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Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence and Value of an Embedded, School-Based Field Experience

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE AND VALUE OF AN EMBEDDED, SCHOOL-BASED FIELD EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how preservice teachers perceive the influence and value of an embedded, school-based field experience. Information was gathered from preservice teachers using surveys and a focus group interview. The data collected showed that an embedded field experience tied to a language arts methods course was generally a positive influence leading to great self-efficacy. Further, the data compared similarly to research supporting the notion that embedded field experiences generally have the effect of strengthening preservice teachers' self-efficacy. Looking at Bandura's work in *Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change*, it shows that early interactions and successes will boost the self-efficacy of preservice teachers. This study found that successful experiences help preservice teachers value their embedded, school-based field experiences and help view it as something positive. Even if the experience had its difficulties, preservice teachers were able to learn from the situation and if they ever find themselves in a similar circumstance, they will feel more confident about handling things. Therefore, when these preservice teachers become in-service teachers, they will feel more confident about their abilities compared to in-service teachers who did not have similar experiences in their teacher preparation program.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and my sister. From an early age, my mother taught me the value of an education. My sister shared with me her never-ending passion for learning. Together, these two amazing beings have supported me with all of my dreams and have encouraged me to always strive to be the best person that I could be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I would also like to thank my sister, Cynthia, for her encouraging words and support when I needed it the most through this journey and in life.

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INTRODUCTION

Preservice teachers in a teacher education program often have a variety of field experiences throughout their programs of studies. Typically, preservice teachers all have an internship or student teaching at the end of their teacher education program preceded by multiple field experiences. One type of field experience I experienced was school-based, embedded field experience where our university course met on-site on an elementary school campus and as part of the course, we tutored elementary students. I began thinking about exploring this topic for my honors thesis based on my personal experience in an upper level education course on an elementary school campus. This thesis sought to explore how embedded field experience might possibly influence preservice teachers' self-efficacy. From my readings, others have noted that more field experiences contribute to sustain teacher retention.

Every semester, preservice teachers have to register for courses for the following term. Aside from the course description, some courses may have additional notes such as information regarding text books or location changes. When I was registering for LAE 4314 for Spring 2015, I was intrigued by the fact that one section of all the LAE 4314 courses was going to take place in a nearby elementary school and that we will be working with the elementary students. All the other available options met on the main University of Central Florida (UCF) campus and did not have additional information. After reading the additional notes, I was excited about working with a student so I could actively apply what I was learning. This course was unlike any other regarding the experiences that could be gained as a preservice teacher.

All of the preservice teachers who signed up for this course were paired with a buddy who was an elementary student who was part of a program to improve/strengthen their writing skills. On the day the class would meet, we would have the lecture for the university course and then meet with our student buddy for approximately thirty minutes. Every session between the preservice teacher and student was planned by the preservice teacher and reflected upon after the session. Preparing those minilessons and working with the student on the lesson allowed me and other preservice teachers to be reflective and flexible, similar to what we will do as in-service teachers. I feel that courses like LAE 4314 with an embedded field experience are not as common as they should be for preservice teachers; therefore, I wanted to explore this topic in more depth. Preservice teachers need the experience of preparing lessons and activities tailored to the students' needs. I believe that if more options were available for courses with embedded field experiences, preservice teachers would have plenty of opportunities before internship to interact with students on a personal teacher-student level. These experiences would allow preservice teachers to see how their planning, work, and effort could directly help a student grow, especially compared to a volunteering experience in a class without personally planning the lessons. The more practice preservice teachers could have with preparing and teaching specific structured lessons directly linked to their university studies, the more likely I think they are to learn about teaching tied to the theoretical information learned in class, and the more confident they will feel about their planning and teaching abilities. This was all true from my personal experience.

Therefore, this thesis explored how preservice teachers perceive the influence and value of an embedded, school-based field experience. I wonder how those experiences teaching as a tutor could possibly help preservice teachers develop a strong or stronger self-efficacy. While this thesis will not be a long term study to examine teacher retention, I feel that a strong self-efficacy can, hopefully contribute to sustain future teacher retention. The following sections of this thesis will provide insights into related research surrounding teacher education and needed field experience, including embedded field experiences, self-efficacy, and possible links to teacher retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature will assist the reader to better understand this study about preservice teachers' perceptions of the influence and value of an embedded, school-based field experience. There are four topics covered in this literature review: teacher education and needed field experience, embedded field experience, self-efficacy, and teacher retention. In this study, each of these topics are discussed in detail about what they are and their relevance in this study.

Teacher Education and Needed Field Experience

The following studies provide information from the perspective of preservice teachers during their internship placement. Considering that interns are in training to be teachers, I think their feedback is important to consider in order to improve the teacher preparation program for future educators.

In their study, Drummond and Drummond (1995) surveyed a variety of interns at the end of a semester to gather information about their experiences (positive and negative), special moments, and thoughts or recommendations about the teacher preparation program. The majority of interns surveyed were elementary education majors, other majors included secondary education, music education, and physical education. The schools where these preservice teachers were interning varied greatly in demographics and socioeconomic status.

These preservice teachers were asked to share what situation in their internship contributed the most to their growth. "Four major themes emerged dealing with problem students/parents, utilizing feedback, observing others, and being able to teach" (Drummond &

Drummond, 1995, p. 3-4). The situations that helped the interns learn and grow were made possible from being in the classroom. The experiences the preservice teachers gained from firsthand classroom interactions could not compare to reading or hearing about the situations (Drummond & Drummond, 1995).

For the subtopic "Suggestions for Improving Preservice Training", the main suggestion by interns was to increase the amount of field experience (FE) before getting to the final internship (Drummond & Drummond, 1995, p. 15). Interns shared that they wanted more experiences in the classroom, especially in inner city schools and classes with diverse populations (including ethnicity and ability/disability). Another theme relating to field experience was making the program more reality based instead of too theoretical (Drummond & Drummond, 1995, p. 15).

Similar to the study by Drummond and Drummond (1995), Key (1998) captured the experiences of interns, but on a smaller scale. Key worked with two Language Arts interns and shared what they learned from internship and how their experiences affected them. According to Key:

> "before internship, many interns held overly inflated beliefs about their effectiveness in teaching, classroom management, daily routines of the school and coping mechanisms for daily stress that they faced as educators (Venman, 1984)" (Key, 1998, p. 3).

Whether it boosts their confidence or humbles preservice teachers, field experiences and internship are crucial to give future educators a look into what it is like to be a teacher. This way, preservice teachers do not experience that shock later when they start working solo in their

own classrooms. Receiving feedback from mentors, the teacher, and the students will be invaluable to the intern as he/she learns how to teach and become an educator. Working next to an in-service teacher will also be helpful since the teacher is a mentor teaching them what works, what does not work, how to be reflective, and how to handle different situations. In addition to the vicarious experiences gained by observing an in-service teacher, the intern's own experiences teaching and facing different situations will help them have a better understanding of what it is like to be a teacher. Even with mixed experiences (positive and negative), other researchers have "found that interns believed that their internship and field experiences had a far greater impact on their learning to teach than any college coursework that they completed" (p. 2). Teacher education programs could be a richer experience if field experiences were structured, specific, and allowed preservice teachers to prepare and present lessons with actual students (Key, 1998).

Interns felt that "their other practicum experiences had not given them a true picture of what it meant to be in the classroom every day or to be responsible for students' learning" (Key, 1998, p. 12). With embedded field experiences, preservice teachers will begin to see what it is like to be responsible for a child's learning. It is not to the same magnitude as that of an in-service teacher, but it is still firsthand experience that will prepare them for internship and the field.

The research conducted by Soares and Soares (2002) in "Immersion: The Core of Teacher Education," studied two groups of preservice teachers through their teacher preparation program and the first two years of their first teaching position (p. 3). Group I completed a

traditional model of the teacher preparation program. They took the necessary courses, some of which may have had a field experience component, and completed student teaching before finishing the program. Group II on the other hand, experienced a more intense version of the program. Throughout the teacher preparation program for Group II, students were exposed to more experiences in the classroom and took classes in the evening "which enabled the students to reflect, analyze, and discuss their daily activities with their course instructors, classroom teachers, and field supervisors" (Soares & Soares, 2002, p. 6). Both groups completed a pre- and post-survey, and were required to keep three portfolios: "developmental- for determining process, self-assessment- for gauging achievement, and showcase for demonstrating success" (Soares & Soares, 2002, p. 7). After gathering all the results and reviewing the information, Soares and Soares (2002) found that the immersion that Group II experienced, "and academic study throughout the teacher-training program leads to more confidence on the part of students in teacher training and more competence in handling their classrooms" (p. 8). Based on their study and the information they found, Soares and Soares (2002) support the idea of increasing field experiences in teacher preparation programs. In their study, although both groups scored similarly in the pre-test, Group II scored higher than Group I in the post-test. There were nine dimensions that displayed the greatest difference between groups and they were all in favor of Group II (Soares & Soares, 2002, p. 7).

The dimensions as part of the post-test included:

> "Reflective practices, transitional activities, classroom management, assessment strategies, understanding of school culture, self-assessment of their expertise, flexibility

in changing lesson plans as necessary, adaptability in accommodating individual needs, ability to help every student to learn" (Soares & Soares, 2002, p. 7).

As I read the report “Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), I found myself agreeing with many of the reasons included as to why changing the program for teacher preparation to include more field experiences is important. The changes mentioned in the report support my thoughts that preservice teachers are better prepared through firsthand experiences with students, similar to the preparation medical students experience (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 10). Personally, I am the kind of person that learns through hands-on experiences; therefore, a program that requires me to prepare and present lessons to a class and assess the students, helps me learn and retain more information. This was the difference between my LAE 4314 course with embedded field experience and other courses that taught the theory, but did not have a practical and authentic application component. For this reason, I could not agree more when I read that “school-embedded experiences help teachers develop content-specific and general teaching skills," along with other knowledge such as how to communicate with different audiences and how to respond to different situations (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 10). This report adds that preservice teachers "need to have opportunities to reflect upon and think about what they do, how they make decisions, how they 'theorize' their work, and how they integrate their content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge into what they do. This can be accomplished through a combination of both school embedded

practice and laboratory-type experiences" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 8).

According to the report “Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), this type of clinical preparation through structured practice in "real schools with real students helps ensure that candidates will be ready for the students with whom they will work and the schools in which they will teach. This is critically important in preparing teachers to be successful in hard-to-staff, low-performing schools and is useful in all teaching environments" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 27).

Embedded Field Experience Studies

For this literature review of related research, I read several interesting findings about embedded field experiences for preservice teachers. One study that I found interesting was Flores's (2015) work. Flores also focused on the importance of field experience for teacher preparation, using other research to support her stance. Flores (2015) references Ben-Peretz’s work from 1995 “report(ing) that field experience is viewed as the most critical factor in the development of teaching skills" (p. 2). These "structured field experiences that involve authentic teaching practice in classrooms" not only prepare preservice teachers, but also develop their self-efficacy (Flores, 2015, p. 14). Flores (2015) studied how these structured field experiences boost the confidence of preservice teachers for teaching science. Flores (2015) says that fieldwork and practicum should happen early on in the education of preservice teachers, and that it should

happen often (p. 1). This will show future educators what it is like to be a teacher and help them develop the habit of becoming reflective practitioners as they create and present lessons. Along with learning about writing and giving lessons, preservice teachers are honing their interpersonal skills. Teachers are always communicating with other teachers, students, parents, and administrators, working next to an in-service teacher, preservice teachers will also be learning how to effectively communicate with different these audiences.

In the article “Improving Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy through Service Learning: Lessons Learned,” Bernadowski, Perry, and Del Greco (2013) discuss the importance of teaching preservice teachers the theory as well as having them practice what they learn with students in order to help boost self-confidence as educators (p. 68). To support their research about preservice teachers' confidence, Bernadowski, Perry, and Del Greco (2013) share their findings about self-efficacy from Bandura and other researchers. From Bandura, they found that "how humans function and perform is an interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. (That) the degree of effort, perseverance, and flexibility is dependent on the individual’s sense of self" (p. 3). Knowing this information supports the idea that hands-on experiences from embedded field experiences, will better prepare preservice teachers by not only providing the knowledge of how to teach and work with students, but also the confidence to do so.

Looking at the four sources Bandura (1986) identified to influence self-efficacy (performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states), if preservice teachers checked each one during field experience, they would feel

better prepared for when they enter the field. The practice teaching difference subjects and experience preservice teachers gain during field experience will boost the confidence about teaching and their abilities as an educator.

In their study, Bernadowski, Perry, and Del Greco (2013) shared three factors that could potentially increase self-efficacy. These factors are:

- Peer persuasion, feedback (p. 71)
- Students enthusiasm, participation, feedback (p. 82)
- Being able to reflect on own work/practice (p. 70).

These three factors will be considered in the study to confirm the role that they play in relation to building self-efficacy. Based on experience and on the research included in this study, it could be agreed that each of these factors are important to build a strong self-efficacy. Consistent and continuous feedback from professors, peers, and from students is crucial to guide a preservice teacher to follow best practices and modify any area that he or she needs to improve upon. Reflecting allows preservice teachers to be insightful about their work, their teaching, and their interactions with students, other PSTs, and professors.

As seen in the studies by Flores (2015) and Bernadowski, Perry, and Del Greco (2013), preparing subject specific lessons and teaching them, provide preservice teachers with firsthand experience of what it is like to teach, and receiving feedback from those lesson from an in-service teacher, professors and other mentors will all help boost self-efficacy.

Along with the research, Bernadowski, Perry, and Del Greco (2013) emphasize that mastery experiences should be acquired and developed through field experiences" (p.12).

Self-Efficacy Studies

This section takes a closer look at what self-efficacy is and how it relates to this study. Self-efficacy was introduced by Bandura (1977), as a person's beliefs about their own capacities to complete certain tasks. These beliefs affect what the person decides to do in a given situation. People are more likely to avoid situations that they feel incapable of handling, but will become involved in situation that they feel are within their capacity (p. 3-4). According to Bandura's study, *Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change*, "efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and for how long they will continue in the face of obstacles;" if a person's self-efficacy is strong, he or she will make more of an effort to do well (p. 4).

In his study, Bandura (1977) worked with people with phobias to observe the effects of a person's perceived self-efficacy. Participants in this study were placed in one of three groups, "participant modeling, modeling alone, or no treatment" (p. 15). Every participant was asked to complete a variety of tasks and information was recorded on whether participants "considered themselves capable of performing each of the various tasks at the end of the treatment and by computing the percentage of accurate correspondence between efficacy judgment and actual performance" (p. 16). Of the three groups, 89% of performance accomplishments aligned with preconceived self-efficacy and 86% aligned for the group that was based solely on vicarious

experiences (p. 16). This study notes that although field experiences help preservice teachers by allowing them to observe an in-service teacher in action by teaching and working with students' needs, allowing preservice teachers to teach and receive feedback on his or her performance from the in-service teacher is more beneficial.

For preservice teachers who cannot participate in a course with an embedded field experience, the vicarious experiences from field experiences still provide a positive boost to developing self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977) "seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can generate expectations in observers that they too will improve if they intensify and persist in their efforts. They persuade themselves that if others can do it, they should be able to achieve at least some improvement in performance" (p. 7).

Another study that relates to teacher self-efficacy and the variety of instruments used to measure it, is *Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct* by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk's (2001) work discussed and compared a variety of studies conducted on the topic of the effect of teacher self-efficacy and the correlation to student success. It also discussed how the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale came to be created as a reliable and valid measure for teacher self-efficacy. In their research, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) found that "teachers' sense of self efficacy has been related to student outcomes such as achievement, motivation, and students' own sense of efficacy" (p. 783). Looking over the work of Rand researchers, Guskey (1982), Rose and Medway (1991), and Ashton and Webb (1986) among other studies, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) found many similarities in the results of these studies. Although researchers had different approaches or

different techniques to find the correlation, overall, studies showed that teachers who assumed more responsibility for having an effect on students, had higher self-efficacy than those that attributed student success or failure to external factors (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001, p. 785-786). This supports the different research showing that "teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization" which help prepare them, as well as that these teachers tend to be "more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students" (p. 783). This proved especially helpful in content specific courses where preservice teachers felt insecure about a subject they were weak in such as science, as found in the work of Ramey-Gassert and Shroyer (1992, p. 29). Reviewing the work of other researchers and in their own studies, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) have found that teachers with strong or higher self-efficacy tend to demonstrate more enthusiasm and commitment to their job as an educator (p. 784). These teachers are also likely to be "less critical of students when they make errors" and are willing to "work longer with a student who is struggling," since they feel it is within their power to reach even the most "difficult" students (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk, 2001, p. 783-784).

With a plethora of instruments available to measure teacher self-efficacy, researchers compared several of them and found that most of these tools were either valid or reliable, but not both. Phelan and Wren (2006) defined reliability as “the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results;” and described validity as “how well a test measures what it is purported to measure”. When testing to measure something, in this case, teacher self-efficacy, it is preferred to use a tool that is both valid and reliable (Tschannen-Moran and

Woolfolk. p. 795). A group at Ohio State University created the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES), which was used with in-service and preservice teachers to test reliability and validity of the instrument (Roberts and Henson, 2001, p. 6). The group creating the OSTES used a combination of previous scales and new pertinent information to determine what would be in the new instrument to measure teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk, 2001, p.795, Roberts and Henson, 2001, p. 6).

Teacher Retention

An important topic to consider is how to keep in-service educators in the field, and to study that, people need to know what factors are contributing to teacher attrition. According to Table 2 in the report Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey First Look, from the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), approximately 8% of teachers left the profession in the 2012-2013 school year. There are a plethora of reasons as to why teachers, new and experienced, choose to leave the profession. In the study by Inman and Marlow (2004) and the report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), the most common reasons were salary, benefits, colleagues (support), job security, and work conditions among other reasons. Although the report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) and the study by Inman and Marlow (2004) are approximately a decade apart, many of the reasons for leaving were the same. As I looked over the most commonly stated reasons for teachers leaving, I noticed that some of the reasons, such as support from colleagues or administration, could be tied to a teacher's self-efficacy. I find that people thrive with constructive feedback and positive comments; and since being a teacher could be overwhelming,

feedback and compliments could help a teacher know he or she is doing well and is not alone. The work by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) support this idea after finding a “strong correlation between teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout,” in their study of the dimensions of teacher self-efficacy (p. 620).

In the *Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers* report (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), information regarding teacher retention is provided as well as how it relates to the importance of self-efficacy. It stated that the "research on professional development schools and urban teacher residencies indicates higher retention rates among new teachers prepared in these intensive clinically based programs and greater teacher efficacy" (p. 2). The same report shared that the idea of preparation through structured practice in "real schools with real students helps ensure that candidates will be ready for the students with whom they will work and the schools in which they will teach. This is critically important in preparing teachers to be successful in hard-to-staff, low-performing schools and is useful in all teaching environments" (p. 27). In his study, *Where Should Student Teachers Learn to Teach? Effects of Field Placement School Characteristics on Teacher Retention and Effectiveness*, Matthew Ronfeldt researched the difference between placing preservice teachers in “easier-to-staff” schools compared to placing them in “difficult-to-staff” schools. The results for the two placements were similar, but it appears that preservice teachers completing field experiences in “easier-to-staff” schools observed “better working conditions and teaching faculty who are better equipped to mentor prospective teachers” (Ronfeldt, 2012, p. 21). These positive experiences with the students and

teachers seemed to better prepare the preservice teachers in these schools. Many performed well once they moved on to teaching, regardless of whether they worked in "difficult-to-staff" or "easier-to-staff" schools. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001) found that "teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have greater commitment to teaching and are more likely to stay in teaching" (p. 784). Therefore, based on the research literature surrounding self-efficacy, teacher preparation and field experiences, and teacher retention, this study will explore how embedded field experience might possibly influence preservice teachers' self-efficacy.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis explored how preservice teachers perceive the influence and value of an embedded, school-based field experience. Therefore, to conduct this study, I started by researching prior studies that focused on teacher education, studies on embedded field experience, studies on self-efficacy, and teacher retention, as seen in the review of related research literature. In order to explore the possible influences of a methods course taught on-site with an embedded field experience of tutoring, I had planned to meet with two to three focus groups composed of preservice teachers who were enrolled in their last semester of internship II or student teaching. A sample of convenience was used. The preservice teachers selected for the focus group interviews all had a previous experience in at least one course with an embedded field experience. The instructor of the class possessed the names and contact information of these preservice teachers; therefore, the plan included requesting the instructor to email all students to inquire if they were willing to volunteer to participate in aforementioned focus groups.

The location for the embedded school-based field experience took place at Lovely Meadows School. The LAE 4314 course with the embedded experience was scheduled to meet after school from 2:00 to 4:50 in the afternoon. In between the allotted time for class, there was a thirty-minute time slot dedicated to working with little buddies. The school was located within a community and had two floors. Upon entering the office, the secretary and any other school personnel was readily available to greet guests and answer any questions. Walking through the school, teachers working there friendly and welcoming with the preservice teachers. The

demographics of the school resembled the group of students who participated in the program to work with a preservice teacher after school. Lovely Meadows School worked with students from prekindergarten to eighth grade, and had a magnet program for students in the middle school range (sixth to eighth grade). According to the Florida Department of Education, in the 2013-2014 school year, Lovely Meadows had 745 students who came from a variety of backgrounds. Of the 745 students in the school, 45.2% identified as White, 7% as Black, 34.4% as Hispanic, 9.7% as Asian, 3.1% mixed with two or more races, and the remaining 0.6% identified as another race or ethnic group. From the total student population, 12.5% were registered as English Learners. Although Lovely Meadows School was not a Title I school, 45.3% of the students were considered to be economically disadvantaged and had 38% of students who were eligible for free lunch, and 6% of students who were eligible for reduced lunch prices.

The opportunity to work with a preservice teacher in the LAE 4314 course, was offered to students in the Lovely Meadows after school program. After obtaining permission from the school, the professor of the course sent home a flyer about the program to inform parents. Sign up to become a little buddy was on a first come first serve basis for students with parental permission. At the beginning of the semester, it was a one to one ration with preservice teachers and student buddies. Throughout the semester this ratio changed due to buddies moving or withdrawing from the program. If a preservice teacher did not have a little buddy, he or she worked with another preservice teacher and they shared a buddy.

Preservice teachers who were able to be a part of the focus group interview met at my chair's home on a set date as described below. The interview with the three participants in

addition to myself as a participant-researcher lasted approximately fifty minutes in duration. The interview was recorded, with the permission of the participants. Recordings were transcribed to keep and use for my personal record as I conducted this study. I used the information gathered from the focus groups to research and read for finding any patterns or themes, such as how preservice teachers feel about their experiences, their teacher preparation program, and any recommendations preservice teachers might have had to improve the program. Upon meeting with the focus group, I defined Self-Efficacy, embedded field experience, and integrated field experience to the participants, before asking the questions from the survey. The definitions provided for these words were:

- Self-Efficacy: A person's belief about their own ability to do something. *Could be compared to a person's confidence in their own abilities.*
- Embedded Field Experience: A field experience that is included as a part of a course, such as the experience at Lovely Meadows School.
- Integrated Field Experience: A field experience that is required as part of a course, such as in EDF 4467 which required 15 hours. Preservice teachers either contacted the school or signed up on a list to be contacted by a school to complete the 15 hours.

During the meeting with the focus group, I primarily observed the group and facilitated discussions using the questions listed below.

Questions for the focus groups and online survey included:

- Can you think of field experience that have contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher?
- How helpful are field experiences?

- What field experiences have helped build your self-efficacy as an educator?
- Would you prefer embedded field experiences on a school site or integrated field experiences?
- What are advantages or disadvantages you have noticed about embedded field experience/integrated field experiences, such as the one you had at Lovely Meadows School?
- Have little buddy students changed your perspective on anything?
- Would you sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses if they were offered? What would encourage/discourage you from doing so?
- Would you recommend an embedded field experience course to others? Why?
- What experiences were not helpful for you in your teacher preparation program?
- Would you take an embedded field experience at a school site all over again?

Since I was working with human subjects who were preservice teachers in this study, I had to complete the IRB certification. Upon approval from my thesis committee, I submitted my information and my proposal to IRIS for approval of my study prior to meeting with the focus groups.

The potential participants were contacted from the LAE 4314 course that took place in Spring 2015. This class had 27 students, including me, that began internship II in Spring 2016. The make-up of the class was composed of 2 males and 25 female preservice teachers. The professor emailed the students to see if they were willing to participate and meet on the tentative dates below:

March 21st, 2016

March 28th, 2016

The location where the group met was at the home of my thesis chair.

Considering that potential participants had different schedules with internship, work, and/or other activities, I thought it would be best to offer two options to participate: either in person or online. This would help increase the number of participants, since finding a time and day that worked for everyone to meet would be a challenge. In the event that this selected group of preservice teachers wanted to participate, but were unable to meet, they had the opportunity to answer all the questions I asked in the focus group online via a link to two surveys that were sent in a separate email (screenshots of the survey questions could be found in Appendix B and C).

Each option for the participants had its own set of pros and cons to consider before deciding to use it in this study. Ideally, I wanted to meet with preservice teachers in person by having focus groups, but I knew I could have more participants if there was a more convenient option.

- Pros for the focus group:
    - Provides ample opportunities for discussions between participants
        - Participants could use each other's ideas to contribute to the discussion
        - Other topics related to the study could be discusses
    - Researcher could probe for more detailed responses
- Cons for the focus group:
    - Participants may not feel completely comfortable sharing their experiences with others

    - Participants' responses could influence other answers
    - Last minute cancellations
    - Transportation for participants
- Pros for the online survey
    - Convenient for participants to complete at any time and from any location
    - Participants feel more conformable with the sense of anonymity since they were not required to include their name
        - Participants could be more willing to share information
- Cons for the online survey
    - Researcher will be unable to probe for additional information
    - Researcher will be unable to clarify any misunderstandings

*Dates chosen for the focus groups were planned on days that preservice teachers would have been available to meet and not in internship.

The following sections will discuss the main limitations encountered in this study, as well as the results, the conclusion, and the recommendations for future studies.

LIMITATIONS

There were three main limitations for this study. The first limitation was the restricted amount of research or background information on this specific topic. Similar studies were found about field experience as a whole or about internship, which was also found under student teaching. A few studies were found relating to internship and preservice teachers' self-efficacy, but it was different from this study being conducted.

The second limitation for this study was the finite number of participants that could join this study. This study looked at working with a very specific group of preservice teachers, preservice teachers that had taken LAE 4314 with an embedded field experience at Lovely Meadows. If the study was not as limited, an email could have been sent to the entire student body or even to all of the students in the college of education. Part of the reasoning for this is due to the limited amount of methods courses offered with an embedded field experience. Although there is at least one other course of this kind for preservice teachers pursuing a degree in elementary education, the researcher could not access students from the other course.

Furthermore, of the limited amount of preservice teachers who were eligible to join the study, the majority were unable to attend the focus group for personal reasons. Some of the participants did not have transportation to meet with the focus group, so I offered transportation to participants who lived near the main university campus. Other participants had work, other engagements, or returned home for the break during which the focus group was meant to meet.

RESULTS

All of the participants in this study were preservice teachers who have previously taken LAE 4314, which is a course with an embedded, school-based field experience. Two options were offered to preservice teachers who wanted to participate: they could have either completed two online surveys or met once with a focus group for about 50 minutes. There were eleven participants that completed the online surveys and three participants that were able to meet as part of a focus group. Both groups of preservice teachers answered the same ten questions about themselves and about their field experiences. All of the participants, regardless of whether they completed the online surveys or if they were a part of the focus group, had a similar response about embedded field experiences. Overall, they agreed that teacher preparation programs should have more embedded field experiences, especially in other subjects such as science and social studies. Participants also agreed that the embedded field experience they had at Lovely Meadows School was more beneficial than most of the integrated field experiences they have had in other courses.

Participants

The participants invited to take part in this study have all previously taken LAE 4314 at Lovely Meadows School, which is a course with an embedded school-based field experience. Preservice teachers that volunteered their time and information had two options to participate, they could meet one time as part of a focus group or they could complete two online surveys. Information collected from participants was gathered using the same questions, yet the answers from the focus group provided more detailed and even new information due to the discussions

that occurred within the group. Participants in each group will be known as Preservice Teachers or PST under the respective section in which a participant answered the questions. To distinguish the different participants, each participant was assigned a number. Preservice teachers who completed the online surveys range from one to eleven, and those who participated in the focus group range from one to three.

Information from Online Surveys

After sending out the links three separate times, the online surveys were completed by eleven preservice teachers. One survey asked background information about the preservice teacher (Appendix C: Preservice Teacher Survey Part II) and the other survey asked questions relating to their experiences at Lovely Meadows as well as other field experiences (Appendix B: Preservice Teacher Survey Part I).

From Preservice Teacher Survey Part II, results showed that all the participants were females with varying ages and backgrounds. For background, seven participants identified as White, two Black, one Hispanic, and one Other. Out of the eleven, four are between the ages of 18 and 21, six are between 22 and 25, and one participant was between 26 and 30. One of eleven selected that she had “Some” experience working with children and ten selected that they had “A lot” of experience working with children. To support these results, in the sections below, underneath each survey question, quotes from the participants were included.

Table 1: Survey- Preservice Teachers' Background Information

Participant	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Experience with Children	Helpfulness of Lovely Meadows*
PST 1	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	4
PST 2	18-21	White	Female	A Lot	3
PST 3	18-21	Other	Female	Some	5
PST 4	18-21	White	Female	A Lot	3
PST 5	26-30	Black	Female	A Lot	5
PST 6	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	5
PST 7	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	5
PST 8	22-25	Black	Female	A Lot	4
PST 9	18-21	Hispanic	Female	A Lot	5
PST 10	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	2
PST 11	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	5

*Scale of 1-5 (1-Not helpful at all; 5-I use what I learned regularly)

For Preservice Teacher Survey Part, I, all ten questions were open response so that participants could openly share about their experiences without limitations. Although some answers were different, the majority of the participants had very similar answers. Below, each of questions will be addressed individually and participants' answers will be summarized.

Can you think of field experiences that have contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher?

"*Junior Achievement, and tutoring after school at Lovely Meadows in addition to both internship experiences*." –PST 5

"*Lovely Meadows was far the most beneficial field experiences that I had at UCF*." –PST 6

According to the participants, field experiences that have contributed to their effectiveness as a teacher include Knights Write at Lovely Meadows (mentioned by six), Junior Achievement (mentioned by five), Internships (mentioned by five), and volunteering with ESOL students (mentioned by two). All of the experiences mentioned required preservice teachers to work directly with students on a lesson or even prepare multiple lessons. For this question, PST1 answered that Internship I contributed to her effectiveness as a teacher and PST3 answered that Lovely Meadows was by far the most beneficial field experience she had at the University of Central Florida. These responses show that preservice teachers do find value in sustained field experiences. It also shows that they find some experiences more beneficial than others.

How helpful are field experiences?

"*Internship 1 has provided me with extreme hands on experience. Where I am able to apply what I have learned here at the College of Education. I was able to learn from my supervising teachers who would encourage me, compliment me, and give me feedback and constructive criticism.*" –PST 4

"*Extremely. It gives you a taste of what you will actually be doing on your own.*" –PST 7

Adding to the previous question, "Can you think of field experiences that have contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher?" this question helps elaborate on how those experiences helped. Of the eleven preservice teachers who completed the survey, they all expressed that field experiences have been "very" or "extremely" helpful. Four of the preservice teachers shared that they felt internship has been the most helpful experience due to the hands-on

nature of the experience. PST6 felt that field experiences are extremely helpful because "it gives you a taste of what you will actually be doing on your own." Similar to the thoughts shared by PST6, many other participants felt field experiences are indispensable because it provides an opportunity to see what it is like to be a teacher, which is an experience that cannot be gained in a course that is only lecture. Preservice Teacher 1 stated that field experiences are very helpful, but she added: "when done correctly." PST1 brought up a very important point that will be addressed later on in this study.

What field experiences have helped build your self-efficacy as an educator?

"*Lovely Meadows, internship, Reading camp, and JA*" –PST 1

"*Being a part of the Lovely Meadows class and having little buddies, gave me the confidence to know that I am capable of making a lesson plan on my own and teach the student the way I see fit.*" –PST 11

The College of Education and Human Performance at the University of Central Florida (UCF) has at least nine courses that require preservice teachers to complete some form of field experience, and one course that does not require a field experience, but has an option to take the class with an embedded experience. Of the courses mentioned above, Internship I and II are included as part of the courses with field experiences. Of all the experiences, three particular experiences were mentioned in almost all of the responses: Knights Write at Lovely Meadows, Junior Achievement, and Internship. Another experience mentioned by PST 3 and PST 11 was Reading Camp; this was an option for the third reading class. Preservice teachers could work with a child from the school where they were interning or they could join Reading Camp which

would serve the same purpose and was hosted at UCF. The reasons given for how these experiences have help build self-efficacy for PSTs as educators were also very similar. Overall, it was helpful to work in the same classroom or with the same child over an extended period of time. The consistency allowed PST to form a better idea of what to expect as in-service teachers. Additionally, the work that was required of them in these experiences, was real work that PSTs would be completing in their careers. PST7 mentioned how some field experiences had required her to constantly prepare intervention material for specific students, and how these experiences have helped her immensely in the classroom. PST1 added that experiences such as the one at Lovely Meadows, gave her the confidence to prepare her own lesson plans and teach the way she would find most fitting for a student. Of the field experiences required at UCF, the ones mentioned required preservice teachers to not only observe, but to also be involved with the students by having PSTs prepare lessons and teach. Through this practice, PST are gaining experiences that are preparing them to work with students with different academic and behavior needs. Results from these experiences allow PSTs to feel better prepared for the next time he/she has to teach, since they will have added experiences on what to do or not do, to their teaching repertoire.

Would you prefer embedded field experiences on a school site or integrated field experiences?

"*Both are very important. More experiences the better.*" –PST 1

"*I prefer field experiences like Lovely Meadows.*" –PST 11

An embedded field experience is what everyone who took the survey experienced when they took the LAE 4314 course at Lovely Meadows. It is a methods course combined with a field

experience on a school site. In the case of Lovely Meadows, at every class meeting, preservice teachers would have lecture in the first part of class, then meet with a student buddy for 30 minutes, then return to class to reflect on the experience and continue the lecture with the professor. Integrated field experiences on the other hand, are part of a course that is either taken online or at the university campus, and the PST has to drive out to a school at another time to complete the required hours (typically 15 hours) of field experience. Sometimes in these experiences, PSTs are an aid to the teacher and it is not always guaranteed that the PST will work with students or that he or she will prepare and teach lessons. If they do teach, frequency of this experience will vary for each preservice teacher. The variety of experiences could determine how the PSTs taking this survey would answer this question.

Four of the preservice teachers answered that they would prefer an embedded field experience. Of the remaining participants, five said that they like both because both allow the opportunity to learn and work with students. The remaining two PSTs that answered they preferred an integrated field experience. One of the two said she liked integrated field experiences better because those experiences are less work for her compared to an embedded field experience. Overall, the majority of preservice teachers who completed this survey preferred to have both experiences or an embedded field experience because of the knowledge and experience gained from direct interactions with students in the classroom.

What are advantages or disadvantages you have noticed about embedded field experience/integrated field experiences, such as the one you had at Lovely Meadows School?

"*It was so cool to have the opportunity to have the course right there at the school. I think it was an awesome program for everyone involved. I think that all schools would benefit from having a program like this. I know at my school, we have a time in the mornings (30 min), that we meet with our walk-to-intervention groups. I think UCF students could be utilized during this time for more "hands-on-deck". The smaller these intervention groups, the better. We are limited with the number of teachers that we have here but if we had additional UCF students, we could use them to create more one-on-one time with the students.*" –PST 5

"*An advantage is how convenient it was and how much the atmosphere of being in an actual classroom really promoted learning. Being in an authentic setting allowed for easy transition from planning to teaching. On the other hand, little buddies was after school, so sometimes it was a little difficult to make the lessons interesting enough so that the student was actually interested*." –PST 11

Of eleven participants, only four of them provided answers with pros and cons to field experiences. The other seven participants only answered with advantages or with disadvantages. Make a chart or list all responses for each one of these survey questions. For advantages, the main idea was centered on what PSTs could learn from field experiences. Specifically, with embedded field experiences, participants shared how helpful it is to be able to put what they learn in class into practice with real students. As PST11 mentioned, these experiences "help you determine what works for you and what doesn't," which is something important that many in-service teachers begin learning in their first years of teaching on their own. PST9 added that field experiences allow PSTs to experience new things that they had not known or understood in

regards to teaching. Disadvantages mentioned by participants include the lack of feedback and guidance during field experience. PST10 added as a downside that "you don't really know what to do," and PST8 shared that many of the course requiring field experience hours sent PSTs to school without telling them what type of work to do so she often ended up sitting in a corner observing the classroom teacher. Other disadvantages to field included the limitations of field experiences such as the short time allotted for working with a student buddy or if the student is absent, or exits the program/withdraws from class. If a student is continuously absent or withdraws, the preservice teacher is not able to fully experience preparing and teaching continuous lessons, and see growth in the student, if any. Another disadvantage mentioned by PST4 is that her buddy did not enjoy working with her, but she also noted that this experience is similar to what she may encounter in her classroom, and it is a learning experience nonetheless.

Have little buddy students changed your perspective on anything?

"*It helped me better understand the mentality of a second grader. The middle grades were an area I have lacked experience so it was nice being able to get my feel wet with that*." –PST 5

"*Having a little buddy has changed my perspective on what field experiences should look like. It shouldn't be me in a classroom watching a teacher or teaching her lesson plans. It should be me planning and teaching purposeful lessons while knowing I have the support behind me that I am capable of knowing what that student needs*." –PST 11

Of the 11 preservice teachers who completed Preservice Teacher Survey Part I , nine felt that their Lovely Meadows buddy changed their perspective. Unlike other responses where the majority of the answers were fairly similar, this question received mostly different responses

regarding what PSTs felt changed thanks to their buddy. Main changes mentioned from working with a little buddy at Lovely Meadows include:

- Thinking outside the box for writing prompts (PST10)
- The difficulty of teaching (PST9)
- Realizing the differences in student thinking based on grade or individual student needs (PST2 and PST6-8)
- How field experiences should look (PST1).

Although PST5 said that her little buddy did not changer her perspective, she did include that the experience reinforced her ideas and desire to teach. Preservice teacher 3, on the other hand, shared that she feels that she gets a new perspective or learns something new from every student that she works with during a field experience.

Would you sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses if they were offered? What would encourage/discourage you from doing so?

"*Yes I would sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses because I gained so much experience that I would have not gain in a University class setting*." – PST 4

"*I would depending on the professor, the time, and the location*." –PST 10

All of the preservice teachers that completed this survey said that they would have signed up for more methods courses with an embedded field experience if they were offered. Despite the support for embedded field experiences, four of the participants included reasons to be discouraged from signing up for these courses. Reasons to not register in these courses

included the distance, transportation, location of the school, the time at which the class would happen, or the professor teaching the class. Encouraging reasons to register for these courses were also added, such as the value of what preservice teachers gain from these types of courses, the hands-on experience, and the benefit compared to a course that is lecture and theory only.

Would you recommend an embedded field experience course to others? Why?

"*Absolutely. It allows you a chance to work directly with students and to test some of the content you're learning in the classrooms. It enhances the learning*." –PST 5

"*Yes, I was able to have a real experience with kids. I was able to create the lesson plan, teach it the way I wanted to, and I had support the entire time*!" –PST 11

This question received a positive response as well, with ten participants saying that they would absolutely recommend an embedded field experience course to others. One preservice teacher said that she would only provide the pros and cons of registering for a course like Lovely Meadows. Of the PSTs that said they would recommend a course like this, answers included that it helped shape PSTs through hands-on experiences which also enhanced the learning, and it allowed PSTs to gain experience with school-aged students and assessments while receiving feedback on their work.

What experiences were not helpful for you in your teacher preparation program?

"*In the overall program I feel that the classroom management course was taken too early in the program. It provided the JA training however, we didn't have enough experience to really understand what classroom management could or should look like*." –PST 5

"*The math, science, and ss (social studies) class feels useless. We just follow the textbook and ss isn't taught*." –PST 7

Eight of preservice teachers either included a course or an example of a field experience which they felt was not helpful in their teacher preparation program. Four PSTs included courses in which they prepared a lesson and were not able to teach it or courses in which they followed a textbook and did not feel like they learned something that is applicable in the classroom. Three included field experiences where they only sat in a classroom and observed the teacher instead of interacting with and teaching students. PST1 shared an experience where she had to teach a specific lesson in a certain way rather than having the opportunity to practice preparing her own lessons for the students in that class. This shows that although there is support for increased field experiences, PSTs know that there is more that goes into it in order for preservice teachers to make the most of the learning experience.

Would you take an embedded field experience at a school site all over again?

"*If I could have taken more of my courses this way, I would have.*" –PST 5

"*It was rigorous! I loved it!*" –PST 6

Similar to recommending a methods course with an embedded field experience to others, ten participants reacted positively to personally taking courses with embedded field experiences. PST7 answered that she would have taken more courses this way if they had been offered.

Information from Focus Group

All of the information collected from the preservice teachers completing the surveys, was also collected from the focus group. Considering that the same questions were used for

participants doing the survey and for the participants in the focus group, the questions will be the same noted in Appendices B and C. The focus group had three participants of similar ages and different backgrounds. Of the three, two were between 22 to 25 years of age and one was between 18 to 21 years of age. Similar to the survey participants, the focus group participants were all female. Of the three, one felt she had a great deal of experience with children and two of them felt they had some experience with children. Altogether, the three participants felt that their Lovely Meadows experience was very helpful and use that knowledge gained often.

Table 2: Focus Group- Preservice Teachers' Background Information

Participant	**Age**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Gender**	**Experience with Children**	**Helpfulness of Lovely Meadows***
PST 1	22-25	White	Female	A Lot	4
PST 2	18-21	Other	Female	Some	5
PST 3	22-25	Black	Female	Some	4

*Scale of 1-5 (1-Not helpful at all; 5-I use what I learned regularly)

Can you think of field experiences that have contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher?

Of the three participants, two of them identified Internship I and II as experiences that have contributed to their effectiveness as teachers, and all three agreed the Lovely Meadows embedded field experience course was helpful, with some hesitation from PST2. The participant (PST2) that did not necessarily agree with PST1 and PST3 about internships being the most helpful experience overall, said that although these experiences are good, they could be improved so that it better prepares preservice teachers. PST2 said that to her, the idea of an embedded field experience, like the one at Lovely Meadows, has a lot of potential, but that it

could improve with a few modifications. Some of the suggestions she had for field experiences were:

- Smaller group of preservice teachers per professor
- Professor should observe a whole lesson and provide feedback right after the lesson
- Professor should co-teach with PST to model teaching
- After PSTs teach a lesson, the whole class should discuss, comment, and ask questions about their session
- Feedback by the professor should be provided on lesson before PST teaches it
- Reflection of lessons should not be an individual activity, but with a professor or group

PST2 felt that field experiences would be enhanced and that she would have learned more about being an effective teacher if some or all of these ideas were implemented into the embedded field experience.

On the other hand, PST 1 and PST3 felt without a doubt that they grew with Lovely Meadows and internship. PST1 said that Internship II in particular contributed to her effectiveness as a teacher because, unlike integrated field experiences, Internship II allowed her to interact with the same students and the same teacher, five days a week for a whole semester. In addition to growing with the same group of students, PST1 also added that after she teaches, her supervising teacher provides immediate feedback that helps her grow or encourages her to continue doing what is right.

PST3 shared similar thoughts about receiving feedback in internship, and how that has contributed to her effectiveness as a teacher. She included that at Lovely Meadows contributed

since it was one of the few experiences of preparing lessons that she would be able to apply by working one on one, and consistently with a student.

How helpful are field experiences?

Both PST1 and PST3 agreed that field experiences are extremely helpful, admitting that some experiences are more beneficial than others. Examples included were field experiences where the PST only sat in a corner observing the classroom teacher versus the experience at Lovely Meadows where a preservice teacher prepared lessons and worked with the same student week after week for a semester. PST2 said that the way field experiences are done at this university, they are helpful, but not as helpful as they could be, considering the points that she mentioned in the first question.

What field experiences have helped build your self-efficacy as an educator?

Taking into consideration that the preservice teachers who completed the online survey and the preservice teachers that participated in the focus group are all elementary education majors at the University of Central Florida, the participants in the focus group had similar responses with the survey participants. Field experiences that were helpful for the PSTs in the focus group were Lovely Meadows, Internship, Junior Achievement, and Reading Clinic. All of these experiences allowed the preservice teacher to plan lessons and teach the lessons to a student or a class. Preservice teachers were able to see themselves and know themselves as teachers, even if it was only once a week. From these experiences, all three preservice teachers admitted that it helped them grow more confident in their abilities and even build the courage to seek advice from professors or in-service teachers.

Would you prefer embedded field experiences on a school site or integrated field experiences?

Of the two options provided, all of the participants said they would prefer an embedded field experience on-site and linked to particular coursework. The three preservice teachers agreed that the more experience they are able to gain, the better it is for them as they move closer to becoming in-service teachers. PST1 shared that the beginning of the program, some courses may have integrated field experiences and then methods courses covering subject like reading, math, science, and social studies should all have embedded field experiences. PST2 and PST3 agreed with PST1 on adding more courses with embedded field experiences. PST3 said she enjoyed her field experience at Lovely Meadows because the professors set a great environment that was motivating for the preservice teacher. This prepared her for her session with her little buddy, even if she had difficulty with her buddy at times.

What are advantages or disadvantages you have noticed about embedded field experience/integrated field experiences, such as the one you had at Lovely Meadows School?

This question was asked in two parts, the participants were first asked about the advantages, and then about the disadvantages of field experiences. PST1 said advantages include building knowledge about content areas through lecture and then applying it right away (referring to an embedded field experience). PST2 said that "things in theory sounds great, but putting in the work in practice is different." This will help preservice teachers confirm their desire to continue in the field or realize it might not be the correct path for them. PST3 said that another advantage to field experiences is that they allow preservice teachers to work with different students on different content. She added that this is helpful because it builds the

confidence of preservice teachers. As PSTs begin to learn firsthand about differences among students, how they learn and behave, the preservice teacher learned to modify and differentiate instruction.

A disadvantage added by PST1 was that there is limited input about where preservice teachers are placed. Some preservice teachers have had field experiences in classrooms with teachers they felt were not effective practitioners, or they had classroom teachers that did not connect with them, making communication difficult. PST2 shared that she had experiences where she was only asked to observe for 15 hours. This involved her sitting in the back of the class with no interaction with students and no opportunity to teacher or help the teacher with students. PST3 pointed out that the feedback is not consistent, nor or it is not provided at the appropriate time, if any was provided.

Have little buddy students changed your perspective on anything?

The group agreed unanimously that working with little buddies changed their perspective on at least one thing. PST1 learned about different personalities of students and that she had to better plan with time that she was given. Since time felt limited, she would accidentally underprepare, unsure of how much to plan with her buddy. Eventually, she learned to plan more accurately her sessions with her little buddy. She shared that thanks to her buddy, she feels more comfortable working students who may be shay and not communicate much. PST2 said that she realized that the writing and editing process take longer than expected. In this case, she was referring to the final project that she worked on with her buddy. PST3 that she realized that her little buddy's input was limited due to the short time she had to work with him. When she

realized and reflected on this as an issue, she made sure to increase the amount of input coming from her buddy.

Would you sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses if they were offered? What would encourage/discourage you from doing so?

All of the participants in the focus group answered they would definitely sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses if they were offered. PST1 shared that this would especially be true for the science and social studies classes, since there is only one course offered for these subjects, unlike the reading and math courses. PST2 said that although the experiences are not exactly what she would like, she would definitely sign up for more courses because she could still grain experience from it. The participants agreed that the atmosphere, location of the school, transportation, and time of the class (due to work or other activities) could be factors to discourage them from signing up for the course.

Would you recommend an embedded field experience course to others? Why?

The three participants said that they would recommend an embedded field experience course to others. PST1 said that these experiences serve as a "great reminder of why you're doing this" and it shows "what you could accomplish as a teacher." PST3 added that these moments prepare preservice teachers for internship and beyond.

What experiences were not helpful for you in your teacher preparation program?

Aside from particular courses or certain program requirements, the participants felt that field experiences where they were only able to observe were not very helpful. Experiences with only hours of observation did not feel like purposeful experiences, especially if the classroom

teacher was not demonstrating best practices. One of the participants tried to make this positive by contributing the idea they could learn what not to do in the classroom.

Would you take an embedded field experience at a school site all over again?

All of the participants would take courses at a school site again because, as PST1 stated, preservice teachers are able to learn the theory and then put it into practice. This helps them realize how students learn, as well as what works for them as educators. All the knowledge gained through embedded experiences boost the self-efficacy of preservice teachers as they learn that they are able to teach a variety of students in different situations. Preservice teachers who felt that they did not teach effectively also learned from these experiences. Participants mentioned that they now know how to work through different circumstances and feel better prepared to work through them in the future as a result of what they experienced at Lovely Meadows School.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusion

After reviewing all the responses from the surveys and from the focus group, I was pleased to see that the preservice teachers did not only *think* of field experiences as something that is helpful, but that they have *seen, lived,* and *experienced* how field experiences, in particular embedded field experiences attached to methods courses, help them prepare and grow as future teachers. Some of the preservice teachers share their fears that they would not do well, but then had a positive experience with their little buddy at Lovely Meadows. Other preservice teachers had the same fear and they did have a difficult time reaching their buddy, but that did not discourage them from trying or from wanting to be a teacher. Whether a student is shy or does not want to participate, these are experiences that preservice teachers are learning to work with early on and will feel more confident of handling the situation if it ever repeats itself.

Several preservice teachers agreed that these experiences helped build their self-efficacy as teachers because they gained experience and knowledge that they did not have previously. Participants also shared that they now feel capable of applying what they know in the future with their own students. One of the preservice teachers shared that these experiences help reassure a preservice teacher whether or not this is the right field for him or her. Based on the research included in the background such as Bandura's self-efficacy theory and how certain school subjects affect preservice teachers, the more preservice teachers feel capable of teaching and becoming an in-service teacher, it appears from their answers, the more likely they are to want to teach. The researcher gathered this information from the participants' responses such as how

these experiences have been helpful and if they would do this again or recommend and embedded field experiences. In one way or another, all the participants were able to value the importance of field experiences attached to methods courses. As discussed though, there is a correct and an incorrect way to have a field experience in order to successfully guide preservice teacher, and teachers to build their self-efficacy and grow as future educators. The idea of preparing preservice teachers through field experiences to build a strong sense of self-efficacy, is to hopefully help them prepare to work in different situations, with a variety of students, as well as help preservice teachers practice what is being learned in class. Learning about assessments or a subject and then applying that with a student, has shown to help preservice teachers feel more comfortable about teaching the subject or using an assessment tool. From the focus group, all participants agreed that there should be an embedded field experience attached to the math, science, and social studies courses, since that could have better prepared them for their senior internship. Preparing preservice teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy will help produce effective teachers, who will hopefully remain in the field after gaining a varied collection of experiences throughout their teacher preparation program.

Future Research

To expand on the information gathered and see the deeper impact of field experiences, one possibility is to reach out to the preservice teachers (who participated) upon the completion of their degree program and interview them or have them complete the surveys once more. This

should be done a third time toward the end of their first year of teaching. To see how responses have changed and how the preservice teachers feel these events have affected their teaching.

Another option for further research is to contact a larger group of preservice teachers who have completed courses with embedded field experiences. They should complete a survey at the beginning and one at the end to see the growth and how much the field experience had helped. Similarly, researchers should follow up with participants upon graduating and after their first year of teaching. As much information that could be gathered, the more support there is to estimate the positive effects of embedded field experiences on the self-efficacy of preservice teachers.

People pursuing a degree in education are normally required to complete a specified number of field hours in a classroom as part of a course. Based on the focus group and survey answers for this study, it was clear to see why preservice teachers were often left unsatisfied with those experiences. The top reasons preservice teachers mentioned for feeling unsatisfied with this type of field experience were that it lacked direction, feedback, and real teaching practice with students. Each of these reasons are deemed as important by several researchers. Studies have shown that all three, especially feedback and authentic practice are critical for building a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Innately knowing the importance of firsthand experiences, many preservice teachers were encouraged to register for LAE 4314 with an embedded field experience based at Lovely Meadows School. This course did not require a minimum of fifteen hours, instead it required preservice teachers to prepare a 30-minute session for their little buddy for every class meeting.

After assessing little buddies with assessment tools discussed in class, PSTs had to plan lessons with activities to help their little buddy in an area of weakness. At the end of each session, PSTs had to reflect on the lesson they prepared and plan for the following week. The professors provided feedback and suggestions on the reflections and lessons, and were available if PSTs had questions about planning or teaching. At the end of the semester, preservice teachers were able to see how much they helped their buddy grow. Some PSTs felt that they had no impact on their little buddy, but the PST her/himself did grow and acquired new knowledge about testing instruments, teaching strategies, time management, planning, and about him/herself as a teacher.

This experience at Lovely Meadows is what led to this study about embedded field experiences and the potential effects it could have on a preservice teacher's self-efficacy. After reading multiple studies on field experiences and self-efficacy, and completing my study with preservice teachers who also completed LAE 4314 at Lovely Meadows with an embedded field experience, the results proved that these types of experiences do strengthen preservice teachers' self-efficacy. From both groups of participants (survey participants and focus group participants), preservice teachers agreed that they would take more courses with embedded field experiences, even if they felt that they did not have a great impact on their little buddy. Although all of the experiences and outcomes with buddies were different, all of the participants could agree that they gained something from this experience that made them feel better prepared and more confident to teach either in a similar situation or to teach the subject (writing) that they worked on with their little buddy.

Similar to the participants in this study, I also felt that what I gained from my time at Lovely Meadows was more rewarding than field experiences I had in other courses. After working with my little buddy for a semester, I felt that I had not made an immense impact on his writing. On the other hand, I knew I had gained a new wealth of information and experiences that helped boost my confidence in teaching writing and working with students who are not motivated to read or write. After my time at Lovely Meadows, I would remember some of my experiences with my buddy to help me with other field experiences where I was working with writing. If I had to opportunity to take more methods courses with an embedded field experience, I would do it without a doubt. I would also encourage preservice teachers entering the program to take any courses with an embedded field experience, because they will all help build experience with teaching and strengthen their self-efficacy as teachers.

With this study, I learned about different types of field experiences and how each one has a different effect on preservice teachers. In particular, I learned about the effects of an embedded field experience on the self-efficacy of a preservice teacher. Although some research states that negative experiences could discourage preservice teachers, it appears that all the participants in this study gained something positive from their experience, even if they did not make progress with their little buddy. Since there were more positive experiences to gain from embedded field experiences, participants suggested having more courses with an embedded field experience. In the focus group, the participants agreed that there should be more embedded field experiences and that these experiences are stepping stones preparing preservice teachers for internship and for the classroom after graduation.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Sherron E. Roberts** and Co-PI: **Beverly Zambrano**

Date: **March 07, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 03/07/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Exploring the possible influences of an embedded, school-based field experience on preservice teachers' self-efficacy.
Investigator:	Sherron E Roberts
IRB Number:	SBE-16-12046
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 03/07/2016 12:41:41 PM EST

IRB Manager

APPENDIX B: PRESERVICE TEACHER SURVEY PART I

Preservice Teacher Survey Part I

1. Can you think of field experiences that have contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher?

2. How helpful are field experiences?

3. What field experiences have helped build your self-efficacy as an educator?

4. Would you prefer embedded field experiences on a school site or integrated field experiences?

5. What are advantages or disadvantages you have noticed about embedded field experience/integrated field experiences, such as the one you had at Arbor Ridge Elementary School?

6. Have little buddy students changed your perspective on anything?

7. Would you sign up for more embedded field experience courses attached to methods courses if they were offered? What would encourage/discourage you from doing so?

8. Would you recommend an embedded field experience course to others? Why?

9. What experiences were not helpful for you in your teacher preparation program?

10. Would you take an embedded field experience at a school site all over again?

Done

APPENDIX C: PRESERVICE TEACHER SURVEY PART II

Preservice Teacher Survey Part II

The following questions are about your background

1. Age

- ◯ 18-21
- ◯ 22-25
- ◯ 26-30
- ◯ 30+

2. Background

- ◯ White
- ◯ Black
- ◯ Hispanic
- ◯ Asian
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer Not to Answer

3. Gener

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Prefer Not to Answer

4. Experience with Children

- ◯ None
- ◯ Little
- ◯ Some
- ◯ A lot

5. Rank the helpfulness of your experience at Lovely Meadows

- ◯ 1 (Not helpful at all)
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4
- ◯ 5 (I use what I learned regularly)

6. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any moment after notifying the principal investigator. All information will be kept anonymous and used for research purposes only.

- ☐ I understand that by selecting this option I am consenting to participating in this study and any/all my information may be used for research purposes.
- ☐ Please type your name below to give the principal investigator your consent to use your information in the study.
  **No real names will be included in the study.*

Done