

Effectiveness of teacher training: Voices of teachers serving high-needs populations of students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of educator preparation programs from the perspective of three female Hispanic veteran teachers serving high-needs populations of students. The study strives to contribute to research on minimum proposed standards for teacher preparation programs in Texas. Through a process of coding data from the informant conversations, several themes emerged: teacher concerns about behavior management, the need for strong communication skills, the need for immersion experiences around teaching, and the need for preparation in working with diverse populations of students as well as developing confidence and a sense of efficacy for being a successful teacher. Using the findings associated with this study, teacher preparation programs will better understand the current needs of K-12 practitioners, particularly those in high-needs school districts.

Key Words: teacher preparation, high needs, educator preparation

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most damaging myths prevailing in American education is the notion that good teachers are born and not made. This superstition has given rise to a set of policies that rely far too much on some kind of prenatal alchemy to produce a cadre of teachers for our nation's schools—and far too little on systematic, sustained initiatives to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to become well prepped.

Darling-Hammond, 2006

Teacher preparation programs are theoretically based. Research indicates however that theoretical courses are irrelevant for classroom teaching in the first year. Fletcher (2013) reports that novice teachers find it difficult to balance classroom management and workloads with survival and performance. Panesar, 2010, Flores & Day (2006) agreed that educator preparation programs historically do not do enough to tie theory into practice. Teacher preparation programs that are designed with largely unrelated courses fail to provide prospective teachers with opportunities to learn to teach with a consistent vision of teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

New teachers are unprepared by their teacher education programs because what they learned at the pre-service level was out of touch with the real world of teaching encountered in schools (Barrett Kutcy & Schulz, 2006; Samek, et al., 2010; Collier & Hebert, 2004; Britt, 1997). Beginning teachers are underprepared for classroom management as the preparation is often in the confines of a college setting and based on normal management issues that do not match the real problems in current classrooms. What pre-service teachers learn in the college classroom and practice among themselves with no children present or in a controlled environment is often substantially different from the reality of their first teaching assignment (Melnick & Meister, 2008, Farr & Griffin, 1973; Gullickson, 1986).

Teacher preparation does little to suggest which particular features play a key role in improving teaching practices and student learning (Beck, Kosnik & Roswell, 2007). Beginning teachers are not prepared well enough to assess student performance (Poth, 2013). Using the traditional instructive teaching approach, which focuses on transmission of knowledge, teacher education programs fail to equip future teachers with assessment and evaluation skills that are critical for daily classroom practice (Poth, 2013). “From the perspective of the classroom teachers, this seems to imply a need for the reorientation of college instruction, with respect to measurement issues and concepts” (Mertler, 1998, p.3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research literature has several key themes around the topic of teacher attrition particularly with regard to preparation practices. These themes include teacher frustration, the need for changes in teacher preparation program design, and strategies for retention and support of teachers.

Frustration in the Profession

Teachers are frustrated (Barrett Kutcy, & Schulz, 2006). “Teachers’ concerns have been conceptualized as classifiable into two types: concerns about benefit to self and concerns about benefit to pupils” (Fuller, Parsons & Watkins, 1974, p. 1). Although teachers maintain a love for the work and consider it to be rewarding career, the disconnect between teacher preparation and the profession creates struggles with classroom management and behavior tasks, and parental involvement and interaction (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Panesar, 2010; Barrett Kutcy & Schulz, 2006). Even experienced teachers struggle with many of the same concerns expressed by beginning teachers with the exception of parental involvement and communication (Melnick, & Meister, 2008; Fletcher, 2013). Teachers express frustration that teacher preparation did not include more coursework in classroom management and discipline, and that their pre-service training did not prepare them for the vast demands of teaching (Barrett Kutcy & Schulz, 2006, Fletcher, 2013).

Scott, Stone, & Dinham (2001) used teacher perspectives to explore teacher concerns related to discontent and career motivation from a sample of over 3,000 teachers in four countries: Australia, New Zealand, England, and the United States. This study found that teachers in all four countries were motivated by a desire to work with and for people and to make a difference. In dealings with students, teachers expressed a high level of satisfaction. “Aspects of teaching associated with school level factors—school climate, leadership, resources, and reputation—were rated more ambivalently” (p. 5). Teachers indicated that the decrease in the status of their professionalism is the most prevalent concern of discontent. The effects of social disruption have revealed themselves in teacher frustration. Where teachers are addressing student and parent welfare,” one respondent described the work as that of “bouncer, child counselor, animal trainer, army sergeant, school nurse, etc. According to Scott, Stone, & Dinham (2001), very little is ever done for teacher welfare. Teachers are holding society together but if money is not forthcoming for teacher welfare, there will be a breakdown in the education system” (p.8).

Improving Teacher Preparation Program Design

Critiques of educator preparation program design are abundant. Darling-Hammond (2006) lists among the criticisms: inadequate time for comprehensive preparation, fragmented elements of learning, uninspired teaching methods and haphazard student teaching placements, superficial curriculum, and traditional (often outdated) views of schooling. These concerns justify the need for theoretical understanding, practical knowledge and skill, capacity for comprehensive program planning, knowledge of what to expect in the first weeks, understanding and skill in assessment and evaluation, and ability to implement effective group work. To dismiss these components in teacher preparation is a big mistake (Beck, Kosnik & Roswell, 2007). Teacher education must not only be designed to teach candidates how to teach other children and adolescents; because teacher education candidates are students too, teacher education must be designed in ways that fit the adult learning style (Snyder, 2012).

Strong teacher preparation programs have common features: a clear vision of good teaching that permeates all coursework, well-defined and consistently evaluated standards of practice and performance, curriculum which includes child development and social learning, extended clinical experiences, strategies for helping students to understand and learn, strong relationships, and case study methods to apply real problems of practice (Darling-Hammond,

2006). Completers of strong teacher preparation programs report a stronger sense of self-efficacy and felt better prepared in areas such as communication with parents, instructional strategies, and promoting student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Wasserman & Ham (2013) sought to understand the factors that contribute to the success of mathematics teachers in their classrooms, and at what point the teacher acquired those attributes. A review of the literature indicates that content and professional knowledge are important for effective mathematics teacher preparation and should be what occurs in teacher preparation programs. However it is difficult to know when learning occurs. The study focused on three stages of when learning can occur: pre, during, and post-program. An analysis of the data revealed that in addition to the importance of teacher preparation such as content knowledge, pedagogy, and personal traits, teacher preparation must also include the ability to experiment and seek practical tools as well as possess skills of inquiry, flexibility, collaboration, and confidence.

Retention and Support

Although there are these various inner and practical tensions between teacher preparation programs and real classroom scenarios, many teachers stay. Flores and Day (2006) found that teachers who felt a personal commitment and desire to enter the teaching profession valued their training and teaching practice. As a result, the teaching experience is more rewarding because it fulfills a self-appointed sense of obligation; a service to (and for) children. Teachers who maintain positive beliefs about children have more personal success and student achievement and therefore stay in the profession (Lavinge & Wood, 2014). Research has further indicated that teachers who work in collaborative environments develop more positive attitudes toward teaching (Flores & Day, 2006). The findings have implications for teacher education program design. Opportunities for cultural contexts of schools, induction and collaboration, and the development of personal teaching identity in program curriculum can nurture teacher retention. Research indicates that retention is an especially difficult task at school districts with high minority populations (Murphy et al. 2003). Teachers are reluctant to accept the challenges of working with predominantly minority students. Researchers have found that many of the struggles expressed by educators exist around the issues of diversity and developing multicultural competency in their students (Ng, 2003). Not only is this a teacher preparation issue, the issue is of national concern. Demographic projections suggest that if we do not repair the education systems now in place, not only Latinas/os but all Americans, will share a lower quality of life in future generations (Portales & Portales, 2005).

As a matter of response to barriers in retention, research indicates that beginning teachers need stronger support. One study revealed that induction teachers need relationships, emotional development and career-stage maturity, and personal identity for success in the profession (Hollabough, 2012). By recognizing the influential role that effective induction practices can have on a school community, educational leaders such as pre-service teacher educators, administrators, and faculty department chairs can provide the impetus for supporting effective induction practices in educational communities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

State and federal standards on accountability in teacher preparation programs have shifted and increased focus on how programs are shaped (Tellez, 2003). Still, teacher preparation programs, although often at the heart of standards-based discussions, remain largely unchanged. When changes do occur, it is often to the priorities, resources, or length of the program. Consistency is not present, and changes do not take into account the currency of the profession (Collier & Hebert, 2004). Teacher education is political and dated and teachers are not well prepared for with a knowledge base for a global society (Hokka & Etelapelto, 2014). “Neither pupils’ nor adult observers’ accounts can fully capture the lived realities of teaching as an occupation: that can be done only allowing teachers to voice their own thoughts and feelings” (Nias, 1989, p. 2). Feuerstein (2011) recommends that policy should be developed considering the valuable perspectives of educators “enough to give them some real influence over policy goals related to the desired knowledge, abilities, and dispositions of new teachers” (p. 21). More than scores or mathematical formulas can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understanding of teaching is and how others can be prepared to engage in this profession (Carter, 1993). But stakeholder meetings regarding educator preparation program design and development rarely include current teachers, teachers’ associations, or school district representation. As such, there is an omission of valuable perspectives. Further, research should attempt to determine what adults identify as relevant to learning so that it can be used to improve the effectiveness of teacher education (Snyder, 2012).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the effectiveness of educator preparation programs from the perspective of teachers serving high-needs populations of students. The study strives to contribute to research on minimum proposed standards for teacher preparation programs in Texas. Through the findings associated with the study, teacher preparation programs will better understand the current needs of K-12 practitioners, particularly those serving high-needs populations of students.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research for this study is guided by the following research question:

- 1) How effective are educator preparation programs from the perspective of teachers serving high-needs populations of students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research “is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context” (Patton, 1985, p. 1). The research methodology for this study was naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry seeks to understand multiple realities and to find constructed meaning. (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allan, 1993). Results of naturalistic inquiry are

grounded, emergent theory “because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41).

Instrumentation

“Naturalistic research involves utilizing what one comes into the world with (i.e., five senses plus intuition) to gather, analyze, and construct reality from the data” (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 82). Thus, in naturalistic inquiry, the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher. In a qualitative study, the primary sources of data are interviews, observations, and document analysis (Patton, 1990). This study used semi-structured interview conducted in a setting mutually agreed upon between the researcher and the participant. The interview consisted of 11 questions that allowed participants to engage in conversation about their experiences as teachers and their experiences with teacher preparation. Interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of each participant. Further, the researcher assured each participant that any identifying information would not be included in the final report of findings.

Sample

The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is central to naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, et al., 1993). This sampling method is based on informational, not statistical considerations to maximize information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and “maximizes the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms” (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 82). In order to explore the efficacy of educator preparation programs from the perspective of current teachers, participants were current K-12 teachers with various years of experience stemming from various teacher preparation programs. Further, all participants teach or have recently taught in schools servicing high-needs populations of students.

Transcribing

Responses from the participants of the study were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The researcher used a transcription machine to complete the transcription process and used caution to ensure that the transcript reflected participant responses verbatim. The date, location, and setting for each interview were also recorded. Following each recorded interview, the researcher sent a copy of the transcription to each participant for member checks (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Participants were asked to review the transcript and verify the data transcribed.

Data Analysis

Because naturalistic inquiry is a process of developing shared constructions, the process of data collection and data analysis are inseparable. This approach encourages a continuous attention to data analysis emanating from the start of the study to its completion. Among the first steps is the process of coding transcribed interviews. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2012, p. 3). The Microsoft Excel file included columns for pseudonyms that were assigned to each participant to

maintain anonymity, the researcher's question, participant responses, and themes. Transcripts from each interview were coded for key words that noted strengths or deficiencies in teacher preparation programs, then again for recurrent themes.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

A study must be trustworthy in order to have an impact on human knowledge (Erlandson, et al., 1993). In order to establish trustworthiness of the data in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that naturalistic inquiry should have credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. As a means of achieving credibility of the data, the researcher must consider the relationship between the data and what the data represents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this study, the researcher used data from a sample of current teachers who have completed teacher preparation programs and who could speak to the relationship between teacher preparation and current teaching scenarios in high-needs school districts. Participants were asked to verify transcribed interview questions and responses. Additionally, the researcher frequently asked the participant questions for clarification as a means of member checking throughout the interviews. During the course of the study, the researcher sought insight on the process of naturalistic inquiry and the data collection from a faculty advisor. This process is known as peer debriefing. Using multiple sources achieved through purposive sampling and document analysis, peer debriefing, and member checks, triangulation was achieved. Triangulation of data is important in naturalistic inquiry because it helps to establish credibility through intense thick description of relevant information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

Results of the informant data in this study revealed several themed perspectives of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs as they relate to the real-world setting of teaching high-needs student populations. Prior to sharing those results, some background on the participants is provided.

Participants

Participants in this naturalistic study included three current teachers certified to teach in various fields and grade levels. All were Hispanic females who received teacher preparation in South Texas and have recently taught or are now currently teaching in high-need school districts. Participant years of experience as teachers ranged from 7 years to 27 years. Demographic information is provided only in summary and is cautious not to reveal identifying information.

Julie was the first participant interviewed. She has been a teacher for 27 years mostly in elementary school settings. In her interview, Julie explained that her perception of teacher preparation is "the course of study that a person would complete for the field of teaching they are pursuing... varied teacher professional courses and so forth." Julie had this to say about her own teacher preparation experience: "Being in the field, I think it's been 27 years that I've been doing this, the more that I see new teachers coming in, I realize that they are still lacking so much."

Jeanette was the second participant interviewed. She has been a teacher for 7 years in both elementary and middle school settings. For Jeanette, teacher preparation is "a program that is designed to develop the knowledge and skills as a highly qualified teacher." Jeanette indicated

that she does “not believe there is a single program that can extensively prepare an individual to educate and impact our diverse youth. It takes years of experience, training, and compassion to fulfill the role of an accomplished educator.”

Janie has been a teacher for 9 years in elementary school settings. She was the third participated interviewed. She explained that, “teacher preparation is when teachers are adequately prepared to conduct instruction in a classroom setting.” Like, Jeanette, Janie expressed concern that “teachers will never be 100% prepared for the things that come with teaching.”

FINDINGS

Data analysis involved a process of coding participant interview responses. This process allowed several themes to emerge as to the perceptions of teachers of high-needs student populations about educator preparation programs. The emergent themes included teacher concerns about behavior management, the need for strong communication skills, the need for immersion experiences around teaching, and the need for preparation in working with diverse populations of students as well as developing confidence and a sense of efficacy for being a successful teacher.

Behavior Management

One of the most prominently noted themes revealed in this study was the concern for educator preparation programs to offer training in behavior management. Further revealed was a need for professional development and identification strategies for working with special populations of students including those who may have emotional disturbances. Janie spoke with particular concern to this regard.

Although we were taught the appropriate TEKS to become teachers, we were never taught how to handle extreme behavior problems. My first year was very hard because I had a lot of defiant students and did not feel prepared to deal with some of the behavior situations. For example, I had a student who threw furniture and not once were we told in college how to handle those types of situations.

Jeanette also spoke with particular attention to concerns of behavior management as a component of teacher preparation.

I think that teachers need to know about the students that will give her a hard time.

Teachers need to be better equipped on how to handle situations when a child has an episode and throws his/her chair at the board. Teachers almost need to have a minor in psychology.

To this, the researcher asked Jeanette how psychology would be beneficial to a teacher candidate. She responded:

I majored in psychology and worked for a child-placing agency prior to getting my alternative certification. Having been exposed to that training and education made me better equipped. I have been in situations where I have had to get my entire class outside my classroom because one of my kids is having a breakdown and it is too dangerous.

That has happened many times in other classrooms as well.

Jeanette also indicated that she has “faced many challenges with students that have explosive disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, ADD, ADHD, and neglect.”

One interview question asked participants if changes to educator preparation programs can contribute to student achievement. Janie stated “Yes. I believe that if teachers are given more chances to learn about behavior interventions then the teacher will spend less time dealing with behavior and more time teaching.” She responded similarly to a question which asked if changes to educator preparation programs can contribute to school improvement.

Yes- more behavior intervention classes will lead to a less hostile environment for both students and teachers. Prospective teachers need to understand the importance of behavior management in the classroom.

Communication Skills

Another theme revealed across participant interviews was the need for teachers to have comprehensive professional communication skills. As participants indicated, this goes beyond class presentation and teaching. As much as skills in classroom teaching and presentation are needed, the data suggests that teachers must also be prepared to interact effectively with parents and children beyond the content. Julie pointed out that “Parents now may be confrontational, and teachers need to be ready for that.” She referred to an instance where a meeting with a parent became difficult:

...Even though you have documentation and you report to parents some certain thing a kid did, you know issues that you might have, or that the student has with others, and you tell the parents, get ready because they are going to say ‘how do you know it was my kid?’ They will question you. A lot. Sometimes you just need to let the parents talk.....There’s just this whole other world outside of the actual teaching part. It’s what comes with the job. You have to be a negotiator, a mediator, a problem solver, a booger cleaner. You know, new teachers just need to know what comes with the job.

Janie also expressed concern for communication skills as a component of preparation. “I believe that teachers that are well-prepared should have some background on how to deal with irate parents.” Further, she explained that “there may be issues with other co-workers and with the principal and they [teachers] need to be taught how to deal with those issues in a professional manner.”

The respondent expressed concern that candidates completing teacher preparation programs are not well prepared in student-teacher relations, specifically, “the interactions with children.” The informant also discussed the need for better preparation in communication with parents and faculty referring to experience and personal observations of new teachers getting “scared off” in the midst of parent confrontation. To expand, the informant suggested better training in conflict resolution.

Diverse Learners

Another theme revealed in the data was diverse learners. Participants indicated that there is a strong and growing need for teachers to be prepared for student diversity, not only in terms of demographics or identity, but in learning styles. Janie stated, “students’ learning styles vary, which is why teachers must implement a variety of strategies to appeal to each learner.” She added, “Teachers need to be prepared for dealing with all kinds of children including those with special needs. Teachers need to learn to teach in different ways to meet the needs of all students.”

Jeanette also spoke to concept of the need for teacher preparation to include knowledge of diverse learners.

Upon completion of a teacher preparation program, a teacher should be able to become well aware of the demographics of the student population, provide instruction that is meaningful yet high level for student achievement, implement effective classroom management procedures, and comprehending programs such as in special education and adhering to individual plans. One of the biggest surprises is that everyone thinks of a classroom in the 'perfect world' scenario. As a teacher, you see many difficulties that students go through. Many students nowadays have disabilities that make it really difficult for them to learn such as ADD, ADHD, and oppositional defiant disorder.

In response to the researcher's question about the limiting factors of educator preparation programs, Jeanette responded that in her experience she wasn't prepared to meet the needs of varying demographics and subpopulations of students. In proposing changes to teacher preparation, Jeanette continued:

I think that a great class to take for upcoming teachers would be a class on autism. There are so many students being diagnosed and very little is known of the disorder. I have had the privilege of working with one [autistic] student. Being educated about the disorder would be in the best interest for the student and the teacher. They are very different and if you don't know how to best respond to them, you are in for a surprise!

Janie explained that the ability to teach diverse learners goes beyond knowing about disorders or learning styles. "Whatever grade level it is that they [teachers] get they need to be ready and well prepared for that. You know, they need to realize that the needs and wants are for kinder or first graders are not the same as for a fourth grader."

Immersion into the Teaching Profession

Themed data revealed a call for more field experiences that immerse future teachers into the realities of the profession. Jeanette stressed:

I don't think any amount of training will actually prepare you for all of the challenges that you will at some point take as a teacher. But I also believe that the student teacher program should be extended to give the student more experience. There is only so much you can learn from a book and from student teaching. It takes experience and a good work environment to help you through those types of challenges.

Julie concurred, "There's just this whole other world outside of the actual teaching part. It's what comes with the job." To achieve this, Julie suggested that teacher preparation programs offer more immersion experiences: lunch duty, drop-off and pick-up, field days and field trips, etc. "If they volunteer, they'll know. They'll see that it's not just classroom." She also stated:

They [teachers] just need exposure. Experience. . . . So much experience. . . . Hands on and in the trenches. . . . They need to use the time during observation and student teaching to see the trial and error of what works and what doesn't work. That sometimes, you have to deviate from the lesson plan. Sometimes it doesn't work.

Julie further spoke to the notion of a more interactive and diversified observation experience. Calling upon personal teacher preparation experiences, the informant discussed the need to do more than just sit and watch one teacher. "They have to develop their own teaching style, right? But they have to be able to see that everyone gets to the same objective maybe a different way."

From these and other responses, a subtheme emerged. Julie has twenty-seven years of experience, and discussed how many of her strategies have been acquired thru trial and error.

You have to realize that even though it's supposed to be *this* way, it's not going to be that way. You gotta be prepared for it all. You are NOT prepared for it all. That's just something you gotta have to live it and once you've got the hang of it you will be okay.

Janie stated:

I feel no matter what or how much you learn in the program to prepare teachers, you really will never know it all until you are in the actual classroom on your own. I was very clueless when coming in and had to learn on my own. Everything else is just trial and error. You learn in your own classroom what you did wrong and what you can do better next time to make it work. I still learn something new every day.

In effect, the subtheme that emerged indicates that perhaps teacher preparation programs cannot prepare future teachers to be ready for everything. Perhaps trial and error is necessary and needed for teachers as life-long learners.

Confidence in the Teaching Profession

Julie's responses were adamant about her perspective that teachers need to have confidence in their teaching ability. The term "afraid" was used often. "They need to not be afraid . . . Teachers can't be afraid . . ." The data collected indicated that there is a strong need for confidence building in teacher preparation candidates. Julie stated:

They [teachers] need to not be afraid. That's a big one. They need to not be afraid. It's like get your feet wet in there, get your feet wet and find a way to solve whatever it is you have a problem with. Ask your teacher and your mentor teacher, ask another teacher . . . um I don't know. Sometimes I see teachers and they, they either look afraid or unsure. Mmmmm. That's a biggie. They have to be, *have* to be sure of themselves.

In almost a tone of offering advice, she continued:

And if you're not really confident, you have to . . . exude it. Because the kids are gonna . . . touch on that. They're gonna know . . . If you don't have that, even if they have the classroom management and content mastery, the job gets hard. You're just gonna have a tough year. And maybe that's why teachers leave.

Referencing an interaction with a parent, Julie again touched on the need for future teachers to be confident:

Teachers can't be afraid. They have to stand their ground. Be firm. Don't back down because the confrontation scared you. Don't be afraid. And if you are afraid, don't show it. You know like when a dog can sense fear? You just have to stick to your guns and give them facts and be strong, confident. Teachers need to be prepared for that.

DISCUSSION

Data analysis in this study reveals a unique insight into the experiences of three female Hispanic veteran teachers with regard to their perspectives on teaching primarily high-needs students in Hispanic majority schools. Interestingly, while informant conversations revealed the need to be able to work with diverse populations of students, this diversity for these Hispanic teachers centered primarily on special needs students in those conversations and the need for preparation in working with these students.

Additionally, the coded data revealed that the informants are concerned with new teachers being better prepared for the environment of the teaching profession, not just as Julie stated “the actual teaching part.” The themes that emerged from this study indicate a need to evaluate teacher preparation in terms of terms of context as well as in terms of content. The subtheme that emerged indicating that good teacher preparation comes from trial and error further suggests that perhaps educator preparation programs are doing what they can to prepare teachers. Janie stated “every year, you get different students and a different group of parents all of which have different ideas and different attitudes.”

All respondents expressed concern for the gravity of practical experiences. This need aligns with the literature. For example, Darling-Hammond (2006) calls clinical experience “the glue for powerful preparation,” (p. 152) and agrees that carefully designed, immersive and intentional field experiences are needed to comprehensively develop good teachers. “There is nothing as practical as good theory and nothing as theoretical as good practice” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 154).

New teachers desire from preparation programs an experience and course of training that is reflective of the field. The findings of this study suggest that the needed improvements to teacher preparation will not come from a new course structure or a revised set of state standards. Instead, improvements to teacher preparation will be revealed in a program’s ability to develop the future teacher as an adaptable, responsive, experienced, and competent professional and life-long learner.

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