Examining Teachers’ Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach in Low-Income Schools Upon Completing a Master of Arts in Teaching Degree

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Upon Completing a Master of Arts in Teaching Degree

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Doctoral Program in Teaching and Learning
Major in Postsecondary Teaching and
Instructional Leadership

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DISSERTATION

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This document was created for the dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement a major project within their school or district that relates to professional practice. The three foci of the project are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership
- Policy Advocacy

For the Program Evaluation focus, candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership focus, candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy focus, candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


4.21.16
ABSTRACT

Recent teacher shortages after the COVID-19 pandemic’s disruption of education systems have increased interest in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) targeting teacher candidates who obtained earlier degrees in fields other than education. This mixed methods research project employed surveys and semi-structured interviews to examine early career teachers’ perceptions of preparedness after completing a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) EPP in an urban, low-income setting located in the midwestern U.S. These MAT EPP program completers described their views of their preparation program, including the EPP’s perceived strengths and areas for improvement framed by the four domains of teaching responsibility: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities (Danielson, 2007). The researcher utilized a sequential survey and interview research design to gather survey data (N=25) and open-ended interview data (N=8), seeking to triangulate subjects’ views of EPP effectiveness in teaching, particularly in low-income schools. Results found that 60% of surveyed MAT EPP graduates indicated that the Classroom Environment domain was their perceived greatest area of strength during their first year of teaching. Conversely, the largest subgroup (32%) reported the domain of Instruction as the most significant area in need of additional support. The follow-up interview phase reported two EPP structural components as equally influential: Instructors’ Support and Student Teaching Placement (32%, respectively). Teacher responses to survey and interview questions showed that most participants identified a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy as an area needing improvement within EPPs. The study described tenets of change leadership and adaptive leadership as frameworks for improving MAT EPP curriculum,
suggesting that EPP should devote greater attention to developing cultural proficiency to improve teacher effectiveness. Findings noted that some teacher competencies could only be learned through real-world experiences. The findings also suggest that although EPPs provide hands-on experiences, the depth of those experiences must be expanded to maximize their effects on teachers’ self-efficacy.
DEDICATION

To my daughter, Journey, the most beautiful human being I know. Through your encouragement, strength, and wisdom, you helped make this possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I give all honor and praise to God for giving me strength throughout this experience. His showers of mercy and blessings have been and will forever be unfailing. I am grateful to acknowledge the depth of my appreciation to those who helped me accomplish one of my biggest goals.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Teacher Certification Program</td>
<td>Teacher preparation programs that provide expedited pathways to teaching licensure, typically in one to two years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator Preparation Program (EPP)</td>
<td>An accredited teacher preparation program that leads to teacher licensure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch (FRPL)</td>
<td>Federal lunch program provided to students of low-income families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Education Plan (IEP)</td>
<td>Special education services in a written document that provides students in need of extra support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC)</td>
<td>Standards used to assess the performance of teacher candidates in educator preparation programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Income/Impoverished</td>
<td>An individual whose family's income does not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Art in Teaching (MAT)</td>
<td>An educator preparation program focused on practical skills and subject-specific information for teachers or future teachers who wish to gain licensure in teaching or improve teaching practices after obtaining an undergraduate degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest University (MWU)</td>
<td>Pseudonym used for higher-education institution of professors who participated in interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Tiered Student Support (MTSS)</td>
<td>Gives target instruction to struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservice Teachers (PST)</td>
<td>Teachers in an educational preparation program who has not begun teaching professionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Beliefs and attitudes toward one’s own capabilities to achieve academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Teacher</td>
<td>Haberman describes star teachers as successful teachers of high-risk students who demonstrate a common belief system that supports their resilience in teaching in our country’s most challenging environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban School</td>
<td>Schools in cities with at least 50,000 people.</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) provide preservice and current teachers with opportunities to gain knowledge about teaching pedagogy and subject matter, as well as provide exposure to practical classroom experiences. Despite efforts to specialize teacher education programs and improve teaching preparation practices, schools in low-income areas continue to struggle to meet state achievement goals in reading and math. Students in low-income areas are unable to make gains toward closing the achievement gap between themselves and their more affluent peers.

Recent studies identify poverty as one of the most significant factors influencing student achievement (Boyles & Mullen, 2020). The social and academic implications of poverty on low-income students are exacerbated by the increased likelihood of being taught by new teachers compared to their non-minority and non-affluent peers. Some educator colleges have developed alternative routes to obtaining teaching certification for urban teacher development, including targeted certification programs specifically for high-poverty schools.

Although researchers have examined how teaching experience influences teacher effectiveness, studies also indicate that the influence of expertise eventually decays over time (Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). However, self-efficacy continues to impact teacher success through their lived experiences in the classroom (Gilette et al., 2018). According to Gilette et al., self-efficacy is a teacher's judgment of their capability to promote student learning and engagement, even among challenging or unmotivated students. However, few studies have attempted to measure and evaluate alternatively certified teachers' perceptions of preparedness to positively impact low-income students' learning.
Statement of the Problem

Students from low-income environments are more likely to be exposed to risk factors that increase their vulnerability to develop risk behaviors that negatively impact their lives. While not all low-income students display at-risk behaviors, the term “high-risk students” is used to describe students with a high probability of struggling in school due to exposures to risk factors such as poverty, housing insecurity, and limited access to health care (Knight et al., 2017). According to McKinney et al. (2008), highly effective teachers are integral for children who may have limited options for achieving personal and professional success other than their successes experienced in school. In addition to training in scientifically-based methods of instruction, teachers need training in specialized approaches to teaching so they can address the achievement gap plaguing many low-income,..

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2010), over 30% of our beginning teachers leave the profession after five years. Moreover, the high teacher turnover rate has a larger impact on high-risk schools, which have a higher likelihood of employing teachers with less than five years of experience (Mason-Williams, 2015). Consequently, teacher candidates graduating from EPPs face the incumbent task of meeting the needs of students who historically have been plagued with educational inequalities, relying heavily on their preservice and in-service experiences. Therefore, research on teacher self-efficacy after completing their teacher preparation is now more vital than ever before.

Purpose of the Evaluation
The researcher chose to evaluate the perspective of teachers who graduated with a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree from an alternative certification EPP. Based on more than 15 years of experience as a teacher and educational leader in low-income schools, the researcher observed that many new teachers needed more adequate preparation for the realities of teaching in the classroom. Evaluating MAT graduates’ perspectives of preparedness and self-efficacy upon graduating with an MAT degree allows the researcher to determine which aspects of their preparation program influenced their feelings of readiness and perceived future success in teaching in low-income schools.

**Rationale**

There is value in examining teacher self-efficacy when determining the needs of EPPs. Prior research has demonstrated the linkage between a teacher's sense of readiness and their beliefs regarding their effectiveness in the classroom (Warner & French, 2019). Furthermore, the interconnectivity of teacher self-efficacy and student success implies a linkage between teacher preparation programs, teacher quality, and student learning. Due to this linkage, it is recommended that EPPs develop their programs based on new teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and ability to meet the needs of the community they serve upon entering the teaching field.

EPPs tend to prioritize measures tied to accountability metrics instead of actions that support continuous improvement; this prioritization is a direct response to an array of state, federal, and local mandates that hold EPPs accountable for their performance. EPPs undergo quality assurance measures through internal and external peer reviewers. The reviews are conducted by organizations that represent the academic community,
professionals, and other stakeholders that provide accreditation through one of two national accrediting agencies: the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP; Sawchuk, 2013). Program evaluations make inferences from data gathered about the quality of the preparation experience and its role in producing high-quality teachers. For example, data about EPP program completers’ retention in teaching jobs in high-needs schools could help drive attention toward gaps in performance that the program would seek to close through improvement efforts (Solberg et al., 1997). Over time, EPPs have become reliant on accountability to achieve better results (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). While the evaluation of an EPP is insufficient to bring about wide-scale improvements in teacher preparation, teacher quality, and student learning (Feuer et al., 2013), teachers’ perception of readiness to teach in high-risk schools can add to the body of research used to determine program structures that promote effective teaching in low-income schools.

The Critical Issues

Concerns regarding low-income student achievement have led policymakers and stakeholders across the U.S. to focus on ways to improve our nation's educational systems by investing resources into education reform. In 1966, the Coleman Report emphasized the need for education reform in low-income areas by noting how socioeconomic status could help or hinder student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The initiation of education reform efforts placed the responsibility of solving social and economic problems on local school districts (Price, 2014). As a result, teachers are increasingly responsible for equalizing social inequities and promoting future economic growth while educating their students (Kantor & Lowe, 2016).
Attempts at reforming education continue to consider teachers a major contributing factor to students' academic gains and success. A growing body of research connects teacher effectiveness to student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017). For preservice teachers, studies have shown that their self-perceptions of preparedness to teach affects students’ levels of success. The ongoing debate in education reform efforts focuses on teacher accountability for students regardless of economic disadvantages and remedying inequalities by staffing schools with productive teachers. An examination of new teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness to teach and areas of perceived success can identify effective methods that could be employed by EPPs to improve teacher quality and effectiveness. Allen et al. (2009) states that nothing will go as far toward improving the educational attainment of all students, especially those in the most troubled schools, as ensuring a high-quality teacher is in every classroom in every state. Considering the evidence of the social and economic disadvantages students may face, the perception of teachers’ preparedness should be at the center of discussions regarding the design and improvement of EPPs.

**Low-Income Population in Urban Schools**

Traditional educator preparation programs focus on teaching and learning and have gained the attention of many stakeholders intending to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs. Typically missing from these teacher preparation program evaluations are teachers’ perception of their readiness and self-efficacy when entering the classroom and facing the demands of their students. Nearly two-thirds of new teachers report that they were under-prepared for the transition into the classroom by their preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). These programs are frequently designed
to be skill-based, and the experiences and curriculum prescribed often favor White, middle-class ways of understanding lived experiences of economically disadvantaged students and their families (Hunt & Seiver, 2016). While it is nearly impossible to provide preservice teachers with practical field experiences that consider all variables of teaching during their student teaching period, authentic experiences in various schools – including schools with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students – can help new teachers develop skills that would best support their work in low-income schools.

The needs of students in high-poverty schools vary greatly across communities, cities, and states. Studies regarding students in high-poverty schools consistently demonstrate the impact of student needs on the students themselves and the teachers who teach them. McDonald (2019) notes that novice teachers navigating a unique and complex environment are often overwhelmed even after a high-quality teacher education program and a sturdy support system within the school. The perceptions of novice teachers' readiness when encountering these needs may be an indicator of either the strengths or the areas of needed improvement within educator preparation programs to prepare teachers for the realities of these classrooms.

The evaluation of teacher preparation programs is not just the rendering of a judgment of program effectiveness but also the systematic collection of information about its characteristics and activities to improve and further develop its effectiveness (Patton, 2008). The goal of evaluating teachers’ perception of their MAT program is to identify information regarding the program’s value in teachers’ perceived readiness to teach in low-income schools.
Site of Study

The EPP program of focus in this study is the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at Midwest University. This program provides a road to obtaining a teaching license for students with degrees in fields other than education. Professors from Midwest University provided expertise regarding the curriculum and practices of their EPP. They serve as experts in the field and will provide their perspective on their EPP curriculum as teachers and creators.

Midwest University’s MAT in Elementary Education program supports attaining a Professional Educator’s license within one to two years by students who have previously obtained their bachelor’s degree. The structure provides extended field-based experiences, an exploration of instructional methods, and instruction on teaching design according to a teaching degree.

Research Questions

The researcher’s purpose in evaluating the perceptions of recent MAT EPP graduates regarding their feelings of readiness to teach in high-risk areas is to inform the practices of EPP program designers. Therefore, it is appropriate for the researcher to examine how people interpret experiences and beliefs, construct their worlds, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Wiggins et al., 2007). The following questions guided the researcher’s inquiry:

1. What are early career teachers’ perceptions of preparedness related to the four basic elements of teaching according to Danielson’s (2007) framework for professional practice: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities?
2. What do early career teachers perceive they need to learn to feel prepared as teachers?

3. How does the structure and content of the MAT EPP influence early career teachers’ perception of preparedness to teach in high-risk schools?

**Theoretical Framework**

Teacher efficacy is the most powerful among the many qualities contributing to student success (Kim & Seo, 2018). Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory is the framework for this research. According to Bandura, perceived self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Ashton (1985) originally conceptualized teacher efficacy as a teacher's belief in their capacity to positively influence student learning and achievement. It is associated with enhanced student achievement and autonomy, the teacher's willingness to adopt new instructional strategies, and motivation to provide special assistance to low-achieving students.

**Awareness of the Program**

The researcher’s work experiences in low-income elementary and middle schools have revealed that novice and tenured teachers have varying perceptions of the assets of their teacher preparation programs. The overarching theme discovered through impromptu conversations with fellow educators is that many teachers feel that traditional EPPs left them unprepared to lead a class and teach. The researcher's review of the literature produced few resources that evaluated programs through the lens of a new teacher's perception. The researcher wishes to add to this body of research to contribute to assessing EPPs to improve the preparation of teachers of low-income classrooms.
Conclusion

This study will provide insight into teachers’ perceptions of their Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) educator preparation programs. Teachers entering low-income schools upon graduating from an EPP have voiced concerns regarding their feelings of readiness to teach in these schools. The perception of the aspects of early-career teachers’ educator preparation program that led to their feelings of preparedness will add to the literature used to determine ways of improving EPPs. Chapter Two provides a review of literature related to new teachers’ self-efficacy, dispositions, and skills, as well as their relative influence on teaching in low-income schools. The review provides insight into the need to identify and analyze early career teachers’ perceptions of their EPP.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the perceptions of recent MAT EPP graduates regarding their feelings of readiness to teach in low-income schools. It is important to start with a thorough analysis of the literature surrounding the current state of low-income schools and the level of perceived preparedness of the novice teachers assigned to teach in them. In this chapter, the researcher identifies characteristics of low-income schools, how the effects of poverty can present in students, and ways in which teachers feel that preparation programs could better prepare teacher candidates to effectively teach in these environments.

Origins of Teacher Education

The history of teacher education in the United States begins with the establishment of colonial schooling, which was mostly a private undertaking. Teacher training beyond regular academic studies was brief and irregular. Teaching children was not considered a true profession that required extensive schooling. Education reform agents such as Horace Mann sought to make education more democratic, universal, and non-sectarian (Anonymous, n.d.). Thus, the formation of common schools was the precursor to today’s public schools. In 1839, as the need for education beyond literacy and math skills began to grow, normal schools were established. Normal schools aimed to prepare teachers to teach beyond simple grammar-school education.

In the late 19th century, formal preparation for African American teachers began. The Hampton-Tuskegee Normal School, one of the first normal schools to prepare African American teachers, offered studies in both pedagogy and academic subjects for
elementary teaching certification (Fraser, 2007). However, according to Fraser, the Hampton-Tuskegee ideology was based upon the continued oppression of African Americans; it was assumed that schools that taught African Americans were meant to prepare their students to work in the institution’s fields, kitchens, and shops.

By 1935, country training schools emerged as teacher training institutions. The teacher training included principles of teaching and school management, practice teaching, and observations (Fraser, 2007). The subject matter taught in these schools gradually changed to include studies beyond vocational training and began to focus on classical subjects. However, because schools continued to operate in a deeply racist nation, inequalities existed with a severely unequal allocation of resources and funds. These inequalities manifested in dilapidated school buildings, outdated texts, and underqualified teachers for the country’s most vulnerable youth. The disparities between low-income schools and more affluent schools remain apparent in the 21st century. “The inherently separate and unequal two-tiered educational system born 400 years ago remains the foundation of a public education system intended for all but failing many” (Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010).

**Low-Income Schools**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), low-income schools are elementary, middle, or high schools where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (FRPL). In the fall of 2019, approximately 12.3 million students attended low-income schools. Low-income schools qualify for Title I funding, which provides federal financial assistance to schools in low-income communities with a high minority and low-income population (U.S. Department of
Education, 2018). Providing this assistance to low-income schools is an attempt to equip students with tools to meet challenging state academic standards regardless of their socioeconomic status (SES).

**Characteristics of Low-Income Schools**

There is a disproportion of wealth and poverty in the United States. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2022) reports that 12% of White children are poor compared to 34% of African American children. Similarly, 17% of African American children live in deep poverty while only 5% of White children experience the same living conditions. Studies have shown that children born in poverty are more likely to remain in poverty as adults (Moser, 1998; Owens & Candipan, 2019). Moreover, because the negative consequences of poverty intensify with longer exposure to stress factors that affect families and their households and the healthy development of brain circuits, lack of resources and income can be passed down through generations of low-income families (Shanks & Robinson, 2013).

It is important to note that low-income students are often referred to as “at-risk” or “high-risk” in other studies. Both terms refer to students considered to have a higher probability of failing academically due to factors that could adversely affect their educational performance and attainment. Students from low-income families consistently score below average regardless of ethnicity or race and are often identified as at-risk (Bergeson, 2006).

To understand some of the obstacles that students may face in their educational experiences, researchers have examined the characteristics and impact of socioeconomic status on families, students, teachers, and schools. The examination of the effects of
poverty at the student, teacher, and school level depicts the hindrances that are experienced by many families in low-income communities. 

**Student Level.** Every day, countless students arrive at school with special gifts, talents, abilities, and challenges. Data from the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) indicates that children from low-income families and students living in poverty often face more academic barriers than their more affluent peers. These barriers may include inadequate access to experiences that encourage the development of foundational skills such as technology and high-speed internet, reading material, and exposure to rich vocabulary and oral language (Buckingham et al., 2013). In these environments, literacy gaps can develop in children before formal schooling begins (APA, 2017). Children from low SES households and communities develop academic skills slower than children from higher SES groups (Haberman, 2005). The deficits that develop in students with lower academic skills affect the classroom and the student's experiences with learning.

**Teacher Level.** Regardless of the barriers and challenges children face, all students have the potential to learn and be successful irrespective of SES or background. With more than 14 million children living in poverty -- a high percentage of whom are from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds -- "[e]very miseducated child represents a personal tragedy (Haberman, 2005). From this perspective, the students who face the most elevated threat of failure must have teachers who are knowledgeable of their subject matter and possess the skills to meet the academic needs of the students they teach. Teacher quality is the most accurate indicator of students' academic success and achievement rates (Brown, 2002). In an examination of test score data, Hanushek (2014) demonstrated that providing students an opportunity to learn from high-quality teachers...
could close achievement gaps over time. To close the African American-White achievement gap, which is larger than the average income gap, African American students would need to learn from highly effective teachers for three to five years. Therefore, high concentrations of beginning teachers are an important dimension of school quality (Pianta et al., 2016).

According to the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future (2010), 50% of teachers in low-income schools leave the profession in the first five years of their careers. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a recent survey of National Education Association members shows that 55% of teachers planned to leave the profession earlier than expected (Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, 2022). Reasons reported for leaving include lack of support from school administrations, student behavior problems, classroom intrusions, and being unprepared for the demands of teaching in low-income schools (Dill & Stafford-Johnson, 2003). This lack of stability in the teaching profession has severe consequences for the quality of instruction for students and their learning.

**School Level.** Although some low-income schools have overcome the bureaucratic, societal, and cultural challenges often perceived as obstacles to success, many continue to need help to meet the educational needs of low-income students (McKinney et al., 2008). In addition, researchers have argued that the classroom environment plays an important role in outcomes (APA, 2017). Non-academic factors that affect student academic achievement in low-income communities include lower self-esteem, aggression, and health problems (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). These characteristics are more likely to result in childhood problems such as poor school
performance, troubled peer relationships, and poor behavior. The connection between these early-life relational experiences and behaviors suggests that poor social and emotional development sets the stage for poor emotional, social, and behavioral competence in early childhood; it can also predict children's academic performance as early as the first grade and whether they will have to repeat kindergarten (Raver & Knitzer, 2002).

Improving Quality of Schools for Low-Income Students

Our nation's schools with high-minority and high-poverty student populations have a higher risk of falling below the expected achievement line in reading and math compared to other schools. As a result, the Obama administration called for revised policies. The administration’s 2011 reform plan noted that reporting and accountability requirements have not led to meaningful change and questioned whether the data points highlighted in the *Higher Education Opportunity Act* of 2008 were based on meaningful indicators of program effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Ultimately, the Obama administration offered several alternatives for a more streamlined reporting system focused on outcome measures, including collecting the perceptions of performance and effectiveness via surveys of the graduates of teacher preparation programs and their principals.

While professional development is at the forefront of many efforts to improve teaching skills, high teacher turnover rates often thwart those efforts (McKinney et al., 2008). Prior research has identified key dispositions of teachers that help them work successfully with students in poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Grossman et al., 2000; Haberman, 2005). Each researcher supports the claim that there are dire outcomes for
students living in poverty, and the impact that ill-prepared teachers and high turnover rates have on their educational products is of grave importance.

Characteristics of a Successful Teacher

Various scholars have examined the attributes of teachers who have demonstrated success in low-income schools. According to Haberman (2005), successful teachers of low-income students demonstrate a common belief system that supports their resilience in teaching in these most challenging environments. Haberman, McKinney (2008), and Hill-Jackson et al. (2019) identified these characteristics as being willing to face the fact that structural inequality and racism, sexism, bias, and discrimination based on language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and other forms of oppression similarly limit opportunities for some students, but not for others. Self-efficacy was also identified as a characteristic of successful teachers in low-income schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Hill-Jackson et al., 2019).

Dispositions

According to the literature on the effective practices of successful teachers in low-income/high-minority schools, successful teachers understand that individual efforts and knowledge of the curriculum are rarely enough to overcome structural barriers in school and society. Research supports the theory that there are dispositions that stem from individual personal ideologies and belief systems that are equally important to teacher effectiveness in knowledge and skills (Hill-Jackson et al., 2019). Haberman (2005) and Hill-Jackson et al. use the term "star teacher" to identify teachers who demonstrate the seven areas of teacher disposition that positively affect teacher and student success in high-risk communities as described by professional organization such as the Council for
Accreditation of Educator Preparation, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Association for Childhood Education International. These dispositions represent the interconnected behavioral practices that protect students' learning and translate theory and research into practice. The characteristics include (1) persistence, (2) positive values about student learning, (3) the ability to adapt general ideas into pedagogical practices, (4) a promising approach to high-risk students, (5) a professional versus a personal orientation, (6) the ability to avoid burnout, (7) and the tendency to be vulnerable and to admit one's shortcomings (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

How a teacher approaches working with high-risk students is a powerful indicator of their potential success in the classroom (Hartlep et al., 2008). To improve the quality of teaching, educators must establish a common core of professional knowledge and skills taught to aspiring teachers across all types of programs and pathways (Ball & Forzani, 2011). McKinney et al. (2008) identified various characteristics of effective teachers in low-income schools. These characteristics include but are not limited to approaches to at-risk students, theory into practice, professional/personal orientation to students, explanation of teacher success, emotional and physical stamina, organizational ability, explanation of children’s success, real teaching, making students feel needed, the material versus the students, and gentle teaching in a violent society.

Haberman (2005) states that "[s]tar teachers are not very concerned with discipline" (p. 62). However, there is an important distinction between classroom management and discipline. Grant and Gillette (2006) reiterate that the terms, although used interchangeably, are embedded in the idea of power and control:
Classroom management refers to the “teacher s’ ability to arrange the learning environment, the physical set-up of the classroom, the learning activities as well as daily routines" to enhance learning. Finally, discipline refers to training an individual or a group based on extrinsic rewards (p. 99).

Star teachers approach the challenges in classroom structures as part of their job. They anticipate that the effects of poverty and environmental conditions will be evident in some of their students when teaching in low-income communities. Star teachers expect the impact of students’ socioeconomic circumstances to interfere with their teaching and students' learning to some degree. According to Haberman, traditional EPPs prepare preservice teachers for classes made up of normal children. This training is counter-productive for preservice teachers interested in working in low-income schools because it leads them to over-classify students as needing special education services who should be elsewhere.

Discipline is not the top concern for star teachers because they understand the importance of taking proactive measures to know and build relationships with their students (Haberman, 2005). Star teachers realize that meaningful interactions with students beyond teaching allow teachers to learn a great deal about their students to better anticipate, ward off, or prevent negative encounters. Star teachers also expect a range of achievement in their classroom and, in that same way, expect a range of behaviors.

Haberman does not assert that star teachers in low-income schools do not face the same problems that all teachers encounter in their classrooms; rather, he identifies how their perception of classroom issue presents differently.

Self-Efficacy
Teachers' feelings of self-efficacy upon completing their educator preparation program affect how they approach their first few years of teaching in high-risk schools. Research About Teacher Education Studies (RATES) data demonstrates that most graduating teachers neither believe they were prepared to teach in low-income communities nor desire to do so (Bettini, 2021; Howey, 1999). Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) asserts that teachers who feel well-prepared by their EPP are significantly more likely to be effective in the classroom and more likely to remain in teaching as a career. In a large-scale analysis of 43 studies representing 9,216 teachers, the connection among teachers' sense of competence, personality, and effectiveness revealed a significant positive relationship between teachers' understanding of competence and their effectiveness in the classroom. Klassen conducted a large-scale analysis of 43 studies representing 9,216 teachers. His findings revealed a significantly positive relationship between teachers' sense of competence and their effectiveness in the classroom. This study identified a substantial body of evidence suggesting that self-efficacy can be an important predictor of teacher success (as cited in Hill-Jackson et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy is an important component of behavioral change. A quality teacher in high-needs classrooms is a teacher who sets ambitious goals and has a high sense of efficacy because they are more likely to persist in helping learners to achieve desired outcomes (Hill-Jackson et al., 2019). Teachers who do not believe in their abilities are less likely to implement new strategies into their classroom routines. According to Imbimbo and Silvernail (1999), teachers may not adopt new strategies if they have doubts about their successful implementation abilities and question their role in shaping student outcomes. Therefore, evaluating teachers' perception of their preparedness to teach after
completing their teacher preparation programs can provide useful information to support
the improvement of teacher preparation policies and practices in the future. Because of
the importance of teacher quality on student achievement in high-risk schools, many
EPPs have begun to concentrate on providing quality experiences to prepare teacher
candidates specifically for high-poverty schools.

**Education Preparation Programs (EPPs)**

The National Council of Teacher Quality (NCTQ, n.d.) divides educator
preparation programs into two types: traditional and alternative. Traditional preparation
requires the completion of a Bachelor degree in Education at an accredited college or
university. Traditional certification pathways include liberal arts education and content
knowledge culminating in a student teaching experience. The main supporting argument
for traditional certification programs is that the extensive coursework, field experiences,
and mentoring required before becoming the teacher of record produces teachers who are
more qualified and confident about their preparedness to teach (Darling-Hammond,
2003). Traditional EPPs produce approximately 80 percent of the teaching workforce in
the United States (NCTQ, n.d.).

Alternative certification programs were specifically established for urban teacher
development and to provide preservice teacher candidates from various backgrounds with
the skills, knowledge, and dispositions for effective instructional practices. For example,
alternative routes specifically tailored to teachers entering the field of urban education
tend to prioritize learning teaching and in urban communities and have greatly expedited
formal preparation programs (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2008). Since the 1980s, multiple
preparation pathways have emerged offering alternative certification routes to teaching
such as Career Switchers and Teaching Fellows (McKinney et al., 2006) and the National Center for Urban Education (University of Illinois, 2022). The difference between these routes when comparing alternative pathways to traditional four-year university programs include features such as alternative pathways offering decreased duration to complete the program and fewer course load requirements; thus, alternative certification programs make the teaching profession more accessible to career changers and candidates who are interested in teaching (Bowe et al., 2011).

**Related Literature on EPPs and Teachers in Low-Income Schools**

Many critics of university-based teacher education preparation programs assert that U.S. educator preparation programs fail to produce the high-quality teachers needed for a diverse, low-income student population (NCTQ, 2013). However, Project UNITE (the Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education) is a network of schools and colleges of education located in urban settings across the United States and Canada. Project UNITE is one example of various programs dedicated to educating teachers on ways to experience success in urban, inner-city schools or work with youngsters living in impoverished conditions. The mission of such programs assumes a participatory relationship in school reform. Programs like Project UNITE seek to prepare and support teachers who may experience culture shock due to the common conditions and activities that characterize many impoverished communities and schools (Kahled, 2016).

The University of Chicago’s Urban Teacher Education Program (University of Chicago, 2023) is an example of a MAT program designed to prepare teachers specifically for teaching in low-income communities. The program uses context-specific approaches to educator preparation that emphasizes pedagogical knowledge as well as
social and cultural competencies. This two-year MAT program includes a full year of training in trauma-informed teaching practices and provides a space devoted to fostering reflection on critical conversations about race. Midwest University MAT program has been specially designed through the partnership with urban and suburban school districts. The program is structured to provide teacher candidates with year-long student teaching in internships where candidates can gain a full academic year of graduate studies in diverse classrooms.

In response to the nation’s need to develop and attract teachers for low-income schools – and more specifically for urban communities – researchers seek to answer whether and how EPPs aid in developing effective teachers in low-income schools. Gaining a better understanding of variations between alternative teacher certification programs is critical to addressing the pressures applied by national, state, and local officials to improve teacher quality and teacher shortages (Scribner & Heinen, 2009). Scribner and Heinen examined the logic of alternative certification EPPs using program theory evaluation design to investigate policy assumptions, program logics, and dilemma points from alternatively certified teacher training to teacher practice. The logic suggests that alternative teacher certification programs are effective strategies to alleviate teacher shortages and increase teacher quality.

**Challenges for Early-Career Teachers and Implications for EPPs**

For early-career teachers, the excitement of making a difference in students' lives may intertwine with feelings of uncertainty and fear of taking on the responsibilities of an entire classroom for the first time. Teachers entering the classroom following the completion of their EPP are bound to face challenges, as do many beginning practitioners
in any career field. Regardless of the performance level, socioeconomic status, or the percentage of students receiving special education services, teachers and students at any school will face challenges that will affect the delivery and attainment of information. The eight most common issues that first-year teachers face include classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual student misbehavior, assessing students' work, maintaining parent-teacher relationships, organizing classwork, working with insufficient resources, and supporting students with personal issues (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Goodwin and Miller, 2012).

To identify ways of improving the quality of teaching in low-income schools, program developers, curriculum writers, and school leaders can benefit from including content on the following topics into its program: how to improve teaching and learning, creating an information-rich environment, building of a learning community, continuous professional development, parental involvement, and increased funding and resources (Muijs, et al., 2009). In addition, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) and McKinney et al. (2008) agree that strong field experiences combined with professional practice and pedagogical coursework nurture the development and characteristics of practices that positively impact teachers' and students' performance.

Interest in the quality of teachers completing EPPs and entering the classroom led researchers to conduct studies on teachers' perceptions of their preparation after completing their EPP. Findings from using survey-based research can help researchers identify areas of improvement in the design of current and future preparation programs. For example, Imbimbo and Silvernail (1999) used New York City Teacher Survey data to analyze novice teacher self-efficacy in five areas: current teaching status, professional
knowledge and skills, in-service professional development participation, teacher satisfaction and efficacy, and student and school demographic information. Most teachers felt they needed better preparation in classroom management, addressing the needs of individual learners, teaching methods, and in-depth understanding of a content area.

**Transforming Teacher Education**

Teacher preparation to address the challenges of teaching in low-income schools is an important component of educational reform efforts. Recent reform efforts have focused on two aspects of teacher education: alternative approaches to teacher preparation and in-service teacher experiences.

**Approaches to Teacher Preparation**

While competencies can be developed as part of an EPP, dispositions continue to change through a wide array of personal and professional growth experiences within and beyond the classroom. To develop effective teachers, EPPs provide avenues for preservice teachers to explore their belief systems regarding teaching and cultivate skills needed to be effective in the challenging world of education in high-poverty schools. Many multicultural teacher education researchers believe that field-based learning experiences – such as internships and student teaching – are valuable opportunities for preservice teachers to gain exposure to their chosen field prior to graduation (Assaf et al., 2010).

According to McKinney et al. (2001), “experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences, including student teaching, as a powerful – sometimes the single most powerful – component of teacher preparation” (p.17). The Education Commission of the States (2003) reported the need for teacher preparation programs to
develop a strong field experience that unites professional practices and pedagogical coursework. EPPs’ concentrated efforts to provide quality opportunities during the internship experience ignited public schools and university partnerships to adequately prepare teacher candidates for high-poverty school settings. For example, Capella-Santana (2003) examined 52 teacher candidates’ multicultural attitudes and beliefs in an undergraduate elementary education program. The teacher candidates completed questionnaires and interviews before and after taking a multicultural education course and before student teaching in an urban school. All of the teacher educators in the program believed that field-based learning experiences offer important opportunities for teacher candidates to gain valuable knowledge about multicultural teaching and learning, connect theory with practice, and integrate into the school community. There is a broad consensus among researchers that high-quality field-based experiences are vital for learning to teach; however, additional research is needed on the effectiveness of various internship and preservice teaching experiences to inform educational reform efforts (Allen, 2003).

In-Service Teacher Experiences

Clinical practice is defined by NCATE as “student teaching or internships that provide candidates with an intensive and extensive culminating activity. Candidates are immersed in the learning community and are provided opportunities to develop and demonstrate competence in the professional roles for which they are preparing” (as cited in Greenberg et al., 2011). According to Strom (2015), it is not possible to isolate any single indicator as the cause of one's success. Various factors influence teacher success during their first year in the profession, including the teacher's beliefs, content area, grade
level, school environment, classroom setting, and student personalities. The combination of these factors makes it difficult to determine the relationship between a teacher's EPP and their professional performance. There is evidence that novice teachers’ experiences during their EPPs can determine how well they will manage during their early years of teaching. With teacher quality as the most important in-school factor contributing to student success, policymakers and teacher preparation curriculum writers must evaluate teachers' perceptions of their EPP to gain a perspective on improving it (Rice, 2003).

The literature shows compelling evidence that EPPs make a difference in preservice and novice teachers' professional knowledge, beliefs, and practices, which influence teacher efficacy and teacher performance (Grossman et al., 2000). In addition, interviews of new and star teachers have demonstrated the impact of student teaching on their learning experience. While studies on student teaching does not perceive the purpose of the student teaching experience as a unique and critical opportunity to produce the most effective teachers possible, it instead is considered an experience where preservice teachers can, through trial and error, embark on a lifelong career of reflection and insight (Greenberg et al., 2011). McKinney et al. (2008) reported that teachers highlighted student teaching as the single most powerful component of their EPP. Surveys of new teachers suggest that student teaching is the most important part of their teaching training experience (Levine, 2006). These findings bolster the claim that integrating authentic practical experiences into EPPs is important to improving teacher self-efficacy. Teacher candidates’ sense of preparedness is an important quality of consideration for teacher preparation programs. A sense of preparedness has been identified as one predictor for teacher success (Brown et al., 2019). For teachers to gain
experience working with at-risk students before leading their first in-service class, there
must be opportunities for preservice teachers to evaluate their own performance
throughout their educator preparation experience.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

There are several trends in how preservice and in-service teachers deal with ethnic
diversity. In recent years, the prevailing discourse surrounding the challenges of
educating marginalized children in the United States has increased its focus on the role of
teacher-education programs. Despite their efforts to address cultural diversity and equip
their students with the skills and attitudes required to teach children living in
disenfranchised communities, teacher preparation programs face criticism for
inadequately preparing preservice teachers to meet the needs of children in 21st century
century American classrooms (Gorski, 2012; Latham & Vogt, 2007). Recent trends in
dealing with ethnic diversity include avoiding controversial issues such as racism and
historical atrocities, giving proportionally more attention to African Americans than other
groups of color, ignoring poverty, and minimizing knowledge such as values, attitudes,
feelings, and experiences.

Culturally responsive teaching can help eradicate these trends through exposure
and education in EPPs:

“According to scholars who have studied this method of teaching, culturally
responsive teachers are grounded in pedagogical practices, teaching conceptions,
and social relationships that enhance social justice because these teachers relate
the curriculum to students’ backgrounds, establish connections with families,
understand students’ cultural experiences, establish connections with local
communities, create shared learning experiences, and recognize cultural differences as strengths on which to build programs” (Bassey, 2016, p.1).

Instead of ignoring the influences of cultural backgrounds in classroom environments, culturally responsive teaching deals directly with controversy, contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender, and includes multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives (Gay, 2002). According to Gay, culturally responsive teaching is not a skill that teachers develop automatically or simply because they want to; rather, it is a learned skill that should be taught in EPPs (Gay, 2002).

**Reflection on Literature Review**

Prior research does not seek to suggest a finite answer for what makes a teacher successful, and the analysis of such suggestions is beyond the scope of the research in this literature review. However, the literature does elevate the importance of developing teachers who teach in poverty-stricken neighborhoods and has identified findings that support the theory that there are common characteristics of teachers who have experienced success in low-income schools. These characteristics are considered worth duplicating in teachers entering the profession. Unfortunately, these characteristics are not easily measured and receive less research than the more measurable qualities of a teacher’s practice.

Evaluating the effectiveness of EPPs can catalyze the change our educational system needs. For decades, policymakers and stakeholders determined an EPP's effectiveness by evaluating the input and output measures determined by the standards developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). Standards grouping are as follows: the learner and learning; content
knowledge; instructional practice; and professional responsibility, which correlates to the Danielson Framework of Profession Practices (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011). However, Duncan (2011) challenged the need for such standards, arguing that gathering data on input measures wastes the time and limited resources of teacher preparation programs. Instead, Duncan suggested a shift in focus from program inputs to program outputs. The present study will examine teachers' perceptions of their readiness to teach after completing their EPP and expand current knowledge regarding the outputs of self-efficacy and classroom success for new teachers.

**Conclusion**

According to National Center for Education Statistics (2002), 50% of new teachers leave the classroom within their first five years of teaching. Low-income schools are more likely to have higher populations of novice teachers than more affluent schools. The high population of novice teachers in low-income schools results in students being more likely to be taught by less experienced teachers. In addition, due to the influx of teachers leaving the profession, it is even more likely that novice teachers with the least experience will teach students (NCTQ, 2021). The connection between teacher attrition, preparation, efficacy, and student performance has led to EPPs facing heightened levels of scrutiny. Therefore, now more than ever, our low-income students need teachers that have the skills and disposition to address the challenges ahead. The scope of this study is to understand novice educators' perceptions of their preparation to face the task.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Historically, educational research has faced controversies in its quest to effectively capture the complexity of educational phenomena (Walters, 2009). Education can be defined as both a cultural and natural phenomenon. Aspects of the educational experience that manifest in the same way for all students regardless of the context reflect a cause-and-effect relationship between the teacher and the student (Ponce and Pagán-Maldonado, 2014). From this perspective, quantitative research is the dominant approach for examining the cause-and-effect relationship between the individual components of teaching and learning. On the other hand, according to Ponce and Pagán-Maldonado, education can also be defined as a cultural phenomenon. As such, research should focus on the complexities and social relationships that occur in schools, and qualitative research methods are best used to understand these relationships.

This study examines teachers' perception of their preparedness to teach in low-income schools upon completing a MAT EPP and how their program contributed to their perceptions of preparedness. The researcher used a mixed methods approach to capture the natural phenomenon, which is best identified through the relationship between students and teachers, as well as the cultural phenomenon exemplified through environmental factors that affect student achievement. The researcher captured direct quotations from in-depth inquiry about the teachers' perspectives and experiences through survey and interview responses (Patton, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews and short answer survey responses to gather data provided a flexible method for collecting
qualitative evidence, offering participatory action research practitioners' insight into the human dynamics of their experiences (James et al., 2008).

**Rationale for a Mixed Methods Approach**

The researcher’s objective for conducting a mixed methods study was to generate quantitative and qualitative data toward a clear and deep understanding of the research problem. Also, the researcher chose this method to use the strengths of a qualitative research model to offset the methodological shortcoming of a qualitative research model. Furthermore, this approach allows the inquirer to make direct contact and build connections with teachers experiencing the phenomenon.

The researcher utilized a mixed methods research design using sequential phases. The purpose of this design was to conduct an in-depth exploration of the research problem. In the research survey provided to the participants, the respondents were asked to provide their responses using Likert scales, multiple choice questions, and short answer responses to describe their perception of readiness in the four domains of professional teaching practices. After completing the structured quantitative survey, participants were asked to volunteer to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Each interview participant was asked to expound on their responses to the survey questions, which allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of teaching self-efficacy relative to their EPP preparation.

**Research Philosophy**

The researcher's philosophy for understanding the complexities of teachers' perceptions of teaching in low-income schools was interpretive. To determine how EPPs could improve future teachers' perceptions of readiness, the researcher carefully analyzed
participants' responses to survey questions and interview prompts related to the perceived usefulness of their EPP coursework and experiences. Interpretivism integrates human interest into the study (Myers, 2008). Furthermore, interpretive researchers assume that access to reality is unique to the observers' social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. Thus, the practitioner has a role in observing and interpreting the world around them through narrative depictions of their experiences.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions guided the inquiry on teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach in low-income CPS elementary schools:

1. What are early career teachers' perceptions of preparedness related to the four basic elements of teaching according to Danielson’s (2007) framework for professional practice: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities?

2. What do early career teachers perceive they need to learn to feel prepared as teachers?

3. How does the structure and content of the MAT EPP influence early career teachers’ perception of preparedness to teach in high-risk schools?

**Research Context**

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is one of the largest urban school districts in the United States (Chicago Public Schools, 2023). It is composed of 514 district-ran elementary schools and high schools, 111 charter schools, and nine contract schools. During the 2022-2023 school year, the student population included 322,106 students;
approximately 72.7% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged. The student racial makeup was 35.8% African American, 4.4% Asian, .1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 46.5% Hispanic, 1.5% multi-racial, .3% Native American/Alaskan, and 11% White. The teacher population included 22,552 teachers of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The teachers' racial makeup was 20.8% African American, 4.4% Asian, 0% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 23.2% Hispanic, .3% Native American, 47.7% White, and 1.3% multi-racial.

Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching was used to evaluate teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach. CPS adopted Danielson’s framework to provide a common definition for teacher professional practices in connection to the Common Core State Standards and district expectations for rigor and well-rounded instruction. It streamlines and articulates standards of teaching practices, skills, and competencies that teachers can use to evaluate and improve their teaching practices. Seventy percent of classroom teachers’ evaluation ratings are based on these professional practices.

Figure 1 illustrates CPS’s evaluation measures to assess educator performance. This framework considers the vast complexities of teaching, representing 22 components under four domains. Practitioners have found that the framework not only makes it easier to determine their level of performance for each component of the framework but also contributes to judgments that are both more accurate and more worthy of confidence.
Participants

The researcher’s purposeful sampling of Midwest University EPP faculty members and graduates was essential to gathering data from information-rich participants that would yield insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Bloomberg (2019) and Heifetz et al. (2006) likened using multiple perspectives to leading organizational change by viewing a dance floor from a balcony. From the balcony, stakeholders could gain new perspectives of an institution and combine their perspectives to guide the changes they wished to see.
Classroom teachers were important in this study because they provided creative learning experiences for their students in low-income schools. Study participants included elementary school teachers who were current or former teachers in a low-income CPS school at the time of the study. Initially targeted participants included teachers who met the following criteria: (1) early-career teachers with less than four years of teaching experience, (2) graduated from the Midwest University MAT program, and (3) taught at a high-poverty school when they were recruited. Teachers with less than four years of teaching experience were selected for the study because the effects of an EPP become less influential over teachers’ perceptions of preparedness over time.

Faculty participants represented their EPP program as content experts, educators, and curriculum writers. They were chosen for this study because they engage with practitioners and policy advocates to build understanding and knowledge through educator preparation and seek to increase competencies and effectiveness in the field. This insight can improve student learning outcomes by providing many perspectives and raising awareness of ways to effect change.

**Recruitment**

The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants who could provide a rich depth of information as practitioners in the field. Criterion sampling was also used by selecting participants based on meeting the researcher's predetermined criteria (Bloomberg, 2019). The recruitment process for this study took place in three phases: Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III.
Phase I: Direct EPP Faculty Recruitment

The recruitment process included using Midwest University’s MAT website to identify the names of professors and leaders in the EPP. In addition, the researcher sent emails to each MAT professor and leader to introduce herself as a doctoral student interested in interviewing them to find out more about their perspective of Midwest University’s EPP. Faculty who agreed to participate were then asked to recommend alumni who graduated from the MAT program within the previous five years.

Phase II: Direct EPP Graduate Recruitment

To establish communication with potential teacher participants, the researcher obtained a list of graduates provided by the faculty of MWU EPP to recruit research participants. The researcher used the list to send emails to potential participants introducing herself as a doctoral student and requesting their participation in the study. Two respondents replied to the researcher indicating that they were unable to participate in the study. One respondent indicated that he did not have at least one full year of teaching experience; the other respondent was no longer teaching at a low-income school.

The researcher must be able to adapt their research plan to meet the needs of the research subjects and make changes whenever necessary. This adaptivity is defined as emergent design flexibility, where the research avoids getting locked into rigid designs and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge (Patton, 2015). Unfortunately, throughout the recruitment process, only some volunteers who were early-career teachers who graduated from the MWU MAT program were available. Therefore, the researcher utilized social media as a new method of recruiting respondents.
Phase III: Teacher Recruitment via Social Media

After multiple attempts at soliciting email responses from EPP graduates, the researcher posted a listing on a social media platform for CPS Teachers' Union members. Current and former teachers of CPS utilized the social media platform. The researcher concluded she would have a greater chance of connecting with current or former teachers in low-income schools by soliciting responses through this platform. The criteria for each participant recruited through the social media platform were as follows: (1) a current or former teacher at a CPS low-income school and (2) completed a MAT EPP. This criterion allowed the comparison of individual cases that differed on some dimensions of experiences to understand which factors explained the difference (Patton, 2015).

The social media posting identified the researcher as a doctoral student seeking research participants to complete a confidential survey regarding their feelings of preparedness to teach in a low-income school after completing a MAT EPP. Participants who reviewed and completed the research consent form (Appendix A) and a research survey (Appendix B). Teachers could indicate their interest in participating in a separate interview after completing the survey. The interview protocol (Appendix C) included a reiteration of the informed consent and the specific questions asked during the interview.

Sample

The sample included three faculty members of the MAT program at Midwest University and twenty-five elementary school teachers who completed an MAT degree program. All teacher participants were elementary school teachers who had teaching experience in low-income schools; twenty-four of the 25 teacher participants were
current teachers in low-income schools at the time of the study. One teacher participant was teaching at a multicultural selective enrollment school that was not considered low-income but their first teaching position was in a low-income school. Three of the 24 teachers in low-income schools identified themselves as having less than four years of teaching experience at a low-income school, while the remaining twenty-one teachers had more than four years of experience teaching in low-income schools.

Five survey respondents who were teaching in a high-poverty school at the time of the study volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. To maintain participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, all participants were identified by pseudonyms throughout the research. All five interview participants taught in a low-income public school in Chicago upon completing their MAT program, and two had experience with urban and suburban low-income schools. In addition, three participants identified as White and two participants identified as African American.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

The researcher used surveys and interviews to affirm specific strengths in MAT programs and identify potential program gaps in meeting the preparation needs of preservice teacher candidates preparing for licensure at the elementary education level.

**Surveys**

The researcher designed a survey using Likert scales, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions to gauge respondents' perceptions of their EPP. The survey questions were constructed to allow respondents to convey their opinions regarding facets of their preservice EPP and current teaching experiences. The survey questions asked teachers to consider their feelings of preparedness by focusing on the four domains
of effective teaching practices according to Danielson's (2007) Framework for Teaching, which was adopted by CPS as the CPS Framework for Teaching (Chicago Public Schools, 2019). Prior to the start of data collection, surveys were field tested by three elementary school teachers at the researcher’s school of employment at the time of the study.

After contacting participants through email and social media posts, the researcher provided the informed consent form, as required by the University's Instructional Review Board (IRB), created in JotForm. Upon receiving a signature and indicating their agreement to be part of the study, participants received a link to the researcher's survey. The survey tool gathered demographic data about the participants, information about their undergrad degrees, years of teaching experience, the economic demographic of their student teaching site, and their current teaching position.

Interviews

Results from the surveys were used to formulate open-ended interview questions. Respondents who completed the survey were asked to indicate their interest in participating in an interview by providing additional contact information and time of day of availability. The survey respondents who indicated a willingness to be interviewed were contacted within one week of submitting their surveys to schedule a virtual interview to delve deeper into their responses regarding their areas of strength and areas of needed support. Five teachers agreed to participate in a follow-up interview.

One-on-one interviews were best suited to gather participants' points of view on their preparedness after completing their EPP. The major benefit of this method was that it had the potential to capture personal perspectives of an event or experience (Marshall
& Rossman, 2016). Interviews focused on the teacher's feelings of preparedness after completing their EPP and during their first four years of teaching. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was used to gain more in-depth information on the participants' perceptions of their preparedness. Interviews were labeled with pseudonyms that the researcher kept in separate files to ensure confidentiality.

**Ethical Considerations**

To maintain confidentiality for individuals involved in the research, pseudonyms were used for the university hosting the MAT program as well as the teachers and faculty members who participated in the research. All participants were informed that their responses to the survey and interviews would remain confidential and would not be used in any evaluative way. The researcher provided informed consent forms and documented their consent to participate in surveys and interviews.

**Risks and Benefits**

The respondents were informed that there were no risks beyond those of everyday life in participating in this study. Information shared with the researcher was not reported to others, and personally identifiable information such as names or schools was not used. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any or all questions and could terminate their participation in the study at any time. The benefit of participating in this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge to improve teaching preparation programs.

**Validity and Reliability**

In validating research, it is important to ensure confidence in the processes used to conduct the study and the methods used to make conclusions. Triangulation was used to
support the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Curuth (2003) identified five objectives of using a mixed methods research approach to validate conclusions and support such methods. The objectives are as follows:

1. Complementarity - to obtain mutual viewpoints about similar experiences or associations;
2. Completeness - to ensure total representation of experiences or associations is attained;
3. Developmental – to build questions from one method that materializes from the implications of a primary method, or one method presents hypotheses to be tested in a subsequent method;
4. Expansion - to clarify or elaborate on the knowledge gained from a prior method; and
5. Corroboration/Confirmation - to evaluate the trustworthiness of inferences gained from one method.

Utilizing various stakeholders' perceptions of their MAT EPP and subsequent feelings of preparation and preparedness provides a range of similar and contrasting cases to be analyzed and compared, which strengthens the findings' precision, validity, stability, and trustworthiness (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis Techniques

Surveys

The survey results were analyzed using the reporting tool in JotForm and Microsoft Excel. The final dataset represented 25 teachers.
Interviews

A pseudonym was used to identify each respondent, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts from teacher and faculty interviews were created using Otter.ai, an online resource for recording and transcribing the interviewer and interviewee. Finally, the researcher compared the transcripts to their respective recordings for validity.

The researcher conducted an inductive analysis to examine the data for patterns and themes. Inductive analysis begins with data dissection without reliance on preconceived analytical categories, which allows the researcher to discover common themes through cross-case analysis (Patton, 2015). Next, the researcher generated a theory based on the study of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview was coded twice; the first reading aimed to develop the coding categories, and the second reading aimed to formally code and systematically follow the classification system offered in the *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (Patton, 2015). Finally, the researcher reviewed the categories to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the identified.

**Methodology Conclusion**

This study examined teachers who teach in low-income CPS schools and their perception of preparedness to face the challenges they experienced in teaching after completing their MAT EPP. The researcher conducted a mixed-method study by gathering quantitative data from 25 teachers surveys and qualitative data from five teacher interviews and three faculty interviews. The researcher utilized the four domains of professional practice as identified in the CPS Framework for Teaching Practice, which are grounded by Danielson (2007), to examine teachers’ perceptions of preparedness.
Chapter Four outlines the results of the 25 survey responses, as well as the categories and themes discovered in interviews with MAT EPP graduates. The chapter also includes interpretations and judgments of findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined teachers’ perceptions of preparedness for teaching in low-income schools after completing a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) educator preparation program (EPP). The researcher used interviews and surveys to judge and make generalizations about the effective components of EPPs and the conditions under which its components were effective (Patton, 2015). Analyzing teachers’ responses based on semi-structured interviews and surveys was essential to understanding the specific themes and patterns. The generalization of these findings can impact future efforts in improving teacher preparation and addressing program policy issues.

The research took place with Chicago Public School (CPS) teachers who completed and obtained a teaching degree through an MAT EPP and currently or previously taught in a school with a high population of students eligible to participate in the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) program. The researcher conducted surveys and recorded, transcribed, and coded interviews with teachers and MAT faculty according to the procedures in the informed consent document.

Findings

A total of 32 participants completed the researcher's survey, which took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Twenty-five of the 32 participants who completed the survey met the study’s eligibility criteria: (1) taught or currently teach in a low-income school, (2) completed a MAT EPP, and (3) taught in a general education classroom. Seven participants were excluded from the analysis because they had only taught physical education classes or in small group settings such as Diverse Learner
(Special Education) classrooms. Although their perceptions would be valuable in future studies, the researcher chose to limit the scope of the research to teachers who had prior experience teaching in general education classrooms.

Participants who completed the survey and volunteered to participate in a virtual one-on-one semi-structured were interviewed via Google Meets. A total of five participants were interviewed. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes. Interview questions were designed to evaluate teachers’ perception of preparedness to teach in low-income schools relative to the four domains of effective teaching practices described by Danielson (2007). The following section of findings illustrates the survey results, including the short answer responses from all 25 eligible respondents.

**Surveys**

Demographics for the 25 participating teachers are illustrated in Table 1. All 25 teachers indicated that they completed an MAT EPP. Nine out of twenty-five participants, representing 36% of respondents, stated that they attended Midwest University’s MAT EPP. Twenty-three teachers, representing 92% of the participants, were career changers who received undergraduate degrees in majors other than education. Two out of twenty-five participants, or 8% of the surveyed population, majored in education in their undergraduate degree program. All participants indicated that their first year of teaching was in a low-income school; in addition, eighteen teachers (72% of the participants) stated that their student teaching placement as also in a low-income school. The student teaching placements for 23 teachers, or 92% of the study population, was in an urban community, while two teachers indicated their placement was in a suburban community.
Table 1

Demographics of Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from a MAT</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career changer</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majored in education</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year teaching was in a low-income school</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching placement was in a low-income school</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching placement was in an urban community</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching placement was in a sub-urban community</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed an EPP at MWU</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question # 1

What are early career teachers’ perceptions of preparedness related to the four basic elements of teaching according to Danielson’s (2007) framework for professional practice: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities?

Perceived Preparedness. Participants were asked to rate their perceived level of preparedness during their first year of teaching after completing their MAT EPP. Teachers rated their perceived level of preparedness in the four teaching domains -- Professional Responsibilities, Classroom Environment, Planning and Preparation, and Instruction -- as “Above Average,” “Average,” “Below Average,” or “Not at all Prepared.” Teachers’ responses are illustrated in Figure 2. To review the data on a spectrum, the findings are described to reflect students who felt their level of preparedness was “Average” to “Above Average.”
According to the survey data, 72% of participants \((n = 18)\) felt that their level of preparedness in managing professional responsibilities was “Average” or “Above Average.” In addition, 68% of participants \((n = 17)\) felt that their readiness to create a classroom environment conducive to learning was “Average” or “Above Average.” Also, 60% of participants \((n = 15)\) felt that their readiness in planning and preparation was
“Average” or “Above Average.” Lastly, 56% of participants felt that their level of preparedness in providing instruction that met the needs of their students was “Average” or “Above Average.”

**Areas of Strength in Teaching Practice.** Participants were asked to identify their area of strength among the four domains of teaching practice during their first year of teaching (Figure 3). Sixteen teachers (64% of participants) stated that their area of strength was the classroom environment, compared to 16% \( n = 4 \) for planning and preparation, 12% \( n = 3 \) for instruction, and 8% \( n = 2 \) in professional responsibilities. Twelve teachers (48%) indicated that their area of strength was adequately addressed during their EPP.

**Figure 3**

*Area of Strength in Teaching Practice during First Year of Teaching*

[Pie chart showing distribution of strengths: 64% Classroom Environment, 12% Planning and Preparation, 16% Instruction, 8% Professional Responsibilities.]

**Area of Needed Support.** Participants were asked to identify the domain of teaching practice in which they needed the most support during their first year of
teaching. Figure 4 illustrates the following findings: 32% (n = 8) indicated their area of needed support was in the domain of Instruction, 28% (n = 7) indicated their area of needed support was in Planning and Preparation, 28% (n = 7) indicated their area of needed support was in the Classroom Environment, and 12% (n = 3) indicated their area of needed support was in Professional Responsibilities.

Figure 4

Area of Needed Support during First Year of Teaching

Research Question # 2

How does the structure of the MAT EPP influence early career teachers’ perception of preparedness to teach in low-income schools?

EPP Attribution to Level of Preparedness. Using a five-point Likert scale, participants were asked to rate how much they attributed their preparedness level to their
EPP experiences. The scale ranged from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Figure 5 illustrates the findings.

**Figure 5**

*Participants' Perception of Preparedness Attributed to EPP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Area of Need</th>
<th>% of Preparedness Attributable to EPP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities</td>
<td>4% (Strongly Agree) 24% (Agree) 32% (Neutral) 28% (Disagree) 40% (Strongly Disagree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>8% (Strongly Agree) 16% (Agree) 40% (Neutral) 16% (Disagree) 40% (Strongly Disagree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Preparation</td>
<td>4% (Strongly Agree) 16% (Agree) 32% (Neutral) 16% (Disagree) 40% (Strongly Disagree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>4% (Strongly Agree) 16% (Agree) 16% (Neutral) 20% (Disagree) 44% (Strongly Disagree)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Planning and Preparation, 48% of participants \((n = 12)\) agreed or strongly agreed that their EPP attributed to their perceived preparedness compared to 20% \((n = 5)\) who disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the domain of Classroom Environment, eight teachers (32%) agreed or strongly agreed that their EPP attributed to them feeling prepared compared to six teachers (24%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the domain of Instruction, 32% \((n = 8)\) agreed or strongly agreed that their EPP attributed to their feelings of preparedness compared to 24% \((n = 6)\) who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, in the domain of Professional Responsibilities, 32% of teachers \((n = 8)\) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their EPP attributed to their feelings of preparedness, and 28% agreed or strongly agreed that their EPP attributed to their feelings of preparedness.

**Most Influential Structural Components of EPPs.** Participants were asked to identify the most influential component of their EPP. Figure 6 illustrates that student teaching placements and participants’ support from instructors were equally influential on teachers’ feelings of preparedness in this study. Thirty-two percent of participants \((n = 8)\) indicated that student teaching placement was the most influential component of their EPP. An additional 32% of participants \((n = 8)\) indicated that their instructors’ support was the most significant. Class projects and coursework were considered the least influential to participants in this study, with only one teacher (4%) considering it the most influential component of their EPP.
Instructor Support. Some participants indicated that adjunct professors who also taught in low-income schools provided the most meaningful learning experiences in their EPP. One respondent stated that the most significant component of her program was the use of educational vocabulary, which supported her ability to understand academic discourse. Other respondents identified various forms of mentorship as the most influential in their EPP experience.

Two respondents indicated that their experiences in their EPP were unrealistic and did nothing to prepare them for their first years of teaching in a low-income school. They noted that support from coworkers, yearlong coaches, and family members provided many of the supports that they needed to feel prepared.

Student Teaching. Participants were asked if their student teaching experience mirrored their experiences in their first year of teaching. According to survey responses,
48% of participants \( n = 12 \) stated that the student teaching experience during their EPP mirrored their first year of teaching. The remaining 13 teachers (52%) indicated that their student teaching placement had not mirrored their in-service experiences, citing a lack of support in behavior management and classroom management. Regarding behavior management, one teacher remarked that behavior issues in the classroom were overwhelming: “I had more behavior issues in my first year of teaching than in my student teaching, and I felt unprepared for them.” One teacher stated, “What was taught in books was far different than what was truly in the school.” A second teacher shared that their “[s]tudents needed more support than the way I was taught.” Instruction on classroom management during the EPP was a major issue for teachers: “I think the biggest difference was we didn't cover classroom management very much in my EPP.” One teacher noted that their EPP was “heavy on pedagogy and light on classroom management and dealing with children's social and emotional needs.” Similarly, one teacher stated that “[they] were given no direction in the program about urban classroom management.” According to another teacher, “professors put much emphasis on building relationships and restorative practices but not enough on actual classroom management practices when those things don't work.” The overall sentiment from these 13 teachers as captured by one participant: “[t]he best way to learn about teaching is in the classroom.”

**Other Outside Influences on Preparedness.** Teachers enrolled in an MAT EPP are expected to have gained some work experience before beginning their program. These experiences and skills can be used to support teachers’ preparedness in the field of teaching. Some of the experiences that participants indicated were factors that contributed to their feelings of preparedness, including self-determination, dispositions that supported
relationship building, continued professional development, work in private sectors, playing sports, and previous work experience outside of teaching. They also identified personal attributes and previous work experiences that contributed to early career teachers’ perception of preparedness.

Teachers were asked if their previous work experiences contributed to their perceptions of preparedness to teach. Eight out of 25 participants (32%) who responded to the question indicated that their previous work experiences provided them with the skills to work with diverse populations, evaluate and deliver to the needs of students, and be organized. Two participants (8%) contributed some of their preparedness in the classroom to managing sports teams or being camp counselors. One participant (4%) noted that their experience as a business analyst in the corporate sector before coming to the teaching field provided them with the skills to document and be organized.

It is understood that participants gain experiences from all walks of life allow them to develop many skills that researchers have determined are helpful dispositions for teachers in high-poverty environments. For example, 4 out of 25 participants (16%) indicated that their previous work experiences helped them be compassionate to their students' needs. One participant highlighted their prior work experience as a case manager for the homeless and mentally ill. This participant stated, “it helped me not take students, parents, or colleagues’ behavior personally, which is very helpful in teaching. My human resources experience gave me additional experience working with people and an understanding that documenting interactions is very important.”

Participation in organizations that promoted continued professional growth was also highlighted as a factor positively influencing preparedness. For example, two
participants indicated that professional development opportunities, such as an internship through the Urban Needs teaching organization and experience as a Golden Apple teacher, helped them develop skills and dispositions that added to their feeling of preparedness in the classroom. In these organizations, teachers were given mentors to help to improve their practices by providing real-world experiences and mentorship.

**Areas of Most Needed Support.** Participants were asked if the teaching domains in which they needed the most support were addressed in their EPP. Four participants (16%) indicated that their area of most needed support was addressed in their EPP and also noted that only in-class or real-life experience could have prepared them for the classroom demands. Eleven participants indicated that their area of most needed support was somewhat addressed in their EPP. For example, teachers stated they needed help with large class sizes, overwhelming social and emotional needs, and meeting the needs of the wide range of academic levels in their classrooms.

Some participants noted that instructional support was somewhat covered in their EPP but indicated a need for more opportunities for real-world application that could have been provided during their EPP. For example, one participant noted the following: “Yes, it was addressed a little, but more like reading about strategies and tools…. there was no real-world application of the theory.” As one participant reflected on planning and instruction, the participant indicated that they needed more ideas on addressing the various levels in her classroom and differentiated instruction despite practicing lesson planning in her EPP.

Fifty-four percent of participants indicated that they did not receive any modeling in areas where it would have been most useful. For example, regarding the classroom
environment, one teacher stated, “I will say that my EPP mostly emphasized classroom management and planning, but there was no modeling of best practices.” Sixty-six percent of participants noted that hands-on experiences would have been the best learning experiences and would have improved their perceptions of preparedness to teach.

Participants were asked to identify the aspects of their teaching experience that made teaching most challenging. Four respondents indicated that there was a lack of instruction in social-emotional experiences and differentiated instruction coupled with the feelings of having a lack of experience in working in a high-poverty environment. One teacher indicated that her students' social and emotional needs were overwhelming. Another noted that having 35 children in a room caused her a great deal of difficulty, subsequently leading to her seeking personal coping strategies from a psychologist. Another teacher noted that she needed the most support with communicating with parents even though she received instruction on effective communication strategies during her EPP. One teacher also indicated that planning and preparation were difficult because they were “not prepared for the range of needs in [their] classroom.”

**Research Question # 3**

*What do early career teachers perceive they need to learn to feel prepared as teachers?*

Survey questions evaluated teachers’ perception of relevance and personal feelings regarding the coursework and required courses in their MAT EPP. Participants were asked to rate their perception of their EPP’s approach to preparing teachers in the areas of the four domains of professional practice and also expound on their responses in short answer responses. The following quotes were gathered from participant responses.
**Instruction.** One participant responded, “In my student teaching, teachers just gave me things to present, and I presented them. There was no real discussion of how to instruct and why,” they said. “Most of my EPP was a group discussion on issues, which could have been time used to model best practices,” another participant stated. One participant indicated that there were readings about strategies and tools but no real work application. Their EPP mostly emphasized classroom management and planning without precise application strategies, such as role-play. Five respondents indicated that schools had unrealistic expectations, focusing on a level of instruction that was above student abilities. They stated that their EPP needed to provide authentic opportunities to discuss or model best practices for these realities in low-income classrooms.

**Planning and Preparation.** One participant stated, “My teaching experiences were very different from my student teaching experiences, so it could not prepare me for teaching where I ended up teaching.” Another participant noted, “I needed more ideas.”

**Classroom Environment.** Participants indicated that teachers’ perceived abilities to manage classroom behavior hindered them from meeting their students’ needs. One participant stated, “Although I was considered a strong teacher, I struggled with my inability to teach children in intermediate grade levels how to read. I did not have enough behavior management strategies from my EPP to make me feel successful.” Some perspectives of preparedness focused on the lack of skills to meet the needs of students not performing at grade level: “I did not have a lot of phonics preparation. Some participants faced the challenge of meeting the needs of students and overcrowded classrooms or students with unmet social-emotional and diverse educational needs, which is what many low-income schools face.” One teacher noted, “I was unprepared to address
social and community issues brought into the school…. I needed assistance for all
students with special needs and ADHD.”

Three respondents indicated they perceived that their students had little support at
home. One teacher recounted the following: “I had 7 out of 28 students that had behavior
issues due to trauma and chaotic home lives.” They stated, “Many teachers used
intimidation and fear to manage their classroom, and this was not my personality.” One
participant stated, “Many were used to running the streets and the classrooms.”

**Professional Responsibilities.** Three teachers noted the need for support in the
Professional Responsibilities domain, which includes communicating with parents about
the needs of their students. They indicated they did not feel prepared to respond when
parents were upset, whether with good reason or when taken by surprise. One participant
stated that they needed experience and professional development in constructing
Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) and communicating IEPs to parents.
Encompassing the needs of students with IEPs, teachers are required to provide Multi-
Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to their students daily. One participant noted, “Things
like MTSS, REACH [Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago’s Students] type
evaluations, and CPS grading expectations were not part of my EPP.”

**Development of Skills.** Participants were asked to describe what contributed to
their development in the areas they perceived as needing the most support. Teachers
identified areas where they could develop their skills through multiple experiences.
Survey responses showed that work and personal experiences were identified as ways to
strengthen teaching skills in those areas.
One respondent noted that they learned organization skills and how to “toughen up on discipline” through experiences in the classroom. Another teacher indicated that their experience as a teacher’s aide strengthened their skills. One respondent recounted that they tried some of the techniques observed in the classroom and avoided techniques that made them uncomfortable, which helped them strengthen their skills. Another respondent stated, “Through persistence and never giving up, I learned from my experiences how to implement interventions and to connect with students.” Third teacher noted that they taught themselves through trial and error and ongoing professional development. Participants also indicated that having mentor teachers and coworkers that reached out to them was very helpful.

Participants were asked to identify their feelings towards the broader scope of their EPP. Teachers were asked to complete Likert scales to analyze their perception of their EPP’s required courses, the projects assigned during their EPP, and their student teaching placement. According to survey responses, 72% of participants (n = 18) agreed or strongly agreed that their coursework and projects interesting and enjoyable; 52% of teachers (n = 13) agreed or strongly agreed that their coursework and projects were relevant to their current experiences (Figure 7). Figure 8 illustrates that 76% of participants (n = 14) agreed or strongly agreed that their program’s course requirements interesting and enjoyable, and 68% agreed or strongly agreed that their course requirements relevant to their everyday teaching experiences. Figure 9 demonstrates that 72% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their student teaching experience interesting and enjoyable, and 60% agreed or strongly agreed that their student-teaching experiences relevant to their current experiences.
Figure 6

Participants’ Perception of EPP Coursework and Projects

![Bar chart showing the percentage of participants' perception of EPP coursework and projects.]

- Interesting and enjoyable: 56% Agree, 20% Neutral, 16% Disagree, 4% Strongly Disagree, 4% Strongly Agree
- Relevant to my current experience: 32% Agree, 28% Neutral, 16% Disagree, 4% Strongly Disagree, 20% Strongly Agree

Teacher Perception:
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Figure 7

Participants’ Perception of Required EPP Courses

![Bar chart showing the percentage of participants' perception of required EPP courses.]

- Interesting and enjoyable: 4% Strongly Disagree, 4% Disagree, 16% Neutral, 60% Agree, 16% Strongly Agree
- Relevant to my current experience: 28% Agree, 0% Neutral, 4% Disagree, 4% Strongly Disagree, 48% Strongly Agree

Teacher Perception:
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
MAT Graduates Interviews

After completing the EPP graduate survey, the respondents were prompted to indicate if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview with the researcher to expound on their survey responses and provide insight into their perception of their EPP. Twelve participants expressed interest in participating in the interviewing phase of the research. Based on the criteria of being a classroom teacher, the researcher chose eight respondents to interview respondents in self-contained general education classrooms. Of the eight participants who indicated their willingness to participate in an interview and were invited to schedule an interview time, five teachers responded. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews utilizing online virtual meeting platform
Google Meet and recorded the interviews using Otter.ai, which also transcribed the interviews with all five participants.

Through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with survey respondents, the researcher gathered data through open-ended questions using a semi-structured interview format. For example, the participants were asked to describe their readiness when they began their careers as teachers in a low-income school and the experiences that led to that perception. This topical interview method is intended to explore questions of what, when, how, and why from different people with different information and distinctive perspectives (Rubin, 2012).

Participants were identified as TP1, TP2, TP3, TP4 and TP5. Participants TP1, TP2, and TP3 identified as White females. Participants TP4 and TP5 identified as African American females. Four of the five interview participants -- TP2, TP3, TP4, and TP5 -- completed their MAT program more than three years prior to their interview.

The participants’ careers before pursuing an MAT degree varied. Two out of five participants obtained an undergraduate degree in education. TP1’s degree was in special education, and TP5’s degree was in middle school education. P1 and TP5 had previous work experience in low-income schools before completing their MAT program. Two participants, TP3 and TP4, had degrees outside of teaching but had multiple years of being a teacher’s assistant before pursuing an MAT. The remaining participant, TP2, had an undergraduate degree and a prior career outside of teaching.
Table 2

*Interview Respondents' Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Post-Master’s Degree</th>
<th>Bachelor’s Degree Field and Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TP1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>More than 3</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>Business and Economics; No prior teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>Interpersonal Communications; Paraprofessional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>Sports Broadcasting &amp; Communications; Paraprofessional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>Middle Level Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Themes**

Patton (2006) suggests thinking systemically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and institutions of learning. The components of these systems are the competencies, conditions, culture, and context of the whole, including the participating teachers. Upon analyzing the data gathered from interviews, the researcher identified each component in the participants' responses, as defined by Patton.

Eight categories emerged from analyzing the participant’s responses to interview questions, as in Table 3. The table illustrates the interviewees’ responses regarding their perceptions of the context, culture, competencies, and conditions that impacted their learning experiences. A marked box indicated that the respondent referred to the given category.
Table 3

Research Categories and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Indicated a lack of knowledge of the culture of students</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identified personal cultural differences/similarities having an impact on</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students’ experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Noted characteristics of students in low-income communities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Experienced difficulty in creating an environment conducive to learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indicated a lack of pedagogical approaches to differentiated instruction</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noted sufficient mentorship in student teaching</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Indicated insufficient in-person real-world application of learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>through student teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noted a positive experience in student teaching</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Culture

Culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school (Wagner, 2006). “Culture refers to the invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout the system” (p. 102). In this section, the researcher reports how participants described their experiences regarding the culture of the students and families in the low-income schools where they teach. The teachers also compared their own culture and upbringing to that of their students. Finally, the participants' descriptions of culture define how similarities and differences impacted their perceptions and students’ experiences.

Three out of the five participants’ responses identified their perceptions of how the culture of their students compared to their own culture or what the students may have perceived the participants' culture to be. TP1 (White) said, “I come from an area where everybody’s parents are like… over-protective, to working in an area where kids are very independent.” She continued to describe her feelings regarding the students in low-income schools. “The kids are young and taking care of their siblings, and the kids are breaking down and are too stressed out and mentally traumatized.” TP2 (White) recounted, “Obviously, I’m a White woman. I kept thinking that they were thinking of me like a White woman from a perfect world with a White picket fence. But, I’m like, I’m human. I deal with death and divorce and breakups too”. TP3 (White) said, “I’m pretty sure that most of them had never dealt with someone from my generation who was White, middle class, and grew up in the suburbs. "TP4 (African American) stated, “for
me, I fit the demographic. I grew up like a lot of my kids. So, it would be easier for us to relate to each other and create a better learning environment for them”.

Participants TP3 (White) and TP4 (African American) described the perceived differences between the cultures of their students and the implication of having a lack of knowledge of them.

TP3 (White), an Interpersonal Communications B.A. degree recipient with two years of work as a teacher’s assistant, recounted her experience with low-income schools with a high population of immigrants. She compared her experience with low-income, high-immigrant experience with her experiences with low-income schools with a high population of African American students. She stated, “I was used to an immigrant and refugees’ kind of low-income.” But, so many of those cultures came in with such a high value for education”. She said, “when I started on the west side, and there were 99% low-income African Americans, it was an entirely different culture in terms of low-income.

TP3 (White) recounted an instance where cultural differences were evident when using vocabulary terms while communicating with her students.

I spoke differently. It was just a different culture. So, without culturally appropriating, I realized the differences in our vocabulary and ways of talking. I would say things like I’m not kidding! But when an older (African American) teacher came in and said, “I’m not playing,” the students responded to her directives. This showed me that a simple shift in vocabulary resonated with the students.

TP4 (African American) described her perception of the differences between her suburban teaching experiences and her urban low-income teaching experiences. She
reported that her first five years of teaching were completed in the suburban district where she taught. Afterward, she became a teacher at a low-income school in CPS. She stated:

I hate to say it, but [classroom] management at a low-income CPS school will be different from suburban schools. I was not ready for my first year in CPS. It was a different beast. And I think I’m just now getting acclimated to CPS because it’s an entirely different vibe, and you need to be ready for that if you’re not ready…I probably would have quit if I had my first year in CPS.

Both TP3 (White) and TP4 (African American) identified biases evident in their experiences in low-income schools. For example, TP3 (White) described how many of the curriculum books in the school did not mirror the students' demographics or cultures. TP4 (African American) stated that EPPs have much work to address teachers’ biases around low-income students. For example, she recounted an event where a teacher called the police on a 2nd grader for having a tantrum.

A 2nd grader threw a tantrum, and the teacher called the police. I don’t know if she tried to calm him down first, but her next line of defense was to call the police. So, police officers come in with a uniform, and they’re armed, and my kids are like, “man, what's going on?” And this little boy was sitting there, and he's crying, and she's (the teacher) just was like, “You're gonna just need to behave.” He's not committing a crime, and you just criminalized him in front of his class, in front of him, in front of, you know, many people. Is it because you couldn’t calm him down? You couldn't relate to him?”
**Relationship Building.** Relationship building is important in creating an environment where students desire to learn. TP3 (White) shared that she believes that EPPs need to start telling preservice teachers that teaching is not just teaching. In education, teachers wear many hats. “You have to break the barriers to try to find out about your students for them to be successful and trust you,” she reiterated.

TP3 (White) recalled a story where students she had been teaching saw her at her second job as a waitress at her mother’s restaurant. She enjoyed this opportunity as it gave the students a different perspective of who she was. However, she wanted the students to see the “human side” of her as well.

**Context**

According to Wagner (2006), context refers to the larger organizational systems involving schooling. Wagner states that all contextual information must be understood to help inform and shape our work to transform our school's culture, conditions, and competencies. Research findings show that poverty affects the school at the student, administration, and community levels. The research participants in this study described contextual components that contributed to their perceptions of preparedness at each level, student and family, teacher, and organization.

**Student/Family Level.** At the student level, low-income schools serve a population of students with a wide range of needs. Both participants, TP1 (White) and TP5 (African American) shared concerns about their student’s academic abilities. TP2 (White), TP3 (White), and TP4 (African American) each shared the importance of recognizing the students’ family demographics and supporting and building partnerships with parents. TP3 (White) stated the importance of collaborating with parents to share
their goals for their children’s success. “You know, this is how you can help me when
you’re at home, kind of thing,” she said. TP3 (White) recounted stories of students who
lived in shelters and later acquired stable housing but chose to travel far distances to
continue to receive schooling at their home school. This led to frequent truancy concerns
among students.

**Teacher Level.** TP3 (White) stated that she was not sure what she was getting
herself into when she encountered the “pushback” she received from “traumatized”
students. She indicated that she had never taught in an environment outside of her own
middle-class, White, suburban neighborhood.

TP1 (White) expressed concerns about the academic needs of her students. She
stated that she had a difficult time in her experience in a low-income school because
several students had “special needs.” When asked to further elaborate on her perception
of her students whom she had identified as having “special needs,” she said, “all I knew
was that they all needed special ed.” She elaborated more on this assumption by saying
that “these students would run around and not listen, and this behavior, along with them
not willingly working in small groups, meant that they needed special education and
special attention.”

TP5 (African American) stated that in her low-income school, she experienced a
large population of students who had never experienced school. She noted that many
students still needed to attend formal preschool while teaching a kindergarten class in a
low-income community. She indicated that she often had to take the students’ learning
goals down to a lower level.
**Organizational Level.** TP5 (African American) indicated that her educator preparation program still needed to prepare her to consider that students would not be ready to learn from the curriculum that school districts would require them to teach. She indicates that the most valuable experience in her EPP was clinical, which provided opportunities to connect with real teachers, go into their classrooms, and engage in the learning experience.

TP4 (African American) described the experience as “a different kind of beast,” which she would have most likely quit if she had experienced it in her first year. She stated that in her practicum experiences, she observed teachers but was never given feedback on the experience. She had not received input and experienced no real-life application until student teaching, which made the transition difficult.

**Competencies**

Wagner (2006) defines competencies as the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences learning. According to Wagner, competencies are most effectively built when professional development opportunities are job-embedded, continuous, constructed, and collaborative. Participants were asked to describe how their EPP contributed to their readiness levels. Culturally relevant pedagogy can support teachers’ performance in diverse classrooms. Participants were asked to describe their perception of preparedness in the four domains of teaching -- Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instructional Practices, and Professional Responsibilities -- while teaching in a low-income school. Participants were then asked to describe how their EPP contributed to their perception of preparedness. Table 4 illustrates the connections between participants' perceptions of their strengths based on their EPP and work experiences.
Table 4

*EPP Contribution to Respondents' Feelings of Preparedness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree field</th>
<th>Strength in the four domains</th>
<th>Contributes strength to previous work/life experience</th>
<th>Contributes success to TPP</th>
<th>Contributes success to previous work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TP1</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>Planning &amp; Preparation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2</td>
<td>Business and economics</td>
<td>Planning &amp; Preparation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3</td>
<td>Interpersonal communications</td>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP4</td>
<td>Middle-Level education</td>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP5</td>
<td>Sports Broadcasting &amp; Communications</td>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two of the five participants, TP1 (White) and TP2 (White), stated that their strength was in Planning and Preparation; both TP1 and TP2 indicated that their EPP did not have any influence on their feelings of preparedness in the four domains of effective teaching practices according to Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching. Both participants indicated that their EPP was just a means to becoming certified to teach.

*Planning and Preparation.* Three of the five participants -- TP3 (White), TP4 (African American), and TP5 (African American) -- stated that their strength was in the domain of Classroom Environment. When participants were asked to describe how their EPP influenced their feelings of preparedness, TP2 (White) indicated that although her area of strength was Planning and Preparation, her EPP did not align with the outdated instructional practices of the school at the time. TP1 (White) and TP5 (African American)
stated that lesson planning was the largest factor in their feelings of preparedness. TP5 (African American) indicated that the lesson planning instruction as part of her MAT’s Special Education courses focused on differentiating instruction and providing accommodations and modifications for all students. This training is something she continues to utilize in her current position.

**Instructional Strategies.** Three out of five participants described their areas of perceived deficits to be in providing instructional practices that met the needs of their students. For example, TP4 (African American) stated that she wished that, as a middle school teacher, she had more instruction on teaching basic phonemic awareness skills that were not mastered in earlier grades. In low-income schools, many students need to meet grade-level expectations. She indicated that she did not have much experience with implementing instructional strategies to support the diverse needs of her students, so she depended on instinct and collaboration opportunities with experienced teachers at her grade level.

Differentiated instruction is a key component in the success of students with diverse needs. TP3 (White) noted how her EPP Reading Methods course addressed the basics of getting kids up and moving into small instructional groups; however, the course had its shortcomings. “The course did not provide a sense of how to balance the environment so that students can thrive and be effective in the learning environment,” she stated. TP1 (White) voiced frustration in working with small groups: “I couldn’t break them into groups. I tried to put them into groups immediately, which was a mistake. I had to work with them individually and then group them into groups.”
Although she indicated her strength was in creating a classroom environment that was conducive to learning, TP4 (African American) said she struggled to support learners who needed to be on grade level in math. She shared:

I created a classroom that students wanted to be in, but I needed to meet the needs of all students successfully…. You’re going to have the ones that can work, and they’re working independently, but you’ll have the ones that can’t work independently, and they need to sit with you and maybe be taught a strategy that will help them learn the concept. That is my biggest struggle.

**Classroom Environment.** All five interview participants highlighted the importance of having classroom management routines to cultivate an environment for learning. Two of the five participants, TP4 (African American) and TP5 (African American), explained that the assumption that students knew the expectations of the classroom encouraged the development of distractions and disorder among students. Two of the five participants, TP2 (White) and TP3 (White), stated that respect versus intimidation and fear is the key to obtaining positive responses to classroom expectations. TP2 (White) said, “people have to realize two things, you have to talk to kids like their parents are standing behind them, and to talk to them like they matter.” TP3 (White) shared, “you can get classroom management by intimidation and fear, but then the minute you’re not there, or you’re busy, it’s gone.” TP1 (White) believed that being stern and showing no flexibility was the best way to gain respect and maintain order in your classroom.

TP1 (White) stated that her current coursework in obtaining a degree in special education focused strongly on building classroom management into lesson planning. All
participants agreed that building relationships is the foundation of establishing a classroom environment conducive to learning. TP4 (African American) and TP5 (African American) noted the importance of having classroom management strategies modeled to preservice teachers during their EPP.

**Professional Responsibilities.** When asked to identify an area that was a struggle during their first year of teaching, TP5 (African American) indicated that she struggled with taking attendance. She also stated that she needed help gathering and presenting data intended to support identifying students with special needs. TP5 (African American) indicated that her EPP (MWU) did an exceptional job of providing resources for professional development, mainly with her participation in the Golden Apple Teacher. TP1 (White) indicated that her professional development through readings and participation in educational summer camps promoted through her EPP was most influential in her feelings of readiness to teach.

**Conditions**

Wagner (2006) defines conditions as the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources. Participants' responses identified their perceptions of the translation of their in-service teaching experiences into their actual practice in the classroom. The answers to the interview questions about teachers’ perceptions of their EPP revealed the following categories of need: mentoring with timely feedback during student teaching; in-service student teaching used to guide preservice teacher learning; and skills & competencies used for an entire year under a mentor teacher.

All research participants indicated that their competencies were best developed through real-world application of teaching practices in the classroom. These conditions
were mimicked in four out of five participants’ experiences through working as a paraprofessional, receiving support and feedback from mentor teachers, or receiving help from administrators while teaching. In addition, two of the five participants indicated that applying teaching practices under guided mentorship supported their perception of preparedness.

Three out of four participants who spent time under the leadership of a mentor teacher indicated that the classroom environment was their strength. Participants TP3 (White), TP4 (African American), and TP5 (African American) all had previous work experiences in education under a mentor. However, TP3 (White) had a negative experience with the mentorship she was provided during her first year of teaching. She stated that the classroom management techniques suggested were more punitive than positively reinforced the desired behavior.

TP1 (White) and TP2 (White) received their experiences in the classroom before in-service teaching through their student teaching experiences. Three of the five participants indicated that the most impactful contribution to their perceptions of readiness was their time spent in the classroom. In addition, participants who stated that they spent time in classrooms under mentor teachers contributed their perception of enthusiasm to these experiences.

**Interpretation**

The researcher explored the perceptions of preparedness in 25 teachers who completed an educator preparation program and received an MAT degree. The interpretations are anchored in the “4 Cs of Leadership Change” (Wagner, 2006): competencies, conditions, culture, and context.
Culture

Geneva Gay, a pioneer of culturally responsive pedagogy, says positive relationships are one of the major pillars of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). The statement, “we can’t teach what we don’t know,” applies to knowledge of both the student population and subject matter. In this research, it is evident that teachers experienced culture shock from the lack of knowledge when faced with the challenges of teaching ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. This knowledge includes cultural characteristics and how it affects students on multiple levels.

MWU graduates indicated that having a yearlong mentorship with a coach after completing their EPP to support instructional strategies and classroom management would have been a beneficial component of the EPP. Participants appreciated the length of the program and the ease of the process of completing the necessary coursework towards completion. The support from cooperating teachers was far more valuable than coursework around theory and practice indicating teachers’ desire to have more real-world experiences during student teaching. Participants stated that instructors in the MWU program demonstrated a love for what they do.

Context

Poverty affects multiple levels of education. Our schools are affected by poverty at the student, family, teacher, and administration levels.

Low-Income Schools Have a Higher Likelihood of Employing Recent EPP Graduates. Impoverished low-income schools are more likely to be staffed with new teachers than non-low-income schools. Through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher determined that new teachers completing a MAT EPP,
regardless of prior experiences, will face the challenges that low-income students tend to face. All research participants, irrespective of their demographics and childhood experiences, noted that students in low-income schools demonstrated many of the struggles and traits that research indicates plague the experiences of many low-income students.

**Limited to no Previous Experience in Low-Income Communities.** The study’s findings indicate that teachers teaching in low-income schools began with little to no previous exposure to the characteristics of these communities, such as housing instability, food insecurity, threats to physical and emotional well-being, a lack of jobs, and proper healthcare. This is demonstrated by teachers’ responses to their feelings of preparedness to teach after completing their MAT and their first year of teaching.

Out of the 25 survey responses gathered from participants, six teachers expressed frustration due to their lack of preparedness to meet the needs of their students. Of the six participants, two teachers identified students’ lack of support at home and lack of experience addressing social issues brought into the school as a challenge they faced in nourishing an environment of respect and rapport. According to Danielson (2007), in interviews, students consistently reported that one of the characteristics they value most in their teachers is respecting them and their lives outside of school.

Interview participants TP4 and TP5 were African American teachers who grew up in urban, low to middle-income African American communities. Although they could attest that working in schools with a demographic of low-income families is challenging, they still indicated an initial culture shock they experienced when they began teaching. Participants TP1, TP2, and TP3 were White females who had never lived in a low-
income urban community and experienced many of the shocks that TP4 and TP5 experienced. This finding illustrates how vital it is for teachers to be provided opportunities for exposure to the learning environment with this population before completing their EPP. Research conducted regarding Star teachers articulates characteristics of teachers who experience success in these environments. Student teaching placements with teachers with “star teacher” qualities would give teachers exposure to practices that work in a high-needs classroom.

Participants indicated that previous work experiences attributed to their sense of preparedness. More than 50% of the survey participants ($n = 13$) described professions that developed the skills they attribute to their strengths in teaching. Yet, many participants noted that nothing is better than having real-life, hands-on, authentic experiences in the classroom with the demographics that they may teach.

**Competencies**

Most participants indicated that the area in which they needed the most support was addressed in their EPP. There was also a consensus around the need for more modeling and real-life application during their EPP. One participant noted that one or two courses primarily focused on planning and prep, but there needed to be more instruction modeling. One participant indicated that her students’ social and emotional needs were overwhelming. In providing instruction, one participant stated that although she was considered a “strong teacher” her first year, she struggled with the classroom environment due to her inability to teach children in intermediate grade levels how to read. She also indicated that she did not have enough behavior management strategies from her EPP to make her feel very successful in her teaching environment. The pattern
of responses illustrates teachers' desires to have meaningful real-world opportunities to apply skills and practices learned during their EPP.

**Lack of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** The researcher discovered a pattern in participant responses that indicated that instruction and classroom environment were major concerns when discussing the perception of preparedness to teach in low-income schools. In addition, teachers who indicated that their background and culture were far different from those of the students they taught also demonstrated a lack of experience in building relationships relevant to their students’ needs.

**Feedback.** Research participants noted a need for more input during student teaching that could have been used to build their skills during their EPP. Teachers indicated that observations and discussions during practicum were centered around hypothetical situations and did not reflect the experiences that the student teachers were experiencing.

**Mentorship.** Building teachers’ skills through in-person, hands-on teaching experiences with teachers who demonstrate "star teacher” qualities (Gilette et al., 2018; Hill-Jackson et al., 2019) positively affects teachers' outlook on their abilities and thus increases the likelihood that they would persist in learning and adapting to the needs of their students.

**Development of Skills.** Participants identified ways in which they were able to develop and strengthen their skills in teaching. Six teachers provide additional context via a short answer prompt in the survey. Three of the six respondents indicated an awareness of where they needed to improve and sought peer and collegial support. Two of the six participants stated that experience in the field was the best teacher.
Conditions

**Feedback Loops.** Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) reported that content knowledge alone does not adequately prepare teachers for the challenges they will face in today’s classrooms. To improve the preservice teacher experience, there must be a connection between theory and practice through a feedback loop between graduates of educator preparation programs and curriculum writers in EPP programs (D’Aniello, 2008).

**Connecting what happens during in-service to the campus.** During traditional student teaching experiences, cooperating teachers are expected to provide a place for preservice teachers to practice without first establishing a connection between what preservice teachers do in their teacher education program and their school placement. Zeichner (2010) found that cooperating teachers tend to know little about their preservice teachers’ courses. On the other hand, university faculty typically need to be aware of practices expected in the partnering schools (Zeichner, 2010).

Research has shown that field experiences are important to developing teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2009). To bridge the theory-practice divide that hinders teacher candidates and student learning, teacher candidate field experiences must be increased (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

The disconnect between what students are taught during EPP courses and their opportunities for implementing these practices in their school placements can vary greatly. Student teachers enrolled in University of Washington – Seattle’s math methods course attend one of two weekly meetings at the local school where teachers use practices similar to those taught in their methods course (Zeichner, 2010). The suggested
programmatic change incorporates a hybrid space linking training and academic
knowledge. In this context, theoretical knowledge is used to identify the multiple forms
of knowledge and expertise amongst educational practitioners in colleges, university
faculty, and staff. This hybrid space in preservice teacher education intends to blend the
experiences of in-service school practice with university-based teacher programs in new
ways, thus connecting what’s happening in the classroom to the campus and
strengthening the skill set.

Teachers who receive first-hand experience with a supervision teacher who
displays “star teacher” characteristics can develop an appreciation for classroom
management approaches, cultural considerations, communication with parents, and
building relationships with students. Creating a stronger link between academic
preparation and the expertise of experienced “star teachers” in the field bridges this
disconnect. In addition, as Haberman (2011) described, enlisting the support of “star
teachers” allows teachers to gain first-hand experiences seeing Star teachers engage in the
multilayered experiences of teaching in low-income schools.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), in its
2009 Blue Ribbon Report on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student
Learning, recommends that instead of being comprised primarily of courses, educator
preparation programs should become “fully grounded in clinical practice” (NCATE,
2010, pp. ii). The researcher recommends that this accommodation be made through
extensive real-world classroom experiences during teacher preparation.

Judgments
With 38% of participants indicating that, on average, their EPP made them feel prepared to teach, the majority of the research participants think that the culture shock, lack of preparation in the classroom, and culturally relevant pedagogy left them feeling left less than prepared for the challenges they faced. The level of preparation across the four domains indicates that most participants felt the most prepared in Professional Responsibility. Their level of preparedness was equal regarding instruction, classroom environment, and planning and preparation.

The researcher judges that an immediate change is needed in the time teachers spend in the classroom. However, the consensus is best encompassed in a quoted by participant P3: “there are just some things that can only be learned in the classroom.”

**Recommendations**

**Culture**

Culturally responsive standards encourage teachers to be self-reflective of potential biases and preconceived notions of cultures other than their own. They encourage teachers to get to know their students and families to connect the curriculum to students' lives and experiences (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022)

**Context**

Teachers are at the center of the improvement efforts to decrease achievement gaps or achievement opportunities between low-income and non-low-income students. Measures to be innovative in educator preparation practices required a shift in the epistemology of teacher education. The researcher recommends that the transition must also change from academic knowledge being seen as the authoritative source of knowledge to integrating a great deal of preservice experiences into actual classrooms
with “Star” teachers. This method will equip teachers who will teach in our most at-risk communities with skills and practices that have been effectively taught in low-income schools.

Educator preparation programs have historically spent a larger portion of teacher preparation experiences learning the theories of learning and teaching. MWU MAT programs offer experiences where preservice teachers spend a year practicing the skills taught during pre-practicum coursework. This opportunity broadens teachers' perspectives of education and the pupils they will encounter.

Exposure to these environments in a teaching capacity during teacher preparation is vital to helping preservice teachers develop self-efficacy and increase the likelihood that they will grow in their ability to implement best practices in their classrooms.

The next chapter provides the MWU faculty's perception of how its EPP program attempts to meet the needs of preservice teachers to effectively prepare them for teaching multicultural, low-income students and the direction it aspires to reach. It also describes the researcher’s vision of the future and the work landscape necessary to progress in the areas that research participants identified as areas in their EPP that contributed to their perception of readiness.
**Competencies**

The development of an educator’s teaching style and disposition allows them to learn substantially about their students before emergencies occur (Gilette et al., 2018). For preservice teachers to gain experience in creating an environment conducive to learning and responsive to student cultural norms, a preservice teacher must have experience interacting with students and a “star teacher” inside their classroom. With the intent to bridge theory to practice, providing preservice teachers with the practical reality of the demands of teaching enables them to practice their craft under veteran and master teachers (McKinney et al., p. 73). This component includes creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, and managing student behavior. Participants in this study highlighted the importance of having classroom management routines in place to cultivate an environment for learning.

Gilette et al. (2018) identified how “star teachers” perceive major issues in management that are contrary to how many teachers perceive them. Interview participants in this study who identified their area of strength in creating a classroom environment conducive to learning also identified several attributes that Haberman (2005) described as their approach to creating an environment where discipline is not a major problem. Interview participants TP3 (White), TP4 (African American), and TP5 (African American) each identified their area of strength to be a classroom environment. In addition, they noted that relationship building was a key factor in creating a climate of respect and rapport which averts many discipline emergencies before they arise.
Teachers’ learning does not stop upon the completion of their educator preparation program. Professional development throughout their time teaching continues to be beneficial.
CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is one of the largest school districts in the United States. The population of this school district consists of approximately 72% low-income students. Studies indicate that poverty is negatively correlated with student achievement, and the struggles that students living in poverty are higher than their non-impoverished peers. One way that poverty has affected students for many years is through the inequalities in the education that low-income schools have received. One of the inequalities that exacerbate the problems seen in low-income education is teacher quality.

In March 2021, the state of Illinois adopted the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards. These research-based standards address best practices for closing achievement gaps through culturally responsive teaching. Although all research participants in this study completed their EPP before necessary changes to teacher preparation were made around cultural responsiveness, culturally responsive teaching aims to improve student learning outcomes across various indicators, from math and reading scores to attendance to postsecondary enrollment (Illinois Board of Education, 2022).

Envisioning the Success To-Be

Envisioning the success to-be of preparing teachers to teach in low-income schools means taking a closer look at the needs of teachers entering the field of education and the needs of the students they will teach from various perspectives. Through interviews, three MWU EPP faculty provided their expertise on the research questions
that guided this study. Participants were identified as faculty participants (FP) 1, 2, and 3, as described below.

MWU Faculty Respondents’ Demographics

FP1

FP1 held a position as professor of literacy instruction in elementary education and participated in writing the curriculum for preservice teaching classes. FP1 also taught professionally and student taught in low-income schools, conducted research in low-income schools, and observed teaching practices in those schools.

FP2

FP2 held a position as co-chair of the University’s early childhood department, mentored new faculty and adjuncts in MWU’s EPP, obtained an undergraduate degree in education, and taught reading to diverse learners.

FP3

FP3 was a practicum student supervisor and director of teacher preparation in the clinical office at MWU, taught in elementary education graduate program, observed clinical placements, and operated as a field liaison for high-risk schools.

MWU Faculty’s Description of MWU EPP Systems

In Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools, Wagner (2006) identifies four arenas for change and offers an approach to systems thinking about the challenges and goals of evolution in schools which are the 4 Cs referenced in this research: competencies, context, culture, and conditions. Wagner describes the four arenas as parts of a whole system that continually affect each other over time and operate towards a common purpose. This section of the study examines faculty perception of
skills and dispositions teachers need to successfully teach low-income schools and how the EPP addresses these components.

**Competencies**

Wagner (2006) suggests starting with competencies because the development of adults’ skills is the most familiar realm of the change work needed to improve systems involved in, in this case, educator preparation programs. Our beliefs and unconscious biases determine our actions and practices, and these actions inform how systems develop and operate, including our current education system (Berg, 2018). Competencies ask how well we: (1) identify student learning needs, (2) gather and interpret data, and (3) reflect and make mid-course corrections.

**FP1.** FP1, a professor of literacy in MWUs EPP, stated that educator preparation programs must incorporate disposition issues and have open and hard conversations. “You have to be willing to do the work of determining who am I and who are the students in front of me, and how do I know? Not all students in the EPP think it’s important to talk about issues of equity.” She suggested that PSTs look at critical race theory to understand the influences of racism and its impacts on a child’s educational outcome. She stated that until we ask ourselves the hard questions related to racial barriers in education, we may begin to see our students as deficient instead of students living in a world structured by racism. She noted that African American English is identified as a grammatically controlled language. Instead of pushing against it, teachers should be aware of it and allow it to be used in another way.

In an interview with TP3 (White), an EPP graduate, she noted that she did not intend to assimilate a culture of language but wanted to be able to understand the subtle
nuances of the speech her students used that was unfamiliar to her White, middle-class upbringing. She described students not responding well to her directives because of the variations in the use of language in the African American community. TP3 found that if she understood subtle differences in language used in other cultures, she could better understand her students’ responses to her, thus using knowledge of students’ vocabulary to build relationships. FP1 also noted that preservice teachers must understand the cognitive aspects of learning how to read and be nested in the socio-cultural perspective of knowing your students. She emphasized that it is essential that White teachers begin to interrogate how they learned and examine their assumptions about literacy learning that they then pass on to their students. Teachers may bring their perspective of how they learned to read a certain way based upon their upbringing of what they consider normal – perhaps coming from a White middle-class perspective – and teach in a very exclusionary way. It is important not to think of one way of doing things and any other way of doing them as a deficit.

FP2. The co-chair of the Early Childhood Department identified some of the skills necessary for teachers in low-income schools to have. She indicated that teachers must be able to help students understand the standards and how they will translate to what they are doing with their students. She emphasized that the dispositions important to a teacher’s success are being a good listener and being passionate. EPPs must highlight this in any of the programs that teachers go through. She said that treating your student with high regard is important and that she learned from watching role models in her EPP. She attributed everything she had experienced to her current status regarding teaching skills and dispositions to her early childhood teachers.
FP3. The Educator Preparation and Clinical Placement director identified key skills and dispositions teachers need to succeed in low-income schools. FP3 emphasized that it is a very demanding profession requiring a good work ethic, resilience, empathy, and the ability to work with diverse student populations and learn about the community in which they work. She emphasized that there needs to be some self-analysis and self-reflection embedded in the courses coupled with the personal work that faculty must do that will spill into what they are doing in their coursework.

When asked to describe skills teachers need, she indicated that the program gives many tools for teachers to write lesson plans. In addition, students are asked to write detailed lesson plans so that it becomes second nature in their classroom. She noted that this would allow them to know how to modify and differentiate any curriculum for any student.

She indicated that the EPP incorporates learning sciences in coursework because it will help beginning teachers when they get out in the field. From FP3’s perspective, combining learning sciences will give teachers the tools to make the best decisions for their students. This is important, she notes, because even the best EPP can’t prepare a teacher for all possible circumstances.

Wagner (2006) notes that even with a focus on developing these competencies, more is needed to reinvent schools. The parts of the system make up the whole. The next section analyzes the faculty’s perception of their EPPs system, including the conditions, context, and culture.

Conditions
Conditions are the tangible arrangement of time, space, and resources (Wagner, 2006). Conditions ask how well we create and maintain: (1) time for problem-solving for learning and talking about challenges, (2) agreed-upon performance standards, and (3) clear priorities and focus for each person’s work.

FP3 described the time provided for problem-solving and learning and discussed challenges. She noted that the university conducts webinars called “candid conversations” to keep teachers in the circle of professional development opportunities and feedback loops between alumni and faculty. Advisory boards made up of program chairs, faculty, and school partners in public, private, and charter schools post topics to receive feedback on what should be happening, such as culturally relevant teaching leading standards, so that it can be threaded into the EPP coursework. They then discuss and analyze ways to improve practices and dissect challenges. Breakout groups further discuss if what is said is being done matches the needs that are identified in schools. The advisory board then makes recommendations of what should be threaded into coursework; “there is a discussion about what we are doing to change, improve, and alter the coursework regularly.”

Culture

Culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and quality of relationships within and beyond the school (Wagner, 2006). Wagner states that culture refers to the invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout the system. Culture asks how we would characterize (1) our
school’s agenda and (2) the communication between district and school leadership to
teachers.

The shared belief of all faculty is that culturally relevant teaching must be
embedded in all aspects of the EPP. FP1 stated that professors must be willing to do the
work as well as the PSTs. She noted that they must be ready to interrogate themselves
and their personal biases and do the self-work involved with change. FP2 stated that
culturally relevant teaching must be finely woven through the program so that they are all
talking about equity, inclusion, and diversity instead of simply giving preservice teachers
an assignment to complete. FY3 indicated that culturally relevant teaching reading
standards had been greatly emphasized this year: “[e]very program has been held
responsible for making sure that they’re making changes in their coursework, and it’s
been deliberate so that it happens throughout all of our EPP courses.”

Context

Context refers to knowing the worlds students come from and those they must be
prepared for. According to Wagner (2006), contexts ask how well we see the core
competencies students need for work and continuous learning. Faculty participants
described the change efforts implemented to prepare themselves and teachers for
continued growth around culturally relevant teaching.

Equity means that no matter what a student’s background, language, race,
economic profile, gender, learning capability, or disability is, every student should
receive the support and resources needed to achieve their educational goals (Benadusi,
2002). This means that the world of education is turned into a level playing field for all
students. FP1 noted that a “Justice Task Force” was created to look at the Vision and
Mission statement and the elements of the teacher prep program to interrogate the program and how it works. This task force interviewed alums and current teachers and asked about their perception of how equity was addressed in their EPP. Far more Black and Brown preservice teachers felt that the element of teaching equity was lacking and not as effective in some classes compared to their White peers. The practice of interviewing the program participants provided insightful information that led to a shift in structuring assignments so that students look more into equity issues, making them a requirement of the class and not optional.

Conclusion

This research aimed to enhance the current body of literature by sharing insight into teacher candidates’ knowledge, efficacy, and dispositions to improve the effectiveness of EPPs. Recommendations for all domains of teaching practice involve providing culturally responsive teaching throughout EPPs. Culturally relevant competencies should address the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that have been proven to contribute to successful education in low-income schools.

Limitations

Several limitations were uncovered during this study. First, the sample population does not necessarily reflect the perspectives of all teachers who completed their program within the last five years of the study. This limitation suggests that more recent graduates would have a view of more up-to-date practices in EPPs. Second, interviews are not neutral data-gathering tools. Relationships and interactions between the interviewer, interviewee, and the context in which the interview takes place affect the dynamics of interviewee responses. Finally, this evaluation does not intend to summarize its findings
to assess the effectiveness of any program but wishes to highlight the perceived needs of graduates who go on to work in high-need schools.

**Future Research**

Continued studies of novice teachers’ perceptions of readiness will add depth to researchers’ and practitioners’ understanding of the effects of preservice teacher education on teacher self-efficacy and classroom instruction. Moreover, contributions from such research can lead to stronger, more focused educator preparation programs for teachers who decide to teach in high-poverty schools.

The early years of teaching can be an intense time for any practitioner. Because student learning positively correlates to teacher efficacy, teachers must be prepared through exposure and supported throughout their early years of teaching. Teachers are expected to be experts in planning and instruction, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Combined with the challenges faced by novice teachers, as well as the learning curve associated with becoming proficient in the field, student achievement usually suffers. Changes to the format of EPPs to include a larger concentration of time in the classroom learning skills and seeing them implemented simultaneously can be the catalyst to improving teachers’ self-efficacy, thus improving student achievement.

**Reflection**

The themes that arose from interviews and survey data regarding MAT EPP teachers’ feelings of preparedness to teach in low-income schools centered around classroom diversity regardless of socioeconomic status. Students arrive to class with their beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. These differences set each student apart as a unique
individual. This study has highlighted that struggles in the four domains of the profession occur in areas where teachers have had little to no real-world experiences prior to entering their in-service experience. The strategies and action steps discussed in this research seek to embed relevant experiences, practices, and skills into educator preparation programs to prepare teachers for improved instruction, positively impacting the lives of students who need keen insight and encouraging students to achieve heights greater than what is expected of them.
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[https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.t01-1-00382](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.t01-1-00382)


[https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820951117](https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820951117)


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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.05.002


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https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406408330865

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Informed Consent

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. The information gained from this study could be useful to the teaching profession at large and could be used to enhance teacher preparation programs at large. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There are no risks being in research studies.

Deciding not to be in the study or leaving the study before it is done will not affect your relationship with the researcher or any affiliates to National Louis University. The results may be published but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and survey results in personal files on personal a computer and only the I as the researcher will have access to data.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. Upon request you may receive the summary results from this study and copies of any publication that may occur. Please email the researcher at [email protected] to request results from this study. In the event that you have question or require additional information. Please contact the researcher, Aisha Collins at [email protected]

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Stuart Carrier at email [email protected] or the co-chair Dr. Gloria Hall-McDaniel at email: gmcdanield@nl.edu.

Thank you for your consideration

Consent:
I understand that by clicking “Agree” below, I am agreeing to participate in the study “Examining Novice Teachers’ Perception of Preparedness to Teach After Completing a Teacher Preparation Program”. My participation will consist of the activities below during January - June 2022 time period.

- Completion of an online survey will take 20 minutes to complete.
- Participation in semi-structure interview with researcher will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Interviews will be recorded and participants may review transcripts and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent. Clicking on the “Agree” button and submitting this form you are indicating that:
- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

Researcher’s Signature
Appendix B. Teacher Preparation Survey

Teacher Preparation Survey

The purpose of this survey is to capture your perception of your preparedness to teach in a mid-high or high poverty school after completing your teacher preparation program (TPP). A mid-high poverty school is defined as public schools where 50% or more students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

i. When did you complete your Master's of Art in Teaching? *

ii. If more than 3 years, please specify.

1. What is the name of your university where you obtained your Master's of Art in Teaching?

2. What field did you obtain your undergraduate degree in?

3. Mid-high poverty schools are considered schools with more than 50% low income students. Was your student teaching placement in a mid-high poverty school?

4. Is your current school a mid-high poverty school?

5. What best describes the location of your school?

6. Did your TPP experience mirror your experience in your first year of teaching?

6a. Please explain:

Create your own automated PDFs with Jotform PDF Editor- It’s free.
7. How many years have you taught elementary/middle school?
- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 years or more

7a. If other, please specify

8. What grades have you taught?
- K-1st
- 2nd-3rd
- 4th-5th
- 6th-8th

9. The Danielson Framework for Teaching divides the complex activity of teaching into four domains of teaching responsibility. During your first year of teaching, which area did you perceive was your area of strength?

10. Was this area of strength addressed in your TPP?

11. What school/work/personal experiences do you attribute to your sense of preparedness?

12. During your first year of teaching, what was the area you needed the most support in?

12a. Was the area where you needed the most support addressed in your TPP? Please explain.
12b. What made this area the most challenging?

13. How school/work/personal experiences strengthen your skills in the area where you needed the most support? Please explain.

14. Please rate your level of perceived preparedness during your first year of teaching.

Planning and Preparation (Implementing learning activities, utilizing instructional materials and resources, implementing instructional grouping, and planning lessons and units.)

Classroom Environment (Managing classroom procedures Managing instructional grouping, transitions, materials and supplies, and managing the performance of non-instructional duties, and supervising volunteers and paraprofessionals)

Instruction (Composing appropriate activities and assignments that are cognitively appropriate, grouping students, utilizing suitable instructional material, and delivering organized and appropriately paced lessons)

Professional Responsibilities (Growing and Developing Professionally)
Professional Responsibilities (Growing and Developing)
Professionally (Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skills)

15. Rate how much you attribute your level of preparedness to your experiences in your TPP.

<p>| Planning and Preparation (Implementing learning activities, utilizing instructional materials and resources, implementing instructional grouping, and planning lessons and units.) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<p>| Classroom Environment (Managing classroom procedures Managing instructional grouping, transitions, materials and supplies, and managing the performance of non-instructional duties, and supervising volunteers and paraprofessionals) |</p>
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<tr>
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<p>| Instruction (Composing appropriate activities and assignments that are cognitively appropriate, grouping students, utilizing suitable instructional material, and delivering organized and appropriately paced lessons) |</p>
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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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Professional Responsibilities (Growing and Developing Professionally) Professionally (Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skills)

16. What was the most influential component of your program *

- Instructor's support
- University resources
- Student teaching placement
- Classroom assignments/coursework
- Feedback during student teaching
- Other

16a. If other please explain:

[Blank space for explanation]
17. Would you recommend this MAT program to others? *
- Yes
- Maybe
- No

17a. Please explain:

19. Program Components
Evaluate experiences with the component of your teacher preparation program

Student Teaching

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Interesting and enjoyable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant to my current experience</td>
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Program's Required Courses

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<td>Interesting and enjoyable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant to my current experience</td>
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Coursework projects and assignments

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<tr>
<td>Relevant to my current experience</td>
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20. MAT Program

Where do you wish you had more preparation?
Final Thoughts?

21. If you could modify one aspect of your program, what would it be?

22. Do you wish to discuss any further facets of your TPP in an interview?

Contact Details
If you are willing to be part of a confidential zoom/phone interview with the researcher, please provide your contact info below.

Your Name

First Name    Last Name

E-mail

example@example.com

Create your own automated PDFs with Jotform PDF Editor- It's free
Appendix C. Interview Protocol

The following items will be presented in interview settings to faculty. Interviews may be conducted electronically or in person, depending on external circumstances related to institutional and public health policies.

Interview items:

1. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who demonstrate knowledge of subject matter/content of the grade they teach?

2. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who revise instructional strategies that meet students’ needs?

3. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who use effective instructional strategies that achieve the instructional outcome?

4. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who use effective strategies to manage their classroom environment and behavior?

5. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who motivate students effectively?

6. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who use effective verbal communication skills?

7. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who prepare and implement lessons that meet the needs of my students?

8. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who use formative assessment results to adjust instruction and improve student learning?

9. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who interact and collaborate effectively with other school professionals?

10. How does the EPP’s curriculum support the development of candidates who use formative assessment results to adjust instruction and improve student outcomes?

You may choose not to participate, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

There are no risks in research studies. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. The
information gained from this study could be useful to the teaching profession at large and could be used to enhance teacher preparation programs. This new information may help people in the future.

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If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Stuart Carrier at email scarrier@nl.edu; or the co-chair Dr. Gloria Hall-McDaniel at email: gmcdanielhall@nl.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

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ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button and saving and emailing this document to [email protected] indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

☐ Agree
☐ Disagree

______________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

______________________________________________________
Date

______________________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature

______________________________________________________
Date
Appendix D. As-Is Framework

Teachers feel unprepared to meet the needs of students in low-income communities.
Appendix E. To-Be Framework

4 C's Analysis for To-Be Teacher Perception of Readiness to Teach in Low-Income Schools

**Context**
- Strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management strategies and collaborating with community members demonstrated by STAR teachers help teachers feel prepared.
- Decreased percentage of teachers leaving the position within first 5 years of teaching while gaining more experience as teachers.
- In-service, student teaching experience mirrors demographics of various populations including high-needs schools, led by “star” teachers.

**Culture**
- Culturally responsive pedagogy is embedded throughout coursework and teacher preparation program.
- Continued support of teachers focusing on high-needs students.
- Focus on importance of communication with families by seeking to understand cultural differences.

**Conditions**
- Consistent feedback loop between schools, communities, and teacher preparation programs to be integrated into MAP coursework and curriculum.
- One full academic year of internship to develop teachers' self-efficacy.
- Train teacher mentors to mentor teachers.

**Competencies**
- Culturally responsive teaching standards embedded throughout TEP addresses dispositions necessary for student and teacher success.
- Incentivize STAR teachers to become mentors for new teachers.
- Focus on 4 domains of professional practice throughout teacher in-service.
## Appendix F. As-Is Strategy/Action To-Be Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As-Is</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>To-Be</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lack of culturally relevant pedagogy leaves teachers feeling a lack of skills that are necessary to be successful in low-income schools</td>
<td>Diagnose the system; discover structural implications. Mobilize the system Design effective interventions: Determine the ripeness of the issue</td>
<td>Observing events and patterns around you; interpreting what you are observing (developing multiple hypotheses about what is really going on); designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified. Discover structural implications: An organization’s formal structures create the playing field and rules for all activities that take place in the overarching system. For example, structures may reward certain behaviors or attitudes (such as not making mistakes or bringing in new business or customer satisfaction) and implicitly discourage other behaviors and attitudes (risk taking or increasing business from existing clients or focusing on improving employee morale).</td>
<td>● Culturally responsive teaching standards are embedded throughout EPP and addresses dispositions necessary for students and teacher success&lt;br&gt;● Incentivize star teacher for becoming mentors for new teachers&lt;br&gt;● Focus on the 4 domains of professional practice throughout teacher in-service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As-Is</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>To-Be</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong>&lt;br&gt;● Teachers’ experience culture shock due to cultural differences and biases&lt;br&gt;● Low-income students have a higher risk of experiencing learning challenges&lt;br&gt;● Lack of trust between families and teachers Underlying biases and deficit perspectives constrains students access to educational opportunities</td>
<td><strong>See yourself in a system</strong>&lt;br&gt;Identify who you are; Identify your many identities</td>
<td><strong>You can develop greater freedom by understanding three types of default settings within your system: your loyalties (your feelings of obligation toward your colleagues, community, and important figures from your past feelings that can come into conflict when you are dealing with an adaptive challenge); your personal tuning (how your &quot;harp strings are tuned&quot; to respond to challenges and opportunities.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Culture</strong>&lt;br&gt;● Culturally responsive pedagogy is embedded into coursework throughout teacher preparation program&lt;br&gt;● Continued support for teachers focusing on high-needs students EPPs focus on importance of communication with families by seeking to understand cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As-Is</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Action</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Mobilize the system, build an adaptive culture</td>
<td>Several practices can help you institutionalize reflection and continuous learning in your organization or team. Ask Difficult Reflective Questions Honor Risk Taking and Experimentation</td>
<td>Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Mentor teachers’ feedback is inadequate and untimely</td>
<td>Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>● Consistent feedback loop between schools, communities, and teacher preparation programs to integrate best practices into MAT coursework and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● In-service teaching experiences infrequently used as opportunities to guide PST learning in authentic ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● One full academic year of internship to develop teachers’ self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Skills and competences are not applied in a full takeover for an entire school year under a mentor teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Train teacher mentors to mentor teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As-Is</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>To-Be</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Deploy yourself</td>
<td>In leading adaptive change, you ask people to open their hearts to you and the purposes that you believe you share with them. Demonstrate the same openness to them and their sense of purpose. Don't resent them when you deliver a message that isn't easy for them to hear and their eyes begin to glaze over or they resist. In addition to hearing your own emotions, listen for signs that there is something else going on in the group beneath what people are saying. Think about what that something else might be.</td>
<td>Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teachers are leaving the field due to burn out and feelings of lack of preparation</td>
<td>Stay connected to your purposes; engage courageously. Get past the past</td>
<td></td>
<td>● Strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management strategies and collaborating with community members demonstrated by star teachers, help teachers feel prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Low-income schools have a higher likelihood of employing recent EPP graduates</td>
<td>Be with your audience</td>
<td></td>
<td>● Decreased percentage of teachers leaving the position within first 5 years of teaching while gaining more experience as teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teachers in low-income schools begin with little to no previous experiences with the characteristics of low-income communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● In-service, students teaching experience mirrors demographics of various populations including high-needs schools, led by star teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>