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The Impact of a Teacher Education Program: A Critical Review

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify the impact of a teacher education program on its graduates' success. More specifically, what characteristics or themes do graduates of a teacher education program self-report as being effective components of their training? The research question was, "What characteristics do teacher education graduates report as being important components of their training?" The sub-questions of the study were, What is the effect of teacher education training on student satisfaction and success? What beliefs do graduates report regarding their training in the teacher education program?

There were a total of 22 participants in the study. 17 were female and five were male. Of the total participants, 19 are currently in the teaching and education field. Six have full-time, contract teaching positions; seven participants have full-time substitute positions; three are part-time substitutes; three are graduate students in teacher education; and three participants are not in the teaching field. The survey contained nine demographic questions, nine quantitative questions, and 12 qualitative questions. The purpose of the survey instrument was to assess a student's belief, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction regarding the teacher education program. A novel survey was created and used as an interview guide for the trained phone interviewer. The interviewer contacted each of the participants and went step-by-step throughout the interview guide asking the participant each of the survey questions.

The respondents rated the quantitative questions with great satisfaction. Taking into account a 1 to 10 scale, with ten being "Strongly Agree," the participants ranked their satisfaction with the teacher education program with at least an 8.25 response. The highest response was 9.4 and this was related to the fact that the students felt their course work contained up-to-date information in their field of study. Taking into account the qualitative data, there were 12

themes described in this study. The themes were (1) Independent Thinker, (2) Value of

Teaching and Children, (3) Educational Technology, (4) Diversity, (5) Human Development, (6)

Educational Psychology, (7) Teaching Satisfaction, (8) Useful Aspects of Teacher Education

Program, (9) Least Useful Aspects of Teacher Education Program, (10) Overall Preparedness

(11) Clinical Experience Preparation, and (12) General Education Courses.

The Impact of a Teacher Education Program: A Critical Review

The effectiveness and impact of teacher education programs has been questioned at the national, regional, and local level (Gorczyca, 2004). The debate is typically centered around the issue of training and certification. Given the prominent impact that teachers have on student development, there is limited research on teacher effectiveness (Rice, 2003). Teaching pedagogy to student teachers plays an important role in the training of teachers. The Education Commission of the States (2004) supports the conclusion that preparation in pedagogy can contribute significantly to effective teaching, particularly subject-specific courses and those designed to develop core skills such as classroom management, student assessment, and curriculum development.

Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2002) showed a positive connection between teachers' subject matter preparation and both higher student achievement and higher ratings on teacher performance evaluations. Research related to the effects of pedagogical preparation dealt with certification and the value added by education coursework.   A positive correlation between certified teachers and student achievement was described in the research (Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy, 2002). Teacher coursework in both the subject area taught and pedagogy contributes to positive education outcomes. Pedagogical coursework seems to contribute to teacher effectiveness at all grade levels, particularly when coupled with content knowledge (Rice, 2003).

Teacher experience is a teacher quality variable that is related to student learning. The number of years a teacher has been teaching is related to student test scores. Teacher preparation programs must include the requirements that demonstrate a competency in meeting standards that are set for the program by various agencies. Research indicates that the teacher shortage and

out-of-field teaching are not primarily caused by too many course requirements in schools of

education and inflexible teacher certification requirements but rather other factors (Laczko-Kerr

and Berliner, 2002). Research by the Education Commission of the States (2004) supports the

conclusion that preparation in pedagogy can contribute significantly to effective teaching,

particularly subject-specific courses and those designed to develop core skills such as classroom

management, student assessment, and curriculum development This research seems to suggest

that accreditation of a teacher education program by the National Council for the Accreditation

of Teacher Education (NCATE) may increase the number of program graduates who become

fully certified to teach.

Graduates of teacher education programs have a positive effect on student development

and success. Students of certified mathematics teachers scored higher on standardized

mathematics tests than those of uncertified teachers (Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy, 2002).

Teachers who are prepared in quality reading teacher education programs are more successful

and confident than other beginning teachers in making the transition into the teaching profession

(International Reading Society, 2003). The qualified reading teacher is able to create an enriched

literacy environment in the classroom, prepares students to read, and engages the students to read

than teachers who are not given such training. Student achievement in reading is higher for

students who are engaged in a variety of literacy activities that teachers from quality reading

preparation programs provide to students (International Reading Society, 2003).

Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) found that students of under-qualified teachers did not

perform significantly different from students of under-certified teachers. Students of certified

teachers out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified. Teachers need a solid

knowledge base of pedagogy, a sophisticated understanding of children's cognitive development,

and knowledge of how the cultural beliefs and personal characteristics of learners influence the

learning process (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002). Pedagogical

preparation positively affects teaching practice and student learning (Wilson, Floden, and

Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

Students in teacher preparation programs are academically prepared compared to those in

other disciplines. Education students score as well on national tests from Educational Testing

Service as other types of students (Educational Testing Service, 2002). Research conducted by

Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) suggests that alternate route programs recruit more

diverse teacher candidates, have only a mixed record of attracting the best and brightest, and

vary in their ability to prepare teachers for the classroom. Teacher education, as it turns out,

matters a great deal. In fields ranging from mathematics and science to early childhood,

elementary, vocational, and gifted education, teachers who are fully prepared and certified in

both their discipline and in education are more highly rated than non-certified educators.

Certified teachers are more successful with students than are teachers without preparation.

Teachers with greater training in learning theory, child development, teaching methods, and

curriculum are found to be more effective than those with less education and training (Laczko-

Kerr and Berliner, 2002).

Given the debate and political reaction related to the impact of teacher education

programs on student development, greater research needs to focus on the effectiveness of

traditional training programs. If changes are going to occur in how teachers are trained such

changes in teacher education programs should be based on empirical research and not political

assumptions. Teaching impacts the development of a society and plays a prominent role in the

success of that society. Due to the conflicting beliefs regarding the training of teachers and the

role of teacher education programs on the development of a society, the following research will

provide greater knowledge in the area of effective teacher education programs.

Research Question

      The purpose of this research was to identify the impact of a teacher education program on

its graduates' success. More specifically, what characteristics or themes do graduates of a

teacher education program self-report as being effective components of their training? The

research question was, "What characteristics do teacher education graduates report as being

important components of their training?" The sub-questions of the study were, What is the effect

of teacher education training on student satisfaction and success? What beliefs do graduates

report regarding their training in the teacher education program? It is hypothesized that students

who excel in the program will have greater satisfaction with their teacher education training and

self-report greater success as a teacher. Given the specific research questions, a quantitative and

qualitative research design were utilized.

<center>Methods</center>

Participants

      There were a total of 22 participants in the study. 17 were female and five were male.

Of the total participants, 19 are currently in the teaching and education field and six have full-

time, contract teaching positions. Of the six full-time teaching positions, two are working in

Ohio, one in West Virginia, two in North Carolina, and one in Kentucky. There are seven

participants who have full-time substitute positions with six being in the State of West Virginia

and one in Ohio. There are also three part-time substitutes who work in the state of West

Virginia. Three students have continued their education and are currently working on their

Master's degrees and are employed as graduate assistants at the University. The remaining three

participants are not in the teaching field. One works for Enterprise Rental Company and plans to

continue employment with this corporation. The second participant works for Accordia

Employer Services and presently plans to continue working with this company. The third

participant is working for Manpower Services while she waits for her teaching certification to be

processed. Her plan is to obtain a full-time teaching position after she has earned her teaching

certificate.

Instrument

        The interviewer used a survey that served as the interview guide. The survey contained

nine demographic questions, nine quantitative questions, and 12 qualitative questions. Please

refer to Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument. The purpose of the survey instrument

was to assess a student's beliefs, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction regarding the teacher education

program. Reliability analysis of eight of the nine quantitative questions had an Alpha of .569

and a standardized item alpha of .656. The question related to technology was removed during

analysis due to variance in responses.

Procedure

        The participants for this study were 2001 cohorts from the teacher education program.

Out of the 41 students who graduated, 22 students were successfully contacted and agreed to a

phone or in-person interview. The contact information for the participants was obtained from

Alumni Affairs or from administrative information kept on file at the University.

        A novel survey was created (refer to Appendix A) and used as an interview guide for the

trained phone interviewer. The interviewer contacted each of the participants and went step-by-

step throughout the interview guide asking the participant each of the survey questions. All of

the participants agreed to be interviewed. Each interview was tape recorded and contained

demographic, quantitative, and qualitative questions. The interviewer also completed

comprehensive written notes on the survey while obtaining information from the participants. 19

of the 22 interviews were transcribed verbatim. Three of the interviews were not successfully

transcribed due to tape recorder failure. The interviewer's notes and completed surveys were

transcribed for all of the participants. The transcriptions and interviewer notes were then

compared for consistencies and used as the main data for this research study. The nine

quantitative questions were analyzed using statistical procedures.

Quantitative Results

Upon review of Table 1, the respondents rated the quantitative questions with great

satisfaction. Taking into account a one (1) to ten (10) scale, with ten being "Strongly Agree," the

participants ranked their satisfaction with the teacher education program with at least an 8.25

response. The highest response was 9.4 and this was related to the fact that the students felt their

course work contained up-to-date information in their field of study. The question that contained

the most variability in response, dealt with the participants' opportunities to utilize educational

technology in the classroom. When this question was sorted by the participants who were

teaching full-time or had long term contracts, the mean was 8.27 compared to the participants

who were not teaching or substituting on a day-to-day basis contained a mean of 8.66. The full-

time teachers did not have the opportunity to utilize educational technology in the classroom.

Two of the participants in the study did not plan to continue in the field of teaching and this was

reflected in the variability of question 12 related to this topic. 19 of the 22 students felt that the

content courses had met their expectations whereas three of the participants felt neutral toward

this topic. 20 of the 22 students felt prepared to meet the individual needs of diverse students in

the classroom.

When the data is reviewed taking into account correlational analysis, certain significant

relationships appear. There was a significant relationship [r(22)=.701<.01] between the students

who found great value in their teacher education course-work and those students who plan to

continue in the education profession. The students that rated the teacher education program as

being highly effective also felt that their professional education courses met their expectations

[r(22)=.545<.01]. There was a significantly positive relationship between the students who were

prepared to be independent thinkers and the students who felt their course work contained up-to-

date information in their field of study [r(22)=.512<.05]. It is important to note that the students

who felt prepared as independent thinkers also felt that their course work was valuable in

pursuing their chosen career [r(22)=.439<.05].

Qualitative Results

The information discussed in this section is portrayed in a theme format. The narrative

from each of the participants was analyzed according to similar words that are linked together to

form common ideas. The words that are in quotations marks are the direct statements of the

participants. There are numerous reasons to use a qualitative research design. Qualitative

research allows the researcher to provide thick description, connections, strands, themes, and

webs of significance for the person or persons being studied (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research

goes beyond straight recording of facts and accounts. It introduces emotion, detail, context, and

"webs of social relationships" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) that connect persons to one another. Such

thick description evokes emotionality, self-feelings, and inserts history into one's experiences.

Qualitative research establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for

the person or persons in question. "In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and

meaning, of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).

Grounded Theory was used for the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the

qualitative aspects of this research. Grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data

systematically obtained from research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As the name implies, theory

or ideas are built from the ground up. According to Anselm Strauss (1987), grounded theory

should not be treated as just a methodology, but as a "style of qualitative analysis" that facilitates

the "development of theory" (p. 5). Grounded theory provides a vehicle used to close the gap

between abstract theories and rich description of the data (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979). Such an

approach uses the process of interviews, observations, field notes, and journals to obtain data.

Given this approach, there are 12 themes described in this study. The themes are (1)

Independent Thinker, (2) Value of Teaching and Children, (3) Educational Technology, (4)

Diversity, (5) Human Development, (6) Educational Psychology, (7) Teaching Satisfaction, (8)

Useful Aspects of Teacher Education Program, (9) Least Useful Aspects of Teacher Education

Program, (10) Overall Preparedness (11) Clinical Experience Preparation, and (12) General

Education Courses.

Independent Thinker

When the students were asked, "How did your collegiate experience at the University

prepare you as an independent thinker in a specialized professional role?" a prominent theme

emerged. The most common response from the participants dealt with the clinical experiences.

The participants believed that the clinical experiences and student teaching prepared them to be independent thinkers. The methods courses and the classes that dealt with classroom management and hands-on activities had a strong impact on their ability to be an independent thinkers. One student stated, "All classes promoted critical think[ing]." The students' experiences regarding independent thinking provided them with the opportunity to be more "intellectually diverse", "more broad minded", and "opened-up thinking" abilities.

Specific assignments also allowed the students to increase their independent thinking abilities. Such assignments or processes that increased independent thinking abilities were the capstone experience, assignments that dealt with lesson plans and bulletin boards, portfolios, and real-life problems discussed in the classroom. Assignments that dealt with "creative processes" or assignments that "encouraged one to think" or "express opinions" were discussed by the students as a means to increase thinking abilities. Class expectations that were "encouraging" and "demanding" were valuable to the students in the area of independent thinking. Opportunities that allow the "freedom to explore many options" and having the "ability to plan" were described as being helpful to the independent thinking process. Student autonomy and class activities, where the students were "set out on their own," were helpful to a student's thinking process. As one would expect, the classes that were taught in a critical thinking format were helpful to the students. Such "independent thinking" courses were taught in a "forum atmosphere" and classes that were geared to teaching the "specific duties of a teacher" were strongly associated with increasing independent thinking abilities. The students also felt that when they had to "work through problems" or had "open projects," such assignments were an asset to their abilities to think independently.

The clinical experience was a valuable component to creating and increasing a participant's ability to be an independent thinker. The methods classes, capstone experience, assignments that dealt with lesson plans, portfolios, and real-life problems discussed in the classroom were helpful to the participants regarding their ability to think independently. The process to allow the participants the "freedom to explore many options" and having the "ability to plan" were described as being helpful to the independent thinking process. Student autonomy also established the belief among the participants that they now had the skills to experiment with novel behaviors related to teaching.

Value of Teaching and Children

The question, "What characteristics about children and teaching do you most value?" seemed to create two sub-themes. The first sub-theme dealt with the characteristics that the participants placed upon the children as being valuable. The main theme encompassed the children's ability to develop within an environment that facilitated change. As one participant stated, "They [children] are always curious." They have the ability to "soak in information." The children are "nonjudgmental" and they will "talk to anybody new." They have the "interest" and "curiosity" to ask an endless amount of questions. One participant stated that she valued the "eagerness" of the students to learn and how they were "excited" to learn. The [children] want to "please the teacher." One participant learned that he was able to be "patient with children." He learned how important it was to be a male role model. The participants also expressed other important characteristics related to the children's behavior. The students "are so playful, fun, and innocent." The children have a "willingness to learn at a level where they are honest and caring." The themes related to the "willingness to learn" and "honesty" were echoed by numerous

participants. The participants also valued "the amount of compassion" and "sense of humor" that the children were be able to display.

Given this first sub-theme it becomes apparent that the participants had the ability to critically analyze the behavior of the students in their classes. The participants were able to identify prominent characteristics and divide such characteristics into descriptive behaviors. This ability is associated with a competent learner. To analyze student behavior and place such behavior into a taxonomy is a significant characteristic of a first-year teacher.

The second sub-theme dealt with the characteristics of teaching most valued by the participants. This theme could be summarized by the following statement expressed by a few of the participants, "When you see the light come on. When they finally get it." The main aspect of this theme was related to the product of teaching. It dealt with the ability of the students to learn. Basically, effective teaching created competent learners. One of the participants felt that she could "make a difference" and was "able to help the students develop." Another participant wanted to "help the students to think and grow" while also "building a sense of confidence" within the child. The topic of development and growth was key to this theme. A few of the participants enjoyed watching the children "succeed" and the interpersonal bond that was developed between the teacher and the student. One of the participants summed it up by saying that she wanted to "try to make all [the] students feel needed and show [that she] cared. To lend a helping hand." The value of teaching, as described by a few of the participants, revolved around the issues of "patience, professionalism, honesty, being fair, and flexible." "Flexibility" dealt with the ability to be "open to change." Some of the participants "valued all the different types of learners [and being] able to work with them [students]."

When the two themes are compared, the issue of teaching and learning becomes the foundation for the process of change. The first year teachers cared about the students and wanted to "make a difference" in the lives the of students. The participants valued the learning process and felt that change could occur within an individual. The teacher education program taught the participants to value the process of teaching but, more importantly, to value the child as a person.

Educational Technology

The participants had a confounding response to the question, "In what way have you had opportunities to utilize educational technology in your teaching?" It was hypothesized that the full-time contract teachers and permanent substitutes would be utilizing educational technology in the classroom. This belief was not echoed by the participants. The majority of the participants were not using educational technologies in the classroom. The respondents were divided into two themes. One set of students that used educational technology in the classroom and the other set of students who did not use educational technology in the classroom. It is prominent to note that all of the participants were trained in some aspect of technology. This belief is representative of the data given the fact that most of the participants mentioned that they used their own personal computer to complete educational activities or used an individual computer at the school to complete lesson plans. Basically, the participants are knowledgeable and experienced in the area of educational technology, but do not have the resources nor are they given an allotted amount of time to use computers in the classroom.

The main reason the participants stated for not utilizing educational technology in the classroom dealt with resources. They did not have computers or internet access in the classroom.

The limited amount of computers that were available in the classroom were not up-to-date and had obsolete software. A few of the participants stated that they used their own computer in the classroom. Another reason for not utilizing educational technology was related to the participants "taking the students to the computer lab." The school culture did not encourage the participants to use advanced educational technologies in the classroom.

Less than half of the participants did utilize educational technology in the classroom. The most often cited technology was the computer. Numerous participants mentioned utilizing computer programs called Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math. As one would expect, the internet was a common vehicle to complete research and lesson plans. A few of participants mentioned the use of PowerPoint, Electronic Keyboards, WebGuests, Smart Board, Overhead Projector, Cassette Player, Closed Circuit Television, Graphics program, Videos and Compact Disks, Excel, Word Processing, Page Maker, and Computer Projector.

The use of technologies in the classroom were not an integrated process. The participants did not mention the daily use of technology geared to the specific topics being taught. The first-year teacher seemed to have other concerns than the utilization of technology in the classroom. The participants understood the value of educational technology, but did not utilize such a process due to other more prominent issues within the classroom. The connection between teaching, learning, and the use of technology was not fully established nor was it a seamless process in the public school system.

Diversity

The issue of diversity was discussed with the respondents. When the participants were asked the question, "How would you describe the diversity of children that you teach?," a variety

of responses were discussed. The range of responses dealt with the participants having

extremely limited student diversity in the classroom, to an extensive amount of diverse students

in the learning environment. There was not a single issue related to diversity. Diversity, as

described by the participants included religion, racial/cultural/ethnic, academic ability, economic

class, physical challenge (disability), multiple ages, special needs, behavioral disorders, and

sexual expression. The issue of poverty seemed to be consistent with many of the participants,

whereas ethnic diversity was not a common theme discussed by the participants.

As one participant stated, "There [were] no Latinos or African Americans. . . it kinda

made it hard to teach with diversity [be]cause they've all been with the same group of people

their whole entire lives. They had it in their minds that they were going to be with the same

people their entire lives." The variety of responses was prominent given the fact that another

participant had a totally different experience related to the issue of diversity. A participant

states, "Gosh, very diverse. Probably 50 percent African American, 30 percent Hispanic,

probably 20 percent white, very diverse. The free and reduced lunch is probably 70 percent at

my school so it's a very diverse background of children." Another participant stated that she had

students from Puerto Rico, Thailand, and Germany. The academic ability level of the students in

this class was high and lacked any range in academic achievement. The English as a Second

Language (ESL) students were mentioned by one of the participants given the fact that the

teacher stated, "I have children from everywhere."

Diversity involved multiple factors and included a variety of perspectives that were not

similar in nature. The participants were not surprised by the issue of diversity in the classroom,

and were accepting of the challenges presented by diverse learners. A few of the participants

mentioned that the issue of diversity was an important topic in the school. Even though all of the

participants lived and worked in a geographically similar environment, the prominent issues of diversity basically revolved around socio-economic level and academic ability.

Human Development

The issue of human development, as related to a teacher education program, was a significant theme among the participants. When the participants were asked, "In what ways have you had opportunities to utilize the theories of human development in your teaching?," numerous prominent statements were expressed by the respondents. A few of the participants felt that the theories of human development helped them comprehend how a student's age was related to their ability to learn. One participant stated, "You have to teach it the way they want to learn. Even if you have to teach it 14 different times. You have to find a way for it to come alive to them. I think that's the thing I came away with the most."

For many of the participants, the theories of human development assisted their teaching as related to how children learn. The participants were able to "see" (understand) the growth of children between different age levels. The theories of development helped the participants [teacher] to understand "why children play and engage in certain activities". The majority of the participants stated that they knew what to expect from the students given their understanding of human developmental theories.

Another aspect regarding the understanding of human developmental theories dealt with application. One participant expressed the belief that understanding developmental theories was valuable in the design of lesson plans as well as the assessment of a student's learning. He was able to engage the most appropriate teaching behavior in reference to learning. This participant states, "You basically have to know if the students are ready for a concept or an idea. . . If you

think they're ready for it [you have] to go about teaching it. . . [Is it] better to do it hands-on or verbal or more abstract." A participant was able to utilize the theories of human development in making referrals of a few students to Special Education. "We use that (theories of human development) when I was deciding whether or not to refer a couple of kids for Special Ed because I just noticed their social development was behind, their motor development was behind, and a couple of other things, so that helped me to determine that it was referral time."

Developmental theories were a valuable tool in the creation of lesson plans, referrals, assessment, teaching, and learning. Many of the participants were able to utilize human developmental theories as a foundation to teaching and learning. The theories were the keystone to understanding human behavior and the application to creating change in students. The most significant realization from a few of the participants was related to their synthesis of developmental theories to their teaching repertoire. Such a practice is an indicator that the participants have integrated theory into practice.

Educational Psychology

When the question was asked, "In what ways have you had opportunities to utilize the different theories of learning in your teaching?" the participants articulated numerous responses. The majority of responses dealt with using different teaching strategies to increase learning. One participant used the textbook as a teaching tool and realized that this was not the most appropriate approach given her understanding of learning theories. She states, "I learned real quickly that they [students] were not textbook learners. That was my main way of going about the chapter. . . I found out very fast that these particular students were visually hands-on. They [students] had to have their hands in it at all times. I did one chapter where it was basically - let's

read the chapter, let's go over the chapter, and let's take a test on the chapter. . . They did not do good at all. I put the book away and [we did] the entire thing [lesson] hands-on. Their test scores shot up."

A few of the participants felt that a key component to learning dealt with the utilization of teaching strategies. One of the participants felt that she had to use multiple teaching approaches to aid the students in learning. She states, "Children learn in lots of different ways. . . the thing that reaches one of them may not reach another one. So we've tried several different things to reach the different children's needs. We have some that learn by sight and some that have to actually feel it. . . we've had to create a lot of different learning environments for those [students] to meet their individual needs. . .[to] create learning centers and different activities to meet the different children's needs." A few of the other participants felt that they had to "accommodate" their teaching to assist the students in learning. This also involved hands-on teaching, multiple teaching strategies, a variety of lesson plans, and basically "making learning fun."

The issue of learning theories encompassed specific teaching strategies utilized by the participants. The more common responses dealt with hands-on approaches and using a variety of teaching techniques. One of the participants echoed the belief that learning styles were a key component related to teaching strategies. When analyzing any type of data it is important to note the topics that were not mentioned by the participants. The respondents did not mention any specific learning theorist or theory of learning. Their foundation of learning was based on techniques and strategies rather than applied theories of learning.

Teaching Satisfaction

The participants were asked a simple question, "How do you feel about being a teacher?" and the responses were quite positive in nature. This question had the lengthiest of all responses. The typical statement from the vast majority of participants regarding this question was, "I love it!" A few of the participants shared a common belief as expressed by the following quotation, "I could never imagine doing anything else." Another participant stated, "I love being a teacher. I am definitely satisfied with what I chose." One of the participants was fortunate enough to obtain a job in West Virginia upon gradation. He states, "I love it [teaching]. It's what I've always wanted to be. . . I just feel blessed to have actually graduated in December and then a month later actually have my own classroom in West Virginia which is a very rare thing to step into. . . So, I'm really excited about it." Another participant related teaching to the issue of responsibility. He states, "I feel like it's a huge responsibility [teaching]. I also feel that it's the most rewarding job that anyone could ever have. . . just seeing a child succeed in anything [he/she does] everyday is rewarding. I think that's the greatest thing about being a teacher. The reward that you get. . . it's not a quarterly bonus or a Christmas bonus, it's everyday." The financial reward for this person was not as significant as the affective reward earned by being a teacher. The financial aspect was an issue with another participant even though she "loved teaching." The financial aspect was a concern, but the rewards of teaching outweighed such beliefs. She states, "I love it. I love it. . .like financially it's not. . . it's not as rewarding financially. . .but I feel good at the end of the day."

A female participant was told by numerous people that she would hate being a teacher and then she states, "Well, I love it [teaching]. You know, people tell you all through college

that you're going to hate it. . . " Teaching was rewarding for this participant even though her

peers at college tried to persuade her beliefs of graduating from a rewarding program.

Four of the participants enjoy teaching but had some concerns regarding the level of

stress, classroom management, and discipline problems in the classroom. A participant states, "I

love it. I wouldn't do anything else. There were times though, [at] the beginning of the year

when I came home and said 'I am not doing this anymore.'" Similar concerns were discussed by

another participant. He states, "It's rough and tough, but I feel good about it. I feel like I'm

doing the right thing. I feel like I'm in the right field. It's just going to take me a year or two to

get the feel for it but I feel like I love it. . . "

Another participant expressed mixed reviews about teaching as a career. Even though the

job of teaching is rewarding there are situations that can be stressful. The participant states,

"Well you know some days are absolutely wonderful when you feel that you're connected with

the students and they've learned and really gotten something out of them. . . some days when you

have many discipline problems which you perceive to be a lack of interest--that can be kinda of

stressful.

One of the participants felt overwhelmed by being a teacher. She found the job to be

stressful and her ability to manage the students in the classroom to be a difficult process. She

states, "I've tried every classroom management thing that I have learned and I can't seem to find

the exact one. . . so really this year has been very stressful and I didn't have any idea. I mean it's

really hard to tell anyone what they're getting into until they're there [teaching]."

The vast majority of the respondents "loved" teaching. The career of teaching was

rewarding and a few of the participants felt they made a difference in another person's

development. The teacher was a positive influence in helping a person learn. There were a few

participants (first year teachers) who felt overwhelmed in the classroom. The issue of classroom management and discipline problems were the major issues of concern. Such concerns are not atypical of first year teachers.

Useful Aspects of Teacher Education Program

When the participants were asked, "What was the most useful aspect of your teacher education training?," the overwhelming response was "student teaching" and their "clinical activities." As a student described with enthusiasm, "My most useful is definitely the student teaching. The actual experiences, not just student teaching, but the experiences that led-up to it [student teaching]. The reading block, all the hours of the experience of the time I had to go out into the classrooms. Everyone of my special ed classes I had to take. . . I had to go out into the classroom and I got to see a variety of all the different disabilities that I would be facing once I'm a teacher. So, definitely it was the experiences and the student teaching experience. The actual classroom experience, going out and applying the knowledge that you have learned in the classroom." Another participant stated that it was the combination of background knowledge, technology courses, and observations. She states, "It was a combination of having the background knowledge from the basic courses. Having the experience with technology courses because that's a huge part of our school systems today and just getting information from the teachers who have been out there - observing." It is important to note that only one student mentioned the significance of using technology in the classroom.

The student teaching experience was prominent for the majority of the participants because "they learned the most" and they were able to apply their knowledge. When one participant was asked about the most useful aspect of the program she states, "My student

teaching. Definitely, and I feel like I learned the most. . ." Given this same question another

participant states, "I think that getting out there and actually doing student teaching and getting

some feedback, positive feedback, and of course getting out in the next week doing it was

probably the most, most useful thing." A male participant found the reading block and guided

reading to be the most useful.

The participants described their student teaching and clinical experiences as the most

useful aspect of their training. The application and "real life" experiences of the clinical

activities provided the "teachers in training" with the opportunity to teach. The student teaching

experience allowed the participants to practice the "art of teaching." The clinical experiences

were an opportunity to apply all the previous information learned in the program into an

exchange of behaviors geared at creating an optimal learning environment.

Least Useful Aspects of Teacher Education Program

An effective teacher education program is one that is evaluated consistently and adapted

to become a stronger, more efficient program. The question, "What was the least useful aspect

of your teacher education training?" generated a variety of responses. About half of the

participants found all aspects of the teacher education program to be useful. They were satisfied

with their level of education and training. As one participant simply states, "Everything that I

have learned I have used in one way or tried to use." The teacher education program, for this

specific participant, was practical and provided the necessary skills for her to succeed. When

another participant was asked about the least useful aspects of the program she responded by

saying, "I think everything is useful. . . I can't really think of anything that was least useful." The

teacher education program was ranked by at least half of the participants as not having any deficiencies.

In the review of any academic program one of the objectives is to determine student satisfaction. When the participants were prompted to describe their least useful aspect of the program, there were three students who mentioned their technology classes. The general concern was related to having too many technology classes and the need to condense the present technology classes into useful aspects. The course content should address the issues of technology in the present day classroom. It is prominent to note that many of the participants who are full-time teachers do not have opportunities to utilize technology in the classroom. Another participant felt that she already had the skills in the area of computer technology. When asked about her least useful aspect of the program she states, "Probably the very basic computer technology because I already know a lot of that stuff."

The participants provided the following feedback related to concerns in the program: the program was too repetitive, the general education courses were not helpful as related to the electives in physical education, there needs to be more elementary education courses, the portfolios were too numerous and redundant, the observations should have included hands-on activities, the philosophy of education class was not useful, and the lesson plans were too in-depth compared to actual lesson plans used in the classroom. As one participant states regarding her experiences with portfolios, "Well. . . probably all the portfolios we did. Now, I know a portfolio was useful but we did several and after you have done one you've got the idea."

Overall, the participants found the program to be useful and valuable in their training as teachers. The issue of technology training as related to the process and course content needs to be addressed since a few of the students expressed concerns about this issue. The other issues

mentioned by the respondents were individual in nature. More information needs to be obtained

over a longer period of time to have a greater understanding of such individual issues.

Overall Preparedness

The question, "How well were you prepared for teaching?" generated consistent

responses from the participants. Considering the 19 participants who were working in the field

of education, 16 felt prepared to teach. The typical response was, "I was very well prepared."

Another participant states, "Oh, very well prepared. I mean, if teaching is meant for you to do,

going through [the university's] program, then you'll be prepared." This participant felt that

teaching was a "calling."

Two participants felt that the issue of preparedness dealt with experience. As one

participant states, "I think that I was extremely prepared. Like I said, with all the previous

experiences, by the time you got out to student teach, you were ready. You're ready to get up

there and do that and not just sit there and observe. You're ready to get up and teach the

classroom." Another participant felt that preparedness is related to experience. She states, "I

feel like I was pretty well prepared. Really, I mean, I think most of it you just have to do. You

learn as you go. . . there's always a few things that you learn and that you would change but I

think that just comes from experience so I think that I was as well prepared as anyone could be

with no experience."

Three of the participants felt that they were not prepared in the area of classroom

management and to teach outside of the state of West Virginia. One of the participants wanted to

have more "real world" situations related to teaching during her training in the teacher education

program. Another participant had preconceived ideas that were inaccurate. Such

misconceptions were not helpful in her teaching experiences. She states, "I don't think I was very prepared at all but I don't think it's the school's or my curriculum's fault. I think that was more what I had in my head was so much different from what was actually there. Like I had it in my head that I was going to go and it was going to be this way and it was completely opposite way so that threw me off a whole lot and classroom management was completely not what I expected it to be. I was really unprepared in classroom management. I think that's probably something that needs to be focused on a whole lot more--classroom management because that's what I struggled in the most."

The teacher education program overwhelmingly prepared the vast majority of the participants to be successful teachers. The participants answered this question quickly and confidently indicating their conviction to this question. Three of the participants did not feel well prepared in the areas of classroom management and in "real world" situations that may occur in the classroom. Such responses indicate a disconnectedness on the part of the three participants related to classroom management techniques.

Clinical Experience Preparation

Student teaching is a valuable component in the learning process for future teachers. Some educators may say this is the capstone experience to all experiences in the area of teacher education. Such a belief was echoed by the majority of the participants given the question, "How well did your clinical experience prepare you for teaching?" The three students who were not employed in the field of teaching felt that they were well prepared to teach. This is a unique perspective given the fact that they were not employed in the area of teaching.

The participants answered this question in the most consistent manner compared to the other themes. All of the responses were painted with positive comments. A few of the participants stated that the clinical experience was, "Awesome," "I learned a lot," "The clinicals were very helpful," "Extremely eye opening," and "Student teaching was wonderful!" Such consistent responses are an indicator that the clinical experiences successfully prepare students to teach. A participant states, "You get to see first hand how things go on a daily basis so I think it really prepared me well."

Although the participants had complimentary comments about the clinical experiences, a Master's level student did have a suggestion. He felt the Master's program needed to have a greater concentration on classroom management techniques. The issue of classroom management for first year teachers is traditionally an aspect that can be complex in nature. The introduction of more "real world situations" in the teacher education program can be beneficial and increase a future teacher's ability to understand atypical behavior among the students.

General Education Courses

The advantages and disadvantages of taking general education courses may be related to a person's career goals and expectations. A "well rounded" education may include liberal arts courses and content specific courses. When the participants were asked the question, "How well did your general education courses prepare you to be a teacher? These are your non-major courses such as math, English, and science courses," a variety of responses were articulated by the participants. Taking into account the 22 participants who responded to the survey, eight felt the general education courses were advantageous, nine felt the general education courses were

not beneficial, and four participants had mixed reviews regarding the preparedness of having to take general education courses.

One participant felt that the general education courses "made you a well rounded person." He states, "They just make you a more well-rounded person, give you a little bit of knowledge about everything. . ." A female participant had a similar belief. She states, "It [general education courses] was a good knowledge base." Another participant echoed the same consistent belief. She states, "I guess it helped me to be more round. . ."

There were participants who believed that the general education courses were not beneficial to their career activities. These participants felt that the general education courses were not applicable to their job. The participant states, "None of those [general education courses] apply to my job. . . I don't use them. I teach elementary math." Another participant had a similar belief and states, "I don't think they're [general education courses] all that beneficial. I mean I learned a lot in some of the classes but I didn't use a whole lot of that in my teaching." A female participant was quite direct in her expression of her beliefs. She states, "None. I don't think they [general education courses] really help you be a teacher. . . My most biggest concern is how to teach second grade, the content, so really, the education classes helped me the most."

A few of the participants provided a multidimensional response to the general education question. There were both advantages and disadvantages to taking general education courses. A participant states, "I think that some of them [general education courses] are very useful, some of them I don't. . . I don't know how much the high level science classes are going to come into play for me [K-6 teacher]." The varied responses to this question indicates a diverse expression of beliefs. These beliefs are based upon the participants' experiences in a classroom environment and their reflection upon their career skills. While the survey participants were unable at present

to comprehend the value of General Studies courses, after teaching for a few years they will be in a better position to understand that the increase in knowledge deepens their knowledge base and increases the quality of their teaching abilities. The quantitative and qualitative responses, for this question, are not consistent. Given such an inconsistency in responses, it would be beneficial to have a greater number of participant responses and the placement of this question at the beginning of the survey.

Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative data presents a prominent picture related to the participants' satisfaction with the teacher education program. The participants felt well prepared to teach and rated the program as being successful regarding their training as teachers. The comparison of quantitative and qualitative data provides a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the teacher education program. The participants felt their course work contained up-to-date information given the fact that this was the highest rated quantitative question. The participants rated the program as being able to increase their independent thinking abilities, embrace diversity, and felt the course content met their expectations. The program was effective and the majority of the participants plan to continue in the teacher education field.

There were variations in responses related to the use of technology and the significances of the general education courses (electives). The use of technology for the full-time teachers was limited in nature. The participants' technology training was adequate, but they did not have the opportunities to utilize such training in the classroom. This is not an issue within the teacher education program, but was a school cultural issue within the educational system. Almost a third of the participants felt that the general education [electives] courses were not overly useful in

their teaching profession. Such a perspective is limited in scope and needs to be addressed. A "well rounded education" is beneficial to the development of the teacher and student. An educational foundation is the structure that allows for the growth of a person.

The profile of a typical graduate of the teacher education program has numerous characteristics. The teacher rates the program as being effective. He or she feels well prepared to teach and is an independent thinker. The teacher is able to meet the individual needs of diverse students and understands the complexity of religious, racial/cultural/ethnic, academic ability, economic class, physical challenge (disability), multiple ages, special needs, behavioral disorders, and sexual expression diversity. They have up-to-date knowledge about their specialization and their course content met all of their expectations. The teacher met and exceeds the definition of a professional teacher. The graduate of the teacher education program is competent and has great skill in his or her abilities.

The participants also discussed a few concerns in the area of classroom management. The issue of discipline and behavioral problems may pose a limited number of concerns to the first year teacher. The teacher is trained in the area of technology but does not have the opportunity to use technology in the classroom. The teacher appreciates a well rounded education, but at times may question the complete utilization of their general educational electives.

Conclusion

In the current policy debate on teacher preparation, those advocating alternative routes to teaching certification hold that content knowledge equates to teacher quality and that knowledge of one's subject matter trumps all other cards. Those wishing to abandon traditional standards

for teaching certification are skeptical about schools of education and university-based teacher

preparation programs. They hold that passing an examination is evidence of teaching ability and

quality. This line of thinking is extremely troublesome for professional educators. Why is it that

medical students have to go through exceedingly rigorous and demanding training to become

physicians? Could it be that they need the training? Why should we, as a society, want less

from our teachers who are entrusted with the nurturing, care, and intellectual development of our

children? Is developing a brain any less important that treating a brain?

On the other hand, professional educators recognize the complexities of the teaching

process. They believe that a knowledge base for teaching exists. This knowledge base consists

of knowing the developmental characteristics of children, knowing the developmentally

appropriate instructional strategies including technological approaches to instruction, knowing

concepts of curriculum and methods, and knowing components of assessment and evaluation of

pupil progress. The professional educator understands that enhancing the knowledge base and

skills of teaching is vital. They understand that teaching is much more than the instructor's

simple mastery of a content discipline. Professional teachers believe that this understanding is

absolutely critical, especially in an era of increasing student diversity. Professional educators

want to make certain that teachers are well-equipped in the areas of methods, technology,

educational psychology, and literacy to teach diverse learners. Teacher educators understand the

complexity of reaching children at different developmental levels, the importance of motivation,

the value of instructional technology, and the significance of evaluating and measuring pupil

progress.

This study contributes to the scientific body of research now emerging and evidencing

that teacher education does matter a great deal. In fields ranging from the social sciences,

humanities, and sciences, to early childhood, elementary, vocational, and gifted education,

teachers are fully prepared and certified in their discipline. Certified teachers have higher

retention rates in their profession, are more highly rated by their supervisors, are more successful

with student achievement, and possess a positive teaching self-image with independent thinking

skills (Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy, 2002).

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Table 1

Post Graduate Survey

Questions	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Deviation
10. How would you rate the effectiveness of the teacher education program at the University?	8.68	8.00	8.50	.893
11. My collegiate experience at the University prepared me as an independent thinker in a specialized professional role.	9.13	9.00	9.00	.774
12. I plan to continue in the education profession.	9.09	10.00	10.00	2.04
13. I have had opportunities to utilize educational technology in my classroom.	8.25	10.00	10.00	2.59
13a. Full time teachers use of technology.	8.27			
13b. Part time teachers use of technology.	8.66			
14. I was prepared to meet the individual needs of diverse students in my classroom.	8.76	10.00	9.00	1.48
15. My coursework was valuable in pursuing my chosen career.	8.95	9.00	9.00	.998
16. My coursework contained up-to-date information about my field.	9.40	10.00	10.00	1.05
17. The content courses in my program met my expectations.	8.27	9.00	9.00	1.57
18. The professional education courses in my program met my expectations.	9.18	10.00	9.00	.906

APPENDIX A

Undergraduate Post Survey - Conceptual Framework
Phone Interview Questions

1.   What is your name? _____

2.   What is your address? _____

3.   What is your telephone number? _____

4.   What is your electronic mail address? _____

5.   Who is your employer? _____

6.   What grade level do you teach? _____

7.   What classes do you teach? _____

8.   Are you employed in the field that you are certified to teach?   YES   NO

9.   Are you employed as a substitute teacher?   YES   NO

10.   How would you rate the effectiveness of the teacher education program at Marshall University?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree					Neutral					Strongly Agree

11.   My collegiate experience at Marshall prepared me as an independent thinker in a specialized   professional role.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree					Neutral					Strongly Agree

12.   I plan to continue in the education profession.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree					Neutral					Strongly Agree

13.   I have had opportunities to utilize educational technology in my classroom.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

14.   I was prepared to meet the individual needs of diverse students in my classroom.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

15.   My coursework was valuable in pursuing my chosen career.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

16.   My coursework contained up-to-date information about my field.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

17.   The content courses in my program met my expectations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

18.   The professional education courses in my program met my expectations.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree				Neutral					Strongly Agree

19.   How did your collegiate experience at Marshall University prepare you as a independent thinker in a specialized professional role?

20.   What characteristics about children and teaching do you most value?

21.   In what ways have you had opportunities to utilize educational technology in your teaching?

22.   How would you describe the diversity of children that you teach?

23.   In what ways have you had opportunities to utilize the theories of human development in your   teaching?

24.   In what ways have you had opportunities to utilize the different theories of learning in your teaching?

25.   How do you feel about being a teacher?

26.   What was the most useful aspect of your teacher education training?

27.   What was the least useful aspect of your teacher education training?

28.   How well were you prepared for teaching?

29.   How well did your clinical experience prepare you for teaching?

30.   How well did your general education courses prepare you to be a teacher. These are your non-major courses such as math, English, and science courses.