interviews, and these will be conducted on the researcher’s iPad, which is password protected. The researcher will assign a pseudonym for each intern to protect their privacy. Interviews will be stored on the password protected IPAD for three years, and then destroyed/deleted.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

The nature of this research should cause no harm to participants. No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student teacher in your program.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Bethann Cormier, the person mainly responsible for the research. You may reach Ms. Cormier at: cormier.b@husky.neu.edu or 508-450-8023.

You can also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jane Lohmann, a member of the NEU Faculty at Northeastern University: 360 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02115 (Belvidere, 4th Floor). You may reach Dr. Lohmann at: j.lohmann@neu.edu or 617-756-3237.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

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.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
No remuneration, reward, or compensation will be offered for you to participate in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

You will not incur any costs in order to participate in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

Your evaluations for educator license and your grades for your undergraduate studies are NOT linked in any way to your participation in this study.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent Date

Bethann G. Cormier

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

STUDENT TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Form
Student Interview Protocol

Interviewee: ________________________________

Institution: ________________________________ Date: ________________

Location of Interview: ________________________________

Research Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand how student teachers describe their transition from the undergraduate to the practice teaching phase of their teacher preparation program in order to understand the complexity of this process and to help support others making a similar transition.

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Through this research, I hope to gain an understanding of how student teachers feel about the transition from being students themselves to being teachers.

Because I wish to be as accurate as possible in documenting your responses, I would like to record this interview. Do I have your permission to record our conversation? I will also take written notes throughout the interview. As per the form I asked you to sign when you agreed to participate in this study, all of your answers will remain private, your responses will remain confidential, and all recordings and notes will be password protected and/or stored in my locked desk drawer.

This interview should run between 60 and 90 minutes. Do you have any questions at this time? Let’s first begin with some questions about your background.

Part I: Background Information:

What is your college major/content area of study?

What draws you to teaching?

Please describe the school where you are student teaching (size, demographics, urban/rural, etc.).
Describe what it was like walking into your classroom for the first time. How did that feel?

How do you think your students might describe their first impressions of you?

Describe some of your early experiences as a student teacher in the classroom that stand out as memorable for you. (What made it memorable or what stands out about it.....)

What are some of the biggest lessons you’ve learned so far through your student teaching?

Describe the first lesson you taught. (What made it go well...what seemed to impact the things that didn’t go well....)

How did you go about developing the lesson?

What would you do differently next time?

How did your observations inform your thinking about your own teaching?

What do you find most rewarding about teaching?

What do you find most challenging about teaching?

Describe your relationship with your mentor teacher.

Describe your relationships and interactions with the other teachers in the building.

What advice would you give to someone who is about to begin student teaching?

What particular aspects of student teaching are preparing you for your own classroom?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in learning to teach?
Appendix E

Email Letter Requesting Student Teachers to Participate

Dear Student Teacher:

I am conducting a research study on what it is like learning to teach in today’s challenging classrooms. In order to do that, I am seeking volunteers to share with me stories about their internships. I plan to interview student teachers, each for about an hour, and talk with them about how they experienced student teaching, what they learned, and what challenges they faced. Hopefully, once I have completed this research, I will have a better understanding of the teacher training process and will then be able to offer continued support to others who experience teaching for the first time.

Please understand that this study does not seek to evaluate your teacher training program, and your university will not be named. I will not be evaluating you in any way, and this study is not linked to your grades or to your licensure evaluations. Should you agree to participate, you will be given a pseudonym to protect your privacy. Your participation would be completely voluntary, and you could quit at any time if you choose to. You would have access to the data that I collect about you at any time. The only other person besides me who would have access to your identity and the information you provide would be my advisor at NEU, Dr. Jane Lohmann.

I truly hope you agree to volunteer to participate in my study. I am eager to hear your stories about teaching for the first time. You may contact me via email at: cormier.b@husky.neu.edu, or by phone at: 508-450-8023.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Bethann G. Cormier