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2X1. UNI Teacher Preparation: Iowa Principals' Perceptions

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Findings from In-Depth Interviews with Iowa Principals

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UNI

Education Summit

*Inclusive Praxis for 21st Century Education:
Advocacy, Challenges, and the Public Good*

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Acknowledgements

Iowa Principals
Jill Wittrock
CSBR Staff

Background

- Part of Teacher Education Strategic Initiatives (TESI) the University of Northern Iowa)
- UNI's Center for Social & Behavioral Research (CSBR) assisted in gathering input from this key stakeholder group
- Study was funded by the Center for Educational Transformation
- The primary aim was to provide feedback specifically about classroom teacher preparation at UNI from a key constituency – those who hire new teachers

Study Design

- Face-to-face data collection mode chosen to achieve most candid and richest responses from principals
- Interview guide was developed in consultation with several members of the College of Education faculty, staff and administrators
- Interviews were conducted by the Director and Assistant Director of the CSBR
- Length limited to 30 minutes to balance needed content with respondent burden

Selection & Recruitment

- Schools selected to maximize breadth and to assure a variety of school types was included.
 - Urban, rural, and suburban school districts
 - Ethnic and racial diversity, determined by % ESL and minority students reported in the Iowa Community Indicators Program at Iowa State University
 - Poverty, as determined by % of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch reported by the Des Moines Register Data Central
 - Student body size, based on 2013–2014 enrollments from the Iowa Department of Education
 - Geography – western, central and eastern Iowa
 - Elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools

Selection & Recruitment

- Schools selected to maximize breadth and to assure a variety of school types was included.
- Once school districts were identified, principals in the districts were sent email invitations and received follow-up phone calls to schedule an interview
- If a principal was not available at the time specified, another principal at a school in the area was recruited
- Principals did not receive compensation for participating in an interview

Materials

- A semi-structured interview guide was developed in consultation with COE and CET collaborators
- Focused on gathering information regarding perceptions about teacher preparation priorities generally as well as eliciting input on UNI's training programs in particular
- The interview guide included approximately 14 questions

Data Collection

- 16 half-hour interviews were conducted by Mary Losch or Jill Wittrock
- Both researchers were in attendance and both took separate notes during the majority of interviews. CSBR research assistants were present at two interviews to take notes
- Interviews were not recorded. This decision was made to allow principals the opportunity to be as candid and open as possible during the interview
- The notes and observations were entered electronically as soon as possible following the interview to facilitate recall of the event

Analysis

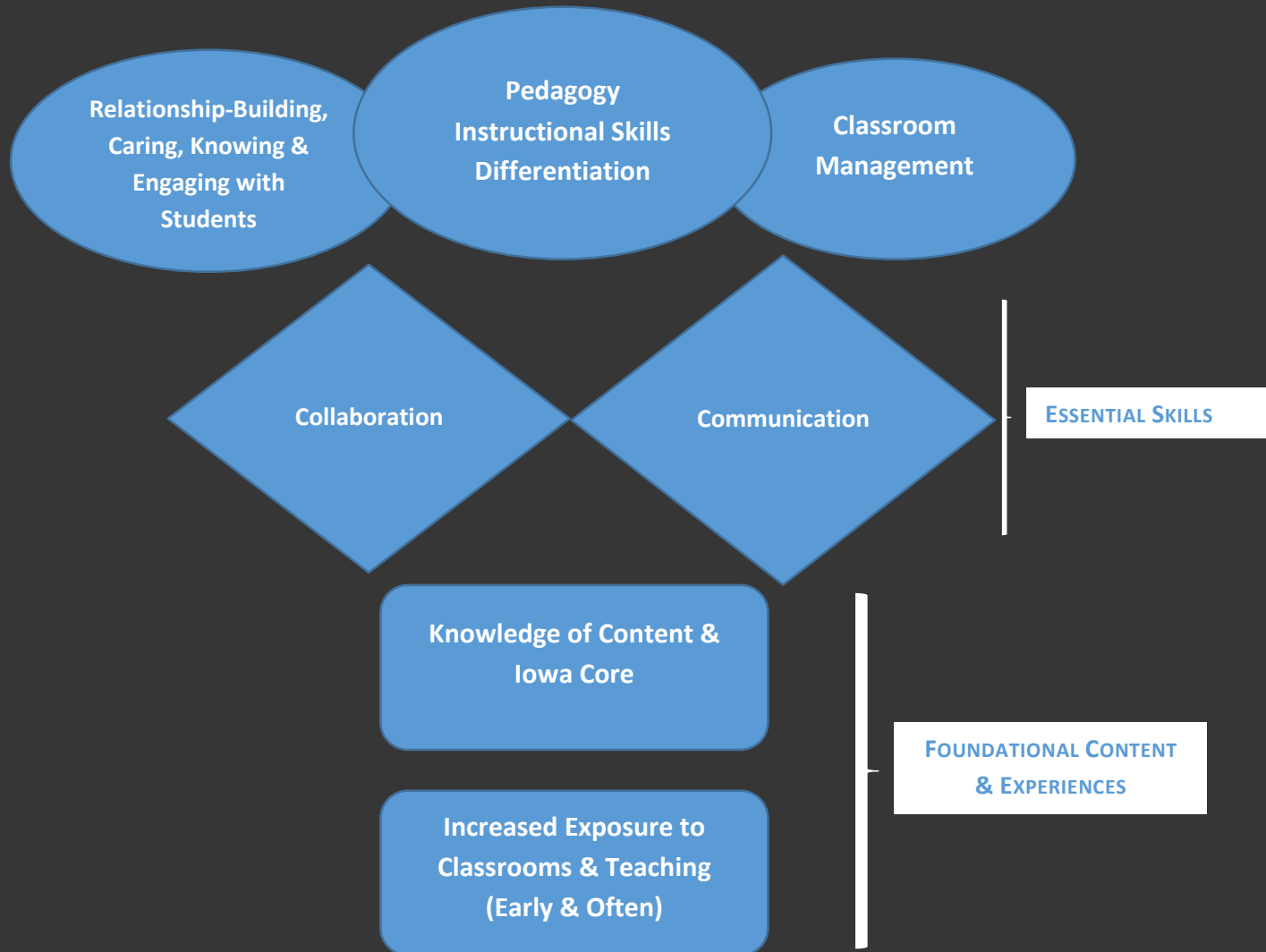
- Inductive thematic analysis used to identify major themes in the interview data
- Both researchers carefully reviewed both sets of notes to refamiliarize themselves with interview responses and identify codes and then key themes
- Content was compared for each note taker (to check for any missing points) and across all interviews to yield the final key themes
- Selected passages and quotes from the interview notes that were deemed representative of the primary and secondary themes were selected for inclusion in the report and a smaller subset were selected for today's presentation

Primary Themes – Teacher Training

- Principals were asked about their views of the most important areas that should be emphasized when training teachers
- What skills do they look for when they interview candidates?
- What should be added to teacher training?
 - What do YOU think?

Conceptual Framework

CRITICAL TEACHING PRACTICES



P Primary Themes – Teacher Training

- Top focus areas included:
 - Pedagogy
 - Instructional Skills
 - Lesson Planning
 - Specific Approaches to Differentiation

Pedagogy

Pedagogy has to be an integral part of teacher training – how do contextual and cultural issues impact teaching? – How to integrate these dimensions into good teaching is important – (Middle / Junior High Principal)

Pedagogy / Engagement

*Engaging through the curriculum –
May be able to focus on 3 standards
– NOT 31! – Understanding how kids
are part of the process – kids are
different now – teachers have to
understand “professional responsibility”
– It isn’t going into a classroom, sitting
at the head of the room
– (High School Principal)*

*The most valuable are models of
effective teaching, such as
student-centered and
collaborative models.
– (Middle School/Junior High Principal)*

*For example, their instruction should be more
student-centered. They need to incorporate
activities that engage students.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

Pedagogy / Differentiation / Backgrounds

*Understanding that kids come in a variety of shapes and sizes with different needs
– (Elementary Principal)*

*Have to know that they [STUDENTS] come in a variety of labels, diagnoses, and do not fit neatly into a specific box.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Urban [SCHOOLS HAVE] diversity, poverty, and [A VARIETY OF] demographic backgrounds. In my experience, we've received students who have Teach Iowa grants and they don't understand what it is like to work in an urban, diverse school. [IT IS] Really hard for them to adjust. They need to understand the children that come from different backgrounds.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

Content / Iowa Core

[MOST IMPORTANT] Core – teachers need an intimate knowledge of the Iowa Core [SECOND MOST IMPORTANT] Content literacy strategies – all teachers must become literacy teachers.

– (High School Principal)

[NEED A] good basis in the core curriculum, the Iowa Core. They need to have a good understanding and know the activities that go with that.

– (Middle / Junior High Principal)

R Relationship-building / Caring / Engaging

*[MUST HAVE AN ABILITY TO]
love unlovable kids
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Building relationships with the
kids is what I look for in
new teachers.
– (Elementary Principal)*

*Need more emphasis on how to build
relationships to leverage these
relationships to get kids to learn. This
will make kids want to run through
walls for them...Content doesn't matter
if you can't motivate those kids.
– (High School Principal)*

*[MOST IMPORTANT ARE] Intangibles
[LIKE] caring
– (Elementary Principal)*

C Classroom Management Skills

Have to have classroom management be positive and proactive. The principal can't be the first line of defense.

– (Elementary Principal)

[ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES OF TEACHER PREP]

Classroom management with instructional practices

– (Elementary Principal)

Collaboration & Communication

*[I] Don't want a school of independent contractors. I want collaboration.
– (High School Principal)*

*Curiosity – do they ask questions? They
[NEWER TEACHERS ARE] are receptive and
willing to ask for help.
– (Elementary Principal)*

*Communication – how to work as a team
with both colleagues and administrators –
[I] have to know a teacher's ability to
communicate. How does that email [TO A
PARENT] sound? How do you cooperate
in a team environment?
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*PLCs – expectations for collaboration.
Teaching is not a closed-door
profession any longer.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

Increased exposure to classrooms - early & often

Classroom experience is SO valuable. We better serve future teachers by trading off seat time [IN THEIR CONTENT CLASSES] for more opportunities in the classroom. Sooner is better for pretty intense experiences in the field.

– (Elementary Principal)

[STUDENTS NEED] Variety of experience! It is easy for some students to stay in safe bubble. The more they can know about a broader reach of knowledge is helpful.

– (Elementary Principal)

Increased exposure to classrooms - early & often

Better now than in older cohorts. Iowa isn't the most diverse but [our location] is pretty diverse –40 different countries represented in the school. ESL is always busting at the seams. In five seconds we see more color than most of Iowa. Prep should emphasize more practicum and student teaching to help expose new teachers to diversity. Some are drawn to diversity and others want to go back home to small town.

– (Elementary Principal)

When putting them in practicums, it shouldn't all be at [REDACTED], need to go to [REDACTED]. If they want to do elementary ed, make them go to middle school. It is completely different walking into a 5% poverty school versus a 90% poverty school.

– (High School Principal)

Secondary Themes – Teacher Training

➤ Top focus areas included:

- Knowledge and use of standards–based grading
- Understanding assessment & its applications to learning
- Ability to understand and use data at both micro (student) & macro (classroom/school/community) level
- Strong understanding of educational technology and its application
- Personal Energy/Enthusiasm/Passion
- Adaptability/Flexibility
- Professionalism/Work ethic

S standards-based grading

*[Grading for learning – push toward standards-based grading. ABC [GRADING] doesn't help... need to know learning targets.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Does the grade represent learning rather than a specific behavior in the classroom or completion of a particular task?
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

Understanding assessment and its application

*...make sure they understand rigorous assessment.
– (Elementary Principal)*

*[LOOK FOR] instruction and assessment cycle
...Does your teaching match your assessment?
How do they align?
– (Elementary Principal)*

Ability to understand and use data

*Analyzing data – teaching or presenting a task, collecting student data and making decisions based on it. Need to be able to analyze data – collect student information and make decisions about it with assessments. We collaborate and talk about the implications. [TEACHERS] Need to make decisions based on data.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Ability to understand data and research to aid in curricular planning
– use evidence to plan – use data to help choose focus.
– (High School Principal)*

Strong understanding of ed tech & its use

*[MOST VALUABLE FOR FUTURE TRAINING] Use of technology and social media for instruction and communication
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Educational technology – [I] revisit this all the time.
Do they use it to enhance instruction [OR NOT]?
– (Elementary Principal)*

Energy, enthusiasm & passion

Must be passionate about teaching kids. Passion is key. They must be willing to go above and beyond. It is not a 7am–3pm job. You take it home emotionally, too.

– (Elementary Principal)

[LOOK FOR] Enthusiasm, passion.

– (Middle / Junior High Principal)

Adaptability and flexibility

*...have to be flexible based on the
[REQUIREMENTS OF THE] environment...
– (Elementary School Principal)*

*Must be flexible.
– (Middle / Junior High Principal)*

*Teaching now – it takes such a
resilient person.
– (Elementary Principal)*

Professionalism & Work Ethic

...must be a hard worker. It takes courage to make [DIFFICULT] phone calls to parents.

– (Middle / Junior High Principal)

Professionalism – younger teachers struggle with [SOME OF THE] professional pieces. [THEY NEED TO] Stay off of Facebook [DURING THE WORK DAY].

– (Middle School / Junior High Principal)

It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory. — W. Edwards Demming



The scholar who cherishes the love of comfort is not fit to be deemed a scholar. — Confucius, *Analects*

Thank you

Questions?