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Scaffolding Teacher Candidates in Developing Discourse and Acquiring Praxis

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Dedication

To my husband Mark and my daughter Victoria for your unending love and unwavering support. This journey was traveled standing on your shoulders. This dissertation belongs to all of us.

To my mother and father, Michael and Rita Potuto, for always believing I was capable, even when I doubted myself. Look, Dad, there is no need for a deck now!

To all of my family and friends for supporting me throughout these last three years. I cannot express just how much your optimism and encouragement meant to me. I am grateful that all of you are a part of my village.

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Abstract

This study examines what scaffolding practices impacted how teacher candidates assume teacher Discourse and develop teaching praxis. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Bruner's Scaffolding, and Gee's Discourse are used as a framework for this research. Using data from surveying and interviewing six new practicing teachers from two educator preparation programs, the qualitative analyses suggest that scaffolding through modeling, practice, and reflection have the strongest impact on how teacher candidates develop their Discourse and praxis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It was around 4:00 pm, and I was teaching Education Issues and Trends, or as the teacher candidates call it "Pullback." This is a course where student teachers return to the university campus twice a month to touch base with university instructors, revisit curricular requirements, and reflect on their time as student teachers. To start each Pullback, students are allowed to meet in small groups to discuss what they are observing in the field, what struggles they are experiencing, and what triumphs they are celebrating. One evening. while listening to the student teachers' conversations, usually a highlight of teaching for me, I was unnerved. It was quite normal to have a few student teachers in every Pullback who were disgruntled or flailing, but on this night (March 11, 2019), the conversations were spreading among the groups and seemed to be getting quite heated. Understanding that they were not going to care what I had to teach them when they were in this mindset, I turned over the class to the teacher candidates to allow them to articulate their feelings, views, and experiences. This group of candidates took the opportunity to compare their experiences. Sam started the conversation by saying, "I was just telling my group that my cooperating teacher let me try a science experiment that we learned in Dr. H's class and then Judy got upset." Judy picked up, saying:

> I got upset at the situation not at Sam! I like my cooperating teacher, but I am frustrated because she hands me the lesson plans that the team writes and that is what I have to teach. How am I supposed to figure out my teaching style like that?

The rest of that evening, we brainstormed ideas for addressing their concerns, but I was still left with concerns of my own. I sat down that night and wrote in my teaching journal, as is my habit:

> Tonight, I got a gut punch because I hate to see these kids so lost. Even the ones who are having a solid student teaching experience are feeling the strain from their peers. So, how do I fix this? Is this something that even can be fixed? I realize, as a teacher, sometimes you deal up Aces and sometimes you deal up Duces [*sic*], but as a whole, I believe we are doing a solid job teaching our crew how to be successful. We have a good relationship with the district; we don't let our group student teach if we don't think they are ready to fly. Every one of them has an equal foundation even if they don't understand it equally. So why are their teaching experiences so different? Is it an "us" problem, a "them" problem, a more than just "us" problem? Frankly, it can quickly become an all of us problem if student teachers leave student teaching not ready to teach.

As I continued to reread that journal entry and reflect upon that evening's occurrence, I knew that I had to uncover what I could do in my practice to address the evident disconnect between teacher candidate preparation and student teaching experience.

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are sequences of classes and experiences intended to take teacher candidates on a journey from being students concerned about their learning to teachers concerned about the learning of others (Gonzalez et al., 2017). In the United States, approximately 26,000 EPPs serve close to 200,000 teacher candidates (Greenberg et al., 2011; Kuenzi, 2018). These candidates spend an average of

400 hours (Greenberg et al., 2011) in the K–12 environment, during which, many student teachers are left wondering about the purpose behind the theory they learned (Merk et al., 2017). At the same time, many teacher educators wonder how they can scaffold these future teachers in the discourses they need to educate students beyond simply teaching content (Hatch et al., 2016; Strangeways & Papatraianou, 2016).

For many years, EPPs have recognized the need for redesigning the student teaching experience so that teacher candidates, under the guidance of quality mentors, experience working with students in authentic ways (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). According to McMahan and Garza (2016), "Teacher education should focus on providing innovative field experience options and time for reflection" (p. 3). The Council of Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2013) states as one of the components of quality, "The provider demonstrates, through structured and validated observation instruments and/or student surveys, that completers effectively apply the professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the preparation experiences were designed to achieve" (Standard 4.2). Therefore, EPPs need to provide practice designing lesson plans based on students' needs; interaction with real-world scenarios; theoretical understanding to be articulate in why teaching practices are effective; and high-quality, realistic field experiences.

Problem of Practice

The student teaching experience is intended to facilitate the transfer from educational theory to effective practice (Daniels et al., 2016; Hatch et al., 2016; Stenberg et al., 2016; Strangeways & Papatraianou 2016). It is the time when theory, practice, idealism, and reality meet (Fallin & Royse, 2000). Student teaching is an essential time

for teacher candidates to finetune their concepts of directing learning and for reflecting on teaching effectiveness (Swinkels et al., 2013), yet teacher candidates undergo dramatically different experiences during their student teaching. Some teacher candidates easily translate the Discourse of the EPP into pedagogically sound praxis, others attempt to implement pedagogy into practice, and still others fail to apply learned pedagogy at all (Woods & Weasmer, 2003). Unfortunately, when faced with the reality that in implementing teaching strategies one size does not fit all, teacher candidates often default to the teaching Discourse of the mentor, which may or may not align with evidence-based pedagogy (Bingham et al., 2014; Daniels et al., 2016; Merk et al., 2017). During the student teaching process especially, teacher candidates often find themselves deferring to the Discourse of the school, the preference of their cooperating teacher, and the path of least resistance (Matoti & Lekhu, 2016; Walsh, 2018). This is problematic for the teacher candidates who are still trying to develop their teaching literacy and practice, the schools who are hiring teachers who are insecure in their teaching praxis, and the students who will have neophyte teachers who are struggling to find a teaching personality all their own (Greenberg et. al., 2011; Walsh, 2018).

Understanding this potential disconnect between the pedagogy that teacher candidates learn and the methods through which they are expected to teach, I aimed to understand what factors teacher candidates felt impacted their ability to apply their learned teacher Discourse and learned pedagogy during their student teaching. By understanding how teacher candidates perceive the interrelationships between Discourse and praxis, and with insight into what factors most impact teacher candidates'

instructional decision making, as a teacher educator I will be better prepared to help teacher candidates bridge theoretical pedagogy into effective practice.

Theoretical Framework

Crossing the bridge from theoretical to practical requires considering where a learner begins their journey: their starting point impacts how actively scaffolded learning affects them and how they navigate the social Discourse of the learning environment (Day & Goldston, 2012; Peercy & Troyan, 2017). Furthermore, learning is not a single function but a complex interaction within the mind. Given that learning happens in various domains of human functioning (Eun, 2018), effectively connecting theory and practice comes through a novice learner's practicing skills under the tutelage of a mentor through both formal and informal experience.

When mentors consider the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), the learner can more effectively internalize what was learned through either formal or informal experiences. Vygotsky (circa 1930) indicated the ZPD is that space between what an individual can cognitively do on their own and what they can cognitively do under the guidance of an expert acting as a mentor. The mentor's job is to help the novice build upon prior knowledge and move from simple understanding to complex problem-solving—what Bruner referred to as scaffolding:

> More often than not, it involves a kind of "scaffolding" process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult "controlling" those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's

> capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90)

Therefore, scaffolding allows the novice learner to create their own understanding within the proper context while gaining the confidence needed to transfer the learning to new situations.

Transferring knowledge and facilitating more effective scaffolding between novice and mentor requires considering the importance of Discourse. Sharpe (2006) indicates, "The notion of scaffolding is congruent with the essentially social nature of learning and affirms the importance of language in making meaning within this process" (p. 212). Daily, people interact with one another. In those interactions, they communicate information and make assumptions. It is often assumed that discourse is simply a part of that communication, yet Discourse is much more. According to Gee (2015):

> When we speak or write we simultaneously say something ("inform"), do something (act), and are something (be). When we listen or read, we have to know what the speaker or writer is saying, doing, and being in order to fully understand (p. 419).

Full understanding means understanding both the semantics, or how something is defined, and the situational meaning, or how something is applied (Gee, 2016). Therefore, Discourse depends on the situation, the environment, the communicator, and the receiver. In the case of transferring knowledge and scaffolding, Discourse can be quite complicated. Through Discourse, learners discover the social norms of a school and become part of a community (Gee, 2015; Manouchehri, 2002). The reality is, "Entering

any educational setting is to enter a culture which holds and maintains its own normative structures" (Manouchehri, 2002, p. 716). Not only must the learner transfer and apply content, but they also must uncover the intentions behind the Discourse of the mentor and convey their intentions clearly to avoid misconstruction.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that impact student teachers' translation of learned pedagogical theory into instructional practices during their student teaching experience from the perspective of elementary teacher candidates in EPPs.

This qualitative research followed a narrative phenomenological study design. The qualities of qualitative research include the holistic account of how participants and researcher make meaning of the issues being studied based on multiple sources of data and inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Also, according to Creswell and Creswell (2013), action research has multiple purposes including the investigation into a problem of practice. Considering the purpose of this study is to explore the factors that impact student teachers' translation of learned pedagogical theory into instructional practices and considering that the researcher is innately a part of the account of the research, I determined that a qualitative action research study would best meet the research objectives. Since this research is so heavily dependent on the personal perspectives of the participants, I determined that a narrative phenomenological research study would be most effective. Narrative studies ask participants to share stories of their individual experiences and phenomenological research focuses on how the participants have perceived the lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By combining the stories of the researcher and the participants, the researcher can form a collaborative narrative

about the collective experience regarding the research question (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Crewell, 2013). The research question that drove this study is:

According to the perceptions of new teachers, what scaffolding practices, included in an elementary Educator Preparation Program (EPP), impacted how teacher candidates assume the Discourse and develop the praxis of a teacher? Included within this broader question are the sub-questions:

1. What scaffolding practices had the greatest impact on the development of their teaching discourse and the acquisition of their praxis?
2. How did the setting of the methods classes, in the k–12 environment or the university setting, impact the development of their discourse?

Researcher Positionality

Researchers must examine their positionality by reflecting on the stance they take in relation to the context, location, and participants of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). A researcher's positionality "will determine how they frame epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues in the dissertation" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 30). In the case of this study, I take the position of an outsider in collaboration with insiders. My role in this study is one of the interviewer and data collector who must, especially in the initial interview, allow the participant to lead the discussion and tell their story, including the elements they see as most important. In the remaining interviews, I had the task of forming guiding questions while maintaining the critical role of an audience for the story rather than the author. Not until the end of the research, where the stories are combined to tell of the collective experience, will my role as a teacher educator become relevant. As

such, it is important to recognize that I was a middle school teacher for 10 years and within those years, I was a mentor for five student teachers. Additionally, I have been a teacher educator for 10 years at the university where the research is being completed, having taught educational methods courses and the university course associated with student teaching and having acted as a university supervisor for the student teaching experience.

Research Design

The setting for this research combines a public community university in the Upstate of South Carolina and the associated flagship university. The public community university maintains a traditional EPP where students attend methods classes in the university setting and are encouraged to practice those methods while completing clinical (pre-student teaching) hours in the k–12 setting. The flagship university's EPP holds school-based methods courses so teacher candidates both learn and practice the methods in the k–12 setting. Both universities serve a student population that is a diverse mix of traditional, non-traditional, and transfer students. As such, the student body represents a variety of socioeconomic statuses, ethnic groupings, and age ranges. The participants of this study are elementary education teachers who have completed their student teaching experience and are in their first years of teaching. They have all been certified in South Carolina as elementary education professionals and have completed all the required elementary methods courses as set by their elementary program of study and the state.

Convenience sampling ensured an equal representation from both universities and consideration of participants' race, gender, traditional/non-traditional representation, and cooperating school demographics ensured representation of the diverse population of

each university. I determined that three participants from each university would provide a breadth of views and the depth and richness inherent in a phenomenological narrative study.

Data collection included a survey, an open-ended questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. The survey sought to determine how the participants viewed themselves as teachers and how they are applying pedagogy to the daily tasks of teaching. The questionnaire asked specific questions connected to the scaffolding the participants received in their methods classes, the types of Discourse they experienced in their professional courses and the factors that impacted their instructional decision-making in their student teaching. Finally, in the interview, the participants led the discussion, but the general protocol ensured attention to specific themes.

Significance

Teacher candidates begin their teaching journey with certain conceptions of teaching and learning based on their prior Discourses (Gee, 2000; 2004; 2015; 2016). Teacher educators are responsible for scaffolding these future teachers from their initial understandings to a deeper understanding of teacher Discourse (Churchward & Willis 2019). Through building these scaffolds, teacher educators hope to help teacher candidates span the proverbial bridge from student to student teacher to teacher (Anderson & Freebody, 2012), yet teacher candidates come to EPPs with different Discourses that affect their ZPD and may not align with the Discourse of their EPP. Further, even if a teacher candidate does accept the Discourse of the EPP, that Discourse may not align with the Discourse of the k–12 school (Daniels et al., 2016; Frank, 2018), preventing the scaffold from scaffolding. Beyond learning the teaching Discourse,

teacher candidates also learn to apply pedagogy. In a relatively short amount of time, these candidates must learn to navigate the Discourse (Edmondson & Choudhry, 2018) and apply the practice, so they have at least a fundamental praxis before they begin their teaching journey (DeMonte, 2015).

Some of the most influential and meaningful occupational learning happens through experience (Henderson & Trede, 2017; Morris, 2020), yet teaching is a profession that cannot afford professionals who learn as they go. Unprepared teachers do not belong in schools where they are responsible for the safety and learning of children, nor can school districts afford to pay new teachers to slowly acclimate themselves to the processes and procedures of teaching (Howard, 2014). Teaching is a profession where new hires must be effective from the very beginning or the people they work closest with, their students, will bear the burden. In response to this truth, EPPs ensure that teacher candidates complete a student teaching experience where they can apply what they have learned (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Krieg et al., 2020; Postholm, 2016; Zeichner, 2010;). However, not all student teaching experiences are equal, not all student teachers apply methods equally, and not all student teachers leave their student teaching experience equally prepared for the workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Krieg et al., 2020; Molle, 2021). To improve my practice as a teacher educator, this research aims to uncover possible reasons for this inequity based on the perspective of the student teacher and how they perceive the interrelationship of scaffolding received, theory learned, educational literacies, and professional discourses.

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. First, the nature of a narrative study allows for depth of discussion but lacks breadth. Therefore, the assumptions based on the data are narrowly focused. Additionally, this study is limited by the educational focus of the participants. All participants are elementary education teachers, which could impact how they perceive their pedagogy and praxis. Finally, this study only includes participants who are currently practicing teachers and does not consider the perceptions of teacher candidates who chose not to continue in the field of education.

Key Phenomena

1. Educator preparation programs are university programs designed to prepare future teachers.
2. Teacher candidates are those individuals who have met the requirements to be accepted into the educator preparation program.
3. In the case of this study, Discourse refers to the ideas of sociological Discourse, i.e., the dominant structure of an institution is set by the communal hierarchy through language, actions, and relationships.
4. Scaffolding refers to the adjusted support of a learner by a more knowledgeable expert.
5. Learning refers to the direct and conscious gaining of new knowledge and skills.
6. Acquisition refers to the indirect gaining of knowledge based on immersion and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Study

Becoming a teacher requires traveling a path that is not always straight and smooth; there are hills to climb and twists and turns. As the teacher candidates travel along this road, they must learn a new language of sorts and must acclimate to a potentially unfamiliar culture. By the time they reach that last stop along their journey, student teaching, they must no longer think like a student, but they must think like a teacher. They must take their newly acquired tools and apply them to new situations, take the theoretical and make it practical, and span the divide between practice and praxis. To aid these future teachers and to a larger extent help other Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) prepare teacher candidates for this journey, this study examined the extent that student teachers use instructional practices in the k–12 environment that align with the pedagogical theory they learned in their EPP as well as what factors impact their application of those theories.

Organization of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to establish an interpretation of research as pertains to this study and to describe the theoretical framework and how it supports this research. With that intent, this chapter will first explore the frameworks of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding as a teaching methodology, and social Discourse as an influence on student teacher practice. From there, the historical context

of student teaching will be briefly discussed to help establish the context for this study. This chapter will additionally underscore the issues of equity that are encompassed in this research. Finally, related research will be considered as it relates to the current study.

Literature Review Methodology

This literature review encompasses texts from peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, and research studies. The search began with the help of a library professional who aided in identifying key terms that would garner the most relevant research based on the topic of this study. Recognizing a multitude of factors that could impact the direction of the research, I began researching topics such as preparing teacher candidates, student teacher success, teacher candidate apprenticeships, scaffolding teaching methods, social Discourse, Discourse in education, student teaching, teacher preparation, constructivist pedagogy, standardization of education, and the application of educational philosophy.

Theoretical Framework

It is hard to imagine a journey of learning without acknowledging Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which has been an area of wide interest and extensive research in the field of education for nearly a century (Eun, 2018). The definition of the ZPD has been challenged over the years but is still considered quite ubiquitous (Eun, 2018; Margolis, 2020), referring to the distance between the independent development level and the potential development level under guidance. Eun (2018) describes this further, saying, "more specifically, what the less competent participant in the zone can accomplish with the help of the more capable person becomes internalized and forms the basis for the next closest developmental phase" (p. 20).

Therefore, the ZPD is a fluid concept built upon individual development over time. Instruction can focus on areas the learner is ready to develop with the help of the more knowledgeable other (Margolis, 2020), and once the learner can internalize what is learned, the help is withdrawn. Eun (2018) summarizes the ZPD in this way:

> What one can achieve only with the support from others becomes what one can perform independently. This in turn becomes the beginning point for the next ZPD. As this process continues, the zone never stopped shifting its point of departure and final destination. (p. 21)

Based on Vygotsky's ZPD, Bruner referred to interacting with the more knowledgeable other as a loan of consciousness: the learner borrows the expert's knowledge and skills to develop their own understanding (Margolis, 2020). Bruner (1973) described children as needing the support of a more knowledgeable other to move from basic skills to a more complex activity requiring a combination of lower-level skills. Wood et al. (1976) further validated this idea of scaffolding in their study of how tutoring impacted a child's ability to problem-solve. In describing scaffolding, van de Pol et al. (2010) explain:

> Borrowed from the field of construction, where a scaffold is a temporary structure erected to help with the building or modification of another structure, the use of scaffolding as a metaphor within the domain of learning refers to the temporary support provided for the completion of a task that learners otherwise might not be able to complete. (p. 271–272)

The educational method of scaffolding presumes that developing learners learn the procedures and skills of problem-solving through the help of the more skillful other

(Wood et al., 1976). For scaffolding to be effective, the skilled other must have an understanding of the problem the learner is attempting to solve and the various solutions. Additionally, this skilled other must understand the learning needs of the mentee. As Wood et al., (1976) stated, “Without both of these, he can neither generate feedback nor devise situations in which his feedback will be more appropriate for this tutee in this task at this point in task mastery” (p. 97). In other words, for scaffolding to occur, the more knowledgeable others must understand the content and construct of what they are scaffolding as well as the learner’s developmental stage.

Since the introduction of scaffolding, this concept has attracted scrutiny as well as support but is widely considered to be a viable methodology for helping learners move from concrete skills to an abstract application (Many, 2002; van de Pol et al., 2010). Today, among many definitions of scaffolding, there are three common elements: (1) contingency, which is adjusted teaching to meet the learners’ needs; (2) fading, which is the gradual withdrawing of the scaffolding; and (3) transfer of responsibility, which is when the learner is fully responsible for completing the task (van de Pol et al., 2010). Scaffolding intends to move the novice to the role of a practitioner by guiding them to successful completion of tasks and increasing their self-efficacy in their ability to problem-solve (Boblett, 2012; Sharpe, 2006). In current educational Discourse, scaffolding describes a process where learners achieve specific goals, with support, ultimately allowing for appropriation—strengthening independent cognition through collaboration with experts (Boblett, 2012; Sharpe, 2006). For this scaffolding to occur, the expert introduces novel opportunities to apply knowledge, while still using familiar terminology or context, allowing the novice to relate prior knowledge to the current

experience and solidify the learning. Bruner (1976) referred to this as extension and ratcheting. Current understandings of scaffolding articulate three levels: macro-scaffolding, meso-scaffolding, and micro-scaffolding (Boblett, 2012; Sharpe, 2006; van Lier, 2006). Macro-scaffolding is the planned progress of learning throughout a learning experience, meso-scaffolding is the structure of individual learning activities from basic understanding to more complex comprehension, and micro-scaffolding is the moment-by-moment interactions between expert and novice. Ultimately, "scaffolding can perhaps best be understood as a balancing act between the planned, on one hand, and the unpredictable or improvised on the other" (Boblett, 2012, p. 11), giving learners a voice in their learning.

Two critical points clarify the application of scaffolding to the current study. First, scaffolding can be planned or occur naturally through opportunities for discussion as teachable moments arise (Many, 2002; van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). Additionally, scaffolding looks very different based on different situations; therefore, scaffolding cannot be applied as a universal, one-size-fits-all practice (van de Pol et al., 2010).

As suggested previously, communication is an integral part of the scaffolding process, yet communication is far more than the exchanging of words. Learners develop understandings and strategies through social dialogue, which provides the foundation for developing thought and language (Gee, 2015; Many, 2002). Gee (2015) describes this type of social dialogue as Discourse with a capital D and suggests big "D" Discourse is a combination of words, tools, actions, interactions, values, and beliefs that get people

recognized as having socially significant identities. Within Discourse are Discourse combinations that Gee (2000) describes as:

> combining the following things: (a) speaking (or writing) in a certain way; (b) acting and interacting in a certain way; (c) using one's face and body in a certain way; (d) dressing in a certain way and (f) using objects, tools, or technologies (i.e., "things") in a certain way. (p. 109)

Gee (2004) further indicates that understanding what is being said requires understanding who the speaker is and their socially significant role. In this manner, Discourse closely intertwines with social learning theory because Discourse forms by interacting with the power or authority of more knowledgeable others who helped form the Discourse (Gee & Green, 1998). This is significant in considering the importance of Discourse among student teachers, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers who not only have to be receptive to collegial dialogue but also must recognize and respect each other's Discourse. This is especially true when members of different primary Discourses receive different cues in secondary Discourses in very different ways (Gee & Green, 1998).

Primary Discourse is the initial Discourse from the early stages of an individual's development, built through interactions at the familial and immediate community level. Through engagement with family, friends, and neighbors, children learn language usage and how to interact with others (Gee, 2015). As individuals continue to progress, they develop a secondary Discourse based on wider systematic interactions in structured places such as church and school (Gee, 2015). How one develops and understands secondary Discourse depends on one's primary Discourse and changes as situations and experiences dictate. As Gee (2015) explains, "There are, of course, complex relationships

between people's primary Discourses and the secondary ones they are acquiring, as well as among their academic, institutional, and community-based secondary Discourses" (p. 4). Beyond this complex relationship, a third type of Discourse, Authoritative Discourse, stems from innate authority from officials who hand such discourse down or from the nature of the environment itself (Sydnor, 2017). Gee and Green (1998) indicate that these Discourses can emerge based on how members "coordinate (or fail to coordinate) interactions, what positions (roles and relationships) they take, and what rights and obligations they hold each other accountable for" (p. 131). By their very nature, these Discourses cannot be ignored, but they can be questioned. When considering Authoritative Discourse, one must consider how individuals respond. As Sydnor (2017) indicates, "Because they are embedded in mandates, these Discourses invite responses that may range from willing compliance to reluctant submission, to outright defiance" (p. 3). The various responses can impact the development of, or perception of, secondary Discourse.

While teacher candidates spend multiple semesters in the university setting learning the Discourse of the university and learning education methods, teacher education practices only partially influence student teachers. Largely, they conform to the practices of the cooperating school and cooperating teacher, which can impact their acquisition of expected teaching practices (Stenberg et al., 2016). If the Discourse of the placement school is different than the Discourse of the university, teacher candidates tend to defer to the Discourse of the placement school (Frank, 2018). One explanation for this is that student teachers value the expertise of the cooperating teachers more than that of the teacher educators because they see the cooperating teacher as having a more current

position as a practitioner (Frank, 2018; Merk et al., 2017). Still, student teachers' exposure to conflicting Discourse is not necessarily a negative; as they engage with these differing Discourses, with the support of teacher educators and cooperating teachers, they may gain more confidence to handle conflicting Discourse on their own (Sydnor, 2017). As stated by Gee and Green (1998), "Through interactions, members appropriate the bits and pieces available to them within the social group, and these bits and pieces often become part of the peoples' taken-for-granted social practice" (p. 125). This indicates the scaffolding they receive as they learn a new secondary Discourse can help the student teachers become more knowledgeable others in the Discourse in their own right. This is essential as they move beyond student teaching to the next phase of their teaching journey.

Of concern in studying the impact of Discourse in student teaching is how teacher candidates respond to the Discourse of cooperating teachers and placement schools. Gee (2000; 2004) indicates that Discourse construction is community- and socially based, while Discourse deconstruction is based on personal experience and primary Discourse. Context helps determine meaning and meaning also helps define the context (Gee & Green, 1998), so the context of the student teaching experience helps student teachers define the criticisms and merits of applying learned pedagogy, but negative perceptions of the Discourse of the environment can impede the student teacher's success (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Frank, 2018; Gee, 2004; Merk et al., 2017; Sydnor, 2017; Walsh, 2018).

Since context is a large part of Discourse, the student teaching placement plays an important role in the scaffolding and development a student teacher receives (Darling-

Hammond, 2006). Often, the placement of student teachers is outsourced to a central administration (Zeichner, 2010). About this randomized placement of student teachers, Walsh (2018) indicates, “Sometimes it is a great experience. Many times, it is not” (p. 39). Additionally, prior research shows that student teachers are being placed with cooperating teachers who have advanced degrees, schools that have a lower turnover rate, or schools with more potential positions opening the following year (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Krieg et al. 2020). However, just because the location of the placement is considered positive, the situation is not necessarily a good fit. If a cooperating teacher is not confident in scaffolding or if there is a misunderstanding due to discrepant Discourse, the placement could be less than ideal (Krieg et al., 2020). This is concerning as student teachers will often reorient their teaching to align with the cooperating teacher’s expectations and school Discourses regardless of if they feel the approaches have merit (O’Grady et al., 2018). Often, they will defer to silence to keep the peace and maintain their grade (Smalley et al., 2015).

Having to navigate the Discourse of an EPP, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher further complicates teacher candidates’ experiences (O’Grady et al., 2018; Smalley et al., 2015). As teacher candidates navigate these Discourses, they look for guidance from the cooperating teachers; however, cooperating teachers often feel the onus of initiating professional Discourse falls on the student teacher (O’Grady et al., 2018). Therefore, as teacher candidates span Discourses, they need to experience the Discourse of supportive autonomy through collegiality. Walsh (2018) suggests EPPs and cooperating schools can mitigate these issues by working together to identify cooperating teachers with the skills to mentor and scaffold student teachers who, in turn, fit the needs

of the schools. Unfortunately, “A perennial problem in traditional college and university-sponsored teacher education programs has been the lack of connection between campus-based university-based teacher education courses and field experiences” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 483). Without an opportunity to collaborate with the cooperating teachers and the university instructors, the student teachers are left to reconcile what they have learned in their EPPs and what they are seeing in the K–12 classroom (Orellana et al., 2017). Ultimately, the teacher educators and cooperating teachers should try to apply what Gee (2005) calls semiotic resources—words, deeds, and practices presented in a similar enough way to meet the goals of effective education. When that happens, EPPs and school districts can go a long way toward “strengthening the new teacher pipeline” (Walsh, 2018, p. 40).

Historical Perspective

Before the first common schools in the 1830s, not all children attended school or even received schooling. Those students who did study did so at home, in Dame schools, and through apprenticeships. No standard qualifications for teachers existed beyond having basic content knowledge and the desire to teach. By 1860, taxpayer-funded common schools required minimal training. Taxpayers wanted accountability, but that accountability was limited. Still, from the outcry for trained teachers emerged formal programs of teacher training, “normal schools,” yet these early teaching schools only produced about one-quarter of the practicing teachers and these teacher-education programs did not have much contact, if any, with students as part of the requirements (Schneider, 2018). Although the requirement to complete clinical practice was part of teacher education as early as the 19th century (McIntire and McIntire, 2000) most states

did not require teachers to earn a license granted by the state until the 1920s, and the requirements for state licensure were still far from universal and requirements for interactions with students before certification was minimal. Only in the late 1940s did teacher accreditation receive oversight from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), and in the 1950s, the National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education joined with AACTE in a unified effort to form a more uniform process and uniform requirements for teaching certification.

Today, EPPs have been working to collaborate with k–12 schools, find a balance between content and pedagogical preparation, and strengthen clinical and student teaching experiences (Ducharme & Ducharme, n.d.; Schneider, 2018; Sydnor, 2017). The latter goal is critical as EPPs continue to improve. This is especially true as research continues to show that student teaching is a powerful influencer of appropriating knowledge (Sydnor, 2017), yet with all the progress in teacher preparation, there is still a significant deficit in the student teaching process. Student teachers seldom transfer instructional studies into instructional practice (Zeichner, 2010).

Empirical support in recent years has shown that knowledge of educational theory is highly significant (O'Grady et al., 2018; Sydnor, 2017). Merk et al. indicate:

> Against this backdrop, teacher educators repeatedly call for enabling and encouraging preservice teachers to draw on educational theory and research to inform their instructional practices and decision making, as opposed to just acquiring practical tools for teaching or managing classroom situations. 2017, p.

Still, it has been my experience that student teachers have a difficult time using education theory in meaningful ways and many see these theories as irrelevant to developing their teaching praxis.

Current research shows that student teachers still lean toward performing for a grade rather than applying theory or expanding their approach to teaching (O'Grady et al., 2018). This may be because incorporating theory into practice is an in-depth process that goes far beyond adding theory to practice (Stenberg et al., 2016). The issue, for student teachers, is that educational theory is often too abstract and too idealistic for their current classroom experience (Merk et al., 2017), which "produces a narrower picture of the profession, one that easily alienates early-career teachers from theory and leads them to concentrate only on the practical aspects of their work" (Stenberg et al., 2016, p. 471).

The goal of teacher education is to make university learning directly relevant to a preservice teacher's future practice (Anderson & Freebody, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Merk et al., 2017; Stenberg et al., 2016), which "means that the enterprises of teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools and a mutually transformed agenda with all of the struggle and messiness that implies" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 302). One way EPPs are attempting to cross these boundaries into K–12 settings is by holding methods courses in K–12 schools. Teacher educators and K–12 teachers collaborate and set common Discourses, and methods instructors teach the type of methodologies the teacher candidates will see in the K–12 classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Postholm, 2016). "The other striking feature of this approach is that it affords preservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on their development through the theoretical (university-based) and

practical (school-based) elements of initial teacher education" (Anderson & Freebody, 2012, p. 374). In other words, school-based methods classes enable preservice teachers to work alongside practicing educators and learn practice and praxis while being scaffolded by university instructors and practicing educators alike (Posthom, 2016; Zeichner, 2010). In so doing, teacher candidates are "innovating and improvising to meet the specific classroom contexts they later encounter" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 308).

Equity in Quality

Often, new teachers begin their teaching careers in classrooms with students from low-income households and/or a majority of students of color (DeMonte, 2015), yet recent studies show that novice teachers feel ill-prepared and reluctant to teach in high-poverty schools (Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Equity in education, including a focused effort to close the achievement gap, requires new teachers to be prepared to deliver high-quality education to all students (DeMonte, 2015; Howard, 2014; McMahan & Garza, 2016). With the vast majority of teacher candidates' being White and female (NCES, 2018), EPPs must provide opportunities for them to engage in the Discourse of different cultures. Prior experience impacts the choice to teach in high-poverty schools, so EPPs must provide student teachers with experiences within schools and communities that will help them form a secondary Discourse congruent with serving in these high-needs schools (Howard, 2014; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). More experience in high-poverty schools can lead to more interest in, more preparation for, and less attrition in the schools that serve these at-risk populations (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Howard, 2014; Whipp & Geronime, 2017) Student teaching is one way to provide the opportunities to practice

their pedagogy, with scaffolding and guidance of a cooperating teacher, in a reality different from their own.

Through understanding how Discourse impacts the application of learned pedagogy and through interpreting what scaffolding methods most impacted the teacher candidates' instructional decision making, EPPs can better prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students. Whipp and Geronime (2017) stated, "studies suggest that background experiences, teacher preparation experiences, and level of commitment are extremely important in an early career teacher's choice to teach and continue teaching in a high-poverty school" (p. 806). By providing more diverse experiences, EPPs may encourage more teacher candidates to volunteer to student teach in the underachieving or high-poverty schools instead of requesting schools associated with higher socioeconomic status. This is important because as DeMonte (2015) indicates, "The locations where teacher candidates do their student teaching and the characteristics of that clinical preparation may influence where they work, how prepared they feel, and how long they stay in teaching" (p. 9). Teacher educators, with the help of cooperating teachers, are responsible for preparing teacher candidates to be equally effective no matter where or whom they teach.

Related Research

In considering the factors that impact the methods teacher candidates use during their student teaching, one must examine the multifaceted nature of student teaching. Embedded in this experience are the elements of planning, evaluation, communication with different stakeholders, and social Discourse of the university, the placement school, and their stakeholders. The related research for this study encompasses these many angles

to consider where there are gaps in the research and how such research may illuminate the data.

Discourse plays a crucial part in the success of a student teaching placement, yet do the different types of Discourse impact teacher candidates differently? Sydnor (2017) focused on answering this question by identifying how authoritative and internal Discourse impacted the forming of teacher identity. In this qualitative study, narrative and observational data from two participants in their student teaching placement and their first year of teaching indicated that the Discourse of the school and the authoritative Discourse of standards and mandates were often at odds with the internal Discourse of student engagement. The researcher found that student teachers need to be directly taught how to engage with this discordance and need opportunities to directly problem solve, plan for, and address these conflicting Discourses while under the mentorship of cooperating teachers and university instructors.

In a similar vein, a quantitative study by Matsko et al. (2020) investigated the qualities of cooperating teachers that had the most impact on student teachers' perception of their preparedness to teach. This study included 1,122 cooperating teachers and student teachers in the third-largest school district in the United States. Data from three surveys—one during pre-student teaching, one during post-student teaching, and one of mentor teachers found that student teachers felt most prepared when working with a cooperating teacher who had similar philosophies on teaching as they did. Other indicators that increased a student teacher's perception of being prepared were strong pedagogical practice and willingness to spend time coaching student teachers. Perhaps a bit surprising is the minimal emphasis participants placed on years of experience or

certifications. This study indicates that teacher candidates feel most prepared when they are placed with a cooperating teacher and in a school that has a similar Discourse to them. Additionally, they feel most effective when working with a teacher who takes the time and the initiative to scaffold their teaching and learning.

Beyond the ideas of Discourse, the application of theory is central to this research. In a qualitative study that examined the impact of focused reflection on the integration of educational theory and practice, Stenberg et al. (2016) intended to determine if student teachers who were given focused tasks reflecting on the purposeful embedding of educational theory were able to embed that theory in more meaningful ways than those who did not receive the focused tasks. Of 16 student teachers who were followed throughout their student teaching placement, eight received focused tasks and guided mentorship on embedding educational theory in meaningful ways. The other eight completed a standard student teaching experience. All 16 participants reflected on their thoughts and experiences. After coding the reflections categorically by terms indicating educational theory, the researchers found, unsurprisingly, that the eight participants who received scaffolding showed a greater connection between educational theory and educational practice throughout their student teaching experience.

While understanding and being able to reflect on educational theory is critical, other factors impact how teacher candidates choose educational practices. Daniels et al. (2016) attempted to determine if one of those factors was teacher candidates' perception of their responsibilities as student teachers. Using surveys and a Patterns of Adaptive Learning scale, the researchers sought a connection between how student teachers saw their responsibilities and their chosen type of instructional practices. Based on data from

97 participants surveyed twice during their student teaching semester, the study found that student teachers felt most responsible for student motivation and were able to rule out practices that were contrary to that responsibility. However, these student teachers had a difficult time selecting and articulating better practices. The researchers recommended that EPPs scaffold teacher candidates during methods classes by presenting different scenarios to meet students' needs and motivate them to learn.

In another study, Ihtiyaroglu (2018) used a mixed-method approach to correlate teacher candidates' satisfaction with a teaching methods course with the methodologies used in that course by recruiting 404 participants from a stratified sampling of preservice teachers. Data from student opinion polls and an open-ended questionnaire underwent transformative sequential analysis with greater emphasis given to the open-ended questionnaire. The findings showed a strong correlation between classes with a student-oriented approach and the perceived value of the methods taught in that class. Ihtiyaroglu called for more study of whether teacher preparation courses are using and not just espousing the methods they teach.

Finally, to determine the relevance of student teaching practices from the perspective of student teachers, Smalley et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative descriptive survey of 140 student teachers from the north-central region of the United States, using convenience sampling for a regional connection. The surveys focused on what constructs of the student teaching experience the participants considered relevant and what activities they felt were most pertinent. The student teachers found the student teaching experience to be beneficial overall but found the experience with planning based on data-driven instruction to be the most helpful. The recommendation from this study was for

university instructors and cooperating teachers to communicate and collaborate more freely to identify the elements of planning every student teacher should know before they begin their student teaching to allow for more data-driven focus during the student teaching practice.

Summary

Student teaching is a prominent feature in teacher preparation. While it is an experience that is essentially a stop along a greater journey, it is an experience that has a significant impact on the remainder of a teacher's career. Research indicates that many facets impact the quality of a student teaching experience, but ultimately it is a matter of perception. It is a matter of teacher candidates' perceiving value in what they learned in their methods courses; perceiving worth in applying educational theory; perceiving the ability to navigate the student teaching triad of teacher candidates, practicing teachers, and university supervisors; perceiving their ability to interweave discordant Discourses of the teacher educator, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher; and perceive their belonging to the dominant social Discourse of their placement school.

Ultimately any EPP should aim to scaffold student teachers as they develop their teaching literacy. Educational theory is not simply an add-on to that success; it lies at the heart of success. Without understanding theory, teacher candidates struggle to understand why they are doing what they are doing in the way they are doing it. Therefore, teacher educators must present theory in such a way that teacher candidates not only see the value but practice the application of theory. Furthermore, in collaboration with cooperating teachers and university supervisors, scaffolding practices can be used to fade

the guidance, transfer the teaching responsibility, and help the teacher candidate take on the Discourse of a fully successful teacher.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) focus on scaffolding future educators in the professional Discourses they need to apply evidence-based pedagogy and implement responsive teaching practices (Demonte 2015; Frank 2018; Shaughnessy & Boerst, 2018). However, recent studies show that teacher candidates have either a limited scope of the importance of integrated educational theory or a limited vision of why integrating theory is important (Lancaster & Bain, 2019; Merk et al., 2017; Stenberg et al. 2016). EPPs instruct in methods based on educational theory, yet as Stenberg et al. (2016) indicated, "even with support, it appears that student teachers are seldom willing or able to use educational theory in significant ways to assess or contribute to their teaching practice" (p. 482). This phenomenological study was aimed towards answering the following question: According to the perceptions of new teachers, what scaffolding practices, included in an elementary Educator Preparation Program (EPP), impacted how teacher candidates assume the Discourse and develop the praxis of a teacher? Included within this broader question are the sub-questions:

1. What scaffolding practices had the greatest impact on the development of their teaching discourse and the acquisition of their praxis?
2. How did the setting of the methods classes, in the k–12 environment or the university setting, impact the development of their discourse

Research Design

According to Herr and Anderson (2015), "Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (p. 3). They go on to say, "It is meant to address the immediate needs of people in specific settings, and it is this utility of knowledge generated by action research that represents one of its major strengths" (p. 6). Qualitative research, as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), focuses on "understanding how people interpret their experiences… and the meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Within the construct of qualitative design is the paradigm of a phenomenological study, which aims to accurately describe the truths of an experience from and through the perspectives of the people who have lived the experience (Groenewald, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The task of the researcher is to craft a general description of the experience while recognizing and removing, or bracketing, biases from their own lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The current study was a program review comparing the practices of two different teacher preparation programs within the same network of a state university. This study intended to determine how the different practices impact student teaching and addresses the need to help preservice teachers "link theoretical elements to educational practice" (Stenberg et al., 2016, p. 470). As a teacher educator within one of the EPPs, I was seeking to better form my practice through studying the perspectives of student teachers within the two educator preparation programs. Based on these qualities, this research study was best situated as a phenomenological qualitative action research study.

The foundation of this study was based on the perceptions and lived experiences of student teachers. Ultimately, this research looked to uncover how scaffolding and Discourse impact how these student teachers applied educational pedagogy to their educational practice and if learning situated within the K–12 environment impacted their efficacy. Traditional EPPs are constructed so that preservice teachers attend methods courses in the university setting, are required to teach some lessons in a K–12 setting, and then are required to complete one semester of student teaching (Krieg et al., 2020; Orellana et al., 2017; Postholm, 2016). In a response to a need for reform, some EPPs hold methods classes in K–12 classrooms that model practices discussed in courses and require preservice teachers to implement the strategies they see (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010;). This study involved participants reflective of both of these styles of an EPP. Additionally, by nature of their different locations (different schools, different districts, and different areas of the state), Discourses are constructed in combinations that are reflective of their given place and power structure (Gee, 2016). Through collecting data from student teachers who studied in two different styles of EPPs and who lived student teaching in different K–12 environments with various Discourses, I hoped to craft a general description of their student teaching story and how those stories could improve my preparation of future teachers.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was comprised of six participants, which facilitated rich storytelling and deep analysis of the participants' perspectives, consistent with phenomenological qualitative study's reliance on understanding the "affective experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were elementary education majors from two EPPs within

a university system in the southeastern United States. The first EPP (School A) held their education methods classes in the K–12 environment. The teacher candidates would spend time with their methods instructors learning about different teaching strategies, and then they would have the opportunity to observe practicing educators implementing those strategies or would have the opportunity to practice those strategies themselves. From there, the teacher candidates would return to the methods class to debrief and reflect on what they learned. The second EPP (School B) held methods courses in the traditional university classroom and relied heavily on recreating the K–12 environment, role-play, and micro-teaching, i.e., the candidates would teach lessons to each other. They then completed clinical hours (an extended time in the K–12 classroom before they student taught), during which they were expected to apply what they learned in their methods classes.

The participants student taught in six different elementary schools. Three of the participants were teacher candidates at School A and the other three were students at School B. Of the participants, three identified as White females, one identified as a White male, one identified as an African American female, and one identified as a Hispanic Male. This is a small-scale representation of the teaching demographics according to the 2017-2018 characteristics of public-school teachers from the National Center of Education Statistics. Four of the student teaching schools were considered suburban, one was considered urban, and one was considered fringe rural. Three of the cooperating schools had a predominantly White student population with low rates of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch and the other three schools served predominantly students of color with a free and reduced-price lunch rate above 50%. This contextual

information is important because Discourse emerges from the culture of the community and is understood based on personal experience and the experiences of others (Churchward & Willis, 2019; Gee, 2015). In developing their teacher Discourse, the teacher candidates had to navigate the differences between their primary Discourse as they acquired their teaching Discourse. Furthermore, these future teachers had to develop their teaching literacy as it pertains to the Discourse of the students they taught.

My role in this study was one of interviewer and data collector. As such, I allowed the participants to lead discussions and tell their stories, including the elements that they saw as most important. Before the interviews I formulated guiding questions, but I played the critical role of the audience for the participants to tell their story and not as the author of the story. At the end of the research, I coded the participants' stories and combined the data to tell of the collective experience. (Groenewald, 2004).

Data Collection and Research Procedure

This study incorporated three different sources, including a survey. The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) created by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) was originally constructed as a self-assessment for understanding what created difficulties in teachers' daily activities. As a valid and reliable instrument, this survey provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on focused aspects of their EPP and to bring to light areas that might require special attention during their interviews. The survey was administered electronically. No identifiable information was collected, beyond the program of enrollment, to protect confidentiality.

An open-question, researcher-created questionnaire focused on the participants' current praxis and practice, including questions about experiences in their methods classes, what methods were used in their teacher preparation courses, what pedagogy they used in their student teaching, and how they would describe the Discourses of their university and elementary placement. The questionnaire was also administered electronically.

Finally, participants participated in a semi-structured interview. As described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "most of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (pp.111–112). Each interview was conducted and recorded using Zoom and lasted approximately 45 min., guided by a general interview protocol. While the participants led the discussion, the researcher ensured attention to specific themes, as gleaned from the previous research instruments. Once completed, the interviews were transcribed and all identifying information was redacted. The recorded Zoom videos were then permanently deleted. The participants were only referred to by an assigned pseudonym as needed.

Data Analysis Strategies

This research sought to determine what factors impact how student teachers apply learned pedagogy within their elementary student teaching experience. Housed within that broader question are questions about scaffolding received during preservice teaching classes, the effect of embedding those classes in a k–12 setting, and the impact of

differences in experienced Discourses. These questions informed analysis of the data collected from the survey, open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews.

Survey responses for each question were used to craft a general cross-comparison of the two programs as well as to gain a general insight into how the participants viewed themselves as educators and how they viewed their experience in their EPP. The open-ended questionnaire contained questions about the lived experience of the participants as it pertained to their teacher preparation courses and experiences navigating different Discourses. The responses to the questions were first analyzed using a cross-question comparison looking for similarities and differences in participants' experiences between the two programs. Then the answers were coded using a deductive stance based on the themes from prior research. Finally, the interview transcriptions were coded using deductive coding with thematic analysis based on themes gleaned from the literature study. The transcripts and the assigned codes were applied within the NVivo CAQDAS system to explore more sophisticated connections between data and the different assigned codes.

Summary

This qualitative action research study took a phenomenological stance and attempted to address the factors that impact how student teachers acquire and apply learned pedagogy. Within this study are questions about how scaffolding of the application of educational pedagogy and the location of the methods courses themselves impacted the student teachers' practice.

According to Herr and Anderson (2015), action research "must consider how the knowledge generated can be utilized by those in the setting, as well as by those beyond the setting" (p. 6). In describing qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state the purpose is "to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (p. 15). Groenewald (2004) describes a phenomenological study as "concerning understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the people involved" (p. 44). As this research concerns the phenomenon of Discourse from the perspective of student teachers, as it endeavors to describe how teacher candidates make meaning of the student teaching experience, as the conclusions are intended to improve the program within a university system and potentially in other schools of education, this study is best described as a qualitative phenomenological action research study.

Chapter 4: Findings

In chapter one, I presented a vignette of an interaction between myself and two of my former student teachers, Sam and Judy. This interaction highlighted the need for change within my own teaching practice and perhaps within the Educator Preparation Program (EPP) at large. I was faced with the reality that there was a disconnect between teacher preparation and teacher practice that was impacting how the student teachers were implementing learned teaching pedagogy. I realized that I needed to make changes within my own practice to begin bridging that teaching divide. As part of making changes in my practice, I wanted to understand if it was only my EPP that was experiencing this discrepancy with their student teachers applying pedagogy and what other EPPs were doing to scaffold their teacher candidates in developing teaching Discourse. With these questions in mind, I began this action research study.

Beginning this journey was not something that I could undertake in isolation if I truly wanted to understand if the discrepancy in developing Discourse was unique to my teacher candidates or a broader issue. As a teacher educator at a smaller university (Winding Brook University) that is a part of a lager state university system, I had the advantage of access to student teachers in other EPPs. This allowed me to include perspectives from student teachers who were expected to acquire a similar Discourse to my student teachers yet were trained using different methods in a different environment. Through the aid of my advisor, I was able to secure participants from a second EPP

(Mountain Crest College), a larger university who holds their EPP methods courses in the k-12 setting. This was important to my study because as Gee (2015) tells us Discourse is impacted by both place and structure. With participants selected and secured, I was eager to begin the expedition into collecting data to determine the stories it would tell.

Suzuki et al. (2018) state, “Skillful storytelling helps listeners understand the essence of complex concepts and ideas in meaningful and often personal ways” (p. 9468). In order to better prepare future teacher candidates for the complex task of teaching, it was important to hear the stories of these participants who had completed their respective EPPs and were immersed in their professional practice. Through their stories, I was able to gain perspective on the impact of the scaffolding they experienced while in their EPP and how those experiences moved them through their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Additionally, I was able to gain insight into what scaffolding they felt most significantly impacted the development of their teaching literacy which allowed them to take on the Discourse of a teacher before their student teaching experience.

With student teaching being such an instrumental part of teacher development, EPPs, in conjunction with k–12 schools, have the responsibility of creating student teaching experiences that are effective and meaningful for all teacher candidates. In describing the importance of student teaching, Goldhaber et al. (2017) stated:

> The theory of action connecting student teaching to teacher effectiveness is simple: For most prospective teachers, the student teaching requirement is the single prolonged experience they will have in an actual classroom before the management and learning of students becomes their primary responsibility. (p. 326)

With this in mind, it was also important to determine, from the participants' stories, if the continued development of their teacher Discourse throughout the student teaching experience prepared them to acquire the Discourse of a professional educator.

Mapping out the Journey

A travel guide is an expert who plans the logistics, creates the itineraries, and works with the local guides to ensure the travelers reach their destination while having the best experience possible. In the same way, teacher educators plan the journey for their teacher candidates that takes them from their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky) to thinking and acting as an effective teacher. That journey can take many forms depending on the structure of the university classes, the philosophy of the teacher educators, the culture of the cooperating schools, and indeed, the teacher candidates themselves. Ultimately, the purpose of the EPP is to plan the logistics (the courses), create the itineraries (the methods and lessons), and work with the local guides (the cooperating teachers) to transition the teacher candidates from the Discourse of a student who wants to be a teacher to the Discourse of a teacher who helps students learn.

The preconceptions based on the teacher candidates' prior Discourses form the foundation of their ZPD, that time and space of initial problem-solving under the guidance of and in collaboration with the more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978). Teacher educators are responsible for providing the learning, through scaffolding, so that teacher candidates build literacy in the Discourse of teaching in order to develop their independent praxis. As Golden et al. (2019) stated, "Explicit attention and teaching practice—in the form of teacher modeling, scaffolding, providing feedback, and defining the practice—can be essential to equitable learning" (p. 420).

The two different EPPs through which participants in this study were scaffolded provided learning opportunities intended to move the teacher candidates from their initial Discourse to a more professional teacher Discourse. Also, the programs aimed to develop the candidates' ability to develop a complex praxis that combined the theories and strategies learned in their EPPs with the realities of the classrooms in which they student taught. Thus, development came in the form of opportunities for both learning and acquisition.

Learning experiences are those directly scaffolded events when teacher candidates cognitively and cognizantly develop their teacher literacy and apply it to practice, whereas acquisition refers to the instinctive and intuitive learning of teacher literacy as part of their experiences in their EPP. Gee (2001) stated, "While some forms of appropriately timed scaffolding, modeling, and instructional guidance by mentors appear to be important, immersion in meaningful practice is essential" (p. 719). While mapping the journey that will allow teacher candidates to learn and acquire in a complementary fashion, EPPs must also recognize that the role of the MKO will change as the teacher candidates move from learning to acquiring and their zones of proximal development shift from the Discourse of a student to the Discourse of a teacher.

Who are the Travelers?

Planning a journey suited to the needs of the travelers requires knowing who those travelers are. This study is a small-scale representation of the national teaching demographics according to the 2017–2018 characteristics of public-school teachers from the National Center of Education Statistics. For this research, six participants facilitated the depth of insight that comprehensive conversations can provide. Additionally,

choosing representatives from two different university EPPs was important to understanding how the construction and location of educational methods courses impact how teacher candidates acquire educational literacy and develop their praxis.

For the sake of clarity for this chapter, Table 4.1 outlines who the participants are and what EPP programs they belong to.

Table 4.1 *Participants and Their Associated EPP*

Winding Brook University (WBU) *Methods courses in the university setting*	Mountain Crest College (MCC) *Methods courses in the k-12 setting*
Taylor	Alex
Jamie	Casey
Blake	Cameron

The Discourse of the Travelers

Not all travelers on a journey come from the same cultural background nor speak the same language. The travel guide must recognize these differences and prepare to accommodate the needs of the travelers in their care. This is no less true for the teacher candidates who enroll in an EPP and the teacher educators who help them journey across the bridge from student to teacher. Gee (2004, 2005, 2015) indicated that people develop primary Discourses through their early life experiences and continue to develop different Discourses based on different social expectations and experiences. People can switch between multiple Discourses as the circumstances merit. Based on this belief, I recognized that the teacher candidates came into the EPP with different Discourses.

Further, I concluded that these differences in Discourse impacted their reasons for becoming a teacher and their understandings of what it means to be a student and a teacher. To have a better understanding of the candidates' perceptions of their EPP experiences, I need to know about their prior Discourse and how it impacted their views about teaching and learning.

An example of Discourse impacting these views of teaching and learning comes from, Taylor and Jamie, both from Winding Brook University, who said they were good students who enjoyed being in their schools. Taylor said, "While nursing was my first choice, I was always good at school, and I thought teaching would be a good way for me to help people" (April 28, 2021). Jamie said, "I had great teachers that helped me be a successful student; I want to be that for someone else" (May 2, 2021).

Other teacher candidates come to teaching as a former struggling student who had a teacher who cared about them.

Cameron (MCC) was such a student. He said:

> I was not a strong student but had a teacher who cared enough to push me to do more and be more. I kept in contact with this teacher and still talk to her today. I came to teaching because I wanted to have an impact on students who were like me. (April 25, 2021)

Still, other teacher candidates have a Discourse based on a desire to teach from an early age or a family tradition of teaching. Alex (MCC), Casey (MCC), and Blake (WBU) all stated that teaching was always what they wanted to do. Alex said:

> I have been exposed to what it means to be a teacher for a while. I was a teacher cadet in high school and then I became a teaching fellow. Teaching is just who I am. (April 27, 2021)

Casey (MCC) stated, "I come from a family of educators; I am a third-generation teacher. I have experienced first-hand how changes in education impact teachers" (April 29, 2021). Blake (WBU) told a similar story:

> I wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember. A lot of my family members are teachers. I know the power of a male teacher who cares, and I want to be that for someone else. (May 10, 2021)

These different experiences and backgrounds impact not only how teacher candidates see teaching, but also how they receive scaffolding in their methods courses. For example, Taylor (WBU) said:

> One of the biggest things I had to get over was that not every student was going to like school as much as I did. I had to learn ways to reach students who were a lot different than me. (April 28, 2021)

While Blake (WBU) said, "I loved all the discussions we had (in methods courses) about the different teaching strategies. It was like an extension of family dinners at home" (May 10, 2021).

These results indicate that understanding teacher candidates' prior Discourse is an important step in scaffolding their teaching literacy. As part of improving my own practice, I will need to become familiar with their prior Discourse in order to identify learning objectives and apply appropriate mentoring strategies to develop their teaching

Discourse. This means that I will have to move beyond superficial knowledge about my teacher candidates into deeper questions about their experiences in teaching and learning. It will be especially critical to uncover those previous assumptions about teaching, learning, and learners based on their prior Discourse.

Beginning on the Journey

After mapping the journey and identifying the travelers, the travel guide begins to move the group along their path. How the group travels and the stops they make along the way depend on the location, the travelers' needs, and the purpose of the journey. In the case of this research, both EPPs created a journey dedicated to helping the candidates develop their teaching Discourse. The way they designed their travel (methods courses) and their location were distinctly different, but the purpose of their journey was the same—to develop teacher candidates' praxis, which in turn requires developing their teaching literacy. The EPPs have the responsibility of teaching the language, skills, and mannerisms the candidates need to build their teaching identity kit (Gee, 2015). The EPPs in this study were dedicated to this responsibility as evident in both the interviews and on the questionnaire.

Casey (MCC) reinforced this idea in discussing how her professors grounded their learning in meeting students' needs:

> Every methods course and each experience had a focus on building up the whole child and using the standards to do so. When we had to write lesson plans, we were encouraged to use inquiry learning and hands-on projects to differentiate for student learning. By working with our professors, along with the k-12 teachers, I

> learned the importance of communication and teaming as we grow the whole child and move them forward. (April 29, 2021)

Blake (WBU) said:

> When I think back on what my professors wanted me to understand, the theme is that everything we do should be about caring for kids. The professors, in every class, made us face the issue that meeting kids where they are and getting them where they need to be is complex. They taught us to differentiate by differentiating lessons with us. They gave us experience with different learning styles and gave us a lot of choices in our assessments. By (having us) repeatedly writing lesson plans and unit plans in a lot of different styles they showed us that standards are the map, but student learning is the destination and getting there is hard work. (May 10, 2021)

Alex (MCC) also discussed how the methods courses helped her learn the importance of student-focused instruction:

> We learned a lot in our program about differentiating instruction so they (k-12 students) could learn by figuring things out. By watching our professors teach students (k-12), by observing teachers, and by teaching to the students myself I learned a lot about the process of learning. I think that was really important for me to see and to do before I student taught—have experienced teachers repeatedly model and help me practice the I do- we do- you do method of teaching to help my students be independent. If you think about it, through showing, telling, and

> having us do the work our professors taught us to scaffold by scaffolding us. (April 27, 2021)

Jamie (WBU) described her experience of developing discourse as learning to think like a teacher:

> The professors in our program challenged us to look past our comfort zone and apply theories to lessons--theories that we may not have confidence with. For example, in this one lesson, my partners and I had to apply reciprocal teaching to a literacy lesson. It was hard for me because I was not confident using this strategy, but my partners were comfortable with it. Activities like this helped me think like a teacher and understand that theory isn't just something we say but affects what teachers do. It also helped us see the importance of collaborating with others and respecting different opinions on different styles of teaching. (May 4, 2021)

Cameron's (MCC) reflection on the discourse and learning in his methods courses seemed to reflect and summarize what his peers indicated. He wrote:

> There were explicit and implicit examples of what it meant to be a teacher. We were told and shown that if you are not in teaching for the right reason, then you can't fake it. Our professors, and even the cooperating teachers, showed us that you have to want to be there (in the classrooms). The lessons our professors gave us were unscripted and we all engaged with each other. We saw the work that our professors taught us about outside of the methods class. (April 20, 2021)

Based on the participants' responses, the EPPs appear to make a concerted effort to develop different facets of professional Discourse. Both programs, while their approaches were different, emphasized the importance of cooperation and collaboration. Additionally, the EPPs promoted a teacher Discourse of theory and standards as vehicles for student growth. Most significantly, both programs focused on scaffolding a Discourse of student-centered learning.

Beyond celebrating that the participants recognized the efforts of the EPP to teach them effective Discourse, this data shows that EPPs need to continue to provide opportunities for candidates to observe and immerse themselves in effective teaching. It will be critical for me to continue to explicitly connect theory and pedagogy so that teacher candidates can experience those practices that build up the whole child. Most importantly, as teacher educators, we must be open and honest about the complexity of the praxis that will allow them to apply these strategies within the prescriptive reality (that reality that teaching practices are based on proscribed standards and standardized testing) that permeates the current education system.

Modeling for and with the Travelers

Toward the beginning of a journey, once all the travelers are together and moving in the correct direction, a travel guide will prepare them for stops along the journey, interactions with people they may encounter, or skills they need to succeed at planned activities. Often this preparation occurs through discussion and modeling of these needed skills. This is also true for EPPs who, from the early stages of the methods courses, discuss and model the skills needed to develop teacher Discourse. In developing a new Discourse, the MKO needs to scaffold the learner. Scaffolding allows the learner, through

experimental activities, to make connections between present conditions and future applications (Bruner, 1973; Margolis, 2020). Modeling is one way that teacher educators, acting as the MKO, can provide options for solving authentic problems. The participants from both programs indicated that modeling was a critical aspect of developing their teacher discourse.

Alex (MCC) stated:

> A lot of what we did in our methods courses was built on modeling. I can remember my literacy professor having us observe her working with students using a strategy that she wanted us to use. We were shown the pros and cons of different strategies, we partnered with classmates to come up with different ideas to try, we got to try them with students (k-12). Then we got to come back and talk about how things went and what we would do differently. Planning, teaching, and reflecting is still something that I do today. (April 27, 2021)

Taylor (WBU) looked at modeling through a different lens because of her methods courses being held in the traditional university setting. She said:

> Even though we didn't get a lot of modeled lessons in schools where we could see teachers interacting with students, the professors did a lot of lessons where they would make us pretend we were the students, and they would show us how to use the strategies. The way they would stop throughout the lesson and talk to us about the process and focus our attention on specific skills was very helpful so we understood why they were doing the things that way--like when they would hand out materials during a hands-on project, they would stop and explain the

> classroom management. They were not just telling us what a good teacher should do but were showing us what a good teacher does. (April 28, 2021)

Casey (MCC) indicated that the k-12 environment provided the opportunity to immediately see the skills they learned in their methods courses being applied to the k-12 classroom. She indicated:

> I think modeling helped me the most because it gave me a visual of what skill we were discussing. We were given ideas about what practice we should be looking for and trying and then we got to spend time with teachers who were doing it (those practices). It let me see how the skills actually looked with students. It was both show and tell. (April 29, 2021)

Blake (WBU) also discussed the importance of modeling during his interview, but in a slightly different way. He indicated that modeling through role-play was an important part of how he developed confidence with adopting teacher discourse. He stated:

> I remember going on an archaeological dig in social studies where we had to dig through cake mix and sugar and other stuff and try and figure out where the dig site was. The whole time, we were acting just like elementary kids and the professor was having to keep us on task and make sure we understood the point of the lesson. That kind of modeling happened all the time in our methods courses and helped me visualize how the skills we were working on worked in the (elementary) classroom. (May 10, 2021)

As indicated from these responses, modeling allowed the participants to see the situational application of what they learned. Through the joint activity between the MKO

and the learner their range of understanding increased. This increase allows the learner to gain confidence in transferring learning to undertaking solving similar problems. This type of learning is constructed "on the basis of everyday spontaneous concepts, which become increasingly generalized and conscious in the form of organized learning" (Margolis, 2020, p. 23). This data reinforced my understanding that modeling is an important part of building practice. However, this data also emphasizes that, in order to build my teacher candidates' praxis, it will be important to explicitly clarify why we are doing, what we are doing, in the way that we are doing it.

The Transformation from Traveler to Guide

After journeying with a travel guide for some time, the group dynamic begins to change. The travelers build a relationship of sorts with the guide and become more confident in their travels. As a group, they tend to pick up some of the verbiage the guide uses and some of the knowledge needed to venture out a bit on their own. This is indicative of Bruner's (1973) belief that the guidance of the MKO becomes less needed over time as the learners make their own meaning of the content being studied. This phenomenon also occurs in the EPP as teacher candidates expand their range of knowledge and begin to venture out into the action of teaching. While expanding the range of understanding is important to develop in professional literacy, Gee (2015) argued that to truly be literate, one must have semantic (defined) and situational (applied) learning. For their teacher candidates to have teaching literacy, EPPs must scaffold the candidates past the semantics of educational theory to the situational meaning of applying pedagogy. Because situational meaning is based on practical thinking, planning, and adjusting behaviors "as we engage with an activity or project" (Gee, 2015, p. 349),

teacher candidates must practice pedagogy. The participants agreed that opportunities to practice their skills had a significant impact on the development of their teacher discourse.

According to the participants, practice came from a variety of opportunities, some from directly interacting with k-12 teachers and students, some from deconstructing content, and others from adopting the mindset of the k-12 student. For Cameron (MCC) it was not practicing with grade levels and content that he was comfortable with that was most meaningful to him but practicing in his ZPD that had the greatest impact. He said:

> I grew the most as a teacher by practicing different strategies with students--like the time I taught a whole class a science experiment, I was able to get experience with methods that worked for me. Even when I taught grades I was not interested in, like those younger grades, I felt that through practicing teaching those students I better understood how to modify my teaching strategies to meet standards. (April 25, 2021)

Jamie (WBU) considered practicing the skills needed to create effective learning rather that the practice of working with students directly to be most critical to her development. This is evident when she stated:

> Don't get me wrong, I think the clinicals are really important because we get to teach kids and work with teachers, but I think the most valuable practice I had was writing lesson and unit plans in the methods classes. We learned to think about each part of the teaching process and how to think through keeping students engaged while still thinking about assessments and standards. It was a lot of hard

> work, but the professors practiced each step with us as they pushed us outside our comfort zone. (May 4, 2021)

Casey (MCC) also felt that practicing in the k-12 environment was a valuable experience. She said:

> Methods courses in the schools were great because they gave us the opportunity to see the practice and then practice it ourselves. The great thing was the variety of teaching opportunities--we got to interact with a lot of students before student teaching. (April 29, 2021)

Blake (WBU), on the other hand, spoke about bringing the practice of teaching elementary children into the university setting:

> We were often told that the ones who were doing were the ones who were learning, and our professors made us "do". They made us practice team planning, teaching, deconstructing standards, and applying different teaching strategies. We practiced being the teacher and we practiced being the student. For example, if our classmate was teaching an elementary math lesson, then we were expected to act like a student in that elementary class. That kind of role-playing helped me not only think about how I teach but helped me think about what my future students might do and helped me plan for that situation. (May 10, 2021)

It seems evident, based on what the participants shared, that situational understanding does indeed come from practice. Whether that practice comes in the k-12 setting or whether it comes through recreating the k-12 environment in the university setting, it seems the bigger issue is providing the opportunity to experiment. To improve my

practice, I must intentionally require my teacher candidates to move further within their ZPD. All the methods courses I teach will need to include opportunities to deconstruct lessons, observe teachers (even through the use of videos or distance learning platforms), and interact with students (even on a small scale). This is true because, as is evident in the data and based on Gee's (2016) theory of acquisition, teacher candidates gain confidence in Discourse through exposure, reflection, the opportunity to fail, and the opportunity to make sense of that failure.

The Confident Travelers

Oftentimes people will refer to traveling as going on an adventure because in travel there are always factors of the unknown. The travel guide does their utmost to plan for all eventualities, but there are issues that cannot be anticipated for example weather complications, travel restrictions, or complications dealing with locals or other travelers. Yet, even with these complications, some travelers will still come away feeling more confident in their ability to travel on their own. It seems that this is also true for teacher candidates as they become immersed in their teaching career. Based on the data from the surveys and from the interviews, it would seem that the participants were able to acquire confidence in their teaching Discourse regardless of perceived discrepancies in their EPPs.

One premise that came from the survey is that the participants are confident in their current teaching practice. As is shown in Table 4.2, they rated themselves as agreeing and strongly agreeing that they can use a variety of teaching and assessment strategies to improve understanding and motivate a student to learn.

Table 4.2 *Participants' Opinions About Their Current Teaching Practice*

Questions	School A Person 1	School B Person 1	School A Person 2	School B Person 2	School A Person 3	School B Person 3
I can motivate students who show low interest in class work.	6	6	5	5	4	5
I can improve the mastery of a student who is failing to understand the content.	6	6	5	6	5	5
I can use a variety of assessment strategies.	6	6	6	5	6	6
I can provide an alternative example when students are confused.	6	5	5	6	5	5
I can implement alternative strategies in my classroom.	6	5	5	6	5	5

Note. A score of 6 is strongly agree, a score of 5 is agree, a score of 4 is somewhat agree, a score of 3 is somewhat disagree, a score of two is disagree, and a score of 1 is strongly disagree.

In the questions directly pertaining to professionalism (Table 4.3), all participants stated they agreed or strongly agreed that they had the opportunity to collaborate with

professionals, that they were comfortable in speaking as a professional, and that they were confident in interacting with other professionals.

Table 4.3 *Participants' Opinions About Professionalism*

Questions	School A Person 1	School B Person 1	School A Person 2	School B Person 2	School A Person 3	School B Person 3
I was at ease with other faculty and staff in the school.	6	6	6	6	5	6
I was familiar with the verbiage that was used at my placement school.	5	6	5	5	5	5
I was given options for choosing teaching strategies in realistic situations.	5	6	6	5	5	6

Note. A score of 6 is strongly agree, a score of 5 is agree, a score of 4 is somewhat agree, a score of 3 is somewhat disagree, a score of two is disagree, and a score of 1 is strongly disagree.

Another area of interest that came from the survey was one of the discrepancies in their opinions (Table 4.4). When asked if they were taught current teaching methods in their EPP, one participant somewhat disagreed, three participants somewhat agreed, and two participants agreed. Along the same vein, one participant somewhat disagreed, three somewhat agreed, and two agreed they were taught realistic expectations for teaching. However, in the same survey, two participants agreed and four participants strongly agreed that the education professors were knowledgeable about current educational trends and two participants somewhat agreed and four strongly agreed that they were taught methods similar to what they were expected to use while teaching. Based on these discrepancies, I felt the interview should include questions about developing realistic expectations for teacher Discourse and questions about how the participants perceived the scaffolding they received in translating method to practice.

Table 4.4 *Participants' Opinions About Their Education Methods Courses*

Questions	School A Person 1	School B Person 1	School A Person 2	School B Person 2	School A Person 3	School B Person 3
I was taught current methods that could be used in the modern k-12 classroom	4	5	4	3	4	5
I was taught realistic expectations for teaching in the k-12 classroom	4	6	4	4	3	6
My education professors were knowledgeable on current teaching trends.	5	6	6	6	5	6
The methods I was taught were like the methods I was expected to use	4	6	6	6	4	6

Perhaps the most significant piece of data to come from the survey is based on the statement My professional education courses prepared me for my student teaching experience (Table 4.5). Three of the six participants strongly agreed with this statement and the other three only somewhat agreed with this statement. Participants from both programs were represented in both categories, which shows that teacher candidates can complete the same program at the same time and perceive different results.

Table 4.5 *Participants' Opinions About How Effective Their EPP Was in Preparing Them*

Questions	School A Person 1	School B Person 1	School A Person 2	School B Person 2	School A Person 3	School B Person 3
My professional education courses prepared me for my student teaching experience.	4	6	6	4	4	6

Note. A score of 6 is strongly agree, a score of 5 is agree, a score of 4 is somewhat agree, a score of 3 is somewhat disagree, a score of two is disagree, and a score of 1 is strongly disagree

Based on this data from the survey, I went back to the interviews to see if the participants' stories would shine any light on how they were able to build confidence in

their teaching despite their perceived inconsistencies in their EPP. As it turned out, there stories did indeed provide some insights into this phenomenon. It seemed to be a story of knowing the culture building confidence.

This can be seen by Jamie (WBU) who stated:

> Teaching in the school where I did my student teaching was a huge benefit to me. I already knew the climate of the school and I knew the colleagues who were helping me. I was comfortable in the environment I was teaching in. (May 4, 2021)

Cameron (MCC) also discussed his comfort with the school environment saying:

> I believe what made me confident is that I am teaching in a school that agrees with my teaching philosophy. I modify my teaching to meet my students needs, but I don't have to change my beliefs. I am supported and that has a lot to do with the principal and the school culture. (April 25, 2021)

Taylor (WBU) discussed returning to teach in the community she was raised in as having an impact on her confidence. She said:

> I went back into my community, the school I went to, so I feel like I am part of the greater community not just the school community. I was able to focus on learning how to be a better teacher because I already understood the expectations of the school. (April 28, 2021).

Alex (MCC) attributed her confidence to her colleagues creating a community of acceptance saying:

> I went into my first year expecting to be an excellent teacher, but I had to learn that it was ok for me to fail. My colleagues helped me understand how to take what I learned in college and apply it to where I was. The culture of my school allowed for me making mistakes. (April 27, 2021)

This data reflects Gee's (2001) idea that acquisition of social literacy, in this case, the Discourse of a teacher, cannot be directly taught but rather is gained indirectly through experience. Gee (2016) also states that learning, or that direct instruction, does not have as much impact on the development of the learner as does acquisition, the natural learning that comes from being embedded within the culture. This indicates that in order to improve my practice, it will be critical to surround teacher candidates with authentic teaching experiences and immerse them in the teaching culture early on in their program. Also, it raises questions about the merit of beginning teachers teaching within their own communities, which is a topic beyond the scope of this research.

Reflecting on the Journey

At the end of a journey, when all the travelers have gone safely on their way, an effective travel guide will reflect on the trip and see what they can learn from the journey. And so, as a travel guide responsible for taking teacher candidates from the Discourse of a student to that of a teacher, what have I learned from my own research journey?

In her interview, Taylor (School B) said, "You always told us that student teaching was our longest job interview, but I am not sure that you professors realize that

the interview questions are always changing" (April 28, 2021). This statement has resonated throughout this research. As teacher educators, we clearly articulate the importance of student teaching as supported by McMahn and Garza (2016) who stated that student teaching experiences "provide a vital component in the preparation of preservice teachers for entry into the classroom" (p. 1). But do we do enough to scaffold the teacher candidates through their ZPD into the needed Discourse of a teacher? Do we do enough to prepare them to continue their professional development throughout their student teaching to acquire the Discourse of a professional educator? This study intended to discover what scaffolding practices were implemented in two EPPs and which of those scaffolding practices had the greatest impact on teacher candidates' development of teacher Discourse.

Through this research, I discovered that not all scaffolding strategies were equal. The scaffolding participants found to be most helpful included strategies that allowed them to participate, teach, and reflect. Additionally, although methods classes embedded in the k–12 environment provided a demonstrably different experience, both formats provided opportunities for learning and areas for needed improvement. Finally, the data showed that professional teacher Discourse begins in the methods courses, but the teacher candidate must build upon the learning of the semantics of teaching to acquire the situational language to succeed in the student teaching environment. Ultimately, the findings of this study tell the story of the importance of implementing teacher Discourse, building a teaching identity kit (Gee, 2016), and acquiring teaching praxis as teacher candidates cross the bridge from student to teacher.

Chapter 5: Implications

In her award-winning performance as Countess Aurelia in Herman's (1969) Dear World, Angela Lansbury sings about how a single person can make a big difference: whether beating a drum or blowing a horn, "that little boom/ and that little blare/ can make a hundred others care" (track 13). This research intended to provide another instrument to sound the need for continual improvement in teacher education (Schneider, 2018). In discussing evidence-based research, Ferguson (2021) indicated that the effort to increase evidence-based practices incorporates training, opportunities for scaffolded practice, and "teacher educators that model, reflect on and share insights by documenting their own evidence-based practice" (p. 206). This investigative study was an endeavor to reflect on my own teacher education practices and provide insights that could impact the training of future educators.

This study intended to determine what scaffolding practices, included in an Educator Preparation Program (EPP), impacted how teacher candidates assume the Discourse and develop the praxis of a teacher. To gain insight into this overarching question, I posed the following sub-questions:

1. What scaffolding practices had the greatest impact on the development of their teaching discourse and the acquisition of their praxis?

2. How did the setting of the methods classes, in the k–12 environment or the university setting, impact the development of their discourse?

Improving the Journey

Every great travel guide will recognize that even the best-mapped journeys with the most well-laid plans have room for improvement. Who better to provide suggestions for those needed improvements than the travelers themselves? The same can be said for the teacher educators in an EPP who benefit greatly from hearing suggestions from their successful teacher candidates.

The participants of this study indicated EPPs' obvious dedication to preparing these new teachers to successfully navigate the Discourse of teaching, yet I also needed to understand where they felt there were areas of needed improvement: limitations in their teacher preparation program and how they felt their EPP could have better prepared them for success. As DeMonte (2015) said, "If they (teacher candidates) are poorly prepared, this influx of new teachers could block efforts to solve our nation's education problems and guarantee that the next generation of students will not receive the high-quality education they deserve" (p.1).

In answering the question about needed improvement, Casey (MCC) said:

> It was great that we had our methods courses in project schools, but because we were in one grade level, we became fixated on that specific great level standard. So, I was really good at third grade English but didn't get to unpack the standards beyond that.

When I asked her how she would fix this problem she said:

> I know time is the issue, or maybe it is finding willing cooperating teachers, but I would have us rotate classes and grade levels. For example, if it is a 15-week methods course, then we can work with the third grade for three weeks, fourth grade for three weeks, and so on. By rotating classes like that, we will have a lot more experience with not only the standards, but with more teachers, and more students. April 29, 2021

Cameron (MCC) on the other hand focused more on a need to build up self-confidence:

> What I wish we spent more time on is building up our self-confidence future teachers need to make a strong connection to the fact that they are professionals, and they're going to make professional mistakes. Those mistakes can be fixed as long as they're able to learn from them. There need to be more opportunities to build that self-confidence with children, colleagues, and the community. Maybe the answer is to get those of us who want to be teachers up and teaching earlier in our program. The more we teach and interact with teachers, the more confident we will become. April 25, 2021

This sentiment was echoed by Jamie (WBU) who said:

> The biggest thing that you professors could do for us is to build up our self-confidence. Really the only way to do that is to give us practice. I truly feel, and I realized that this is not anything eye-opening, that the more I practiced the better I became. I don't just mean practice teaching, which is self-evident, but I also mean practice talking to teachers and practice talking to parents and practice

> interweaving technology into what we are doing and practice communicating with all those involved in education. I realize that our plates are already full, and I don't know if the answer is to start earlier, but truly practice builds self-confidence and self-confidence builds better teachers. May 4, 2021

When thinking about how to improve her program, Alex (MCC) focused more on writing lesson plans and creating a curriculum:

> I feel like a lot of the time I was working harder than the cooperating teachers. I realized that I don't have as much experience as they do so that it would take me longer to write lesson plans, but I felt like I was trying to create these epic lessons every time. Trying to write a lesson that had all the bells and whistles and moved students up blooms levels and was inquiry-based was a real struggle and my cooperating teachers were having a hard time understanding why I was trying to do it all. I think methods classes need to do a better job focusing on real-world strategies and the practical nature of teaching. This would be a great opportunity for professors to talk with teachers and find out what they are really doing and how they are doing it. April 29, 2021

Blake (WBU) also found that there was a need for improvement in the same areas as Alex. In telling his story he said:

> My cooperating teacher actually laughed when she saw the type of lesson plan I was doing; there was another teacher at the school who also went through our program (EPP) and she knew exactly what I was doing. I was more than a little frustrated when she told me that no one actually writes lesson plans that are so

> involved. I wish that we would have spent more time learning different real types of assessments, more real tools to apply to our teaching--like technology, and more real classroom management strategies. Maybe instead of pushing for the "wow factor" for every lesson we wrote, we could have been given some authentic lesson plans from practicing teachers in different grade levels so that we could discuss the strategies we learned about in our classes. May 10, 2021

In answering her question about areas for improvement Taylor (WBU) told this story:

> I remember in my first week of full-time student teaching I asked my cooperating teacher if I could change the classroom management strategies to reflect more of what I thought I would feel comfortable doing--of course she agreed to let me try and I quickly realized that the classroom management strategies I learned were not going to work-- all the positive reinforcements were not going to work. My students were not going to be good to get a prize from the prize box, they did not respond to callbacks, and I could have clapped until I had blisters and they would have ignored me. It was so frustrating because the students who did want to learn couldn't. I had to go back to using my cooperating teacher's management strategies and I felt more than a little defeated. In our methods courses, we were taught a lot of cute, positive, and upbeat classroom management strategy and of course as adults who were role-playing elementary school children we responded to those because we knew that's what we were supposed to do. What we were lacking was reality. Our education courses need to prepare us for what happens when cute and positive just don't work. I believe we would have benefited from watching videos of real teachers of various ranges (years) of experience teaching

various age ranges and various contents all the while dealing with those very realistic and varied classroom management issues. April 28, 2021

The results show that although these EPPs have achieved incremental development and increases in scaffolding of their teacher discourse, there is room for improvement. Whether it is in the K–12 environment or in the university setting, student teachers need to be exposed to what they would consider the realities of teaching. They need more than just to hear professors talking about real teaching and more than just seeing a few teachers doing their teaching. Opportunities in classroom settings beyond professors' pontificating about proper pedagogies and mentor-teacher observations are essential for influencing positive change and professional growth.

Summary of the Major Findings of This Research Journey

While reflecting on participants' thoughts and opinions offered many points for consideration, some findings emerged as the most impactful. EPPs provide meaningful scaffolding through modeling effective pedagogy and providing teacher candidates the opportunity to rehearse applying theory to the practice of teaching. However, the participants indicated a need for further scaffolding in the application of theoretically sound pedagogy to the real-world classroom. Peer and self-reflection also manifested as valuable to the participants in developing their teaching.

Regarding comparing the benefits of methods courses' being embedded in the K–12 setting to those conducted in the university setting, the findings were inconclusive because I did not obtain definitive data for measuring the effectiveness of one type of program in comparison to the other. This may have resulted from the small sample size or

the nature of this research. Both programs had areas of strength, and both had areas where the teacher candidates suggested improvements. Based on the results of this study, the comparison of the effectiveness of the differing programs may not be as significant as the lessons learned from the strengths of each of the programs. This is especially true concerning the means by which educators can use program strengths to improve their practices.

According to the participants, the Discourse of the EPP and that of the K–12 schools were similar, but they felt that teacher educators still focused too heavily on what every teacher should do and not realistically what every teacher has the time and resources to do. Furthermore, they did not necessarily feel equipped with the professional Discourse required to assert their need to practice different teaching and management styles as they developed their pedagogy.

Another finding also reverts to the original purpose of this investigative study. All the participants voiced concerns over the fact that not all student teachers have positive student teaching experiences. They indicated how this lack of equity can be detrimental to the development of teaching praxis and to the ability of novice teachers to respond to the needs of diverse students.

Finally, a significant finding was the participants' confidence in their teaching ability although they had concerns about their EPP. This raised the question of the cause of their ability to develop teaching confidence. Due to the results, a supplementary question for consideration is how acquisition of teacher Discourse aided in the development of this confidence and if this self-confidence is true for solely the participants of this research or if it is the reality for the majority of teacher candidates.

Organization of the Chapter

The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to an exploration of insights and considerations grounded in the results of this research. I will consider the implications of the key findings of the impact of scaffolding and Discourse and how they can form the understanding of future teacher education practices. Furthermore, I will discuss the constraints and limitations of this small-scale study.

Implications

This study was motivated by the observation that while some teacher candidates easily transfer learned educational pedagogy into their student teaching, others struggle to do so. Still, other teacher candidates neglect their learned pedagogies once they complete their methods courses. By my questioning participants from two different EPPs, and by obtaining an in-depth look at their education stories, a tale began to form about why this phenomenon occurred.

One fundamental assumption that framed this research was that the teacher educators were teaching theoretically sound pedagogy through pedagogically sound practice. Participants validated this assumption by articulating how they received effective scaffolding about student-centered pedagogy through modeling and through opportunities to practice teaching. Even with this as a strength of the EPP, EPPs must model pedagogy aligned with current and realistic core K–12 teaching practices. “The importance of core practices to teacher education is that they are derived from key elements of teaching and are developed in concert with practicing teachers” (Frank, 2018, p. 501). Keeping in concert with practicing teachers will also help ensure that the

scaffolded pedagogy is authentic, which was an area of weakness according to the participants.

One suggestion to help candidates connect theory and pedagogy is to use videos of current teachers practicing their craft and having teacher candidates discuss their observations. This dynamic classroom discussion allows teacher candidates to build ideas of authentic teaching based on evidence, learn about others' thinking and ideas, and challenge their own perceptions of teaching practice (Edmondson & Choudhry, 2018). Another suggestion is for teacher educators to collect samples of cooperating teachers' lesson plans and unit plans as authentic examples to help teacher candidates deconstruct how to apply pedagogy to teaching standards. Relatedly, Jamie (School B) asked, "How many times each year do professors sit and talk with practicing teachers and principals to see what is going on in the schools?" (May 4, 2021). This question highlights the need for direct and continuous conversation between the EPP and the K–12 stakeholders as a significant part of framing methods courses and not just as an afterthought.

Through the further sharing of thoughts and ideas, the participants indicated they felt strongly about the impact of self- and peer reflection. During methods courses, reflection will continue to be an essential part of the learning process to allow teacher candidates to pause the learning and solidify their understanding through reflective practices. According to McMahan and Garza (2016), "Orchestrating frequent and systematic approaches to engage preservice teachers in reflecting about their experiences can help them explore their thinking and strengthen their connection to pedagogical theory" (p. 3). These periods of reflection will allow teacher educators to gauge what was perceived, scaffold the learning that was achieved, and use professional Discourse to

support teacher candidates in making personal and collective connections to coursework. However, even more significant is creating a community of learners that continues to reflect with each other beyond the methods class. To limit the opportunities to reflect as a community is to "constrain the shifts that teachers undergo and leave unresolved tensions that arise as teachers appropriate new practices" (Molle, 2021). By forming trusted collegial relationships, which involves sharing ideas and collaborative problem solving, the teacher candidates can navigate high-stress and steep learning curve situations during student teaching with the support of professional educators.

Whether it be part of their reflective practice or in other forms of communication, Discourse is an important aspect of student teacher success. The participants felt that the Discourse of the K–12 environment was similar to the Discourse of the EPP. This was significant because interaction with those with a different Discourse takes time to learn the new language (Gee, 2004), and student teaching is time-limited. Therefore, EPPs must begin developing a teacher candidate's teaching literacy from the beginning of the program by providing opportunities to be in classrooms or to work with teachers from their first methods courses.

Even with the similarities in Discourse, the participants identified discrepancies in Discourse of practice and Discourse of praxis. In the case of this research, Discourse of practice is intended to describe those aspects of teaching that focus on effective instruction while Discourse of praxis describes those aspects of professional disposition. When considering Discourse of practice, this research demonstrated a need to prepare student teachers to apply sound pedagogy in their student teaching. This includes, as Frank (2018) indicated, "providing resources that will allow the student teacher to

experiment responsibly as she tries to bring a better educational present into being for her students" (p. 510). The resources they receive need to go beyond a toolbox of ideas to include authentic situations and realistic classroom dynamics. These resources need to include theoretical underpinnings and practical application. With these resources, teacher candidates will have the necessary support to clearly articulate strategies they would like to use, why they would be effective for the students, and the theory that supports their choices. The use of role-playing, suggested by one of the study participants, is an effective way to provide these resources and develop complex skills. These types of simulations offer an approximation of practice and allow learners to think critically and problem-solve as they take an active role in their learning (Chernikova et al., 2020).

Critical thinking and problem-solving are also important aspects of the Discourse of praxis. As teacher candidates navigate student teaching, they are developing their efficacy and teaching style. This Discourse is not easily transferred into the student teaching placement, however. Those study participants who saw themselves as a teacher, who felt welcomed, and who saw student teaching as more than course work discussed their student teaching placement much more favorably. This is in contrast to those participants who saw themselves as more of a guest in the classroom and saw student teaching as something they needed to do. This is an important distinction because student teachers who feel they are performing for a grade or for the perceived necessity to please their mentor struggle to develop personal pedagogy (O'Grady et al., 2018). Therefore, as a point of practice, EPPs must scaffold teacher candidates through the process of assuming the role and Discourse of a professional teacher. This means encouraging these candidates to act as professionals and to interact with other professionals outside of the

requirements of the methods classes. Consequently, teacher candidates will likely benefit from course assignments that require them to adopt professional practice. For example, EPPs could require students to attend and present at teaching conferences, attend K–12 after-school functions, and even attend teacher professional development sessions. By completing these types of assignments, teacher candidates will develop a stronger Discourse of praxis when they "have ample opportunities for guided field experiences… and immerse themselves in a variety of adjacent experience to the teacher education program" (Whipp & Geronime, 2017, p. 818).

Beyond the ability to transform pedagogy and Discourse, teacher candidates must construct their understanding of their teaching identity. According to Rust (2019), teacher educators have the responsibility to help new teachers reconstruct their notions of effective teaching. One way of doing that is through exposing teacher candidates to diverse classroom settings. This is the nature of embedded education methods courses where the teacher candidates not only learn the strategies but see how teachers and students interact and then interact with the students themselves. Participants who had embedded courses would likely feel more confident and competent in their student teaching. Surprisingly, however, the group that had traditional classes was equally confident in most areas. This indicates embedding the methods courses in the K–12 setting may not be enough. As McMahan and Garza (2017) stated:

> It is especially important not to orchestrate field experiences opportunities that focus solely on exposing preservice teachers to the complex dynamic of teaching, but also to deliberately ensure that they are systematically crafted to strengthen

> preservice teachers' thinking to promote their pedagogical growth and development. (p. 12)

Preparing effective teachers is not just about exposure but about scaffolding their understanding through being a part of the interaction and the Discourse.

Perhaps the most relevant data that came from this research showed how aware teacher candidates are that not all student teaching experiences are positive. While they recognized many reasons this could happen, they were mostly concerned about how negative experiences could transform a new teacher's practice. Through this research, I realized EPPs need to work closely with districts not only to align content but also to work alongside and provide service for K–12 educators (Clark et al., 2015). By engaging with the cooperating teachers in this way, teacher educators can do more to effectively match teaching candidates with cooperating teachers who share similar instructional beliefs as suggested by Matsko et al. (2020). For those situations where the student teaching placement is not ideal, and those will happen regardless of best laid plans, the EPP must scaffold the teacher candidate through developing a plan for discordance (O'Grady et al., 2018). In other words, the EPP must explicitly scaffold the teacher candidate through forming a professional Discourse that prepares them to traverse a student teaching placement that may not be a natural fit and still gain the needed proficiencies that student teaching experiences afford. Be it in methods courses embedded in the k–12 setting or methods courses in the university setting, teacher candidates rely on teacher educators to help them link theory, practice, and praxis (Rust, 2019). To fulfill this obligation, teacher educators must continue to model and scaffold current best practice, must expose teacher candidates to a variety of teaching situations,

must provide opportunities for professional Discourse beyond the methods courses, and must encourage the peer and self-reflection that will allow these new teachers to challenge their assumptions and develop their efficacy.

Future Research

One topic for further investigation is based on the participants' self-reflection about their first year of teaching. Even though they recognized inconsistencies in their EPPs and noted needed areas of improvement, the participants still indicated they were confident in their teaching. This aligns with Gee's (2016) idea that acquisition through practice is a more significant indicator of developing practice than is direct learning. Teacher educators should delve further into what participants felt most impacted their development of confidence if it was not directly related to their experiences in their EPP.

Limitations

This study investigated how scaffolding, Discourse, and embedded methods courses impacted the application of learned pedagogy into a student teaching placement from the perspective of participants who have completed their student teaching. However, there are limitations to this study. For instance, this study was limited by the number of participants. While six participants were a reasonable sample size for the narrative nature of this investigation, a larger-scale study may provide a broader scope of the data. Additionally, the participants were limited to elementary education majors, whereas participants from other majors would have a different viewpoint on their student teaching story.

Conclusions

Professional educators are aware that teaching students effectively requires knowing a wide range of strategies and knowing how and when to use them (Bigham et al., 2014; Churchward & Willis., 2019; Daniels et al., 2016; Golden et al., 2019). This statement is also relevant for training future teachers. In relation to teacher education, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Rather, there is only the sharing of a diversity of experiences and ideas as teacher educators work to improve their practice.

Based on this research and analysis, I concluded that while EPPs have their areas of strength, teacher educators still have areas for improvement. By continuing to scaffold current teaching practices and promote continuous reflection, teacher educators will support teacher candidates as they strengthen their command of pedagogy. By teacher educators communicating through specialized Discourse and demonstrating problem-solving skills, teacher candidates can more fluidly navigate the nuances of professional interactions. By teacher educators organizing opportunities to act in the capacity of an education professional, teacher candidates will more easily transition from the mindset of a student to the viewpoint and professional practices of a teacher.

Herr and Anderson (2015) stated that the purposes of action research "transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth, and organizational and community empowerment" (p. 1). That is the purpose of this action research: to grow as a person, to improve as an educator, and to share ideas that may empower other teacher educators to make the needed changes to their own EPPs. These changes have the potential to support student teachers as they generate the confidence

needed for a successful student teaching experience and plausibly the competence needed to positively impact the lives of students for many years to come.

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