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Collaboration of Researchers and Stakeholders: Transforming Educator Preparation

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Abstract

This study contributes to the literature on first year teachers by identifying complexities and struggles of becoming a teacher and the implications of district-university partnerships to strengthen our educator preparation program. The importance of partnerships with stakeholders, memorandum of agreements to share data, observations of first year teachers by university faculty, employer surveys, and the first year teacher's perspectives about how well our university prepared them, as well as how they compare with other first year teachers nationally is addressed. Multiple sources of data were used to provide information about completers, individuals that graduated from the educator preparation program. These include state reports, national trends, and review of survey results next to universities across the United States involved in teacher preparation. Graduates of our teacher preparation program have a 93% retention rate after five years of teaching. The national average is 50% after five years.

Keywords: completers, teacher preparation program graduates, first year teachers, data-sharing, district-university partnerships

1. Introduction

A large university in south Texas opened its doors Fall 2015 as the first major public university of the 21st century in the state of Texas. It was created by bringing together two universities that previously existed in south Texas.

As a member of Deans for Impact and utilizing a suite of surveys through their Common Indicator System, the College of Education and P-16 Integration established a baseline of data for this longitudinal three-year study. Key leaders and faculty in the college agreed that it was necessary to follow graduates of our teacher preparation program to receive feedback on their effectiveness as first year teachers and their impact on student learning in order to use that feedback to inform decision-making and improvement efforts at the program level. A meeting with superintendents of surrounding school districts was held to invite them to partner with the college in these efforts. Five school districts agreed to participate in data sharing processes.

Simultaneously, a proposal to conduct a case study of our "completers", (students who graduated from our educator preparation program and are now employed as first year teachers) was developed and submitted to the Institutional Review Board and approved. The purpose of the case study was to collect data to support our CAEP accreditation self-study and demonstrate, based on evidence, the quality of our graduates entering the teaching profession. Areas to be examined included student learning and development, indicators of teaching effectiveness, satisfaction of employers, and satisfaction of completers (CAEP Handbook, 2019). Graduates of the program employed in the school districts that agreed to participate in the data sharing process were invited to participate in the Case Study.

The College of Education and P-16 Integration is a member of the Deans for Impact Common Indicator System (CIS) Network and was involved in the selection of a suite of valid and reliable instruments that make up the CIS. All universities represented agreed to use the same instruments. The CIS includes CLASS for clinical teaching observations, the Teaching Beliefs and Mindsets Survey, which is administered to teacher candidates during the teacher preparation program, the Beginning Teacher Survey, and the Employer Survey. These last two surveys are administered to first year teachers who are graduates of the participating programs and their principals. Participating

institutions can use all instruments or some of the instruments. In year one, 2017-2018, of our participation we chose to use the *Beginning Teacher Survey* and the *Teaching Beliefs and Mindsets Survey*. During the second year, 2018-2019, in alignment with the desire to further explore our completers' effectiveness and impact we added the *Employers Survey*.

In addition, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) requires that all principals of first year teachers complete a Principal Survey at the end of the teachers' first year of teaching. The TEA also began to administer a Teacher Survey to first year teachers in the Spring of 2019. The results of the Principal and Teacher Surveys are then shared with the educator preparation programs.

This paper describes the results of multiple measures used during the first two years of the study to assess the effectiveness and satisfaction of first year teachers who graduated from our teacher preparation program.

2. Review of the Literature

Case studies on early career teachers' practices and experiences can contribute to understand... novice teachers' needs in terms of support systems and teacher preparation which might ultimately benefit students' outcomes (Osterling & Webb, 2009; Snyder, 2012). According to Gourneau (2014) it is well known that the first years of teaching are a challenge for all beginning teachers.

After leaving the role of being undergraduate students and taking on the role of teachers, they soon become overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the curricula, diverse students, behaviors, feelings of a lack of support, and other school duties. These challenges and frustrations are an aspect of beginning teacher experience that is consistently featured in the literature (Fry & Anderson, 2011).

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's study (2010) first year attrition has been steadily increasing since 1994. They reported that the beginning teachers leave the profession even before they are proficient educators who know how to work with colleagues to improve student learning. The immense expense of this departure is a concern to the future of the nation's school districts (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2010).

In a study by Dupriez, Delvaux, and Lothaire (2015) there is abundant data in the international literature showing that a large proportion of beginning teachers leave the profession after a few months or a few years of work experience (Ingersoll, 2002; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Sass et al., 2012; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). According to Ingersoll (2002), for example, 11% of US teachers leave the profession during the first year and 39% over the first five years. These studies have also attempted to identify characteristics of the teachers and their workplaces that can be associated with a risk of an early exit from the profession. Such research often singles out the following factors: the teachers' socio-demographic features, their preparation and the specific features of their work environment.

In Zhang & Zeller (2016) point out that teacher retention is important because teacher turnover creates instability and costs and negatively impacts teaching quality—especially in schools that most need stability. During an interview in 2013, professor and researcher Richard Ingersoll stated that anywhere between 40% and 50% of teachers will leave the classroom within their first 5 years. This percentage includes the 9.5% who leave before the end of their first year (Riggs, 2013).

Muller, Gorrow, and Fiala found that early 50 percent of America's beginning-teachers exit the profession within their first five years, while 17% do not complete their first full year of teaching (Wong, 2004). Considering that beginning-teacher attrition has increased by more than 40% over the past 16 years, coupled with an unparalleled wave of imminent retirements, Carroll and Foster (2010) conclude that traditional hiring practices no longer meet staffing challenges. Simply placing inexperienced teachers where openings exist with modest attention to challenging environments, making a good match, or offering necessary support can lead to burn-out which ultimately fuels the teacher turnover rate.

In addition to beginning-teacher turnover, retirement eligibility is looming for approximately one third of the nation's teaching force (Levine and Haselkorn, 2008) and veteran teachers exit for reasons other than retirement (Ingersoll, 2003). Beginning-teacher attrition and normal retirements accounted for the loss of 2.7 million teachers between 1995 and 2005 (Carroll, 2007). In addition to the negative effects of teacher attrition on student achievement, such high turnover rates create a major financial impact to local districts bearing an estimated cost of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per teacher (Levine and Haselkorn, 2008).

The National Education Association (2007) reports the number of beginning teachers leaving the profession is still increasing. One out of every two, close to 50% leave the profession during their first five years of teaching with at least 30% of new teachers leaving by the end of their first year and even more within three years (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 13). Darling-Hammond (2003) also states that teachers who lack adequate initial preparation are more likely to leave the profession than are those teachers with adequate preparation.

Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are constructed over a lifetime of experiences in classrooms. One nine-year longitudinal study found that new teachers initially believed that students were like themselves, that students in the same grade have similar abilities, that teaching is simple, and that teachers function autonomously. Nine years later, they believed that students differ from one another and from themselves, that differentiating instruction is essential but difficult, that teaching is complex, and that teaching is often constrained by outside factors (Wall, 2018).

3. Methods

This longitudinal three-3-year study is guided by the following questions, which are grouped in three categories:

Teaching Effectiveness:

RQ 1. What challenges do novice teachers grapple with during the first year of teaching?

RQ 2. What do faculty observations demonstrate about novice teachers' understanding of learning to teach?

Satisfaction of Employers:

RQ 3. How satisfied are employers that hire our educator preparation program graduates?

RQ 4: How do the principals rate the novice teachers on state formal evaluations?

Satisfaction of Completers:

RQ 5. How satisfied are completers with the preparation they received in our program?

RQ 6. How do our first-year teachers compare with first year teachers nationally and state-wide?

3.1 Data Sources

The following data sources were used to answer the research questions:

3.1.1 Teaching Effectiveness

- Formal annual teacher evaluations of case study participants for the academic year (2018-2019)
- school districts participating in the case study use the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) as the appraisal tool. One participating school district uses the McREL teacher evaluation program.
- Faculty conducted classroom observations of case study participants' instruction using the T-TESS, which was also used to evaluate their performance as teacher candidates during their clinical teaching semester.

3.1.2 Data on Satisfaction of Employers

- The college administered the Deans for Impact Employer Survey to the principals of first year teachers who completed the Beginning Teacher Survey. The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete and is administered electronically.
- The Texas Education Agency administered a Principal Survey to the principals of first year teachers who graduated from our program and shared the results with the educator preparation program. The survey assesses the performance of new teachers and is administered electronically.

3.1.3 Data on Satisfaction of Completers

- The college administered the Deans for Impact Beginning Teacher Survey to all program completers from Fall 2015 to date. The survey takes about 20 minutes to complete and is administered electronically.
- The Texas Education Agency administered a survey to all new teachers at the end of the first year of teaching to provide feedback on the quality of preparation they received from their teacher preparation program. The survey is administered electronically.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study are first year teachers who graduated from our teacher preparation program. The population for this study consisted of teacher preparation program completers from Fall 2015 through the Spring 2019

semesters. Participants were contacted via email using the database of completers kept by the Office of Educator Preparation and Accountability. A total 743 completers were invited to complete the CIS Beginning Teacher Survey in 2017-2018 and 517 in 2018-2019, of whom 117 and 110 voluntarily chose to participate. At the end of the survey, 27 participants voluntarily provided their principal contact information. The CIS Employer Survey was sent to those principals, and 14 responded to the survey.

The Texas Education Agency administers the Principal Survey to all principals of first year teachers in the state. Results from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 are included in the study. The Ns for these years are 256 and 215, respectively. The Texas Education Agency started to administer the First-Year Teacher Survey in the Spring of 2019. The respondents for the 2018-2019 academic year are 41.

A convenience sample of completers was invited to participate in the Case Study. The convenience sample was drawn from the school districts whose superintendents agreed to engage in data sharing with our college. In collaboration with each school district, first-year teachers who graduated from our teacher preparation program were identified and invited to voluntarily participate in the Case Study. A total of 20 participants were part of the Case Study in 2018-2019. These participants voluntarily shared their teaching appraisals and were observed at least once by a college of education faculty member.

3.3 Data Analysis

For quantitative analysis, the researchers checked and rechecked the responses and data to ensure the data was clean. Researchers used Microsoft Word and Excel, to analyze close-ended responses. Where appropriate, novice teachers were compared to novice teachers across the nation and state based on survey results from the Deans for Impact Common Indicator System and from the Texas Education Agency. Data collection is on-going. Information about 2019-2020 will be available in August 2020 and included in future research.

For qualitative analysis, completers' comments were analyzed based on the open-ended questions they replied to in the survey. Researchers looked for patterns and trends vis-à-vis the research questions and theoretical frameworks. Researchers used the grounded theory method of data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Themes were collapsed when they related to larger themes. The researchers met to discuss our individually created themes and to establish inter-rater reliability.

3.4 Other Methodological Considerations

A pseudonym was assigned to case study participant/s to support confidentiality of the participant's responses. A coding system was used to link data to the participants. To further support confidentiality, the key to the coding system was stored separately from the data in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office. Only the research team members and the research assistant have access to the data.

Digital data was stored in the principal investigator's computer that is double password protected. Consent forms and hard copies of the data are stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office. Data will be stored for a minimum of three years. The PI will destroy all research related data by deleting files from her computer and shredding any paper documents. Information gained will assist the faculty of the college in making improvements to our educator preparation program.

4. Findings

The results for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 are included, year three data, 2019-2020, will be available to us in August 2020 and will be included in next year's update of this study.

4.1 Teaching Effectiveness: T-TESS Faculty and Principals

The T-TESS was designed by the Texas Education Agency in correlation with the Texas Teacher Standards (Texas Admin Code, Chapter 149). The T-TESS is a proprietary instrument. These results correspond to 2018-2019. Although not statistically significant, results seem to indicate a tendency in faculty to rate novice teachers' performance lower than campus leaders. Factors such as familiarity with teacher performance could influence rating. Principals have more opportunities to observe each teacher both formally and informally and produce a more informed rating than faculty who visited each teacher during one or two opportunities. The only T-TESS domain consistently observed by all faculty and principals is *instruction*. This domain includes five dimensions:

- The teacher supports all learners in their pursuit of high levels of academic and social-emotional success.
- The teacher uses content and pedagogical expertise to design and execute lessons aligned with state standards, related

content and student needs.

- The teacher clearly and accurately communicates to support persistence, deeper learning and effective effort.
- The teacher differentiates instruction, aligning methods and techniques to diverse student needs.
- The teacher formally and informally collects, analyzes and uses student progress data and makes needed lesson adjustments.

Table 1. Satisfaction of Employers: CIS Employer Survey and TEA Principal Survey

These results correspond to 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. A three point scale is used.

EPP Name	Overall Score	Instr.	Lrng. Eviron.	Planning	Prof. Prac. & Resp.	Students & with Disabilities	Eng. Lang. Lrners.	Respondents
So TX Lg Univ	2.25	2.24	2.23	2.25	2.46	1.98	2.28	41
State	2.3	2.28	2.43	2.26	2.46	2.13	2.21	4940

CIS Employer Survey Section 1: Background. Administrators who completed the survey about our first-year teachers indicated 100% that they believed that it is possible for new teachers to positively impact student learning from their first day in the classroom. Only 67% of the CIS group of institutions indicated that they believed that it is possible for new teachers to positively impact student learning from their first day in the classroom. Administrator perceptions of our teacher education graduates are rated more likely to be able to positively impact student learning from the first day than 2/3 should we use a percentage here to match the statement above? 75%? of the CIS Network.

Eighty-six percent of administrators of UTRGV first-year teacher graduates reported that they interacted with the new teachers at a moderate to extensive level. Eighty-one percent of the CIS group of administrators indicated they had moderate to extensive interaction. Schools in which our new graduates are employed provide moderate to extensive interactions with administrators.

Seventy-two percent of administrators of UTRGV new teachers indicated that the new teachers were fully or mostly ready to meet the needs of students in their schools. Seventy-six percent of the CIS administrator group indicated new teachers were fully or mostly ready to meet the needs of students in their schools. UTRGV new teacher graduates are approximately equal in preparation to meet the needs of students in their school as with the CIS administrator group.

CIS Employer Survey Section 2: New Hire Feedback. More UTRGV new teachers are at the top 25% when implementing well-structured lessons than the new teachers in the CIS Network. More UTRGV new teachers are rated average (typical) than CIS Network teachers when meeting the needs of English Language Learners and students with special needs. This can be explained by noting that UTRGV teacher education graduates receive extensive preparation for meeting the needs of ELLs which has become a common expectation in school districts in our region. UTRGV new teachers are willing to take academic risks and are at the top 25% when enforcing high expectations and use reflection to improve practice.

TEA Principal Survey. Using the *TEA Principal Survey* and comparing the results of UTRGV Educator Preparation Program to the State Standards, our EPP scored much higher than the state standard in the percentages of First Year Teachers designated as sufficiently or well prepared in 2017-2018. The number of graduates was 256.

4.2 Satisfaction of Completers: CIS Beginning Teacher Survey and TEA Teacher Survey

Extensive data are available for the CIS Beginning Teacher Survey, but due to limited space only the summary scale scores are shared here for 2017-2018 in Table 1 from the *Beginning Teacher Survey*, and Table 2 for 2018-2019 *Beginning Teacher Survey*. Table 3 provides information for the *Beginning Teacher Survey* 2017-2018 and Table 4 shows *Beginning Teacher Survey* results for 2018-2019.

Results of the *Beginning Teacher Survey* for 2017-2018 are as follows in Table 2. These results are based on responses from completers, defined as those who graduated from the Educator Preparation Program and are currently employed as classroom teachers.

Table 2. Beginning Teacher Survey Results 2017-2018

Summary Scale Scores	Educator Prep Program					CIS Network (17 institutions)				
	Sample Size	Average	Min	Max	St. Dev.	Sample Size	Average	Min	Max	Std.Dev.
Quality of Tchr Prep 1-5, low-high	90	4	2	5	0.658	191	3.9	2	5	0.658
Opportunity to learn 1-5 Less-more	85	3.4	1.4	5	0.773	183	3.4	1.4	5	0.718

The UTRGV results are very similar to the CIS Network (17 institutions) results. Individualized items within the survey demonstrate greater differences. For example: Sec. 2-Part 1: Teacher Preparation Quality item “i” states “Teach in ways that support students with diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.” Forty-one percent of South Texas first year teachers responded that the educator preparation program prepared them very well, whereas 31% of the CIS respondents indicated they were very well prepared.

Table 3. Beginning Teacher Survey Results 2018-2019

Summary Scale Scores	Educator Prep Program					CIS Network (17 institutions)				
	Sample Size	Average	Min	Max	St. Dev.	Sample Size	Average	Min	Max	Std.Dev.
Quality of Tchr Prep 1-5, low-high	78	4	2.2	5	0.712	323	3.9	1.9	5	0.673
Opportunity to learn 1-5, Less-more	82	3.5	1.2	5	0.734	205	3.4	1.3	5	0.619

Table 4. Beginning Teacher Survey 2017-2018

	Educator Preparation Program			CIS Network (17 institutions)		
	Sample Size	Yes	No	Sample Size	Yes	No
Prior to attending a teacher preparation program at UTRGV, had you ever worked as a classroom assistant or substitute teacher?	104	100%	0	219	61%	39%

The completers from the south Texas program indicated that 100% of them had worked as an assistant or substitute teacher prior to attending a teacher preparation program versus only 61% of the CIS Network participants. A substitute teacher training certificate is available to high school students in this region. This may not be available in other parts of the country.

5. Discussion

The Texas data on Teacher Effectiveness is positive. Our completers are performing above expectations on all measures aligned with impact on student learning demonstrated within the T-TESS results from principals and professors observing completers.

On the *TEA Principal Survey*, Principals rate First-Year Teachers in six different categories: 1) Classroom Environment, 2) Instruction, 3) Students with Disabilities, 4) English Language Learners, 5) Technology Integration and 6) Use Technology with Data. In the 2017-2018 academic year, our EPP program percentages in all six categories of First Year Teachers Designated as Sufficiently or Well Prepared when compared to all the EPPs in Texas were higher in all categories. Principals' perceptions of first-year teachers show that principals rated 100% of first-year teachers as well-prepared or adequately prepared for their first year of teaching, well above the state average of 74%. Principals surveyed also rated 100% of UTRGV first year teachers as “well prepared” or “adequately prepared” in each of these areas: preparation to teach students with disabilities, preparation to teach English Language Learners, preparation to integrate technology into teaching, and use of technology to collect, manage and analyze data. Again, these ratings are

well above the state averages between 80% and 90%.

According to the CIS Employer Survey, more of our new teachers are at the top 25% when implementing well-structured lessons than the new teachers in the CIS Network. More of our new teachers are rated average (typical) than CIS Network teachers when meeting the needs of English Language Learners and students with special needs. This can be explained by noting that UTRGV teacher education graduates receive extensive preparation for meeting the needs of ELLs which has become a common expectation in school districts in our region.

Regarding the completer's confidence to implement various teaching practices, the percentage of our completers was overall at or slightly above the percentage of the Network's completers' percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements. Our completers are confident in their ability to set challenging goals, plan and align instruction with standards. Also, they are confident in their ability to relate lessons to students' backgrounds and interests, establish positive and supportive relationships where there is mutual respect, differentiate instruction, provide useful feedback, help students to think critically, and assess student knowledge. More work could be done to improve their confidence to maintain discipline and an orderly environment.

Experience as a substitute teacher may provide experiences in the classroom so that those entering the profession have a better idea of expectations and challenges. This will need to be further developed in future studies. Another factor to further explore is the socioeconomic status differences. Teaching is a respected career in south Texas and is considered a good paying position with excellent benefits.

6. Conclusion

The data gathered from multiple sources support our belief that program completers (a) are effective beginning teachers, (b) are hired by employers who are satisfied with completers' preparation, and (c) are, themselves, satisfied by the preparation they received. With the new accreditation expectations for data on completer impact, combined with its national focus, the faculty recognized the complexity of its context and initiated a preliminary review of the status of P-12 growth data.

Our university is one of the largest Hispanic serving institutions in the nation, and produces the largest number of teachers in The University of Texas System. We graduate approximately 400 certified teachers per year, most of whom are Latinx. Students completing the EPP are certified by the State of Texas when they leave the university, having taken and passed examinations in both their content areas as well as their Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities examination. State report cards on educator preparation are particularly important for an institution such as ours. Working with the *Deans for Impact* and the *Common Indicator System* includes us in the national landscape. It is a much-needed way to be able to see how our students and programs look next to other institutions across the nation using the exact same instruments and completed on a similar timeline.

Our university has been in existence as a new institution for only five years. It has been a challenge to meld two very different higher education cultures into one. The common thread of doing what is best for our students is what has brought us together. The data support that we are putting in place solid programs that result in well prepared new teachers. We have worked to establish relationships with stakeholders as our partners and are beginning to see the positive impact of these efforts. Continuous improvement is now the expectation we embrace to move forward.

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