

## **Are They Prepared? Examining Teacher Candidates', Cooperating Teachers', and University Supervisors' Perspectives of a Redesigned Field Experience**

**Joy Myers, Shin Ji Kang, and Michelle Hughes**

### **Abstract**

A team of teacher educators conducted a phenomenological study to explore the perceptions of teacher candidates (TCs), their cooperating teachers (CTs), and university supervisors (USs) during and after they participated in a redesigned seven-week practicum that led directly into seven weeks of student teaching. Data were collected via two surveys with open-ended prompts and revealed three distinct themes across the three groups of participants: relationships, preparedness, and professionalism. Opportunities, presented by the redesigned field experience, were seized upon but in varying ways dependent on each group of participants (TC, CT, and US). The findings from this study are significant because unlike other studies that just examine the perspectives of one group of the triad, the goal of this research was to understand the perspectives of the entire triad (TC, CT, and US). Recommendations for teacher education programs interested in redesigning their field experiences are shared.

**Keywords:** *student teaching, teacher education, elementary education*

*Dr. Joy Myers is an Associate Professor and Executive Director of James Madison University's Grow Your Own Initiative. She can be reached at [myersjk@jmu.edu](mailto:myersjk@jmu.edu)*

*Dr. Shin Ji Kang is a Professor in the Early, Elementary and Reading Education Department at James Madison University. She can be reached at [kangsj@jmu.edu](mailto:kangsj@jmu.edu)*

*Dr. Michelle Hughes is Professor Emerita of the Early, Elementary and Reading Education Department at James Madison University. She can be reached at [hughesma@jmu.edu](mailto:hughesma@jmu.edu)*

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An examination of what is included in effective teacher education programs has existed for over 40 years (Lehr, 1981). Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that teacher education programs that graduate well prepared teachers, have academically strong teacher candidates (TCs) as well as effective programs. Hauser and Kavanagh (2019) further connect these two aspects of teacher education programs by stressing that candidates' abilities to learn teaching practices is dependent on the use of effective teacher education practices.

One such effective practice, according to Dunst et al. (2019, 2020), is extensive student teaching which provides TCs opportunities to learn how to develop students' knowledge and skills in engaging ways. In fact, field experience is a signature pedagogy of many teacher education programs (Shulman, 2005). One type of field experience is practicum which often occurs in the semester(s) before student teaching. In contrast, student teaching is often the capstone of teacher education programs during which the TC begins by shadowing the cooperating teacher (CT) and over time takes on more teaching responsibilities.

Research suggests that student teaching prepares teacher candidates for future teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010), shapes teacher retention (Gedzune, 2015), and is the most significant component of teacher education programs (Leung et al., 2013, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010; Wilson & Floden, 2003). Although student teaching is often considered demanding (Caires et al., 2012), it provides opportunities for TCs to navigate their personal belief systems, knowledge, and competences (Hattingh & De Kock,

2008) as well as observe experienced teachers and develop relationships with them (Brown et al., 2015).

In 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) encouraged teacher education programs to be “fully grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses”(p. 11). This resulted in more attention being focused on the amount of time TCs spent in the field (National Research Council [NRC], 2010). Now, Standard R2.3 of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) calls for teacher education programs to create clinical experiences that will “...ensure that candidates demonstrate their developing effectiveness and positive impact on diverse P-12 students’ learning and development...” (caepnet.org). Teacher education programs, accredited through CAEP, are being held accountable for their candidates’ impact on children’s learning and programs are considering how more time in the field might help meet this standard.

However, if the focus is TCs spending more time in the classroom, Brown et al. (2015) argues that more needs to be understood about the exact benefits, if any, as perceived not just by the TCs but by all stakeholders. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate teacher candidates’ (TCs), their cooperating teachers’ (CTs), and their university supervisors’ (USs) perceptions during and after they participated/supervised in a redesigned field experience.

## **Literature Review**

### **Revised Field Experiences**

Many teacher education programs in the United States, and across the globe, have examined and altered the duration, timing, requirements, and connections of field experiences to university courses (Atkinson, 2004) resulting in restructured experiences (Colson et al., 2017; Wang & Odell, 2002). For example, Grudnoff et al. (2017) examined the impact of a redesigned

practicum experience and found that relationships, role transformations, and collaborative practice all led to reinvigorating the practicum experience for TCs. Other institutions have extended the length of field experiences, in part, because these changes can positively impact the learning process and success of TCs (Hascher & Kittinger, 2014; Temiz & Topcu, 2013) as well as improve candidate preparedness (Ronfelt et al., 2014).

To better understand the impact of extended field experiences, Dunst et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis which compared 10 or more weeks of student teaching (extended) with five to nine weeks (limited). The more time TCs participated in student teaching the more proficient they were in the use of teaching practices. In addition, more time student teaching also led to higher classroom quality. Spooner et al. (2008) surveyed TCs in a year-long internship and their peers in a semester-long student teaching experience. The TCs in the year-long experience reported better relationships with their CT as well as increased knowledge of school policies and procedures. However, the two groups did not differ in their perceived teaching ability. In another study that examined year-long student teaching, Colson and colleagues (2017), found that TCs who participated in an extended student teaching experience perceived themselves as highly confident in supporting student engagement, designing instructional practices, and facilitating classroom management. Furthermore, spending more time in the field could offset the shock that first year teachers may feel once they have their own classrooms, according to Kim and Cho (2014), who state the shock is a result of the gap in what was learned in teacher education programs compared to the reality of teaching.

### **Teacher Candidate Support**

However, just increasing the hours in the field is not enough. The experience and mentoring ability of CTs is key to the success of field experiences (Baum & Korth, 2013; Korth

& Baum, 2011; Matsko et al., 2020) because CTs directly impact TCs' learning in practicum (Grudnoff et al., 2017; Mattsson et al., 2012). Furthermore, research suggests that TCs feel more supported when they can work one-on-one with their CT (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hamman et al., 2006). However, since programs vary in the length of their student teaching, opportunities for mentoring relationships may be significantly different. Thus, it is not surprising that Grossman (2010) argued that CTs are one of the most acknowledged, yet least understood, contributors to the student teaching experience.

In order to understand the complex mentoring work that CTs engage in, Matsko et al. (2020) surveyed CTs and TCs. They found that TCs felt better prepared to teach when their CTs modeled effective instruction and provided frequent feedback. Successful CTs also balanced providing TCs' autonomy and encouragement. Some argue that increased time in the field, with mentoring, can help TCs understand the realities of teaching resulting in them being better prepared to deal with the complex realities of today's schools, classrooms, and students (Spooner et al., 2008). However, more is not better if the extended time does not enhance the quality of learning (Melser, 2004) or if adding mentoring to the expectation for classroom teachers takes away from their main responsibility which is to instruct children (Korth et al. 2009).

One common criticism of teacher education programs is the perceived gap between theory (associated with university coursework) and practice (what happens in schools) (Beck & Kosnick, 2002; Grossman et al., 2009; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Establishing the right practice-theory balance can be challenging (Allen, 2009; Mayer, 2014). Thus, teacher education programs and schools must intentionally coordinate learning and teaching opportunities for TCs that help them shift from self-as-student to self-as-teacher (Holt-Reynolds, 1991). University supervisors (USs) and/or faculty can provide additional support to facilitate the balance between theory and

practice. These individuals often help TCs navigate the initial stress of not understanding a school culture and working with a CT. It is not uncommon for TCs to describe their field experience as filled with anxiety (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2016) since the profession of teaching itself is stressful (Prilleltensky et al., 2016).

Previous research has examined TCs' perceptions of extended student teaching experiences and CTs' thoughts on traditional student teaching models compared to redesigned field experiences, but no one has sought the input of all components of the field experience triad (TC, CT, and US). Bullock (2009) argues that only through sustained and systematic careful inquiry can we appreciate and understand the challenges of each role. Thus, in this study, we sought to answer the following question: What were teacher candidates', cooperating teachers', and university supervisors' perceptions of the impact of a redesigned field experience with extended practicum and student teaching?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the field experience literature, three people are recognized as key to success: the teacher candidate (TC), the cooperating teacher (CT), and the university supervisor (US). Each of these individuals, who together are often called a triad, brings different assumptions and expectations about the purposes of field experience within teacher education programs (Johnson & Napper-Owen, 2011). As researchers, we believe Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that learning is an inherently social process. Vygotsky also believed that learning resulted from not only assimilation and accommodation, but the social interactions among people. Like Vygotsky, Bakhtin (1986) believed that learning is a socially mediated construct that is reflective of one's social worlds. Learning depends on individuals negotiating understanding through the use of language (Kim & Cho, 2014). In learning to teach, the triad works together during field

experiences to socially construct their understanding of teaching and/or supporting teachers. Thus, a sociocultural lens provided a nuanced understanding of participants' perceptions of the impact of a redesigned extended practicum and student teaching experience. Furthermore, this lens provided insight into how individuals learn through their interactions with others, in this case, as novice and expert. Vygotsky proposed that scaffolded guidance from those with more knowledge could help novices internalize strategies and knowledge to develop cognitively. In this study, that development was related to the TCs' teaching capacity.

### **Methods**

This phenomenological study (Schram, 2006) examined teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors' perceptions during and after they participated/supervised in a redesigned field experience. Phenomenology is best suited when researchers who seek to understand the experiences of individuals as they engage in common experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). In this paper, we identify the phenomenon as the experience of participating and/or working with candidates in the redesigned field experience.

### **The Experience**

Our state decided to transition all public university teacher education programs from a 5-year MAT degree, in which the candidates minored in elementary education, to a four-year BS degree with an elementary education (ELED) major. With only a year to plan, teacher educators, including the three authors of this paper, worked within the ELED program at a large university in the Southeast, to redesign the program. We saw this as an opportunity to make some needed changes specifically to the final field experience which would now occur in the fourth year. We kept the following guiding thought in mind: professional knowledge and theoretical knowledge are complementary and of equal value. Knowing that a lack of explicit connection between

coursework and field experience is one of six key obstacles to professional learning (Zeichner, 1990) further propelled our work. We knew we wanted to provide future teachers more robust and extended experiences in the classroom *and* connect coursework to school-based experiences.

After monthly meetings for over a year, the ELED program decided to switch from two eight-week student teaching placements at two different schools in one semester to a Fall seven-week practicum that led directly into seven weeks of student teaching with the same CT within the same grade level at the same school. Then in the Spring semester, the TCs would have a second placement in a different school, grade level, and work with a different CT. Table 1 provides a summary of additional differences between the re-envisioned and traditional student teaching model at our university.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Key Differences between Traditional and Redesigned Student Teaching Model*

<b>Traditional Student Teaching</b>	<b>Redesigned Student Teaching</b>
State mandated major of Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies with an Elementary Education Minor	Elementary Education Major
5-year program	4-year program
14-week final practicum Fall	7-week final practicum leads into 7 week student teaching in the Fall AND Spring
14-week student teaching (7 weeks in lower grade, 7 weeks in upper grade) Spring	
1 course taken asynchronously	2 courses embedded purposefully within each semester

Furthermore, both the Fall and Spring seven-week practicums increased, over time, the number of days TCs were in schools (see Table 2). This revision was intended for TCs to be immersed in the field for two full semesters benefiting from the expertise of working with their CTs and US.

**Table 2**

*Overview of the Semester in the Redesigned ELED Program*

<b>Week</b>	<b>What TC’s are Doing</b>
Weeks 1-4	Class: Monday and Thursday Practicum: Tuesday
Week 5	Class: Monday and Thursday Practicum: Tuesday and Friday
Week 6	Class: Monday and Thursday Practicum: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday
Week 7	Class: Thursday Practicum: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday
Week 8-14	Class: Online Check ins Student Teaching: Monday through Friday

During the Fall semester, the TCs took two courses concurrently while participating in the seven-week practicum: a literacy course and a curriculum course. LED 462: Disciplinary Literacy for Diverse Classrooms PK-6, was the third literacy course the TCs took and focused on developing their skills planning instruction across the content areas. The curriculum course, ELED 450: Planning, Instruction, and Assessment in the Elementary Education Curriculum, required TCs to design, implement, and assess curriculum using a backwards design model. The course work was completed prior to student teaching in the second seven weeks of the Fall semester. The Spring semester followed the same pattern but TCs took ELED 455: Home,

School, and Communities and ELED 485: Guiding Student Behavior. During both the Fall and Spring semesters, the course instructors collaborated closely to maximize TC's learning and minimize possible redundancy between courses.

### **Participants**

The university decided to allow the entering first years in Fall of 2019 to choose either the new ELED major or stay with the five-year MAT since that was the program for which they had applied. Only 18 out of the 120 first year students chose the four-year ELED major. We began this study in the Fall of 2021 as a way to understand the impact of the redesigned field experience--- the first semester it was offered for our first group of ELED majors. Thus, we used purposeful sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to identify the participants.

Before the start of the study, the TCs (N=18) had completed three years of required coursework, including two practicum experiences and were fully eligible to student teach. Due to the small number of participants, and a need to protect their privacy, no demographic data was collected. All 18 TCs were placed in one of five elementary schools for the extended practicum/student teaching experience. The schools were located close to the university and students and families that make up the schools' population come from a variety of race, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, representing the diversity of the city as a refugee resettlement location. A few of the languages spoken in the homes of the students enrolled at the learning center include Spanish, Arabic, Kurdish, Russian, and Korean.

The cooperating teachers (N=18) were carefully selected by their principals for this unique practicum/student teaching experience. It was essential that all TCs were supervised by highly qualified CTs. The university supervisors (N=2) were all former teachers and had supervised traditional student teaching experiences. There were 38 participants in total. The

ELED program shared with principals, the CTs and the USs a description of the restructured field experience and a schedule.

We, the researchers, all have held leadership positions in the ELED program. The knowledge and perspectives gained from such experience served as motivation in designing the current study, which focused on the Fall 2021 semester, so we could make changes, if needed for the Spring 2022 semester. Because of our roles in the program, we had working relationships with some participants. However, none of us were instructors of the TCs at the time of the study but had taught them in previous semesters.

### **Data Sources**

Data collection occurred through two open-ended surveys given to the TCs, CTs, and USs, after the first practicum placement (October 2021) and after the first semester of student teaching (December 2021). The timing of the survey distribution was key because the goal of the study was to gain insight into their (TC, CT, US) perspectives after practicum and again after student teaching to monitor the possibility of changes in those perceptions. In addition to understanding their perceptions, we hoped to use this data to make any needed changes before the TCs progressed into the Spring 2022 semester. Furthermore, in Fall 2022, TCs would no longer have a choice between the ELED major or the five-year MAT programs. So instead of 18 TCs we would have over 160 TCs participating in the redesigned field experience.

We created six different surveys in order to seek the responses from each group of participants during and after the field experiences. We chose a combination of forced-choice responses and open-ended responses because the intent was to qualitatively capture the participants' perspectives (Flick, 2006). For the forced-choice questions, participants had the

option of adding comments and/or other responses. All surveys were completely anonymously to help ensure candid responses.

The initial surveys, given to all participants in October, had some overlapping questions. For example, each group of participants was asked questions specific to their impressions of the overall field experience model, balance of coursework and field experiences, as well as about the integration of coursework. However, some questions, across the groups of participants, differed. For example, the TC survey questions focused heavily on how they managed the coursework during practicum, The surveys for the CTs asked about their perceptions of the TC's skill level at the end of practicum and their ability to balance field work and course work. The USs were asked to reflect the TCs' level of preparedness at the end of practicum before student teaching. The second survey, given in December, for all groups, focused on the participants' impression of the extended practicum and student teaching model and allowed space to make suggestions for improvement.

### **Data Analysis**

We followed Creswell and Creswell (2018) coding procedures by reading and discussing participants' open-ended responses. This process was guided by our belief that learning is an inherently social process (Bakhtin, 1986). We began by individually examining the first set of surveys from each group, attempting to obtain a general sense of the data, and noting emerging themes. Then we did the same with the second set of surveys. Next, we met to discuss our individual analysis of the survey data and to identify categories that captured the patterns of the themes. Once a consensus had been reached on the themes, the data were coded using these categories.

Peer debriefing was used to enhance trustworthiness of the research findings. The two course instructors, who taught the TCs in the Fall semester, were chosen for this task since they were familiar with the goals of the study but were not participants. Peer debriefing included sharing a data analysis draft with each instructor and debriefing with them individually.

### **Findings**

This study examined the perceptions of the field placement triad, which included the teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors during and after participating in a redesigned field experience. The data revealed three distinct themes across the groups of participants: relationships, preparedness, professionalism. Opportunities presented by the redesigned field experience were seized upon but in ways dependent on each group of participants (TC, CT, US). Furthermore, each group of participants also offered suggestions for future semesters which we categorized as “looking forward.”

#### **Relationships**

The first theme that was prevalent across the surveys for triad members was relationships. Overwhelmingly, the TCs reported that the additional time in the redesigned field experience was a benefit specific to building relationships. A TC wrote, “More time in the classroom allowed me to form relationships with the students and allowed me to follow along better with what they were doing in school.” Other TCs mentioned how the course design fostered relationships between the TCs. She stated, “I liked working with the same group in the two classes.” Over the semester, the TCs felt more comfortable in their relationship with their CT. For example, on the mid semester survey, a TC wrote, “Maybe talk to the CT’s about being gentle with the workload” implying that they did not feel comfortable broaching this subject with their CT themselves. However, by the end of the semester, the TCs were able to reflect on the

beginning of the semester noting the advantages of more time to implement lessons and learn from their CTs.

The CTs also saw the benefit of extra time in the field placement as positively impacting relationships. “I like how the [university] student gets to come and start meeting students, building relationships, and watching classroom procedures before they are in the classroom five days a week.” Another shared, “Overall I think it is good for student teachers to also be able to have the practicum experience with the same classroom so they can develop relationships with the students before jumping all the way into teaching.” Building relationships was seen as a huge advantage of this redesign by the CTs as well as the USs. A US wrote:

I think the new model provides a great way for the student teaching candidates to get to know the students and cooperating teachers by participating in their practicum experience first. They are able to build a strong professional relationship with one another with the full semester model.

Overall, the triad found additional time in classrooms became the foundation of the positive experiences in the field.

### **Preparedness**

The theme of preparedness was seen across the three groups of participants. The TC’s, in their survey responses, often mentioned how the courses they were taking, simultaneously as being in practicum, influenced how prepared they felt. One TC noted, “This combination of courses really allowed me to see how each subject can be blended together to maximize education time. It also gives me a vast amount of resources and the ability to justify my decisions.” Another TC saw the benefit of the courses in terms of being more active while in the

practicum writing, “Each class was hard but ran smoothly with each and allowed for greater involvement with my placement.”

However, not all TCs felt this way about their coursework. Several mentioned in the survey their frustration with planning lessons that they could not directly use in their field experience. A TC noted:

The courses would be more beneficial if they were personalized to what my class is actually learning. I've spent half of the semester working on a unit plan that I will never actually use in the classroom because my teacher switched the order she was doing her units.

When the assignments in the courses did not align, the TCs felt their work was wasted and it did not contribute to them feeling prepared.

In contrast, the CT's connected being prepared to spending more time in the classroom. For example, a CT shared:

It was nice to have her here more and more days because we have been able to start planning for student teaching. She will, as a result, be able to start teaching part of the content her first week and thus be able to start teaching full time sooner.

Another CT responded to the survey specific to preparedness stating, “I think it is very beneficial to her experience student teaching and ready to hit the ground running and ultimately grow more as a preservice teacher.”

Many of the CTs in this study were previously cooperating teachers for candidates in the five-year ELED MAT program. Often, these past experiences shaped how they responded to the survey questions. For example, a CT wrote enthusiastically:

I love this new model! I feel that my TC had a better understanding of our classroom community and routines. She was able to establish stronger connections with the students and the transition into student teaching was absolutely seamless! She also knew what we had been teaching throughout the semester, so she was able to bring in past learning experiences.

The two USs also had experience in the previous ELED MAT program. Midsemester, their survey responses were positive, but they were keenly aware of where the TCs needed to be in comparison to the previous TCs they worked with. Within the 18 TCs, the USs, who each worked with half of the cohort of candidates, saw how the group was split in terms of their preparedness after practicum. “The candidates who have been involved and proactive in working with students are ready to roll! The very few who have been a bit more tentative may find student teaching more challenging.” The USs also noted other concerns to watch for in the next seven weeks, which was student teaching, such as using the lesson template to guide planning and adhering to deadlines. However, after seven weeks of student teaching, one US shared, “They are prepared to begin taking on teaching responsibilities earlier and feel more comfortable doing so.”

In general, the CTs and USs believed the TCs were ready to assume the responsibilities of a teacher. Furthermore, the coursework combined with the extended field placement allowed the TCs to demonstrate their knowledge and skills adding to feelings of preparedness.

### **Professionalism**

The final theme reflected in the data from all three groups of participants was professionalism. For the purposes of this study, we defined professionalism as the disposition of an individual who was engaged in behaviors that were expected of that position. In addition, the

frequency with which these behaviors were demonstrated suggest a commitment to the profession. Within our ELED program, faculty have identified a number of professional dispositions that teacher candidates are expected to achieve by their senior year. These include, but are not limited to: replies to colleagues, professors, and supervisors in a timely and respectful manner; arrives on time; sets appropriate priorities; meets deadlines; and proactively addresses issues.

As we reviewed the data from the TCs, CTs, and USs, we discovered a pattern that suggested some of our TCs were not exhibiting the professionalism we expected. While most of the CTs indicated they believed their TC was prepared to move into their next placement in the Spring semester, some offered suggestions. For example, one CT wrote, “Stress the importance of professionalism. State the importance of getting to school on time, being assertive, and walking around the room to help students.” Both USs echoed concerns about professionalism. One wrote, “The maturity level is not quite where I would like it. I find them asking ‘Do we have to...’ rather than ‘Can we...’; [they’re] doing just what is required and not wanting to go beyond.” The second US expressed a need for a few TCs “...to adhere to deadlines...”

Some of the TCs’ survey responses showed a lack of understanding regarding the expectations of the teaching profession. One TC seemed to categorize herself as a student more than someone entering a profession. She stated, “I have been extremely disappointed [with] not being able to follow [the college’s] breaks... we should not be obligated to stay all by ourselves in [city] when all other [college] students are enjoying their well-deserved breaks.” This desire was mentioned by another TC who wrote, “Our breaks should line up with the [college’s] schedule.” These data caused us to question whether the level of professionalism we expected was present in all the TCs.

## Looking Forward

In the final survey, we asked members of the triad to offer suggestions on ways to improve the redesigned field experience. The TCs recommendations tended to focus on their needs as seniors in college. For example, multiple TCs requested that a few excused absences be built in. Others recommended ways the courses could be restructured so that they were connected but did not overlap in such a way that it felt redundant (i.e., completing two similar unit plans).

The CTs noted issues with the technology. For example, they did not think the learning management system was user friendly. A CT shared, “the documents that were sent to us were not in a format we could easily access ... so there were extra steps we had to go through to give the required feedback.” In addition, although the course titles for the Fall and Spring semester were shared with the CTs and USs, the CT survey responses hinted that they were unclear what expertise the TCs should already have. For example, several CTs stated that the TCs would benefit from a class on behavior management, not remembering that that course would be offered in the Spring semester. The USs also offered suggestions regarding the number of days each week they thought the TCs should spend in schools as part of the “scale up model” of practicum to student teaching.

## Discussion

The aim of this research was to uncover the triad’s (TC, CT, and US) perceptions of a revised field experience. We identified three themes from the data which caused us to extrapolate why these themes emerged. Relationships, we believe, can be easily explained. Conclusions from many studies find that increasing time in the field enhances the relationships within those experiences (Colson et al., 2017; Grudnoff et al., 2017; Spooner et al., 2008). All members of the

triad benefited from extended time with each other in their roles as novice or expert. The second theme, preparedness, echoes other's work specific to how student teaching shapes TCs' perceptions of their preparedness to teach (Brown et al., 2015) and how they see their role as educators (Hattingh & De Kock, 2008). Similar to Dunst et al. (2019), both the CTs and USs found that the more time TCs engaged in the field, the stronger their teaching quality. In addition, the revised field experience provided more opportunities for the CTs and USs to identify areas in need of growth while supporting the TCs' developing skills (Spooner et al., 2008).

When considering the theme professionalism, two different explanations are possible for this finding. One is maturity. The TCs in this revised field experience entered student teaching a year earlier than students in the sunseting Five Year MAT Program. Could the data be attributed to the fact that these TCs were younger than previous students and therefore, did not see themselves or act as professional as the older MAT students with whom many CTs and USs had interacted? A second possibility might be that the TCs did not have enough exposure to the profession to internalize expected dispositions. Bandura (1977) proposed that individuals need direct experience, observation, and exemplary modeling with feedback to learn and develop skills. In their first field experience as sophomores, TCs had one day of face-to-face practicum. However, due to COVID, their second practicum in Fall of 2020 was completely online and the quality varied greatly. The third practicum, in the Spring 2021, was face-to-face for some TCS and virtual for others. Therefore, could it be that the lack of professionalism that the data showed was attributed to a lack of direct experience, observation, and exemplary modeling?

This study is limited in that we only collected data from one small cohort of TCs, CTs and USs during the first semester of the revised field experience. Now that we have multiple

cohorts in the ELED major, it would be beneficial to conduct this study with a larger group of students, across multiple cohorts, to build generalizability.

### **Implications**

Temiz and Topcu (2013) argue that to be an effective teacher in the future, TCs must have strong teacher education programs. Based on the findings from this study, a review of the literature, and reflections of the authors, we identified implications for our ELED program and offer considerations for other teacher education programs specific to potentially revising their field experiences.

### **Our ELED Program**

Based on the data we collected, and conversations with the course instructors as part of peer debriefing, some of the changes the ELED program and the redesigned field experience worked. For example, extended time in the field added to relationships being built and feelings of preparedness. However, one area that needs attention are the TCs' professional dispositions. While they are still college students, the ELED program needs to find ways to help TCs realize that their senior year is not a typical college senior year; they must meet the expectations and responsibilities of being a teacher as part of the redesigned field experience.

In addition, we believe it is important to consider the triad's feedback on course content and course sequence. Next steps include exploring how the courses could be restructured so that they are connected without being redundant (i.e., completing two similar unit plans). We will also review the course sequence to see if the classroom management course could be offered earlier in the ELED program since that was suggested by several CTs.

## **Beyond Our Program**

This study contributed greatly to our understanding of the new four-year ELED program and its redesigned field experience. For those considering changes to their existing teacher education program, here are the lessons we have learned.

First, involve all stakeholders in conversations about what is currently working and ideas for improvement. It is essential to identify mutual goals and consistent expectations so teacher education programs and K-12 schools, together, can provide the highest quality field-based experiences for candidates. Collaboration between universities and schools enhance the relationship between theory and practice while providing benefits for all involved (Allen et al., 2013; Baum & Korth, 2013). Furthermore, we suggest explicitly outlining the roles and responsibilities of TCs, CTs, USs, and faculty. By including all members of the triad in our work, we as teacher educators, are sending the message to them and others that their thoughts and opinions are valuable.

Second, we suggest examining the support that your program is offering stakeholders. Forgasz (2017) argues that the way to improve candidates' student teaching experiences is to give more attention to those who support them in the field, such as CTs and USs. In addition, we encourage you to consider what opportunities they have access to specific to mentoring (Loughran, 2013).

Third, if you are considering revising any aspect of your teacher education program, we recommend creating a manageable timeline. Although we had hoped to have two years of conversation about the new four-year ELED degree, which would have given everyone involved a chance to create meaningful and feasible revisions, that time frame was condensed into a year. As a result, many of our plans needed to be abandoned to meet the new deadline.

## **Conclusion**

Spooner et al. (2008) argued that when considering field experiences, it is important to look at the “value added” to the TCs, the schools, and the children. We argue that faculties' understanding of TCs' thinking during field experiences, as well as the perceptions of CTs and USs, can inform how to better structure learning experiences that will best contribute to the development of TCs' competence, professionalism, and teacher identities. As teacher educators, we do not and cannot operate in isolation. If we ignore any one aspect of the triad, we will be unable to work towards cultivating equitable education systems or improving future teaching success.

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