Perspectives of Program Completers on the Effectiveness of Clinical Education Program on Teaching Preparedness

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the extent to which education program completers effectively apply the professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the education program was designed to achieve. Prior to this study, the EPP has only analyzed completer survey data to determine the extent to which education program completers believe their preparation program was effective in preparing them to enter the profession ready to meet the challenges inherit within their classrooms and schools.

The mixed methods pilot study used multiple methods to explore the impact the EPP's redesigned clinical education program had on perceptions of program completers from 1 to 5 years employed; to determine the extent to which program completers have a positive impact on their P-12 students' academic growth, and to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement relative to the preparation program provided by the EPP.

INTRODUCTION

While everyone agrees that all students should have a quality teacher in each classroom, there is some discussion related to what that "quality teacher" should look like. The National Council for Accreditation of Teachers commissioned a blue-ribbon panel to report on the state of teacher education in the United States. The 2012 report recommended teacher education should move to programs that are grounded in clinical practice with academic content and professional courses as the supporting work. This recommendation would flip current teacher preparation practice for many programs across the nation.

Research documents the attention on teacher preparation in other countries, such as Singapore, Finland, and China,

where top high school candidates are selected through a rigorous application process to attend universities. Once identified, the candidates are trained in theory, as well as pedagogical practices in a structured, supportive clinical setting (CIEB, 2017). In the United States, colleges and universities are under fire because of lack of pedagogical practices tied directly to educational theory and clinical application. The foundation of good teaching is to provide students with interesting and meaningful context regardless of student age and stage of learning (Ogle & Beers, 2012). Teaching excellence should be the focus for all teacher preparation programs, and the EPP related to the study maintains that focus. Responding to research and data related to the teacher preparation program formed the basis for the redesign of one preparation program in the south-central region of the United States. After the program redesign, the question for the program became, "If how pre-service teachers are trained is critical to the long term success of P-12 institutions and should be the core work of all educator preparation programs, then how does this program measure up to this challenge?" What data is present to indicate the program is high quality and candidates are ready for the classroom on day one?

With an average of 300 program completers each year in the preparation program, the program must continue to grow and continuously improve in order to address the rapidly changing landscape of teaching as a profession and prepare teacher candidates for the ever changing setting of the education world. Research suggests that that new teachers, who perceive their preparation program to be adequate, tend to have fewer issues within their first years (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002).

This small-scale study focused on the perceptions of program completers regarding their program after they have been hired by a school district and have worked in the classroom setting for one to five years. There is little research related to the influence education preparation programs' have on practices in the field beyond initial student teaching. This study relates to program impact beyond the professional semester and the student teaching experience. Do the program completers feel as if the education preparation program prepared them for the day-to-day work related to classroom teaching? Based on the received data, what program adjustments can be recommended to the education preparation advisory board for continuous program improvement?

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study examines the impact of a teacher preparation program on the perceptions of first-year teachers and their perceptions of preparedness regarding their professional practice and influence on student achievement. The review of literature focuses on current practices of the teacher education program as they pertain to training teacher candidates and the effect on student achievement. Research indicates the quality of the classroom teacher is a fundamental factor in academic growth of students (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). Furthermore, the future of education will be improved with quality teacher preparation as the foundation for the academic success of students (Wei et al., 2009). In addition, highly effective classroom teachers are the major indicator of student learning (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012). With that said, the teaching profession is complex and requires the execution of various mandates, policies, curriculum, pedagogy, and management practices simultaneously (Moore & Whitfield, 2011). Teaching and learning will be transformed by teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010). High attrition rates of new teachers emphasize the need for new and innovative quality training for the complex education profession (Thomas et al., 2013).

Teacher preparation programs have the responsibility of providing classroom teachers the skills and knowledge base necessary to be successful educators in the 21st century. The quality of teacher education training is powerful and a significant factor of professional knowledge of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Because of this, it is important for preparation programs to focus on effective teaching that involves ways to help students increase knowledge, develop skills, and build values (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015). Productive strategies for evaluating outcomes in teacher licensure programs are becoming increasingly important in the education field (Cooner, Stevenson, & Frederiksen 2011). Researchers recognize the art and science of effective teaching (Brown, 2012; Marzano, 2012). Marzano's framework of effective classroom pedagogy includes instructional strategies, classroom management strategies, and classroom curriculum design (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). This framework builds the teacher standards necessary for success in the classroom.

Current Kentucky teacher standards (EPSB, 2018) convey that professional teachers demonstrate the following skills as an initial classroom teacher: content knowledge, instructional planning, learning climate, manages instruction, assesses and communicates learning results, implementation of technology, evaluates teaching and learning, collaborates with colleagues/ parents/ others, evaluates teaching and implements professional development and provides leadership within school/ community/ profession. These initial teacher standards are used in the evaluation and assessment of a teacher for continued certification, as well as for EPP accreditation purposes.

- **Content knowledge** is evidenced by contemporary depth of academic knowledge in the content area of certification.
- **Instruction planning** is evidenced by effective planning and design of instruction in order to cultivate student capacity in the application and integration of core concepts, effective communication, and development toward individual self-sufficiency as well as community engagement.
- **Learning climate** focuses on the development and maintenance of learning environments which support student abilities directly related to instructional learning objectives. Candidate must be able to effectively manage his/her classroom using norms, procedures, and routines o build a safe, positive learning climate for all students.
- **Instructional management** is evidence through the successful implementation and support of instructional plans which ensure learning targets are met effectively and with fidelity among all students.
- **Learning Assessment** is employed equitably in order to determine individual student mastery of specific learning targets through a variety of reliable mechanisms in order to ensure accurate evaluation and the results are communicated to student, parents and fellow educators.
- **Technology integration** is utilized in support of instruction so as to access data, communicate with stakeholders, create and present instructional materials and develop professionally through research and professional growth opportunities.
- **Evaluation** is rooted in the ability to accurately reflect upon and assess specific elements of instructional practices and programs.
- **Collaboration** entails positive engagement with colleagues and other stakeholders directly involved in students support and those programs focused on developing student abilities and skills.
- **Professional development** involves evaluation of individual performance in relation to professional expectations and the development of aligned learning goals which strengthen knowledge, pedagogy and skills necessary for effective educators.
- **Leadership** is evidenced by initiative in leading the educational community and profession toward the objective of enhanced student learning and well-being. Teacher contributes to the expertise and knowledge of the profession.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methods

The first phase of this project consisted of planning sessions between the co-directors, project team members, and college associate dean of assessment, accountability, and accreditation. Our priorities were to determine: 1) the type of program completer data we needed, 2) identification of the completers for the pilot study and 3) development of instruments to be used for study. Phase two consisted of gathering data, development of instruments we would use for the study, and completing Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative training for members that needed to be updated. Phase three included seeking support from school principals to complete the pilot study and obtaining permission from the University Institutional Review Board. Phase four was the actual observations of program completers, surveys completed and related assessment data submitted. In phase five, data was coded, disaggregated for themes across the preparation program. Phase six consisted of reporting the related data to the education preparation program stakeholders and developing next steps for the study.

Participants

Participants were identified as recent (1 – 5 years) program completers currently employed in a public school setting in Kentucky who volunteers for the study. Potential subjects were contacted with information about the study and invited to participate. Participants were selected from those who respond positively. Participants were purposively selected to reflect the variety of licensure areas representative of the preparation programs (elementary, middle, secondary, P- 12) such that four completers, each representing one of the four licensure levels, were selected for participation as case examples for the pilot study. Attention was given to certification levels, as well as school demographic data included two Title I schoolwide schools and two non-Title I schoolwide schools. School organizational types included one school as an independent district, one as a large county system, and one as a laboratory school. The pilot sample was 75% female and 25% male. All participants met the criteria of 1-5 years teaching experience and program completers from the identified education preparation program.

Once selected, participants were interviewed using a structured interview process. Participants were observed twice during a normal instructional day for an instruc-

tional episode using the observation form designed by the EPP and based on the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program observation form. The two observations were conducted by two different researchers. Participants were asked to provide data including their student growth data (from PGES), student performance data (from K-PREP), and student voice survey data (from PGES), with all identifiers removed. Participants were asked to participate in a post observation interview if clarification was needed based on observation.

Survey Development

The survey instrument consisted of 16 survey questions related to Kentucky Teacher Standards and how well the candidates felt they were successful in the classroom related to these program standards. Participants rated their experiences Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent as related to the program preparation. Observation data was related to the same Kentucky Teacher Standards as implemented in the classroom setting for the Kentucky Teacher Internship Program completion. Related assessment data included state required Student Voice data and District Classroom goals for each individual classroom teacher.

Participating EPP faculty members were trained to conduct classroom observations using Kentucky's KTIP observation process. The training addresses observations that were bias free and designed to assure inter-rater reliability. The classroom observations, along with completer self-reports and student achievement measures versus learning goals were used to triangulate data regarding themes related to the EPP completers.

The Pilot Study used three schools, with identified completers from all EPP preparation levels: K-5; P-12; 6-8; and 9-12. The schools identified for inclusion were public independent, district and the University lab school. The completers represent a range of licensure areas; from PE, elementary, middle level, and secondary math. Permission from all building administrators was granted prior to the first observation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The pilot case study used multiple data points to collect information from four recent completers to explore effectiveness of the EPP planned program and the professional readiness of candidates. The collected data provides opportunities to formulate hypothesis and generate new questions for the larger mixed-methods study related to EPP completer classroom effectiveness with respect to applying the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that the EPP program sought to provide. The Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (KTIP) Teacher Observation instrument, Student Voice Survey data related to the Kentucky Professional Effectiveness and Growth System, Completer Student Goals, and EPP Completer Survey were used as the pilot study assessments for recent completers. These instruments and protocols were selected for their validity and reliability in teacher evaluation projects such as the MET study and the instruments familiarity of completers based on Kentucky regulations.

Initial analysis of the data has been completed. Information obtained from direct observations, teacher self-reports, and student voice surveys were compared to form a comprehensive picture of the EPP's completers' effectiveness with respect to academic impact. The data will help the EPP identify program strengths and weaknesses related to our teacher preparation programs, and implement a continuous improvement model to meet student academic development needs in our P-12 partner schools and beyond. The pilot study will be used to refine the larger completer impact mixed-methods study, including focus groups with completers that will scale up the pilot process.

Survey Data

Based on the survey data from the completers (4 of 4), the EPP is producing teachers who perceive they are "good" or "excellent" regarding standards 3, 6, and 8. Completers (3 of 4) for the most part perceive the EPP is producing teachers that are "good" or "excellent" regarding standards 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, & 10. Completers (2 of 4) perceive that the EPP is producing teachers who are "good" or "excellent" regarding standard 4. The overall completers' perception of their education program is "good" or "excellent" for the majority of the completers surveyed.

Observation Data

The observations were formal observations of active teaching in the classroom. Each pilot participant was observed two times by the co-principal investigators of the study. While typical classroom observations are used to give constructive feedback to the observed teacher, the purpose of these observations were to gather real time data related to completers and observable impact of students in the P-12 setting. Investigators then compared observation data and scoring information noting that student engagement and technology use were a strength for 3 out of 4 candidates; while classroom management and structures for routine was an area for growth for 1 out of 4 candidates.

Table 1
Completer Survey of Initial Kentucky Teacher Standards

	Kentucky Teacher Standard	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
1	The Teacher Demonstrates Applied Content Knowledge	0%	25%	35%	40%
2	The Teacher Designs and Plans Instruction	5%	15%	30%	50%
3	The Teacher Creates and Maintains Learning Climate	0%	5%	30%	65%
4	The Teacher Implements and Manages Instruction	15%	20%	15%	50%
5	The Teacher Assesses and Communicates Learning Results	4%	17%	33%	46%
6	The Teacher Demonstrates the Implementation of Technology	0%	0%	60%	40%
7	The Teacher Reflects on and Evaluates Teaching and Learning	0%	25%	8%	67%
8	The Teacher Collaborates with Colleagues, Parents and Others	0%	10%	35%	55%
9	The Teacher Evaluates Teaching and Implements Professional Development	15%	5%	25%	35%
10	The Teacher Provides Leadership with School, Community and Profession	10%	10%	55%	25%

*Multiple indicators measured under each Kentucky Teacher Standard

Student Voice

The Student Voice survey used by the Kentucky Department of Education is an opportunity for teachers to receive feedback from students related to their learning experiences. The survey asks questions of students that assess seven constructs of student engagement targets: support, transparency, understanding, discipline, engagement, nurture, and trust. The student Voice survey was derived from the Tripod Survey, a survey that has been developed as a partnership between Cambridge Education and Dr. Ron Ferguson. The data related to the student voice survey provides formative evidences for teacher reflection in order to improve classroom culture and instructional practices. Based on data related to the pilot completers, the average scores for positive impact in each of the seven constructs is mostly positive. The survey is directly related to the perceptions of the P-12 students' and the impact the completer teacher has on P-12 learning in the pilot classroom.

Table 2
Student Voice Survey Data

Student Voice Theme	Teacher			
	A	B	C	D
Engage	54%	68%	79%	59%
Nurture	80%	85%	77%	61%
Support	86%	91%	75%	77%
Discipline	57%	44%	63%	64%
Trust	74%	82%	72%	67%
Understand	57%	89%	66%	69%
Transparency	83%	88%	77%	76%
Average	**70%**	**78%**	**73%**	**68%**

Student Growth Goals

Kentucky's Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) includes a local student growth contribution for all educators that is aligned to Kentucky's Academic Standards (KAS). Policy and procedure related to the local growth goal is determined by the local school district and deployed at the school and classroom level. All Kentucky educators use classroom evidences and data to construct a Student Growth Goal (SGG) in collaboration with the building administrator, based on academic data related to course content. Assessment literacy is the foundation of the SGG which is designed to monitor the improvement of students from one point in time to another during the same academic year. Each year, educators and administrators use results from multiple assessments of student progress and district decision rules to determine a local student growth rating.

Based on the self-reported completer student growth goals, and self-reported results, 4 out of 4 pilot study completers achieved the student growth goal that was developed during the pilot study school year.

Table 3
Completer Student Growth Goals

Goal: All of my students will develop basic manipulative skills. All of my students will improve their underhand throwing by one performance level. Students will be evaluated using a standards-based four-point rubric. Additionally, 80% of my students will meet or exceed level 3 of the rubric.
Results: 91% of my kindergarten students met or exceeded level 3 of the rubric.
Goal: 100% of my students will show growth in reading between the months of August and April. Growth will be determined based on Benchmark Assessments, STAR reading scores, and formative assessment data determined by teacher.
Results: 100% of students met goal.
Goal: 100% of students can use available technology in math classroom to research and reinforce topics taught in the math classroom.
Results: 100% of students met goal.
Goal: 80% of students will show one year of growth in the same area as determined by Benchmark Assessments, STAR reading scores, and formative assessment data determined by the teacher.
Results: Over 80% of students exceeded goal.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Positive perceptions and areas of concern were identified by program completers in the pilot study. Results indicate completers are prepared to create and maintain their learning climate and can demonstrate the implementation of technology in the classroom. Completers also effectively demonstrate collaboration skills with colleagues, parents and other education stakeholders. Areas of concern reported by the program completers included indicators related to implementation and management of instruction. Completer observations, self-reported student growth goals, and follow up questions to the completers perceive their preparedness in management of classroom slightly above average for recent program completers as compared to other same year teachers. Lack of deep understanding of differentiation and how to plan for multiple students' needs related to ensuring learning targets are met was a general concern of all completers.

The quality of teaching in schools is directly linked to the quality of preservice preparation that teachers receive (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004). An implication of the study is the value of identifying perceived weaknesses within the redesigned education program. Areas of concern identified by the completers and the related data should be analyzed and modifications to the instructional program should be addressed in the education preparation program. Many teacher preparation programs lack defined clinical experiences and hours for pre-service teachers to gain these skills, the purpose of the program redesign was to increase these opportunities for teacher success. These clinical opportunities were viewed favorably by the assessed completers.

Teacher education programs can rely on survey data to evaluate and improve themselves or debate if such data is influenced by too many external factors to be meaningful benchmarks (Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, & Chiero, 2012). The EPP supports the research related to data based decision making, and study methodology will undergo periodic formative evaluation to make adjustments that are consistent with program improvement, state regulations, and education data cycles needed for continuous program improvement. The education preparation program responds to the collected data with all related faculty and stakeholders in order to make data driven decisions for program improvement that impacts P-12 student achievement and program completers.

Next steps include expansion of the study to all program completers within the identified time frame and evaluate the related outcomes for continuous program improvement. A year to year comparison can begin to contribute to the knowledge of the EPP and will foster conversations on improvement strategies. The initial results of this first sample convey that the EPP completers are good or excellent in the areas of skills, knowledge and dispositions that the EPP focused on. Additional research will provide important data to guide effective completer impact and overall program improvement.

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