



Examining Teacher Preparation Programs' Influence on Elementary Teacher Candidates' Sense of Preparedness

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Abstract

Teacher candidates' sense of preparedness is integral to success as a teacher and longevity in the profession. Beyond preparing teacher candidates with content knowledge and pedagogy, elementary teacher preparation programs must be cognizant of teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and teacher candidates' concerns because of the impact each has on their future success. This yearlong

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study investigated elementary teacher candidate sense of preparedness across three U.S. institutions and across semesters. Qualitative data indicated that practical strategies during coursework and opportunities to apply theory to practice in actual classrooms had the biggest influence on feelings of preparedness. Teacher candidates felt well prepared to plan lessons and less prepared for classroom management, making accommodations and modifications, and assessment. While aspects of teacher candidates' sense of preparedness aligned with the study's theoretical framework, Fuller's concern theory, some teacher candidates never progressed to the *concern with impact* stage. Considerations for research and practice regarding teacher preparation programs are provided.

Introduction

Elementary teacher preparation worldwide faces many challenges when it comes to the development and support of future teachers. Teacher candidates enter their preparation programs with assumed knowledge and understanding of how to teach and what it means to be a teacher (Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). Their assumed knowledge and understanding are often accompanied by a presumed confidence in their ability to teach. They frequently experience cognitive dissonance between their assumed knowledge and the reality that their teacher preparation programs provide through courses and practicum experiences (Eisenhardt, Besnoy, & Steele, 2012). Many teacher candidates are ultimately concerned with and focused on their likeability as a teacher and surviving all the responsibilities and reality of becoming a teacher (Fuller, 1969). Their concerns evolve over time and are connected to their sense of preparedness as they learn and gain experience and support in coursework and practicums (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Newman, Moss, Lenarz, & Newman, 1998; Smith, Corkery, Buckley, & Clavert, 2013).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 1999) views sense of preparedness as a feeling about how teacher candidates or teachers perceive themselves as capable of meeting the challenges and expectations of teaching. Sense of preparedness is connected to the quality of teacher performance along with strong content knowledge and pedagogy (Brown, Myers, & Collins, 2019; Housego, 1990; NCES, 1999; Rowan & Townend, 2016). Due to the connection of teacher candidate concerns and sense of preparedness to their pedagogy and content usage as in-service teachers, it is important for teacher educators to consider the influences of teacher preparation on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns. Therefore the purpose of this study was to understand the elements of teacher preparation that influence teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and their stage of concerns. This yearlong study relied heavily on qualitative data to capture these constructs for teacher candidates across three U.S. institutions and across cohorts.¹

Teacher Candidates' Sense of Preparedness

Teacher candidates' sense of preparedness is an important quality of consideration for teacher preparation programs. Sense of preparedness has been identified as one predictor for teacher success (Brown et al., 2019) and has been linked to student success (Giallo & Little, 2003). Teacher preparation programs play a role in teacher candidates' sense of preparedness (Darling-Hammond, 2006), with strong preparation positively correlated with teacher candidates' sense of preparedness (Ingvarson, Adrian, & Kleinhenz, 2007; Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018; Turner, Jones, Davies, & Ramsay, 2004).

Influential Elements of Teacher Preparation

Influential elements of teacher preparation on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness include coursework, practicums (i.e., field placements in schools), and student teaching. Teacher preparation coursework has a positive influence on sense of preparedness when it works in tandem with practicum assignments (Onchwari, 2010; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Onchwari (2010) conducted a study with 160 teacher candidates and 55 in-service teachers and concluded that classroom management coursework increased a sense of preparedness. Likewise, O'Neill and Stephenson (2012) found that teacher candidates who completed classroom management units of study felt better prepared. In terms of classroom management, there is a link between teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and their self-efficacy (Giallo & Little, 2003).²

It is essential to the preparation of teacher candidates to have experiences in schools throughout their teacher preparation programs. School experiences contribute to their sense of preparedness (Siwatu, 2011) by providing authentic training and opportunities to apply theory to practice (Juuti, Christopherson, Elstad, Solhaug, & Turmo, 2018). Three essential experiences add to teacher candidates' sense of preparedness: teaching opportunities, observing master teachers, and building relationships with faculty (Brown, Lee, & Collins, 2015).

Student teaching is the culminating experience for teacher candidates and proves essential to teacher candidates' sense of preparedness (Brown et al., 2015). The cooperating teacher or mentor teacher plays an important role in teacher candidates' sense of preparedness (Matsko et al., 2020). Cooperating teachers can increase teacher candidates' sense of preparedness by exemplifying best teaching practices and using coaching skills and techniques to support teacher candidates' development (Matsko et al., 2020).

Elements of teacher preparation that are tied to a strong sense of preparedness are those that include active learning. Courses and/or assignments that allow for teacher candidates to *learn by doing* are the ultimate goal in active learning theory (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Active learning allows for the internalization of pedagogy by experiencing the learning with their students (Ambrose, Bridges,

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DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010) through reflecting, revising teaching strategies, and taking note of struggles and successes. This allows for greater understanding in comparison to passive learning activities, such as reading a textbook or listening to a lecture (Olgun, 2009). Active learning within teacher preparation programs has been linked with teaching capabilities (Kramarski & Michalsky, 2009; Virtanen, Niemi, & Nevgi, 2017). Additionally, Aksit, Niemi, and Nevgi (2016) found active learning contributed to teacher identity and growth. Active learning is a critical component in the preparation of teachers.

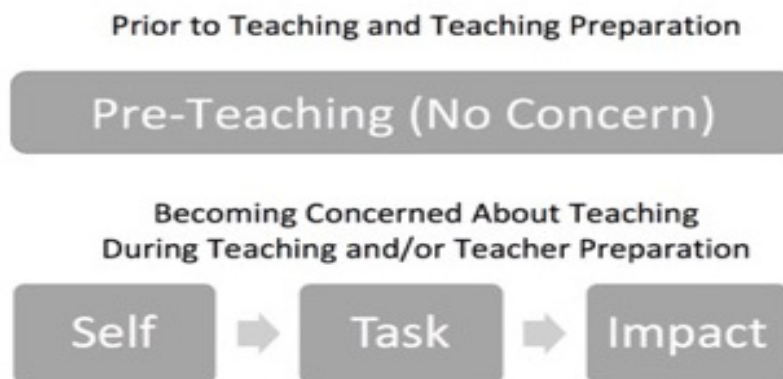
Aspects of Teaching for Which Teacher Candidates Felt Unprepared

Teacher candidates note areas where they feel they could have been more prepared. Pettway (2005) found that beginning teachers' perceptions related to diversity, technology, and classroom management showed they lacked a sense of preparedness in these areas. Additionally, Rowan and Townend (2016) found that beginning teachers lacked a sense of preparedness in teaching and supporting students with disabilities, in addition to engaging in positive dialogue or discourse and developing relationships with families.

Theoretical Framework

Fuller's (1969) concern theory examined the focus of teacher candidates' concerns. Fuller found three different types of stages through which teacher candidates progress: *concern with self*, *concern with task*, and *concern with impact*. Fuller also labeled the stage prior to entering the teacher preparation program as *preteaching* or *no concern* (see Figure 1). Concern with self includes one's concerns for one's

Figure 1
Conceptualization of Fuller's Concern Theory



survival, acceptance, and competence. Concern with task includes one's concerns regarding things like responsibilities, time, and assignments. Last, teacher candidates become concerned about the impact they have, including concerns about student achievement. Because all teacher candidates enter teacher preparation programs with varying perspectives, experiences, and foci, some enter teacher preparation programs with concerns related to task and impact, whereas others begin in the no concern stage or concern with self stage.

Because of the concise progression of Fuller's concern theory (Conway & Clark, 2003), it is considered a seminal framework that has provided the underlying foundation for a number of educational studies related to sense of preparedness (e.g., Boz & Boz, 2010; Derosier & Soslau, 2014; Giallo & Little, 2003). As a research team of teacher educators, we recognize the goal of teacher preparation programs to support aspiring teachers to focus on impacting student learning more than on concerns about themselves, so, like researchers before us, we chose to rely on Fuller's work to frame our study. A study that was framed by Fuller examined elementary teacher candidates who were student teaching and supported by coaching cycles with their university supervisors in the area of mathematics instruction. This study determined teacher candidates' concerns did move through Fuller's stages of concern (Livers, 2012).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and their stage of concern over various points in their teacher preparation programs (i.e., first-semester junior, second-semester junior, first-semester senior, second-semester senior) across three institutions. Specifically, we focused our study on two research questions:

1. What factors influence elementary teacher candidates' sense of preparedness at varying points within their teacher preparation programs?
2. How does the elementary teacher candidates' progression match with Fuller's concern theory.

Methodology

Sociocultural processes like teacher education are often studied using qualitative and interpretive research methods (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005), especially when a study is geared toward "insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 42). The reliance on qualitative data was essential to help us best understand the teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns across three institutions over a 1-year time period.

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Sample and Population

Using a nonrandom sample (NR), all elementary teacher candidates admitted to three midwestern United States teacher preparation programs were invited to participate in this study. Researchers at the three institutions conducted this study simultaneously through the use of email. At the initial data collection point (September 2018), a mass email was sent inviting all qualifying teacher candidates ($n = 579$) to participate in the study. The same invitation was sent again in May 2019 to the group of teacher candidates who participated in the first round. The email included consent, a self-efficacy survey, and open-ended questions. The initial collection point yielded 143 responses, and the second collection point yielded 128 responses.

Context

Teacher candidates who participated in this study were recruited from three different teacher preparation programs. These teacher preparation programs were all located in the midwestern United States and in two different states. We have masked the programs as TPP A, TPP B, and TPP C (with TPP standing for “teacher preparation program”). See Table 1 for program comparisons.

Table 1
Comparison of Teacher Preparation Programs on Selected Factors

<i>Factor</i>	<i>TPP A</i>	<i>TPP B</i>	<i>TPP C</i>
Carnegie classification	doctoral/professional university	doctoral university: higher research activity	research university: very high research activity
Undergraduate enrollment	20,000	17,000	33,000
Elementary program enrollment	740	739	374
Elementary education degrees conferred annually	180	165	104
Licensure grades	1–6	K–6	K–6
Field experience types	lab school, partner schools	lab school, professional development schools, partner schools	closely tied to methods courses
Student teaching hours	16 weeks	16 weeks	16 weeks
Unique features	yearlong clinical placement option	dual major in elementary education and special education option	dual major in elementary education and special education option

Note. TPP = teacher preparation program.

Research Design

This study was designed in three phases that looked at the influence of teacher preparation on self-efficacy and sense of preparedness within the chosen theoretical framework (Fuller's concern theory). The focus of this article was Phase 3. While Phases 1 and 2 focused on teacher candidates' self-efficacy, Phase 3, which occurred concurrently with Phase 2, focused on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness. The sample size differs for each phase due to the type of analysis being performed.

Phase 1 was conducted prior to the current study and used baseline data to analyze the demographic data of the participating teacher candidates ($N=143$), who were a mix of juniors and seniors. Self-reported demographic data were collected, and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) was administered at the start of this project. Analyses conducted included one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and an independent-sample *t*-test to determine if there was a statistically significant mean difference across age, TPP, and hometown. A Rasch model was performed using four facets: teacher candidates, survey items, age, and TPP. This phase concluded that there was not a significant difference between teacher candidates' self-efficacy and institution, teacher candidates' self-efficacy and age, or teacher candidates' self-efficacy and their identified type of hometown (Davis et al., 2019).

Phase 2 was designed to analyze teacher candidates' self-efficacy in terms of any variance across institutions and cohorts in a pre-post design using the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). There were 143 teacher candidates who completed the initial survey (preassessment), and 22 of the same participants finished it the second time (postassessment), giving us 22 teacher candidates for Phase 2 quantitative analysis. A three-way mixed design ANOVA was applied to examine whether teacher candidates' self-efficacy perceptions were statistically different across two cohorts and three institutions. The between-subject variables were *cohort* and *institution*, while the within-subject variable was the *data collection point*. The results showed that the sphericity assumption for the repeated-measures ANOVA was met because the *p*-value was .16. Overall, there were no significant differences in self-efficacy among teacher candidates from different cohorts and institutions across time. More specifically, teacher candidates did not exhibit statistically significant disparities in self-efficacy levels across time, $F(2, 34) = 2.019, p = .148$. There were no significant interactions between *time* and *cohort*, $F(1, 17) = 0.266, p = .612$, and *time* and *institution*, $F(2, 17) = 1.078, p = .362$. To reiterate, teacher candidates' levels of self-efficacy did not differ significantly across the two cohorts, three institutions, and three time points. There were also no statistically significant interactions among *time*, *cohort*, and *institution* as all of the *p*-values exceeded the .05 threshold.

Phase 3, which is the focus of this article, was conducted in tandem with Phase 2. This qualitative study analyzed responses to open-ended questions and follow-up interviews about teacher candidates' senses of preparedness in an exploratory,

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cross-sectional design. The cross-sectional design allowed us to examine the qualitative data for similarities and differences between teacher candidates who were at varying points in their programs. In particular, this design allowed us to see the difference between participants who were early in their programs versus those who were near the end of their programs. The four data sets included the following: first-semester juniors ($n = 56$), second-semester juniors ($n = 45$), first-semester seniors ($n = 74$), and second-semester seniors ($n = 38$). The total sample size for this phase was 213 teacher candidates. Eight of these teacher candidates also participated in a follow-up interview.

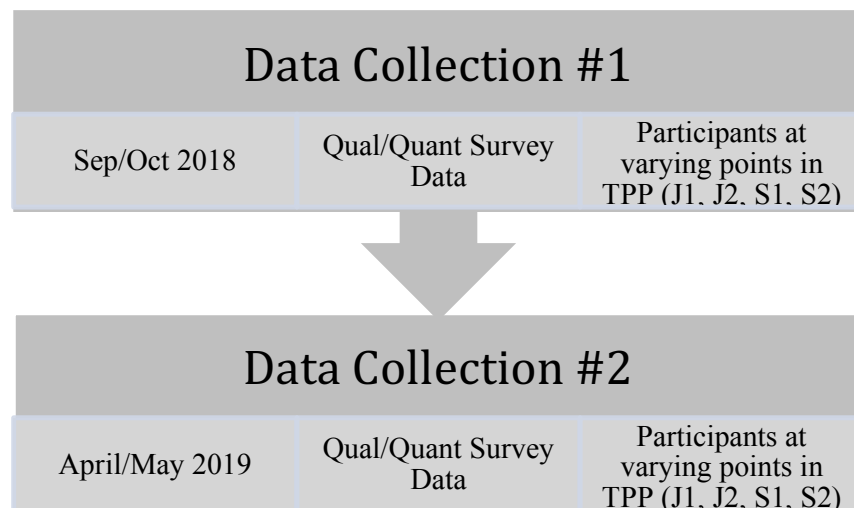
Data Collection

We divided the year into two distinct data collection points (see Figure 2) that included a survey with open-ended questions (i.e., fall [September/October] and spring [March/April]). Each data collection point included participants at varying points in their teacher preparation programs (i.e., first-semester juniors, second-semester juniors, first-semester seniors, and second-semester seniors). Having multiple collection points was intentional to capture potential variation in teacher candidates' sense of preparedness.

Data Sources

The current study used open-ended questions and interviews to analyze the influences of teacher preparation on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness. At

Figure 2
Data Collection Cycle for Phases 2 and 3



the end of the survey that included the open-ended questions, teacher candidates were asked if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview.

Open-ended questions. Two open-ended questions were placed at the end of the TSES survey from Phase 2 for the participants to provide a written assessment regarding their sense of preparedness. These questions were designed to understand the aspects of the teacher preparation programs' influences on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness. The questions were as follows: (a) What experiences in your teacher education program have helped you feel prepared to be a teacher? Consider areas like engaging students, instructional strategies, and classroom management; and (b) What experiences in your teacher education program have made you feel less confident or less prepared to be a teacher? Consider areas like engaging students, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Follow-up interviews. Eight teacher candidates agreed to a semistructured interview conducted at the end of Phase 3. The interview focused on the highlights and challenges of the semester for the teacher candidate and how that related to their sense of preparedness in regard to student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management (see the appendix).

Qualitative Data Analysis

First, we organized the open-ended survey questions by teacher candidates' enrolled semesters. The breakdown of the number of participants in each program per enrolled semester is found in Table 2. Using code mapping (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002), we organized the data with tabular strategies to document the relationship between data sources and our study's research questions, the development of categories and themes, and the triangulation of findings. We organized the open-ended survey responses into four data sets (by semester) to allow us to see the similarities and differences in teacher candidates' responses based on what semester they were enrolled in within their teacher preparation programs.

Using MAXQDA, responses to open-ended survey questions and interview transcripts were entered and associated with respondents' demographic information. To ensure the reliability of the data analysis, multiple rounds of coding and code

Table 2
Teacher Candidate Breakdown of Enrolled Semester

	<i>First-semester junior</i>	<i>Second-semester junior</i>	<i>First-semester senior</i>	<i>Second-semester senior</i>
TPP A	14	11	28	19
TPP B	22	9	19	5
TPP C	14	13	15	6
Total	50	33	62	30

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refinements occurred. Initially, three researchers concurrently coded the first data set (junior year, Semester 1) and used grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) to identify repeated ideas and/or concepts to develop starter codes. Then, we each individually coded another data set. Next, we came together for discussion, during which we confirmed similar codes or reached consensus on different codes to promote trustworthiness in the coding process (Smagorinsky, 2008) and determine the most salient themes, refine themes when needed, and assist in reporting the findings. Finally, we arrived at the codes described below in terms of positive impact (Figure 3) and negative impact (Figure 4). The encompassing themes were *teacher preparation program coursework*, *classroom experience in K–6 classrooms*, and *being prepared or not prepared for a particular aspect of teaching*. These findings allow us to answer Research Question 1: What factors influence elementary teacher candidates' sense of preparedness at varying points within their teacher preparation programs?

In the final phase of analysis, we aligned the most frequently occurring themes from the teacher candidates' open-ended survey responses with the stages of Fuller's (1969) concern theory. For example, the theme of classroom management aligned with Fuller's *concern for self* stage since teacher candidates' comments indicated a focus on their skill of managing a classroom. These findings allow us to answer Research Question 2: How does elementary teacher candidates' progression match with Fuller's concern theory? Details of this analysis are found in the "Findings" section.

Figure 3
Positive Impacts of Teacher Preparation on Teacher Candidates' Self-Preparedness.

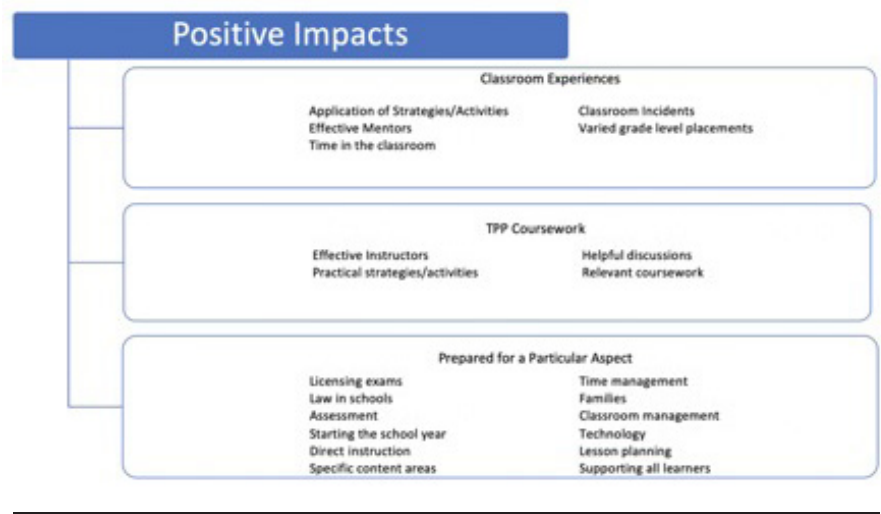
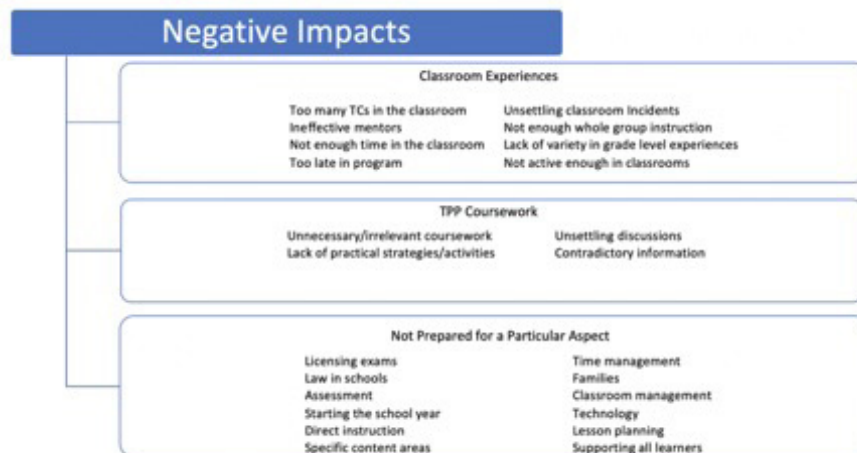


Figure 4
Negative Impacts of Teacher Preparation on Teacher Candidates' Self-Preparedness.



Findings

The purpose of this study was to analyze the influences of teacher preparation programs on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness between three midwestern U.S. institutions, two cohorts, and at different points (semesters) within a TPP. Finally, we sought to see if teacher candidates' sense of preparedness in this study was tied to elements of Fuller's (1969) concern theory. Figure 5 provides a summary of the findings in alignment with the two research questions; each will be presented in this section.

Factors Influencing Sense of Preparedness at Different Points Within the Teacher Preparation Program

Qualitative data revealed some differences in the aspects of teacher candidates' TPPs that contributed to their sense of preparedness. Teacher candidates' responses to the two open-ended survey questions and interviews conducted across all semesters revealed two factors that positively and negatively influenced their sense of preparedness: TPP coursework and K–6 classroom field experiences. Additionally, findings included a few prominent tangential aspects of teaching in which teacher candidates felt unprepared.

Teacher preparation program coursework. The first factor influencing teacher candidates' feelings of preparedness involved their TPP coursework. Teacher candidates' responses to the open-ended survey questions indicated the importance of “practical strategies and activities” within coursework, which was

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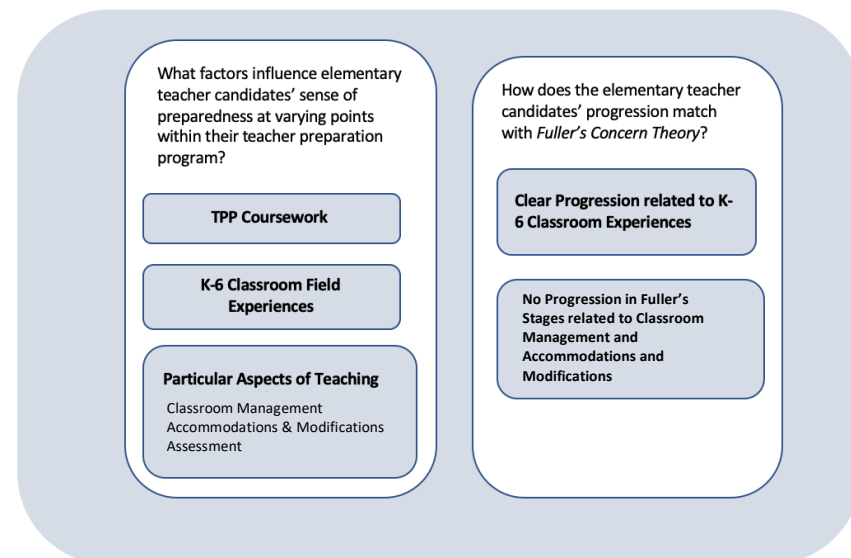
the most prominent subcode (17%). For example, Alicia,³ a second-semester junior, wrote, "I feel prepared with the amount of lesson plans and activities I have had to design throughout my classes." Felicia, a first-semester senior, also wrote, "I feel like there have been many varying strategies introduced throughout the education program. These have been introduced alongside the content areas being focused on, so that the strategies would make sense and be better understood/applied."

Additionally, teacher candidates near the end of their TPP began to see their coursework as more necessary and relevant to their teaching. Teacher candidates in their senior year pointed to specific aspects of instruction when citing coursework as having a positive impact on their sense of preparedness. Second-semester senior Melanie listed, "5 E lesson plan, critical thinking, and growth mindset" as three concepts she learned about in her TPP coursework that positively contributed to her sense of preparedness to teach. First-semester senior Natalie wrote, "[Dr. Smith] and [Mrs. Miller's] class offered lots of instructional strategies for classroom management and [sic] cooperative learning environment that gave me the most value."

Conversely, some teacher candidates indicated a negative influence of coursework on their sense of preparedness. For example, June (a first-semester senior) stated,

I often feel like my education classes are filled with what not to do and a little less of what to do. So sometimes I feel like I am not sure exactly what I should be doing when it comes to different areas such as differentiating and hooks.

Figure 5
Alignment of Findings to Research Questions.



Interviews with these teacher candidates further demonstrated the influence of coursework on their feelings of preparedness to teach. Charlotte, a first-semester senior who was about to enter her student teaching semester, remarked, “In every course we’ve had, they’ve talked about culturally responsive teaching, which I feel like is a big part of why I feel confident to be a teacher.” In addition, teacher candidates frequently mentioned specific instructors or professors who influenced their sense of preparedness to teach. Molly, a first-semester senior, for example, said,

I feel really confident in some areas and really not confident in some areas. And I think that really has to do with who my professor is. . . . You want somebody who is experienced to help you out and help you build your confidence.

During her yearlong student teaching experience, Rachel described the impact of the regular class meetings that were required during that semester. She said, “Having those conversations really helped, [as well as] reading some of those materials on what experts and professionals are saying . . . you need to do. That was really helpful.” Even as candidates engaged in student teaching and internship experiences, coursework continued to influence their confidence and sense of preparedness to teach.

K–6 classroom field experiences. A second factor influencing teacher candidates’ feelings of preparedness was their experience in K–6 classroom field placements. Teacher candidates perceived a variety of components of their field experiences in elementary school classrooms as contributing to their sense of preparedness to teach. During their junior year, teacher candidates indicated that “time in classrooms” was influential to their preparation. For example, in response to the open-ended questions, Jaylah, a second-semester junior, wrote,

As a student at [TPP B], I have had a lot of opportunities to be in the classroom. My very first semester I was in a class that required us to go to an afterschool center and work with children. Having these constant and enriching experiences with children has made me feel much more confident in my abilities as a teacher.

During the senior year, actually applying theory and strategies while in a classroom setting influenced teacher candidates’ sense of preparedness. In the second semester of her senior year, Jazkira wrote,

Implementing *Total Participation Techniques* in every lesson and learning strategies like Think, Pair, Share and thumbs up/down helped me find versatile ways to keep students engaged. I also had the opportunity to practice stations and small group lessons in literacy and math which built my confidence in my ability to differentiate lessons while keeping the entire class engaged in learning.

In an interview during the second semester of her senior year, Rachel attributed her confidence in her own abilities to a variety of field placements. Rachel said,

I think one of the things that had really helped me be a little bit more confident is that they really stressed having us being placed into different types of schools,

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different types of classrooms for practicums, and I feel like . . . being in those types of classrooms, those different types, and working with different students, that really helped me with my engagement, especially in this [student teaching] classroom.

Other teacher candidates mentioned the opportunity to practice specific instructional strategies as contributing to their confidence in applying those strategies in their own teaching. During an interview in her second semester of her senior year, Miranda described the experiences she had teaching small groups of students and how those instances contributed to her confidence teaching small groups during student teaching. Miranda stated,

Last spring when I was doing an immersive, I was in the class for two full days a week, and I had small groups for math. I had small groups for reading. So, I worked in small groups a lot. Then, I worked in small groups this past fall. I had a guided reading group I taught every day. So, I feel like I've just had a lot, a lot of hours of small group time.

Teacher candidates in both their junior and senior years reported feeling less prepared because of “not enough time in classrooms,” “not being active enough in classrooms,” “too many teacher candidates in the same classroom,” and “ineffective mentors.”

Jessica, a second-semester junior, felt a “lack of involvement in the classroom” was related to her feelings of unpreparedness. She wrote, “It is hard to learn how to do things like classroom management and engaging students in a classroom setting where you don't get to practice strategies on real students.” Similarly, during her second semester of her junior year, Berenice wrote,

Classes where we only go to a school a few times in a short time period makes me less confident because I feel so rushed and like I can't be effective and use my teaching strategies to the best of my abilities because it's not an ideal situation nor is it ever a situation I would actually be teaching in.

Christine, a second-semester junior, indicated an “ineffective mentor” contributed to her sense of unpreparedness when she wrote, “When teachers are not supportive of mistakes and do not offer suggestions is when I feel less confident and flustered.” Eleanor, a second-semester junior, illustrated her concern about “too many teacher candidates in the same classroom” when she wrote, “When the field experiences were shared with 5+ people in one classroom. That's way too many [teacher candidates] trying to gain experience in one room.”

While teacher candidates in their senior year reported similarly, they became more specific about their concerns, adding “too many teacher candidates in the same classroom” and “not enough whole-class instruction” to their list of aspects that negatively influenced their sense of preparedness. Molly, a second-semester senior, related her own concern with an “ineffective mentor” in relation to classroom management during a field experience course:

I'm very confident because science is my area of concentration, and I feel like math and science go hand in hand, but it was more of just like classroom management

or different teaching strategies 'cause I know the content, but I'm wanting different strategies to help all students understand. If we have students with disabilities or students who are way above and beyond, how to gear up, gear down, different tiers, . . . it's just like, she [field experience instructor] was like, "I don't know." "What do you mean you don't know?" I am trying to get my students to understand what a power polygon is and you're giving me nothing.

Aspects of Teaching for Which Teacher Candidates Felt Unprepared

Throughout the open-ended survey responses and interviews, teacher candidates indicated particular aspects of teaching for which they felt more or less prepared by their coursework and/or K–6 classroom experiences. These included classroom management, accommodating and modifying instruction, and assessment.

Classroom management. A prominent aspect of teaching (44%) indicated across all semesters was feelings of unpreparedness to manage students. While 20% of teacher candidates reported feeling prepared to manage a class, 24% felt unprepared in this aspect. This was illustrated when Laura, a first-semester junior, wrote, "I feel like classroom management is something that is hard to teach, but I would like to have more positive reinforcements in my 'toolbox' that I could use in my future classroom." Jaylah, a second-semester junior, wrote, "I think these experiences can help me with classroom management especially as knowing how children think and act is essential in creating an effective classroom management strategy."

In an in-depth interview, Kelly, a second-semester junior, stated,

We've talked a lot about management . . . how the room is set up, how things are working together, what factors are contributing, having knowledge of those things to observe and to notice in the classroom aside from the content.

In this interview, Kelly was talking about conversations with her peers as she developed lessons when she concluded by saying this practice "helped me be more effective in regulating myself as a teacher and working with those students."

Accommodating and modifying instruction. Teacher candidates also frequently mentioned feeling unprepared to "accommodate and/or modify instruction" (16%). For example, Sarah, a second-semester junior, described her concern when she wrote, "To adjust to different learners and implement teaching strategies." Conversely, Stacie, a first-semester senior, conveyed she had "learned a great deal about engagement and differentiation in [her] social studies and science methods classes." In an in-depth interview, Rachel, a second-semester senior, mentioned, "I did not feel comfortable or confident in what I planned because it was hard to group students based on their ability and then also make sure that all of the stations were differentiated based on their ability."

Assessment. Finally, it was not until the student teaching semester that teacher

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candidates mentioned feeling unprepared to “assess students.” This aspect of teaching was mentioned by only 1% of teacher candidates overall; however, 10% of student teachers mentioned this concern. Suzie, a second-semester senior, wrote,

The only part of my experience that I'm not as confident in is analyzing and interpreting standardized assessment data. I think it's unfortunate that there were no classes devoted to assessment as this is a huge part of teaching today.

Additionally, Claire, also a second-semester senior, wrote, “The area I feel least prepared is in student assessment. I only took one course devoted to assessment and I felt that we were barely able to scratch the surface of assessments.” These comments from teacher candidates regarding their student teaching experiences demonstrate their concern regarding their sense of preparedness around assessment and were not evident from other teacher candidates in earlier semesters.

Sense of Preparedness in Relation to Fuller's Concern Theory

Our findings both aligned with and slightly deviated from Fuller's developmental model. Teacher candidates' concerns often appeared to shift, as Fuller predicted, from preteaching to concern with self to concern with task and then to impact. In some areas, there was alignment with Fuller's model, while in other areas, concerns remained the same across semesters, indicating that teacher candidates progressed at varying paces. Sabrina, a second-semester senior, exemplifies how teacher candidates grapple with the various concerns outlined by Fuller. She said, “When you're a student teacher it's so overwhelming. It's hard to really focus on the students because you're focusing on your learning as well.”

Alignment of Fuller's stages related to K–6 classroom experiences. One area in which teacher candidates showed an alignment to Fuller's stages was related to the specificity of their comments in regard to elementary school classroom experiences. In both semesters of their junior year, a prominent theme was “not having enough time in classrooms” and “becoming unsettled by incidents in the classroom.” Commenting on “not having enough time in an elementary classroom,” Beth, a second-semester junior, wrote, “Walking into classes for one day where students don't understand what's happening and have no consequences for bad behavior, they won't ever see us again is very discouraging and frustrating for all parties.” Both lack of time in classrooms and unsettling classroom incidents align with Fuller's stage of concern with self.

Although teacher candidates in their senior year also indicated they wanted “more time in the classroom” and were sometimes unsettled by incidents in classrooms, many began to write more agentic statements about how they desired to be more involved. This was indicated by comments regarding sharing a classroom with too many of their classmates, not being given the opportunity to teach enough whole-class lessons, and not being allowed to be active enough in the classroom.

These types of comments align more with teacher candidates' concern with task. For instance, as a second-semester senior, Daniela, wrote,

I think classroom management is still something I continue to need to grow in. Having a second teacher there is great, but then you don't get the chance to try to figure out how you would handle it on your own.

As mentioned previously, it was not until their senior year, during the student teaching semester, that teacher candidates mentioned "assessment" in their responses to the open-ended questions about their sense of unpreparedness for teaching. This exemplifies Fuller's final stage of impact. During her student teaching experience, for example, Jane wrote, "I think it's unfortunate that there were no classes devoted to assessment as this is a huge part of teaching today." It was not until she was in a classroom full-time that she recognized this gap in her preparation that is integral to impacting student learning.

Deviation from Fuller's model related to classroom management and accommodating and modifying instruction. However, there were topics which teacher candidates mentioned with the same frequency across the four semesters. A prominent theme across all semesters was feelings of unpreparedness for classroom management. Some teacher candidates reported feeling prepared to manage a class, and others felt unprepared in this aspect. This concern about classroom management aligns with Fuller's concern for self stage because teacher candidates' comments indicated a focus on their skill of managing a classroom. A first-semester senior, Gretchen, wrote, "Learning and having the opportunity to implement classroom management strategies has been extremely helpful and made me feel more prepared as a future teacher. I was able to learn what has and has not worked." Given the fact Gretchen was in the final year of her program, we would expect her to have moved beyond the beginning stage, concern for self, considering the coursework she had completed and field experiences in which she had been involved.

Also, "accommodating and modifying instruction" was frequently mentioned as an aspect of teaching that teacher candidates felt both prepared and unprepared for across all semesters. Teacher candidates across all semesters expressed an interest in and awareness of adapting instruction. Cami, a first-semester senior, wrote, "The teacher program has helped me understand the academic diversity in the classroom far better than a textbook ever could." Josie, a second-semester junior, also expressed an awareness when she wrote, "I have done pull out intervention for students on both academic ends of the classroom—the lowest achievers and the highest achievers. Due to this experience, I have been able to learn lesson differentiation." Prior to student teaching, Cami and Josie already displayed concern for impact related to accommodations and modifications of instruction. This finding aligns with Fuller's concern for impact stage because teacher candidates were thinking of the needs of not only students monolithically but of all students and their varying academic needs.

Discussion

The sense of preparedness of teachers and teacher candidates is an important construct related to a successful teaching career (Brown et al., 2019). Darling-Hammond (2006) noted the importance of teacher preparation program components related to teacher candidates' sense of preparedness. Therefore it is important to analyze program components and monitor teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns to help support confident teacher candidates and beginning teachers. This study sought to analyze possible influences on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns over time.

The qualitative data revealed that teacher candidates' stages of concern (Fuller, 1969) and feelings of preparedness remained the same for some areas across semesters and showed progression or growth for other areas. Overall, teacher candidates found value in practical strategies and activities they could directly connect to impacting their teaching and influencing their sense of preparedness. It is promising that, by the end of their teacher preparation program, they deemed coursework as valuable to their sense of preparedness (Onchwari, 2010; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Teacher candidates in this study felt confident in their ability to plan lessons, which makes sense given the number of lesson plans teacher candidates write within their TPPs. Toward the end of their program, teacher candidates reported feeling unprepared in terms of assessment. In fact, it was not until this point that they mentioned assessment at all. This is not surprising given the increased focus on using assessment to guide instruction in the certification requirements during the student teaching semester (i.e., edTPA, university supervisor assessment). These findings support that active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) with lesson planning increased teacher candidates' sense of preparedness, but a lack of active learning around the area of assessment left teacher candidates feeling unprepared.

Application of strategies and time in classrooms were components of their TPPs that have contributed to teacher candidates' sense of preparedness (Juuti et al., 2018; Siwatu, 2011). Classroom management and student behavior are historically perceived areas of apprehension for early-career teachers and teacher candidates (Veenman, 1984). The area of classroom management is one element in which we would hope teacher candidates would become more prepared over time; however, in this study, it remained a prevalent concern. This could be due to other elements noted by the teacher candidates, such as the number of teacher candidates in a classroom, teaching time, and effectiveness of their mentors, which could have impacted their opportunities for active learning. Having additional teacher candidates in a classroom and lack of time creates more of a passive learning space.

One area in which teacher candidates felt unprepared was in accommodating and modifying instruction. This was a concern throughout the teacher candidates' TPPs. Teacher candidates were not necessarily specific in terms of working with students with disabilities, but we can speculate given the mentions of ability groups

and academic needs. If this is the case, then these findings do align with Rowan and Townend's (2016) finding that beginning teachers lack a sense of preparedness in teaching and supporting students with disabilities. Teacher candidates do need time and support in working with students with disabilities and students who need added scaffolding. Demirtas (2018) recommended that teacher candidates need multiple learning experiences and time invested with students to learn how to create "learning environments" to support students who need accommodations and modifications.

This study revealed that teacher candidates exhibit Fuller's (1969) stages of concern. Teacher candidates' concerns over time evolved (Derosier & Soslau, 2014), although some teacher candidates' concerns did not progress through the stages toward impact. This is an area for TPPs to examine to determine if TPPs need to be adjusted to better support teacher candidates to move beyond no concern and concern for self.

Implications for Practice

Teacher candidates in this study highlighted practices within TPPs that deserve further exploration. Specifically, course design and field experience components should be examined for similarities and differences within a TPP. The number of teacher candidates placed within a field placement assignment, for example, may need to be evaluated in terms of the influence on sense of preparedness and management of tasks assigned. Teacher candidates noted concerns about other teacher candidates assigned to the same classroom and the impact a shared classroom had on their amount of teaching time, management experience, and ability to complete tasks.

TPPs should examine how teacher educators support teacher candidates to be confident with classroom management. Coursework tied to classroom management has led to increases in teacher candidates' sense of preparedness for classroom management (Onchwari, 2010; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Teacher candidates had this concern throughout their program, so it is an area to revisit in the early courses of teacher preparation, methods courses, and student teaching. Assessment-guided instruction is an area in which teacher candidates need continual support and practice to increase their sense of preparedness. This practice tends to occur toward the end of some TPPs. This area warrants examination to determine whether teacher candidates might benefit from earlier and continued exposure to and experience with assessment practices. This is essential because assessment drives instructional decisions (Diamond, 2005).

Teacher candidates in this study were concerned about a lack of preparedness in their abilities to accommodate and/or modify instruction. Teacher preparation programs should examine how they support teacher candidates in planning and implementing accommodations and modifications. We also wonder if teacher

Elementary Teacher Candidates' Sense of Preparedness

candidates felt unprepared for other types of diversity and did not explicitly note their concern. As the population diversity of the United States continues to increase, TPPs need to place more attention on meeting the needs of all learners (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.). As other studies have shown, teacher candidates are leaving TPPs feeling unprepared to teach a diverse student body (Pettway, 2005; Siwatu, Polydore, & Starker, 2009). We recognize that in the interviews, we should have asked some clarifying questions to ascertain if the concern of preparedness was actually supporting English learners, students of color, or students of varying socioeconomic status.

We also noticed deficit language used by teacher candidates in both the survey and interviews. Language included “bad behavior,” “ability grouping,” and labeling students as “low/high achievers.” As teacher educators, we feel a responsibility to acknowledge this language as problematic and recommend we support teacher candidates in reframing how we see and talk about students.

Implications for Research

More studies are needed to discern the effectiveness of TPPs and their impact on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns. This study relied on qualitative data. We recommend a follow-up study using a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the TPPs' influence on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and concerns; a mixed-methods study would allow for triangulation and increase the likelihood of generalizability. Additionally, we recommend an extensive study that would follow a cohort of teacher candidates from their TPPs into their first year of teaching. This type of study would provide a more detailed picture of the influence of TPPs on teacher candidates' sense of preparedness.

Conclusion

Because of the noted relationship between teacher candidates' sense of preparedness and their success as teachers (Brown et al., 2019) and the success of their students (Giallo & Little, 2003), TPPs are well served by studies, such as this one, that provide guidance on enhancing teacher candidates' sense of preparedness. This study highlighted aspects of TPPs that promote or impede teacher candidates' sense of preparedness.

Teacher candidates noted the value of coursework and classroom field experiences that made them feel more or less prepared to teach, as well as particular aspects of teaching for which they feel more or less prepared. Of note, teacher candidates valued coursework that included practical strategies and activities. They felt well prepared to plan lessons and less prepared to manage, assess, and accommodate and/or modify instruction. Classroom field experiences, while providing an opportunity to apply theory to practice, may obstruct teacher candidates' sense of

preparedness when too many teacher candidates are placed in the same classroom, when teacher candidates have limited teaching time, and when they have a less than effective mentor teacher.

While aspects of teacher candidates' sense of preparedness aligned with Fuller's (1969) stages of concern, some teacher candidates never progressed to the concern with impact stage. Perhaps if TPPs identify and address the areas that influence teacher candidates' sense of preparedness, then all teacher candidates might feel less concerned with self and task and more concerned with impact.

Notes

¹ We define *cohort* as a group of teacher candidates who are grouped together for courses within the same semester of their teacher preparation program.

² We define *self-efficacy* as a belief in one's capabilities to plan and implement lessons.

³ All names are pseudonyms.

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Appendix **Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me about one highlight of your teacher preparation this semester.
2. Tell me about one struggle you've had this semester.
3. Tell me about a time you felt confident (or not confident) engaging students.
 - a. What contributed to this?
 - b. [If previous answer was unrelated to university coursework] What aspects, if any, of your [university] experiences, including classes and/or field experiences thus far, contributed to this?
4. Tell me about a time you felt confident (or not confident) using various instructional strategies.
 - a. What contributed to this?
 - b. [If previous answer was unrelated to university coursework] What aspects, if any, of your [university] experiences, including classes and/or field experiences thus far, contributed to this?
5. Tell me about a time you felt confident (or not confident) managing a classroom and/or student(s).
 - a. What contributed to this?
 - b. [If previous answer was unrelated to university coursework] What aspects, if any, of your [university] experiences, including classes and/or field experiences thus far, contributed to this?
6. My colleagues and I are doing a study about self-efficacy and how confident our teacher candidates are to become teachers. Do you have anything else to say about how confident you feel about becoming a teacher?