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Essential Skills for Success: Feedback from Beginning Teachers of Students with Emotional / Behavioral Disorders

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Abstract

This exploratory, case study used qualitative measures to investigate the perceptions of recent college graduates who were teaching students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders on their preparedness to teach in the field. Structured open-ended interviews were conducted to explore how well their teacher education programs prepared them to work with this population and to meet the mandate of preparing students for entry in a global society. Findings garnered positive comments regarding global competencies and suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation. Effective communication and collaboration with school personnel and parents, organizing paperwork and data collection, decision making, and more relevant field placements were areas considered to be in need of increased focus.

In recent years, the federal government has increasingly emphasized the need to provide an education that readies our students to compete in the global marketplace; current research suggests that teacher preparation plays a critical role in achieving this goal (Fadel, 2010; O'Connor & Zeichner, 2011; Quezada, 2010; Zeichner, 2010, 2012). Increasing both teacher content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (knowing how to effectively teach the requisite content) are key to student learning acquisition (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). The Longview Foundation's seminal report on Teacher Preparation for the Global Age: The Imperative for Change (2008) reported that globally competent teachers must not only possess sound knowledge of their subject matter area, but also possess the pedagogical skills that will help students become critical thinkers and understand multiple points of view within their subject matter. Mansilla & Jackson in their work on preparing youth for global competence report that when students are taught their content matter though this broader inquiry lens and meet the expectations of global investigations, they (a) apply their growing global competence to engage new topics with sophistication (and) are prepared to succeed in college and participate in the life of work and civic society (2011, p 30)". The critical component though is teacher education;

students cannot learn what teachers have not been prepared to teach. Ann Imlah Schneider (2008) author of *Building International Competence into the Undergraduate Training of K-12 Teachers* wrote "Despite significant attention to internationalization in higher education in recent years, teacher training programs are often among the least internationalized programs on American college campuses. ("Teacher preparation for," 2008)." It is only very recently that the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards and Learning Progressions for Teachers (2013) provided a resource for teacher preparation programs that describe the global vision of the newly revised standards that incorporate global initiatives into the core content framework. Without a doubt, in order for teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of equipping our students for success in a global society, they themselves must be well versed in both their own subject content knowledge and the pedagogy of the 21st century

Consistent with this realization, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (NCLB) mandated that teachers be certified in the content area in which they are teaching to be deemed "highly qualified" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, 2002). The goal of having a highly qualified teacher in the classroom is an important first step toward teacher effectiveness and accountability, priorities that are stressed in current educational legislation.
In the last five years, educational legislation has emphasizes professional teacher development that strives for future teachers with approved credentials, expertise in the content areas, and a global pedagogical focus. One of the U.S. Department of Education's five priority goals for 2014-15 is to improve learning by ensuring that more students have effective teachers and leaders U.S. (Department of Education, 2013).

Given this reality, colleges and universities are well advised to understand and assess their effectiveness in creating "highly qualified" and globally competent content teachers (Neill, 2006; McEwin, Dickinson, & Smith, 2003; Education Commission of the States, 2003). Teacher preparation programs differ widely within colleges and universities as to the emphasis placed on global competencies within the content area and the amount of preparation in pedagogy and supervised teaching their teacher candidates must complete before their formal first job (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2008, 2007) The essential questions seem to be how much preparation and exactly what type of preparation do teacher candidates need in order to be globally competent and successful prepare students for a global society, and how is this competency assessed.

Although this is true for all content subject teaching areas, it is especially true in the preparation of the special educators. Special education is "instruction specifically specially designed to meet the unique needs of children that result from having a disability so they may learn the information and skills that other children are learning" (Pomona Unified School District, 2013, ¶1). Special education teachers can be endorsed in a variety of areas (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional or cognitive impairments), but they are first qualified to teach core subject content in early childhood education, elementary programs, and / or secondary programs. Hence, the special educator must also master global competencies, including technologies as well as the particular skill set of the disability population (Connor, 2012). There is a dearth of research on the effectiveness of the teaching programs in preparing special educators to meet the need of a globally competent citizenry.

As it is, special education is a high needs field (nationwide Teacher Shortage Area list for 2013) with teacher shortages in almost every state (US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Ed, 2013). Indeed, attracting and retaining special education teachers has become a nationwide problem (Hymes, K, 2013; Nicholas & Sosnowsky, 2002). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the need for special education teachers will increase17% by the year 2020). Thus, the need to competently equip the special educator is all the more important.

Consequently, given the importance of training and retaining highly qualified, globally competent teachers in special education, this exploratory case study was designed to assess the preparedness of graduates from special education programs through job satisfaction (Grilli & Rampichini, 2007; Irani & Scherler, 2002). The researchers asked nine graduates in the special education fields of emotional impairments / behavioral disorders from a liberal arts college how well, in the first years of working with special education students, their undergraduate program had prepared them for work in the field and to equip their students for global citizenry. The purpose was twofold, (a) to explore current special education teacher's preparedness and (b) to get feedback in order to improve training of future teachers. Specifically, this study was conducted to answer the following questions:

How well did your teacher education program prepare you to meet the mandate of preparing your students for entry in a global society (i.e., entering the special education field)?; and

2.What advice would you give colleges and universities concerning future teacher training?

Methods

Participants

All special education graduates from a liberal arts college in the Midwest who met the following criteria were asked to participate in the study: (a) they were currently teaching students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders or (b) had recently taught these types of students and were now in general education classrooms with special education students included. A packet consisting of a formal invitation to participate, a consent form, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope was mailed to all graduates of a liberal arts special education program who had earned emotional impairments / behavior disorders endorsements from 2000 to 2010. Some respondents indicated that they have left the teaching field, and therefore could not be considered for inclusion. However, a total of nine teachers indicated that they were still teaching and agreed to be contacted for the study. These current teachers were instructing in public, charter, or private schools. All had graduated from a liberal arts college in education with an emphasis in special education: emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. All were female and elementary general education endorsed.

The liberal arts education program from which the participants were selected has a special education endorsement in Emotional Impairments / Behavioral Disorders similar to many others colleges and universities. According to its program description, all teacher education candidates complete coursework that leads to either an early childhood, elementary or secondary education teaching certificate. They do so by completing content area majors and minors, and the general education diversity requirement. The Special Education endorsements require additional courses (approximately 33 credit hours, not including field experience or student

teaching credits). Field placements begin in the first semester of the program and continue throughout each semester, culminating in two semesters of student teaching. The Education Department program is approved by the State and accredited under the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Students must pass state teaching tests to be licensed.

Instrumentation

The researchers used structured open-ended interviews and surveys to garner the requisite information. The exact sequence and wording of interview questions were determined in advance, and the open-endedness of the questions allowed for further exploration and discussion of topics in detail. Open-ended interviews were generally used to explore an issue or phenomenon about which little was known while gathering information that was rich with insight. These interviews had the potential to expand learning and insight on this important topic (Brill, 1995). Experts in the field made up of college professors and special educators corroborated the content validity of the interview protocol. Personnel who had knowledge about teaching students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders completed pilot interviews. After each pilot, suggestions were noted concerning the wording and sequencing of each question. A revised interview was created based on this feedback and subse-quently used in the present study.

Procedures

Participants were asked to (a) indicate a convenient time when the researcher could call and conduct the interview and (b) return the form along with their signed consent using the prepaid envelope. Upon receiving the consent form, the interviewer called the participant at the designated time and conducted the interview. The interview was taped. In addition, notes were also taken by the interviewer to provide reliability (Seidman, 1998). The audiotape contained the raw data, and once the interview session had been transcribed, the audiotape was destroyed to protect participant anonymity.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the audiotapes, the researchers identified and wrote down initial code categories for the transcribed text. To do so, a copy of the transcripts was cut or divided into topical units that indicated patterns across questions. These units were subsequently placed in file folders. The result was a set of folders that contained excerpts from the interviews divided into specific categories. The cutting and sorting into file folders is the traditional approach used in qualitative analysis to organize categories, themes, and patterns (Berg, 2004).

Results

Analysis of the transcripts revealed how well the participants felt their liberal arts undergraduate teacher program had prepared them to meet the needs of preparing their students in a global society and to enter the special education field in the area of emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. It also garnered advice to colleges and universities concerning teacher training. Both positive comments and suggestions for improvements were gathered. The themes surrounding the positive aspects of participants' undergraduate preparation focused around effective and relevant field placements that equipped them to practically teach, especially pedagogically while concurrently enrolled in special education teacher training classes. The themes surrounding areas in need of improvement

centered more on the managerial side of teaching than on global competency, core content or pedagogical issues. The major recommendations for the training programs include (a) creating effective relationships with people, (b) collecting data and completing paperwork, and (c) managing the job stress related to high burnout rates. Each of these themes will be explored in more detail below.

Special Education Classes with Concurrent Relevant Field Placements

Interviewees overwhelmingly reported that one of the experiences that best helped them learn to effectively teach students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders was early and relevant field placements. When relevant field placements were completed concurrently with college pedagogical classes, respondents noted that teacher candidates had opportunities to ask their professors questions about children, teaching strategies, and behavior management that was observed for which they may felt uncomfortable or did not have enough time, to ask the field placement mentor teacher. Each interviewee expressed the view summed up in the comment that the combined field placements and classroom conversations led to "a deeper understanding of the best practices, theories, and behavioral methods that are effective when teaching students." As another commented, "I felt very prepared." These interviewees also noted that their field placements in diverse settings in different classes in the special education continuum of services allowed teacher candidates to "develop knowledge concerning different teaching styles and behavior programs" as well as experience different types of classrooms in special education. As one teacher said:

It is helpful when colleges [or universities] let people [teacher candidates] know and experience the different types of programs that are out there for students with emotional and behavioral disorders -- like the categorical level in a learning center, hospital level for severely emotionally impaired children, the resource room, the specialized schools at the LEA [Local Education Agency]. It would be wonderful if the colleges [or other teacher preparation programs] let the people [future teachers] see all the different types of programs [for students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders] where the teacher candidate can teach in.

Many participants discussed the importance of starting these field placements early so they could understand with more clarity "how students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders were best taught" and even if they themselves were equipped to handle them.

I really like how [this college] puts you into the classroom with field placements pretty much right away when you decide on your major. You get to know right away if you like to teach these types of kids and if you have a heart for these types of children. That's really different from a lot of other colleges. A lot of my friends that went to other places [colleges and universities] didn't get into the classroom until their junior year, which I think, is too late.

Since these teachers could work in many different classrooms in the continuum of special education, the consensus in this exploratory case study was that these

38

placements helped the teacher candidate solidify the classroom in which he/she wanted to work and aided them in acquiring and implementing the theory-based, best practice pedagogy required to teach the emotional impairments / behavioral disorders for global citizenry.

As mentioned earlier, the areas requiring improvement focused on the administrative side of teaching, more so than the content / pedagogy of global preparedness. Training in how to deal with the constituents involved in teaching the special education student, especially parents, the general education teachers, and paraprofessionals was of paramount importance.

Relationships

Many participants discussed problems they had with relationships with colleagues and other staff. When entering the field, they did not realize that they had to work and communicate with different types of people when instructing students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. Relationships with parents, the general education teacher, and paraprofessionals were particularly noted as areas requiring more extensive training.

Parents

New teachers trying to do their best at educating students with disabilities were at times blindsided by angry parents. Some of these parents were unreasonable, and the new teachers did not know how to effectively communicate with them. One participant said:

> One of the biggest struggles in the real world of work is "PI," or "parent impairment." Seriously, there are parents who will come and curse you [the teacher] out. There are parents who think you are just the worst person in the world for trying to educate their child. Dealing with

(angry) parents is difficult because you are only told [in teacher training] how to deal with nice parents. We need to know about the [parents] who completely attack you.

These new teachers noted that it would be helpful to receive more training in how to deal with these types of parents.

Teachers

Many participants discussed the importance of effective and ongoing communication with the general education teacher who plays a part in equipping the special education student for global citizenry. Most notably, interviewees felt that their training program had not informed them sufficiently about animosity that might occur with some of their coworkers and how to resolve such conflicts. As one individual succinctly articulated:

> I wish I was a little more prepared with the fact that teachers get very frustrated with EI (emotionally impaired) and behaviorally disordered students and with the EI program … (or that special education) teachers are not going to be very well liked by the other staff … because they [staff] get frustrated with my students and don't know how to handle them.

Collaborating with general education teachers is an important skill that these special education teachers needed to develop.

Paraprofessionals

Educators increasingly work hand in hand with paraprofessionals, who are subordinate to the special education teacher. Participants in the current study reported that at times it could be intimidating for new teachers to work not only with one but

several paraprofessionals in a special education setting. They had not been trained to lead and be assertive in meetings where otheir team members are their elders. They felt that their undergraduate program had not prepared them for such an occurrence. One young teacher summed it up well:

> I needed more knowledge in working with paraprofessionals. As a new teacher beginning at 24 years old, working with a paraprofessional who is 40 can be a problem. They [paraprofessionals] might be 10 to 15, or even 20, years older than you [new teacher], and you are the person who is the leader so you need to be more assertive. It is important to have more information on how to work with these paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals, the participants reported, as very helpful to both the students and teacher, but they need to be guided appropriately in which important task to complete.

Again, these comments are focused on relational issues separate from content / pedagogical issues, but they are no less important. Failure to resolve these relational issues were causes for increased stress among these special education teachers. Where they enjoyed teaching, failure to handle parents, general education teachers, and/or paraprofessionals could "ruin" the new special educator's experience.

Paperwork and Data Collection

The second theme revolved around the plethora of paperwork that abounds in special education. Foremost are individualized education programs (IEPs), which are required every year for each student in special education and ongoing paperwork including progress reports, notes to teachers and parents, and students' behavior plans. Teachers commented that they needed more knowledge and education in their undergraduate program on how to fill out the paperwork and run an effective IEP meeting. Participants noted that the college preparation had some of this information, but they needed more practice to be successful. As one individual said:

> I was really nervous to run my first IEP meeting and to fill out the paperwork for it. I had really no idea what I was doing. We [teacher candidates] had one practice IEP, but I feel like we could have had more practice in writing IEPS and filling out the paperwork.

This sentiment was shared with almost all of the participants.

Paperwork related to data collection for the IEP was viewed as another essential skill for these teachers of students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. Data driven instruction as well as data driven data collection (assessments) are key components to special education. Assessments must be conducted so evidence is available to show that IEP goals are being worked on and accomplished. One respondent commented:

> We [teacher candidates] need to understand a way to collect data and betterways to do it. Right now [in school districts] it is all data-driven decision making and we didn't spent enough time on how to collect data on IEP goals and how to keep track of progress on IEP goals [in our undergraduate studies].

Emphasis on data driven decision-making is important for teacher candidates to understand and know how to effective

use this data for students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. Failure to manage the paperwork and the fear of mishandling it, was an added stress factor to these special educators.

Stress

A person, who aspires to enter the field of special education--and in particular teaching students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders--must be aware of the high stress and burnout rate that accompany this type of placement. Being able to not let the stressful situations at work permeate one's life outside of school is important. Many teachers commented that the undergraduate program did not discuss the high stress and burnout rates, nor give them strategies for how to deal with or avoid the day-to-day stress of teaching. As one person commented:

> The burnout rate is high in special education when you are teaching students with emotional impairments; you have to learn how to balance your life so you don't get too burned out in the field. It is hard to leave work at work and still have a life outside of that. I have switched [teaching] a different type of special education student so it has given me a break from the more behaviorally challenged kids.

Many of these new teachers discussed the importance of balance in personal lives in order to avoid possible burn out and leaving the profession of special education.

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to gain insight into how special education teachers assessed their own undergraduate teacher preparation program in terms of equipping them to effectively teach their students appropriately for global citizenry. This included training in core content and theory-based pedagogy essential for emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. Additionally, the researchers sought to discover what advice these new special education teachers would you give colleges and universities concerning future teacher training. Themes were revealed related to areas where they felt equipped (i.e. content knowledge acquisition and sound pedagogies through exposure to students in diverse field placements) and where better preparation is needed (i.e., relationship building, paperwork and data collection problems, and stress management). Each of these areas will be discussed below.

Exposure to Students in Diverse Field Placements

Many participants concluded that effective undergraduate programs exposed teacher candidates to the type of children they will be teaching in early field placements and these placements alongside of special education preparation classes caused great growth in their knowledge in effective teaching. They were able to successfully implement the best practices learned while training and felt their teaching to be effective for student growth and ability to be productive citizens in a global society. Further, the early exposure to the field helped them acquire mentors and people with whom they felt free to ask questions and gain better understanding of the pedagogy or theory being modeled. Research confirms that the mentoring aspect for special education teachers assist in increasing job satisfaction and thus teacher retention in the field (Horrison-Collier, 2013; Muller & Burdette, 2007). Not only was the how to effectively educate the special education population answered by early and repeated exposures to the field,

but the want to was also revealed. Respondents indicated that such experiences helped them decide whether to enter the field and realize that they had a heart for working with these types of students. Respondents believed that teacher candidates need multiple field placements in diverse settings in the continuum of special education services. Hence, participants noted that numerous, diverse, realistic field placements helped them when they started working at their first job.

While this is an exploratory case study, these findings of global competency is an important indicator that these special education teachers were generally satisfied with their content / pedagogy training. They had no major issues regarding their feeling equipped to educate their special education population effectively for global citizenry. Whether this self-report is in fact accurate is outside the scope of this study. However, the lack of dissension or negative expressions of concern by all nine special education teachers, encourage and support the initial conclusion that current teacher training is adequate. Special education teachers felt equipped to teach their emotionally impaired / behavioral disordered students. This is also an important finding, supporting research showing that teacher quality is related to experiences and teacher quality is related to the teacher being fully certified in the field in which he/she is teaching (Educational Policy Research Reform Institute, 2003). For students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders to be successful, our exploratory research backs the need for their teacher to acquire a strong educational background and have completed an appropriate teacher certification (Clark-Chiarelli & Singer, 1995). In fact, teacher certification is strongly correlated to student math and reading achievement, (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Unfortunately, teachers of students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders have had historically low levels of teacher training and certification, and about 20% of teachers with emotionally impaired classrooms in a study conducted in 2000 were found to be either not certified or to have temporary or probationary certification (Westat, 2002). With massive special education teacher shortage and higher percentages predicted by 2020, these statistics are not diminishing. Because special education is a critical needs area, states can provide "temporary or emergency licenses that bypass State licensing requirements. In most state, private schools are exempt from the state requirements (All Education Schools, 2007)." In 2007, eight percent of public school teachers fell under this exempt umbrella. The number is rising (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, updated 2010).

According to Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, and Westat (2002), the type of school in which student teaching and other previous field experiences occur is important, because if teacher candidates have encountered certain situations in their college field placements, they report they are more skilled when later having to deal with similar situations. These special education teachers' responses concurred with this finding. There is no doubt that our initial findings supported the premise that Field experiences that are intensive and well supervised benefit the new teacher once he/she takes a permanent position at a school (Carlson et al., 2002). In fact, it was the lack of exposure to dealing with issues thoroughly in field placements or during courses that led to the dissatisfaction comments from the teachers that are discussed below.

Relationships

Overwhelmingly, these new teachers noted that they did not feel that their undergraduate degree had prepared them to work with parents, other teachers, and paraprofessionals. Instruction in clear communication and effective collaboration with these partners will help students with emotional impairments/behavioral disorders in the long run and make the teacher's life in the school district more pleasant and productive.

This finding correlates with other studies reporting that new teachers feel that their training did not address how to effectively collaborate with the general education teacher or that collaboration was weak (Villegas, 2013; Carlson et al., 2002). Collaboration is important since an overwhelming number of special education teachers team up with non-special education teachers to identify and implement needed accommodations and promote interactions between children with and without disabilities (Carlson et al., 2002; Stempien & Loeb, 2002;). Thus, new teachers must be able to clearly and effectively communicate while cooperating with the general education teacher.

Another relationship that is very important for the special education teacher involves paraprofessionals. Although paraprofessionals are an asset to the special education teacher, they do bring more work in terms of scheduling and the assignment of tasks. The current research supports other studies (e.g., Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001), concluding that there are many gaps in the literature on how to work with and acknowledge the work of paraprofessionals, including guidelines for assigning paraprofessionals to work with special education students. Additionally, the newly graduated special education teacher has the additional stressor of age to add to the equation; as mentioned repeatedly by the special educators, the fact that the paraprofessionals are oftentimes decades older than them can be intimidating. Thus, it is important to train the teacher candidate in how to supervise paraprofessionals since most of them will be performing this function as part of the work in their classrooms (SPeNCE, Fact sheet, 2003). Studies show that paraprofessionals who spend more time meeting with teachers on lesson planning, curriculum development, guidance and counseling, evaluation of programs, and other collaborative work related to instruction feel more confident in their ability to implement the special education program for the student (French, 1998; Freschi, 1999). Regular meetings between special education teachers and paraprofessionals provide opportunities for the paraprofessional to share his/her feedback about students' performance as well as get information from the special education teacher on how best to service particular students (Ghere & York-Barr, 2003).

The participants also reported that communication between parents and teachers can be complex and that the teacher candidates need to know how to initiate and maintain good relationships with parents. The special education teachers' stress in this area is not a new phenomenon; in a 2012 Special Needs Resources article on the challenges of special education teachers, lack of parent support made the top of the list (Ferry, 2012). The special education students feelings of inadequacy when dealing with difficult parents is an important finding, since keeping parents involved in their child's education is of primary importance (Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002) and can be effectively accomplished through thoughtful and meaningful communication between school and home. The practice of good communication

between home and school is important because helping children learn more at home is important to improving their school performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Also, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004, requires schools to collaborate and communicate with parents and students with disabilities in the design and implementation of special education services (Patterson, 2005).

Paperwork and Data Collection

Interviewees mentioned that paperwork and data collection were overwhelming for new teachers. More and more school districts are requiring teachers to document outcomes for students with disabilities, thus requiring documentation and paperwork (Fish & Stephens, 2010). This issue is complex, because it is more than simply a plethora of paperwork, it is the quality of the work required and the grave fall-out associated with the tasks, coupled with a lack of exposure to the process / skills necessary to effectively collect and communicate the requisite data. The special education teachers remarked they were not prepared with the data driven collection and decision making skills required in our Response to Intervention culture. While the benefits of the data driven decision making is not being debated, it is without doubt that these special education teachers would have benefited from management systems and more specific teacher preparation in their education programs.

These teachers were not alone. A large number of teachers have reported that the required special education paperwork interferes with their job of teaching students (Carlson et al., 2002; Major, 2012). The typical special education teacher spends five hours per week completing forms and doing administrative paperwork (SPeNSE, Fact sheet, 2002). Clearly, this demand on teachers' time to complete paperwork in a

timely and organized fashion should be a major topic of discussion and practice during teacher training classes. The time-consuming demands of paperwork is one of the most burdensome aspects of special education teachers is a main cause their dissatisfaction (Klein, 2004)."Thus, it is imperative that programs help teacher candidates recognize the amount of paperwork involved in teaching and suggest how to complete paperwork and data collection in a timely fashion while at the same time giving important and accurate information.

 Stress Management

Participants also noted that it is important to avoid stress and to balance one's life when teaching students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders. It was suggested that teaching training programs should focus more on this topic for teacher candidates going into special education. This suggestion should be taken seriously. Teacher turnover caused by teachers leaving the field of teaching, moving to a different school, or transferring to another teaching area, has become a concern in education research (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Major, 2012). This is especially true in special education (Kozleski, Mainzer, Deshler, & Coleman, 2000; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Some research shows that approximately between 6 to 20 percent of special education teachers want to leave the profession as soon as possible (Carlson et al., 2002). There is stress in any teaching position, but for the special education teacher it is multiplied by the nature of the students involved (Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

Burnout rates for special education teachers are high. Further, research has shown that half of the teachers who are instructing students labeled emotionally impaired were 35 years or younger (Westat, 2002), suggesting that teachers don't stay

with this student population. Further, when Stempien and Loeb (2002) asked teachers of students with emotional disorders if they planned to stay in this field, 36% reported that they planned to leave the field within one year. A major reason for this high turnover rate is the emotional exhaustion and high stress who are levels these teachers face (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders need teachers effective at instruction and have experience in this specialized field. Teachers who are more effective have more experience (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005), and they are more successful than brand-new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, an overwhelming number of teachers of students who are emotionally impaired do not have a lot of experience, having been teaching at their present school for five years or less (Clark-Chiarelli & Singer, 1995). This is a issue that needs to be addressed in teaching preparation programs. Thus, in answering the two questions proposed in this exploratory study (i.e. whether special education students felt equipped by their teaching program to prepare their emotionally impaired / behavioral disorder students for a global citizenry and what advice they would give colleges and universities concerning future teacher training), we found mixed results. These beginning special education teachers felt confident in their ability to teach (content wise and through theory-based, best practice pedagogies; and the stressors came more from the managerial side of the job, including relational (maintaining positive, work-based relationships with general education coworkers, paraprofessionals, and parents); data driven collection and decision making, coupled with massive paperwork; and generally caring for the special needs

student. Most of these stressors could have been minimized with better preparation in the education program; for the beginning special education teachers repeatedly remarked that they "wished they had known." Lack of knowledge increases stress since the special educator has the shock to deal with as well as the feelings of inadequacy to deal with the situation. While better preparation will not eliminate these new special education teachers' stressors, it would go a long way in alleviating them.

Limitations of the Study

This exploratory study used qualitative research to study the perceptions of nine special education teachers who recently graduated from a liberal arts college concerning how well their undergraduate program had prepared them for this field. The important findings of this study must be considered in the context of the following limitations.

First, the findings are limited in generalizability because of the exploratory nature of the study with its small sample size. The teachers of students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders whose perceptions were sought constitute a limited group and may not be representative of teachers in special education. Further, social desirability is a concern when using interviews in research. That is, some participants may respond to questions based on what they perceive is expected of them or what they deem to be the socially or politically correct response (Patton, 1990). Thus, although participation was voluntary, the validity of the study may be limited by the bias inherent in the data collection methods used.

Implications for Future Research

The study provides support for existing evidence with regard to teacher learning and

45

teacher preparation, and the new implication that special education teachers feel equipped to prepare their students for global citizenry. These initial findings must be substantiated, thus additional studies should be conducted on this important issue of teacher global competency. Mastery of global competence in both teachers and students is fundamental if the U.S. is to reign in this new millennium. In this exploratory study, we looked at content and pedagogical knowledge and skills requisite for success in the 21st century, but there are factors such as diversity sensitivity and training that also need to be considered.

Additionally, further, comparisons of attitudes could provide important information about the effectiveness of undergraduate teacher preparation programs. Future research is also needed to investigate the perceptions of other special education teachers, beyond the emotionally impaired / behavioral disorders. A wider sample using quantitative methods might be helpful to gather information concerning special education preparatory programs.

Nevertheless, given these findings, teacher-training institutions should direct increase attention to successful teaching of students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders to include successful communication, paperwork management, and stress reducers. Specifically, they should focus on effective collaboration with school staff, outside agencies, parents, and the students themselves. In addition, they should educate future teachers about how to write an effective and compliant plan for students with disabilities. Likewise, preparation programs that are training teachers should discuss of the realities of working with students with emotional impairments / behavioral disorders.

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