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From University to Classroom: Improving the Student Teaching Experience

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From University to Classroom: Improving the Student Teaching Experience

by

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Abstract

Teachers are dropping out of the profession at an alarming rate. Part of this nationwide issue starts with the semester of student teaching. This is a 15-week period of time where full-time students take on the task of full-time teaching without any of the financial benefits. On top of that, the classes they have taken through their universities do not always reflect the classroom realities of working as a teacher. The purpose of this study is to discover what factors help create a positive student teaching experience for the student teacher, the student teaching advisor, and the host teacher. Participants in this study include current teachers, incoming student teachers, student teaching advisors, and current or former host teachers as well as 100 anonymous online survey respondents. The findings of this study have several implications for improving the student teaching experience, and because there have not been many academic studies on creating a successful student teaching experience, this research has the potential to reform how host teachers and student teachers enter the student teaching semester. Student teachers around the world are experiencing similar positives and negatives when it comes to student teaching. To improve student teaching, this study concluded: 1.) Clear expectations should be set by the student teaching advisor, student teaching, and host teacher, 2.) The host teacher needs to take on an active role as not just a host, but also a mentor for the student teacher, and 3.) All three parties need to take individual steps to prepare for the student teaching semester. Our future teachers will enter live classrooms with more confidence in their teaching abilities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Teachers are dropping out of the profession at an alarming rate, leaving behind a nationwide teacher shortage, "Generally, retaining teachers in the profession is of great concern…it is undisputed that a great proportion of teachers leave the profession prematurely and voluntarily, a phenomenon termed the 'revolving door,'" (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016, p. 243). Part of this nationwide issue starts with the semester of student teaching, "Much learning occurs as student teachers experience a new environment—new demands on their time, new applications of their content, and new levels of stress" (Joseph, 2004, p.40). The new levels of stress include all of the responsibilities of teaching in a live classroom, a full-time course load at their university, and no financial compensation. An added stress that the student teachers face is the hope that they perform well enough during the semester to warrant a letter of recommendation from one or both of their host teachers. But what happens if the student teacher and host teacher have different teaching styles, or if they just do not get along?

Statement of Purpose

Negative student teaching experiences have occurred for many years according to both the academic literature and individual testimony. Many articles have been written about how there is frequently a discrepancy between expectations formed during university course work and the reality of teaching in a live classroom (Joseph, 2004; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). There have been articles written about the importance of finding a positive and supportive mentor to learn from in all areas of life (Callahan, 2016; Peters, 2010). There have also been academic articles exploring the achievement gap in the United States (Morales, 2016; Tygret, 2017). These studies indicate that there is a disconnect between the student teacher, host teacher, and

student teaching advisor. It seems as though student teaching is just another assignment needed in order to receive the credentials to become a teacher instead of being utilized as a major learning experience for student teachers. In contrast, there is an abundance of literature discussing how to become a mentor in other areas or professions (Peters, 2010). In one case, the importance of a proper mentor was explained using young incoming tap dancers and the elder professionals who teach them (Peters, 2010). I learned very quickly that there was not a lot of academic literature on the subject of what makes student teaching successful or unsuccessful, but there was a plethora of personal literature from blogs of current student teachers or former teachers discussing their negative experiences while student teaching. Moreover, while there were many race-related academic articles exploring why there were fewer teachers of color (Sleeter, 2016; Schneider, 2019; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012; Miller, & Mikulec, 2014), none of these articles mentioned how to support teachers of color during student teaching specifically. My research is particularly relevant for student teachers who differ from the majority female, white teacher population. It is more likely that communication differences would affect the student teaching experience when the background of the student teacher does not match the directing teacher's background (Sleeter, 2016; Roane, 2008). After reading through numerous articles, it became clear that very little research has been done to create a successful student teaching semester. The purpose of my research is to discover what helps create a successful student teaching semester.

Overview of the Research Design

The idea for this study stemmed from my own personal negative experience as a student teacher. At first, I believed my situation to be unique, until I learned that the two other

student teachers at our assigned school were experiencing similar negative feelings. If this is what we were experiencing, I began to wonder how many other student teachers were experiencing the same feelings of low confidence and torment from the semester spent student teaching. This negative feeling was not due to unruly students or the feeling of being overwhelmed with coursework, but instead the cause of this daily stress stemmed from our host teachers. My experience in one classroom with one host teacher differed entirely from my second placement midway through the semester. I am a white male who, at the time, had just turned 32 years old. This may have played into the dynamics in my first placement as my host teacher was a female teacher of color in her final year of teaching before retirement. These differences may have impacted both of our experiences even if it was unintentional. There should not be drastic differences in host teacher expectations from classroom to classroom despite age, race, gender, or experience in the field. In order to discover what goes into a positive student teaching semester, I reached out to an array of participants.

My research will discover what student teachers, host teachers, and student teaching advisors need in order to have a successful student teaching semester. I started my research by asking the research questions: What factors help create a positive student teaching experience? What factors caused a negative student teaching experience? How do university courses help prepare incoming student teachers for the realities of live classroom teaching?

In order to get answers for my questions, I interviewed two former student teachers, two incoming student teachers, one former host teacher, and one student teaching advisor. Each of the interviewees were white women. All interviewees were between the ages of 20-70 years old. There were multiple interviews with each interviewee lasting about one hour long for

each session. Each interview was voice recorded and later transcribed. Because each of my interviewees were white women, there are limitations for this study. The limitations being that the perspective is only through the eyes of white women who might not have experienced the same prejudices and hardships of other genders, races, or age groups. Despite this limitation, my research is still relevant for teachers of color and male teachers because all teachers need to complete a semester of student teaching in order to receive a teaching credential. This study explored multiple ways to improve that experience. To counterbalance the interviewees, I also reached out with an online survey.

Along with my in-person interviews, I reached out to 100 current or former teachers to anonymously survey their experiences as a student teacher. The survey was created through SurveyMonkey. The survey was then posted on social media platforms used by teachers. I asked survey respondents to complete the survey, and then share with all of their coworkers and friends who were current or former teachers. The survey included multiple choice questions regarding individual experiences during student teaching as well as the number of years teaching experience. The opportunity for written responses were given for each question when applicable. The respondents had teaching experience ranging from kindergarten through senior year of high school and had taught between one to fifteen plus years. It was important to get a range of respondents because student teaching was different for past generations of teachers. While student teaching has morphed and changed since then, answers for what created negative memories of student teaching shared similarities. The respondents to the online survey were from all over the United States and the United Kingdom. Upon receiving similar responses dictating what created a positive or negative student teaching experience, I

discovered the flaws in student teaching are universal. It did not seem to matter where the respondent was from or in what district they taught. The bottom line became clear: they all wanted to be treated as a professional in the world of teaching.

Summary of the Research Findings

Twenty-eight percent of former student teachers described their experience as either neutral or negative. To improve student teaching for student teachers, student teaching advisors, and host teachers, this study concluded there needs to be clear expectations between the three aforementioned parties. The host teacher needs to take on the role of an active mentor for the student teacher. The student teacher, student teaching advisor, and the host teacher all need to individually prepare for the student teaching semester in different ways. Through these findings, future teachers will enter live classrooms with more confidence in their teaching abilities.

Significance of the Study

Student teachers, student teaching advisors, and host teachers all want to be treated with respect from their peers and those who are working alongside them. Student teachers want to feel like they are part of the faculty and that their opinions matter. Student teaching advisors want to work with student teachers and host teachers to create the best outcome for both parties. The host teacher wants to be treated with respect as someone who has worked at least three years in a classroom. To a large extent, the relationship between these three is what determines the outcome of the student teaching semester. It is up to all three parties to work together for the benefit of the student teacher, the students in the classroom, and future students.

These findings are different than what has been discovered and written in the past. Past academic articles did not focus on all three parties involved. Instead the focus was on either one person's experience (Tygret, 2017; Schneider, 2019; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Morales, 2016), or the focus was on the experience of the student teacher with only a brief mention of the role of the host teacher, rather than on the relationship between the two (Roane, 2008; Yoon, Larkin, 2017).

The findings from this study suggest that student teachers, host teachers, and student teaching advisors must work together to establish open and honest communication, a mutual understanding of effects of the power dynamic in the classroom, and a plan that properly prepares for collaboration at the specific school. The open and honest communication along with understanding the power dynamic can begin prior to the student teaching semester in the form of an informal meeting between the three parties. This will open up lines of communication, set clear expectations for all three parties involved, and it will start to chip away at the power dynamic that exists between the student teacher and host teacher. In order to feel prepared to teach at a new school, the incoming student teacher should take the time to study up on the campus at which they will be teaching. This research should be done prior to the informal meeting. That way, if the student teacher has any questions about the campus, the student population, or about other faculty, the host teacher can help with that prior to ever stepping on campus or in their shared classroom.

Research Implications

Implementing each of these steps carries a heavy responsibility. While the informal meeting is a time to get to know each other and answer any questions the student teacher has

about the upcoming semester, the responsibility of helping the student teacher feel

comfortable in the classroom by disabling the power dynamic ultimately falls on the host

teacher. University classes can prepare incoming student teachers, and their student teaching

advisors can be there for support, but ultimately, the classroom is shared by the student

teacher, host teacher, and the students of the class. If the power dynamic is still intact, the

open and honest communication will suffer. When open and honest communication does not

occur, the findings of this study indicate that more than a quarter of student teachers will have

a neutral or negative student teaching experience.

Removing barriers in communication and an explicit recognition of the existing power

dynamic in the classroom will increase the potential for a more diverse teacher workforce. As

stated before, there are fewer teachers of color in the United States (Sleeter, 2016). I found

that it is critical to support all incoming teachers by removing the barriers that are particularly

difficult for minority teachers (i.e., teachers who are not white, female, heterosexual, middle

class) such as closed communication, a lopsided power dynamic, or a lack of preparation when

entering a culturally different classroom. Each of these barriers can make a student teacher feel

more closed off and distant from the host teacher and students. Removing these barriers will

increase the likelihood of a more culturally diverse teacher workforce, which will benefit the

students as well as the future teacher.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a lack of elementary teachers in the United States today (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016).

While there are arguably many causes of fewer teachers in the industry, including the famous

line that teachers are grossly underpaid, the problem I will focus on and explore in this review is

the student teaching experience. In order to become a teacher in California, there are a number

of standardized tests, observation hours, university courses, and eventually student teaching

weeks that need to be completed (California Standards for the Teaching Profession, 2009).

Incoming elementary teachers are already well aware of what the final outcome will look like,

as they were all at one-point elementary school students. However, what is unknown to all

incoming student teachers is the amount of labor that goes into becoming a teacher. This labor

culminates in a semester of student teaching where university students are placed with host

teachers. They are instructed to solo teach a classroom and take on all of the responsibilities of

a classroom teacher. They do this all while continuing university coursework (Joseph, 2004;

Frank, 2018). At its completion, a host teacher will either give a letter of recommendation or

they will not. This adds an extra layer of stress on top of what is already a hectic situation.

The following literature review focuses on how to help future student teachers have the

best experience with first-time student teaching in a live classroom, and how to create a

positive bond with a host teacher. The review begins with exploring structural inequality within

the teaching industry and the formal preparation student teachers take leading into student

teaching. Next, I will explore how school and classroom climate can have an effect on student

teaching. Following that, I will discuss how studying and abroad can help with all student

teachers entering the classroom for the first time, and the effects it has on systemic racism in

our elementary schools. Finally, my research will show the importance of student teachers receiving positive, and honest, communication and feedback from their host teacher.

Structural Inequality Within the Teaching Industry

Research has displayed both structural inequality and systematic racism leading to fewer teachers of color (Sleeter, 2016). There are many reasons that have been speculated for this occurrence in the United States. It can be difficult for a student teacher to create a bond with students who they have little in common within the short time provided. Standardized tests have been created by culturally white, former teachers, which has therefore left potential non-white teachers with the difficult task of assimilating to a culture with which they are unfamiliar (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012; Sleeter, 2016).

Morales (2016) argues that an increase in teachers of color will increase the likelihood of students of color succeeding (succeeding in this case refers to graduating, going to college, and becoming a professional). Often times the studies being performed on the achievement gap in lower income areas are by educational analysts, researchers, and political entities. In an article about the achievement gap between students in the United States, Morales suggests that an important voice that is not often heard is that of the student teacher who may be from the same community as the students. That is one of the reasons we need to prepare our student teachers for culturally different live classrooms. "…Statistically speaking students of color from low socioeconomic areas overwhelmingly attend segregated schools and have less qualified and less experienced teachers" (Morales, 2016, p. 102). It seems the teachers who make up the lower socioeconomic schools are rarely there by choice. Often times teachers are placed from Teach for America to low socioeconomic areas, or areas which have experienced

natural disasters. The teachers placed in these areas are typically not from the same background, "There are many factors cited as contributing to the achievement gap, and a major one is the relative lack of teachers of color in public schools nationwide …Cultural discontinuity refers to a sociocultural phenomenon where the cultural background of the students conflicts with the cultural values of their teachers and schools" (Morales, 2016, p. 102). Therefore, when student teachers of color enter the teaching profession, it is particularly important that the appropriate structures and supports are in place to create a successful student teaching experience.

A more diverse faculty will provide coursework that would focus on working with children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Sleeter, 2016). In her article, Sleeter suggests, "It is very difficult to shift the center of gravity of a program in which the center is defined by white interests, and any proposed change must align with white interests to gain support", (Sleeter, 2016, p. 4). While this may be inadvertent by the district or the teachers, these teaching methods do leave out the non-white issues. This could have negative effects on minority student's success, "When teaching race-related content, there is evidence that teacher educators tend to focus on the emotional needs of white students rather than those of students of color," (Sleeter, 2016, p. 5). Again, this could be inadvertent on the part of the district or teachers. People, not just teachers, live off of life experiences. If a white teacher has not experienced life in a culturally diverse community, they will likely teach what is known through personal experiences, leaving out non-white student's life experiences. This is another reason we need a more diverse teaching population to help reach all of the students in classrooms across the United States.

Miller and Mikulec (2014) stated, "In order to achieve culturally responsive teaching, the educator must have an understanding of cultural capital and its impact on the education of under-represented learners…the American educational system is designed to benefit learners with perceived 'white' cultural capital," (Miller & Mikulec, 2014, p. 18). This quote suggests it is important for a teacher (or student teacher) to be open-minded to the fact that there is an imbalance in the classroom experience for students of color. Therefore, there should be a meaningful dialogue between the host teacher and the student teacher that examines existing dispositions and beliefs. The host teacher should provide opportunities to apply skills to practice and prior knowledge for the student teacher in overcoming those beliefs. "In order for pre-service teachers to learn to teach culturally diverse students…they need opportunities to discover their own cultural identities, to experience and learn about other cultural groups, to consider their beliefs about racial and cultural difference, and to examine critically the socio-cultural aspect of learning and teaching," (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012, p.10). Student teachers entering a culturally diverse classroom need to recognize that they are coming from personal experiences that may differ from that of the students in the class. Just recognizing that not everyone is having the same experience in life will help the student teacher create a stronger bond with the students of the classroom and the school community. This can be achieved through positive communication with both students and their respective families.

DeVillar and Jiang used the quote, "Culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success," DeVillar & Jiang, 2012, p. 9). It is a teacher's responsibility to understand and respond effectively to the learning needs of all

students in the classroom. This understanding expands to language use (code switching), cultural background, and culturally influenced behaviors towards education. By doing so, the teacher creates a safe environment where every student is free to be themselves without the pressure of assimilating to the culture held by the teacher, or the culture of the school community. A safe environment in the classroom will lead to a higher success rate for students of color and their white classmates.

By providing white student teachers with the opportunity to observe and work with a more diverse population of students, the dispositions that student teachers might have will already begin to chip away as more is understood about a different culture, "…by observing and reflecting on alternative models of schooling, pre-service teachers might be more likely to develop curriculum around the needs and interests of their future students," (Miller & Mikulec, 2014, p. 19). Observing culturally different students will prepare student teachers for classrooms they might have in the future. By relating curriculum to individual classrooms (and even individual students), the student teacher is already helping the students towards academic success. Teachers who are able to honor their students by creating a classroom based on open dialogue, social and emotional safety, and who implement a values-based behavior management system have a higher probability of student success. This also helps teach the student teacher how to create a classroom climate that will allow students of all races and cultural backgrounds to thrive (Kaka, 2019).

Along with racial biases, there are gender biases and negative stereotypes attached to students and potential teachers who look physically different (Rukavina, Langdon, Greenleaf, &Jenkins, 2019). The article, *Diversity Attitude Associations in Pre-Service Physical Education*

Teachers suggests diversity in the classroom goes beyond ethnic, cultural, and gender differences, "Perception of overweight is often associated with negative judgments or endorsement of negative stereotypes (e.g., lazy or self -indulgent)," (Rukavina, Langdon, Greenleaf, &Jenkins, 2019, p. 1). Student teachers who also observe PE classes are at risk of being exposed to the beliefs, attitudes, and values being communicated unintentionally and/or unconsciously. The findings from the article indicate that student teachers who observe PE classes had greater biases after student teaching than before. This suggests that the communication between host teachers and student teachers is not always helpful, which can end up spreading negativity, and it can lead to a toxic classroom environment.

Formal preparation and standardized tests. Unfortunately, standardized tests have shown to be biased towards white student teachers. "…The California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET) [showed that] in social studies, they found only limited reference to U.S. racial and ethnic minorities, and none to U.S. Latinos…candidates with a degree in ethnic studies found it difficult to pass the CSET," (Sleeter, 2016, p. 7). A similar gap could be found amongst white and African American test-takers observed on the SAT and GRE. These tests are geared for white experiences, which leads to fewer students of color passing exams to even have the chance to later become teachers. An interesting study found that students of color achieved more academically with a teacher of color who failed these standardized tests than the same students would achieve with a white teacher who passed the standardized tests. The study claimed, "In other words, tests such as Praxis tend to favor white teacher candidates *at the expense of* Black children," (Sleeter, 2016, p. 7).

There are a number of standardized tests that student teachers need to complete prior to becoming classroom teacher, and they can act a deterrent. These standardized tests include: RICA, CBEST, CSET, and the TPAs. The TPAs or Teacher Preparation Assessments will be the focus for this section as they raise several concerns. These assessments require student teachers to take on complications that can be found in classrooms. However, student teachers may not have stepped foot in a classroom prior to beginning this stage of the university coursework. Working in a school requires using effective communication with veteran teachers and school specialists in order to develop tactics that can be used to help both English language learners and students with special needs (California Standards for the Teaching Profession, 2009). Teaching is a job that requires constant communication and fluidity in the classroom.

These standardized tests require future students (who may never have worked in a classroom setting) to use educated guessing when it comes to the written part of the TPA exams. Each of these standardized tests and courses costs the student teacher hundreds of dollars (each time the test is taken). If the student teacher fails an exam, it needs to be retaken at full cost, and without any input as to where the student teacher went wrong. Telling a student that they did not pass a test only to have them retake the test without any additional information would be universally recognized as poor teaching practice. We do not treat our students like this, so why would we treat our student teachers like this? Sleeter says, "…increased teacher certification testing [was found] to have no effect on teacher quality, but the costs of testing discouraged otherwise qualified teachers," (Sleeter, 2016, p. 7). Student teachers use host teachers as a way of learning the new skills required in the classroom, as well

as a mentor for advice on students who need extra help and support. These skills cannot be learned through simply observing classrooms.

Potential student teachers can be assigned up to one hundred and forty hours of observations in a live classroom, which need to be completed prior to becoming a student teacher. Student teachers who observe classrooms from different culturally and socioeconomic classrooms have shown to have a higher success rate when it comes to their own positive student teaching experience (Roane, 2008). This strategy works for two main reasons: 1) student teachers have the opportunity to meet people from cultures and backgrounds that are different from their upbringing, and 2) student teachers get the opportunity to observe working with English language learners in order to learn teaching strategies that may not have otherwise been taught.

School and Classroom Climate

Once a university student pushes through the requirements for entering the student teaching semester, they are placed at a school in a nearby district. The school climate where a student teacher is placed can have either a positive or negative effect on the outcome of a student teacher's experience. Incorporating strong collaboration skills within a school will result in not only a student teacher's confidence as a professional, but also the rest of the school community (including parents!). Within the realm of positive collaboration skills is the ability to include modeling strategies for students with language and/or learning barriers, building positive relationships with other professionals, and using team teaching methods (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). If a host teacher is able to demonstrate these skills with the student teacher, there is a higher chance of creating a positive relationship between host teacher and

student teacher, thus helping to create a positive student teaching experience for both the student teacher and the students in the classroom. As a host teacher, creating a positive environment for the student teacher is vital not only to help mentor a future teacher, but also for the students within the classroom, "…preservice teachers in their student teaching practicum who experienced high-quality guidance from their mentor teachers reported lower levels of burnout," (McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017, p. 231). The opposite outcome can come from a negative student teaching experience.

A negative classroom or school environment can lead to negative symptoms for the student teacher, "…teachers who transitioned into schools they perceived to have lower-quality climates increased the most in their depressive and anxious symptoms, while teachers in schools perceived as having a positive school climate reported no significant increase in symptoms," (McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017, p. 236). Depression and anxiety can ultimately lead to teacher dropout, or in the case of student teachers, not following through with university courses to complete the teaching credentials program.

So, with that herculean responsibility, how can a host teacher ensure an inviting classroom climate? Building a positive classroom environment is reflective of a positive school community environment (McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017), "The environment that a teacher creates in the classroom can make or break their students' academic success, as it has been found to be one of the most important factors affecting student learning", (Kaka, 2019, p. 1). Teaching student teachers in a live classroom should be just as important as teaching the students for a host teacher.

The Benefits of Studying Abroad for Student Teachers

Communicating to students or a host teacher can be difficult when the classroom climate is culturally diverse. If a student teacher who studied or taught abroad is placed in a diverse (socio-economic, racially, or culturally) district or classroom, it has been shown that they will have an easier time adjusting to a new environment (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). Student teachers have succeeded in culturally different classrooms through either studying abroad, traveling outside of their home country, or even outside their home state (Roane, 2008). Roane's article, *Home Culture, Host Culture, and Identity: Student Teachers' Understanding of Self and Others* discusses how foreign language majors are either encouraged or required to study abroad in order to master language skills. However, he states that less than six percent of student teachers have participated in international activities.

Schools in the United States are becoming more and more diverse (Roane, 2008). Students from around the world can be found in just about every district. With all of these cultures coming together, it can be difficult for a teacher to feel as though they have really connected or made a lasting and trusting bond with the students. One way this challenge can be decreased is through experience. "The level of knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions that pre-service and practicing teachers have regarding students from cultures different from their own is generally weak and even cause for feelings of professional inadequacy," (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012, p. 8). In other words, if a student teacher is struggling to make any real bonding connection with their students at even a base level (not even considering the language barrier that might exist), that student teacher could feel overwhelmed and underprepared. If the student teacher experiences those feelings during classroom

observations or the solo weeks of student teaching, there is a higher likelihood that the student teacher will not continue on that career path.

It does not seem to matter where one studies or travels abroad. What is gained through the international travel is the ability to recognize that there are other cultures in the world, and that the home culture and experiences of the traveler is not always going to match that of their students. Picking up on the language or even just learning a few words can really help create a bond between a student teacher and a student from a different cultural background.

So how can we solve this issue on our home soil? Not every university student or student teacher will have the means to study abroad or travel internationally. Instead, universities can allow potential student teachers to observe multiple school districts located in different cultural or socioeconomic areas. The benefits for the future student teacher will be made clear with their ability to interact with students who are not from the same cultural background. Another benefit from observing multi-cultural and multi-lingual schools is learning classroom management and teaching techniques for student teachers who do not speak the same language as their students. This is also an opportunity for student teachers to learn more about cultures from around the world.

There is only one downside to studying or traveling abroad, and that is if the traveler has a negative experience while abroad, it could lead to bias when they return and become a teacher. That said, the way to combat stereotypes is learning more about the culture. Therefore, being exposed to as many different cultures and people from those cultures will eventually lead to better communication between teacher and student, even if it is not through spoken language.

Positive Communication and Honest Feedback

Once the student teacher has completed the necessary tests through their university and been placed in a district, they must connect with their students to build a trusting relationship. In the same way, the host teacher must connect with the student teacher. In order to create a positive student teaching experience, the host teacher must provide positive forms of communication. These communication methods also include honest critiques and feedback along with a willingness to share the knowledge they have gained through teaching experience (Frank, 2018; Peters, 2010).

Part of host teaching is using those collaborative skills in order to discover the strengths of the student teacher. Because the weeks building up to solo teaching for the student teacher include observation and eventually team teaching, the host teacher should set aside time to get to know the student teachers' strengths and weaknesses. This can be discovered within the first two weeks or less of student teaching in the form of offering more classroom responsibilities. When student teachers take on more classroom responsibilities, they begin to interact with the students of the class more often. This leads to the student teacher discovering their own strengths and weaknesses. With guidance from the host teacher as well as trial and error, student teachers will begin to create a style unique to them (Joseph, 2004).

Being honest and using effective communication with future student teachers at the university level is important for student teacher success. "Being persuaded by others that one has great capability in the domain of teaching (social persuasion) would influence the formation of self-efficacy beliefs of preservice teacher most when they are being given feedback regarding their performance by a person who they regard as being competent in the field concerned,"

(Pfitzner-Eden, 2016, p. 241). There needs to be a mutual respect between the student teacher

and the host teacher. If the host teacher does not respect the student teacher enough to give

honest, direct, and constructive feedback, there will be mistrust. On the other hand, if the

student teacher does not respect the host teacher, it will be harder for the host teacher to give

that honest feedback. The honest feedback also includes a chance for the student teacher to

use a self-reflection tool, "Through supportive mentoring, student teachers learn that self-

evaluation is vital to making good decisions about best practices in the classroom" (Joseph,

2004, p. 41). Self-reflection will allow the student teacher to feel more prepared for future

lessons.

Future student teachers show up to classrooms with high expectations of preferred or

positive outcomes (Joseph, 2004). Coming in with these high hopes can end up being

detrimental for the student teacher. University courses teach methods for working with English

language learners or students with special needs do well to help teachers identify those

particular students, but where they fail is providing real world experiences in how to teach

those students. Instead of discussing different possible methods of teaching English language

learners or students with special needs, it would benefit university students to observe live

classrooms with multiple English language learners and students with special needs, and allow a

discussion with the host teacher to learn different methods that they use in everyday teaching

(Schneider, 2019).

The downside of getting a university student's hopes up prior to becoming a student

teacher is that the student teacher loses their confidence in the classroom (Pfitzner-Eden,

2016). This is where effective communication can be a major factor in teacher retention. The

communication needs to come from both the university professors as well as the host teacher and observed teacher (prior to student teaching). Learning goals need to be realistic and specific for individual student teachers in the classrooms where they are teaching. There is no right answer, and in fact, the answer that works for today's lesson may not work for tomorrows. According to Pfitzner-Eden (2016), "Unrealistic optimism was particularly pronounced for classroom management. Preservice teachers could be prone to unrealistic optimism at the beginning of the teacher preparation program resulting in inflated [teacher self-efficacy] for classroom management, which subsequently decreased during the university year," (p. 250). When student teachers enter the host teacher's classroom, it is important that the student teacher be aware of the fact that not only is classroom management difficult and unique to each classroom, but that there are different styles that work for different teachers.

Some host teachers have been working as a professional teacher for many years. As the university system continues to evolve around new teaching methods, new student teachers are being released into the professional world with what can be considered radical teaching methods according to those who are unfamiliar (Frank, 2018). Communication between the student teacher and the host teacher seems to be almost more important than it is between anyone else (student teaching advisors or university professors). Frank (2018) explains, "[The student teacher] will often trust what the host teacher suggests, even if it contradicts what she [or he] has been taught to be research based, or best, practices during the teacher education coursework," (p. 500). The student teacher will rely on the guidance of the host teacher for classroom management techniques (especially in the first days of student teaching).

Where the student teacher can act as a teacher is in discussing the techniques that are being taught in the university classes. One line that host teachers should stop using with their student teacher is, "that may work in theory, but not in practice", (Frank, 2018, p. 500). There are a couple reasons why those words are detrimental to the outcome of the student teacher and therefore the student teaching experience: 1) the student teacher may lose confidence in their ability to offer creative suggestions, and 2) it can lead to a higher imbalance of power between the host teacher, the student teacher, and the university professors. The student teacher will lose trust in what they are learning in university courses if it is not used in a live classroom.

However, the host teacher is not the only person the student teacher has to impress in order to become a professional educator. During the aforementioned Teacher Preparation Assessments, student teachers are required to record themselves while teaching a lesson with a live classroom. If a host teacher has suggested an idea will only work in theory, and the student teacher knows there is an anonymous grader reviewing the TPA, the student teacher is less likely to want to try something new and innovative during that lesson. While this point also connects student teachers and the standardized tests needed to be passed in order to become professionals, in the long run, the words from the host teacher may stay with the student teacher well after the standardized tests have been completed and the student teacher has moved on to become a professional.

A host teacher's job is to share all of the knowledge they have gained through experience with teaching children with their student teacher. But unfortunately, sometimes host teachers are stuck in a narrow and competitive mindset where sharing information can

lead to being replaced. Peters (2010) explores the importance of being a positive mentor and sharing learned experiences to a younger generation of, in this case, tap dancers. This article suggests that for long periods of times, the great tap dancers of the time (Jimmy Slyde, Lon Chaney, and Chuck Green) originally were very secretive in how they were able to perform in the manner in which they did. However, once they had gained more time and experience, "the elder tap dancer mentors gained immense gratification and pride in seeing younger dancers pursue excellence in tap dance and professional careers in this art form that they had spent a lifetime perfecting" (Peters, 2010, p. 442). The benefits of mentoring the younger generation were a positive community and lifestyle for both parties. The roots of dance were kept intact, and the younger generation could take what they had learned further using newer experimental techniques. There is a similar relationship between host teachers and student teachers. By using cooperation instead of competition in the work place, both the student teacher and the host teacher are able to profit. The mentor, or host teacher, gets to share the years of invaluable experience from the classroom, and the student teacher gets to learn and apply these techniques to their own unique teaching style.

On top of helping to create successful teachers, the school community will benefit from the shared knowledge as well. If all of the faculty are sharing experiences in a completely open way with no fear of being shut down by a peer, the school community and morale amongst the teachers will increase. A supportive staff will lead to more pleasant classroom environments where new ideas are shared and taught. A more pleasant classroom environment will lead to more successful student relationships and student outcomes.

Conclusion

There are many contributions in academic literature to the field of education and student teaching. There are numerous articles that point out the structural inequalities that has led to fewer teachers of color entering the education career. This stems from having culturally diverse student communities and teachers working together. Student teachers can prepare for multicultural classrooms through traveling abroad, or even just to different destinations around the United States. In some major cities, the local culture can change from neighborhood to neighborhood. Despite the arguments that standardized tests are necessary for future teachers to succeed in classroom teaching, there is a lot of academic literature that would argue potential teachers of color are getting left behind due to inequalities within these tests. If this barrier is broken through, there is still the need for a positive host teacher to act as a mentor.

There are articles surrounding the importance of mentorships, not only for student teachers looking to become teachers, but for young students looking for academic success. There have even been articles written about the importance of mentorships outside of the field of education. As teacher's preparation continues to change, one thing has remained clear throughout the whole process, and that is the understanding that clear, honest, and positive communication is the key to a successful experience when it comes to the student teaching, hosting teaching, and the teaching process.

Although there is quantitative data studying teacher burnout, and there are many academic articles that speculate the reason for this, there is little qualitative data that examines how to help student teachers feel empowered and confident going into the teaching profession. Therefore, the purpose of my study is to explore the perspectives of a large number

of incoming student teachers, current teachers, host teachers, and student teaching advisors all with the experiences of becoming a teacher. By collecting the memories of my participants, the researcher hopes to add methods for allowing both student teachers and host teachers to have a positive experience in the classroom together.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Question

Because people are subjective in what is considered to be a positive and negative experience, there is not a specific test or formula that can be used to reach a conclusion. Instead, I collected the experiences of as many future student teachers, former student teachers, student teaching advisors, and host teachers as I could in order to build a playbook on different methods that should lead to positive experiences for both the student teacher and the host teacher. More importantly, there is a lack of knowledge when it comes to successful communication strategies along with methods for providing feedback, especially for diverse student teacher populations. My research aims to examine how open and honest communication along with positive reinforcement between host teachers and student teachers can improve the student teaching experience. The sub-topics associated with my central research questions will examine structural inequality within the teaching industry, the effect of formal preparation and standardized tests on student teachers, how both school and classroom climate affect the student teaching semester, the benefits of studying abroad for student teachers, and the effect of positive and honest feedback between host teachers and student teachers.

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

The best approach for my data collection was through qualitative research. Creswell describes qualitative as, "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaningful individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem," (Creswell, 2018, p. 4). I used open-ended interviews with an array of volunteer participants who were future student teachers,

former student teachers, current teachers, former host teachers, and student teaching

advisors. Because there is no quantitative data to describe their experiences, and because the

information I collected was subjective experiences based on memories, finding similarities in

language, emotion, and tone helped to categorize experiences as either negative or positive.

This helped to start a guide on how to create a positive experience during student teaching. I

also incorporated two worldviews into my research approach.

Two worldviews are represented in my research: transformative and constructivist. The

study supports a transformative view because the data collected was from the lives and

experiences of a diverse population. It is my hope that my research will be able to potentially

change the lives of future teachers prior to them entering the professional world of education.

Teacher burnout has become so prevalent in the United States that it has been referred to as

the "revolving door" affect. By improving the student teaching experience as a whole, student

teachers will be better prepared when it comes to running their own classroom.

The dominant worldview represented in my research is constructivist. My study

supports a constructivist view because my research relies almost entirely on the volunteer

participants' experiences. My research was collected mainly through open-ended interview

questions, which allowed the participant to express a subjective answer. "The goal of the

research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied,"

(Creswell, 2018, p.8). Each of my participants had a personalized and individual story when it

came to their student teaching experience. There is quantitative data that discusses the large

number of teacher turnaround, but those numbers do not offer any solutions leading to fewer

student teachers dropping out. By listening to these teacher's experiences, I opened up a

channel of discussion that led to discovering how to help student teachers exit the semester with a positive experience. All teachers graduating from university teacher preparation courses in recent years will have gone through a student teaching semester. Some experiences were positive, some negative, and others neutral. In this study I focused on all of the experiences in order to find out what helped create a positive student teaching experience.

Seidman's approach of phenomenological interviewing focuses on the experience of participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2013). The experience of the student teacher should be given more weight when it comes to teacher turnaround and the revolving door affect. This research used experiences from an array of participants to get a well-rounded view on the student teaching experience. The host teacher and the student teacher may have been in the same classroom, but may also have had two completely different experiences. It is important to find out why that is to help future student teachers and host teachers succeed together.

Research Design

Research sites. The research site used for recruiting in-person interviewees was Dominican University of California. Founded in 1890 in San Rafael, California, Dominican University is located in an affluent area of northern California. The U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges guidebook has ranked Dominican University of California as one of the top regional universities in the West. Dominican University offers undergraduate and graduate programs for students attempting to achieve a teaching credential. I was a graduate student in the Education Department at Dominican University of California. The student demographic within the Education Department is mainly white females between the ages of about 18-27 years old.

With permission from the IRB and professors from Dominican University, I was granted permission to conduct research with current students within the education program, and I was introduced to current and former host teachers around the district. I also used social media as a platform for data collection. My hope was to gain a more diverse group of teachers with student teaching or host teaching experiences as well as reach a larger data collection pool to help define both positive and negative student teaching experiences.

Participants.

Student teaching advisor. This volunteer was a current student teaching advisor at Dominican University of California and former teacher and principal. She is a white female. She has had the opportunity to work in many districts with many student and host teachers throughout her career. It was important to interview her because she not only had the information about expectations from the point of view of the host teacher, but also the expectations of the incoming student teachers.

Future student teachers. The two incoming student teachers were volunteers from Dominican University of California's Education program. The participants I recruited were white females aged 20 and 21 years old. One had worked in classrooms and the other had not yet. Both had observed classrooms as part of the education program at Dominican University of California. Interviewing future student teachers who had not yet worked in a classroom helped get an idea of what student teachers were looking forward to upon entering a classroom for the first time, as well as the stresses they were feeling going into the semester.

Former host teachers. The former host teacher volunteered to be interviewed, and she was recruited by a teacher from San Francisco Unified School District. This volunteer was a 36-year-

old white female who taught in California's Central Valley. She had, on more than one occasion, a student teacher in her classroom. An interview with her was important in order to discover what shaped either a positive or negative host teaching experience.

Current teachers. The two participants were volunteers recruited from personal friends and family members who are teachers as well as some of my former classmates from Dominican University of California. This group consisted of two white females aged 26 and 31. The purpose of interviewing this group of participants was to capture recent memories of their lives during their student teaching. I chose this age group because I wanted the memory of student teaching to still be somewhat fresh, while they also had a number of years teaching experience.

Social media. The 100 survey participants varied in age and gender. Because it was anonymous, I didn't know the age, gender, or race of the participants. They were recruited from social media groups such as Teachers of Facebook, Student Teachers of Facebook, and through sharing between my friends and family members in the teaching community. The importance of reaching out to these groups was to get more subjective stories of what created a successful or unsuccessful student or host teaching experience. Recruiting from this platform also allowed me the opportunity to hear from teachers who taught around the world. All participants were members of the teaching community and had been either a student teacher or a host teacher at some point in their careers.

Sampling procedures. For my research, I used purposive sampling. I chose five demographic groups to find the best results for my study. These groups included 1) Incoming student teachers who have yet to work in a live classroom, 2) Future host teachers who will be working with student teachers, 3) Current teachers who went through the student teaching process, 4)

Student teaching advisors who had worked with both student and host teachers, and 5) Teachers who have been host teachers in the past. This demographic was particularly informative for my study because it was interesting to find out what host teachers and student teachers' expectations were prior to working in the same classroom. Interviewing current teachers who either went through the student teaching or host teaching process was important because I found out what went right and wrong from their points of view. This meant we could potentially set the right expectations for both student teachers and host teachers prior to setting foot in the live classroom together. If both the student and host teachers along with the student teaching advisor were on the same page from the beginning, I strongly believed there would be a higher success rate from the student teacher's perspective, thus helping to build the population of teachers in America.

I interviewed a group of teachers and potential teachers. This group was made up of white, female teachers who taught grades ranging from Kindergarten through high school aged students. The student teacher's age ranged from 20 years and higher, while the host teachers age ranged from 24 and higher. The student teaching advisor I interviewed was also a white female who had taught elementary school through high school and had also been a principal during her tenure.

I did not interview any children under the age of 18. All of my interviewees were adults over the age of 18. I interviewed bilingual teachers who are fluent in English (even if English is a second language).

In order to find my participants, I reached out to Dominican University or California. This is the university where I completed my teaching credentials along with my student teaching

experience. One professor there invited me to recruit incoming student teachers who started

their student teaching experience in the upcoming semester. I attended a class to announce my

research and pass around a sign-up sheet for individuals interested in participating in an

interview. I also reached out to my former student teaching advisor who put me in contact with

former and current host teachers. I recruited a large group of folks within the teaching

community through groups on social media in order to get surveys from a larger population.

This was done in the form of a "post", where participants also had the opportunity to complete

a brief survey. In addition to that demographic, I reached out to current teachers who have

been through the student teaching process. These teachers were met through personal

experiences. I asked these teachers to put me in touch with their colleagues who were

interested in participating.

Instruments for Data Collection

In-person interviews. Each volunteer was interviewed two times (with the exception of the

student teaching advisor). During the interviews, I asked the predetermined questions (see

appendices B, C, D, E, and F). Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions. I asked

participants to elaborate on the answers they had provided. I reminded the interviewees that I

was recording the interview, but their identity would remain confidential.

Then, I began my interview conversation. As needed, I helped the interview continue on

track. I did this by asking for more elaboration as mentioned. Because each interviewee was

going to have a different and unique story, I liked to allow the participant to talk as much as

possible to get their whole story. That said, if the participant started to explore off-topic issues,

I asked them a follow up question that brought the interview back to continue answering my set of questions.

Once the questions had all been answered to both the participant's and my liking, I thanked the participant for their time, and again reminded them that everything we discussed regarding personal information would remain confidential.

Online survey. Survey participants clicked on a link that took them to an anonymous survey administered through SurveyMonkey. The survey included a letter of introduction to participants in my anonymous survey research study, which stated my name, the purpose of my research, the amount of time the survey should have taken (between 5-10 minutes), and that any personal information provided by my participants would remain anonymous. If at any point the survey participant wanted to withdraw from participating, there would not be any negative repercussions. The survey remained confidential by way of remaining on the researcher's laptop protected by a password, and it did not include the names or any identifying information from the participant.

Data Analysis

I collected data through qualitative open-ended interviews. I recorded each interview using my phone as the recording device. Throughout the interview I wrote key phrases having to do with what caused the positive or negative experiences. Similarly, I went through each individual interview immediately after the interview took place, and I wrote analytic memos for each interview. I then categorized the participant's experience with student teaching as an overall positive experience or overall negative experience. The idea was that there should be a pattern in both positive and negative behavior categories. With incoming student teachers, I

took note as to what their thoughts were on going into student teaching along with the tone with which they spoke. It was important to learn what their expectations were prior to entering their student teaching semester.

I used all three of Maxwell's (2013) strategies for qualitative data analysis: writing analytic memos post interview, categorizing strategies, including coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies, or narrative analysis. By creating memos, I was able to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in multiple interviews based on both positive and negative experiences.

Memo writing was included in my methods post interview. I was able to capture the mood, facial expression, and tone of my interviewee. Often, I found that just listening to a recording of the interview did not have the same tone. By marking down how the interviewee looked based on body language, I was able to see a pattern in interviewees. Memo writing also helped to remember where the interview took place and what the circumstances were like during the interview in case that had an effect on how the interviewee answered.

Before I began interviewing, I created a list of words and phrases I expected to hear during my interviews. These potential code words included: communication, feedback, frustrating, vent, exhausting, exciting or excited, support, and unique. This worked as a mini hypothesis based on my own experiences. If others used similar words, I asked follow-up questions with hopes of a more in-depth response, and was then able to know where to categorize their interview. During interviews, however, I put my own list out of sight, and I concentrated on my interviewee and the language they used. When a word or phrase was mentioned that I felt needed to be remembered, I wrote it down. After the interview was

complete, I took those words and compared them to my list and categorized them accordingly.

I repeated that process again when I listened to the recording and transcribed the interviews

(each interview was recorded and then transcribed for coding). This process was repeated for

each interview.

Coding was used before, during, and after each interview. In addition, peer coding was

used during the open coding process. I asked a peer to review the words I had written based on

the interviews, and my peers created their own list based on positive and negative experiences.

Next, I used my initial codes to create a concept map where my codes became themes in order

to form the central findings of my research. Concept mapping involved grouping the coded

words from the audio and transcribed interviews into two main sections: positive experience

and negative experience.

After concept mapping, I used connecting strategies to piece together similarities and

differences in my interviewees' stories. Because each experience in student teaching, host

teaching, student teaching advising, and classroom teaching is entirely subjective, I used a data

analysis matrix that combined similar experiences (positive with positive and negative with

negative). That made finding similar key words and phrases easier to keep track of throughout

the process of interviewing and analyzing notes and quotes from my interviews.

Finally, I used focused coding by looking for similar or the same words used by the

interviewees. These words were either the most frequently used words, or stood out as the

most significant words or phrases used by the interviewees to describe their positive or

negative experience in student teaching. By finding these patterns, I was able to determine the

language student teachers and host teachers use when describing both a positive and negative

experience, or in other words, I was able to find out what was most important to my interviewees who had either a positive or negative experience.

Validity

There is no objective truth to creating the best student teaching experience for every candidate who goes down the teaching career path. That said, there are similarities between what is subjectively a positive student teaching experience versus a negative student teaching experience. Maxwell (2013) suggests that alternative interpretations, or interviewees not giving accurate data could potentially skew the results of my research. Also, because the interviewees were giving their side of the student teaching experience, it is possible that the partner teacher at the time (either host teacher or student teacher) might have had a completely different experience. I was not able to interview partnerships (meaning the student and host teachers who were partnered at the same time), and therefore my conclusions are based on biases. My job as the researcher was to address the threats to the validity of the research findings to produce the most accurate representation of the memories formed from that period in the student teacher, student teaching advisor, or host teacher's life.

Maxwell (2013) wrote that there are two main validity threats with qualitative research: researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias includes selecting data that fits the researcher's existing theory, goals, or preconceptions. Because I had a negative student teaching experience, there was the potential that my bias was going to be towards weeding out all the positive experiences in order to find out what similarities all of the negative experiences each interviewee had. However, in this case, due to my bias, I was interested in hearing all

experiences (negative, positive, or neutral), and what caused those emotions during the time of the student teaching semester.

In addition, the validity threat may not have come from my bias, but that of my interviewee. When emotions run high, it can be difficult for the interviewee to focus on anything except their own biases. I know this because that is how I felt when explaining my situation during and after my student teaching experience. It took time to reflect on my experience before I could admit that while I had a lot of positive moments during my student teaching semester, I could have made different choices to improve my situation. For this reason, I asked my interviewees to take time to really reflect on the experiences they had student teaching during the time between the first and second interview.

Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the individual studied (Maxwell, 2013). Essentially, this suggests I controlled the interviewees in a way that gave me the answers I wanted to prove my research one way or another. However, because I do not have the right answers, and in fact, there is no "right" answer, reactivity was not the central concern on the part of the researcher. This responsibility primarily fell on the interviewee to give the best version of their truth to help create a process by which future student teachers and host teachers can have the best possible outcome for each other. At the same time, it was important not to pose leading question, or indicate approval or disapproval towards a participant's answers.

I made my research more valid using Maxwell's description of triangulation and by using thick description. I used triangulation by interviewing multiple participants from a wide age range and who had a variety of student teaching experiences. The interviewees came from

across the United States and in a few specific cases with the survey, around the world. Again, because I am not looking to change my participant's experience, I was open to listening to and exploring all of the answers regardless of whether or not their answers were through a positive or a negative student teaching or host teaching experience.

I used thick descriptions by including my participant's behavior, tone, and of course, the words they used during the interview. By actively listening during the interviews, I was able to make a note when the participant's tone changed, or when they made a physical movement that stood out during the interview. A long pause meant the participant had to weigh out and think about what was to be said aloud, whereas a quick answer meant typically this question was something the participant was passionate about, and they had likely spent a lot of time thinking about the subject prior to my interview.

Research positionality. The researcher acknowledges a possible bias as friends or relatives were some of the interviewees and survey respondents taking part in this research study. This could influence data analysis due to familiarity with the participants. I did not discuss my personal experience with the interviewees, nor did I include my experience in the letter of introduction for the survey volunteers in an attempt to keep my participant's answers from being skewed. Seidman (2013) says interviewing acquaintances and/or friends can be problematic as interviews can sometimes create tension between interviewer and interviewee. However, because my only goal was to retrieve subjective stories regarding their student teaching semester, the interviewees were free to share or not share any information they considered relevant. If I asked a follow-up question, the interviewee knew that an answer was voluntary, and they could either answer or not answer.

Survey participants were likely to share a very honest truth (according to their experiences) due to the complete anonymity of the social media survey. The researcher acknowledges the possibility of survey participants being more likely to fill out the survey if they had a negative experience. With this bias in mind, I asked friends and family to share the survey with as many teachers as possible to gain higher numbers of participants, and more positive experiences as well as negative experiences in the student teaching and host teaching environment.

With these biases in mind, the researcher strove to make conclusions based on what was said in the interviews or in the surveys instead of comparing his own bias in student teaching. Interviewees who were involved in the student teaching process will likely have their own biases towards the research. However, because the researcher is collecting qualitative subjective data, each interviewee will offer a unique perspective, which is central to the insight of this research topic.

Chapter 4: Findings

After concluding this study, and reading through over one hundred survey responses as well as the interview notes, the findings from this research demonstrates that, while there are many influences affecting the student teaching semester, there are four main factors impacting open and effective communication: First, it is necessary for both the host teacher and the student teaching advisor to set clear expectations for the student teacher in order to establish a foundation for effective communication. Next, all parties must be aware that there is a power dynamic that must be negotiated through open communication in order to develop a professional relationship between the host teacher and the student teacher. In addition, the host teacher's must be more than just a "host" in the classroom. They must demonstrate the ability to be an active and effective mentor for the student teacher. Finally, all three parties (host teacher, student teacher, and student teaching advisor) must take steps to prepare for the student teaching semester. These themes proved to be the main factors in creating either a positive or negative student teaching experience.

Clear Expectations Create the Pathway to Positive Results

Future student teachers go through university courses with a certain set of expectations about their upcoming role as a student teacher and eventually a classroom teacher. Host teachers can anticipate student teachers coming prepared and ready to work in a live classroom. However, there is a disconnect when all three parties involved (student teacher, host teacher, and student teaching advisors) enter an intensive 15-week student teaching process with different expectations and realities.

According to interviews with former student teachers who are now teachers and an online survey performed by former teachers who are now teachers, the university courses leading into the semester of student teaching do not fully prepare incoming student teachers for the realities of a live classroom. One anonymous survey respondent said, "[Student teaching] was the steepest learning curve of my life. There is so much work [at the university] that is not reflective of actually being a teacher (e.g. a detailed lesson plan for every lesson)." This example is one of many small (and large) differences between what is taught in university courses and what is actually being performed by teachers in the field. This disconnect is first recognized during the classroom observation hours required to begin student teaching. These hours are spent by university students ideally in multiple classrooms at the elementary school or high school at which they will be placed for the future student teaching semester. The goal of these hours is so that the student teacher will have a multitude of teachers to observe, and potentially choose which two teachers to host them during the student teaching semester. It becomes apparent during those hours that the lessons taught to the incoming student teachers in university courses do not always match up with the way live classrooms are taught.

Expectations start with the university. University coursework includes classes on classroom management, students with special needs, and how to adjust your lesson plans for English language learners. However, the smaller, more detailed parts of teaching are not always recognized. This quote came from an anonymous survey respondent,

"There was a lot of work that we were required to do that did not seem to have much value. We had to write these exhaustive lesson plans that would take hours to write,

however, all it takes for a lesson plan to get off track is one bad assumption on the teacher's part, or a good open-ended question from a student. So, I would do all this prep work that rarely impacted my teaching past the first 15 minutes of a lesson. No one ever taught me how to use student assessments to evaluate specific parts of my teaching or how to use outcome data to find gaps in my work. I did so much prep work but was never taught how to incorporate data into my reflections on my work or how to sift through the parts of my lesson that were most effective at improving student understanding and performance. I think being reflective on your personal practice and identifying ways to improve your teaching are not inherently known and should be explicitly taught and modeled to people in the student teaching process."

It could be argued that these smaller more detail-oriented parts of a teacher's life can be taught during the student teaching semester by the host teacher, or even that a new teacher can ask a colleague for advice in those situations. The issue is that student teachers are not told what questions to explicitly ask a host teacher or colleague.

When speaking with a former student teacher, it was mentioned that the observation hours spent in the classroom prior to beginning student teaching were more valuable than most of the classes that were taken at the university. This is not to imply that it is not important to learn how to create detailed lesson plans or any of the other invaluable lessons taught through university courses. However, this person said that specific courses on classroom management and how to teach English language learners or students with special needs did not help much in a live classroom, "There are too many variables with a live classroom that just

cannot be taught through coursework" (anonymous). Expectations of teaching should not fall entirely on the university. The role of a host teacher is monumental in the success of the learning that goes on during the student teaching semester.

How to get the host teacher and student teacher on the same page. Expectations start with the university as it is the student teacher's first point of contact prior to observing live classrooms, but then there are the host teacher's expectations. Becoming a host teacher is a complex process. Teachers have to reach many standards in order to be considered for a host teaching position, including the fact that they are chosen by the principal based on performance and attitude. Equally important, host teachers are only paid a minimal amount for the work required to be a host teacher. Once selected, the potential host teacher must complete a ten-hour training (as of 2021) course as well. But with so many teachers taking on the responsibility of hosting a student teacher, consistency in expectations during the student teaching semester can diminish due to the different character traits of each host teacher. A former host teacher I interviewed stated, "Think of it like hosting a dinner party. When your guests arrive, you want them to feel comfortable exploring your space. If there is any tension, it can be felt by the other guests (or students)." Comparing hosting a dinner party to hosting a student teacher in a classroom was a very unique way of exploring the similarities.

There were multiple survey responses that expressed how one host teacher had certain expectations while the other host teacher had a completely different set of expectations. If all host teachers take the same ten-hour course, hopefully our student teachers will not have such vastly different experiences in different classrooms with different host teachers. An example of what this can look like from a student teacher's point of view was sent in through the survey, "I

worked under the guidance of two master teachers. One was thoughtful, professional, and interested in my learning experience. The other one did not seem to care and just wanted an extra hand in the classroom." A student teacher being used to grade papers or to make copies is okay as long as it is not getting in the way of the rest of the experience of being a classroom teacher. Fourteen percent of the survey respondents reported being used for simple tasks in their classroom, or were not given the opportunity to lead lessons as much as they would have liked. This treatment of a student teacher will be detrimental in the long-run as they will not be prepared to take on their own classroom after completing the credential program.

Misconceptions within a live classroom can include the student teacher not quite understanding their role within the classroom. This could lead to a student teacher sitting back and waiting to be told what to do, or trying to lead lessons that have not been approved by the host teacher. By setting clear expectations early on with their student teacher, the smaller misconceptions can be alleviated. It can be as simple as meeting with the student teacher prior to the semester and discussing expectations to help the student teacher come into the classroom ready to work from day one. When I asked an incoming student teacher why she felt nervous going into student teaching, she stated, "I would like to know what the expectations are from my host teacher." That seemed fairly black and white. Most student teachers are interested in learning as much as possible while in the classroom. Setting clear expectations is vital for the transition of having two teachers in the same classroom. While these conversations can be difficult, that is what the student teaching advisor is there to facilitate.

As it turns out, there are new plans in place to help control the outcome of student teaching. During an interview with a student teaching advisor, she stated that in an effort to

improve the host teacher's and student teacher's experience, "…there is 10 hours of training through the state of California." She went on to say, "We do not know if it will help yet, because we have not seen it in action, but I am hoping that it will clarify some of the misconceptions." If all host teachers are on the same page with expectations, the expectations when working with different host teachers should not change too drastically. Classrooms will inevitably be different, but the host teachers will have the same training, which would lead to more consistency for the student teachers. Having consistent host teachers will allow the student teachers to keep the focus on teaching their students instead of worrying about what whether or not they are doing what the host teacher expects.

Expectations of the student teaching advisor. Having a student teaching advisor who is involved (both physically and emotionally) and holds clear expectations can make a big difference in a student teacher's life. An advisor is there to give direction, constructively criticize lessons, be a shoulder to lean on when the student teacher needs advice, and to facilitate meetings with the host teacher. They are also there to make sure that the classroom is a good fit for the student teacher. By having a meeting with all three parties prior to the semester of student teaching, the advisor can help explain the standards and expectations set by the host teacher.

When a student teaching advisor was interviewed, she said, "I wish [the host teacher] had that conversation we had on the last day much earlier in the semester because that would have solved a lot of things and cleared them up." She was referring to the final meeting where the student teacher, host teacher, and she all met up to talk about how the semester had gone.

It was on the last day of student teaching when the host teacher decided to list all of her grievances from the past eight weeks.

Without setting clear expectations early on, what might have been acceptable in one classroom, may be viewed as disruptive or unhelpful in another. If a student teaching advisor is able to communicate with both the host teacher and the student teacher, there is less room for miscommunication or misunderstandings. Once the communication is in place, it is up to the host teacher to take on the task of relinquishing their total control within the classroom.

The disconnect between student teacher and host teacher expectations. Student teachers and host teachers need to be clear with the expectations. A former student teacher said, "During my second semester for student teaching, my host teacher had me stay later than expected to set up the classroom the next day. I was more than happy to help and did so, but it seemed like she did not understand all the work I had to do for my credential program when I got home. In my first student teaching assignment, my host teacher gave me more time to work on my teaching and teaching assignments." This quote demonstrates the need for the host teachers to be aware of the student teacher's need for reflection and coaching. Many times, a host teacher expects a student teacher to stay after the students are dismissed. Host teachers need to make this clear from the onset of student teaching. Equally important, student teachers need to understand that their job does not end when the bell rings. If the student teacher has a lot of course work to complete, the two can negotiate an appropriate dismissal time.

As teachers, we set a list of classroom rules with our students within the first couple of days of the first semester. These rules work as expectations, guidelines, and classroom norms. As one student teaching advisor explained, "I think you have to pick up norms too. Even if you

do not call it that. We set up the norms of not having a laptop open, or figuring out whether or not it is okay to eat and drink during class. It is important to find out what the host teachers' parameters are so [the student teacher] does not overstep a boundary, and build [the relationship] from there." Host teachers should set up these rules with student teachers in the same way they set them up with students. These norms are set up as a group. Typically, they are an agreed upon set of norms for the class to follow. The same can be done for student teachers.

Different Power Dynamics

Within every classroom there is a power dynamic between the teacher and the students. It is understood that the teacher is in charge, and the students are to listen to and respect the teacher. The same invisible power dynamic exists between the host teacher and the student teacher. Incoming student teachers have expressed feeling nervous entering a host teacher's classroom. If a host teacher does not treat a student teacher like a professional equal, it can be very difficult for a student teacher to feel comfortable trying new skills and lessons that were learned in university courses, especially while standing in front of a classroom full of students. My survey, conducted with 100 participants, showed that 61% of former student teachers suggested open communication or host teacher collaboration would have helped cultivate a more positive student teaching experience. Former student teachers found it hard to communicate with their host teachers due to the power dynamic that existed between them. This was backed by numerous written accounts from anonymous survey respondents, "I worked under the guidance of two master teachers. One was thoughtful, professional, and interested in my learning experience. The other one did not seem to care, and just wanted an

extra hand in the classroom." This person went on to say, "I still keep in touch with my first master teacher, but I have not spoken to the other since." Out of the student teaching semester, the new teacher gained a valuable mentor. The clear dichotomy within the same school in two different classrooms happened due to the power dynamic being depleted in one classroom and ignored in the other.

The relationship between the host teacher, student teacher, and student teaching advisor is important. If the bond is created early on during or prior to the student teaching semester, the student teacher will learn more effectively during the semester. The word, "support" appeared in multiple written statements by the people who took the anonymous survey. While "support" can be a subjective term, it seemed that the underlying theme of the responses was that to support a student teacher meant also to empower the student teacher to become a part of the classroom. Incoming student teachers and classroom teachers both need to feel as though they are being supported by each other for the relationship to work. By working as a team, they will unknowingly equalize the power dynamic that occurs during student teaching.

Within the school community. The power dynamic is spread throughout the entire school community, and it can change from classroom-to-classroom and teacher-to-teacher. It is important that even without the ten-hour training that host teachers attend, all teachers on campus should treat the student teacher as a professional. One anonymous survey respondent wrote, "I was lucky enough to be able to pick the school site I was at. After doing that, it was not until the end of my first semester of prep to student teaching that I truly felt comfortable at the school site. However, the teachers were all very helpful and welcomed me into the

classroom environment. In my second semester student teaching, I also was considered a 'teacher' to them, and was able to participate in a lot of activities." Every teacher has a responsibility to treat student teachers with respect as an equal. Because the students at the school (especially at the elementary level) already see student teachers as a "real teacher," the other educators at the school should do the same. The student teacher will feel more welcomed and like an equal in the classroom, and there will not be any confusion with the students in the classroom as to who is in charge.

Tone of voice. Despite the limited classroom experience, it is important to show the students of the class that this new inclusion is to be treated with the same respect as their normal homeroom teacher. One way the host teacher can do this is by addressing the student teacher with a professional tone of voice. In an interview with an incoming student teacher who had spent forty hours observing her future host teacher, it was stated, "I never have a moment to talk to her while I am observing. I have not really communicated with her because she talks to me with the same tone she talks to her students. I do not know if I would talk to her if I had any issues." In her case, this student teacher felt an amplified power dynamic by the tone of voice used by the host teacher. Having another adult speak down to the student teacher may intensify the anxiety of not being a professional equal. If this incoming student teacher felt comfortable enough to have the difficult conversation expressing how the tone of the host teacher made her feel, it could give the host teacher a chance to reflect on how her tone affects not only the student teacher but the students within her classroom as well. This is an opportunity for both to develop their professional relationship and grow as educators, but it

can be missed because of the power dynamic within the classroom and how it affects the student teacher.

For incoming student teachers, the feeling of being wanted in the classroom is important. The tone of voice a host teacher uses can make the student teacher feel marginalized. The host teacher must realize it is important to treat the student teacher equally in the classroom. This is true especially in front of the students in the classroom and within the school as a whole. The way the host teacher treats the student teacher will be reflected by the students who view their teacher's behavior.

Host Teacher's Ability to Work as an Active Mentor

A host teacher takes on the responsibility of being an active mentor by coaching their student teacher. Mentors help student teachers celebrate their successes and provide support when they struggle. This mentorship can then form into a trusting relationship between the two by planning together and having in-depth conversations about how to best serve the students within the classroom. By building a positive professional relationship between student teachers and host teachers, the host teacher is able to pass on the vast knowledge of classroom teaching. Student teaching leads to a letter of recommendation from the host teachers and the principal, the last thing a student teacher wants is to seem unlikable or, more importantly, un-hirable. This added pressure can cause a student teacher to only survive student teaching instead of thriving by using this experience to its full potential. With the right host teacher, the student teacher may have a mentor to reach out to for the rest of their career in teaching and in life. This requires an active role in the classroom while the student teacher is solo teaching.

Coaching when student teachers struggle. When a host teacher recognizes a student teacher struggling through a lesson, it is important to set aside time to coach and mentor the student teacher in order to improve future lessons. Student teachers typically have little to no classroom teaching experience. Until a person is comfortable addressing a live classroom, that person is bound to make mistakes while teaching a lesson, especially early on in the student teaching semester. This is where the host teacher must act as a mentor and not only help communicate the lesson for the students, but also find time to coach the student teacher on how to improve for next time. When asked, "What would help create a more positive student teaching experience", an anonymous survey respondent stated, "The most important element of the student teaching experience was the relationship with the host teacher. The host teacher's willingness to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences is important. During my initial student teaching experience, the host teacher was unwilling to relinquish teaching time, which made it difficult for me to have a meaningful student teaching experience." A host teacher has the responsibility of preparing the student teacher for what it is like to work in a school. If the student teacher does not recognize the host teacher as a mentor, it can be difficult for the student teacher to leave the semester feeling confident in their abilities in the classroom. The host teacher has already experienced the early stages of teaching. They have likely made the same mistakes in the classroom. The host teacher has a vault full of knowledge regarding classroom management techniques, lesson planning, and differentiation. This is an ongoing process, but if there are any tricks or tips, the student teacher will benefit from this shared experience. The ability to share these experiences requires open communication between both the host teacher and the student teacher.

Open communication builds trust. Meeting before or after school hours to plan the curriculum for the day or week can improve the communication and the relationship between student teacher and host teacher. This gives the student teacher an opportunity to know what is expected for the day's lessons, and would allow them to ask any clarifying questions to improve their teaching for their students. According to a current teacher, a successful classroom is run with open and honest communication where expectations are given and reinforced throughout the school year. These same techniques should be used with a student teacher. One teacher said, "We would plan together every day either before school or after. It was a lot of work, but she [the host teacher] made me feel confident before every lesson I taught." The expectations were given to the student teacher, who then passed them on to the students in the classroom, which led to feeling more confident as a teacher (even if the lessons are not always successful).

In order to build a mutual and trusting relationship, it is important for the student teacher, host teacher, and student teaching advisor to use open and honest communication. This communication can be used to praise or critique all parties involved. This also requires each individual to be open to the idea that everyone has something to offer in order to master the art of the ever-changing classroom teaching. If all three parties do not use honest and open communication (or if there is a lopsided power dynamic), the trust cannot be built, and therefore the relationship as equal professionals will struggle to exist. A very insightful comment was made by an incoming student teacher who said, "If the communication is not there, it is almost as if the relationship cannot fully form." If this dynamic relationship as professionals does not exist, communication is lost and there will most likely be a power dynamic in favor of the host teacher.

Along with open and honest communication comes trust. This is a big step for all three parties. The student teacher has to trust that the host teacher is going to give them an opportunity to learn within the classroom. The advisor puts trust in the host teacher to be the best example for the student teacher. In turn, the host teacher has to trust that they can give up the classroom to a person with little teaching experience. My findings suggest that the host teacher has the biggest responsibility because when a teacher has been in the same classroom for years, they have their own way of teaching certain subjects or lessons, and have built a foundation of classroom management techniques that work for them. To give up that power can sometimes be stressful, and can lead to more work to be done to get the students back on task when the student teacher inevitably and accidentally creates a learning opportunity for themselves and loses the attention of the class. In an interview with a current teacher who has hosted several student teachers, it was stated, "I was always happy to let [the student teacher] teach lessons. In the beginning there are usually mistakes made. It is expected. It can be hard keeping the students focused if they lost control of the classroom." A host teacher should take some time to remember what it felt like walking into a classroom as a first-time teacher. A survey response gave the simple sentence, "Lack of empathy from mentor," (anonymous). Student teachers are going to make mistakes in the classroom. It is important for host teachers to recognize that mistakes will be made for the sake of a professional relationship and trust the student teacher in the classroom.

Building that trust early on between student teacher and host teacher can be as simple as greeting each other in the morning. When I spoke with a student teaching advisor about this topic, she suggested, "You build trust in the little ways. If you can build little bits of trust, then

you can build up to [solo teaching]. This could start with planning lessons together from the beginning. It could start with just meeting up to talk before school starts." She spoke about the importance of building trust early on in the student teaching semester. An act as simple as inviting a student teacher to help plan for a lesson could mean a lot to a nervous incoming student teacher. The host teacher should be required to meet prior to the student teaching semester and ask the simple question, "What do you want out of this experience?" This would open up a conversation that will start building trust.

There are immediate consequences if a student teacher and host teacher are unable to build a professional relationship within the classroom. A current teacher reflected on her time during student teaching, "Both the student teacher and host teacher should be open to criticism, but it is hard to communicate criticisms with a person you have just met, unless you can build that trust quickly." Without trust in a professional relationship, the power imbalance that exists can be amplified, making any conversations difficult for a student teacher. The act of expressing new teaching methods can be a daunting task if that trust is not there. Also, host teachers may have a hard time listening to criticisms from a person with no teaching experience based on only their knowledge learned from university courses. In an interview with a former student teacher, it was mentioned, "If there is not trust in the relationship early on, it can feel very one-sided. The directing teacher is trying to give out advice or criticism based on years of classroom experiences, and the student teacher may not feel comfortable accepting criticisms from a directing teacher who always seems to have something negative to say." No one likes to be corrected all the time. Having this trust early on will allow the difficult conversations to be taken constructively instead of offensively.

If a trusting professional relationship is not formed early on or if the student teacher feels more like a burden to the host teacher, the student advisor is there to facilitate a change. A survey respondent wrote, "I do not think the person I was supposed to work with was the most effective mentor, and there should be a better 'screening' process between school site administrations and universities." Unfortunately, sometimes personalities clash. When this researcher read that quote to one student teaching advisor, they gave insight to what their job entails and the unfortunate placements that can happen, "The hope is that host teachers will give [student teachers] ideas, support, and strategies all the way through, which is what we want. That is what we want for everybody. There are some [relationships] that just never clicked. Even when there is a good student teacher and a good directing teacher, they just do not click, which is why we try to have those meetings early; to get that out of the way." The relationship between this host teacher and student teacher could have been fixed early on through open communication. While it sounds easy enough to express difficulty getting along with a host teacher to an advisor, the student teacher can be faced with a mountain of negative thoughts and doubt that prevent that conversation from happening.

Building trust in a relationship between student teachers and host teachers can include making oneself vulnerable by expressing the concerns that both a host teacher and a student teacher have going into the semester. If both are able to trust each other enough to openly express themselves, the expectations are set leading into the semester (no discrepancies). This process can help the host teacher and the student teacher be prepared with the right mindset to teach a classroom full of students.

Planning for your student's success. Planning involved with classroom teaching is not limited to the lessons being taught. Using the students as the topic of conversation can be another way to break the ice of communication. Because different students require different needs within the classroom, a host teacher sharing information about different students can spark innovative teaching methods if the student teacher and host teacher work together. When speaking with a former host teacher, she said, "We [the student teacher and host teacher] were able to come up with an action plan for one of my students who had a mild form of autism. Even after she had left, we continued to use the methods the two of us came up with." This quote is a great example of how working together and planning based on different experiences benefitted the students of the classroom. Just because a student teacher does not have all the experience, does not mean they cannot still contribute to the classroom as a professional.

Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance

There are many ways to prepare for the student teaching semester. Not all of these preparations are limited to any particular person involved in the semester. For a student teacher, exploring the school website could relieve some of the early anxieties of student teaching. For host teachers, student teachers, and student teaching advisors approaching the student teaching semester with a growth mindset and using tools like self-reflection often, the student teacher can learn from their mistakes. Using the same process, the host teacher and student teaching advisor may also learn something new in the classroom.

Look before you leap. While there are many stressors that can be kept in control, the classroom provides external stresses that may not have anything to do with the relationship between student teacher and host teacher. A major stress for incoming student teachers is not

knowing what to expect from the school placement. Student teachers performing a small background check of the school at which they will be teaching can help relieve stress and create a positive mindset. This background check can also prepare an incoming student teacher to decide if the school they have been assigned to is going to fit well with their personality. According to a student teaching advisor, "It is really important to know what the climate of the school is. Check the website, know demographics, any special holidays, how are [students and teachers] dressed, and hopefully they have had a chance to meet with the principal and teacher beforehand." Going into a new atmosphere with a clear idea of the mission statement, or even just having a general idea of the campus's layout and the faculty members can help reduce stress before the student teacher even arrives on campus. By performing self-reflection on what kind of school atmosphere and in what grade the student teacher would like to work, the student teacher can reach out to the student teaching advisor to make adjustments prior to even walking on campus.

Growth mindset on campus. The mindset of the student teacher can be affected by many aspects throughout the student teaching semester. The same can be said for the host teacher. A teacher's mindset can change due to reactions caused by daily classroom randomness, which are out of the hands of the student teacher and host teacher. It is important that the student teacher arrives on campus with an open mind, and that the host teacher remembers what it was like arriving in a classroom for the first time. If both student teacher and host teacher do their best to arrive on campus with a positive attitude every day, the student teaching semester already has a better chance of becoming a great learning opportunity.

Part of growth mindset is being able to adjust and demonstrate flexibility in the classroom. When speaking to a former host teacher, she stated, "If part of a lesson did not go as planned, [the student teacher] would become visibly upset, and they struggled to get the students under control." It takes a lot of practice to become comfortable speaking in front of a classroom. Learning to adjust a lesson when in the middle of teaching is a skillset and a handy tool for teachers.

The feeling of wanting to be a part of the classroom is not limited to the United States. My survey made its way to the United Kingdom where several current teachers shared the experiences of becoming teachers. "My main placement was pretty grim. Staff were negative and condescending, and did very little to help with behavior management (e.g. I sent for the [head of department] to take a student out…and she told me just to move him to a different seat in the future because she did not want me to bother her)," (Anonymous). This teacher shows that a negative mindset can have the same effect on teachers around the world. When leadership brushes off a student teacher, or if the student teacher does not feel supported, the semester in the classroom is not as productive for the learning process. The classroom students recognize that disharmony, and may lose motivation to learn from that instructor. This in turn can remove the student teacher's voice within the classroom as a figure of authority. The relationship does not have to just be between the student teacher and the host teacher. If the principal (or in this case, the head of department) does not support a student teacher, it can lead to a negative mindset moving forward causing an overall negative experience with student teaching. There are many different things that can alter the mindset of an incoming or current student teacher. There are always going to be lessons that do not go as planned, or another

form of a wrench stuck in the gears of the classroom. This is where teachers can use another tool to become more successful.

Self-reflection helps a teacher grow. In order to continue to grow as an educator, self-reflection should be a part of the teaching routine. Lessons will not always go as planned, and teachers must continue teaching. However, when the lesson is over, taking a few minutes to reflect on what went well, what did not go well, and what can be adjusted for the next time can greatly improve the chances of the next lesson being successful. According to an anonymous survey respondent, "I think the most important ingredient is the host teacher's feedback, support, and initiation of ideas to try out." Another stated, "If you do not have a master teacher who will train you, and let you implement what you learn, you will not grow." These two statements suggest that receiving effective feedback, which gives the student teacher an opportunity to self-reflect, and then using that feedback to implement new strategies is a chance to grow as an educator. Taking these steps is important in order to improve the skills needed to be an effective classroom teacher.

What Factors Create a Positive Student Teaching Semester?

There are multiple factors that help create a positive student teaching experience for the student teacher, host teacher, and student teaching advisor? Incoming student teachers shared the same anxieties with each other prior to entering the classroom. The needs of both student teachers and host teachers are similar worldwide. The major themes found were that all the three groups need to collaborate in setting clear expectations, addressing and dismantling the power dynamic, exploring the host teacher's ability to be an effective mentor teacher, and individually preparing for the student teaching semester. All of these aspects

played a factor in the outcome of the student teacher's experience. More importantly, these

aspects had a direct effect on the student teacher's success. If all parties involved are able to

use these themes to work as a team, the student teacher will leave with more knowledge of

what is to be expected, and the tools to be successful when they enter their own classroom.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

There were many similarities between my research findings and those found in my literature review.   The similarities between my research findings and my literature review were the need for positive and honest communication (Joseph, 2004; Yoon & Larkin, 2017; Callahan, 2016). Joseph (2004) stated, "Often seen as a negotiator, the supervisor tries to close the gap between the student teacher's expectations and the realities of the classroom, recognizing that a successful relationship between a student teacher and cooperating teacher requires effective communication," (p.44). The author perfectly sums up how the three parties involved in the student teaching semester (student teaching advisor, student teacher, and host teacher) need to be in constant communication with each other in order to succeed. The article is mainly based around the realities of classroom teaching versus what incoming student teachers are exposed to through university courses.

Another similarity is the acknowledgement that host teachers have a significant impact on the student teacher's experience. Joseph (2004) suggests that the best relationship between host teacher and student teacher is a symbiotic partnership. The importance of being a positive and active mentor are apparent. Peters (2010) suggests, "For the mentees, the availability of acknowledged masters of tap dance as mentors provided them with an unparalleled opportunity for professional development. The expertise the old heads had in using actual performance settings and their presentational skills before live audiences were considerable pluses," (p.442). This quote can directly correlate with the importance of finding a positive mentor while student teaching. Yoon & Larkin (2018) shared a similar idea by saying, "In

meaningful apprenticeships, the relationship is collaborative and mutually beneficial as both

the mentee and mentor bring knowledge to the experience," (p.50). It is agreed that having a

positive mentor host teacher will invite new successes to the student teacher's experience.

My research also coincided with my literature review with respects to the direct effect

the classroom climate has on a student teacher (Joseph, 2004; McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez,

& Granger, 2017; Tygret, 2017). All of the incoming student teachers I interviewed, along with

the former host teachers agreed that working together through positive and open

communication led to a successful student teaching semester. While both the literature review

and several interviewees mentioned the added stress of needing to complete the standardized

tests required to enter student teaching, this was not found to be a key in determining the

outcome of the student teaching semester. However, the formal preparation (university

courses) were found in both to be inaccurate to the realities of classroom teaching (Parks,

2019; Joseph, 2004; Tygret, 2017; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). The school and classroom climate were

found to have an effect on the outcome of the student teacher's mindset (McLean, Abry,

Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017; Roane, 2008).

Implications or the Literature

Based on my findings from the research, it is the role of the host teachers and student

teaching advisors to take on the responsibility of setting clear expectations for the student

teacher through open communication. In order to set these expectations, the host teacher and

student teaching advisor need to invite the student teacher to a meeting prior to the student

teaching semester beginning. At this meeting, the host teacher has the opportunity to address

the power dynamic between themselves and the student teacher. This process is critical to the

success of the student teaching semester. The host teacher's job in this meeting is to allow the

student teacher to feel comfortable and welcomed into the classroom and school community.

A host teacher needs to act as a mentor for the student teacher. All three parties must prepare

for the student teaching semester, however. The student teacher must come into the

classroom with an open mind ready to learn from a veteran teacher. They must also get to

know the school environment prior to this meeting in case they have any clarifying questions

for the host teacher. The student teaching advisor must be ready to facilitate meetings

between the host and student teachers. The introduction of new host teacher training has the

potential to acknowledge the power dynamic issue, and teach future host teachers how to

distribute power in the classroom to help the student teaching semester end successfully for

both themselves and their student teacher.

What made my study unique is that there have not been many studies on what actually

helps dismantle the power dynamic leading to a positive student teaching experience.

Specifically, the power dynamic stood out as being the most influential aspect in determining

the positive or negative outcome during the student teaching semester. Peters (2010) stated,

"Only in such an atmosphere, characterized by freedom from cutthroat competition, intense,

scrutiny, and severe criticism, could most fledgling dancers thrive. The youngest fledgling

dancer vividly describes how, within this participatory, non-competitive atmosphere, he was

introduced to improvisation," (p. 443). While her article was referring to the older generation of

tap dancers becoming mentors to the younger generation, this same mentality works for host

teachers and student teachers. This dynamic needs to be addressed by the host teacher prior to

the semester starting. Student teachers around the world explained their difficulties with host

teachers or other school faculty members. These interactions had a direct effect on the student teachers. If the host teacher entered the student teaching semester with the goal of becoming a positive mentor, the semester ended in success. It's through communication that we are able to reform how we address and enter student teaching. Interviews with incoming student teachers suggested they feel nervous about entering the classroom because of the power dynamic that exists between themselves and their respective host teachers, and the lack of experience working with students. This is where the communication at the informal meeting prior to entering the classroom can help a student teacher feel more confident moving into the semester.

Following the power dynamic, incoming student teachers suggested unclear expectations and feelings of being unprepared from university courses were also factors that led to a successful student teaching semester. Unclear expectations were a major concern for incoming student teachers along with former student teachers. These feelings of insecurity tied in with feeling unprepared from all of the university courses required, led student teachers feeling less than confident going into the semester. Communication is important for every relationship in life. Teaching is no different. Communicating expectations prior to the student teaching semester will clear up any confusion as to what all parties expect to gain from the experience. Currently, according to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, "The CSTP are intended to provide a common language and a vision of the scope and complexity of the profession by which all teachers can define and develop their practice," (p.1). However, the standards that need to be met through university courses and standardized tests have left incoming student teachers unprepared for live classrooms. My research has shown that not all

host teachers speak that "common language" to which they refer. Because people are intrinsically different, there cannot be the prospect that every host teacher's classroom will be the same without open communication through informal meetings ahead of the semester.

While university courses can theoretically teach incoming student teachers different techniques when in the classroom, and host teachers can plan informal meetings to discuss goals and expectations for the semester, what cannot be taught or discussed during these informal meetings is how the student teacher will react when placed in front of a live classroom. Teaching students with special needs or English language learners is part of teaching. However, in university courses, there is no real way to demonstrate the difficulties of teaching those students while also teaching the rest of the class. This is where expectations from university professors need to be clear and to the point. What happens if these expectations are brought to a live classroom is the student teacher feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, or just lost. This leads to teachers ending their careers early.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The data from this research suggests that learning communication tools such as a mandatory informal meeting between the three parties who are going to be involved is a critical practice in addressing the power dynamic, setting clear expectations, and creating a safe place for open and honest communication.

Host teachers should be taught how to properly support the student teacher prior to entering the classroom. This would include sensitivity training and different methods of giving out constructive criticisms without shutting down the student teacher. Classroom teachers should also have the chance to learn what student teachers are feeling prior to working directly

with the students. This brings the opportunity to informally meet prior to the student teaching semester. Both the host teacher and the student teacher should come with relevant topics ready to share with each other.

First, student teachers should discuss courses that have been taken and which courses they are currently enrolled in with their host teacher. This will give the host teacher an idea of what kind of courses are being taught in the current teaching programs. They may be different than courses the host teacher took when earning their credentials. Host teachers should be allowed to disclose information regarding the students the student teacher will be teaching during the upcoming semester. If student teachers know that there are several English language learners in the class, the student teacher will have time to research multiple methods of teaching them. Their professors may have covered some techniques in courses, but having the information about their future classroom will help them prepare more for the challenges that might arise. While the relationship built between the student teacher and students is important to maintain, just as important is the relationship between host teacher and student teacher.

The informal meeting will benefit the relationship between the student teacher and student teaching advisor because they will continue communication with each other throughout the semester. The student teaching advisor is there to support the student teacher if there is an issue between them and the host teacher. A student teaching advisor present at the informal meeting will help the student teacher meet the expectations of the host teacher because they will have heard the same thing as the student teacher. That means there is less of a chance of miscommunication or misinterpreting the expectations given by the host teacher

during the semester. This meeting will allow the student teaching advisor to get to know the host teacher as well. This is an important part of the process because ultimately a student teaching advisor can make the decision to remove a student teacher if they do not feel it is a good fit for the student teacher.

Social Benefits of This Research

My findings can contribute to social changes because a better student teaching experience will lead to the development of future mentor teachers. With more student teachers having a successful semester, there will be more student teachers entering teaching with more confidence. The hope is they will ultimately become host teachers and future mentor teachers as well.

The findings emphasize the need for student teachers to research the school they will be at for the semester. By learning more about the culture of the school and students within the school, the relationship between student teacher and students will be stronger. Creating culturally aware student teachers will help them when they have a classroom of their own. By creating culturally aware teachers, the students of the class will be more likely to succeed (Sleeter, 2016; Tygret, 2017).

Learning better communication tools will provide structures that will help relationship building with teachers entering the profession, and with students in the classroom. These communication tools will help teachers who are teaching classrooms with different cultural backgrounds. Learning to share the power, or be a team player, in the classroom will allow students to feel more comfortable because there will be a greater sense of trust built in the

student teacher relationship, particularly for students who come from marginalized communities who are drastically underrepresented in the teaching profession.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study can be seen in my interviewees, my anonymous survey respondents, and in my own bias. The interviewees were all white females ranging from ages 20-67 years old. These women mainly taught or were going to teach at the elementary school level. The student teaching advisor I spoke with had not taught in many years, but she was a current student teaching advisor. I am missing the perspectives of male teachers in and out of the classroom, teachers of color, principals, faculty members who are not directly involved with student teachers, and students who have had a host and student teacher at the same time. Their insights could determine what a positive or negative student teaching experience looks like through their eyes.

My anonymous survey respondents are a limitation because they were all anonymous. While I know 20 people who took the survey, there are 80 people who I do not know. Any of their answers could have been made up or incomplete. There were at least two who had consistent answers that made me think they were not even in the realm teachers. Because they were anonymous, I do not know for sure what kind of teaching experience any of the respondents have had, or in what areas they have taught. One survey answer, though it was eventually a theme in my findings, simply said, "support". Further research is needed to determine what support means to each of the respondents. One person's definition of support may be very different from another.

My own personal bias affected my findings because at first, I was looking for negative student teaching experiences. I wanted to see if my experience was like others, when I should have been researching what went into a positive student teacher experience. My perspective is also through the lens of a white 34-year-old male. Being a white male teaching and interviewing in an affluent area was limiting for my research because the experiences of my peers and interviewees will be different from a more rural or urban teaching environment. What I see as the forefront of the issue behind teachers dropping out will be different than a person with different cultural experiences. My own bias may have limited my interviews because I may have inadvertently caused my interviewees to answer in a way they thought I wanted to hear. By sharing my experience with them throughout the interviews, their attitudes may have shifted to answer questions in a way they otherwise would not have.

Directions for Future Research

Because there is not a formula for creating the best student teaching experience for all three parties involved, the gaps in research are ongoing. Different people will have different student teaching experiences that were good or bad. These subjective views create a gap in knowledge in understanding the perspective of student teachers beyond the white female population. More research is also needed to find out more from educators who are not tied to student teaching (teachers who never took on that role, admin, etc...). The gap in knowledge would shed light on what it is like to work at a school with student teachers who are not directly tied to that student teacher. The outside opinions on why they chose not to be a host teacher could lead to more ways of creating a successful student teaching experience.

Administrators could give insight into their experiences with student teachers at their schools. They might see or hear things that the host teacher missed.

This study should continue for each generation of teachers who choose to take on a student teacher in their classrooms. Every time a new university course is created to better prepare student teachers for a live classroom, or every time a new test is needed to complete the credential program in order to be a classroom teacher, this study should be performed again. Further studies should examine the new challenges student teachers are facing to become classroom teachers. As teaching evolves, so too should teachers. This study will continue to help host teacher and student teachers share a classroom. While each experience in the classroom will be different, the underlying themes I have written about can provide a base for all new discoveries.

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Appendix A: Letter of Approval

DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY *of* **CALIFORNIA**

12/9/2019

James Reid
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear James,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled **Improving The Student Teaching Experience Through Positive Communication** (IRBPHP IRB Application #10820)*.*

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Randall Hall, Ph.D.
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Jennifer Lucko

Appendix B: Interview Questions (Incoming Student Teachers)

My interview with student teachers will be a free-flowing conversation regarding expectations going into a live classroom with a host teacher. The purpose of my research is to explore and improve the experiences of both host teachers and student teachers by examining examples of positive feedback and communication provided to student teachers during student teaching. In order to keep the conversation focused I have a set of questions I would like to be answered during the interview.

1. What made you want to become a teacher?

2. Why did you decide to enroll in the teaching program at [their university]?

3. What has helped prepare you to enter a live classroom the most in your opinion?

4. Have you ever worked with children before?

5. What has been your favorite part of working with children?

6. Do you know any teachers who you have really admired? What qualities did that person have?

7. What are the qualities you want to bring into the classroom for your students?

8. What are the qualities you expect in a host teacher?

9. What are your expectations within the school where you're student teaching?

10. How do you imagine the relationship between yourself and your host teacher?

11. If you are having difficulties or are concerned about some aspect of your student teaching experience, how do you intend to communicate grievances with your host teacher?

12. What is your typical reaction to positive/negative feedback? Can you tell me a story

about your reaction to each?

Appendix C: Interview Questions (Future Host Teacher)

My interview with host teachers will be a free-flowing conversation regarding expectations going into their live classroom with a student teacher. The purpose of my research is to explore and improve the experiences of both host teachers and student teachers by examining examples of positive feedback and communication provided to student teachers by the host teacher during student teaching. In order to keep the conversation focused I have a set of questions I would like to be answered during the interview.

1.What made you want to become a teacher?

2.What made you want to become a host teacher for student teachers?

3.What expectations do you have of your assigned student teacher?

4.Have you been a host teacher before?

5.What helps create a positive atmosphere in your classroom?

6.What are communication techniques do you use with your students when you're critiquing their work?

7.Are you aware of what student teachers are learning in any of the classes in which your student teacher is currently enrolled?

8.Are you open to learning from your student teacher? If yes, how will you create opportunities to learn from your student teacher?

9.What qualities do you look for in your student teacher?

10.How do you intend to provide feedback to your student teacher?

11.What is your typical reaction to receiving positive/negative feedback from your colleagues?

12. Can you describe an experience in which you were able to learn from constructive criticism?

13. How would you support a student teacher who is receiving constructive criticism?

Appendix D: Interview Questions (Current Teacher/Past Student Teachers)

My interview with current teachers will be a free-flowing conversation regarding memories from student teaching, host teaching, or both. The purpose of this interview is to get a subjective point of view from a current teacher on the positive and negative methods of effective communication between host teachers and student teachers. Every teacher interviewed will have gone through the student teaching program, and will have a memory that sticks out in either a positive or negative light. This will help dictate what a positive student teaching experience looks like.

1.Where did you complete your student teaching?

2.What memories do you have with student teaching?

3.Did you and your host teacher get along?

4.What helped make it a positive or negative experience?

5.Did you have regular meetings with your host teacher?

6.How would you define the relationship between you and your host teacher?

7.Did you ever feel uncomfortable in the classroom? If so, why?

8.In what ways do you think the student teaching experience helped you with your first classroom?

9.What tools did you find most useful while working with your host teacher?

a.) How was the feedback given to you?

b.) How did you feel when you received constructive criticism?

c.) How did you respond to receiving constructive criticism?

d.) How could the host teacher have better supported you when providing constructive criticism?

10.If you could give one piece of advice to incoming student teachers, what would it be?

11.If you could give one piece of advice to host teachers, what would it be?

Appendix E: Interview Questions (Current Teachers/Past Host Teacher)

My interview with past host teachers will be a free-flowing conversation regarding memories from hosting student teaching and being a student teacher (if applicable). The purpose of this interview is to get a subjective point of view from a current teacher on the positive and negative methods of effective communication between host teachers and student teachers. Every teacher interviewed will have been a host teacher, and will have a memory that sticks out in either a positive or negative light. This will help dictate what a positive host teaching experience looks like.

1.How long into teaching were you before you decided to take on a student teacher?

2.What memories do you have with your student teacher?

3.Did you and your student teacher get along?

4.What helped make it a positive or negative experience?

5.Did you have regular meetings with your student teacher?

6.How would you define the relationship between you and your student teacher?

7.Did you ever feel uncomfortable in the classroom, or did you have any tense moments while hosting your student teacher? If so, why?

8.In what ways do you think your host teaching experience helped you with in your classroom?

9.What tools did you find most useful while working with your student teacher?

a.) Did you receive any feedback? If so, how was the feedback given to you?

b.) Did you receive any constructive criticism? If so, how did you feel when you received constructive criticism?

c.) How did you respond to receiving constructive criticism?

d.) How could the student teacher have better supported you in the classroom?

10.If you could give one piece of advice to incoming student teachers, what would it be?

11.If you could give one piece of advice to host teachers, what would it be?

Appendix F: Social Media Post & Questions

The social media post and survey will serve as a method of retrieving the experiences from student teachers and host teachers from around the US (and potentially the world). The questions are geared toward finding out the student teaching and/or host teaching experience from an array of educators with the hope that participants will "please elaborate" on their experience in student teaching. These questions will also help to find out how the general educating population feels about the student teaching and host teaching experience. The information gathered can potentially help to create a more positive experience for future student and host teachers.

Social Media Post

Hello members of Student California Teachers Association! I am conducting a research project on how we can improve the student teaching experience with a focus on effective communication between host teachers and student teachers. Participants will be part of a short 10-minute online survey. These can be negative or positive experiences. My hope is to use your information to help inform both student teachers and host teachers what a positive student teaching experience can look like. If you choose to write me your story, your name, your host teacher/student teacher's name, and the name of the school where this took place will not be included in my final write-up. Please feel free to send me a direct message if you have any questions, or if you would like to share your story. Thank you so much for doing what you are doing in the world of education!

Social Media Survey

Your Student Teaching Experience

1. How would you describe your student teaching experience?

- Very positive

- Positive

- Neutral

- Negative

- Very negative

- Please Elaborate:

2. Were you given a chance to experiment with new classroom management techniques or

lesson plans?

- Yes

- No

- Other (please elaborate)

3. What would help create a more positive student teaching experience?

- Classroom Climate

- Host Teacher Collaboration

- Principal Support

- Open Communication

- University Support

- Please Elaborate:

4. How easy was it to get along with the other teachers at your school while student teaching?

- Extremely easy

- Very easy

- Somewhat easy

- Not so easy

- Not at all easy

- Please Elaborate

5. What would you change regarding your student teaching experience if given the

opportunity?

- A great deal

- A lot

- A moderate amount

- A little

- None at all

- Please Elaborate

6. How long have you been teaching in a classroom setting?

- 0-5years

- 6-10 years

- 10+ years

7. With which grade did you student teach?

- K

- 1

- 2

- 3

- 4

- 5

- 6

- 7

- 8

- 9

- 10

- 11

- 12

If multiple grades were taught, please elaborate:

8. Would you like to share any more information regarding your student teaching experience?

- Yes

- No

- Other (please elaborate)