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NCE Faculty Research Residency

**Impact on P-12 Student Learning: Perspectives from Multiple
Stakeholders**

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1. Statement of Research Problem

It is essential for teacher preparation programs to be able to track teacher candidates' impact on P-12 student learning in school sites in order to fulfill accreditation requirements and measure candidate and program success. Additionally, it is critical for us to understand how candidates' opportunities to impact P-12 student learning are influenced by their host school sites, including their classroom cooperating teachers. Therefore, we conducted an exploratory study to collect qualitative input from multiple stakeholders, including teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and school. The perspectives collected in this study has helped our program, the college, and the outreach office to discern the factors that may prevent or promote field training and teaching effectiveness, and allow us to work collaboratively with partner schools to provide relevant resources and support for our candidates in the area of impacting P-12 learners.

2. Research Question

What kind of framework, processes and cooperation are needed for schools and colleges of education to track pre-service candidates' impact on P-12 student learning?

3. Supporting Literature

Although not new in teacher preparation program, we are committed to the importance of demonstrating our candidates' impact on P-12 student learning while national accrediting bodies are calling for stronger and more evidence-based data. The most recent definition of impact on P-12 student learning by Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) reads:

...the measure of success in educator preparation. While a variety of types and sources of evidence are necessary to a comprehensive and functioning quality assurance system, evidence of completers' impact on P-12 student learning and developing is the ultimate aim. Though gathering such evidence is extremely challenging, its value as the ultimate outcomes measure is clear. Evidence of impact on P-12 learners is not the only evidence needed in accreditation, it is however, essential. Educator preparation programs are encouraged to innovate in developing such data in partnership with schools, state agencies, program completers and others." (CAEP, 2014, p. 4).

The National College of Education (NCE) has developed a variety of residency models to train teacher candidates and support their demonstration of teaching effectiveness. For example, the Elementary Education program has developed linked practicum experiences for candidates throughout the program to familiarize them with school settings and get comfortable with classroom practice. Teacher candidates are placed in the same school, same classrooms on a continuous basis to establish true partnership with the classroom cooperating teachers. Our ultimate goal is to have the teacher candidates produce meaningful impact on P-12 children.

It is essential for us to be able to track teacher candidates' impact on P-12 student learning in school sites. In the meanwhile, it is critical for us to track how candidates' opportunities to impact P-12 student learning are influenced by their host school sites, including their classroom cooperating teachers.

Research has shown that there are a variety of ways in which teacher education programs have collected data on candidate impact on P-12 learning, one of the most highly advocated being teacher work samples (Denner, Shu-Yuan, Newsome, Newsome, & Hedeem, 2012; McConney, Schalock, & Schalock, 1998; Montecinos, Rittershausen, Solis, Contreras, & Contreras, 2010; Sivakumaran, Holland, Heyning, Wishart, & Flowers-Gibson, 2011). This methodology has been used effectively by teacher candidates in the elementary education program in NCE for a number of years. Other methods for collecting data on how candidates impact P-12 learning include portfolios, case studies, edTPA, and P-12 student surveys. The essential features of these effective assessments that measure impact include pre-testing prior to instruction, planning an appropriate sequence of instruction, a concluding assessment or post-testing, reflection on changes in teaching that might have impacted learning, and a demonstration of data literacy to justify instructional decisions (Chepko, Gorowara & McKee, 2014). This proposed research is designed to explore the various methodologies being used by our case study participants and host schools.

Collaborative relationships and strong mentoring experiences are an essential aspect of successful candidate practice in schools during practicum and student teaching experiences (Andrews & Carr, 2004; Dottin & Weiner, 2003). This research seeks to understand the mentoring relationship between teacher candidates and their cooperating teachers and how this relationship leads to positive impact on P-12 student learning.

In addition, as part of being able to positively affect P-12 student learning, teacher candidates need to be “assessment or data literate” and highly reflective in order to determine their effectiveness (Chepko, Gorowara & McKee, 2014). A framework for teacher education programs that supports candidates becoming assessment literate in both coursework and field practice should be a top priority.

Too much of the focus on how candidates impact P-12 student learning has been on proving rather than improving (Diez, 2010). Another goal of this research is to develop a framework that encompasses both – a way to document our candidates’ impact on P-12 student learning and a way to improve their learning and teaching effectiveness.

4. Research Methods

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with three pairs of NLU teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and school principals from three school sites (so, in total, there were nine in-person interviews). Each interview lasted for about one hour, and was carried out by researchers within the school settings. The sites were located in three different school districts of Illinois (district 30, 15, and 68).

These three schools hosted the practicum II and student teaching of our three teacher candidates from the MAT program of Elementary Education, began in Fall of 2014 and continued through winter 2015 (one candidate to be placed in each of the schools). The interviews took place during student teaching, and mostly after the students’ take-over weeks. Those sites are important to work with because: (1) firstly, they represent the geographic and demographic diversity of the communities and educational agencies served by NLU. (2) Secondly, these are sites that we have

established partnership with and our student candidates have been often placed here. Therefore, it is important to understand their framework and process of field practice mentoring.

In addition to in-person interviews, a focus group was held with NLU faculty members who teach the nested and interconnected practicum seminars, university supervisors, and faculty of NCE outreach unit to capitalize on communication between the researchers and faculty members. The goal of the focus group was to generate qualitative data on how program curriculum was structured and how relevant content was taught and assessed.

The interview protocols were designed by the research team based on a thorough literature review and were framed tightly around the proposed research question. In general, the interviews with school principals, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates aim to collect data from each party's perspective regarding the framework, procedure, and collaboration needed to assess and track teacher candidates' teaching effectiveness. The investigation focuses on whether there is a shared vision and awareness among the parties and what factors might prevent or promote the evaluation process that would inform both schools and higher education institutions such as NLU. The focus group with university faculty members will examine the teaching preparation experiences and evaluate whether teacher candidates were gaining systematic and integrated knowledge base related to subject content and formal or informal assessment techniques. **The interview protocols were attached in the appendix.**

The interviews and focus group were audio-recorded, and all researchers were involved in data transcription. The specific data processing and analysis involved the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes that emerge in textual data and determine how those response patterns and themes might help answer the proposed research question. The data patterns and themes were identified by the research team together. The meaning of the data was negotiated among the researchers, and agreements were reached based on consensual community validation. The overall analytic process was inductive, meaning we did not post predefined hypothesis, but rather discover important patterns and relationships through the data review process.

5. Research Findings

The study has several key findings as summarized below, with some supportive quotes from the interviewees:

First, teacher candidates generally adopt existing, curriculum-related assessments to assess their students' learning, and need more support in developing formative assessments and using assessment results to reflect on their practice and effectiveness.

[A quote from a student: The assessment I used are mainly tests and quizzes that come along with the curriculum, from teacher's resource book...]

Second, candidates used assessments mainly for meeting NCE assignment requirements, but focused less on informing their teaching; assessments were not treated of as a critical and integral part of teaching and self-reflection.

[A quote from a student: I am not sure we are required to document our teaching. We have to write assessment and reflection in our unit lesson plan. So, I have to show what I am going to do, I will have a test. ...]

Third, interviews show that assessment and impact on P-12 student learning is beginning to gain more attention in candidates' lesson design and implementation.

[A quote from a supervisor: When I first starting supervision, their main concern was their performance, how did the lesson go, how did I do? Now they are turning more to, did I do a good enough job that the students learned something? And it is usually part of the conversation and whereas before, it wasn't always. So, I think they are more aware of the fact that they do impact what these children get ...]

[Another quote from a cooperating teacher: I try to teach the student use the little exist slips when she taught a lesson. I tried to teach her to see specific goals for each small lesson, and that was just not in her nature. But she is getting there, and it definitely was not something that she came in with. She started doing that now.]

Fourth, candidates did not feel they had sufficient training in designing, implementing and analyzing assessments.

[A quote from a student: Nobody has taught how to do that and they just said do it and I did it. And most of my classmates did it, so I am assuming we came in here with those skills. I do not know if NLU has prepared me on this. I think it has been stressed that we should document, we have been told to document, but I do not know we have been shown how to document. I think they kind of left that up to us. So, some people might use a spreadsheet, some people might keep up a math journal, some people document through other formative assessments. It has been left up to us to use our judgment to figure out how we do that. We have not been trained on how to; we have been trained on do it. Do it and figure it out!]

Fifth, student teaching experiences have been essential in candidates' learning how to document their teaching effectiveness. However, how much they learn varied by the quantity and quality of mentoring received and the quality of placement sites.

6. Study Implications

Before we talked about the study implications, it is important to point out that this is a small-scale, exploratory study. Therefore, the findings and implications of the study cannot be overgeneralized. In fact, what we learned from this project prompts us to consider using larger-scale samples and more rigorous methodologies to examine the emerging issues in much further details.

Based on the study findings, we will discuss the following implications for the Elementary Education program and the National College of Education, in terms of how to better prepare effective future teachers.

First, one obvious conclusion that we got from the interviews and focus group discussion is that students need more solid training in assessment design, data collection, management, analysis, and use of assessment results to inform teaching refinement. This area has been identified by all

parties involved in this study as a common deficiency in the student teachers' teaching. Therefore, one recommendation that the researchers had for the Elementary Education program would be to strengthen the assessment-related knowledge and skill training through analyzing the current program curriculum, mapping the related content and skill building into various program courses, and developing new courses related to assessment and teaching documentation. The program should especially emphasize the linkage between theory and practice in field placements, engage teacher candidates in self-analysis and reflections. Utilizing a variety of summative and formative assessments to evaluate impact on children's learning to make appropriate pedagogical decisions for future instruction is integral to all practicum and student teaching seminars. As research shows that teachers' likelihood of using both formative and summative data in decision making is affected by how confident they feel about their knowledge and skills in data analysis and interpretation (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Second, it is critical to conduct professional development and training for cooperating teachers. As the study revealed, student teaching experiences have been essential in candidates' learning of how to document their teaching effectiveness. However, how much they learn varied by the quantity and quality of mentoring received and the quality of placement sites. Some cooperating teachers had been supportive, while others might tend to have relatively rigid supervision.

For example, in terms of interaction with children in classroom, a cooperating teacher made an alarming statement as "...you just have to kind of fit into the classroom. When you get your own classrooms, you can make changes that you want...". The implication is that the student teacher needs to follow the cooperating teacher's protocol and is not given enough flexibility to express their own styles in interaction and discipline, and likely in teaching. This was verified in a student teacher's comment: "I found the CT and I have very different teaching style. It is very difficult for me to mimic her exact style. I tried my best. She has very specific routine, and I try to stay on that routine just because I am only there for 4 weeks, so I do not want to give her a completely different routine. What that means is that when you are on that routine, I tried to ask questions the way she asks questions, I tried to differentiate the way she does. But in my brain, it does not match with my style. Often time, I ended up going home and thinking I am just not good at teaching math. And then I realize it is not that I am not good at teaching math, it is I am not good at teaching math the way she does...".

Therefore, professional training with cooperating teacher is necessary in order to guarantee that teacher candidates receive appropriate and efficient supervision and mentoring. In the meanwhile, the inter-personal skill training for our teacher candidates might also benefit their communication and negotiation with the cooperating teachers, especially when challenging situations emerged or when there is a personality mismatch between student teachers and cooperating teachers. Another relevant issue brought up by both the cooperating teachers and school principals was about how time consuming it was to closely supervise a student teacher. One suggestion that the researchers have for the college might be to work with school districts and negotiate about how to support cooperating teachers in mentoring student teachers (e.g., buying out a proportion of cooperating teacher's time for student teaching supervision or paying their time for supervision).

Third, the program and college might consider extending internship period beyond 10 weeks. Some school principals and cooperating teachers advocated for a longer duration of field placement. For example, one school principal said: “I think student teaching should be one-year long to see how you start a school year, how you end a school year, and everything in between is crucial for student teachers. So, I am frustrated when the student teaching is only 10 weeks...”. An extended field experience will give teacher candidates enough time to adapt to school culture, get familiar with cooperating teachers, children, and their families, and more opportunities to practice various aspects of their teaching skills.

Lastly, a clear message that we got from the study is that an open communication and close collaboration between school sites and teacher preparation institute are critically needed. The perspectives contributed by the school principals helped us to find a shared interest and common ground for partnership in scaffolding teacher candidates. By creating a sustainable model of data use that builds alignment between school districts and teacher preparation pipelines, we can better serve the teaching and learning of children.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol: Mentor Teachers

(Note: the interview questions with teacher candidates and school principals were similar, with minor modifications)

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your professional background?
2. How long you have been teaching in this school and in what role?
3. How many NLU students you have worked with? For how long?
4. Tell me a little bit about your experiences with NLU students.
5. In your school and district, what are current methods used to determine teachers' impact on student learning?
6. In your perspective, which are the most effective methods for doing this and why?
7. What are your expectations for the student teacher in terms of impacting children's learning in your classroom?
8. Can you share some of the assessments that you used in your classroom?
9. How do the assessment methods that the student teacher uses align to your methods and has the student teacher tried his/her own methods of assessing children's learning?
10. Can you please give me one example how your student teacher uses assessment results to give feedback to diverse needs of learners?
11. How do you support the student teacher in understanding and implementing the methods in collecting data on how much children have learned from his/her teaching?
12. What kind of challenges does your student teacher have in terms of designing and implementing assessments?
13. What kind of collaboration is needed between the college of education and schools to better support the student teacher's teaching effectiveness and impact on learning?

Focus Group: NLU Faculty, Supervisors, and Placement Director

1. How long you have been working at NLU? How long have you been supervising our teacher candidates? What is your role/relationship with NLU? What is your background in elementary education? Can you share any experience you might have with elementary schools and how this experience impacts your work with our teacher candidates?
2. What kind of requirements does Elementary Education program have for teacher candidates in terms of documenting their impact on elementary grade students' learning? (Question directed at program faculty).
 - Sub Question for Supervisors: Do you see this playing out with the students in their practicum and/or student teaching placements?
3. What kind of assessment techniques do you see candidates using in their teaching? What are your expectations of the students related to assessment?
4. Do you think NLU prepares candidates well in using assessments to document and inform teaching? If not, what are your suggestions on how we could improve in this area?
5. How is assessment of content knowledge covered in the elementary education program curriculum? Any revisions in curriculum need to be done? (Question directed at Jeff Winter.)
6. Do you have any concrete examples of how you have seen our candidates impact children's learning?
7. Do you have any feedback on using the teacher work sample to document impact on learning?
8. As a supervisor, what are your challenges in supporting the candidate's goal of impacting children's learning? What are the candidates' own challenges in your opinion?
9. What can teacher preparation programs do in terms of collaborating with placement schools in supporting teacher candidates' impact on their K-12 student learning?