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Action Research Projects in
Pre-Service Teacher Education

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Abstract
Classroom-centered Action Research Projects are an integral component of the M.S. in Elementary Education Program at the University's (pseudonym) College of Education. This article provides a summary and discussion of the projects completed by students in the Science, Technology, Literacy and English Language Learner Specializations of the Masters' program.

In 2003, the Education Department at the University (pseudonym) (now the College of Education at the University) moved from an undergraduate licensure program to a five-year licensure program with a M.S. in Elementary Education awarded after the end of the fifth year. Students would still receive their BA/BS degrees and take Education courses during their undergraduate years, but they would now continue for an additional year. During this year, the would be taking only Education coursework and doing a year long practicum/student teaching internship.

The change was dictated by two factors: an increase in licensure requirements, often causing students to delay their

student teaching semester until after they had graduated, and requests from local school districts that we produce new teachers who would also be leaders in their schools. The addition of a fifth year would deal with the first issue. As for developing school leaders, the Department decided that this need would best be served by providing students a level of expertise in an area related to teaching. These areas would be called "specialization areas", and during the final semester of their undergraduate year, students would choose one of the specialization areas for the following graduate year.

During this fifth year of coursework, students choose a specialization area in which they develop a level of expertise in a specific area related to teaching. The students acquire this expertise through: 1) graduate-level seminars, working with faculty advisors who are researchers in that particular specialization field, 2) a student-teaching internship placement with a mentor teacher skilled in that area, and 3) an action research project, implemented in the internship classroom, developed around what the interns and mentor teachers view as a need for students. The action research project is a very strong component of this program. Our view of what action research should be is well articulated by Ferrance (2000):

> Typically, action research is undertaken in a school setting. It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the "research." Often, action research is a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change. (p. vi)

This article provides a summary and discussion of the projects completed by students in the Science, Technology, Literacy and English Language Learner Specializations of the Masters' program.

Benefits of Action Research

The use of action research in teacher education is not a new concept (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Noffke & Zeichner, 1987). Though most often used by in-service teachers, research has demonstrated the benefits of using action research in pre-service teacher education programs Kosnik, 1999; Peters & Gray, 2007). These benefits include: 1) bringing prospective teachers into the intricate process of teaching and learning, 2) promoting deep reflection on practice inside the classroom, and 3) creating habits of "self-monitoring" for pre-service teachers to take into their future careers as educators (Caro-Bruce et. al., 2007; Kosnik, 1999; Zeichner & Gore, 1995). Peters & Gray (2007) indicate that pre-service teachers can "learn best if they actually experience the process of inquiry…and if their learning experience is grounded in their own practices" (p. 327).

The Fifth Year

During the first semester of the fifth year, students take graduate-level coursework in Inclusive Classrooms, Models of Instruction, and Educational Research. In addition, they have a graduate seminar in their specialization area during which they plan their action research project. The specialization areas are: Arts, Literacy, Instructional Technology, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Special Education. A specialization in teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) was added last year due to the increasing numbers of ELLs in local schools. The number of students choosing a particular specialization varies from year to year, but it is generally between four and six. The program graduates about 36 students each year.

In addition to coursework, students have a fifteen-hour/week practicum requirement in the Fall of their M.S. year, with their practicum assignments closely connected to their coursework. This practicum takes place in one classroom, in the school where the students will also do their second-semester student teaching internship. The grade level for the practicum is determined by the grade level chosen by the student for his/her student teaching internship. Therefore, if a student chooses to do

his/her student teaching internship in an upper level grade, the practicum will be in a lower level grade.

The second semester of the M.S. year is the student teaching internship. The intern is placed with a mentor teacher who has expertise and experience in the chosen specialization area. During this semester, along with all the other responsibilities and tasks expected of a student intern, the intern implements his/her action research project. The results of the action research are presented to an audience of faculty, peers, and mentor teachers during a research symposium held during final exams week.

Specialization Seminars

Students who have chosen a particular specialization enroll in a seminar for that area during the Fall semester of their graduate year. The seminars meet weekly throughout the semester and involve discussions of assigned readings relevant to the specialization and considerations of teaching strategies and approaches for the specialty area.

During the second half of the seminar, discussion of possible action research topics begins. The students are encouraged to discuss possible research areas with their second-semester mentor teacher in whose classroom the study will take place. Once their have developed their research ideas, students review relevant literature and plan their methodology. As the semester progresses, students develop a their action research proposal. This proposal consists of introduction/rationale, literature review, and methodology sections. At the end of the semester, students present their proposals to a group of faculty and an audience of their fellow graduate students. Each presentation is followed by time set aside for questions and discussion.

As indicated earlier, the action research project is implemented during the second semester during the student's internship. The implementation takes place with guidance from the mentor teacher and the specialization area faculty member, who also acts as the student's internship supervisor. At the end of the internship, the student writes his/her research paper and prepares a final research presentation. The presentation consists of the previous Introduction/Rationale, Literature Review, and

Methodology, with the addition of Results, Discussion and Implications sections. The presentation is made to a group of faculty members, mentor teachers, and fellow graduate students.

Action Research Projects

In the following section, we describe action research studies conducted by students in four specialization areas: English Language Learners, Instructional Technology, Literacy, and Science. These studies were selected as being representative of the kind of projects undertaken by our M.S. in Elementary Education students. We describe these studies in order to provide a view of the process of the development and then implementation of students' action research projects.

English Language Learners

This specialization began in Fall 2011 due to the influx of English Language Learners (ELLs) into local schools, and the need for pre-service teachers to be prepared to effectively work with these students. One pre-service teacher in this specialization chose to focus her action research study on improving understanding of homophones for ELLs (Montgomery, 2012). This pre-service teacher was placed in a first-grade classroom for her student teaching in a Title 1 school. There were five ELL students in this classroom, all of who struggled to learn new vocabulary. This pre-service teacher wondered how she could help the students learn and retain new vocabulary, specifically homophones which have shown to be particularly difficult for ELLs to differentiate (Opitz, 2009).

Through her review of literature related to effective instruction of ELLs, this pre-service teacher decided to use technology as a means to improve ELL students' knowledge of homophones (Helman, 2009; Lee, McLoughlin, & Chan 2007). In addition, she wanted to see if using technology would motivate ELLs to learn homophones.

The study took place over the course of a six-week period. With the purpose of the study to determine the effects of technology in learning homophones, the pre-service teacher used a comparative assessment to determine whether the ELLs benefited from the use of technology. She instructed the students

first mirroring current vocabulary instruction in the classroom, and then by using Apple iPods ® for instruction.

To begin, the pre-service teacher generated 12 grade-level homophone pairs. The homophone pairs chosen were based on a collaboration of Gentry's "Relative Frequency of Homophones in Children's Writing" and Dr. Edward B. Fry's *Fry's Instant 1000 Words*. Fry's word lists refer to the most common words used in the English Language in order of frequency.

During the first three weeks of the six-week intervention, two pairs of homophones were given at the beginning of each week during small reading group instruction mirroring the current teacher's instruction. The words were said, spelled and defined with a coordinating picture on a laminated index card. The students then wrote the words on a small white board. The Friday of the same week, a picture-matching assessment was given to each student to determine the students' retention of the words. The assessment had the homophones on the left side and the coordinating pictures on the right. The words and pictures were in no particular order. However, only three options of pictures were provided to help ensure that students were not just guessing at the answers. The procedure was repeated for three weeks.

During the second half of the six-week intervention period, Apple iPods ® were implemented for homophone instruction. The new homophone pairs were still introduced during small group instruction; however, now students used the iPods to learn the homophones. The pre-service teacher made a podcast for each homophone instructed during the second half of the research. Each podcast included the homophone, a coordinating picture, the word's spelling, and an appropriate sentence. The same kind of picture-matching assessments were given at the end of each week.

The results showed that the ELLs' assessment scores increased using the iPods to learn homophones. Every participant scored a 100% on his/her matching assessment after using the iPods compared to inconsistent scores prior to using the iPods. In addition, analyses of the observations demonstrated that the ELL students seemed to be more motivated while using the iPods compared to when working in small groups with the white boards. The ELLs remained focused longer and were not

distracted by external factors, such as classroom banter or student questions. While using the iPods, the ELLs' main focus was listening and looking at the iPod screen, where the homophone word, picture, and sentence were located.

Instructional Technology

Van Ness (2012) examined the use of the Tag Reading System in a second grade classroom. The Tag system consists of a hand-held "smart-pen" that will selectively read words, pages, or an entire book to the student as the pen's tip is pressed to a word or icon on a page. The College of Education has a number of these pens and associated books, and the Tag system was introduced to students in the Instructional Technology seminar early in the Fall semester. Van Ness decided to use this system in a research study examining the effect these pens might have on lower-level readers' motivation to read. She quickly became proficient in using the pens, books, and associated software, and she used the system on a trial basis in her fall practicum classroom. During this time, she also met with her spring semester internship teacher to discuss implementing the research in her classroom. The classroom teacher was very excited about the project and worked with Van Ness to identify a group of students for the study.

As the fall semester progressed, Van Ness began to gather reference material for a literature review section, and, working with her host teacher and graduate advisor, began to develop methods for implementing the study and collecting data. By the end of the fall semester, Van Ness had prepared a formal research proposal.

In the study, titled *The Tag Reading System's Effect on Lower Level Readers' Motivation to Read*, Van Ness worked with three students who were classified as lower level readers, as determined by their performance on the Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening. All three students participated in the school's Reading Resource Program. The study was conducted over several weeks, including a week at the beginning of the study set aside for familiarization in the use of the pens and books. Students used the pens and books during the second grade's I.E. (intervention and enrichment) block that takes place for 45 minutes every day. The participants read and worked with the books for about 15 minutes every day for four weeks. The students read fifteen different books during the study.

Van Ness gathered data from personal observations, interviews with the students, with the classroom and Reading Resource teachers, and data from student performance on content-related games and puzzles at the end of each book. She found an increase in motivation to read on the part of all three students during the study. The students asked to use the Tag readers and books during recess, lunch, and during other free time. She also noticed excited conversation among the three students as they discussed the books they had read, were currently reading, or planned to read. Part of this she attributed to the ability to hear and re-hear difficult words or passages. A student would not have to worry about possibly being embarrassed by continually asking a teacher to restate a word or go over a pronunciation. The pen would allow the student to hear the word or text as often as needed.

Van Ness also noticed the high level of interactive reading among the students. They did not use the available headphones, but rather, they held the pens to their ears as if they were talking on a cell phone. They were quick to share a particular passage or word among the group. Reading had become something of a social activity.

Literacy

In fall 2010, a pre-service teacher in the literacy specialization decided to focus her action research study on writing in math and science (Pringle, 2011). She was placed in a fourth-grade classroom for her student teaching where the two teachers at that grade level team-taught. One was responsible for teaching math and science, and the other for teaching language arts and social studies. The pre-service teacher was placed with the teacher who instructed in math and science. The pre-service teacher had noted that when the students were asked to write in their math and science journals in class, the request was often met with "eye rolls and groans". She wondered how to get the students more motivated to write in these critical content areas.

Through her review of the literature, she found that blogging had been used successfully to motivate students to write because blogs gave students the opportunity to write for a "real audience" (Richardson, 2006; Zawilinski, 2009). Writing in traditional composition books without the aid of graphics and without an audience may cause students to view content area

writing as boring and repetitive with little authentic purpose (Armstrong & Rettner, 2008). Students should see writing as a fun, yet purposeful, activity so that they may become more intrinsically motivated to write (Lam & Law, 2007). It was the goal of this pre-service teacher's action research to have her fourth grade students become motivated to write meaningful, content-immersed blog entries in place of using the more traditional classroom math or science journal. With the use of a classroom science/math blog, students posted writings of their own choosing about math and science, answered teacher-generated prompts, and entered internet-based discussions on the content with their classmates.

Data collected over thirteen weeks to look for evidence of motivation related to blog writing included: 1) pre and post study student questionnaires regarding students' opinion of math/science writing 2) student interviews 3) research field notes, and 4) comparison of student blog entries to traditional math/science journal entries.

Fourteen out of the twenty-eight participating students gave their consent to participate in the surveys and questionnaires used to collect data on their opinions toward writing. In order to analyze the results from the Likert scale questions each possible answer was assigned a point value (strongly disagree= 1, disagree= 2, not sure= 3, agree= 4, strongly agree= 5). An average score was then calculated for each student, the class as a whole, and each item presented in the survey. Average scores above 3 indicated a positive attitude toward writing, whereas scores below a 3 indicated a negative attitude toward writing. The average score of all fourteen students increased between the pre and post study surveys.

The free response portion of the questionnaire also reflected students' favor toward blog writing. Every student expressed that they enjoyed writing on the blog. Most students stated that they preferred writing about math and science on the blog to writing about the subjects in their notebooks. Students cited their main reason for this as being able to leave comments on other students' writing and receiving comments on their own postings. Some students also were more open to the idea of writing about math and science outside of assigned class work at the end of the study as expressed in their questionnaire answers. One student

expressed that she would write independently about math or science "if it was fun". Another stated that independent writing would help him to "get smart", and another student expressed that she would write about math or science outside of a school assignment as a way to teach her younger sister about the content.

As a whole class, there was more enthusiasm toward writing on the blog than writing on paper. For example, some students would answer multiple blog prompts per week. As a contrast, most students had to be reminded several times to turn in their notebook writing and most students did not complete the assignment. One student mentioned that it felt 'more important' to write on the blog than to write in his notebook because he knew that others would have the ability to read his writing. Students liked the idea of being able to share their thoughts with others, even mentioning that they wanted to help others with the content they were writing about on the blog. In addition, the perception of "an audience" encouraged students to keep proper writing mechanics in mind when composing their blog posts. Presenting their thoughts on a topic in a public way and receiving feedback through comments showed students that their thoughts were valued and could be influential to others.

Science

Maynard (2012), in a study titled D*o teacher read alouds promote understanding and interest of science concepts in first grade students?*, examined the use of content-related children's literature as an introduction to a science unit. She and her internship teacher's interest in the use of children's literature in science teaching guided the selection of this topic. The fall semester was spent choosing appropriate books for the study and developing methods for data collection. As with all studies, Maynard developed a formal proposal presentation for review by the faculty at the end of the fall semester. The project was implemented during the spring semester.

For this study, Maynard decided to focus on ten students, randomly selected from her first grade classroom. All students in the class would listen to the read-aloud, but only the selected students would provide data for the study. The research took place over the course of three, one-week science units. At the beginning of each unit Maynard would administer a pre-test to the ten students, examining their knowledge regarding the

upcoming content. She would then begin the science class by reading a content-related children's literature book. This was followed by a post-test (same questions as in the pre-test) for the study group. At the beginning of the second day of the unit, Maynard would ask the students in the study group to draw a picture of something they remembered from the book read the previous day. She also interviewed students and the host teacher at the conclusion of the study, determining interest in and enjoyment of the read-alouds.

Maynard found an increase in post-test scores for two out of the three units. The first unit, dealing with seasons, showed no change. She suggested that seasons would be a topic students are quite familiar with, so they would have little difficulty answering the general knowledge questions presented on the tests. Students were not as familiar with the other two topics, hibernation and migration, and they wouldn't be able to draw upon the same level of prior knowledge for the test. The illustrations provided additional evidence of the benefit of an introductory read-aloud. For one of the books, seven of the ten students produced a drawing that was directly related to knowledge that had been gained only from the text. Of the pictures, the two best showed a bear sleeping in a cave and a pile of snakes huddled together to stay warm. Both of these pictures demonstrated that knowledge was gained and retained directly from the read-aloud book.

The interviews with participating students provided additional information as to why the books might be helpful. Student greatly anticipated the read-alouds and often preferred that part of the unit to other activities. They also enjoyed the pictures, and many comments suggested that the pictures were the most memorable part of the read-aloud.

Conclusion

The process of developing and implementing an action research project is has become an intricate part of the teacher preparation program at the University (pseudonym). Going through the process of action research engages our students in highly reflective teaching. They become accustomed to the notion of researching a teaching strategy or approach before bringing it into the classroom. As indicated by Peters & Gray (2007), pre-

service teachers can "learn best if they actually experience the process of inquiry…and if their learning experience is grounded in their own practices" (p. 327). Our next step is to collect data about how our pre-service teachers feel they benefit from their action research projects, and what they might change about the process. This is an essential component to assessing the success of our teacher education program.

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More Than Just Play:
Enhanced Teacher Preparation
Through Authentic Learning

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Abstract

This article describes the research behind and development of Play Lab, a play-based authenic learning environment for university students learning to teach children with developmental disabilities and the case study analysis from the Play Lab's first year of implementation. Data from (a) pre-development surveys which were triangulated with (b) parent and university student surveys, including questions about needs, knowledge, comfort level in working with children with developmental disabilities, (c) university student reflections and survey questions about satisfaction with the course; (d) feedback from parents during Parent Night; and (e) a review of university student projects describe Play Lab's authentic learning environment as reported by the university students.

More Than Just Play: University Students Describe Their Authentic Learning Experience at Play Lab

Introduction

Play Lab was developed in the College of Education at a small liberal arts university in Virginia to help meet the needs involved in training future teachers to work with children with developmental disabilities.With developmental disabilties such as autism on the rise, the demand for trained teachers has not been met (Nougaret, & Scruggs, 2005). In many areas where special education teachers are in high demand, local school systems repeatedly hire special education teachers provisionally, before they complete their full training or receive supervision and feedback on their skills (Katsiyannis, et al., 2003; Nougaret, & Scruggs, 2005). Faculty felt it was imperative to develop a unique opportunity to train teachers by having students participate in a supervised authentic learning experience as part of a course. (Myers, 2009).

The name Play Lab was chosen for this authentic learning experience because it is in fact a "lab" model by which the university students can receive training in working with children with developmental disabilities. "Play" was chosen because each time the lab was offered, the themes were based upon play-based learning. This case study provides an exploration of the Play Lab experience for university students, examining "How did university students experience Play Lab? How did university students describe their experience and what did university students describe as their "take-away" from the experience?

This article begins by describing the research behind Play Lab development, the course in which students ran Play Lab, and the research-based strategies taught in the course. Play Lab set up and university student activities are covered along with results of the case study analysis of the university student experience. The article concludes with a discussion of the need for supervised learning experiences and suggestions for faculty interested in authentic learning.

Literature Review and Pre-Development Surveys

The literature review was conducted as part of a year-long research fellowship. Peer-reviewed journal articles were examined on several related topics including: teacher preparation, authentic learning programs, developmental disability needs, pre-service special education teacher needs, and trends in special education. Two large disability studies published at the time Play Lab was in development were found to be instrumental in supporting the development of Play Lab. One was the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia (2009). COMMISSION DRAFT: Assessment of Services for Virginians with Autism (JLARC, 2009), which reviewed services for children with autism in the state and the second was the Living with Disability Survey, a nation-wide disability study (Easter Seals, 2010).

After the literature review was completed, surveys were developed following Mertens and McLaughlin's *Research Methods in Special Education* and Merriam's *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* guidelines (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995, Merriam, 1998). Actual survey questions were based on Fink's "How to Design Surveys," strategies from *The Survey Toolkit* (Fink, 1995). Responders were encouraged to share the survey with others involved in working and/or living with children with developmental disabilities in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. Surveys examined local, regional, and national needs for training teachers to work with students with developmental disabilities, and university students were suveyed about their current preparation for teaching. Surveys were sent to special education coordinators, parent resource centers, child development centers, and community service boards. In total, 166 people answered the survey used to develop the Play Lab.

Survey findings were consistent with the literature review. 100% of respondents cited lack of services for children with disabilities and a need for improved teacher preparation in working with children with disabilities. 87% of those surveyed indicated it was "extremely important that university students receive supervised experience working with children with

developmental disabilities as part of their preparation" (Myers, 2009).

Play Lab: An Authentic Learning Experience

The definition of authentic learning is "learning by doing, through incorporation of real-world problem-solving" (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007). Play Lab's real-world problem is the high number of children diagnosed with developmental disabilities coupled with a shortage of teachers trained to work with children with these disabilities and lack of community programs to serve these children. Play Lab allowed university students to learn how to teach students with disabilities and receive supervision and feedback on their work as part of a university course, while addressing the the real-world problem of addressing how to provide university students with supervised experience within a graduate course.

> University students participated in these components of authentic learning at Play Lab:
>
> (a) collaborating in a community of practice,
>
> (b) using multiple sources of data,
>
> (c) engaging in reflection,
>
> (d) using integrated assessment, and
>
> (e) roviding multiple interpretations and outcomes of their work with children.
> (Lombardi & Oblinger, pp. 3-4).

University students were taught research-based teaching strategies and interventions as part of the course. Ways to collect data and the importance of teacher reflection was also emphasized at Play Lab. While university students were not involved in conducting action research while at Play Lab, they did use data collection teachniques they were taught to make data based decisions and reflections.

Play-based activities were chosen as the main technique to support children at Play Lab as they "allow children to practice language, social, and behavioral skills in a relatively safe

environment where mistakes are tolerated and repetition of the practice develops confidence and competence" (Greenspan, & Weider, 2006; Smith, 2001, p.1). University students were also taught some of the more widely used classroom techniques to complement the play-based strategies. These included: using visual supports (Kabot, Reeve, & McBride, 2010), TEACCH/ structured teaching (Carnahan, et. al., 2011; Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2004), sensory integration strategies (Pfeiffer, et. al., 2011; White & Wake, 2011), the Model Me Kids social skills curriculum (Hu, 2008), which uses videomodeling (Bellini, & Akullian, 2007), social stories and role plays (Gray & Garand, 1993), and use of the 1 2 3 Magic Behavior Management program (Phelan, 2010).

Course Information and Training for University Students

Participating students were enrolled in a 16 week graduate student course. They participated in six or seven (fall 7, spring 6) class sessions (6:00 p.m.-8:40 p.m.) of course content and training before running Play Lab. Students received in-depth training in teaching social skills, play-based approaches, behavior mangement strategies and improving communication; they also participated in transdiscipliinary collaboration (VAC, 2005).

A break in Play Lab was scheduled for the third week to allow university students to meet again in class. During this class session, students received written feedback on their work, participated in role plays, and faculty spent additional time covering data collection and reflection techniques. In addition to teaching class sessions, coordinators moved throughout each classroom providing guidance, modeling strategies, and assisting in activities. Students met after Play Lab to reflect on the night's experience, identified areas of strength and for improvement, and came together to work on future goals for the following week. Students received written evaluative feedback on their work at mid-point and at the end of Play Lab.

As part of the course requirements, students developed a parent training binder with strategies they could use to help their child. Included in this binder was a description for the parents of the ways their child enjoyed and participated in Play Lab, a discussion of their strengths and a list of potential ways that the

family could support areas of growth for their child. Anecdotal stories were provided to the parents along with an explanation of the different classrooms and activities in which their child participated. Data collection forms were provided to the parents so they could see how their child progressed in each of the classrooms.

Play Lab's First Year of Implementation

Twenty-one children and families participated in Play Lab. Twenty-four university students participated in the course and Play Lab. One graduate student took the course a second time. Every family received a family training binder and participated in a training specific to their child.

Course Information
The first time the course was taught (fall semester), students met in class for 7 weeks and ran the Play Lab for the remaining 8 weeks. The second time the course was taught (spring semester) an adjustment was made to allow for 6 sessions of class, two Play Lab sessions, one in-class session, and then 6 weeks left of running the Play Lab. This allowed students to gain more in-depth feedback on their work, an evaluation of their performance to date, time for coordinators to train students in data collection and to review requirements for the parent binder.

Play Lab Schedule
Play Lab met weekly at a local occupational therapy clinic for 8 weeks each semester, from 6:00 p.m.-7:15 p.m. After each session, students worked together in groups to reflect on how it went, madesuggestions for the following week, and received feedback on their plans.

Play Lab Participants
Play Lab served children from the local region, which consisted of nine different school districts. Participating children ranged in age from 3 -13 and had diagnoses including autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, mood disorder, developmental delays, sensory processing disorder, learning disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, visual

impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities, cerebral palsy, and hydrocephalus. 85% of children participating at Play Lab also had an intellectual disability, and many of the children participating had been diagnosed with multiple disabilities. Coordinators sent applications to school systems, parent resource centers, and disability agencies to recruit applicants and a university committee determined participants.

University Student Participants

　　Play Lab was a requirement of a 3 credit graduate level course (that could also be taken by senior undergraduates as an elective). The elective course was titled "Special Topics in Special Education." All students knew at the time of registration that they would run a program for children with disabilities. The first semester the Play Lab class attracted 7 graduate students, all of whom were either teaching general education or training to teach general education. The second semester the course enrolled 17 and attracted a greater variety of students, including beginning special education teachers, more general education teachers, supervisors of special education and teacher trainers, and two students who asked to work at Play Lab for field experience hours for another course.

Figure 1: University Student Participants

Play Lab Fall	7 students students already teaching general education or in their final semester of their M.Ed. in general education program.
Play Lab Spring	17 students. 2 undergraduate students took the course (one in education, one in psychology), 1 art teacher, 1 autism coordinator for a local school district, 1 music teacher, 1 supervisor of early childhood programs/teacher trainer, 9 provisional special education teachers (2 of which were also parents of children with special needs) and 2 elementary teachers starting their career.

Play Lab Coordinators
      Play Lab was coordinated by the authors. One coordinator was a faculty member in special education and the other a director of a local disabilty agency. The faculty coordinator had over 20 years of disability experience, a Ph.D. in Special Education and taught the Special Topics in Special Education course. The other coordinator was a licensed professional counselor, who had a M.Ed. in Special Education and over 20 years of experience working in the disability field.

Classroom Goals and Description of Activities
      Children spent approximately 15-20 minutes in each classroom at Play Lab. Each classroom allowed for university students to support the children in learning new goals through play-based activities.

Figure 2: Classroom Activities and Focus Skills

Classroom	Activity	Focus skills
1.	Social Skills and Snack	Communication, friendship, table manners
2.	Communication, friendship, table manners	Communication, sensory regulation, peer play, attention
3.	TEACCH/ Handwriting	TEACCH/Handwriting
4.	Free Play	Communication with adults and children, typical play with toys, sharing and other peer-play activities
5.	Sensory Area	Sensory regulation, increasing tolerance of textures, emotional regulation through play

Methods and Analysis

This study employed a phenomenological research design in order to understand the meaning university students made of their experience and contains data from (a) pre-development focus groups and interviews; which were triangulated with (b) parent and university student surveys, including questions about needs, knowledge, comfort level in working with children with developmental disabilities, (c) university student reflections and survey questions about satisfaction with the course; (d) feedback from parents during Parent Night; and (e) a review of university student projects. This case study provides an exploration of the Play Lab experience for university students, examining "How did university students describe their Play Lab experience and what meaning did students make of the experience?"

Data Collection and Analysis

After Play Lab, a follow-up survey (using the same guidelines), was given to those participating in Play Lab. 24 university students, 2 coordinators, and 22 families completed surveys which were analyzed for consistent themes along with a review of student reflections, projects, and student data collection. The constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used along with the computer program, NVivo, to assist with the development of themes and categories (QSR International, 2003). Analysis of information was "issue focused," to describe what has been learned from all of the respondents about students in this particular situation and to achieve both local and inclusive integration (Weiss, 1994, p. 153). Analysis was ongoing to identify themes, patterns, and additional questions. Coding matrices were developed and refined through comparison and on-going interaction with all data sources. Categorical examples and non-examples were analyzed and interpreted.

The goal of this study was to examine Play Lab. Researchers could find no similar programs when it was developed. Purposeful sampling was used in this study and Merriam (1998) points out that in "qualitative research, a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what

is generally true of the many" (p. 208). Readers will need to determine if their situations are similar and what from the study is applicable to them (Walker, 1980, p. 34)

Questions in the survey were shared with researchers in the field for feedback on question formats and methodology and this was used to make modfications to the surveys. Triangulation was used by (a) using all surveys and information obtained to verify information from participants, and (b) the use of "pooled judgement" through discourse with the university students and peer examination through reviewing study findings with researchers in the field (Denzin, 1970; Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Researchers's biases were clearly stated to clarify personal assumptions and theoretical orientations and member checks throughout the study served to assure that researcher interpretations were accurate. These steps are considered the "the most important way to rule out misinterpretations and ensure that researchers maintain the correct perspective" (Maxwell, 1996).

The limitations of this study include the small number of participants and that the Play Lab has only run for two semesters. The results will not represent what other university students would experience if they did not take the Play Lab course, however they are important in that they demonstrate what can be developed in a university course.

Results

While not the focus of this article, it is important to note that a review of data collection forms demonstrates that all (100%) of the children progressed (in varying degrees) in each of their target areas throughout the weeks that Play Lab was held. Circles of communication, behavior, and attention improved at Play Lab. Parents indicated they saw many benefits as well. One parent described Play Lab as "the key that opened many doors for my son."

How University Student Experienced Play Lab and the Meaning they Made of the Experience

Researchers were interested in what meaning the university students made of their experience at Play Lab and what "take-

aways" they gained from the experience. University students were asked about this and their experience running Play Lab. Overall students reported Play Lab being a "positive experience" and that they learned "things they could take to their job." The only negative response received from a student was "wanting more time to run Play Lab during the semester." Commonly cited responses included:

(a) growth in recognizing disability characteristics,

(b) feeling confident in working with children with developmental disabilities,

(c) learning how to reflect on children's performance and data,

(d) having a variety of strategies they can use,

(e) understanding how children experience grief in their lives due to working with several children who recently experienced loss, and

(f) gaining confidence in training parents.

Coordinators reviewed student reflections weekly and found that as the course progressed, student reflection skills greatly improved. Students went from describing how they felt they did to reviewing what worked/what didn't and to seeking better ways to support their assigned child. Student reflections increased in length and included seeking responses from other group members and looking for references and materials as Play Lab continued.

A sample student group reflection early in Play Lab read:

"Overall the group evening went well. Everyone stayed flexible and switched in and out with the kids in the group as needed. The group made it to all classes but not necessarily with all kids at each station."

This same group moved beyond making sure each child participated in each classroom and later wrote:

"We are very happy with some of the accomplishments of this group but know that from now on we need to be much

more specific and begin working on detailed mini-plans for the group and for each student in order to achieve the goals by the end of Play Lab. We discussed each of the classrooms and everyone in the group agreed on:
1) For TEACCH, we will start next session with the workbook. We feel we need to see how much each student can do and then decide whether the shaving crème or playdough will be a better choice for practicing handwriting.
2) For Free Play, we will continue to focus on interactions the kids have while playing and on responding directly to questions about the game, the toy, or the situation.
3) For the sensory room, the same kind of interaction will be encouraged but the toys will "go visit" other toys and they'll "say hello." We will also give the toys a "shower." We might even create a story so the students or the toys can act it out.
4) For the Social Skills room, we will have the group snack time again and we will continue to encourage good manners at the table. We will focus more attention on the Say Hello video as a group, then imitate those interactions more accurately by turning to the person and responding.
5) For the obstacle course, more interaction among students will be designed in order to have a set of three or four activities the students will do as a group working together.
6) The use of the clean up song and the it's time to go song will be practiced to help with transitions whenever necessary." (Group 3 reflection)

Overall, the feedback from the students was very positive and encouraging. Students identified many things (sensory integration strategies, classroom teaching strategies, and ways to work with non-verbal children) that they would like to use in their own classrooms. They felt that they had "learned patience" and that "play can be used as a way to make learning fun and can initiate many social and academic skills in students." Learning how to collect data on children was also frequently cited and one student indicated the data sheets "are going to help me most at my job." TEACCH tasks were also highly valued by the students. One student wrote, "I will use the TEACCH boxes at my job. I personally enjoyed seeing the kids do the tasks." A student who was a teacher trainer stated they learned "some good ways to supervise teachers for my job." Another student wrote, "I saw

and learned how to help parents." All university students described their confidence level as increased in using data collection and sharing training methods with parents. 100% of university students indicated they perceived the experience of running Play Lab as something that would be "beneficial to their career."

In examining data from all sources, three emergent themes were particularly strong and consistent across sources: appropriate teaching methods, focus on all disability-related impairments, and providing resources to the community.

Figure 3: Themes

Appropriate Teaching Methods	Focus on All Disability Related Impairments	Community Service and Parent Training
Related Impairments Community Service and Parent Training Students received supervision and feedback of their work. They reflected on how things went and were given more strategies to try when something was difficult.	Students experienced an increased focus on all difficulties associated with disability. Students saw need for skill development in multiple areas.	Students indicated they enjoyed providing much needed services outside their places of employment.
Students gained knowledge and skill in use of research based strategies	Students were able to see characteristics first hand rather than just learning from lecture or textbook reading.	Students developed resources for the families and community to support children.
Students were trained in how to collect data and use it to make educational decisions	Students learned how to assess students and address delays through data, intervention, and goal development and reflection.	Students trained parents in follow up activities and intervention strategies
Students practiced strategies before using them in in a K-12 classroom.	Students practiced strategies before using them in in a K-12 classroom.	Students were able to practice collaborating and training parents.

Theme 1: Appropriate Teaching Methods.

University students described benefitting from receiving appropriate training in research-based strategies and the opportunity to practice using them (JLARC, 2009). The ability to see disability characteristics first-hand and implement teaching strategies while receiving supervision (in addition to gaining experience providing consultative services to families) is something university students indicated they did not encounter in a typical course. Students cited receiving feedback on their skills before they tried a strategy in the classroom. They indicated that the training in conducting data collection and reflection allowed them "to better understand how to determine the effectiveness of research-based methods used with the children with disabilities" (JLARC, 2009).

Theme 2: Focus on All Disabilty-Related Impairments.

Students learned how to address needs, including generalizing new skills through assessments, effective intervention, and goal development. (JLARC, 2009). Students cited "learning teaching strategies to address more than just academic deficits." They indicated they were able to "see disabilty characteristics first-hand, rather than just reading about them in a textbook." Students felt that Play Lab focused on addressing the specific impairments related to disabilites in the following areas: behavior, social skills, sensory integration, communication skills, and academic skills (JLARC, 2009). One student explained, "I didn't realize just how important reflection was before Play Lab and that they "learned to reflect back on data and the child's experience to make teaching decisions."

Theme 3: Community Service and Parent Training.

Students described Play Lab as providing a "much-needed service" to the community. They "enjoyed providing resources to the families and community while learning to teach." Students indicated being intially "scared to complete the parent training," and stated the Parent Training was helpful in learning to "collaborate with families" and "collaborate with the community." All university students indicated that they "learned from this exercise" as they "had little experience collaborating."

Challenges in Implementation and Future Goals

Due to the limited research on authentic learning, it was initially challenging to convince university adminstration of the value of the experience and to receive the go-ahead to implement Play Lab. Fundraising was an additional concern in starting Play Lab.

Coordinators would like to find/development instruments that would allow them to collect more quantative data, including data that explores whether university students make changes in their teaching as a result of Play Lab. Examining if parents continued using strategies at home is another area for exploration. Coordinators would like to examine what the children found most valuable at Play Lab. In addition, coordinators would like to expand data collection and one day have university students complete action research as part of the course.

Developing an Authentic Learning Experience within a Course

Analysis of university student experience provided evidence that described Play Lab as a positive experience. It is important to also note that student course evaluation feedback was extremely positive and that the the second time the course was offered, enrollment more than doubled.

Listed below are suggestions from Play Lab coordinators for faculty interested in developing an authentic learning experience as part of their course.

Figure 4: Suggestions for Developing an Authentic Learning Experience, such as Play Lab within a Course

Research Needs.	Research local, regional, state, and national needs to help guide you in developing your authentic learning experience.
Give Time to Practice.	Classtime allowed university students to practice encouraging each other, to better prepare for Play Lab and to get comfortable with receiving coordinator feedback.
Provide Midterm Feedback.	This served as a reminder to students what they were being graded on and it allowed coordinators to provide 1:1 feedback to the university students without children present.
Schedule a Class Meeting.	Schedule a Class Meeting.
Use Highly-Trained Coordinators	Coordinators must be comfortable discussing and demonstrating the use of play-based activities.
Keep numbers low at first.	Keep the number of children low at first to make sure that there are enough students to provide support.
Schedule Time for Administative issues.	Marketing the program and course, answering questions, and community outreach was vital to the success of Play Lab.
Provide Samples.	Students benefitted from having sample parent binders/parent training rubrics to review as they developed their own assignments and their TEACCH tasks.
Relate Play Lab Actvities to Classroom.	Students wanted to know that they were learning K-12 special education research-based practices that were being taught in a community setting, not just community strategies that were only to be used in the community.
Model Reflection.	Coordinators modeled reflection by sharing their experiences and views on each session, and asked students to reflect on what worked, the week's successes/struggles, and then create goals for the upcoming Play Lab.

Discussion and Implications

University students indicated they were introduced to skills needed to run a classroom for children with a variety of developmental disabilities and learned specific research-based teaching strategies at Play Lab. They described learning "the importance of providing structure in their classrooms through visual supports" and "how data should drive instructional decisions. Several students shared that they were beginning to generalize the knowledge they gained at Play Lab and "put it into their classroom." Lastly 100% of university students indicated feeling "more confident and comfortable working with children with a variety of challenging developmental disabilities" and "better able to train parents in how to assist their child."

Teacher preparation programs often struggle to meet the needs of adult learner. Authentic learning environments, such as Play Lab, may serve as a viable tool for training individuals to work with children with disabilities (Muwana & Gaffney, 2011). Play Lab provided beginning and pre-service teachers the opportunity to work 1:1 with children with a variety of disabilities under faculty supervision. Analysis of data provided insight into how university students experienced running Play Lab and what they felt they gained from the experience. Insight into the needs that could possibly be met by authentic learning (pre-service/beginning teacher, parent, child, educator, community, etc.) was also provided .

With the rise of alternative licensure routes for teachers in special education, more research into authentic learning environments as a way to train and supervise beginning teachers who will not have a full student teaching experience will be necessary. Investigation of how authentic learning environments, such as Play Lab, may contribute to current on-going research in the education and teacher education field, along with investigation of the research-based methods used at Play Lab with children with a variety of disabilities should be further explored.

Conclusion

Authentic learning may serve as a valuable teaching tool at the higher education level, in K-12 classrooms, and in the community. Teacher preparation programs struggle to meet the needs of adult learners needing experience teaching children, especially children with disabilities. In addition research supports the use of authentic learning environments as a viable tool for training individuals to work with children with disabilities (Muwana & Gaffney, 2011). Play Lab provided beginning and preservice teachers the opportunity to work 1:1 with children with a variety of disabilities under faculty supervision. It also provided some disability resources to community children and parents. Additional research on authentic learning is needed to determine how programs such as this may prepare future educators while providing opportunities to support faculty, students, and the community.

At a time when university students are habitually hired as provisional teachers before they complete their entire coursework, our beginning and preservice teachers (especially those teaching students with disabilities) are injudiciously frantic attempting to learn teaching strategies "on the job." As teacher educators, it is imperative that we consider other options to train teachers, especially those who are career-changers or working adults, outside the typical daytime practicum/student teaching course standards of the past. Play Lab provided an authentic learning environment for adult university students enrolled in the course, allowing university students to actually experience teaching children with developmental disabilities (outside typical public school classroom hours) and receive supervision and feedback on their experience.

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Place of Learning, Place of Practice: Elements that Affect the Transfer of Teachers' Professional Development to Students' Learning in Classrooms

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to bring to light elements that teachers require in order for learning gained during professional development sessions to find a place in their classroom practices and to affect student learning. Through their inquiry with K-12 educators at the Margaret Sue Copenhaver Institute for Teaching and Learning, a professional development program in southwest Virginia, the authors have devised recommendations regarding teacher needs and preferences for a climate that nurtures continuing professional growth. The authors also seek to define a data-gathering method that illuminates teachers' productive practices as framed by the Virginia Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers.

Introduction

> For many teachers, the idea of professional development is met with groans, the result of conjuring up scenes of large, crowded auditoriums where teachers listen to an expert on one subject or another speak for two to three hours. The topic may or may not be the "theme" for the year, but frequently, after the presentation and a few weeks of conversations, the topic fades into the dustbin of themes, like so many before it. Does this have to be the way educators conduct professional development? (Heller, 2005, p. 7.).

The scenario that Heller describes above raises the following important questions about both the purpose and the *process of professional development programs: What is the intended aim of such programs?* And, *what elements support effective transference of professional development to the classroom and result in enhanced student learning?* The National Staff Development Council defines professional development as "the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students" (2001, p. 2). This definition answers the first question with the premise that high-quality professional development should benefit not only educators, but also their students. It suggests that teachers' learning within the context of a professional development venue is a means toward an end, not the end itself. The ultimate site to determine the effectiveness of professional development is each teacher's classroom. Only when student achievement is enhanced as a result of improved teaching practice has the professional development program achieved its aim.

The purpose of this article is to consider characteristics of professional development that support transference to the classroom. Utilizing a framework designed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), the authors will explore three dimensions of professional development: *Content, Process and Context.* Particular attention will be focused on the Context dimension because of its emphasis on implementation within a school setting. The NSDC dimensions will frame examination of the effectiveness of the Margaret Sue Copenhaver Institute for Teaching and Learning, an annual professional development program for educators in southwest Virginia. Additionally, the

authors propose further assessment of the Copenhaver Institute's effectiveness through collection of data gathered using *Virginia's Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers* (VUPS). Examination of this data will allow exploration of the classroom context within which teachers transfer professional learning to impact student achievement.

Literature Review

In 2012, the Commonwealth of Virginia unveiled *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers* (VUPS), its state-wide stipulations for high quality evaluation (Virginia Department of Education [VDoE]). According to VUPS (2012), the ultimate purpose of a teacher evaluation system is to "optimize student learning and growth." However, transferring teacher knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs from a place of learning to a place of practice, to a classroom where this knowledge can affect student learning, is not automatic. Without appropriate reinforcement through classroom practice, a newly learned way of thinking or a teaching skill will likely disappear into Heller's "dustbin of themes" (2005, p. 7). Educational theorists (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Murrell, 2001; Phelps, 1998; Randi & Zeichner, 2004; Sessums, 2006; Wegner, 1998; Zeichner, 2005) have issued a steady call to enhance in-service training by situating teacher learning in school-based professional learning communities. Without the support and shared risk-taking of a learning community, the innovations that are studied in a professional development session may remain "alien, literal, fragmented, [and] non-negotiable" (Wegner, 1998, p. 220). However, an intentional, "[m]utual engagement in a shared practice," conducted within the schools where teachers work, can instigate "a process of constant fine-tuning" (Wegner, 1998, p. 214) of new procedures.

In addition, a teacher's own students are often the strongest influences that guide her professional learning. Teachers point out trial and error and immediate feedback from students as factors that make the classroom a setting in which teachers' best professional learning logically occurs. Virginia's Uniform Performance Standards acknowledge this source of learning by mandating multiple data sources that demonstrate teachers' impact on student growth and by focusing on the relationship between teacher practice and student learning outcomes (2012).

For teachers to be able to process these multiple data sources, they require opportunities for self-questioning and reflection about their own practices and about the values and norms that underlie the schools in which they work (Flores, 2003). However, schools often fail to provide a generative, collaborative learning community during professional development offerings. Thus it is difficult for teachers to build bonds of trust among one another, enabling the group to examine its practice critically and to take risks that promote the entire group's development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). To achieve this result, Asian and European teachers participate in learning communities that invite faculty members to plan together and observe one another's instruction. In these settings, teachers are offered a menu of school-based professional development selections which include such possibilities as 15-25 hours of planning and collaboration time each week at school, or up to a month set aside annually to attend professional seminars and visit other schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 198).

Though these international practices have clear benefits, schools in the U.S. tend to house anemic learning communities, yielding flimsy support for implementing best teaching practices. If we want "consequential changes in the lives of teachers" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 295), transformations that yield improved student performance and a better-informed teacher workforce, we will have to ensure that teachers receive opportunities to build professional development communities similar to the ones that yield results in international settings. To this end, NDSC challenges schools to set targets of devoting 10% of their budgets to professional development and a quarter of teachers' time to collaborating with colleagues (2001, p. 12).

Maintaining a focus on teacher learning in schools is a logical and significant step toward improving teacher preparation. Sessums (2006) writes, "[A] school must be more than a place of instruction or a 'knowledge distribution center;' it must also be a community of practice where members negotiate their own enterprise and shape their own boundaries while remaining congruent with larger institutional policies and procedures (2006, para.4)." When teachers feel a shared sense of responsibility and a collective intellectual purpose, studies show achievement gaps narrow (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In such

communities, teachers try out new learning in their place of practice, testing the fit of their new knowledge against the real-world constraints that are unique to their schools, and away from the rarified environment in which staff development occurred. For such communities to develop, Darling-Hammond points out that schools must establish an infrastructure that supports new and veteran teachers, a framework the US consistently fails to provide (2010, p. 194).

Research Question

Recognizing the challenges inherent in building professional communities that address complex student needs within an increasingly diverse student body, a team of staff developers in Virginia has considered several questions related to the transfer that must occur in order to move new knowledge and skills from the training site into the classroom. Through this research, the team is considering the following question: *What characteristics of professional development support effective transference of teacher learning to the classroom and result in enhanced student learning?*

Research Design and Methodology

The question has been explored in the context of the Margaret Sue Copenhaver Institute for Teaching and Learning (MSCI), an annual professional development program now in its fourteenth year. Two of the central purposes of MSCI are identified as: 1) to provide cutting-edge, relevant educational theory for educators, and 2) to offer opportunities for participants to consider effective ways to translate theory into classroom practice. Toward these aims, MSCI adopted a three-day program design, offering the institute each June shortly after schools recessed for the summer. The date was chosen at the suggestion of the Institute's Steering Committee, a group consisting mostly of PreK-12 teachers and administrators. The members believed the June date would allow teachers an opportunity to: 1) reflect with colleagues on their previous year's work, 2) find time for renewal and appreciation of their work commitment and accomplishments, and 3) glean new learning that could be processed over the summer in preparation for a new year.

On MSCI's opening day, participants are introduced to educational theory relevant to the institute's selected annual theme during keynote addresses and discussion sessions with keynote speakers. On the institute's second day, small-group breakout sessions are offered, presented by educators who model examples of classroom practices that implement the theory. On the final day, time is provided for participants to process learning and to begin to construct their own classroom plans. The three-day institute closes with a celebratory program.

MSCI limits its annual enrollment to 100-150 participants and structures the three-day program to include ample opportunities for collegial, free flowing conversations. The manageable number encourages a sense of community with frequent interactions and opportunities for an exchange of experiences and knowledge. The result is a collaborative experience that has been described by participants as: "a place to meet academic needs … (as well as) a time to sit and talk, share and _laugh_ together," and "a professional development opportunity that provides restoration, revitalization and renewal."

MSCI is grounded in constructivist theory, a belief that knowledge is not given to individuals. Instead, learning is a process of individuals creating meaning in the world, not discovering it or having it defined for them. This process of creating meaning requires individuals to actively participate in a lesson vs. observing a model. The institute's annual themes align with this theoretical perspective, helping teachers develop a classroom practice that allows students to be active participants in their own learning. Researchers whose work informs the theory of constructivism are targeted as keynote speakers. Past presenters include:

- Carol Tomlinson - Differentiated Instruction
- Howard Gardner - Multiple Intelligence Theory and Differentiated Instruction
- David and Roger Johnson - Cooperative Learning
- Lynn Erickson - Concept-Based Curriculum
- Grant Wiggins – Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction

Each year, MSCI participants assess the effectiveness of the institute by completing a survey at the close of the program. The surveys use a five-point Likert scale. A one on the scale indicates a participant's strong disagreement with an evaluation statement. A response of five indicates a participant's strong agreement with the evaluation statement. A response of three indicates a participant's neutral response; he or she has not been impacted negatively or positively.

Over the years, this assessment tool has been revised to include many of the professional development standards noted by educational organizations and scholars. The National Staff Development Council provides a compilation of 12 standards for staff development which are particularly relevant to MSCI's underlying goals. The 12 NSDC (2001) standards may be considered in a three-dimensional schema – standards of *Content, Process and Context* – as a way to organize the research findings from which the standards are drawn. NSDC provides the following description for these dimensions:

- *Context* standards address the organization, system and culture in which the new learning will be implemented. They describe the structures that must be in place for successful learning to occur.
- *Process* standards refer to the how of staff development. They describe the learning processes used in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Process standards address the use of data, evaluation, and research.
- *Content* standards refer to the *what* of staff development…. Staff development content addresses the knowledge and skills that ensure all students are successful (p. 2).

Data reported in the following tables are based on MSCI surveys conducted from 2004-2011. For each year, a mean score is reported for selected evaluation statements reflective of the NSDC *Content, Process and Context* dimensions.

Results

In its early years, the MSCI assessment survey focused heavily on the *Process* and *Content* dimensions recommended in the NSDC standards. Participants were asked to respond to Content issues such as whether sessions were informative and the degree to which theory presented was applicable to classroom practice. *Process* was also addressed, including items that focused on MSCI's learning environment, the structural design of the institute's three-day program, and the significance of collegial interaction and collaboration as part of the learning process. Additionally, participants were invited to expand on their Likert scale responses with open-ended comments. One veteran participant described her experience as "inspirational and right on target in addressing actual classroom issues. At the same time, they keep me attuned to best practices (of) research and cutting-edge theory."

Approximately 40% of each year's MSCI participants are returning veterans; many have attended eight or more institutes. These individuals receive a slightly modified survey so that MSCI organizers can gauge the impact of previous institute participation on classroom practice, offering a glimpse of the implementation of participant learning within a school setting. Interestingly, the 2004 survey from veteran participants yielded noteworthy responses related to the third NSDC domain, *Context*. [See * items in Table 1]

Table 1

Veteran Participant Survey Results – Selected Items (2004)	(n=50)
A. The educational theory presented was applicable to my classroom.	4.88
B. Keynote speakers were informative and engaging.	4.92
C. The institute environment encouraged me to learn.	4.76
D. My teaching practice is noticeably different because of my previous learning at MSCI.	*4.16
E. My students are demonstrating more learning as a result of instructional changes that have resulted because of my participation in MSCI.	*4.00
F. Since coming to MSCI, other professionals have noted that my instructional practices have changed.	*3.29
G. I think attending the institute again will further my skills and understandings of teaching.	4.72

Responses are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strong Agreement (5) to Strong Disagreement (1).

While veterans provided consistently positive ratings to survey items focused on *Content* and *Process* (Items A, B, C and G), several items on the survey received significantly lower responses. Conspicuously, these items included: Item D. - "My teaching practice is noticeably different because of my previous learning at MSCI," Item E. - "My students are demonstrating more learning as a result of instructional changes that have resulted because of my participation at MSCI," and Item F. - "Since coming to MSCI, other professionals have noted that my instructional practices have changed." The data suggested that, while educators responded favorably to their three-day professional development experience, their acquired knowledge and skills were not necessarily transferring to their classroom practices and subsequently were not increasing student learning effectively.

In response to this finding, the MSCI team revised the assessment instruments around the *Context* dimension. On surveys disseminated in 2005-2011, the issue of knowledge and skill transfer was probed more deeply. During these years, under the category, "What I Learned at the Institute," veteran respondents again confirmed the effectiveness of *Content* and *Process* items. [See Table 2] Items such as H. "has provided me with new teaching skills," I. "has provided me with new knowledge," J. "is authentic or has relevance in my classroom," K. "can change my classroom practice," and L. "caused me to reflect on my beliefs about teaching and learning," received ratings ranging from 4.34 to 4.67, with a mean of 4.6.

Table 2

Veteran Participant Survey Results – Selected Item: "What I learned at the Institute . . . ."	2005 (n=102)	2006 (n=74)	2007 (n=98)	2008 (n=103)	2009 (n=69)	2010 (n=64)	2011 (n=77)	Mean (n=84)
H. has provided me with new teaching skills.	4.57	4.38	4.35	4.40	4.35	4.66	4.34	4.43
I. has provided me with new knowledge.	4.67	4.54	4.58	4.67	4.66	4.59	4.47	4.59
J. is authentic or has relevance in my classroom.	4.50	4.65	4.51	4.49	4.56	4.48	4.55	4.53
K. can change my classroom practice.	4.41	4.53	4.53	4.44	4.35	4.41	4.34	4.43
L. caused me to reflect on my beliefs about teaching and learning.	4.52	4.62	4.67	4.75	4.60	4.55	4.55	4.60
M. will be difficult to implement due to my school division policies and practices.	2.55	3.00	2.88	3.00	2.58	2.69	3.00	*2.81
N. will be difficult to implement due to my local school's administration.	2.27	2.86	2.81	2.86	2.52	2.72	2.97	*2.71
O. will be difficult to implement due to state policies and regulations.	2.67	3.00	2.79	2.85	2.38	2.97	3.22	*2.84
P. will be difficult to implement due to federal policies and regulations.	2.55	3.00	2.62	2.83	2.29	3.03	3.16	*2.78

Responses are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strong Agreement (5) to Strong Disagreement (1).

However, responses to Items M. through P. raised additional questions. These items, which connected a teacher's difficulties in implementation to local, state, and federal regulations, as well as to school administration, received ratings between 2.27 and 3.22, with a mean of 2.78. Because the items are stated in terms of respondent agreement or disagreement, the data suggests a neutral response to these items. While this finding did not necessarily confirm a significant classroom implementation problem, it suggested that MSCI planners had not adequately considered the potential disconnect between the professional training provided during the institute and the climate in which teachers practice. According to NSCD (2001), this *Context*, "the organization, system and culture in which the new learning will be implemented" (p. 2), is a vital dimension in transferring teacher learning. Thus, it is plausible that when professional developers do not intentionally consider transfer of teachers' knowledge and skill, the effectiveness of professional learning is undermined.

The NSDC Context standard (2001) extends consideration beyond the places where teachers learn, such as the Margaret Sue Copenhaver Institute, to the climate that must exist in order for the content of professional development sessions to become a part of teachers' classroom practice. NSDC (2001) identifies three elements of *Context* – learning communities, leadership and resources – elements that must be addressed to ensure that teacher professional development enhances student learning:

- *Learning Communities* – Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.
- **Leadership** – Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.
- *Resources* – Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration (p. 5)

Discussion and Implications

In order for teacher learning to transfer into classroom practice, teachers need sustained learning communities, supportive leadership, and adequate resources (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Heller, 2005; NSDC, 2001). However, a school's budget and institutional restraints may limit the extent to which schools can provide these elements to support effective professional development transfer. Here, external professional groups can assist, by providing quality opportunities for ongoing learning and supporting the development and upkeep of a professional learning community.

Data gathered in past MSCI evaluation surveys suggests that the annual three-day event's "place of learning" experience is positive. Consistently strong survey responses from veteran participants during 2005-2011 [see Table 3] indicated that the seeds for an ongoing professional learning community are planted during the annual MSCI experience.

Response items such as Items Q. and T. (mean scores of 4.37 and 4.46) point out the value placed on professional resources such as time and teachers' experience. Items R. and S. (mean scores of 4.43 and 4.63) are among those that illustrate the significant role educational leaders can play in enhancing professional development sessions. Most notably, the number of responses related to professional collaboration (e.g., Items W., X., and DD. with mean scores 4.66 4.53, and 4.64) indicate the perceived significance of a collegial learning community in the professional development process.

Capitalizing on the potency of professional collaboration (Arnau, 2006; Palmer, 1998), MSCI additionally schedules ample time for teachers to meet and converse with one another and with guest speakers. As one teacher reported, the institute's setting "causes us all to reflect on our practice. It helps us want to improve and the tools are given to us…to implement the approach." MSCI's environment is designed to emanate a sense of professional respect, and participants work in a comfortable and resource-rich space.

One veteran participant labeled the institute's opportunities for professional conversation as "room for growth of understanding." At times, the conversations are scheduled at

Table 3

the

Veteran Participant Survey Results	2005 (n=102)	2006 (n=74)	2007 (n=98)	2008 (n=103)	2009 (n=69)	2010 (n=64)	2011 (n=77)	Mean (n=84)
Q. My classroom experience was valued by others.	4.14	4.32	4.42	4.47	4.43	4.39	4.43	4.37
R. My knowledge base was valued by others	4.26	4.45	4.60	4.41	4.50	4.31	4.51	4.43
S. I was treated with professional respect.	4.74	4.61	4.72	4.54	4.67	4.62	4.54	4.63
T. My time was valued.	4.43	4.53	4.60	4.33	4.58	4.38	4.37	4.46
U. I felt encouraged to continue teaching.	4.63	4.68	4.74	4.64	4.69	4.62	4.66	4.66
V. I found the environment enjoyable.	4.84	4.84	4.84	4.94	4.86	4.86	4.69	4.83
W. I found the environment encouraged me to engage with others.	4.67	4.51	4.74	4.69	4.72	4.76	4.57	4.66
X. I gained a new appreciation for a colleague(s).	4.51	4.41	4.70	4.60	4.39	4.62	4.54	4.53
Y. I gained a deeper appreciation for a colleague(s).	4.42	4.41	4.67	4.47	4.53	4.66	4.56	4.53
Z. I learned more about what my peers do as educators.	4.40	4.43	4.43	4.56	4.47	4.52	4.40	4.45
AA. My teaching network was strengthened.	4.23	4.22	4.51	4.25	4.43	4.28	4.40	4.33
BB. My interaction with peers encouraged me to continue teaching.	4.33	4.39	4.42	4.36	4.34	4.38	4.54	4.39
CC. Presenters talked with me rather than "at me."	4.42	4.51	4.53	4.58	4.61	4.48	4.66	4.54
DD. A mutual respect for colleagues was fostered.	4.56	4.58	4.67	4.60	4.67	4.72	4.68	4.64

Responses are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strong Agreement (5) to Strong Disagreement (1).

close of formal addresses. At other times, the conversations occur informally in dorm rooms, coffee shops, the dining hall or other local venues. Wherever they unfold, these professional dialogues focus on teaching and are filtered through the experiences and knowledge of MSCI participants. The sharing is significant because it gives voice to personal processes of transformation and individual stories of student success. In addition, teacher sharing enables staff developers to identify teachers' professional proficiency and then to intentionally design the agenda for future institutes.

A critical question to consider is how or whether the professional learning community that emerges at the annual MSCI event can be extended to support teachers in their places of practice at their home schools. To that end, institute planners have begun strategically to design year-round mechanisms with the purpose of providing an ongoing sounding board and source of support. To date, these intermittent contacts have included an online database where participants may post instructional activities they are using in their classrooms, a mid-year meeting to exchange ideas, and ongoing connections shared by members of the MSCI steering committee. Several past participants have completed a learning cycle by returning to the institute as presenters themselves, providing an opportunity to share their classroom innovations. College faculty and K-12 teacher participants have also written and presented collaboratively at regional and national conferences. In 2012, an additional opportunity emerged that may potentially provide a sustainable year-round professional learning community for MSCI participants.

Project Proposal

At the June 2012 institute, a group of returning participants engaged in a workshop focused on Virginia's *Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teacher*s (VUPS). The session provided teachers with an opportunity to examine VUPS components, as well as instructional strategies learned at MSCI that may support their efforts to successfully navigate the new evaluation process. Following the workshop, 21 educators committed to participate in a two-year research project designed to measure how their learning at MSCI transfers to their

classrooms. VUPS will be the common criteria used to measure teacher performance and student growth, the hallmark of effective professional development.

During the workshop, each participant drafted intended growth goals for his or her students. In October 2012, 16 of the 21teachers met to revise these goals based on the characteristics of their 2012-13 student groups. Additionally, teachers identified two differentiated instructional strategies to implement throughout the year to support student attainment of the goals. Differentiated instruction was identified as a base from which teachers selected instructional strategies because it has been a recurring MSCI theme for which all participating teachers have received training. In March 2013, the group will meet again to report their baseline data and mid-year formative data points. They will evaluate their use of the identified differentiated instruction strategies and make necessary modifications to their strategies based on the data. At MSCI in June 2013, the participants will meet to report summative data for their student learning goals. The data collection cycle will continue through the 2013-2014 school year. To culminate the project, participants will present their research on implementation of differentiated instruction and its outcomes documented by VUPS in MSCI 2014 breakout sessions.

The two-year research cycle is intended to 1) provide teachers evidence of their impact on student learning, 2) offer insight into how a place of learning and place of practice are related and influenced by professional learning communities at macro and micro levels, and 3) allow participants to demonstrate teacher-leadership, a requirement for Virginia's pay for performance structure. Among the participating teachers are those who are collaboratively partnering in the research with others in their building or division, and others who are the sole project participants in their educational settings. These varying layers of support will be examined throughout the study. Ultimately, the project will explore what NSDC names as Context elements of teacher professional development – learning communities, leadership and resources – documenting "effectiveness" in terms of the primary purpose of teacher learning, that of creating "high levels of learning for all students" (NSCD, 2001, p. 2).

Data from this project can offer valuable insight about transfer of professional learning to classroom practice. Implications of the research may be relevant for other staff developers to consider as they seek to build and shape professional development programs that ultimately result in enhanced student learning. For MSCI planners and participants, the research can underscore ways through which both school leaders and external staff developers may effectively root teacher learning in places of practice.

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A Vision Within a Classroom of Her Own:
The Case of Ann

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Abstract

Researchers have suggested that effective teachers have a vision for their instruction. This article describes the professional journey of one teacher from her initial teacher preparation coursework through her first year of teaching. This research documented the role visioning played in enhancing this teacher's instruction across time.

The process of *visioning* requires teacher candidates and teachers to explicitly consider the educational values they hold and, accordingly, articulate their goals for their students (Duffy, 2002; Fairbanks et al., 2010). Arguably, teachers' visions impact the quality of instructional experiences their students receive. For example, Darling-Hammond, Banks, and their colleagues (2005) proposed that teachers with a vision are more likely to implement

effective instruction because "they are able to create a coherent curriculum that is also responsive to the needs of students" (p. 177). Conversely, "The teacher who lacks clear goals and a sense of purpose is likely to have difficulty making sensible, consistent decisions about what to teach, when and how" (pp. 171-172). The visioning process, then, has the potential to support teacher educators in guiding preservice and inservice teachers in developing a clear vision of education, a vision that will influence the daily instructional choices teachers make on behalf of all their students.

Researchers suggest that the visions teachers embrace contribute to the identity they develop as a teacher: "As teachers develop a vision for what teachers do, what good teaching is and what they hope to accomplish as a teacher, they begin to forge an identity that will guide them in their work" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 383). This identity is empowering. Turner (2006) reiterated this perspective: "Teachers who articulate their own instructional visions tap into a rich, internal source of professional power and integrity that can potentially enhance their teaching effectiveness" (p. 311). This sort of empowerment is what enables teachers to do what is best for their students in spite of limiting instructional directives that are commonplace in teaching (Duffy, 2002; Vaughn & Parsons, 2012). For example, Fairbanks and her colleagues (2010) stated that a vision "may be the source of the persistence, perseverance, and agency that fuel teachers' efforts to resist restrictive policy mandates" (p. 164). Therefore, tapping into teachers' visions of education may encourage novice educators to embrace critically reflective dispositions.

Accordingly, some teacher educators include vision statements in coursework as a tool for promoting critically reflective dispositions (Parsons et al., 2011; Squires & Bliss, 2004). For instance, Turner (2006) had preservice students write a paper describing their vision of culturally responsive instruction. She studied the content of the teachers' vision papers and found that their visions illustrated a sense of purpose and included specific actions that the teachers intended to make in their teaching. However, the teachers in this study also acknowledged the difficulty in enacting one's vision of culturally responsive instruction. Vaughn and her colleagues (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011; Vaughn & Parsons, 2012) worked with inservice teachers in

graduate coursework. Teachers wrote vision statements as part of the courses, and the researchers interviewed teachers throughout the duration of the courses. They found that these teachers faced many obstacles to enacting their visions in their teaching contexts. However, these teachers frequently negotiated these obstacles so they could enact their visions.

The research highlighted above gives an indication of the complex nature of developing reflective practices as teachers grapple with adopting new ideas and adapting established pedagogical routines. In a similar vein, Parsons and his colleagues (2011) also had inservice teachers write vision statements in two different graduate courses. They conducted interviews with 12 teachers and analyzed these data along with their coursework. These researchers found that vision statements compelled teachers to be more reflective about their instruction and their teaching context. Across the studies, researchers concluded that tapping into teachers' visions promotes reflective dispositions and encourages teachers to consider their role as educators.

In sum, a vision can lead teachers to provide instruction that is responsive to the students they teach even in the context of restrictive mandates (Duffy, 2002; Fairbanks et al., 2010). Visioning as a course assignment can empower teachers to negotiate obstacles they face and bring about positive pedagogical changes within the contexts of their own classrooms (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011; Vaughn & Parsons, 2012). Across the literature, visioning encouraged increased reflection about instructional practices, a disposition essential for creating effective classroom environments for all students (Parsons et al., 2011).

As teacher educators dedicated to preparing teachers who can effectively operate within the teaching context they will enter, we have our teacher candidates articulate a vision for their teaching in a preservice methods course. In spite of the rich literature base on teacher visioning and although studies with inservice teachers have shown promise for visioning as an instructional tool, few studies have followed teachers from preservice programs into their teaching careers to study how their visions develop or how their visions guide their instruction. Accordingly, this case study details one teacher's journey from a preservice literacy methods course through her first year teaching. The following research questions guided this study:

- What is this teacher's vision for her instruction?
- What experiences served as sources for her vision?
- Does her vision change over time? If so, how and what causes it to change?
- How does she enact her vision?
- What obstacles does she face in enacting her vision?

Methods

The study reported here used case study methods (Stake, 2006) to document one teacher's progression through her preparation program and into her first year teaching using the lens of visioning. The longitudinal case study design allowed us to consider changes in vision, pedagogical practices, and contexts over a substantial period of time. Previous research on visioning has occurred over relatively short timelines typically defined by the traditional semester university schedule (Parsons et al., 2011; Vaughn & Parsons, 2012). The longevity of this project will enrich our understanding of key factors that contribute to teacher professional growth overtime. The particular case study detailed in this discussion serves as an illustrative example of the professional development process novice teachers may go through as they struggle to balance university based theoretical positions, school based practical positions, and personal visions for what education should mean for the students they serve.

Data collection began in 2009, when Ann (pseudonym) was enrolled in the first author's literacy methods course. Ann was a white female in her mid-20s pursuing her initial teaching certification through an elementary education master's degree program. She was selected using convenience sampling. A researcher, who was not the instructor of the course, invited all students in the class to participate and five of the nine students volunteered. Ann was selected for this report due to the insights her case provided for using visioning as a teacher education tool. This course occurred during the spring semester of her first full year in a two-year program. Data sources for this study included (a) a vision statement, (b) interviews, (c) observations, and (d) an email questionnaire.

In the methods course, teacher candidates wrote vision statements, which were guided by the following questions "Why do you want to be a teacher? What are you passionate about? What do you want to instill in your students?" (adapted from Duffy, 1998). In addition to writing this vision statement, Ann was interviewed about her vision during the course, at the end of the course, and in the following fall semester as she continued her coursework. In each of these semesters, she also completed 30 hours of fieldwork in which she observed instruction, co-taught, and occasionally independently taught lessons. The interview protocol sought to gain insight into the research questions. Therefore, questions inquired into her vision, opportunities to enact her vision, and obstacles to enacting her vision. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. During spring 2010, Ann completed student teaching. Her instruction was observed once during student teaching and a post-observation interview was also conducted. Ann completed an email questionnaire regarding her vision in the fall of her first year teaching. In the spring of her first year teaching, her instruction was observed once with a post-observation interview. Cumulatively, this case study captures two and a half years of professional growth for the participant.

For analysis, data were inserted into a chart (Appendix) that displayed Ann's responses chronologically related to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The two researchers separately analyzed the data filling in the chart and adding research memos (Maxwell, 2013) that included information germane to the research questions. The researchers then talked through their separate analyses. Peer examination of multiple data sources over an extended period of time and across multiple environments enhances the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

We first meet Ann during the spring semester of her first full year in a two-year graduate education program. In Ann's first interview, she expressed her vision as follows: "My vision is mostly I want kids to have fun reading and writing…I want them to read because they want to and not because they have to." She

explained, "because I remember when I was growing up, I always hated reading by myself because in school it's just like you have to read this, you have to read this, you have to read this." Continuing, Ann identified "silent reading and giving kids options" as two strategies she planned to use to ensure her students learn to enjoy reading. Summarily she stated, "I want kids to want to read."

Ann's vision emerged from her past experiences as a student. Notably, she drew upon experiences she found de-motivating in school and used her vision to create a different instructional model for her future students. Similar to previous studies (Parsons et al., 2011), this research found that providing Ann the opportunity to articulate her vision encouraged her to (a) reflect on what she ultimately wanted for her students, (b) explore why she believed her vision was important, and (c) consider pedagogical strategies that supported her vision of her teaching. Ann added, "I want to make sure that I do keep my vision in the back of my mind and I do want to try to implement it into my creating lesson plans." This statement revealed how a teacher's vision, even early in her teacher preparation program, has the potential to influence the day-to-day pedagogical decisions. This finding is in line with previous researchers' suggestions (Darling-Hammond, Banks et al., 2005).

The following example illustrates how Ann's vision did, indeed, influence her instructional decisions. The literacy methods course required preservice teachers to design and implement a guided reading lesson during the corresponding practicum experience. When asked if she had had the opportunity to enact her vision, Ann stated the following regarding the guided reading assignment:

> I picked a book that—it's a fun book. It doesn't really have that much of a, like, the purpose is for pleasure. So I have a—we're doing predicting and we're using the pictures to make predictions. So I'm using a book that they are going to have fun reading but I'm also incorporating comprehension strategies.

Ann's purposeful selection of a high-interest guided reading book corresponded with her vision: for students to enjoy reading.

In subsequent interviews, Ann continued to rely on her past experiences to articulate and guide her vision. She revealed, "I like reading now because I can read what I want to. I can, you know, go to the library and pick out a book and I've learned that that's okay." Continuing, Ann rationalized, "if you enjoy reading when you're younger, it will help you to learn to read better, it will help you as an adult." Again, Ann's vision stemmed from her personal experiences and culminated in literacy goals emphasizing reading for enjoyment.

Interviews with Ann also revealed how field experiences (30 hours of observing and co-teaching each semester) encouraged her to reflect on classroom practices that supported and undermined her vision. In the following exchange, a rub between her mentoring teacher's actions and Ann's vision comes to light:

> The whole school did "Drop Everything And Read". . . I thought that was kind of cool because I hadn't seen it in action. You know they made the announcement and everything and then . . . I luckily had a book with me. I read as well, though the teacher didn't read—I did notice that . . . She was going to be gone the next day so she was doing, like, getting sub plans ready and stuff like that.

Ann's subtle questioning revealed how her vision remained constant, even though she was not actively recalling it. Therefore, field experiences allowed her to recognize instruction that aligned (DEAR time) and that did not align (the teacher's failure to model self-selected reading) with her vision.

Ann also faced obstacles to enacting her vision in her field experiences. For instance, in another interview, she lamented the lack of time she had to work directly with the students during her field experiences:

> In high school, I did internships and I would go to the school library [in the] afternoons. And so, there, I was seeing the kids every day and I was, it's a lot easier to get to know them and to motivate them and do stuff—you know, get them excited about school, when you see them every day . . .Unfortunately, [because of] my job, I go see [the students in my field experience] once a month pretty much. So it's hard to really get to know the kids.

Ann expressed a desire to get students excited and motivated to read—her vision—as she had done in previous internship experiences. However, lack of time in her current role was an obstacle that impeded her ability to fulfill her vision. This interview illustrated, once again, the role past experiences played in shaping Ann's thinking about her vision for her students.

Even though Ann relied on previous experiences to support her emerging literacy vision, she also recognized the potential value in additional educational opportunities. Contrasting field placements in two different classrooms, Ann revealed the desire for mentoring teachers to provide constructive feedback while still affording her the opportunity to develop her own lessons. She explained,

> My teacher that I had in the fall was just like, "Do whatever you want; I don't care"—had that attitude. So, it was hard for me to get by. I tried to be like, "Well, is this okay?" I really wanted her input on, like, I'm coming into her classroom and since I'm doing something for her kids I want to do it the way that I want to, but also the way that she would want me to do something with her class. And then, she just didn't give me any tips or anything. The teacher I work with now I really like . . . I send her my guided reading lesson, so she knows what I'm doing and she gave me her input on it . . . I haven't really had to negotiate or anything, but I like getting that feedback from the teacher.

Ann's sentiments illustrated the value she placed on appropriate feedback in helping her reach the goals she established for her students. She appreciated the opportunity to develop lessons on her own, but also sought confirmation from mentoring teachers. Providing the opportunity for Ann to articulate her experiences, both positive and negative, within a visioning context, encouraged the adoption of critically reflective dispositions. As teacher educators, we understand her position as a novice teacher. We recognize the value of field experiences that both encourage and guide preservice teachers' development (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

Nearing the end of her coursework, Ann's position as a preservice teacher is revealed as she grapples with aligning her vision with the demands of a future school district:

> A big challenge [is] to learn how to teach them everything that they need to know, like, standards wise and curriculum wise. But, I also want to do it in the fashion that I want to do it in . . . I have all these ideas, but I don't know if I am going to be able to do all of them.

Ann's analysis highlights an obstacle she anticipated having as a new teacher. In a position of uncertainty, she worried how her vision will align with her future context.

Throughout Ann's preparation experiences, visioning played an important role. In the data from Ann's time in her preservice work, visioning served as a foundation for lesson construction, provided a lens for recognizing coherent pedagogical practice, guided an appreciation for purposeful feedback, and encouraged the assimilation of new knowledge. Moreover, she was optimistic about how her vision would play out in the real-world teaching context. Describing the time in her field experiences, she shared, "It's hard to know, like, what books they read, what they've studied, and stuff like that. So once I get my own classroom it'll be a lot easier." However, the value of visioning as a reflective tool throughout a teacher preparation program remains unknown unless we ask how, or even if, teachers recognize their visions as first year teachers.

We first reconnected with Ann, now a third-grade teacher, through an email questionnaire in December of her first year teaching and then again for an observation and face-to-face interview the following April. The tentative preservice teacher disappeared, and Ann confidently confronted the daily realities of a first year teacher. Ann wrote, "My vision is to create students who want to be lifelong learners and who love to read." This statement was consistent with her preservice teaching vision. Yet, she went on to contextualize it within the lives of her students:

> At the beginning of the year one of my students asked me what they were supposed to do if they didn't have books at home. This broke my heart! I have set up a classroom library where the students are free to "check out" books,

and I have really focused on setting it up and making it grow. I have really enjoyed organizing it in a way that is kid-friendly and feel that its inviting feel will help the students WANT to go and read a book.

Ann's vision remained a passionate source guiding her actions within the classroom. Confronting the realties of her own unique teaching situation and the individual needs of her students, Ann made available to her students the resources they needed to obtain the vision she holds dear.

Additional elements of the instructional environment Ann established also reflected her vision. Describing her literacy block, Ann wrote,

> I also have a Language Arts Contract that the students work on during independent work time while I meet with guided reading groups. This contract has a variety of reading, writing, and word study activities that the students get to choose to do. I am hoping by allowing the students to have this freedom of choosing reading and writing activities that it will allow them to feel that they have a voice in the work they do rather than being given something and told to do it.

The literacy instruction Ann implemented in her classroom addressed her first visioning concern: Students are constantly told, "you have to read this, you have to read this, you have to read this." And two years later, she enacted her vision by "giving kids options," realizing the opportunity to change students' experiences with reading in a classroom of her own.

Not only did Ann continue to make pedagogical decisions based upon her vision, she also continued to filter new knowledge and opportunities based on the literacy vision she refined during her preservice work. Ann explained, "I've taken a writing workshop class just to, kind of, see…and it was pretty much very similar to the writing workshop that we talked about." She continued, "I mean I use everything that I've learned from that class because they [school administrators] are hands-off. But, because they are hands-off, we have to, you know, it's all on our own." Listening to Ann's contextualization of her first job placement, we realized the important role teacher education

programs play in providing a strong pedagogical literacy foundation for novice teachers to build on during their first years teaching. In Ann's experience, having a "hands-off" administration was not a negative component. In fact, it was a freeing and necessary element that allowed Ann to work through the routines and pedagogical philosophies that would ultimately support her vision. Vision dialogues provided a critical lens through which Ann could assimilate new literacy strategies and align the literacy practices she learned during her preservice preparation work with her personal literacy vision.

Despite Ann's ability to flexibly enact her vision within the confines of her own classroom she still encountered contextual impediments. Specifically, Ann found the school schedule to be an obstacle in fully enacting her vision. In her email response, she explained,

> Our language arts block is never at the same time and some days it is broken up. It is really difficult to get the students working independently and pull a couple of guided reading groups on a daily basis. This has been the biggest struggle for me. I have this idea of how I want my language arts block to run but we never have a good solid hour and half to have a mini lesson, get the kids set up on independent work, and then be able to pull a guided reading group or two except for on Fridays.

While Ann worked around the scheduling parameters to meet the needs of her learners, she clung to a vision that afforded students extended blocks of time immersed in literacy experiences.

Subsequently, during Ann's spring interview, she revealed how she advocated for changes in the daily structure, "Our schedule is hard because we don't have uninterrupted language arts block . . . But that will be changing next year cause we have all been voicing our opinions."Ann used her vision to influence contextual changes she recognized as necessary for supporting the development of students' dispositions toward literacy. Her administrators clearly worked hard to create a collaborative and responsive environment for the teachers.

Reflecting on her first year, Ann also acknowledged social emotional learning attitudes impeded many of her students. For instance, during Ann's spring interview she described the students she worked with on a daily basis, "Kids drag their feet

with their hoods on every morning, not wanting to be here. So, it's making them passionate about school and to want to learn." Continuing, we hear evidence of Ann's professional growth as she reflected on her vision development in relation to her current teaching position:

> I think when I did my paper I wanted them to be lifelong learners. I guess, with this particular group of kids, I'm not looking so much to the future; I'm looking to right now to having, I mean, to really getting them to want to learn this year, in hopes that that will carry over.

Ann used her vision to carefully consider the learning environment she created for her students. She recognized the negative disposition toward literacy that many of her learners' possessed, and she actively worked to shift students' perceptions:

> I try and do fun activities. Like today you saw the concrete poems. I knew that would—at the end of the day on Thursday, they're tired. We haven't had a break all day. So, it's kind of a fun thing for them to learn. So, I try and incorporate stuff that they need to know with fun activities. Sometimes we'll go outside and we'll do activities or I'll do hands-on activities in here. So just making it that it's not always work, work, work, that you can work and have fun at the same time.

In Ann's description we see her vision in action. She created "fun activities" to engage the students in the learning process. Ann's literacy lessons, including guided reading groups, interactive writing, read alouds, word study, and language arts contracts, are not just fun without a purpose. The context drives the pedagogical decisions Ann makes on a regular basis. Furthermore, her vision not only empowers her to act but also informs our understanding of the true intentionality behind her actions.

Finally, Ann's concluding statement provides teacher educators and administrators a last glimpse into the personal value visions may hold for novice teachers, as they strive to make a positive difference in the literacy lives of their students; Ann reflects, "I am hoping that my vision is rubbing off on my students because of this enthusiasm they have for reading."

Implications

Understanding a novice teacher's vision is one way for administrators, school leaders, and teacher educators to help new teachers navigate the transition from university experiences to the realities of daily life in the classroom. This study followed one teacher through her preservice preparation program and into her first year teaching, documenting the development of her vision. Across the two years of this study, Ann's vision did not change much. Ann clung to a desire for her students to enjoy literacy activities. As a novice teacher she relied on her vision to guide her in identifying practices that aligned with the literacy goals she embraced. She faced some obstacles as she attempted to enact her vision. In her preservice experiences, Ann found the field experiences to be obstacles. First, she was there so seldom that she felt that she could not get to know the students and the curriculum well enough to help them develop a love of reading. Then, she found the varying supportiveness of her cooperating teachers to be an obstacle. She was seeking feedback as a novice teacher and her cooperating teacher did not provide much support. Once in her own classroom, the school's schedule proved to be an obstacle to enacting her vision. Although obstacles did emerge in this study, they were not the restrictive curricula and instructional mandates other researchers have reported (Duffy, 2002; Vaughn & Parsons, 2012). In fact, Ann specifically states that the administration in her first position was "hands off."

It is encouraging that Ann, as a first year teacher, negotiated obstacles she faced. The school's schedule did not allow her to implement the literacy instruction of her vision, so she negotiated this obstacle by initiating conversations to get the schedule adjusted. Plans to change the schedule resulted from these conversations. It appears that Ann found a teaching context that was supportive of her vision.

As researchers have previously suggested (Duffy, 2002; Parsons et al., 2011; Squires & Bliss, 2004), it appears that visioning as a teacher preparation exercise is valuable. It is important to note that through this research, many other aspects teacher preparation program emerged. For example, Ann appeared to have strong pedagogical literacy knowledge. Also,

although her perspective of the quality of her field experiences varied, they certainly influenced Ann as a developing teacher. Therefore, visioning certainly shows promise as a component of methods courses, but only when paired with the other aspects of effective teacher preparation (see Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

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Appendix

Ann	Coursework / Field Observations			Student Teaching	Year 1	
	3.16.09 interview	5.23.09 interview	9.29.09 interview	3.4.10 observation and interview	12.13.10 questionnaire	4.28.11 observation and interview
Vision						
Enact						
Obstacles						
Negotiate						

Why Rural Schools Are Important
for Pre-Service Teacher Preparation

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Abstract
Rural schools are often overlooked in educational research. At least one in five children in the United States attends a rural school and one-third of all public schools are located in rural areas. Research on the effects of teacher education in rural schools on teacher candidates and the rural schools themselves is almost nonexistent. This position paper is an essay in which university faculty and our cooperating teacher partners from a rural elementary school describe the strengths-based lens through which we view the rural school as an important and effective context for preparing future teachers.

Why Rural Schools Are Important
for Pre-service Teacher Preparation

Rural schools are often overlooked in teacher preparation research. Specifically, the importance of rural field experience placements for pre-service teachers has not been explicitly or thoroughly explored in the literature. We think this is unfortunate because the importance of "place" is well documented in educational research. For instance, we have a rich literature exploring importance of the urban environment on schools, instruction, and teacher preparation from multiple perspectives (Hammerness & Matsko, 2012; Jablon, 2012; Taymans, Tindle, Freund, Ortiz, & Harris, 2012). Thus far, the vast majority of research on teacher preparation for schools in rural settings has been limited to discussions of the challenges rural districts face attracting and retaining high quality teachers (Fraser, 2007) or solutions to problems such as technologies to help busy faculty members supervise interns in rural schools from a distance (Falconer & Lignugaris-Kraft, B., 2002). In preparation for writing this essay, we struggled to find articles celebrating the unique strengths and mutual benefits of rural schools/university partnerships for teacher preparation programs. Instead, the small body of research focused on rural education focuses on the challenges rural schools face due to poverty and geographic isolation.

To some extent this gap in the literature may reflect a historical deficit view of rural schools. Beginning with the Normal School movement of the 1840s to Teacher Corps in the 1960s-1970s to the current program, Teach for America, politicians and academics invested in teacher education have largely described rural schools only as places of significant need. If historically rural schools have been primarily understood as places of great cultural, socio-cultural, and educational poverty, it is unsurprising that little work has been done to understand how rural schools might contribute to effective teacher preparation. If one thinks that rural schools are inherently deficient, why would anyone want to prepare pre-service teachers there?

Our essay is a position paper to offer an alternative view of rural schools and their role in teacher preparation. We believe that a singular deficit perspective of rural schools and inattention to

their potential contributions to teacher preparation is both unfair and problematic. Many of the dispositional qualities and problem-solving skills we want to develop in 21st Century teachers are, of necessity, simply part of how we do business in rural schools and communities. Problem solving, family-centered practice, community engagement are all part of our day-to-day rural life in Appalachia. We wish to make an incremental contribution to the rural school literature by sharing our lived experiences preparing pre-service teachers in rural schools. We find that rural school placements help us address important issues in teacher preparation including opportunities to develop teacher candidates' cultural competencies and exploring the mutual benefits of university/community school partnerships. We also believe that strengths-based research on rural schools is underrepresented in the teacher preparation literature.

Perhaps we academics who are involved in rural education are somewhat to blame. Many of us tend to work at teacher colleges and universities with 4-4 teaching loads, a professional life that leaves little time to write and publish. When we do publish about our research and progress in rural education, we focus on strategies and skills for school improvement. Also, we "preach to the choir", often choosing to focus on disseminating results to like-minded academics in one of the three professional journals dedicated to rural education (Coladarcci, 2007).

We believe it is time for change. Rural education matters. Teacher preparation in rural schools matters. At least one in five children in the United States attend rural schools and one-third of all public schools are located in rural areas (Johnson & Strange, 2005, p.3). Because of our historic roots in the Normal School movement, many teacher colleges and universities with significant teacher preparation programs are located in or near rural school districts (Fraser, 2007). Yet, research on the effects of teacher education in rural schools on teacher candidates and the rural schools themselves is almost nonexistent. When rural schools and teacher education are discussed together in the literature it is nearly always in the context of using alternative entry programs such as Teach for America to rescue, revitalize, or reinvent the perceived deficits of existing rural schools, rural teachers, and rural students (Fraser, 2007). As teacher educators from a regional state university in Appalachia and cooperating

teachers from a rural elementary school, we acknowledge the importance of research that identifies and addresses the many challenges that exist in rural schools. However, we also see a need for work that articulates the many positive contributions that rural schools and rural field placements can make to our collective understanding of best practices in teacher education. Our purpose is to share our experiences preparing student teachers in a rural placement so as to more accurately represent the complexities of rural education and teacher education therein. In this essay university faculty and our cooperating teacher partners from a rural elementary school use a strengths-based lens to explain why we believe the rural school is a particularly important and effective context for preparing future teachers. We hope our work can inform and inspire future empirical research in rural teacher preparation. (Please note: To alleviate potential confusions, in this essay the terms pre-service teacher, student teacher, teacher candidate, and intern are used interchangeably.)

Who We Are

We are faculty members from a university-based teacher preparation program, preK-5 public school cooperating teachers from a rural partnership school in Appalachia, and a student in the pre-service teacher education program. We have partnered for over a decade to prepare general and special education teachers, support ongoing school improvement and mutual professional development among university- and school-based faculty. Our essay describes why we believe rural schools are particularly well suited to these tasks. First, we explain how the rural school where we place our teacher candidates is consistent with best practices in teacher preparation. Second, we describe the valuable lessons our pre-service teachers learn about cultural diversity from their placements in a rural field experience. Third, we explore the ways in which placing pre-service teachers in a rural school benefits the school. Finally, we celebrate the implications our position for teacher preparation programs, rural and other.

Disclaimer: We embrace our love of rural schools and are proud to acknowledge our bias. We believe that we produce excellent teacher candidates because of the opportunities we offer our students to enact their student teaching in our rural

partnership school. We wish to add our voices the professional literature and document our experiences that suggest that rural schools can have strengths as well as needs. We celebrate the many positive aspects of rural schools that make them great placements for student teachers. We hope that after reading our essay, you will also.

A Rural Placement Can Support Best Practices in Teacher Preparation

Pre-service teachers straddle two worlds during their field experiences. They simultaneously enact the dual roles of student and teacher (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The transition from university student to professional teacher is a change in identity that is deeply rooted in both the acts of teaching these pre-service teachers observe and commit in these field experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Like the master for the apprentice, the cooperating teacher is the primary source of professional support for pre-service teachers during this critical period of professional identity formation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teacher educators need to find placements in which pre-service teachers' professional practices, expertise, and behaviors can evolve over time (Lave, 1991) with ongoing support from highly effective cooperating professionals and the school community. We find this in our rural school student teacher placements.

> Pre-service teachers are embraced in our school at all times. They are in our school full time. This is a time where our pre-service teachers are fully immersed in our school and feel the support that is true to our school and unique community. (Lisa. kindergarten teacher).

The literature exploring best practices in pre-service teachers' supervision is growing and represents diverse theoretical orientations and practical perspectives (Bates & Burbank, 2008; Falconer & Lignugaris, 2002). There is however, general agreement as to its importance and purpose; to provide pre-service teachers with guided practice in authentic contexts (Koury, Ludlow, & Weinke, 1991; McDevitt, 1996; Russell, Williams, & Gold, 1992). Ideally, pre-service teachers have

ongoing professional relationships with university faculty and their cooperating teachers (Giebelhaus, 1995). University-based supervisors should be knowledgeable of the pedagogy pre-service teachers learn in methods courses and familiar enough with cooperating teachers classrooms and schools to engineer placements where the pre-service teachers receive sufficient guided practice with methods to achieve mastery (Bloom, 1968; Clift & Brady, 2005).

> As a pre-service teacher that went through a rural school system for my education training, the opportunities that were provided to me were invaluable. I had the opportunity to be placed in a yearlong cohort and develop lasting relationships with teachers and staff at the school. I learned how to do numerous things that text books did not tell me about teaching! I had to collaborate with education professionals on how to set up a classroom, how to plan effective instruction, what to do when you have behavior problem, and how do you challenge that gifted learner? We had to solve problems in ways that made sense for individual students and their families. The hands on experience of working with students every day gave me the chance to administer assessments and monitor students' academic growth. I was able to attend before and after school activities and become a part of the community. The teachers were amazing mentors and went the extra mile to ensure success for pre-service teachers (Megan, first grade teacher).

We enact these research-based practices for teacher preparation in our partnership with our rural elementary school. Because of low teacher turnover and a long-term partnership, we know our cooperating teachers and the surrounding community well. We share similar values related to inclusive practices and the idea that teaching is hard work. We work together to interpret evidence-based practices for use in our local classrooms and to tailor instructional approaches for individual classrooms and students.

> Some days the pre-service teachers are in the classroom all day. Other days they spend half a day in our classroom and they remainder of the day in a classroom in our school

learning from university professors. This allows the university to create lessons and opportunities that are catered to our school and our school needs. (Lisa., kindergarten teacher).

Our cooperating teachers are invested in producing high-quality novice teachers and they take their roles seriously. They attend the student teachers' weekly seminars to ground what our student teachers learn from coursework in effective instructional practices based on their years of lived professional experiences. Seminar topics include theory and practice in lesson planning, classroom management, explicit instruction, guided discovery, working with parents, professional collaboration, universal design for learning, co-teaching, and more.

> As a veteran teacher who has had interns from other universities in (other states), and who has been a part of this (University/Elementary School) partnership since its inception in 1997, I feel the (partnership) is unique. Pre-service teachers (interns) are placed in our school for most of the school year. The first benefit of this placement is interns have access to our beginning-of-the-year processes, including home visits, Open House for families before school starts, and the teaching of routines & procedures during the first two weeks of school. Interns see real-life and real-time applications of strategies and concepts for starting the school year, which they are learning in (university) coursework. (Meredith, second grade teacher).

Benefits of Rural School Field Placement for Student Teachers

The term 'rural' implies a peaceful, pastoral setting with lush green fields of corn and adjacent woods. We may envision a farm family gathered 'round a Norman Rockwell dinner table heaped with corn on the cob, fresh tomatoes, steaming potatoes, and blue lake green beans seasoned with bacon. The family is seeking the American dream by supporting itself on the land and promoting their children's future through a public-school education – in a school not far from their farmland. Life is rich here.

This is not the setting where we place our teacher candidates in rural schools.

Instead, we find our schools to be welcoming children and families who are rarely attached to the land for their entire income or livelihood. Families in our rural school are a mixture of mostly working and middle class folks and a few professionals who are choosing to live in the country close to their work.

Yes, there are rolling fields and woods, and we hear roosters crowing and cows mooing as we drive up the school's driveway, but these images belie the reality of most of the children who come to our rural schools. When we take our candidates on a school bus trip along the bus route so that they understand their students' lives, there is silence on the bus as their eyes took in the impoverished settings of many of the school's families. They see from the bus window a few homes that were still without sewer services, not 20 minutes from their dorm rooms.

Our accrediting institutions require that our candidates gain experience with children from diverse settings. Our rural schools do not include large numbers of ethnically and racially diverse families. However, research tells us that the most common thread among students who "struggle" with school is not race or ethnicity. Rather, the determinant for "struggle" is poverty. It is commonly assumed that we can find major centers of poverty in urban centers, and this is true. However, urban poverty does not negate the reality of rural poverty and the value of understanding it. Our students who are placed in rural schools gain invaluable knowledge about how poverty impacts learning and how they can positively influence student learning despite the odds. Therefore, their rural school experiences are relevant and help develop the skills and dispositions they need for culturally responsive practice. Here are one student teacher's thoughts on how this rural placement helped her learn about meeting diverse needs in her future classroom.

> Growing up in [one of the wealthiest suburban communities in the United States] affected my views on how other people live. After being use to the affluent lifestyle of the upper and middle class, my experiences in this rural school came as a shock . . . Within the first week of my internship I quickly learned that a student's

socioeconomic status truly affects his/her learning environment. I was able to experience how the lack of economic security affects a child's ability to learn and 'take-in' school physically, socially and emotionally. This past semester some of my students said that they couldn't afford school supplies; they wouldn't be able to pay a few dollars for a field trip, or even get sponsored for a school wide relay for life by family members. As future educators it is important to focus on how to address socioeconomic diversity. Student teachers need to learn how to discuss and differentiate lessons based on both special education needs and the economic needs of a classroom. The more aware and receptive a teacher is to the specific needs of a child, the better able they will be to teach. (Allie, student teacher).

What do our teacher candidates learn?

They learn how to create inclusive settings that welcome working and middle class families along with professional families – who all choose to live in rural settings and who are thus not segregated in neighborhood schools.

Our candidates can see how poverty marginalizes people from the mainstream American dream. They gain real experience with real families who are faced with all the associated issues that poverty creates –mobility from job-to-job with school-to-school changes, the struggle for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and sewer which can lead to homelessness, the impossibilities associated with health care and health issues, and the complexity of how mental health issues are both an influence on and a result of living with poverty.

They can see how families work hard to earn a living and how this hard work at 2-3 jobs often keeps families away from school and away from providing the support educators expect from families.

Our candidates learn how the illegal drug manufacturing and trafficking market in rural settings influences children's stability or lack of stability.

Our candidates then witness how skilled, committed, and compassionate teachers make every effort to make connections to families in need. Teachers alter their schedules for family conferences to provide alternate times that do not conflict with families' multiple work schedules. Teachers visit kindergarteners

in their homes during the summer to make school seem safe and welcoming. Teachers buy supplies and support weekend back-pack programs that deliver food to families.

We believe we must support our candidates in examining their interpretations of families' lives so that they do not finish their internship with negative assumptions about the families they serve. Therefore, during their internship experience, we support their thinking by guiding them not to stereotype all the families living in poverty by these examples. Together, we analyze our own biases and how they might influence our sensibilities to make judgments about families.

What is the relevance of learning from rural schools? In our case, many of our students will return to rural schools in our region, so their internship experiences prepares them for their real world. For those that return to a more 'privileged' suburban school, our candidates return to those settings with a more complete understanding of how challenging it is for people who are marginalized by poverty. Our students who find teaching positions in urban and diverse settings - they have a more nuanced understanding of how people's identities and potential are diminished by poverty often through no fault of their own.

Multicultural education scholars want teacher candidates to gain experiences with "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006). In truth, our candidates do get the experience of teaching children who are different from themselves. There are certainly more mainstream schools in our university region with which we could create a partnership alignment for our placements. These teacher candidates might experience some "ideal" classroom settings, but of course, we find ourselves always committed to preparing teachers to teach ALL children, not just those who live in privileged or mainstream settings.

Benefits to Our Rural School Partner

While funding disparities among rural schools and their urban/suburban counterparts have been reduced, these disparities have not been erased completely. Rural schools are usually found in low property-wealth districts (Weldon, 2011). The struggle for funding equity and adequacy continues to challenge teachers and administrators working in rural schools to

do more with less in order to comply with legislation such as the *No Child Left Behind* initiative.

Each cohort in our teacher preparation program consists of approximately 20 teacher candidates. Depending on the number of classroom teachers eligible to mentor teacher candidates, we are able to place an entire cohort in one or two rural schools. This concentration of teacher candidates allows us to mitigate some of the challenges faced by rural schools and benefits these schools in several unique ways.

Attracting Highly-Qualified Teachers

One of the challenges facing rural schools is the NCLB highly-qualified teacher stipulation (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Typically drawing a smaller pool of applicants for teaching positions, attracting and retaining highly-qualified teachers to rural areas is a challenge. Rural school districts may not have the resources to devote to recruiting on a scale commensurate with the recruiting efforts of larger school districts. Pedagogical brain-drain is discussed in the research literature as a phenomenon through which the brightest individuals in a small or rural community migrate to more metropolitan areas in search of healthier labor markets and greater opportunities (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Gibbs, 2005; Mathis, 2003; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Prospective teachers cite fear of social and cultural isolation, more modest benefits and salary packages, and less access to professional development opportunities for their reluctance to pursue teaching in rural schools (Osterholm, Horn, & Johnson, 2006).

For the schools with whom we work, we offer a steady stream of highly qualified applicants and a yearlong "courtship" period that enables school administrators to observe potential candidates' actual instruction. Our teacher candidates experience a yearlong immersion experience in rural school culture that may allay the typical fears cited in the literature as aversive side effects of working in rural schools. Teacher candidates experience the benefits of rural schools consistent with those cited by Osterholm, Horn, and Johnston (2006) such as fewer disciplinary issues, lower cost of living, and heightened status within a tight-knit community. The schools with whom we work now have a strong contingency of our program graduates who can serve as mentors to the next generation of teachers.

As the school year progresses, having interns in the classroom impacts student learning in various ways. Student-teacher ratios are reduced, offering the opportunity for immediate remediation for struggling students, or for enrichment activities for advanced learners. There are extra pairs of eyes in the classroom to monitor behavior issues and academic progress. Having a second or third adult in the classroom allows students to form a relationship with another positive role model, besides the cooperating teacher. Interns can learn more about the assessment process by observing students and recording data to share with the cooperating teacher (Meredith, second grade teacher).

Tutoring Program as RtI – Tier II Support

Many rural schools do not have the resources to implement a multi-tiered model of Response to Intervention, often because they lack an available pool of candidates to hire as intervention specialists and/or the resources to train and monitor the RtI implementation. The rural schools in which we place our interns are able to leverage the concentrated number of teaching interns for use in implementing a multi-tiered approach to instructional intervention in reading. A twice-weekly, before-school tutoring program for fourth- and fifth-grade students offers assessment-driven and highly-individualized support in reading. Students who perform below grade level on state-level assessments and do not qualify for additional support through special education services are selected for participation in the tutoring program. University faculty provide professional development for teacher candidates and ensure the fidelity of implementation in the Response to Intervention model. Now in our tenth year of implementation, the tutoring program plays a large role in supporting our rural partnership schools with their Tier II supplemental instruction. In fact, our rural school partner has been recognized as a Distinguished Title I school two years in a row.

Increasing Instructional Intensity

Using co-teaching models, our teacher candidates enable the rural schools in which they are placed to increase the instructional intensity through reducing teacher-student ratios. Professional

development seminars on co-teaching models and options are offered for both the teacher candidates and the practicing teachers throughout the schools. Using models such as station teaching, alternate teaching, parallel teaching, and one teach/one collect data (Friend, 2007), typical whole-group instruction can be modified to make effective use of all adults in the classroom to support diverse learner needs. Monthly seminar meetings are used to discuss the strengths and challenges involved in co-teaching and to provide a forum for school- and university-based personnel to learn from each other, contributing to mutual professional development.

> Interns also bring in current teaching strategies, which veteran teachers may not have had time to research or experience. Certainly, one advantage is the younger generation's familiarity with the newest technologies, which can be incorporated into teaching and learning in many different ways (Meredith, second grade teacher).

Our Program

The literature on pre-service teacher preparation describes many barriers to effective pre-service teacher education in the following domains: lack of money, shortages of qualified K-12 personnel (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, and Terhanian, 1998), a lack of well-trained university supervisors (Falconer & Lignuris-Kraft, 2002), difficulty establishing, explicit, clear connections between methods courses and field placements (Bates & Burbank, 2008;), geographic proximity (Dymond, Renzaglia, Halle, Chadsey,& Bentz, 2008;), and an increase in distance learning as paths to certification (Mercer, 2004; Sun, Bender, & Fore, 2003).We reject these so-called barriers in our program. Simply put, we *choose* to structure our teacher preparation program to overcome common barriers described in the research. Although far from perfect, we believe that our choices result in well-prepared, ethical, competent novice teachers who are invested in their own professional development, their students, and their community. For the reminder of this essay we describe the choices we make to enact our rural school/teacher preparation program work and why we believe this is the right way to enact teacher education.

We invest in student teaching and supervision. We pay full-time, tenured or tenure-track professors to teach undergraduate methods classes and to supervise pre-service teachers at a time when many colleges and universities use graduate students, adjunct faculty, or other personnel for this work. We see this as the best investment we can make in our students' future professional successes. As a regional university we have ongoing relationships with our cooperating teachers. In fact, several of our cooperating teachers are alumnae from our programs. We attend professional development activities with our cooperating teachers as participants and co-presenters. University faculty and cooperating teachers communicate nearly every day (in person, over email, by phone) about our pre-service teachers' performances in their placements. University faculty are in schools 3-4 days a week. Our jobs are structured such that student teacher supervision is a "course" in our four-four teaching load. In a time of increasing interest in "distance learning" models of teacher preparation, we (university faculty and cooperating teachers) embrace the time and effort it takes to prepare effective teachers "the old-fashioned way"; immediate corrective feedback, high expectations, consistent reinforcement, all of which are made possible by significant personal investments of time and energy in pre-service teacher candidates, teachers, schools, communities, and most importantly, kids. Is it worth the effort? Absolutely!

Conclusion

In closing, we offer the perspectives of two of our cooperating teachers. Megan is an alumna of our university, an early career first grade teacher, and a cooperating teacher for our program. Lisa is an experienced kindergarten teacher and a veteran cooperating teacher. In this essay we have tried to add underrepresented voices and represent an oft-missing perspective to the teacher preparation and rural school discourse. We believe they say it well.

> After spending a year at the school and being a part of an amazing cohort, I was hired in the same school and continued my education in a Master's degree program. I now have the opportunity to mentor pre-service teachers

and provide the same opportunities to them that were provided to me! (Megan, first grade teacher).

We are very lucky to have the school/university partnership. Our school benefits from the help and knowledge of our pre-service teachers. Our pre-service teachers and the university benefit from our unique community and the opportunity to be immersed in a great school environment (Lisa, kindergarten teacher).

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