Defining *Teacher Educator* Through the Eyes of Classroom Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze a sample of classroom teachers' definitions of the term teacher educator *and determine whether they considered themselves to be teacher educators. The extent that classroom teachers' definitions of a teacher educator were influenced by involvement in a university–public school partnership was also examined. Results indicated that a large majority of the study's participants considered themselves to be teacher educators, but there were variations in how they defined this role. Analysis of the participants' definitions of the term* teacher educator *revealed two general categories: teacher of teachers and general educator. Results also indicated that a school's consistent involvement in a partnership led to a higher percentage of teachers giving definitions that could be categorized under the teacher of teachers theme. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are presented, along with suggestions for future study.*

In today's educational environment of accountability and emphasis on educational outcomes, the success of teacher education programs that prepare schoolteachers is measured by the achievement of the students in the classrooms of teacher education graduates (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Levine, 2006). Feiman-Nemser (2001) said, "If we want schools to produce more powerful learning on the part of [students], we have to offer more powerful learning opportunities to [preservice] teachers" (pp. 1013–1014). In the end, it is expected that student learning and achievement are maximized by teachers who are better prepared and are provided enhanced professional development (Ridley, Hurwitz, Hackett, & Miller, 2005).

In order to provide "more powerful learning opportunities" that lead to better-prepared teachers and improved student learning, many university teacher education programs and public schools have entered into educational partnerships. One of the primary purposes of these partnerships is to broaden the preparation of preservice teachers by providing quality field experiences (Bullough Jr., 2005; Ridley et al., 2005; Sands & Goodwin, 2005; Teitel, 2003), thus preparing teachers who are more qualified to move from university training to public school teaching positions. An important outcome of the field experience, made possible through the partnership, is that preservice teachers are placed in classroom settings to observe, practice, and develop teaching skills. Central to the effectiveness of the field experience being a powerful learning opportunity is the understanding of how classroom teachers enact the role of teacher educators (Young, Bullough Jr., Draper, Smith, & Erickson, 2005).

This focus on the classroom teacher as a teacher educator is not new (Bullough Jr., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Korthagen, 2004; Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2005; McNay & Graham, 2007; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Sands & Goodwin, 2005; Smith, 2005; Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2006; Young et al., 2005; Zeichner, 2005). While there are many complexities related to how classroom teachers enact the role of teacher educator, the purpose of this study is to emphasize how classroom teachers define the term *teacher educator* and indicate whether they consider themselves to be teacher educators. The study sample includes teachers from schools with varying levels of involvement in a university–public school partnership. Thus, the extent that classroom teachers' definitions of a teacher educator were influenced by partnership involvement was also examined.

Field Experience in Teacher Education

In the past several years, the prominence of field experience in teacher education has increased

(Bullough Jr., 2005; Korthagen, 2004), perhaps due to expectations and standards of accrediting agencies that emphasize quality field experience as an essential component of teacher preparation programs. The multiple, interconnected purposes for this requirement include developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for high-quality teaching through guided observation and practice; developing an overall sense of what it means to be a teacher; and connecting theory and practice. Darling-Hammond and Hammerness (2005) point out that guided observations and engagement in practice can help preservice teachers develop a "sense of the big picture" or "schema" of teaching as well as making the connection between the theory and practice of teaching. They further state:

> Many programs now emphasize the importance of providing clinical experience early and throughout a teacher education program—so that prospective teachers develop an image of what teaching involves and requires. This allows them to begin to understand some of the challenges and thinking involved so that they can make sense of how the ideas and theories they encounter in their coursework fit in the process of developing practice. Some teacher educators contend that providing novices with these early practicum experiences actually provides a conceptual structure for them to organize and better understand the theories that are addressed in their academic work. (p. 398)

As noted in Levine's (2006) analysis of teacher education, exemplary teacher education programs include a "field experience component that is sustained, begins early, and provides immediate application" (p. 6). Thus, as quality teacher education programs are developed and defined, field experience continues to be a critical component that can lead to powerful learning opportunities resulting in better-prepared teachers and enhanced student learning. Inherent, however, to the success of the field experience reaching its intended purposes is the role of the classroom teacher.

The Role of Classroom Teachers as Teacher Educators

Increasing attention is found in teacher education literature regarding the role of the classroom teacher in preparing preservice teachers (Bullough Jr., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Korthagen, 2004; Koster et al., 2005; McNay & Graham, 2007; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Sands & Goodwin, 2005; Smith, 2005; Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2006; Young et al., 2005; Zeichner, 2005). The mentoring role of the classroom teacher is critical to the success of preservice teachers in field experiences. However, the addition of this mentoring role and the university's expectations that classroom teachers fulfill responsibilities of teacher educators increase the workload and add complexity to their current role as teachers of children (Bullough Jr., 2005). These additional responsibilities include providing critical and evaluative feedback to preservice teachers, helping preservice teachers acculturate into the broader profession, and being willing to invest themselves in a professional relationship with preservice teachers in their charge (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2001; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Young et al., 2005).

However, research demonstrates that classroom teachers vary in the way they enact the role of teacher educators. Some classroom teachers merely provide a setting for preservice teachers to practice what they have learned in their coursework, providing encouragement and assistance when needed (Bullough Jr., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Other classroom teachers enter into a mentoring relationship with the preservice teacher, providing critical feedback and engaging in reflective dialogue about the field experience and the broader teaching profession (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2006; Young et al., 2005).

Thus, as teacher preparation partnerships rely heavily on classroom teachers functioning as teacher educators, it is important to consider what influences the manner in which classroom teachers enact this role and the role the partnership has in preparing classroom teachers to function in this role so that field experiences lead to well-prepared teachers. University programs should not assume that simply

declaring teachers to be teacher educators or placing preservice teachers in their classrooms will lead them to function effectively in this role (Bullough Jr., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998). It is possible that the manner or degree classroom teachers function as teacher educators might be determined by the way they define this role or even acknowledge their role as teacher educators. In other words, how a teacher defines this role may influence whether the field experience will be a quality learning experience that leads to better-prepared teachers and enhanced academic outcomes. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze teachers' definitions of the term *teacher educator* and perceptions of themselves as part of this category. The impact of a strong public school–university partnership on their definitions will also be examined.

The Study

Participants

Participants for this study included 79 educators from four schools. As a whole, the teachers had varying degrees of teaching experience (0–5 years, 30%; 6–10 years, 25%; 11–15 years, 18%; over 16 years, 27%), averaging nearly 11 years of experience. The majority of the participants (n = 54; 69%) had prior experience mentoring a preservice teacher. All participants had a Bachelor's degree in education with 4 also having a Master's degree. A description of each of the four participating schools along with participant demographics for each school follows.

Setting: The University–Public School Partnership

A university–public school partnership with over a 20-year history was the setting for this study. Located in the Rocky Mountain area of the western part of the United States, this partnership emphasizes meaningful collaboration between the university teacher education program and five partnering public school districts, with the common goal of "simultaneous renewal" of both public schools and teacher education practices (Goodlad, 1994, p. 123). Within each of the five school districts, various schools are identified as partnership schools that are used to place preservice teachers. In addition to being used for placements, partnership schools also participated in the partnership through professional development and contributing to the improvement of the teacher education program. For this study, four schools from three of the five partnership districts were selected to participate in the study with one of the schools not functioning as a partnership school. Selection was based on the schools' history and degree of involvement with the university teacher education program through the partnership. At the time of the study, clinical faculty from the university teacher education program were supervising student teachers at these schools, except at the no-partnership school. Pseudonyms are used to identify the schools, which are all located in suburban communities and are within a 25-mile radius of the university. School demographic data were provided by state demographic reports from the year data were collected for this study.

Participating Schools

Mountain Heights Elementary had a student population of approximately 645 students and 25 classroom teachers. Twenty-three educators participated in the study averaging 13.7 years of teaching experience, 86% (n = 19) having experience with student teachers, and all having a Bachelor's degree. This school was chosen for the study because it was one of the initial partnership schools and had a more than 20-year history of continuous involvement with the partnership. Principals at Mountain Heights consistently supported their teachers in participating in the partnership, including providing ongoing placements for preservice teachers and contributing to the evolution of the teacher education program.

Lake View Elementary had a student population of approximately 1017 students with 37 classroom teachers. Twenty-five educators participated in the study averaging 13.2 years of teaching experience, 76% (n = 19) having experience with student teachers, and all having a Bachelor's degree with 2 teachers also having a Master's degree. Lake View was also one of the initial partnership schools, but

unlike Mountain Heights, it has not been consistently involved in partnership activity. In years immediately preceding the study, Lake View was primarily a site for preservice teachers majoring in early childhood education; thus, only classroom teachers in kindergarten through third grade were actively involved in the partnership.

Valley Elementary had just been opened with a student population of nearly 700 students and 28 classroom teachers. Twenty-two educators participated in the study averaging 7.7 years of teaching experience, 59% (n = 19) having experience with student teachers, all having a Bachelor's degree with 2 also having a Master's degree. The principal learned about the partnership through in-service training and requested that his school be a site for preservice teachers. When selecting and training his new teaching staff, he was purposeful in preparing them to work with preservice teachers.

Finally, River Front Elementary was randomly selected from the schools in the partnership districts that were not functioning as a partnership school and did not have any history or current involvement with the university–public school partnership represented in this study, nor any other formal university–school partnership. River Front was located in the same partnership district as Valley Elementary. River Front had a student population of approximately 620 students and 33 classroom teachers. Only 9 educators participated in the study averaging 9.3 years of teaching experience, only 3 having experience with student teachers, and all having a Bachelor's degree.

Instrumentation

Data were collected by asking participants to address two questions: (1) "Are you a teacher educator?" and (2) "Define the term *teacher educator.*" Participants also provided demographic information regarding position, number of years of teaching, academic degree, and involvement with student teachers. Surveys with the questions and demographic information were distributed to teachers at each of the participating schools. The overall return rate for the four schools was 64%.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed based on the participants' responses to the two questions listed above. First, the researchers tallied participants' responses to the question of whether they viewed themselves to be teacher educators. Data from the second question (define the term *teacher educator*) were analyzed for common or shared themes. Then definitions were grouped according to the emergent themes. After all of the responses had been categorized, a school-by-school comparison was done to determine whether participation in the partnership had any influence on participants' definitions of the term *teacher educator*.

Findings

Data provided information about whether participating classroom teachers considered themselves teacher educators, how they defined *teacher educator*, and how partnership participation of the school impacted a teacher's definition of the term *teacher educator*.

Classroom Teachers as Teacher Educators

Of the 79 participants, 75 (95%) indicated that they considered themselves teacher educators (see Table 1). Of these 75 who related the term *teacher educator* to themselves, 20 (27%) reported that they had not worked with preservice teachers. Only 4 of the 79 participants (5%) did not consider themselves to be teacher educators. Based on the demographic information provided by these participants, 3 of these 4 had not worked with student teachers and were in their first 3 years of teaching; they stated that their inexperience as teachers was the reason they did not view themselves as teacher educators. They indicated that as new teachers they were not ready to educate others about teaching, but they anticipated becoming teacher educators as they gained more experience and were given the opportunity to have preservice teachers assigned to their classrooms. One stated, "I might be [a teacher educator] if I had cohort/student teachers in my class." This seems to indicate that these 3

teachers may feel that they are teacher educators only when they are actually working with preservice teachers. In contrast, the 4th teacher, who did not identify herself as a teacher educator, was a veteran teacher of 22 years. She stated, "I have served as a mentor teacher many times; however, I don't perceive myself as a teacher educator." This distinction between *mentor* and *teacher educator* was not made by any of the other participants.

Table 1
Participants' Response to the Question: "Are you a teacher educator?" and Whether They Have Worked with Preservice Teachers

	Respondents who have worked with preservice teachers	Respondents who have NOT worked with preservice teachers	Total
Number of participants who replied, "Yes" when asked, "Are you a teacher educator?"	73% (n = 55)	27% (n = 20)	95% (n = 75)
Number of participants who replied, "No" when asked, "Are you a teacher educator?"	25% (n = 1)	75% (n = 3)	5% (n = 4)

Teacher Educator Defined

Analysis of the participants' definitions of the term *teacher educator* revealed two general categories: *teacher of teachers* and *general educators*. Since 13 responses had elements of both categories and were categorized as both the *teacher of teachers* and *general educators*, the total *n* reported (92) is greater than the number of participants (79). Table 2 includes a description of the categories, examples, and the percentage of total responses in each category.

Table 2
Percentage of Responses Within Categories by School

	Mountain Heights	Lake View	Valley	River Front	Total
Teacher of Teachers	75% (n = 21)	56% (n = 14)	61% (n = 17)	18% (n = 2)	59% (n = 54)
General Educator	25% (n = 7)	44% (n = 11)	39% (n = 11)	82% (n = 9)	41% (n = 38)

Teacher of teachers. This category was used for definitions that explicitly refer to working with preservice teachers or fellow teachers. As a whole, this category could be summarized as definitions that focus on purposefully sharing one's knowledge and skills relevant to teaching in an effort to improve the quality of teaching. Of the participants, 54 (59%) (see Table 2) defined the term *teacher educator* with this focus. Many definitions included the phrase "teacher of teachers," as well as words like *teaches*, *educates*, *instructs*, *helps*, *assists*, *guides*, and *leads* with the intent that preservice teachers or fellow teachers would *improve* and become *better* or *more effective* teachers. Nearly one fourth of these definitions referred to being a *mentor* or *trainer*.

Generally, participants' definitions explicitly referring to mentoring preservice teachers embodied the notion of a teacher educator as "one who teaches, trains, and mentors students desiring to be qualified." Others added that a teacher educator working with preservice teachers is "someone who

helps prospective teachers learn how to apply their college knowledge to the classroom and how to deal with real situations." Some indicate that to be a teacher educator requires education and experience: "A person of educated status who adequately prepares young teachers to be effective in all teaching areas." "A person with teaching experience who then shares [his] experiences with current perspective educators." "A teacher [who] shares her knowledge and experience along with the joys and tribulations of teaching/educating to help soon-to-be teachers." On the aspect of working with preservice teachers, respondents' definitions specified that teacher educators directly interact with preservice teachers with the intent to prepare, train, and/or mentor.

Not all definitions explicitly referred to working with preservice teachers. Some designated a teacher educator as one who purposefully shares his or her knowledge and skills with fellow teachers and other peers within an educational setting to improve teaching. This was made evident in definitions that referred to classroom teachers as being leaders in their schools through their example and explicit instruction about teaching. "A teacher educator is someone who gets the qualities of a teacher into [herself] and can lead others to increase those qualities in themselves. An example who leads [others], [does] not pour information…into others." "One who helps others learn and improve their skills and strategies as [teachers]." A few definitions referred to the time commitment and specific tasks of a teacher educator. "A teacher educator is one who devotes time to the improvement of teacher education to help improve and prepare the effectiveness of teachers. He/she may provide opportunities for growth." "A professional who aids in teaching individuals the methods and the practices associated with teaching. This may be done through demonstrations and critiques and observations/evaluations." Overall, these definitions referred to the responsibilities and actions of a teacher educator apart from the primary role of being a classroom teacher; thus, not all classroom teachers are teacher educators. Rather, being a teacher educator is an additional responsibility with a unique purpose and unique tasks.

General educator. The remaining 38 responses (41%) (see Table 2) defined a *teacher educator* as one who teaches others, emphasizing the act of teaching or educating. The definitions did not refer to mentoring or assisting in improving others' ability to teach. In the simplest sense, they stated that one who teaches or educates others is a teacher educator: "*Teacher*—one who teaches; *educator*—one whose profession is to educate others," "Someone who educates others." Some participants made specific reference to their primary teaching role: "It has to do with my role to teach concepts and educate students on how to use their knowledge in real life." Reference was also made to the tasks of a classroom teacher: "A teacher is a person who [displays] his/her knowledge of a subject and helps guide students' learning"; "someone who takes curriculum and presents it in the most interesting and applicable way." In contrast to answers categorized as *teacher of teachers*, no obvious reference was made to preservice teachers or to interacting with peers or fellow teachers. Nor was there a distinction made between the role of a teacher educator and that of a classroom teacher. The two roles were viewed as one in the same.

Mixed. Among the 79 respondents, 13 definitions could be grouped into both categories. Some referred to a teacher educator who had a dual role of teaching children *and* teaching teachers: "A teacher who has students and also mentors and teaches educators"; "One who teaches children but also teaches peers and potential educators." Others referred to both categories as *either* being an educator of children *or* working with other teachers: "Any person that teaches, or works with teachers or people in a learning environment"; "A professional who teaches children or a teacher who teaches teachers." In other words, teacher educators were viewed as having one role or the other, not a dua l role of simultaneously teaching children and other teachers. One definition clearly made this distinction: "In what context do you mean? All those who participate in face-to-face teaching of students are teacher/educators. Or do you mean teacher educators in the sense of instructing preservice and current teachers? Or do you mean some combination of both (i.e., a classroom teacher that also teaches and guides peers)?" These mixed definitions make reference to the complex role of classroom teachers as teacher educators and point to the need to negotiate those roles.

Impact of Participation in a Collaborative Partnership

In general, the nature of responses seemed to vary with the level of each school's involvement in the collaborative university–public school partnership (see Table 2). Responses from Mountain Heights, a school with a long history of consistent involvement in the partnership, primarily reflected a *teacher of teachers* concept of teacher educator (n = 21; 75%). Only 7 responses (25%) from the teachers a t Mountain Heights reflected a *general educator* perception. The responses from the teachers at Lake View Elementary, a school with a history of sporadic involvement in the partnership, were less consistent than those from Mountain Heights: 56% (n = 14) of the teachers defined a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers,* and a smaller number defined a teacher educator using a more general definition (n = 11; 44%). Respondents from Valley Elementary, a new member of the collaborative partnership, showed a similar pattern, with the majority of teachers defining a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers* (n = 17; 6 1 %) and fewer tea chers giving a more general definition (n = 11; 39%). Accordingly, River Front Elementary, a school with no connection to the collaborative partnership, had more teachers give a general teaching definition (n = 9; 82%). In fact, only 2 of the responses (18%) from the teachers at River Front defined a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers*. Although the sample for River Front is small and can have a skewing effect on the results, a closer look at these 9 teachers shows that the 2 teachers who did define a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers* had experiences with multiple student teachers. The 9 teachers who gave a general education definition also indicated they had never had any involvement with student teachers, except one teacher who worked with only one preservice teacher in his/her 15-year career. All together, these trends suggest that involvement in a collaborative partnership, as well as the nature of the involvement, may have some influence on how teachers define the term *teacher educator*.

Discussion

Current research shows that field experiences can provide powerful learning opportunities for preservice teachers that lead to better-prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005; Levine, 2006). Central to field experiences being quality experiences is the manner in which the classroom teacher functions as a teacher educator. However, research indicates that classroom teachers vary in the way they enact this role, which can subsequently influence the quality of field experiences (e.g., Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2001; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Young et al., 2005). It is possible that how classroom teachers define the role of a teacher educator may determine how they enact this role. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine whether a sample of classroom teachers considered themselves to be teacher educators, examine how this sample defined the term *teacher educator*, and infer how these definitions might have been influenced by participation in a collaborative university–public school partnership.

A large majority of the participants (95%) considered themselves to be teacher educators. Of the 4 who did not consider themselves to be teacher educators, 3 stated that they were in their first years o f teaching and had not yet worked with preservice teachers. However, 21 other participants (of whom 16 were also in their first 3 years of teaching) indicated that they had not worked with preservice teachers, yet considered themselves teacher educators. From these initial findings, the researchers inferred that there were varying definitions of a teacher educator among the sample as well as varying perceptions of how that role is carried out. Additional analysis supported these emerging ideas.

An analysis of the definitions provided by the respondents suggested two categories of definitions. The category of *general educator* included definitions viewing a teacher educator as simply one who teaches or educates others, with no indication of mentoring or working with preservice or fellow teachers. This perception may be a reason such a high percentage of the sample considered themselves to be teacher educators, especially those who indicated that they had not worked with preservice teachers. The finding demonstrates that for some classroom teachers the role of a teacher educator is simply a description of their current role as an educator of children. Thus, these teachers might not

believe that being a teacher educator is a separate or distinct role or set of responsibilities apart from teaching children.

The second category of responses—*teacher of teachers*—is comprised of definitions of a teacher educator as one who is purposeful in sharing his or her knowledge and skills about teaching in a purposeful effort to improve the quality of teaching of others. In contrast to the definitions categorized under *general educator*, these definitions considered the role of a teacher educator to be different or separate from the primary role of teaching children. This was even more evident in the *mixed* category, as respondents referred to a teacher educator as being a dual role in which one simultaneously teaches children and mentors preservice teachers. For example, one respondent defined a teacher educator as "someone who is not only a teacher of students, but someone who teaches all around them *and* teaches them how to teach/lead others" (italics added). Although this may be a positive finding in regard to creating effective field experiences for preservice teachers, a dual role may be challenging for classroom teachers as they attempt to negotiate the increased complexity of their teaching. Assisting classroom teachers with this challenge may be a critical responsibility of the university teacher education program, a responsibility that will be addressed later in the discussion.

These findings regarding the varying definitions of a teacher educator and the perception of being a teaching educator have significant implications regarding the manner in which classroom teachers enact or carry out the role of teacher educator; this, in turn, can influence the nature of the field experience. In short, it is possible that classroom teachers who define the role of a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers* would enact this role differently than if they defined a teacher educator as a *general educator*; such differences would influence the type of field experience encountered by preservice teachers and whether the field experience leads to better-prepared teachers.

For example, teachers who do not see the designation *teacher educator* as a separate role may consider that their responsibility for preservice teachers assigned to their classroom is merely to provide a setting for trying out methods and strategies learned while involved in university coursework (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) labeled this approach to working with preservice teachers as "local guides." Classroom teachers enact the role of a teacher educator by providing emotional support and short-term assistance when needed and then becoming less involved in mentoring as the preservice teacher becomes more confident. Young et al. (2005) also labeled this pattern of mentoring as "responsive," indicating that the mentor interacted with the preservice teacher when assistance was requested, as would a teacher aide or guide. In short, field experiences with classroom teachers who view the role of a teacher educator as that of a general educator, with the primary role of teaching children, may be less likely to generate powerful learning experiences.

In contrast, teachers who define a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers* may be more likely to provide field experiences that are more purposeful and more directly focused on teaching preservice teachers about teaching as opposed to simply providing a classroom for preservice teachers to practice teaching. These classroom teachers may be more likely to invest time in engaging in an in-depth mentor–student relationship and be "agents of change" (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993) where critical and evaluative feedback is central to the interaction between the preservice teacher and classroom teacher, including consideration and evaluation of alternative perspectives (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005; Young et al., 2005). "Unless teacher educators engage prospective teachers in a critical examination of their entering beliefs in light of compelling alternatives and help them develop powerful images of good teaching and strong professional commitments" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1017), their training and development as teachers will be impeded by misconceptions and inappropriate ideas and practices.

Classroom Teacher Educators and University–Public School Partnerships

Results from this study suggest that teachers may be more likely to give a *teacher of teachers* definition if they are working in a school that participates in a collaborative partnership with a

university teacher preparation program. It is possible that a *teacher of teachers* definition may simply be a result of classroom teachers having multiple experiences in working with preservice teachers, and which such opportunities are greatly increased in a school that is collaborating with a university teacher education program. This leads to the possibility that involvement in a partnership seemed to raise the percentage of definitions that were categorized under the *teacher of teachers* simply as a function of increased experiences with student teachers. However, both the results from this study and those of other studies demonstrate that there is significant variability in how classroom teachers define and view the role of a teacher educator, even among those having multiple experiences with preservice teachers.

Thus, it is cautioned to assume that simply the act of working with preservice teachers can lead classroom teachers to effectively function as teacher educators. Adding the responsibility of working with preservice teachers to the other roles performed by classroom teachers complicates their primary role of teaching children. When classroom teachers are left alone to negotiate these roles, the role of a teacher educator may easily be subsumed by the primary role of teaching children (Bullough Jr., 2005), and thus classroom teachers may not function as teacher educators in ways expected by the university. Classroom teachers need guidance and training to be effective in this role, and such guidance and training can logically occur within the framework of a university–public school partnership.

This study did not examine how classroom teachers arrived at their definition of *teacher educator*. It is unclear whether definitions were influenced by training and formal interactions with the university teacher education program or whether definitions were based on the experience of having had preservice teachers in their class. Regardless, the results of this study raise questions regarding the relationship between the university teacher preparation programs and classroom teachers, as well as the preparation classroom teachers receive as they are asked to work with preservice teachers.

For example, although a high percentage of teachers at three partnership schools defined the role of a teacher educator as a *teacher of teachers*, many teachers from the partnership schools did not define or view their role in such a way. Is this the result of insufficient training by the university teacher preparation program, or is it the classroom teachers' struggle of negotiating the additional role/responsibility? Did the university teacher education program simply orient classroom teachers about hosting preservice teachers and teach them to complete assessment forms, or were classroom teachers trained on what it means to be a teacher educator and how to enact that role in order to lead to effective learning opportunities as addressed in the paper and extant literature? In addition, did the interaction between classroom teachers and university teacher education programs include a dialogue on how to negotiate the added responsibilities for teacher educators with their primary role as teachers of children? In short, as university teacher education programs enter into partnerships with public schools for the benefit of preservice teachers, university programs should not assume that simply placing a preservice teacher in an experienced teacher's classroom will lead that teacher to take on a teacher educator role that aligns with the university program (Bullough Jr., 2005).

Similarly, administrators of teacher education programs need be cautious in assuming that good teachers are good teacher educators (Bullough Jr., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2001). Teachers who have demonstrated effective teaching skills and classroom management strategies may not necessarily have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to function as teacher educators. Even though a classroom teacher may be implementing "best practices" that would be beneficial for a preservice teacher to observe, he or she may know very little about mentoring a preservice teacher beyond allowing him or her to simply observe and practice teaching strategies. Those who manage teacher preparation programs need to work directly with their partnership schools and teachers to explicitly discuss roles and ensure that these roles are aligned with teacher education program expectations. The same notion of preparation required for preservice teachers should be extended to preparing teachers to become teacher educators.

It is also important to keep in mind that the university is not the only direct influence on classroom teachers effectively functioning as teacher educators. This was manifested from findings pertaining to

Valley Elementary. As both a newly established school as well as being new to the partnership, a high percentage of teachers gave a *teacher of teachers* definition. It is possible that the school principal made an explicit effort to hire teachers who exhibited both a desire to work with preservice teachers and an effective perspective of that role. Thus, universities need to first consider the existing environment of a school as it pertains to the views of working with preservice teachers as the teacher education programs determines the nature of their training and collaboration with a school. A school that, as a whole, has a *teacher of teachers* perspective of working with preservice teachers may simply need university personnel to assist those teachers in further developing their role. Whereas a school that has not already taken on that perspective may need explicit and intentional training to help it develop an effective view of working with preservice teachers.

The findings of this study do not simply imply the need for an increase in university–public school partnerships but, more specifically, for stakeholders in teacher education to consider the nature of the school–university partnership and the interaction between the university program and the classroom teachers. Although the commitment to university–public school partnerships has increased (Bullough Jr., 2005), these two entities remain "two largely separate worlds [that] exist side by side" (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, as quoted by Bullough, 2005, p. 144). The development of a collaborative partnership goes beyond a school allowing a university to place preservice teachers in its classrooms, with the partnership being present only in name. The partnership must function at a cooperative level (Furlong et al., 1996), with both the school and the university engaged in identifying shared goals and purposes, common definitions, and consistent expectations and role identification. A shared commitment to invest in the preparation of preservice teachers along with the professional development of new and veteran teachers must exist.

Thus, to prepare classroom teachers to effectively work with preservice teachers, university personnel must invite these mentor teachers to participate in the dialogue of what teacher preparation programs should entail (Bullough Jr., 2005). Classroom teachers contribute a critical voice concerning the nature of field experiences, and universities should be invested in helping classroom teachers understand their role as teacher educators. With mutual respect predominant, classroom teachers would then value their collaboration with universities in enhancing their own teaching practices and their students' academic achievement. To this end, the partnership would be functioning at a level that would be characterized as engaging in "simultaneous renewal" (Goodlad, 1994, p. 123).

Study Limitations

The researchers acknowledge several limitations to this study. First, the sample is geographically limited and small. Although multiple schools were included in the study, they are located in the same geographic location. In addition, the sample size is small, especially for River Front Elementary with only 9. Thus, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Data were limited to survey results, and it is possible that interviews would have provided additional data. The survey focused on the term *teacher educator*, and it is possible that some of the respondents might have been familiar with the role of mentoring and training peers and/or preservice teachers but did not connect that role with the term used in the survey. It is also possible that only those teachers who were familiar with the term responded to the survey, and those who did not understand the term did not complete the survey. However, with the exception of River Front Elementary, over 50% of teachers from each school did complete the survey. Finally, the researchers acknowledge that defining "teacher educator" does not necessarily imply certain desirable or consistent actions. Thus, it is possible that those who gave a *teacher of teachers* definition may not have been effective in the role of a teacher educator, whereas those who gave a *general educator* definition may have been very effective teacher educators.

Future Directions

Three recommendations are offered that would add productively to research in this area. First, research needs to be conducted to better identify the specific responsibilities of university teacher

preparation programs in mentoring and training classroom teacher educators. Although this study points to the need for this role to increase in university–public school partnerships, it is unclear what universities need to do in order to assist classroom teachers in negotiating this added role and responsibilities. Second, it would also be valuable to conduct a similar study of how university-based teacher educators define the term *teacher educator,* as well as evaluate their perceived role as teacher educator. Third, it is recommended that research needs to examine the congruity and incongruity between the teacher educator identity of university-based and field-based teacher educators.

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