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An Analysis of Novice Teachers' Perceptions Regarding their Teacher Preparation Program,  
Professional Support, and the Purpose of School

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Maria Veronica Paz Tagle

May 2019

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Dr. Virginia Foley, Chair

Dr. John Boyd

Dr. Hal Knight

Dr. Ryan Nivens

Keywords: teachers' perceptions, teacher preparation programs, purpose of school, school  
expectations, school support, novice teachers

## ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Novice Teachers' Perceptions Regarding their Teacher Preparation Program,  
Professional Support, and the Purpose of School

by

María Verónica Paz Tagle

The purpose of this study was to identify existing relationships between the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their teacher preparation programs, the support given to teachers from their schools, and the purpose of school. The study took place in Northeast Tennessee. Seventeen teachers from three different school systems participated in individual qualitative interviews, which lasted about one hour each.

The finding corroborated the theory analyzed for this study and revealed areas for improvement in all levels of the education system. Teachers suggested meaningful changes to teacher preparation programs, including changes to general prerequisites and reorganizing education programs around meaningful field experience connected with adequate theory. Teachers suggested school districts to refine some programs they already have in place and improve their support. When prompted about the purpose of school, most teachers found a lack of connection between the expectations of school from state level and the purpose of school. The suggestions given by teachers matched the suggestions given by research regarding what needs to change to achieve the purpose of school.

## DEDICATION

To God,

Thank you for this learning opportunity. This work represents my learning path in the United States. May the information included in this dissertation guide stakeholders to promote an equitable and fair education system. Let this information remind the public that without proper teachers, there will not be proper doctors, lawyers, or presidents. The learning journey begins with the Kindergarten teacher, and every single teacher that will either encourage or discourage students. May this research help change traditions and support professional educators to work and advocate for the achievement of the purpose of school.

To my husband Pablo,

Thank you for your constant support! This educational journey was because of you, and it has been a privilege to enjoy it with you. I thank God for having you in my path. Thank you for your support, patience and guidance. I love you!

To Santiago and Daniela,

This dissertation is for you! May the example of perseverance and hard work guide you to fulfill your dreams. Thank you for your sacrifice of not spending time with me. Thank you for your patience, comprehension, support, prayers, and encouragement! You are my daily inspiration. I love you two very much!

To my parents,

Gracias por el apoyo constante, por estar siempre listos a ayudar cuando les he necesitado, por enseñarme que el esfuerzo es lo que importa y que uno tiene que ser lo mejor que puede en lo que hace. Me siento bendecida por tenerles como padres. ¡Les quiero!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Schooling and education in the United States have been a matter of public debate since the 1830s (Spring, 2011). Even though the purpose of education was mostly the same for all stakeholders (Mehta, Schwartz, & Hess, 2012), opposite approaches have been proposed as a path for education. However, throughout the years there has not been any consensus (Cochran-Smith, Villegas, Abrams, Chavez-Moreno, Mills, & Stern, 2015; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). Therefore, the U.S. has failed to create a coherent and systematic approach to teacher education, teaching as a profession, and educational leadership (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Ravitich, 2010). One of the problems that hindered the creation of an educational system was the reactive approach taken by policymakers when enforcing educational reforms spurred by special events like the launching of the Sputnik I or The Nation at Risk Report (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Spring, 2011).

The Common School Movement in the 1830s, the National Defense Education Act in 1958 by President Eisenhower (Spring, 2011), the Johnson Administration in the 1960s (Kantor & Lowe, 2016), and the Nixon Administration in the 1970s (Spring, 2011) promoted, in different ways, that education should improve social problems. In 1966, the Coleman Report results helped inform educators about student success and clarified that the socioeconomic level of students would either help or hinder the achievement of the students in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010b). Soon after this report was issued, policymakers gave educators responsibility for educational improvement (Horn & Wilburn, 2013). Strategically, such reforms had given school districts the responsibility of solving social and economic problems (Price, 2014; Ravitich, 2013; Spring, 2011); thus assigning teachers not only the responsibility of educating

the young but also of equalizing society and promoting future economic growth (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Kantor & Lowe, 2016).

By the 1980s, the Reagan administration shared the results of “A Nation at Risk” report, generated without the participation or involvement of educators (Glover, 2013). This report promoted the idea that school graduates were unable to sustain the economy (Chung & Kim, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Price, 2014; Spring, 2011; Ravitich 2013). It also promoted the idea that teachers were unprepared, used an unsound curriculum, and worked with inadequate programs (Vasquez Heilig, Young, & Williams, 2012). Consequently, teachers were entrusted not only the educating the youth and solving social problems, but also sustaining the nation’s economy (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Policymakers felt motivated to promote reforms driven by the market, thus giving birth to the standards and accountability movement (Chung & Kim, 2010). This movement strengthened the change from evaluating the inputs of education related to teacher salaries, student expenditure, and demographics, to measuring outcomes by standardized testing (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Mehta et al., 2012). Since then, and during the last 30 years, every single reform included cosmetic changes to the market-based idea, promoting no substantial variations to education (Kantor & Lowe, 2016; Mehta et al., 2012) but increasing requirements and accountability to educators (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Price, 2014; Ravitich, 2013; Sahlberg, 2010).

According to Horn and Wilburn (2013), market-based reforms were systems that carefully kept the status quo and power structures. Policymakers considered the education system as dysfunctional (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013), and established reforms for public schools to behave like private corporations and free markets (Trujillo & Renée, 2015) with the intent of improving the educational system. Reformers replicated structures of defective accountability

systems (Adams, Heywood, Rothstein, & Koretz, 2009), promoted individualism (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013), and competition in terms of school choice, charter schools, and vouchers (Mehta et al., 2012; Mungal, 2012; Ravitich, 2010, 2013). Policymakers proposed to award merit pay or economic rewards according to accomplishments (Adams et al., 2009; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2010; Ravitich, 2013), and sanctions to teachers and schools that did not achieve their goals, to the point of turning schools around or closing them (Trujillo & Renée, 2015). Market-based reformers suggested deregulating teacher education and teaching programs with the intent of bringing competition regarding the selection of teachers entering the workforce (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Mungal, 2012; Russakoff, 2015). Additionally, these reformers promoted the idea of providing individuals with alternative teaching certifications and fast routes for teaching without adequate preparation (Amrein-Beardsley, Barnett, & Ganesh, 2013; Kirylo & McNulty, 2011). Government officials disregarded research and, in some subjects like mathematics, dictated what and how to teach it (Boaler, 2008). Reformers emphasized that success means to attain high grades in standardized tests (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Mehta et al., 2012) narrowing success only to tested areas (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Ravitich, 2013; Sahlberg, 2010). They left aside skills that standardize testing could not measure such as the ability to inquire, think differently, or promote innovation (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Ravitich, 2010; Sahlberg, 2010).

In 2002, George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which was inspired by the “Texas miracle.” The center of the law was standardized testing, which also guided teacher and school accountability (Ravitich, 2013; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012); with the mandatory requirement to test basic skills in math and reading once a year beginning in third grade (Ravitich, 2010). The

purpose of the law was to enhance educational quality and to provide equal opportunities for the neediest schools in the nation by assuring them qualified teachers (Meier & Wood, 2004). Equal opportunity meant that every student would be taught with the same curriculum and tested with the same standardized test once each year (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Spring, 2011). The requirement was for each state to tailor standards and tests, which lead researchers to question the connection between the law and school improvement. Raising tests scores and accountability seemed to be what mattered (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2010). Consequently, corruption in school districts increased, promoting administrators cheating, teachers focusing solely on teaching to the test, and school systems using risk management strategies to “stay alive” (Ravitich, 2013; Sahlberg, 2010).

Policymakers disregarded the outcomes of the “Texas Miracle” (Ravitich, 2013; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012), which included the practice of risk management strategies such as asking students to stay home during test days, retaining low-performing students, or labeling students as Special Needs. These actions forced the neediest students “out of schools” (Meier & Wood, 2004, p. 1) and, even though test scores improved, education did not benefit the students that needed it the most. Students learned how to bubble in and take multiple-choice tests (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitich, 2010) but, even though it occasionally raised test scores, those scores did not show what students had learned. Moreover, researchers Kamii (200) and Leatham and Winiecke (2014) clarified that correct answers in standardized mathematical tests did not indicate understanding or mastery of concepts.

Due to the narrow focus of testing requirements, the knowledge that students might have gained from other subjects such as science, history, or art, were undermined or eliminated (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Adams et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2006; Ravitich, 2013, 2010). This



narrowed the experience of school to studying for higher test scores, to the point of preventing special programs and field trips (Meier & Wood, 2004), as well as shortening recess and lunch times (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015). The narrow focus on standardized tests scores ignored desired outcomes such as social-emotional, academic, and civic learning (Coggshall, Bivona, & Reschly, 2012), hindering students the opportunity to think critically or to apply their knowledge in real life situations (Couros, 2015; Ravitich, 2010). Government officials and policymakers ignored the real issues that set schools to fail; they disregarded years of research, which demonstrated that the life of students in their homes and their surroundings influenced achievement at a higher degree than school instruction; furthermore, they gave states the financial responsibility to improve social issues (Meier & Wood, 2004; Russakoff, 2015). As anticipated, the law failed to fulfill its promises (Mehta et al., 2012). Students were far from being proficient by the set date, and as foretold by Meier and Wood (2004), the reform harmed students more than helped them, penalizing the neediest schools. Several cheating scandals came to light after some schools tried to prove themselves successful (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitich, 2010). As these issues continued to occur, companies that provided test preparation materials, tutoring, and testing services, became an important industry (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Meier & Wood, 2004; Price, 2014; Ravitich, 2010; Russakoff, 2015).

In 2009, with the help of philanthropists, the Obama administration created the Race to the Top (RTTT) incentive (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2010), which according to Russakoff (2015) awarded \$4.3 billion to states willing to link teacher and principal evaluations with students' test scores, among other practices (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Mihaly, McCaffrey, Sass, & Lockwood, 2013). The administration blamed teachers and teacher education programs

for the gap in students' outcomes, ignoring the impact of the evident inequality that existed in the education system, and therefore, in student opportunities (Grudnoff et al., 2017). The Obama Administration promoted the idea that teacher education programs were obsolete and inadequate (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017), and proposed to improve teacher preparation programs. Their suggestion was to evaluate the impact of their graduates on their students, by linking the students' required state scores with the teachers and their programs of study (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013).

As explained by the Obama Administration, the purpose of assessing the impact of teacher education programs through standardized test scores of the students their graduates taught was to improve low-performing schools and to increase the effectiveness of teachers and principals (Ballou & Springer, 2015). Nevertheless, neither of these goals had a clear proposal on how to improve education but seemed to have a clear path for evaluation and accountability (Coggshall et al., 2012; G. Henry, Kershaw, Zulli, & Smith, 2012; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitch, 2010). Promoting accountability in public education was a higher priority than working to improve the problems of low-performing schools, such as lack of funding, inequality, and poverty (Price, 2014).

Patronizing educational reforms based on special events rather than on a specific purpose neglected the complexity and long-term goals of an educational system over easy-to-measure isolated areas (Schlechty, 2009). According to Waks (2011), education is a complex system that has a sophisticated interaction between its members. He explained that complex systems are difficult to decipher, prognosticate, or control. These organizations are dynamic, nonlinear, and lack equilibrium, but can adjust to new situations. One of their characteristics is that small changes can yield significant consequences (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grundnoff, & Aitken,

2014) making it essential to understand the system and its mission before making changes to any of its components (Van Geert & Steenbeek, 2014).

Throughout history, the United States has promoted hierarchical structures aiming to control education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Spring, 2011). One of the paths to control complex systems is to undermine the relationship of all the parts of an organization and to focus only on a few areas (Waks, 2011). Market-based reforms put in place since the 1980s focused on accountability and the advancement of the standardized movement, advocating for higher test scores and promoting the belief that higher scores and diplomas would resolve the social and economic problems of society (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Kantor & Lowe, 2016; Ravitich, 2013; Spring, 2011; Sondel, 2013). Critics of market-based ideology understood education as a complex system, and they were aware that focusing on test scores and accountability was not the path to achieve the long-term goals of education (Armstrong, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Glover, 2013; Meier & Wood, 2004; Neill, 2003; Neill, Guisbond, Schaeffer, 2004; Ravitich, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The reform movement began with the idea that students were not being prepared to be productive and successful citizens, which meant a problem for the economic future and safety of the United States (Chung & Kim, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010b; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Price, 2014; Spring, 2011; Ravitich 2013). Reform supporters established high-stakes standardized test scores and teacher accountability as the path to approach the goal of preparing students to be productive and successful citizens. Therefore, during the last 30 years, every mandate has been crafted towards achieving the highest test scores (Kantor & Lowe, 2016; Rose,

2015), but has failed to assess the gap between attaining high scores on standardized tests and what they established should be the purpose of school.

Throughout the income levels, families were noticing the adverse effects of high-stakes testing in their children as they grow (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015). The authors associated these effects with the requirements set by high-stakes testing and the expectation to attend college, which took away a healthy balance between their personal lives and school. They also clarified that such pressure led high school students to experience difficulty finding meaning in their lives, increasing the number of students with depression, severe mental health problems, and suicide attempts. K. Henry, Knight, and Thornberry (2012) explained that there is a high correlation between school disconnection or disengagement and upcoming school dropout followed by drug abuse and crime.

According to the Patel (2018), school shootings with and without casualties have risen to 239 since 2012. Gregory, Wilson, Park, and Jenkins (2018) shared that it is “49 times more likely for an American within the ages of 15-to-24 to die from a gun homicide in the U.S. than in other wealthy countries” (p. 33). Time Editors (2018) informed that drug abuse and the opioid crisis has “become the worst addiction epidemic in U. S. History” (p. 1) killing close to 64,000 people per year. This opioid crisis affects people long before taking their lives away. Vance (2019), an editor for Johnson City Press, shares a two-year study done by an economist at the University of Tennessee (UT). The results from the study validated the idea that opioid prescriptions relate to the drop of people from the workforce. Dr. the Jon Smith, at the University of Tennessee explained, “It not only affects the people who are condemned by addiction, but it has a serious impact on the ability of our economy to produce wealth and make lives better (p. A2).” Besides the opioid crisis, one of the most impactful issues is the fact that about 113 young people commit

suicide every week, making it the number one cause of youth casualties in the U.S. (The Jason Foundation, n.d.).

Reforms based on test scores ignore the needs of students and do not correlate to success during or after school (Meier & Wood, 2004; Rose, 2015). Moreover, they make the experience of schooling less satisfactory. Thus, fail to prepare learners to be responsible, successful and contributing citizens (Armstrong, 2006; Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitich, 2010). These reforms could be the consequence of the social problems that the U.S. currently faces.

Therefore, to improve society, government officials and educators should reassess the purpose of schooling and, as suggested by Wiggins and McTighe (2007), promote a reform that has a clear and meaningful mission, with stakeholders aware of the gap between where the educational system is and where it should be. The authors recommended constructing and continually evaluating every single action, decision, and policy concerning its mission.

Reeves (2006) clarified that, for success to be long-lasting or replicated, leaders must understand the antecedents and purposeful actions that promoted positive results. This view opposes past and current educational policies. For this reason, Abeles and Rubenstein (2015), Couros (2015), Glover (2013), Kallick and Zmuda (2017), Rose (2015), and Schlechty (2011) have advocated for a change in the educational system. They believed that for individuals to be productive and successful citizens in present and future job markets, the educational system needs to move away from rigid standardization and high-stakes testing, and it should consider transforming the experience of schooling into a more significant one.

According to Ell et al. (2017) and Mehta et al. (2012), teachers are the schools' most meaningful influence affecting student learning and can determine whether students are capable of participating in the global economy. Teachers' influence comes after family background and

support from their family environment. Consequently, it is pertinent to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding their teacher preparation programs, their transition from college or university to teaching, and their perception regarding the purpose of school, which is empowering students to become responsible, productive, and successful citizens.

From the teacher perspective, the first year of teaching could be the most challenging and the one that bears the least results regarding student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Plecki, Elfers & Nakamura, 2012). According to Buddin and Zamarro (2009), the improvement of student achievement related to teacher experience. Cochran-Smith (2012) as well as Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), explained that teaching is a profession in which the individual grows with practice and reflection. This growth occurs over time because teachers are also learners and need practice on how to approach their craft. Research also distinguishes teaching as a challenging profession because it happens in a complex system, which means that there are several factors influencing the outcome of students' learning (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grundnoff, & Aitken, 2014; Ell et al., 2017; Glover, 2013). Teachers require adequate preparation and ongoing support to be successful, to continue to grow as professionals, and to stay in the classroom or advance their career as leaders (Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). The preparation of teachers, the support given by school districts in the form of induction or mentoring programs during the first years of teaching, and the environment of the school setting can make the difference between teachers staying in the profession or leaving (Cochran-Smith, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Zembytska, 2016).

For this study, the researcher sought to learn about the perceptions of teachers in grades K-8 regarding their preparation programs, the support given to them by school districts and school administrators during their first years of teaching, and the purpose of school. To do so, the researcher took as a guide the study done by Dillon (2004) about the perceptions of K-5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and their experiences during their first 2 years of teaching, and compared Dillon's results with the perceptions and experiences of teachers 15 years later. The researcher expanded the study by including teachers in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade, with up to 4 years of experience, and incorporating the teachers' perceptions regarding their preparedness and support to promote the purpose of school.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do novice teachers in grades K-8 have in common in terms of experiences and preparation?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding their teacher preparation programs concerning required courses?
3. What are teachers' perceptions about their teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?
4. What do teachers believe colleges and universities can do to make the transition from college to teaching more successful?
5. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding their induction, mentoring, professional development, coaching programs, and feedback provided at their respective schools?
6. How can schools ensure novice teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?
7. What do teachers believe is the purpose of school?

8. What relationship exists between the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their preparation and professional support and the achievement of the purpose of school?

### **Significance of Study**

During the last 30 years, accountability for teachers and schools has consistently increased in the form of scores from high-stakes standardized tests (Rose, 2015). Government officials established as a mandate this strategy as a fair method to evaluate the work done by teachers. In recent years, Abeles and Rubenstein (2015), Couros (2015), Glover (2013), Kallick and Zmuda (2017), Rose (2015), and Schlechty (2011) articulated that although reformers and government officials intended to promote productive and successful citizens, their actions are far from promoting the skills and requirements needed for the life of students outside school.

Teacher preparation programs and school districts should work together to prepare professional educators by equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to become effective teachers that can prepare their students to become responsible, productive and successful citizens. For this reason, the author aimed to share the perceptions of teachers concerning their teacher preparation programs, the support given to them during their first years of working as teachers, and their perceptions regarding the purpose of school. This information might assist school districts, the institutions that provide teacher preparations programs, and government officials, on how to prepare and support teachers to accomplish the purpose of school.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Adaptive Experts:* “Teachers who are prepared for effective lifelong learning that allows them to continue to add to their knowledge and skills.” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 3).



*Curriculum:* “Learning experiences and goals the teacher develops for particular classes – both in her planning and while teaching – in light of the characteristics of students and the teaching context. This conception of curriculum includes the *formal curriculum*, which outlines topics or concepts to be taught; the *enacted curriculum* as it occurs in the activities, materials, and assignments teachers develop and in the interactions that occur between and among teachers and students; and the *hidden curriculum* that tacitly implements the underlying goals and perceptions schools and teachers hold for students individually and as a group.” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 170).

*Development vs. Achievement:* “The word ‘development’ suggests an ongoing process, something that is happening over time. Something that is human is coming into being or being freed. The word ‘achievement’ is quite different. It is not about a process over time but about the *end result*.” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 37).

*Dispositions:* “Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities.” (NCATE 2008, as cited by Nelsen, 2015 p. 86)

*Inquiry as stance:* “Inquiry as stance is a concept developed to emphasize that teacher inquiry is a worldview, a critical habit of mind, and a way of knowing about teaching that carries across the professional continuum and across educational settings.” (Cochran-Smith, 2012, p. 117)

*Logico-mathematical knowledge:* “Logico-mathematical knowledge consists of mental relationships, and the ultimate source of these relationships is in each individual.” (Kamii, 2000, p. 5)

*Morals and values:* “Morals dictate one’s understanding of right from wrong; values help one assess something’s relative importance.” (Bialka, 2016, p. 5)

*Pre-service, In-service, and Induction:* Preservice refers to the education and preparation candidates receive before employment (including clinical training, such as student teaching). In-service development refers to periodic upgrading and additional professional development received on the job, during employment. Theoretically, induction is intended for those who have already completed basic pre-employment education and preparation. These programs are often conceived as a “bridge” from a student of teaching to the teacher of students. Of course, these theoretical distinctions can quickly become blurred in real situations. (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

*Professional Teacher:* “Teacher that is knowledgeable about not only content and pedagogy, but also how to learn from teaching in an ongoing way, how to pose and address new problems and challenges that do not have existing answers.” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 63).

*Purpose of Education:* “The purpose of education is to engage students with their passions and growing sense of purpose, teach them critical skills needed for career and citizenship, and inspire them to do their very best to make their world better” (as cited by Kallick & Zmuda, 2017, p. 2).

*Schools:* “Schools are the institutions that teach our children democratic ideals, enable our children to be successful and productive citizens, and teach them moral and community responsibility” (Ostrander, 2015, p. 273).

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was limited to 17 teachers serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through their 4<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. Teachers were currently working in three different school districts in Northeast Tennessee, two

city districts and one county district, which does not provide enough information to generalize the findings of this study.

### **Chapter Summary**

There is a constant debate in the United States about how to promote an adequate educational system. One prominent point of view is the neoliberal education reform focused on accountability, standardized test scores, alternative teaching routes, and school choice (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). An opposing educational view focused on the development of teaching as a profession, and on the knowledge of society, diversity, and equity (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). According to research Couros (2015), Glover (2013), Meier and Wood, 2004, Ravitich (2010), the government has focused on educational reforms that are easy to assess but fail to embrace the complexity of the educational process. At the same time, there has been an emergence of serious social problems like school shootings, drug abuse, and youth suicide (The Jason Foundation, n.d.; Patel, 2018; Gregory et al., 2018; Reilly, 2018) which, according to research (K. Henry et al., 2012), could be a consequence of the lack of engagement of the youth in schools.

Consequently, Armstrong (2006), Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2015), Mehta et al. (2012) have proposed to create an educational system that promotes fair teaching practices, supports teachers and educational leaders, and respects education as a profession. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions regarding their professional preparation program, the support given to teachers during their first years of teaching, and the purpose of school.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Schools should cultivate the best that each human being has to offer (Armstrong, 2006; Glover, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of education and schooling should be to empower students to become autonomous individuals (Kamii, 2000) who are critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017; Wiggins & McTighe; 2007). Schools should help students develop their strengths as well as their limited talents, hence allowing individuals to contribute to society and to achieve happiness (Schlechty, 2009). It is crucial for schools to promote a culture that cares about relationships, cultivates trust, and nurtures an environment that is open for individuals to take risks. Such culture also shall foster the development of skills such as cognitive ability, leadership, humility, ownership, empathy, collaboration, adaptability, and love for learning. These skills would help students in their lives inside and outside of school (Couros, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Kappan, 2016; Sondel, 2013; Ravitich, 2013). Brown (2008) perceived education and schooling as an environment for students to receive an excellent education, to have solid role models, and feel cared for and loved. For him, as well as for Abeles and Rubenstein (2015), Anderson (2016), Couros (2015), Kallick and Zmuda (2017) significant relationships were a requirement for significant learning to occur.

There have been different suggestions as paths for solving the education and equity problem. One approach that policymakers suggested focused on market-based ideology, grounded in mostly quantitative research, and addressed by out-of-the-field individuals (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Mehta et al., 2012). An opposite approach has been the professionalization agenda proposed by experienced educators, grounded

in mostly qualitative research, and performed by in-the-field individuals (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). Lack of agreement between both sides has cost the United States a comprehensive and coherent system of education (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). However, the gap between low and high-test scores achievers continues to grow, failing to solve the equity problem (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This issue also noticed at the international level, was evident in the results of the TIMSS 2015 test (Mullis, Martin, & Loveless, 2016), and the PISA 2015 tests (OECD, 2018). For this reason, the OECD (2016) gave the U.S. specific suggestions on how to address its equity problem through education.

### **Lessons from Market-Based Education**

Policymakers and government officials expressed that the purpose of schooling was to provide an adequate education for all in order to promote equity and economic growth (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). However, under the constraints of providing adequate funding for public education (Horn & Wilburn, 2013) and addressing the effects of poverty in education (Darling-Hammond, 2010b), policymakers chose to use market-based strategies with the goal of improving schools, and in some cases, fulfilling their personal agendas and economic benefits (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2010). Government officials and policymakers suggested managing schools like private corporations (Mehta et al., 2012; Trujillo & Renée, 2015), using standardized tests as a fair measure for academic achievement (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015), and motivating teachers with monetary incentives to improve test scores. They also suggested consequences to schools or educators lacking compliance to set requirements (Rose, 2015; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Policymakers' intentions and educational discourse focused on performance, innovation, and equity. However, they did not acknowledge research or educators, and by lacking informed

connections to pedagogy or the reality of the students to be served, their proposals included managerial options based on investing the least amount of money and proving successful when getting higher test scores (Moe & Hill, 2012; Sondel, 2013; Ravitich, 2013). Reformers promoted alternative teaching programs with the purpose of deregulating education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). However, Ell (2017) and Sondel (2013) explained that candidates who entered education with the idea of changing social inequities based on reform rhetoric, enforced practices and expectations that perpetuated the status quo, and ended up accepting the idea that accountability would be the problem solver.

Russakoff (2015) described that market reform was set in place to help improve education, but failed to ask educators or communities why education seemed to be in crisis. The reforms set in place for helping students in the neediest schools only promoted teaching to the test (Schlechty, 2009), gaming the system (Ravitich, 2013), and using risk management strategies (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012) to avoid harsh consequences. As a result, the outcomes contradicted their initial intent of providing students in low-performing school the skills needed in the actual world market (Glover, 2013; K. Henry et al., 2012; Sondel, 2013).

In the case of high-performing schools and students with high socioeconomic status, the pressure for performance and the expectations to attend college created a generation of students who could not find the meaning of life, were depressed, and, in several cases, took the option of suicide when attaining low test scores (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015). This type of education made some students realize that being compliant could get them higher grades on tests, but they were lost when finishing school and facing real life (Couros, 2015). Such reliance on standardized testing promoted negative consequences for schools (Sahlberg, 2010) and did not help improve education (Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2010; Rose, 2015).

Reformers saw education as a linear system suggesting that by being proficient in standardized tests, students can finish high school, attend college, graduate, and get a job that increases their economic gains, which promotes social mobility. However, individuals who did not follow this linear path were treated as nonproductive or disposable (Sondel, 2013). Reformers demonstrated their lack of knowledge about educational practices. They disregarded students as human beings, ignored the developmental needs of pupils, and overlooked the importance of adequate educational practices in order to reach the goal of promoting better education practices that in the end provide better citizens and workers to improve the economy (Armstrong, 2006).

### **Teaching as a Profession**

Darling-Hammond (2017), Darling-Hammond & Rothman (2015), Kamii (1989), Mehta et al. (2012), and Ravitich (2013) proposed the creation of a different type of education system, moving away from market-based ideologies and focusing on a coherent and systematic approach to teacher education, teaching as a profession, and educational leadership. When prompted about school quality in the 49<sup>th</sup> annual PDK Poll (Kappan, 2017), the American public agreed with Armstrong's (2006) statement, "the best schools are not necessarily the ones with the highest test scores, but those that seek to develop the best aspects of each human being as he or she grows toward maturity" (p.66).

For parents, teachers and the community, the purpose of school is to give children the opportunity to be happy, enjoy school, be safe, and develop to be positive, knowledgeable, productive, and responsible citizens (Abeles, & Rubenstein, 2015; Cockeran-Smith et al., 2013; Couros, 2015; Glover, 2013; Meier & Wood, 2004; Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2013; Russakoff, 2015; Sondel, 2013). Accordingly, individuals responsible for providing adequate

education to the youth should be the most knowledgeable and well-prepared people in the country. For talented individuals to become teachers and stay in the profession, teaching needs to become a respected profession. Thus, advocacy for future teachers must include financial and professional support (Arbaugh, Ball, Grossman, Heller & Monk, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Kappan, 2018).

If the U.S. aims to improve equity, stakeholders must cooperatively address the real problems behind the achievement gap (Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2013). Thus, the country should consider the OECD (2016) recommendations, respect and apply valid research-based theories and educational practices (Armstrong, 2006), and set up a landmark, a plan, and an evaluation system to make sure the path chosen to reach the goal is working (Ravitich, 2013; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Schlechty (2009) believed that to create a coherent educational system; it is vital to consider education as a social system and to avoid addressing problems only as if it was an operating system. Furthermore, schools, teacher education, and educational leadership work better when approached as learning organizations and not as bureaucracies (Mehta et al., 2012). Ell et al. (2017) suggested approaching education holistically and not in a linear way, because of it being a complex system.

Van Geerk and Steenbeek (2014) described complex systems as challenging to comprehend and to control and explained that it was necessary to simplify complex systems into simplex systems for individuals to recognize each system, reach their mission, and assess the consequences of specific actions. Simplex systems are “clusters of beliefs, knowledge, and practices oriented around how something works” (Ell et al., 2017, p. 4). Individuals working for a complex system may have diverse types of simplex systems molding their understanding and praxis (Van Geert & Steenbeek, 2014). In complex systems, such as education, several areas



interact at different levels (Ell et al., 2017). Consequently, it is essential to understand every area of a system in order to learn and grow. It is also necessary to understand how simplex systems influence complex systems before initiating any changes. Van Geert and Steenbeek (2014) focused on the interaction between educators, researchers, and policymakers as part of a complex educational system and how the knowledge of each one of those simplex systems should address their influence within the complete complex system. The authors explained that researchers assume a causal relationship between a pedagogical intervention and the improvement of instruction, but teachers have a broader view of the classroom environment and the effects of new interventions combined with their requirements and responsibilities.

Teaching is complex and difficult to comprehend by external evaluators. Meaning that mandates might be well-intentioned, but when they focus on part of an educational simplex system without a broader understanding of the complex system, the consequences could harm more than help education (Mehta et al., 2012). Therefore, it is noteworthy, and less expensive, to consider the knowledge from most stakeholders, such as educators and community members, before promoting innovations that might negatively affect the outcomes (Russakoff, 2015).

The purpose of some innovations is to change the components of one simplex system, but due to the interconnections between various simplex systems, there are unpredicted consequences that affect the complex system. Simplex systems of researchers and policymakers could suggest to the teachers the use of specific pedagogical intervention, but teachers are the ones who, following the knowledge and situation of their simplex system, should find a way to fit such innovation as part of their “professional identity” (Van Geert & Steenbeek, 2014, p. 32). Mehta et al. (2012) shared that successful organizations promote:

- (a) The creation of collective targets with stakeholders cooperatively working in the same direction, and including loops of evaluation centered in a combined knowledge base.
- (b) A common language and clearly understood problems, delineating the various elements of a complex system and working cooperatively to achieve the set goal.
- (c) the use of shared norms of inquiry.

The authors promoted the creation of networks of improvement in which teachers would, as professionals, be able to communicate and share their knowledge with policymakers, and avoid top-down mandates that lack educational knowledge.

Schlechty (2009) acknowledged that to create a coherent education system, it was crucial to consider education as a social system. Social systems have people at their core and, to work harmoniously, there needs to be a balanced approach of policies in all areas (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). Due to their dynamic nature, complex systems are adaptive. With the purpose of resolving issues that arise as patterns, complex systems are useful when trying to understand the variability of outcomes in teacher education. Therefore, education systems should consider the curriculum, assessments, and pedagogies as one component of the path to achieving the mission of schooling; and avoid considering only one of those pieces as an evaluation method (Ell et al., 2017).

### **Government Responsibilities**

In the U.S., most states fund schools based on property taxes, therefore they provide the least amount of resources to the schools serving students from low-income families. For this reason, public schools located in poor areas are seen as inadequate or underperforming schools, provide few resources to families in need, and are not able to provide highly-qualified teachers for all students. On the other hand, schools located in affluent neighborhoods get the most

amount of funding, are known as well performing schools, provide students with more services, and can employ mostly high-quality teachers (Ostrander, 2015; Semuels, 2016). Educators suggested government officials should provide not only equitable funding for schools, in all locations, but also to teachers that are equally qualified as the ones serving students from wealthier families (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Jao, 2018; Trujillo & Renée, 2015).

Arbaugh et al. (2015) explained that one of the consequences of market-based reforms was that individuals were shying away from entering teacher education programs. Candidates considered the salaries and the expectation of income increase over time to inform their decision to enter the teaching profession (Bland, Church, & Luo, 2014; Kappan, 2018). Will (2018a) indicated that most states of the U.S. teacher salaries are below the living wages, with several teachers having a second job in order to pay their bills (Reilly, 2018; Will, 2018b). Considering the increasing expectations of the teaching profession, salaries for teachers should be more appealing (Arbaugh et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015).

Working conditions were another factor considered by candidates when deciding to enter and stay in the teaching profession, especially in urban schools (Bland et al., 2014). The requirements of teaching to the test and the lack of autonomy in the classroom hindered individuals from teaching (Arbaugh et al., 2015). Pink (2009) explained that providing autonomy improved intrinsic motivation and helped organizations innovate and improve their practice. Even though teaching seems to be easily accomplished, adequately doing it demands professional knowledge and skill (Arbaugh et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Government officials must shift their expectations, and instead of ensuring compliance to mandates (Mehta et al., 2012), they should comprehend the complexity of both teaching and

preparing teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006), foster respect for the teaching profession, and build a positive approach towards education (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Policymakers and educators should maintain a relationship based on strong partnerships, respect, and compromise in each area of the education system (Mehta et al., 2012).

Considering the influence teachers have on student learning and therefore on the ability to prepare students to participate in the global economy (Ell et al., 2017; Mehta et al., 2012), government officials and policymakers should facilitate and support the advancement and learning of students and educators. They should support an adequate and fair education system for students, by providing students in poverty the same support as students with high socioeconomic status (Mehta et al., 2012). If policymakers chose to help mothers during pregnancy, children's early years of life, and adequate early childhood programs; schools would receive healthier students that are ready to learn (Ravitich, 2013). Policymakers and the government should have the responsibility of providing the funds and spaces for these programs, however, it should be the concern of prepared educators to define what "adequate" means and to operate and lead such programs (Mehta et al., 2012). Ravitich (2013), as well as American citizens interviewed by the 50<sup>th</sup> PDK Poll (Kappan, 2018), responded that schools should provide medical and social services to needy students in addition to summer programs and after-care programs. Ravitich also proposed to eliminate high-stakes standardized testing, to respect teachers' assessment, and to keep public schools public. Thus, finding strategies that help reduce segregation and poverty.

Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2015), Mehta et al. (2012), Ravitich (2013) suggested to work cooperatively with policymakers, leading scholars, and other stakeholders to make decisions based on the use of researched-based practices that focus on student learning and

improving education as a whole, instead of practices aimed only to generate higher test scores (OECD, 2016; Ravitich, 2013). Ravitich (2013) suggested following Finland by using standardized assessments to evaluate the system and its needs and not to judge or reprimand teachers.

In an interview with *The Washington Post* (2016), Pasi Sahlberg, a Finnish educational leader, explained that the sharp fall of PISA 2015 scores in Finland (OECD, 2018) was not a surprise for their educators due to alterations in their education system. He described that those scores reflected the change of students' attitudes such as the amount of time boys spend with electronic devices; the decrease in funding in special education and support personnel; and the immigration of students who lack the knowledge of Finnish language. He clarified that Finland does not focus on getting higher test scores, but rather works towards a more equitable education for its students. Finland's response to lower scores was to make school more interesting, adding interdisciplinary areas like arts and physical activity to improve education, even if that meant reducing time for cognitive areas.

The U.S. is one of the most unequal of all developed countries (Mehta et al., 2012). Thus, the OECD (2016) proposed that the U.S. should promote a more equitable education across their systems, giving teachers the autonomy to choose areas of improvement and avoiding blaming teachers for standardized test scores. This would improve equity with programs promoted by schools and their communities, which are more effective than top-down mandates (OECD, 2016).

### **Educators' Responsibilities**

Ludlow et al. (2017) explained that teacher education is a complex system, therefore, there must to be constant communication, collaboration, and coherence between teacher educator

programs, practitioners, and the expectations from government officials and other stakeholders (Mehta et al., 2012). There should be based on a common language and mission for preparing and certifying teachers (Arbaugh et al., 2015; McDonald, Kazem, & Kavanagh, 2013; Ravitich, 2013).

Teacher education programs should create a set of admission requirements (Ell et al., 2017; Mehta et al., 2012); followed by a set of adequate theories regarding knowledge, skills, dispositions, and teaching exposure to education (Bialka, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; McDonald et al, 2013). They should also include sufficient clinical experiences for candidates to exit the program and begin their work as professional teachers (Arbaugh et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen's, 2010b). Ludlow et al. (2017) explained that teacher learning was a connection of various complex systems and its purpose was to elaborate a “complex explanatory theory based on patterns of interaction within and between levels of system activity” (p. 38).

School districts and school administrators should guide and support new teachers with proven venues to help them adjust to their new role (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chan, 2014; Langdon & Alansari, 2012), and to promote a positive environment to develop and grow as professional teachers (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). Professional teachers must understand their potential as learners and leaders. They must comprehend the education system and its problems, and should be prepared to undertake leadership positions that aim to create social changes through adequate instructional and developmental teaching practices, as well as through policy analysis and enactment (Glover, 2013; Lasso Jijón, 2018).

## **Adequate Teacher Preparation Programs**

University-based programs need support to improve teacher education (Arbaugh et al., 2015). Programs should have adequate admission processes, develop proper content knowledge, and primarily provide knowledge on how to teach while building caring relationships. Due to the complexity of teaching, clinical experience should be well structured and under supervision, including constant constructive feedback (Arbaugh, et al., 2015).

Prosperous countries have set up a curriculum for teacher education and given universities autonomy on how to approach it (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). They have also created procedures for regular curricular evaluations based on teacher information and student evidence (Mehta et al., 2012). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) proposed including inquiry in teacher education programs; thus, aiming to educate teachers as professionals who question, reflect, and research about their teaching methods throughout their careers. The authors shared that several teacher preparation programs “have used inquiry to encourage teacher candidates to engage in critical reflection, develop a questioning stance, understand school culture, construct new curriculum and pedagogy, modify instruction to meet students’ needs and become socialized into teaching by participating in learning communities” (p. 19).

Glover (2013) explained the benefits of creating student cohorts for teacher education, since they are a fertile ground for teacher candidates to join in open inquiry, to learn how to question, and to reflect on the experiences of each individual; thus, creating a familiar and broader interpretation of the group’s experiences or realities. University faculty should not only teach and educate future teachers based on reflection and self-assessment, but faculty should model by practicing it in the same way those future teachers would be expected to apply it (Kelchtermans, Smith, & Vanderlinde, 2017; Maude et al., 2010).

According to Arbaugh et al. (2015), it takes between 3 and 5 years of teaching to become a successful teacher. The short time allotted for teacher education must focus on helping novices learn how to approach their 1st year. Teachers must be ready to use the informed judgment of pedagogical skills and theories to guide their practice. The authors suggested a 5-year undergraduate program, providing novices with four years of theory and school setting practice, plus a 5th, full-year internship. Some excelling programs described by Darling-Hammond (2006) made it a requirement to have education programs that last 5 years.

### **Admissions**

According to Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2015), countries such as Finland respect teachers and the teaching profession as it is one of the most admired professions, with only 25% percent of applicants admitted to an education program. In some countries, the requirements include the aptitudes to excel as teachers, such as creative thinking and interpersonal skills, followed by an interview that evaluates the applicant's commitment to teaching (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). Ell et al. (2017) found that the path taken by teachers was personal and their influence depended on who those teachers were, which means that candidate selection could alter the characteristics of candidates for the profession.

In the U.S. most teacher candidates usually come out from the bottom two-thirds of the distribution of high school graduates (Mehta et al., 2012), with less than 25% coming from the top third of high school students (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). According to Korthagen (2004), other areas for consideration are the candidates' characteristics, "such as enthusiasm, flexibility, and love for children" (p. 79). Therefore, teacher education programs should select candidates based not only on test scores but also on "key attributes that lead to effective teachers" (National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2011, p. 10). It is



also essential to find a way to include a more diversified teacher workforce since there is a connection between diversity and the quality of the profession (Arbaugh et al., 2015). The government could follow the actions taken by developed countries like Finland, in which candidates accepted to education programs have a salary while studying, are provided mostly graduate programs, that are free and well organized, and are provided secure job placement once they finish training (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

### **Dispositions, Inquiry, and Reflection**

Arbaugh et al. (2015) suggested that teacher education should focus on the fundamental knowledge and skills required to be successful. However, Bialka (2016), Korthagen (2010a), and Nelsen (2015) recommended including teachers' dispositions as well. Dispositions were teachers' assumptions combined with their actions while teaching (Bialka, 2016). Habits or dispositions emerge when actions and the environment coalesce in the process of achieving a set goal (Dewey, 1985, 1988, as cited by Nelsen, 2015). Dewey (1985) explained that habits arise as a reaction or behavior to problems we encounter when interacting with the real world; consequently, to solve a problem or situation appropriately, we become motivated to improve our behavior or reactions.

Bialka (2016) illustrated that the importance of positive relationships between teachers and students had a "statistically significant positive effect on student motivation and learning." (p. 15). Therefore, candidates needed to have a deliberate space for reflection and to analyze their environment and assumptions about education, with the purpose to change their beliefs about teaching, learning, and their students. Action that, according to Arbaugh et al. (2015), was necessary due to the background of most teachers in relation to the diverse environment of most students.

When preservice teachers learn to question their actions and beliefs as a habit, their sense of social responsibility for a democratic society improves (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, & Pine, 2009). Bialka (2016) suggested that teacher preparation programs must address teachers' dispositions as the connection between knowledge, skills, and teachers' beliefs regarding the students' learning process. She clarified that teacher education programs provided the only space and opportunity for teachers individually and as a group, to reflect and analyze their newly acquired knowledge, skills, and experience, with their personal beliefs about education.

Dispositions could be malleable or unchangeable depending on the process to develop habits, and how inquiry and reflection were considered (Bialka, 2016; Nelsen, 2015). The more we interact with a specific problem several times, the more opportunities we have to discover a solution. Once we believe our reactions are adequate for solving specific problems, we trust our responses and those habits stop changing. Consequently, we begin to use those strategies without further questioning and keep our dispositions immutable (Nelsen, 2015). According to Nelsen, one of Dewey's goals in education was to develop habits that were elastic and adjustable to every situation; by continually learning from previous experiences, and by providing creative solutions for every problem. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) referred to this process as "adaptive expertise," and explained that developing flexible habits took a longer time than developing rote and efficient competencies. However, on the long run, the process of constant change and adjustment generated innovations. The authors stressed the importance of working in teams, learning from others by assessing performances and continually asking for feedback with the purpose of helping children. When organizing teacher education programs in cohorts, teachers could reflect as a group supporting each other, learning how to work cooperatively, and guiding

candidates to work in professional communities of teachers as learners (Glover, 2013; Korthagen, 2010b).

Addressing dispositions during teacher education programs helped candidates reflect on their beliefs about teaching and learning (Bialka, 2016), and for dispositions to be malleable, inquiry must be at the center of teacher education (Nelsen, 2015). Therefore, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) suggested including inquiry in teacher education programs to help teachers become lifelong learners and to learn, throughout their career, how to question their habits and actions while teaching. When inquiry was the essence of teacher education, it promoted the belief that learning how to teach was a process that takes time, and “how teachers become socialized into teaching and learning is assumed to have a critical influence on their emerging interpretations and practices, their sense of responsibility as educators, and their students’ learning” (p. 19).

Teacher education programs that provided an atmosphere based on an “ethic of care” help candidates’ dispositions progress; hence, giving teaching a moral orientation. In practice, it meant valuing student opinions and recognizing their potential, by providing mutual trust and acceptance (Bialka, 2016). Successful teacher education programs were cautious when choosing the schools and classrooms for their teacher candidates’ clinical practice, and assured teachers learn from adequate teaching experiences before their first job placement (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Challenging teachers’ beliefs with early experiences supported the analysis of their morals and values. Through reflection, teachers analyzed their beliefs, understood what was right or wrong in each situation, and became aware of how their values instruct their craft (Bialka, 2016, Korthagen; 2004; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011). Chung and Kim (2010) explained that, in education, the word reflection could have two meanings. Technical reflection focused on a

teacher's pedagogical judgment or opinion, and critical reflection as a detailed analysis of a teacher's principles, values, and impressions. Preservice teachers required a clear understanding and regular practice of both types of reflection in order to become practitioners that set inquiry at the center of their practice, "generating deeper understanding of how students learn and enhancing educators' sense of social responsibility in the service of a democratic society" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). Moreover, teachers who were aware of and understood their educational beliefs could validate their actions. Thus, fostering responsibility and professionalism through self-reflection and autonomy (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2011).

Bialka (2016) suggested the use of the following approaches, which proved to be successful when attending dispositions:

- (a) Narratives: help teacher candidates to connect their beliefs and actions during practice;
- (b) Case studies: help candidates question and analyze teacher and students' interaction and the consequences of the teacher's actions. Case studies, to be practical, must be interconnected with other areas of the program;
- (c) Surveys: provide candidates with a sample of perceptions from the population they affect, therefore promoting reflection and analysis of practice; and
- (d) Video materials: facilitate reflection and discussions about specific videos or classroom observations.

### **Standards for Teachers vs. Standardization**

Arbaugh et al. (2015) talked about standards for teaching, however, Korthagen (2010a) warned about the danger of standardization and of ignoring the "bottom-up, idiosyncratic, nature of professional learning" (p. 417). He explained that teacher education programs should address

the process of learning how to teach based on reflection and the adequate connection between practice and theory. The outcomes of cautiously approaching standards depended on how program directors addressed them and how teacher candidates perceived them (Chung & Kim, 2010). The authors suggested addressing standards so that teacher candidates perceived them as developmental, to renew the teaching profession. When taken as a regulation, standards neglected the profession of teaching; diminishing choice, self-determination, experience, and growth. When teacher candidates learn both aspects of the standards appropriately they, “could learn to be accountable, autonomous, and reflective in their work” (Chung & Kim, 2010, p. 372). The authors suggested that in order to help teacher candidates understand standards in a broader political context and to become change agents, it was necessary for them to have opportunities to comprehend the real language of the standards, analyze with other teachers the meaning of the standards, and have a safe space to review them.

### **Types of Knowledge Required for a Professional Teacher**

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) explained that teachers must combine the learner-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered domains, considering the community and environment in which the learning process is taking place.

#### **Learner-centered knowledge, developmental knowledge, and cultural knowledge.**

Learner-centered teachers know the learners, their cultural background, their situation, developmental stage, learning style, previous knowledge, and personal interests (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). It is essential to understand pupils, understand how they learn, and their developmental needs, and since development is an ongoing process, the purpose of learning is to grow as a complete human being (Armstrong, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Cultural knowledge is the understanding of the context in which students learn

and progress (Kleickmann et al., 2013), and it could be approached by using relational pedagogy, which entails teachers' respect for each student, their knowledge, and learning style, while acknowledging how they connect experiences and theory based in relationships (Sanford, Hopper, & Starr, 2015).

Teachers must be knowledgeable of the different types of theories that address the development of students as a whole human being –cognitive, language acquisition, social, psychological and emotional, as well as moral development– by influencing the learning process (Armstrong, 2006), and must understand how to approach adequate instruction styles to help students learn (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2007), teachers must adjust their actions according to their students' learning stages. They must be:

- (a) Instructors, knowing when to provide students with information;
- (b) Facilitators of understanding, helping students by setting up adequate opportunities and queries, individually and collaboratively comprehend concepts and methods; and
- (c) Coaches, advocating for students' potential to transfer successfully their knowledge into real life performances with independence and self-determination.

Successful teachers skillfully adjust these three roles, being aware of when and how to adjust their actions in order to help students flourish. Consequently, teacher candidates must be equipped with adequate understanding about each specific subject and the knowledge on how to present it to students, so that they can comprehend it and transfer it to new situations (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

### **Knowledge-centered, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge.**

Knowledge-centered teachers have a curricular vision of teaching, master the information to be

taught, and understand the reasons for teaching it. They have a clear view of the skills and attitudes that students must attain in order to apply their learning in real life situations, and the pedagogical content knowledge to provide adequate instructional methods for students to learn, considering the social purposes of education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Pedagogical content knowledge involves planning adequate pedagogical practice to help students learn a specific concept (Kleickmann et al., 2013). Wiggins and McTighe (2007) clarified that content knowledge and the pedagogy used to teach students are a path to reach a goal. The authors described that the purpose of education is to promote in students the comprehension of information with the intent of changing the mind and actions of pupils in a way that they can apply such knowledge in novel situations. Therefore, the goal is not just to make learners knowledgeable, but to help students use information with rational judgment according to each situation.

Besides getting to know their students, teachers should let them be an active part of their learning by providing choices instead of a fixed curriculum, and self-assessment instead of teachers as their judge (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017). Personalized education promotes school engagement, interests and motivates to learn with individualized projects chosen and promoted by themselves. Moreover, as a group or community, they try to learn about and improve their world (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017; Richabaugh, 2016). Couros (2015) explained that when students are given options on what to learn they enjoy coming to school, and when they make choices on what to learn they can develop their strengths, and learning becomes not only meaningful but also gratifying. When individuals find freedom to innovate, they enjoy discovering new things (Pink, 2009). Therefore, giving students choices in their learning could provide students with

tools that can help them feel useful in society and become contributing citizens who are successful and happy (Glover, 2013).

**Assessment-centered knowledge.** Assessment-centered teachers are cognizant of appropriate assessment techniques that help students demonstrate their learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In order to have a meaningful transfer of information students must be given freedom for thought and action in what they will learn, how they will approach it, and how could they show their learning. Kallick and Zmuda (2017) explained that the four main characteristics of personalized learning are:

- (a) voice;
- (b) student involvement;
- (c) co-creation: develop, with the teacher, a challenge, social construction; and
- (d) based on relationships, and self-discovery: students understand themselves as learners.

Stronge, Ward, and Grant, (2011) explained that assessment is “an ongoing process that occurs before, during, and after instruction is delivered” (p. 431). The authors explained that quality teachers continuously monitor the learning process of their students using various methods of informal and formal assessments. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) stressed the need for teachers to begin their curricular planning with the final assessment in mind, arguing that teachers need to know the purpose for the unit or standard and students’ expectations. Only then can teachers can design their instruction using the content to create meaningful and engaging activities, and provide authentic methods to evaluate students’ learning. Final assessments should be purposefully crafted performance assessments that are complex and reflect authentic contexts. Consequently, students are expected to apply or transfer their understanding of concepts in new



situations, and to demonstrate the skills and knowledge acquired during the learning process (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Sahlberg, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Teacher candidates must be equipped with various assessment strategies, understand the purpose of each strategy, and know how and when to employ them (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Assessments should provide information on how students are learning. There are two general types of assessments created by teachers in schools: formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments evaluate students' processes towards the objective, and effective teachers use them with the intent of promoting learning and improving instruction. Summative assessments are the evaluations of mastery or proficiency for the instructional unit or course. This process usually involves giving grades and communicating those results to stakeholders (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). "Teachers must be skillful in using various assessment strategies and tools such as observation, student conferences, portfolios, performance tasks, prior knowledge assessments, rubrics, feedback, and student self-assessment" (p. 275).

Teachers must consider their pupils' academic starting point and include their culture, environment, and prior knowledge before assessing for learning, then adjust the method of instruction and assessment to help students learn and improve (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Teachers should be conscious of assessing all types of thinking processes, including higher-order thinking skills (Brookhart, 2010), which means that students must be expected to work with and apply their knowledge in the three higher cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy – analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010). Using formative assessment strategies adequately and providing accurate feedback increases student achievement (Stronge et al., 2011). Constant reflection and various types of assessments strategies are necessary to evaluate how students are approaching the learning target, and educators must make

the instructional changes needed to help students reach the instructional goal (Popham, 2008; Stronge et al., 2011). During the process of lesson planning, teacher candidates must question themselves about the reasons to assess students, what, how, and when to assess, as well as how and to whom will the results be communicated (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2017). In all cases, the assessment should produce feedback that promotes students' growth (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017).

***Standardized testing.*** Standardized tests are large-scale external assessment methods created to compare achievement in different areas. High-stakes tests have accountability measures attached to their results (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Popham, 2008). There are two types of standardized tests and neither suits the improvement of education (Popham, 2008). Traditional academic-achievement tests include items linked to the socioeconomic status of students, and customized standards-based tests intend to measure the standards that students mastered during the year (Meir & Wood, 2004; Popham, 2008). Popham (2008) demonstrated that, due to the number of standards and the limited number of items a test could include, the results of standardized tests were not able to give teachers guidance on how to improve instruction. By creating standardized tests by grade levels, the tests failed to show the improvement of students achieving considerably low or considerably high within their grade level (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2015). Therefore, schools narrowed the curriculum with the goal to improve test scores (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Adams et al., 2009; Armstrong, 2006; Ravitich, 2010; Ravitich, 2013; Schelechty, 2009). Administrators used inaccurate instruments, able to provide results that could include a variation of 50 to 80 percent based on factors out of the control of teachers, such as students' health on a given day, or noise outside the testing room (Au, 2011).

Todd Farley, who worked in the standardized testing industry for 15 years, argued that the standardized testing industry is not serious about the scores they give back to schools. He explained that it is not appropriate to believe that those scores reflect student learning, due to the conditions of who scores tests and how they score them (Ravitich, 2013). The rhetoric used by reformers explained that test scores were necessary to improve what and how teachers taught (Mehta et al., 2012; Russakoff, 2015) and tried to demonstrate fairness in the process (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015). The truth was that standardized assessments were used for a purpose for which they were not created (Popham, 2008; Price, 2014) and were considered “unreliable at best” (Ravitich, 2010, p. 107).

Standardized tests lack the capacity to accurately inform the real knowledge and understanding that students have incorporated through the year (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010; Kamii, 2000; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007), nor do they help individual teachers shape their daily instruction (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Popham, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Nevertheless, standardized tests could be a beneficial diagnostic tool to understand the effectiveness of schools, districts, or the system (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Ravitich, 2013). Even though the U.S. uses standardized tests for accountability, teacher candidates must understand the benefits and the limitations provided by these assessments (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Whitaker (2013) suggested that teachers must have this reality under perspective, and learn to see standardized testing as just one part of the components of schooling. Teachers must be aware of the broader mission of schooling, evade the pressure to improve test scores, and always improve instruction for understanding and transfer, which in the long run, will increase scores as well (Whitaker, 2013; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

**Social conventional and logico-mathematical knowledge.** We understand our world and our culture through our language (Smith, 2004), and we learn our language through social interaction with our environment (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). Children learn how to speak a language by being exposed to it, listening to adults who model its usage, and demonstrating the conventions or categories of language. Children assimilate language by observing it, practicing it, and making mistakes that social interactions help correct. Learning to read follows a similar pattern to learning to speak. Individuals need to be exposed to adequate reading materials, have close individuals that model how to read, be able to take the risk to try, and to have an open environment to make mistakes (Smith, 2004). The process of language acquisition centers on social interaction. To have adequate social interaction we need to know how our language works in our environment. Therefore, the categories or conventions previously set by a group of people in specific environments becomes the base of social knowledge (Kamii, 1994; Smith, 2004). Once individuals understand the language, they can begin reading and writing. Only when we can adequately communicate with our environment and understand important ideas expressed in oral and written language, can we become contributing citizens to our communities (Lapp & Ficher, 2009).

Kamii (1994) urged not to teach mathematics through social (conventional) knowledge. Based on Piaget's theory, she noticed that students learn mathematics by discovering how it works, and not when transmitted orally, or by asking students to follow algorithms or steps to solve a problem. She explained that children do not learn arithmetic by looking at the pictures on a worksheet, instead they will draw symbols or count with their fingers (Kamii, 1989). Kamii (1989) clarified that it takes time for students to understand the hierarchical concept of numbers, which means that students must first comprehend the ones system before integrating the tens

system. She stressed the need for students to have the opportunity to solve problems and to come up with their solutions. Through social interaction, students can clarify their misunderstandings, learn to trust their thinking process, and communicate attentively with their peers. She clarified that “logico-mathematical knowledge has to be constructed by each individual from the inside...social interaction thus stimulates critical thinking, but it is not the source of logico-mathematical knowledge.” (Kamii, 1994, p. 55)

Kamii (1984, 1994, 2000) guided teachers to provide a constructivist environment in their classrooms. They let children discover mathematics with real-world problems and games, allowed students to figure out a variety of answers to mathematical problems, and empowered students to construct their learning. This was implemented while avoiding the use of teacher supremacy in the classroom, negating the use of worksheets, and abstaining from telling students how to solve problems. Kamii clarified that the benefits of providing a constructivist environment went beyond a better acquisition of numerical and logical reasoning. For students to become better thinkers, teachers should provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for pupils to think. When schoolchildren solve world problems creatively without guidance, and play games that enhance their mathematical thinking, they enjoy learning without the need of writing their answers or receiving rewards for doing so (Barrody, 1987; Kamii, 1989, 1994, 2000; Skemp, 1971). Teachers should let students expose their points of view, discuss solutions with classmates, and have a safe environment for making mistakes. These strategies help students develop a sense of community, learn how to listen and respect their classmates’ opinions and ideas, learn to accept feedback from their peers and revise their thinking process, solve conflicts by taking decisions as a group and develop their autonomy and self-motivation. Constructivist classrooms promote better logico-mathematical thinking and give students the opportunity to

grow in their sociomoral development, which does not develop when filling in worksheets or workbook pages (Kamii, 2000). Moreover, Fennema and Romberg (1999) explained that constructivist classrooms also promotes equity.

Due to its complexity, logico-mathematical knowledge is harder to assess than social (conventional) knowledge (Kamii, 1994; Leatham & Winiecke, 2014). For this reason, Kamii (1989, 1994, 2000) interviewed students and created problems that evoked logico-mathematical thinking over easy to asses social knowledge. Through her three years of collaborating with teachers, she demonstrated that even though students might show no significant differences in the results of standardized tests in mathematics, teachers could analyze and see the differences of the types of answers and mistakes. Kamii illustrated that the mistakes made by students in traditionally taught groups were far from the correct answer. These children could not articulate their reasoning nor explain how their algorithms worked. The lack of adequate explanations provided by the traditionally taught group suggested that the constructivist group had a better logico-mathematical knowledge, because their mistakes were not far from the correct answer, and when asked, students were able to self-correct and explain their errors.

Evaluating students with tests and statistical methods did not provide an accurate measure of mathematical comprehension (Erlwanger,1974). The author proposed using observation and interview methods to inform teachers about the mathematical learning processes and genuine student understanding when assessing mathematics. Leatham and Winiecke (2014) referred to Erlwanger's work and explained how correct answers in mathematics do not necessarily relate to mathematical understanding. Therefore, for accurately assessing mathematical comprehension, teachers need to observe and interview students and provide them with adequate spaces to articulate and explain their thinking and processes.

Teacher education programs must ensure that candidates are aware of the differences between social (conventional) knowledge and logico-mathematical knowledge (Kamii, 1994). Teacher candidates must have adequate knowledge of the mathematical content required to teach in their area of licensure (Ma, 2010). They must be able to understand, adjust, and provide students with tasks that have various levels of cognitive demands, assigning tasks “that lead to deeper, more generative understandings regarding the nature of mathematical processes, concepts, and relationships” (Stein, Smith, Henningsen, & Silver, 2009). Teacher candidates should be able to uncover students’ misconceptions just by analyzing their students’ work and by observing them solve problems (Ashlock, 2006). They must also guide their students to reflect on their mathematical thinking and self-correct if necessary (Kamii, 2000). Teacher preparation programs should help teacher candidates become well-informed practitioners that understand the required methods to engage pupils, providing meaningful experiences that can develop the students’ ability to comprehend mathematical ideas and apply logico-mathematical reasoning in the real world (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2014).

**Professional knowledge, equity, and market-based strategies.** Teacher candidates must be well prepared to address the equity issue, and realize that equity is also the responsibility of the government (Cochran-Smith, Ell, et al., 2016). Teacher candidates should be instructed not only on educational theories but also to the real meaning of educational jargon and strategies used for political purposes, which in some cases might sound positive and well-intended, but in the long run have proven to promote inequity and injustice (Cochran-Smith, Ell et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2016). Most of the strategies promoted by market-based supporters are based on standardized testing (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2013;

Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Market-based enthusiasts also defended the following concepts and strategies.

***Value Added Measures.*** Value Added Measures (VAMs) are a measurement system designed to assess teacher effectiveness (Price, 2014) based on the improvement of students on standardized test scores from year to year (Ballou & Springer, 2015; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel & Rothstein, 2012; Harris & Sass, 2011). William Sanders created a formula that, he posited, could isolate the influence that teachers could have on in their students' academic achievement when considering the scores of yearly-standardized tests. Consequently, he furnished reformers with the tool they needed to assess teacher effectiveness and promote accountability (Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2013). Their support came from the idea that by recognizing effective teachers, their motivation would help them improve their craft and improving their students' preparation. (Au, 2011).

VAMs met the resistance of Darling-Hammond (2015), Darling-Hammond et al. (2012), Goldhaber (2013), Sahlberg (2010), and Stronge et al. (2011) because such a measure assumed that teachers were the only influence on students' achievement, thus, disregarding factors such as school environment, adequate resources, or personal background. Goldhaber (2013) questioned the accuracy of value-added measures regarding teacher performance. Darling-Hammond et al. (2012) asserted that VAMs failed to differentiate effective from ineffective teachers, and Au (2011) explained that teacher effectiveness as measured by VAMs does not necessarily help students improve test scores. When evaluated under standardized test scores, teachers become technicians that tell students what to do to improve test scores (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2013). In the long run, these actions reduced teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2015) because they hindered creativity and student engagement in schools (Couros, 2015; Sahlberg, 2010).



Haworth, Asbury, Dale, and Plomin (2011) studied the differences in achievement between twins exposed to different environmental experiences and found that “about half of the variance of corrected-school achievement is due to genetic differences between children” (p. 8). The authors explained that when children experience an active way of learning, they produce their own educational experience, which comes from their genetic aptitude, concluding that achievement is not produced only by the teacher. Those indices of added value “show only minimal shared environmental contributions” (p. 9), suggesting that student learning might be as heritable as ability and that children might add value to their environments. Consequently, the resources and adequate teaching strategies provided by a specific system may help the correlation between nature and nurture. Their results supported what Darling-Hammond (2015) suggested, that supporting teachers and providing a better learning environment are the foundation for excellence in student outcomes. Darling-Hammond (2015) also suggested avoiding punishing teachers over measures that are far from their control.

Will (2018c) recommended considering the cost of test-based accountability since the investment is too expensive for unreliable tools. He took as an example the comments of Brian Stencher about the investment of \$575 million by the Melinda and Gates Foundation on a teacher evaluation program that was meant to improve student achievement. The results of achievement were not different from schools that did not participate in the study, concluding that to improve student performance, it was important to consider external factors such as nutrition and education for all students in the early years.

Value-added models proved to be inconsistent because of the significant variation provided by the different statistical methods that were used (Darling-Hammond, 2015), the type of students assigned to each teacher during different years (Au, 2011), the type of tests used

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2012), and a margin of error among subjects (Ravitich, 2013). The statistical error rates of using VAMs ranked teachers inaccurately one out of four times (Au, 2011). When making high-stakes decisions with such variability, the difference in the consequences could range between a bonus and being fired (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Even though some analysis showed correlations between value-added scores and years of experience (Plecki et al., 2012), some teachers complained about getting better value-added scores during their first and second years of teaching than during their third year (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012).

Statistical models are not able to adapt to the percentage of students who might be more challenging to teach in each class. “After controlling for prior student test scores *and* student characteristics, the study still found significant correlations between teacher ratings and students’ race/ethnicity, income, language background, and parent education” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012, p. 10). Teachers in high-achieving schools could rank higher than in low-achieving schools, even though the reality might be the opposite. Therefore, the results of using VAMs gave teachers consequences, which were based on the socioeconomic level of their students, thus failing to consider their real impact on their students’ education (Au, 2011; Whitehurst, Chingos, Lindquist, 2014). Such action could hinder the purpose of staffing low performing schools with highly qualified teachers due to the connection between standardized test scores and socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Ravitich 2013).

Factors occurring outside of schools such as poverty (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Ravitich, 2013), lack of healthcare (Au, 2011), and family problems like having a single parent (Brown, 2017) can affect test scores negatively (Au, 2011). Other factors such as higher socioeconomic status and extracurricular activities can affect it in a positive way (Au, 2011)

showing incorrect results regarding the actual impact that a teacher might have (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Therefore, VAMs can produce the mistaken assumption that teachers can overcome obstacles in their students' lives that are far from their control (Au, 2011). Value-added scores could benefit education only if the measures were more accurate and ranked effective teachers at a high level more consistently, regardless of the socioeconomic level of their students (Au, 2011). According to Coggshall et al. (2012), there were other evaluation options. Having a high correlation between Principal assessments and VAMs. Principal's subjective observations could provide a better estimate of teacher performance (Plecki et al., 2012; Whitehurst et al., 2014) and were less expensive when compared to accountability measures (Horn & Wilburn, 2013).

***Performance pay in education.*** One of the purposes of promoting value-added scores for teachers was to support teacher effectiveness with economic bonuses and to punish the ineffective teachers by firing them or taking away their licensure (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Price, 2014). Policymakers failed to comprehend that teachers, enjoy their jobs and feel motivated to help others, to better society more than earning more money (Adams et al., 2009; Ravitich, 2010; Ravitich, 2013; Northcutt & O'Kain, 2014). Thus, economic rewards do not influence the decision of teachers staying or leaving their placements (Northcutt & O'Kain, 2014). Performance-based systems disturb the inner motivation that teachers have for their practice and promote gaming the system by complying to produce the expected results, never reaching their original objective. Hence, schools that gave bonuses to teachers based on standardized test scores noticed their scores increased, yet the quality of education and success of schools decreased (Adams et al., 2009). When social indicators are quantified and used for

making important decisions, the probability of corruption increases, and there is a higher probability to pervert the social process intended to monitor (Adams et al., 2009; Sahlberg 2010).

*Value-added measures and teacher preparation programs.* Armstrong (2006), Goldhaber (2013), Meier and Wood (2004), Popham (2008), Price (2014), and Sahlberg (2010) explained that standardized tests should not have high-stakes decisions attached. Adams et al. (2009), AERA (2015), Au (2011), Ballou and Springer (2015), Darling-Hammond et al. (2012), Haworth et al. (2011), Horn and Wilburn (2013), Plecki et al. (2012), and Ravitich (2010, 2013) indicated that value-added measures are unreliable and therefore should not be used for evaluating teachers. However, disregarding research, the Obama administration created the Race to the Top (RTTT) incentive (G. Henry et al, 2012; Horn & Wilburn, 2013; Ravitich, 2013) requiring states to link students' test scores with their teachers and principals, and to trace those teachers and principals with their Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs). The purpose, just as with merit pay, was to reward the best teacher preparation programs and to either change or eliminate the worst ones (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Mihaly et al., 2013).

The most significant disadvantage of using VAMs to evaluate TPPs is that such data cannot guide institutions to improve their programs. (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2013; Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Goldhaber, Liddle, & Theobald, 2013; G. Henry et al., 2012; Plecki et al., 2012). Floden (2012) explained that VAM scores do not provide information regarding the “graduates’ moral character, their commitment to teaching (effort and length of service) or their ability to take leading professional roles” (p. 356). In addition, VAMs cannot predict or measure future teacher effectiveness (G. Henry et al., 2013). Therefore, when assessing TPPs, factors such as the purpose for each program, type, and length of clinical experiences, and candidate selection needed consideration (Goldhaber, 2013; Floden, 2012; Plecki et al., 2012). Evaluations

should be fair, holding programs accountable only for factors that are under the programs' control (Plecki et al., 2012). Evaluations should not include areas such as hiring and placement (Coggshall et al., 2012) because different types of school districts will hire graduates from the same college or university, and as explained earlier, VAMs are affected by the school contexts such as the socioeconomic status of their pupils (G. Henry et al., 2012).

Championed by government officials and advocacy groups with their particular agendas (Horn & Wilburn, 2013), using VAMs to assess TPPs conveyed negative consequences to education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). As explained above, VAMs:

(a) Were based on the scores of tests that are inaccurate and unreliable (G. Henry et al., 2012; Kamii, 2000; Meier & Wood, 2004; Popham, 2008; Ravitich, 2013);

(b) Failed to indicate teacher efficacy (Au, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Haworth et al., 2011); and

(c) Were unable to provide information on how institutions could improve their practice (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2013; Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Goldhaber et al., 2013; G. Henry et al., 2012; Mihaly et al., 2013; Plecki et al., 2012).

Therefore, even though the use of VAMs satisfied accountability demands, their use was controversial and contradictory (Goldhaber et al., 2013). In addition, the use of VAMs did not address their purpose, which was to help TPPs improve their practice (Mihaly et al., 2013).

***Alternative teaching certifications and fast routes for teaching.*** Reformers championed different paths for training teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013) with the excuse of staffing high poverty schools with teachers who took no excuses for helping children learn (Darling-Hammond, 2017), and supported the deregulation agenda with the intent of letting the market choose who should or should not teach (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). During the Obama

administration, Teach for America (TFA) and The New Teacher Project (TNTP) were examples of excellent teaching (Zeichner et al., 2015). These programs received millions of dollars, but ignored the fact that they offered teaching certificates to individuals as they entered their training; therefore, they were unprepared for teaching. The administration neglected innovative proposals presented by teacher educators from universities and colleges (Zeichner et al., 2015) and also ignored the fact that the teaching candidates attending those colleges and universities were required to complete their programs and preservice requirements before getting their certifications (Sayeski, 2013).

Most alternative teacher programs place their candidates in the neediest schools after extremely short teacher preparation, grounded on the assumption that teachers learn by doing and that advanced educational degrees make no difference in student achievement (Harris & Sass, 2011; Korthagen, 2010b). Korthagen (2010a) criticized the assumption that teachers learn better by teaching before learning theory, since when in charge of a classroom too early, they tend to focus on classroom discipline more than on learning how to teach or how to help students learn. Kleickmann et al. (2013) clarified that teacher candidates learn content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge better before teaching, and explained that such knowledge did not develop appropriately when teaching without a formal theory-learning period. Teachers who entered through fast routes without adequate teaching preparation, and who lacked certification in the area that they were teaching, provided the most substantial adverse effects on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010a).

Deregulation included creating alternative teaching programs like the RELAY Graduate School of Education, a teacher preparation program that offers graduate education degrees especially designed for charter schools focused on practical clinical experience, and taught by

charter schoolteachers (Mungal, 2012). Programs like RELAY Graduate School of Education and TNTP emphasize teacher scripts, lack the professional vision and cultural understanding necessary to adapt and meet their students' needs and disregard social foundations and educational theory (Zeichner et al., 2015). These programs help promote teachers who are de-professionalized, who tend to stay short times in their placements, and in various cases see teaching as community service or add-on for their resumes before leaving for another profession (Mungal, 2012; Northcutt & O'Kain 2014).

Policymakers promoted fast routes for teaching and lowered standards for individuals who would work in areas of high need for expertise and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2017). With the intent of staffing schools in need, reformers dismissed their requirement to have prepared teachers who can promote learning in the most challenging situations. Hence, school districts with the highest needs hired mostly unprepared teachers who left their positions at higher rates (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Kirylo and McNulty (2011) argued that fast route programs train teachers to be technicians of education and to enforce practices and methods that diminish the complexity of teaching to standardized actions. They disregard the importance of "human development theories, the nature of learning and knowledge, the impact of social and cultural forces on teaching and learning, critical thinking, the theory-practice connection, and the inherently political nature of education" (p. 315). Therefore, as states promote effective preparation practices, there should be an in-depth study of factors affecting education in order to help the teaching profession and student learning, before the promotion of alternative teacher certifications (Heinen & Scribner, 2007).

*Urban residencies.* The creation of "Urban Residency Programs" aimed to address the needs of students in high-need urban areas, with the intent of educating teacher candidates for the

specific context where they would be teaching. In general, these programs place candidates in supervised classrooms while completing their coursework; thus, promoting a longer time of clinical experience for their candidates (Hammerness, Williamson & Kosnick, 2016). It is essential to organize programs for specific contexts with a clear vision and preparation for it to benefit students (Ell et al., 2017). Several traditional university-based programs prepare students in this way (Darling-Hammond, 2006), although reformers assume that university-based programs do not have enough clinical experience (Hammerness et al., 2016). Papay, West, Fullerton, and Kane (2012) found no significant differences between urban residents and novices from traditional teacher preparation programs when relating value-added scores and their effectiveness in raising scores. Matsko and Hammerness (2014) believed that Urban Residency programs could be helpful only if able to provide fair practices and the necessary knowledge of teaching and learning, as well as knowledge of the area and culture of the specific context. In general, the retention of teachers attending Urban Residency programs was similar to that of non-residency preparation programs. This information could guide policymakers and the government regarding the conditions of schools and the resources needed for teachers to stay in the field (Hammerness et al., 2016).

*Teach for America.* Teach for America (TFA) is a non-profit organization founded by Wendy Kopp in 1990. It had the goal of improving equity (Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014) and of increasing opportunity for children (Teach For America [TFA], 2018) by recruiting graduates from Ivy League universities to work for two years in low-income, under-achieving schools across the country (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014; Sondel, 2013). TFA negotiates with school districts, and once candidates are accepted, individuals sign a contract with the organization and participate in an intensive five-week



summer program right before being assigned as regular schoolteachers (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014). TFA recruits receive a teacher salary and AmeriCorps stipends to enroll, if they choose to, in nearby colleges to acquire teaching credentials (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014; Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014). Once corps members finish their 2-year assignments, most of them leave their initial placement (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Heineke et al., 2014; Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014). Various corps members and alumni continue their careers in charter school chains, some as teachers and some in leadership positions (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014; Sondel, 2013).

TFA was seen as an example of teacher recruitment and adequate selectivity (Cogshall et al., 2012). It has been able to accomplish its goals of providing top graduates to serve in under-staffed schools, it has developed leaders who are advocates for educational equity and excellence in education (Mehta et al., 2012), and it also has achieved its mission of affecting change at different educational levels (Heineke et al., 2014). TFA has promoted a missionary concept of selecting middle-class white females as educational leaders to improve the academic achievement gap and promoting equity in low-income areas. This missionary concept attracted the attention of public and private sectors that have donated TFA millions of dollars (Crawford-Garrett, 2012; Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014). Those groups included government officials like the Obama Administration educational department (Zeichner et al., 2015), philanthropy groups like the Eli Broad Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Walton Family Foundation (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014; Mungal, 2012; Philanthropy News Digest, 2013; Walton Family Foundation, 2013), and charter schools’ chains (Crawford-Garrett, 2012; Mungal, 2012; Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014; Ravitich, 2010; Sondel, 2013).

TFA has been criticized by Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, and Manfra (2016), Vasquez Heilig and Jez (2014), Ravitich (2013), Russakoff (2015), and Sondel (2013) who

explained that it transitioned from a non-profit organization, with the goal of helping under-staffed schools, to an organization with crucial political influence, openly connected to market-based reformers, philanthropy, and charter schools. The authors explained that even though TFA was seen as an example of teacher recruitment and adequate selectivity (Coggshall et al., 2012), they recruited mostly middle-class white females to work in the most needed schools. They explained that TFA enjoys privileges not granted to individuals who attended traditional teacher programs, nor even to veteran teachers already working for public systems. Brewer et al. (2016) brought those privileges to light, after analyzing the carefully crafted Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) which TFA signed with public school districts. To help under-staffed schools, TFA charges for every member hired by the system and, as stated above, those individuals undergo a short teacher preparation, are expected to stay just 2 years in their placements, but once hired, receive the same salaries regular teachers do (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014; Northcutt & O’Kain, 2014). Brewer et al. (2016) focused on the preferential treatment that districts gave TFA by hiring members not just for under-staffed schools, but also reserving for TFA several teaching positions that could become available. By doing so, districts overlook professional teachers for the positions and ignored the necessities of the district and the monetary cost of each member. Therefore, it became more expensive to hire TFA teachers due to the need to keep recruiting individuals for the same position every two years (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014) and hindering the opportunity for districts to hire regular teachers who have the goal of staying in the profession (Brewer et al., 2016).

Former TFA members explained that their professional development “diminished opportunities for cultural relevance, stripped the joy out of learning, undermined the social-emotional purposes of schooling, and prioritized the production of data over learning” (Sondel,

2013 p.10), believing sometimes that students' families and communities were a negative influence on their upbringing (Crawford-Garrett, 2012). Due to the quick preparation time, TFA members learn to teach by a transmission model of education, which gives the message that teaching involves simple actions with no preparation or creativity required, and therefore teaching could "be reduced to a set of observable and quantifiable tasks." (Crawford-Garrett, 2012, p. 131). Bialka (2016) clarified that the lack of reflection and understanding of diversity could lead teachers to blame students and their communities for behavior and academic problems, causing extremely high teacher attrition levels due to excessive workloads, inadequate assistance, and lack of transparency (Northcutt & O'Kain, 2014; Sondel, 2013). Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) illustrated that when schools have high levels of teacher attrition, the school culture, and climate suffer.

Even though teacher experience increases student achievement, it provides no significant impact during the first two years of teaching (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). By offering 2-year contracts, TFA undermines the teaching profession, because their members leave at a time in which they would be able to increase student achievement and improve their teaching practice (Heineke et al., 2014; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). Consequently, criticism for the program arose for misinforming the public about the idea that low-performing schools cannot get qualified teachers, but in the process continuing to charge for new corps members appointed to replace the ones who were leaving; thus, becoming a cycle that diverted attention from more beneficial policies (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014).

TFA has been serving in under-staffed schools for more than 25 years. The organization is proud to display that they have more than 55,000 corps members and alumni in 53 territories (TFA, 2018), and has provided the most significant number of teachers for under-served

communities (Crawford-Garrett, 2012). TFA has an expanding revenue that increased from \$10 million to \$193.5 million between 2000 and 2013 (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014); but, despite the organization's growth and the vast fortunes behind some of their members (Russakoff, 2015), equity in the U.S. has not improved (The Nation's Report Card, 2018; OECD, 2016). The achievement gap between students who score high and those who score low on standardized tests has widened (The Nation's Report Card, 2018; Sparks, 2018), clarifying that the difference between high and low test scores relates to the demographics and socioeconomic levels of the students (OECD, 2016). Similar results were addressed by OECD, stating that in science performance, there is a 91-point gap between students in advantaged schools and students in disadvantaged schools. Thus, showing that TFA's service is not as fruitful for lessening the achievement gap (Vasquez Heilig & Jez, 2014) as it is for generating corporate connections and teacher production for the charter industry (Ravitich, 2013).

**Adequate teacher preparation and human development discourse.** When human development discourse guides instruction, teachers and leaders have specific roles. Teachers promote learning activities that engage students while preparing them for their real world, help students develop their strengths and potential, avoid classifying students based on their weaknesses, are concerned with the wellbeing of all human beings, care for the world and their environment, and help the youth learn how to cope and resolve social problems. Leaders, on the other hand, give educators more choice on how to frame their environment, promote teacher development based on autonomy, encourage a variety of programs that promote students' higher order thinking and creativity, and encourage the adoption of developmentally appropriate theories in education (Armstrong, 2006). Armstrong argued that, based on developmental theories, each stage of education should have a different focus and a different relationship

between teacher and student. He proposed that in early childhood teachers should facilitate students' environment as free, and non-directed-play. In elementary grades, the teacher's job should be to act as the coach of a worker who is discovering the world and how it works. In middle school, teachers should be the guide that helps students to be explorers, while they understand their "social, emotional, and metacognitive development" (p. 65). In high school, the teacher should act as a mentor for an apprentice who is trying to learn how to be responsible and independent in life outside of school.

Boushey and Moser (2009, 2014), Diller, D. (2011) have developed different ways to approach the learning differences and needs of students in each classroom by being knowledgeable enough. They approached social knowledge and logico-mathematical knowledge according to each activity, with the intent of promoting independence, autonomy, and self-motivation in literacy and mathematics. These educators have been able to organize their classrooms as communities; thus, giving students the responsibility of behaving respectfully and fostering a safe environment for students to make mistakes, learn independently, and to reflect and communicate about learning. Teacher education programs must expose candidates to conducive environments at the appropriate time during their preparation, in order to promote adequate teaching for their future students (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen 2010a).

### **Clinical Practice and Equity**

Teacher candidates should not have the responsibility to teach during their first years of preparation. They should observe adequate teaching situations early in their education programs before the transmission of pedagogical theories (Korthagen, 2010b). Korthagen explained that humans first react to situations holistically without separating the emotional and cognitive areas. When teachers first experience a situation, their response is unconscious and tied to emotions.

Korthagen (2010a) called this first experience a “gestalt” and explained that when teachers reflect on their previous gestalts or first experiences, they can connect aspects of the environment and understand how those relate to each other; thus, moving into a conscious “schema.” At this level, teachers feel the need to know what to do in each situation, and only then, they can understand the theory, connect it with the real world, and learn how and why to act in a way that students learn. Consequently, teacher education programs should consider these processes for determining their clinical experiences and theoretical courses.

According to Darling-Hammond (2006), adequate clinical experiences are the centerpiece of powerful preparation programs, “the programs seek out and help to develop schools that have developed high-quality teaching for low-income students, recent immigrants, and students of color” (p. 153). These exemplary programs organize meaningful clinical experience directly related to the required coursework and are combined with seminars in which students receive tasks and problems to investigate during their clinical work, further reflecting on their experience. Clinical experiences aligned with the required theory should provide candidates with space for reflection aiming to answer the questions that upraise during practice (Korthagen, 2010b; Peercy & Troyan, 2017). Anderson and Stillman (2013) suggested extended clinical experiences for candidates to experience learning to teach as a procedure that improves over time and interacts with the environment and with social contexts. Candidates participate in these experiences “so that they might have an opportunity to explore a wider range of practices, engage in sustained reflection, observe and support K-12 student development over time, develop deep knowledge of learners and communities” (p. 40). The authors proposed to organize teacher education programs in cohorts exposing the candidates to critical clinical

experiences and constant reflection in order to improve teaching practices and challenge the status quo.

Dillon (2004) and Redman (2015), in their studies about teacher education, listened to the suggestions given by teachers about clinical practices. In both studies, teachers recommended increasing the amount of time of clinical experience to no less than a year before graduation. Teachers interviewed by Dillon (2004) believed clinical experiences should take place in exemplary schools, and across various grade levels and teaching styles. Teachers interviewed by Redman (2015) explained their frustration due to the lack of teaching practice and classroom management techniques.

Dillon's (2004) study reported teachers' recommendation of creating a Professional Development School, where teacher candidates could be exposed to and collaborate with schoolteachers that work closely with faculty. Darling-Hammond (2006) shared that some of the exemplary programs she studied provided clinical experiences in professional development schools. She described that by promoting professional schools connected to the research of universities, the community was able to see their benefits and decided to create partnerships between public schools and the universities. Partnerships between schools districts and teacher education programs have helped teacher programs improve their clinical experiences, improve communication between schools and universities, and improve both programs and school practices (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Sanford et al., 2015; Zeichner et al., 2015). Partnerships were also a suggestion given by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010), urging stakeholders to provide incentives and resources to help provide adequate teachers for hard-to-staff schools.

Purposely created and carefully chosen clinical experiences can expose novices to a diverse group of students, can help candidates develop relationships with a different group than their own, and can help them understand their culture and their environment in a way that promotes equity (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2005). Programs aiming to promote equity must foster critical reflection towards the cultural differences of students and candidates' beliefs and attitudes towards dominant ideologies and systems of oppression (Anderson & Stillman, 2013). Candidates should reflect critically about the inequity found in some educational settings and find ways to foster justice-oriented individuals (Kirylo & McNulty, 2011). Grudnoff et al. (2017) believed that for teacher candidates to approach equity, teacher education programs must instill in the candidate the following facets:

1. Select worthwhile content and design and implement learning opportunities aligned to valued outcomes.
2. Connecting to students as learners, and to their lives and experiences.
3. Creating learning- focused, respectful and supportive learning environments.
4. Using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching.
5. Adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for professional engagement and learning.
6. Recognizing and seeking to address, classroom, school, and societal practices that reproduce equity (p. 321).

The authors also explained that teacher education programs could teach and link those facets with a particular context, culture, and tradition as part of the relationships between teachers and students. Aiming at equity in education could help improve the complaint that universities fail to prepare teacher candidates equipped to work with diverse populations of students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). It is essential for teacher education programs to address equity and to help candidates work with diverse groups of students. However, teachers need to know that they cannot achieve equity alone (Cochran-Smith, Ell, et al., 2016). Teacher candidates must learn about the theories and language of education that reveal the real intentions



of groups that reproduce inequity and injustice. Teachers must collaborate with others to challenge the mandates and regulations that generate inequity, in order for policymakers to “address the fact that multiple factors – in addition to teacher quality – influence student outcomes, including in particular the impact of poverty” (p. 76). Darling-Hammond (2016) also discussed the importance of improving teacher education, teacher practices, and research in education, especially when distorted and misused research supports educational mandates. Therefore, educators should improve their preparation and with adequate knowledge, venture into the political arena with the goal of promoting adequate educational policy. The organization of teacher preparation programs should be coherently built around a “vision of professional practice” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 11), promoting the idea of teachers as professionals that help learners be part of democracy (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This perspective includes theory and practice to help their candidates see the full picture of education and to be able to use theory appropriately when faced with an unknown situation (Korthagen, 2010b).

### **Addressing Leadership in Teacher Education**

Teacher education programs should improve their approach to educational leadership and provide teacher candidates with experiences that can help them recognize their potential regarding social and political changes in society (Lasso Jijón, 2018). To address equity and justice, teacher candidates should have adequate clinical experiences tightly related to methods courses and to critical reflection based on open inquiry techniques (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Cochram-Smith, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Glover, 2013; Grudnoff et al., 2017; Kirylo & McNulty, 2011; Korthagen’s, 2010b). Lasso Jijón (2018) explained the need for open inquiry and critical dialogue in teacher preparation programs for candidates to connect their identity as

teachers, leaders, and agents that support social change. She clarified that it is during teacher education that candidates can question their assumptions about teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond (2006) and Korthagen (2010b) stated that through critical dialog and adequate experiences, candidates learn about the complexity and connection among teaching, pedagogy, the environment, and society. Glover (2013) supported the idea of using open inquiry and critical dialogue. He promoted his “Lead-teach-learn triad (LTL)” based on open inquiry and developmental empowerment. Glover (2013) explained that “teaching is leading, leaders must learn, and only learners can teach” (p.9) and illustrated that leaders promote changes in their followers by helping followers learn that change is possible. Thus, leaders are teaching, learning, and leading at the same time in the process towards wisdom. He defined a wise person as someone that, “sees broad implications and applications and how both fit with local and more universal contexts to influence future events” (p. 49). Glover posited that approaching wisdom is a product of LTL, and explained that decision-making processes are successful when basing conversations and dialogs on inquiry.

It is indispensable to expose teacher candidates to the realities of the education system and their possibilities of generating change (Lasso Jijón, 2018). These educational leaders must work towards substituting student achievement requirements of improving test scores (Schlechty, 2009) with the requirement of developing individuals as learners who can discover their strengths, passions, and talents (Couros, 2015). Individuals who, through collaboration and involvement with their community, develop values that help them promote social justice (Glover, 2013). It is up to educators to give students just the curriculum or to empower them to construct a better world than the one we have (Couros, 2015; Kallick & Zmuda, 2017).

## **Assessing Teacher Candidates**

Darling-Hammond (2006) proposed assessing the performance of candidates through various measures and by various stakeholders; thus, giving a broader aspect of the acquired teacher's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Nelsen (2015) clarified that to learn about candidates' dispositions, there is a need to inquire about their actions concerning the classroom context and the environment. By creating spaces for inquiry and providing evidence of learning, there is a potential to transform teacher education and to evaluate the advancement of the programs, shifting from external accountability to internal responsibility (Cochran-Smith, 2009).

Darling-Hammond, Newton, and Wei (2013) proposed the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) for prospective teachers. Since this assessment benefited candidates in their process for learning how to teach, performance assessments for teachers spread throughout the county, and now most states require the edTPA as an exit requirement for their education program (Price, 2014). Granting that the field has benefited by having an exit assessment created by educators, there were critics about testing companies handling the educators' materials, for the high fee of the test, and for evaluations taking place outside the university setting (Price, 2014). However, some states have require the PRAXIS tests for each area of endorsement in addition to the edTPA (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018), even though according to Will (2019), PRAXIS exams have no connection with what is taught at colleges and only 46% of students pass it the first time they take it. This number lowers to 38% when candidates are black and 57% when Hispanic. Petchauer (2019) an education professor, noticed the lack of connection between the PRAXIS scores and the skills teacher candidates displayed in his classroom. He also commented on the lack of evidence relating licensure standardized exams and teaching effectiveness. Petchauer did not agree with the use of

standardized testing in education, explaining, “The exams also have a complicated entanglement to racism and other systems of violence, like the eugenics movement” (p, xii). However, he suggested teacher preparation programs to support their students to be able to pass the PRAXIS while they complete their programs.

### **From Learning to Teaching**

Coursework and teacher preparation matter for teacher effectiveness, school environment, and working conditions affect retention and teacher improvement (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015). Schools districts that provide adequate induction programs can shape new teachers into the system’s culture (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chan, 2014; Langdon & Alansari, 2012). Moreover, they can make sure that new teachers stay in the system, adjust to the culture, and learn how to teach better over time (Cochran-Smith, 2012).

### **Supporting New Teachers With Induction Programs and Mentors**

Providing different kinds of support for new teachers is beneficial for student achievement and retention (Allen, 2013; Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chan, 2014; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016). Induction programs provide meaningful and extensive new teacher support that increases the probability of teachers staying in their placement over time; therefore, significantly reducing attrition and migration (Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Zembytska, 2016). The issue is especially true when new teachers move from big cities to small towns, since induction support also helps new teachers to adjust not only to their new position but also to the community (Kono, 2012).

Mentor programs work when the culture supports teachers and learning (Mena, Hennissen & Loughran, 2017; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016); which, at the same time, promotes

higher teacher retention (Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016). Principals set the tone for the culture, the vision, and the development of support programs (Chan, 2014). Mentors need to communicate with their principals continually and have clear goals for teacher learning (Moir, 2009). When schools provide coherent mentoring programs combined with professional learning communities, the impact on teacher improvement grows (Chan, 2014; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016). Systems should set clear expectations for the mentoring process, assessment of mentors' accomplishments, and pre-set goals for teacher growth based on self-reflection and student evidence (Chan, 2014; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016).

Induction's positive effects increase when mentors are experts in the same subject area as the teachers (Bastian & Marks, 2017); thus, generating trust and a better relationship (Chan, 2014). The relationship built between mentors and mentees is also crucial in the learning process, therefore allowing time to communicate and work together is essential (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Korstjens, & Volman, 2014). It is crucial to consider the approach of the mentor towards the new teacher since more directive mentors do not help as much as mentors that inquire and promote reflection. (Mena et al., 2017). Mentors do not need to be on site or in person due to the existence of online communities for learning. Online communities are beneficial for new teachers because they help teachers feel part of a community and provide no boundaries of time or distance (Mitchell, Howard, Meetze-Hall, Henderick, & Sandlin, 2017; Moir, 2009).

University-based induction programs benefit and support new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Some programs allow only their graduates to participate (Allen, 2013), but others invite teachers from various backgrounds to take advantage of their services (Bastian & Marks, 2017). There are contextual urban education programs, which provide ongoing support for teachers during their first years of teaching, assuring teacher retention in urban schools

(Hammerness & Matsko, 2013). Allen (2013) described how Trinity University designed a one-week program during the summer for first and second-year graduates to come back to the university to work in curriculum development. The program connected teachers as a professional network, helped them improve their teaching practice and improved teacher retention.

University-based induction programs could benefit the university by fostering partnership relationships with schools systems, learning from teaching practices in schools sites, creating professional learning communities, and outstretching teacher education programs beyond graduation dates and into leadership (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chan 2014; Moir, 2009).

### **Coaching, Professional Development, and Learning Communities**

Coaching is a new approach to professional development, which occurs in a more differentiated form, tailored to the needs of each teacher, and in the school site where teachers work. This approach became the solution that districts found to help teachers adjust to the requirements set by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Fontenot, 2016; Horne, 2012; Stover, Kissel, Haag & Shoninker, 2011). For example, when states adopted the CCSS for Mathematics, districts hired coaches to guide their teachers. Previous standards required mostly procedural computations of problems, while the new CCSS required conceptual understanding expressed in various ways. Coaches helped teachers understand those differences among standards, and guided them on how to use different teaching strategies to approach those standards through instruction (Taylor, 2017).

To promote student learning, the coach and the teacher must frequently meet, analyze teachers' instructional techniques, and place short and long-term goals to achieve during the year. Together, they should find measurable goals for improvement and target strategies to attain them (Boehle, 2013; Fontenot, 2016; Knight et al., 2015). When properly planned and coherently

approached, coaches have proven effective in helping teachers improve their practice in particular subject areas, and with observation and constant feedback promote student achievement (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Lauer, 2013; Morgan, 2010; Saphier & West, 2010).

The most recent reauthorization of ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, (ESSA) suggests that districts should have coaches to guide teachers to address the standards set up by each state (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Coaches are beneficial when spending time with teachers in instructional activities, but their effect significantly diminishes when working with managerial tasks outside the classroom (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Fontenot, 2016; Horne, 2012). Just as in the case of induction, school leaders must provide an open environment for teacher and student learning, and should foster good relationships with coaches (Fontenot, 2016; Fullan & Knight, 2011). Supportive leaders promote a school environment of trust; thus, improving student achievement (Belt, 2017). The relationship between teachers and coaches needs to develop before student achievement improves (Fontenot, 2016; Horne, 2012; Stover et al., 2011). Therefore, the most critical part of the coaches' job is to build a positive relationship with the teachers (Knight, 2011; Morgan, 2010). Coaches must treat teachers as their peers and trust their abilities to improve instruction (Knight, 2011). With the help of leaders, coaches, because of their connections, can promote a positive school culture (Fontenot, 2016; Knight, 2011; Stover et al., 2011).

Teachers' trust increases when the coach has the same background and expertise in the subject matter they are coaching (Boehle, 2013). Coaches are beneficial when eliciting reflection by asking good questions and listening attentively to teachers' concerns (Knight, 2011; Lauer, 2013; Stover et al., 2011). They play an essential role understanding the changes in state requirements, communicating those changes to teachers, and helping them improve instruction

while keeping students at the center of their decisions (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Fullan & Knight, 2011). In this regard, coaches can help school districts to improve instruction when teachers have had gaps in specific areas of their teacher education.

Fontenot (2016) and Knight (2011) advised that it takes time to notice the benefits of coaching because teachers learn from one year to another, and considering that developing a good relationship between teachers and coach can take more than a year, coaches must have adequate communication skills and earn the confidence and trust of teachers. Just as the work of mentors, coaches can help teachers work as professional communities, with the purpose of helping their schools. Darling-Hammond and Falk (2015) suggested that teachers should design and analyze performance assessments for students, guided by the standards required by their states. In this way, teachers can learn to collaborate towards a common goal as a community, with the purpose of helping all students learn; thus, addressing equity, improving instruction, and promoting leadership. Communication among coaches, teachers, and principals could also generate teacher evaluation evidence. Darling-Hammond (2014) proposed to evaluate teachers as a system of teaching and learning. They could include evaluations based on teaching standards such as evidence of teacher practice, student learning and professional bequest, and it should include feedback tied to professional development. The process should include reflection before setting short and long-term goals for improvement.

### **School Climate, Classroom Management, and Student Achievement**

Favorable school climate improves student achievement, to the point of mitigating the impact of low socioeconomic status (Back, et al., 2016; Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, Benbenishty, 2017; Sulak, 2016). Positive school climate nurtured by proper instructional teaching and learning techniques promotes positive classroom management, and positive relationships among



teachers, principals, and staff (Back et al., 2016). When school principals and teachers offer a caring and positive environment for children, students feel safe, ready to learn, and achievement improves.

Family values towards education also affect student achievement (Sahlberg, 2010). Sulak (2016) and Berkowitz et al. (2017) explained that parental involvement improves student achievement. Likewise, the level of parental involvement in schools also reflects the level of crime in the community (Sulak, 2016). This correlation gave reason for Sahlberg (2010) to suggest that the purpose of schooling goes beyond measurable knowledge. Students must develop as human beings, knowing that they are valued by their by their families and communities for who they are, and not because of the externally set rules of academic achievement. Teachers that care for students' social, personal, and academic needs can create classroom environments in which students are productively in charge of their learning (Stronge et al., 2011). These teachers plan lessons that are engaging (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007), that promote inquiry in their classrooms and empower students to find questions and answers to their problems (Couros, 2015), This approach can also help engage students who feel bored, nonproductive, and find no sense in attending school (Sahlberg, 2010).

Schools with higher levels of minority students have lower academic achievement, which is a reason for teachers to be equipped to work with a diverse group of students and to provide positive classroom management in order to help reduce discipline problems and increase student achievement (Sulak, 2016). The relation between student background and achievement relies on the characteristics of the school and classroom climate (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Therefore, principals must foster an environment in which teachers care for students by providing engaging activities centered on learning, and valuing each student as an individual with strengths and

social, personal, and academic needs (Back et al., 2016). When principals are instructional leaders, teachers feel supported and tend to collaborate more with their colleagues, creating friendly working environments, which improve the climate of school (Back et al., 2016).

### **The Purpose of School**

As explained at the beginning of the chapter, there is a consensus among researchers regarding the purpose of school. Families, teachers, and community members believe that schools should empower students to be knowledgeable citizens, who are happy, responsible, successful, and contributing members of society (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015; Armstrong, 2006; Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Couros, 2015; Glover, 2013; Meier & Wood, 2004; Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2013; Russakoff, 2015; Sondel, 2013). To reach a goal there must be a clear path for action with constant evaluations to help the system reach the set goal. Failing to do so might mean losing track and never achieving such purpose (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

It is essential then, to define what success is and looks like before determining if schools are successful or not. Couros (2015) believed we should measure school success not only when students are in the school, but also after students have left. Couros (2015) noted, “Even if a person earns higher degrees, makes a lot of money, and is happy if he or she isn’t a contributing member of society, is that success?” (p. 214). The impact of school should be evaluated by the impact their graduates have on the world outside the school walls. Therefore, if the goal is to promote individuals who are better prepared to sustain the economy of the country, it is necessary to prepare individuals who can succeed in achieving the requirements of future job placements once they exited school. However, it is important to notice that most of the innovations that have reshaped our world have been sparked by individuals who had purposeful goals (Pink, 2009).

Sinek (2009) clarified that leaders who inspire have a clear answer to “why” they act, and their answer explains their purpose or mission. Only after understanding their mission, they move on to explain “how” they will achieve it, and “what” will they do with it. Most of these inspiring leaders have the goal of impacting the world and making it a better place. Sinek added that when the goal is to promote monetary advancement, individuals must first answer the “what” question, and can explain “how” they will do it, but are not able to articulate the “why.” Sinek further illuminated that by answering “what” questions, leaders are promoting compliance, but when answering “why” questions, they are inspiring action and loyalty. In other words, when reformers expect students to be career-ready, they are answering the “what” question of schools, i.e., what will they do once they finish school. When prompted on “how” they be career-ready, the answer is by achieving higher scores in standardized testing. When the reform focuses on “what” answers, it promotes compliance from the whole system.

The “why” question is answered by Rath (2007) and Amrstrong (2006) when they talk about empowering students to develop their strengths and potential, as well as when Kallick and Zmuda (2016) with their intend to inspire students to make a better world. Because of their knowledge of human psychology and development, educators can explain “how” to do it in a way that can motivate students (Armstrong, 2006), and they can envision “what” students will be able to do when they finish school (Couros, 2015; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

According to Pink (2009), individuals who seek to contribute to a better world felt satisfied and exhibited low levels of anxiety and depression, but individuals who sought economic rewards, even when being successful, exhibited higher levels of anxiety and depression. Pink explained that, when profit was the goal, the results were not always well-being and could contribute to the opposite. When comparing this explanation to Abeles and

Rubenstein's (2015) research, it is easier to understand the stress generated by test scores and college requirements on students, to the point of considerably increasing sickness, depression, and even suicide. Abeles and Rubenstein suggested that parents should require schools to promote a developmentally appropriate curriculum accompanied by social-emotional learning. They explained that students need a variety of self-control skills such as "self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, communication, and thoughtful decision-making" (p. 195), which could help them cultivate relationships, help them work as part of a team, and have a balanced life.

According to Couros (2015), the way learning occurs in schools needs to change to empower individuals to embrace the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He believed students needed to have meaningful learning experiences, based on collaboration, reflection, and positive relationships. To promote these changes, Couros (2015) and Schlechty (2011) suggested shifting the spotlight from what teachers do in class to what students are doing in class, and also focussing on how teachers and schools are helping students develop the skills required to succeed in their world outside schools (Armstrong, 2006).

Considering the social problems our society is facing (Gregory et al., 2018; K. Henry et al., 2012; Time Editors, 2018), and the impact teachers have on students (Ell et al., 2017; Mehta, 2012), it is essential for educators and policymakers to focus on the purpose of school. They should answer the question of "why" we have schools before they can figure out "how" and "what" is that we need do with the purpose of empowering students to be responsible, successful, and contributing citizens. As a consensus, Abeles and Rubenstein (2015), Armstrong (2006), Couros (2015), and Kallick and Zmuda (2016) have highlighted the importance of trust and relationships, of accepting students with their strengths and weaknesses, of promoting safe spaces for making mistakes and learning from them, and of encouraging independence and

responsibility, while empowering students to make good choices. To accomplish such goals, all stakeholders need to work together and consider the different points of view regarding education. It is important to educate teachers who are knowledgeable in all aspects of society (Lasso Jijón, 2018) and it is crucial for policymakers to listen to educators and communities members, since according to the Gallup Poll, Americans are willing to support their school districts, teachers, and students in need (Kappan, 2018).

### **Chapter Summary**

Market-based reforms have not achieved the equity goals (U.S. Department of education, 2016) by failing to narrow the gap between top performers and low performers, which is a reflection of the socioeconomic gap between affluent and needy individuals in a society (OECD, 2016; Sparks, 2018; The Nation's Report Card, 2017). Education policies should focus on coherent systems that promote proper teaching practices, support for teachers and educational leaders, and respect for education as a profession (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015; Mehta et al., 2012). Those policies should keep students at the center of their decisions and measure success as the ability to find an activity that is “satisfying to the human spirit as it is satisfying economically.” (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017, p. 1).

To do so, stakeholders, policymakers, and educators need to work cooperatively (Arbaugh et al., 2015; Ludlow et al., 2017; Mehta et al., 2012) with each group doing that of which they are experts. Policymakers should support students in need by providing them with the services that they are not able to access due to their environment and personal situation (Mehta et al., 2012; Ravitich, 2010, 2013); likewise they should support teaching as a profession, by respecting teachers, providing autonomy, and incrementing their salaries (Arbaugh et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2015). Educators should improve

teacher preparation programs. They should provide candidates with the adequate theory, dispositions, and clinical experience needed to succeed during the first years of teaching (Arbaugh et al., 2012; Bialka, 2016; Cochran-Smith, Stern et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen, 2010a, 2010b), and by exposing them to their responsibility of promoting equity and social change (Cochran-Smith, Ell, et al, 2016; Lasso Jijón, 2018). Schools districts should support teachers as they develop and learn over time, and promote leadership positions to teachers in the field (Cochran-Smith, 2012; Glover, 2013; Lasso Jijón 2018), keeping in mind the students and the purpose of schools to make sure that schools prove to be successful.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of novice teachers serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> years of teaching in grades K-8 regarding their college or university preparation, the support they received from their schools during their first years of teaching, and their perception of the purpose of school. The researcher chose a qualitative methodology since it helps investigators learn about common occurrences from the participant's standpoint (Redman, 2015). To learn about the experiences of teachers and understand the significance of events on personal development as teachers, the researcher selected the phenomenological approach of in-depth interviews. Patton (2015) clarified that phenomenological approaches help investigators analyze and comprehend the significance of specific events in the participants' experience, and according to research (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2016), in-depth interviews are structured dialogues that help the researcher learn about the perceptions of participants concerning a specific phenomenon.

The researcher took as a guide Dillon's (2004) study, which analyzed the perceptions of teachers, working in northeast Tennessee, about their teacher preparation programs and the support given by their schools during the first two years of teaching. Hence, one of the objectives of this study was to learn about the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their preparation programs and the support given to them during the first years of teaching and to analyze any changes to teachers' perceptions during the last 15 years. The second objective of this study was to learn about the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their teacher preparation programs,

the support their school systems have provided them during the first years of teaching, and how those experiences have supported them in fulfilling the purpose of school.

### **Research Questions**

For this study, the researcher adapted the research questions 1 - 6 from the questions created by Dillon (2004). The author's purpose was to analyze the fluctuations in novice teachers' perceptions regarding their preparation programs and support given by their schools. The researcher amplified the investigation by including questions 7 and 8 that pertained to the purpose of school. The questions guiding this investigation were the following:

1. What do novice teachers in grades K-8 have in common in terms of experiences and preparation?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding their teacher preparation programs concerning required courses?
3. What are teachers' perceptions about their teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?
4. What do teachers believe colleges and universities can do to make the transition from college to teaching more successful?
5. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding their induction, mentoring, professional development, coaching programs, and feedback provided at their respective schools?
6. How can schools ensure novice teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?
7. What do teachers believe is the purpose of school?
8. What relationship exists between the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their preparation and professional support and the achievement of the purpose of school?



## **The Role of the Researcher**

In-depth interviews provide an adequate venue for the researcher to learn about the experiences lived by individuals and the impact that those experiences had on the interviewees' life (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) acknowledged that it was necessary to interview individuals who were part of the system to be able to understand social organizations like education; thus eliciting the importance of inquiring about teachers' experiences. Consequently, the role of the researcher was to be an attentive listener and reader to help interviewees find the meaning of their experiences by asking clarifying questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Creswell (2013), with Marshall and Rossman (2016) supported the benefits of having various in-depth interviews and of inquiring about individuals' different stages in their process of becoming teachers. Even though the researcher met with the teachers just once, all questions regarding their teacher preparation programs were sent ahead of time for participants to reflect on and to answer before the first meeting. The researcher also gave the participants the opportunity to email any information they might have reflected on or thought was important after the interview was over. They were also able to read and analyze the interview transcripts before the researcher began analyzing the data.

## **Participant Selection**

Qualitative research and especially phenomenology studies suggest the purposeful selection of research sites and participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher chose three different school districts in northeast Tennessee, two city districts and one county district, and selected teachers working in any grade level between Kindergarten and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> year of experience. The first year of teaching could be the most challenging and the one that bears the least results regarding student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Bransford,

2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Plecki et al., 2012). With experience and reflection, teachers grow in their practice and can understand not only the complexity of teaching but also the factors that influence students' learning (Cochran-Smith, 2012). Arbaugh et al. (2015) explained that it takes between 3 and 5 years of teaching to become a successful teacher, and according to research (Ali, 2017; Bland et al., 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013) depending on the teachers' job placements, between 30% and 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first 3 to 5 years of teaching.

The researcher decided to interview individuals serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> years of teaching who were novice teachers still learning their craft but could leave the profession. The perceptions of their experiences could guide stakeholders regarding preparation programs, district support to novice teachers, and the purpose of school. It could also enlighten stakeholders about the gaps or factors that might empower or hinder teachers to fulfill the purpose of school.

The investigator followed the research requirements from each district, and when granted permission, communicated with the appropriate personnel in order to communicate with the teachers who met the required criteria. The teachers interested in participating in the study emailed the researcher and set up a date and time to conduct the interview. Lasso Jijón (2018) explained that by using purposeful sampling, researchers focus on interviewing a few individuals whose experience could provide significant meaning to the study. According to Creswell (2013), the number of participants should be between 5 and 25 individuals. Therefore, the researcher met with 17 teachers for their interviews soon after they agreed to share their experiences. The sample purposefully included participants that were serving through their 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year of experience in grades K-8.

## **Data Collection**

The process of collecting data for this study occurred once the teachers emailed the researcher accepting the invitation to participate in the study. The researcher responded to the participants requesting them to select a date, time, and location for the meeting, ensuring comfort and privacy (Redman, 2015). The researcher also included the informed consent document for teachers to read and 8 questions regarding their teacher preparation programs for teachers to either answer in writing or to reflect on before the meeting. Creswell (2013) suggested to not only have interviews but to collect a variety of sources of information, such as “formally written responses” (p. 81), that can promote a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences.

During the face-to-face interview, the researcher explained to each participant about the study and asked them to sign two copies of the informed consent form, one for them to keep and one for the researcher. For the interview, the researcher used an audio-recorder, a computer, a microphone, and a data-encrypted flash drive. According to the location and internet availability, the transcription of the interviews occurred during the interview by Google Voice in a Google Document. When secure internet was not available, transcription took place at the researcher’s home.

During the meeting, the researcher reviewed the consent form with the participants and after signing it, the researcher proceeded with the interview. The researcher established rapport with the interviewees and learned about their motives for becoming teachers, asked them about their answers for the eight questions sent to them by email and continued with the interview questions. As suggested by Patton (2015), all the interview questions were the same for all participants (Appendix A). The interviewer also made sure to ask questions that clarified the experiences of each interviewee (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Data analysis began only after the participants had corroborated their transcripts. The researcher gave each participant a pseudonym and eliminated personal information, and following Creswell's (2013) suggestion, the researcher organized, coded, and represented data. In some cases, data were re-coded when clusters of data emerged (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher analyzed and reduced data identifying emerging themes after analyzing the data several times using an inductive method (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). As explained by Creswell (2013), the process of inductive analysis helped the researcher create broad themes by coding transcripts and written answers.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In qualitative research, validity denoted trustworthiness (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The purpose of the research is to be able to answer accurately the research questions set by the study (Patton, 2015). For this reason, the researcher followed Castillo-Montoya's (2016) suggestion of conducting the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPR). First, the researcher aligned the interview questions with the research questions. Then, the researcher made sure that the interview questions were comprehensible, promoted social conversation, and included a variety of types of questions helping the interviewees share their experiences in a non-threatening way. The researcher also requested feedback from educators who could not participate in the study, which helped the author organize the interviews and reframe questions. The last step was to pilot the questions with an experienced educator. When all steps were complete, the researcher applied for IRB approval.

The researcher sent the questions regarding the program of study to the teachers before the meeting to allow them the time to reflect on their experiences (Seidman, 2013). During each

meeting, the researcher recorded the interviews and depending on internet availability, Google Voice transcribed those interviews simultaneously. When secure internet was not available, transcription took place at the researcher's home. The researcher shared the transcripts with each interviewee for validating or making changes, thus, promoting trustworthiness and interpretive validity of the research process and results (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Patton, 2015). The participants had one week to validate the transcripts and sent them back to the researcher. Once the interviewees validated the transcriptions, the researcher gave pseudonyms to each participant and eliminated their personal information. The researcher analyzed the data concerning the original questions set by the study, as explained in the consent form (Patton, 2015).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University required the permission from participating school districts to accept the invitation to conduct research pending their acceptance. The researcher followed the research requirements for each school district and only once granted permission, the IRB accepted the study. The researcher communicated with the person in charge of research in each district. Depending on each district's requirements, the researcher contacted the teachers or the teachers contacted the researcher. In both cases, communication took place by email.

During the interview, the researcher and participant analyzed the consent form, and each participant kept a copy of the consent form (Seidman, 2013). The researcher communicated that her interest in the study was to improve education by informing stakeholders about teachers' experiences and their suggestions to better the profession. The researcher honored confidentiality by providing each participant with a pseudonym. The researcher locked data recorded during face-to-face interviews and identified it by the pseudonym. The researcher managed written

responses only through the university's email and stored all data in a data-encrypted flash drive for analysis.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to learn about the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their teacher preparation program, the professional support they received from their schools and the purpose of school. To learn about teachers' perceptions, the researcher chose the phenomenological approach of in-depth interviews with teachers who were serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> years of teaching in grades K-8 in 3 school districts in Northeast Tennessee. Seventeen teachers accepted the invitation to participate in this investigation.

The researcher met with each participant for about one hour on a location chosen by the interviewees. During the meeting, the researcher addressed questions regarding the informed consent form and after the participants signed the form, the investigator proceeded with the interview. The researcher recorded the interviews, transcribed them and sent them to the interviewees for authentication. Once validated each participant was assigned a pseudonym and personal information eliminated. The researcher coded, analyzed and reduced the data identifying emerging themes. All data were organized and presented in a way that helped answer each one of the research questions set by the researcher.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of novice teachers serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> years of teaching in grades K-8 regarding their college preparation program, the support they received from their schools during their first years of teaching, and their perception of the purpose of school. The research took place in one county and 2 city school districts in Northeast Tennessee. The researcher followed each districts' policy to contact the teachers, and the interviews took place at a location, time, and date selected by the participants. The researcher recorded, transcribed, and coded every interview, following the procedures set by the informed consent document. The interviews and their analyses were fertile ground for emerging themes mentioned throughout the chapter.

#### **Research Question 1**

**What do novice teachers in grades K-8 have in common in terms of experiences and preparation?**

This study included 17 teachers serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through their 4<sup>th</sup> year of teaching experience and working in three different school systems in Northeast Tennessee. Thirteen teachers went to a 4-year traditional teaching preparation program at a college or university in the area. One of them completed all her teacher preparation in a different state. Two of them began their studies in community colleges in the area and transferred later to university. Two of them had an ESL endorsement, and one was working on one. Three teachers had chosen education as a second profession and had undergone an MAT program to acquire their teaching license. Six teachers had completed a Master's degree advancing their careers after their 4-year

teaching program; one of those teachers had recently started a Specialist degree in Education, and one of them a Doctorate Degree in Education. Their areas of expertise included departmentalized and self-contained regular classrooms, physical education (PE), art, English-language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies with licenses to teach in either early childhood education, elementary education, or middle school and high school. Three teachers were serving their 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching experience, one her 2<sup>nd</sup> year, five were serving their 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and eight teachers were serving their 4<sup>th</sup> year of experience. Even though the teachers had different grade levels and taught different subjects, they all reflected having, in one way or another, a call for teaching, enjoyed teaching and wished to stay in the educational field in the future.

Twelve of the teachers had always wanted to become teachers or had a call to teach. Two of them did not want to be teachers because they grew up surrounded by teachers in their families but changed their minds when they were in college. Two of them decided not to follow a teaching path because they decided to “make money,” however, both ended up taking the MAT program to become teachers, and one of them took a non-traditional route and did an adult completion program to finish her undergraduate degree in education, continuing directly with a Master’s in Education.

All interviewed teachers shared that in one way or another they wanted to help people. Wendi wanted a career in which she could build relationships and help people. “I look at kids as humans. They are not lesser than adults are. Our job is to help them figure out who they are and reach their full potential.” Sara explained that her 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher changed her life by choosing books that she could read which motivated her to help others while teaching.

Whether it is to find a book that they like or become a strong writer, learn how to become a better person. Just to be that good role model. That is what I strive to do on a day-to-



day basis. To help my students enjoy reading and try to make good people. Try to help them and encourage them along the way.

Heather shared that even though she did not want to become a teacher when coaching, she gravitated around middle-schoolers. She explained she had a bad experience in middle school and she would tell her students: “I came back to middle school to make sure you do not have that experience!”

When talking about their plans for the future, all teachers saw themselves working in some area connected to education. The majority saw themselves teaching during the next five years. The teachers that did not have an advanced degree were thinking about either getting into a Master’s degree or advancing their careers with ESL or SPED certifications. Three of them wanted to move to instructional coaching positions within the schools, three were interested in higher education as professors, and four wanted to become administrators. Heather talked about pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership, with the goal of changing policy.

I am interested in going back to get my doctorate in educational policy, because of things like standards-based grading and project-based learning. I want the things that I am adamant about should be happening in schools. I want to be a voice for those things. I think I can have more impact moving into policy and having these conversations at a decision making level.

Laura talked about moving into administration and said,

I loved being in the classroom. The big bumner is all the things that are pushed down from the State Department on us. Because being a teacher, I think, is more stressful that people actually think it is, and more difficult too. If not I would stay for the next 30 years! But I do not want to get burned out.

In general, most teachers did not see themselves doing anything else than teaching or working, in one way or the other in public education.

## **Research Question 2**

### **What are teachers' perceptions regarding their teacher preparation programs concerning required courses?**

The majority of teachers had 2 years in the College of Education with some college classes, which required a few hours of field experience, and then moving into student teaching during their senior year of college. During their senior year, students had their student teaching, methods courses, and the requirement to complete the edTPA exam. For the teachers with more experience this was a university requirement, which has been included as a Tennessee requirement for licensure and graduation.

### **Positive descriptions of teacher preparation programs**

Erika shared her program was rigorous,

We read books; did research; presented strategies, models, theories, ideas, and group projects; had formal and reflective writing; thorough lesson plans. I had a variety of general education courses besides the educational ones and felt prepared to teach when I finished.

She considered that her program taught her all she needed to know to be an effective teacher. She had extensive and consistent guidance, support, and feedback, which helped her have good grades, score high on her PRAXIS and do well in student teaching. "It assured me that I could teach and I could teach well."

Martha explained that she began studying before having a family and had to leave her studies, but was able to attend an adult completion program at one of the local colleges. This program was designed for individuals who were not able to finish their bachelor's degree ahead of time and lasted a year and a half. She continued with her Master's in Education for 15 more months. Martha was happy to be able to complete her studies and with the program itself. She

explained that her field experiences related to her courses. She expressed that the classroom management course, with its field experience, was beneficial.

Sara explained that all the English courses that she took for her English major helped her to be a better teacher, and shared:

I had 20 hours of observation in Community College in my Intro to Education course, which I believed had the purpose of exposing us to teaching. Issues in education required me to get involved with local school and communities to better understand student diversity. I volunteered for 20 hours at a homework club. This allowed me to assess the needs of students in the area. I was taught the significance of after-school programs, offered after school tutoring every Monday, and encourage students to join our school's daily High 5 program.

Heather said that her program was overall pleasing:

There was one class for each core content area. Those experiences varied greatly depending on the teacher. My science professor was outstanding. He was an adjunct and worked as a science teacher. My Educational Psychology teacher was the best teacher I probably ever had.

Teachers who took a 4-year traditional program talked about having field experience with introduction to education, classroom management, and Special Education (SPED). The number of hours in schools varied from 10 to 40 by semester. The benefit was highly dependent on how the placement related to the licensure grade span as well as the mentor teacher in each placement. Heather talked about moving slowly from doing mostly observations to having more responsibilities in the classroom and finally teaching some lessons. The teachers articulated the benefit of writing their reflections after observing in schools and sharing those reflections with their classmates at college. Laura, for example, did not benefit from her observation, but was able to take lessons from her classmates:

One of my friends that was in the course with me was assigned to a high school. He was in history and he talked about a really cool lesson that the teacher had done, but then he mostly talked about how poorly the students behaved for the entire lesson. We had a huge discussion on classroom management. You can have an amazing lesson, but if you can't manage your classroom, then nobody is going to understand.

Erika, Laura, Stephanie, and Martha commented on the benefit of learning how to write detailed lesson plans as a requirement for the edTPA. They considered being prepared enough for writing lesson plans on their own once working and stated that was a strength of the program. Five teachers complimented their college professors. In general, they appreciated the classes that had hands-on activities and that applied theory into practice, and those teachers who built a relationship with them and helped them in specific areas. For example, Laura shared that her teachers were phenomenal and had good comments about the ones she liked the most. She remembered that her math teacher was great at teaching according to the age of students. “He would explain first and then model how the lesson would look like in different grade levels.” Laura talked about science as being fun. “Besides doing hands-on activities with science, she would teach us classroom management strategies and ask us to model different types of students during the lessons. We also went outside and did experiments.” Laura also talked about her reading professor being a great teacher, but that most students were not able to connect with what she was teaching them. She reflected, “We just did not have the real-world context of what she was teaching us, and I learned that during student teaching.”

When talking about social studies, Laura explained she had never been so interested in social studies before. “We learned how to make teaching fun with common core standards. She made us act, write, and pretend. She changed our idea that common core had to be standardized and teaching to the test.” Laura added that this teacher went beyond just teaching them social studies going as far as to say, “The best piece of information that I got from the program was the social studies teacher telling us to make sure we built relationships with the students.” Laura explained how instead of making classroom rules they would involve students in creating a

Classroom Constitution, which helped her address classroom management, and “how to make an environment those students would want to be in and would want to learn in.”

Heather remembered her educational psychology teacher as maybe the best teacher she ever had. “She modeled in an investigative approach. She learned that teaching was best when students find information by themselves. She modeled her class around that.” Heather shared that the case studies this teacher gave to her class helped her to see how each person could find a different approach to solving the same problem. “We got to critique one another’s case study and see ‘that works too.’ It made us think outside the box and learn to listen to one another.”

Four teachers emphasized the support and benefit of having a cohort during their college career. Julia expressed how her cohort supported her during those 2 years, but especially during student teaching. Heather was grateful for her cohort and for the continual support she received from the professors from her program, especially her mentor at the university.

Her role in checking with me my first few months teaching. She was not paid for this; it was just a passion of hers. She truly cared about us and we knew that. That gave me the support I needed knowing that I could go back. That was probably the most helpful, going into the classroom knowing that you were not alone. She would tell us “If you get done at the end of the day and you do not know what to do the next day, call us!” I still feel that way with my supervisor teacher, the head of my department, and the professors.

In the same way, Lucy was especially thankful for the people in her program.

“Personally, we were having a bad family time, and they all understood and supported me. That has been what taught me how to behave and support my students, and how their personal lives affect school too.”

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Even though teachers appreciated the positive aspects offered by their teacher preparation programs, Erika stated that “Nobody can prepare you for the emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that comes with the 1<sup>st</sup> year of teaching.” Nine teachers expressed that there were not

adequately prepared to teach when they graduated from their programs, and the complaints ranging from managerial organization inside the programs to inadequate field placements, lack of support, and to not enough theory in some areas.

Karla proposed to include more time in the program. “To have more placements tied to theory, maybe a bridge between your student teaching and your first year teaching. It could mean more experience in the classroom during the semesters, and to have the theory during the summer.” Other teachers reflected that they should spend more time in the College of Education and did not mind augmenting the length of their programs, but were aware areas like general prerequisites, which were not necessarily beneficial for their teacher preparation.

**General Prerequisites.** Mark, Karla, and Sara were opposed to general education prerequisites. Karla explained that:

High school is a prerequisite for college. There should not be prerequisites after that. There is no need! You can have students go on general studies, those classes can still be offered if they need them or want them, but they should not be required. Provide courses that pertain to the field you are going into. If you are going to make things required, do finance, do MLA or APA writing, do English, or wellness, but nothing that will not be necessary.

Sara stated that Colleges should focus more on teaching requirements, “include more time in the field in grades related to my license. That way you would go to school for what you want to do instead of getting more loans.” Mark’s remark about general education prerequisites was that they were pointless, not only from the educational standpoint but from the financial standpoint.

We have so many kids that are going into crazy depth, and half of their schooling are the classes that do not have anything to do with their major. I think that is a turnoff for many kids too. If you could do away with them great!

**Communication.** For Wendi, the biggest issue was the lack of communication from the program to its stakeholders. She reported that teacher candidates “Did not know what was expected. Field placement mentor teachers did not know what was expected from their students. One professor would say one thing and another a different thing.” Laura remembered that some of her classmates had to delay graduation for a whole semester because the university did not communicate with students promptly about some changes in the PRAXIS requirements. This issue made one of her classmates leave the teaching profession. “PRAXIS knocked one great educator out of a job. She was great! She was phenomenal! Even some of the professors tried to help, but she decided to stay home. There was a great educator, at home.” Wendi and Nicole suggested there should be better communication between professors, mentor teachers, and teacher candidates.

**Courses and theory.** Teachers shared that the theory they learned was adequate, but they reflected that they were missing the connections on how to apply such knowledge in the classroom. Wendi, Laura, and Erika suggested including how to do guided reading groups, to teach all the components of English and language arts without limiting it only to reading theory, and to incorporate strategies to assess reading. Both Hanna and Jessica also suggested some guidance on how to teach social studies.

Nine of the 17 teachers expressed they were unprepared to teach when they arrived in their classrooms and noticed that most of their students were at different grade levels in each subject. For this reason, Jessica proposed to “include classroom visits to all grades within the degree, so that students know what to expect regardless of what position they were hired for.” Jessica considered that college helped her understand curriculum and strategies for teaching, but gave her the perception that all students were at grade level,

It did not help me in preparing for the trauma, poverty, behavior issues, differentiation, and clerical aspects of teaching. These things were a heavy hit for me in my first year. It was overwhelming because I had been in a bubble of thinking that, every child was where it needed to be and that every child wanted to learn. NOT true!

Julia also shared that the gaps inside the classroom were a problem for her during the first year, and suggested having more support with English language learners, and Special Education (SPED) Students. She explained that the field experience she had for SPED took place at the special education classroom, which meant that students were not in their regular classroom. “I would have loved to see how the teacher accommodates in the classroom with and without the assistants. How the interaction looked like, and how students interacted with their peers.” Julia recommended increasing the theory of SPED and having the opportunity to observe those students in the classroom. Lucy explained, “We are expected to have inclusion, but we are not prepared to serve those kids.” Most teachers requested more SPED theory, trauma-informed teaching, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Training, educational psychology, brain development, Response to Intervention (RTI), and differentiation. Hanna proposed including courses about poverty and abuse in schools. “My first year shocked me by the amount of abuse teachers faced.”

Heather advised that educational psychology should be intertwined with all courses throughout the program, helping the teachers connect all their field experiences with theory and to be able to understand students to help them according to their developmental stage. Sara agreed with that suggestions sharing, “My program prepared me to teach English but not to understand middle school students.” All these areas relate to classroom management and with how to help students with their emotional needs, which was a problem that Emma, articulated,

A lot of my day is spent telling my kids. “You need to stop, and you need to be a good friend.” My day is spent addressing those social and emotional needs rather than academic needs. A lot of people do not realize that.



Nicole and Irene taught Spanish and were disappointed about never having courses on how to teach a foreign language. They noticed there was no connection between their Spanish major and their education major. Mark had a similar experience and did not include any positive comments about his undergraduate program. He expressed not being prepared to teach Physical Education (PE) and credited his preparation to his teaching assistant position before getting his first teaching job.

We had only three classes that made up our methods sections for PE. They were all taught by one teacher and were all kind of combined into one class. It was like a 6 hours class. It was very rushed, the teacher was great, I like her very much, but she was not very organized which made it one of those classes that are easy to do well in, but you do not necessarily take a lot from. That was unfortunate.

Julia suggested connecting theory with what was currently happening in schools.

Teachers agreed that college professors had been away from the classroom for several years, and suggested that it should be a required for college professors to go to schools and relate to current issues within the schools in the area. Julia shared,

Some professors did not understand the dynamics of the school, which made it hard to ask questions or have discussions on. Some stories “did not seem believable” because they were in East Tennessee. That should never be a response or even a thought. I think the professors becoming familiar with the schools themselves, not just the district, could help the program by creating a better connection between students, professors, and fieldwork.

Laura and Karla proposed avoiding extensive lesson plans, learning how to plan for whole units more than just only lessons. Erika needed guidance on how to organize the schedule and lessons for a 7-hour day, and how to set up the classroom. Teachers suggested learning and practicing how to apply reading theories and differentiation strategies, incorporating case studies to all courses, and having teacher speakers at their classes to be able to learn from their experiences. Six asked for more preparation to get a job, to have mock interviews, and to learn how to build relationships and communicate with parents.

Heather reflected that one of the missing pieces of her program was Standards-based assessment. She explained,

It is essentially not having letters as grades. It is having levels of proficiency. You grade each standard based on such mastery for the entire year... I think that this is where education has to go. This type of assessment works when you have Project-Based Learning... I think there should be more than one way for a student to get to show their learning.

Heather suggested that universities should innovate and teach their candidates current theories to be able to use in future years. However, she recognized that this was a new idea and that it would take time to reach the university level. The time it takes colleges to adopt new theories seemed connected to Jessica's remarks, "I feel like education changes so quickly that many of the ideas I learned in college were not applicable by the time I got hired into my position."

**Assessment.** One of the emerging themes of this investigation was the perceptions teachers had about the assessment requirements for licensure and graduation as teachers. Teachers shared that to graduate they needed to take and pass the PRAXIS exams and the Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). There were teachers who did not question the evaluations and accepted them as a requirement to get the license, but all teachers recognized the amount of work required for the edTPA, and the difficulty that year involved. Stephanie and Sara complained about the lack of information they received about the test and the fear instilled in them by their teachers. However, they noticed there were positive areas, as Sara explained, "Looking at the context of learning, assessing the diversity in the classroom, the community of your students, the population, and after that, you start looking at the needs of your students. You pick a lesson and some type of unit to teach. Then you look at the assessment piece and you

reflect, so it is basically teaching.” Stephanie shared “it made you think about all the little parts that go into teaching, assessing, evaluating, and how you plan.”

Three teachers were openly against it, and the explanations were very similar. Karla was part of the first group that took the test, so their scores did not count towards their graduation.

She suggested that the edTPA should be more realistic, and not looked like busy work,

It was somewhat unnecessarily lengthy. It was not a good representation of what we actually do in the classroom. It is done during your student teaching because one of the requirements is to have videos of you teaching. I thought it was a lot trying to balance the edTPA and all of the requirements as far as the writing process, the videography, and get a good amount of teaching experience; it is a lot to juggle. I think that those who are graduating through the program are expected to be able to manage both of those, and it gives you good reflective practice while you're student teaching, but I wish it were more tailored to what we actually see in our schools.

Nicole, Emma, and Laura were against having it during the same semester as their Residency II. They explained that during Residency II they were required to be at school full time and attending classes at university some nights. They all concurred that it took time away from their learning in the classroom. Nicole, for example, noticed she focused more on meeting datelines and trying to decipher time-consuming prompts, than in learning from her mentor and student teaching experience.

The prompts were extremely confusing. I would not have passed if it were not because a teacher took the time to sit with me and help me. I felt like I was taken away from my field experience. The only positive was the lesson plans. I did not like the way the rubric asked me to prove the learning of students, because you cannot really do that with language.

Emma declared that it was a big workload for such a short amount of time. She understood that there are several requirements for graduation and for being certified, but “too many of my classmates and me, it felt ... so big of a workload that at the end of the day it did not really feel like it was worth it. I have never had to use it again.” Emma explained that she could have learned more from the mentor at her student teaching, and that was her reason to propose to

begin with it during Residency I when the workload of courses and student teaching was not as heavy and to finish it during Residency II. Laura was maybe the most outspoken about it. She was not happy at all with having a standardized test to judge her teaching. She was also the only teacher that needed to work in order to pay for her studies, so her workload was even more significant. Laura did not appreciate the verbiage, the evaluation requirements, and the videotaping. For her that it was unfair.

A couple of teachers talked about the subjectivity of the evaluation. In both cases, the teacher candidates had helped some friends with the rubrics and received lower grades than those friends they had helped. Mark was also in discordance with the edTPA requirements, especially the videotaping as part of the evaluation. Because of having to film his PE class, his video was not able to include every single requirement, and therefore, he did not pass the test. He had to attend a remediation meeting, “The issue is not that I did not do the requirements, the issue was that they were not shown in the clip. It is not necessarily something you are not doing; it just was not shown in the clip.”

Regarding the PRAXIS test, teachers took it as a requirement to get their certification, but as expressed by Karla “The Praxis was what I expected, but again, tests like that are not accurate measurements of knowledge and ability.” According to Laura, who understands that it is essential to know if teachers are prepared to teach, she was frustrated.

A standardized test does not fit every student, and that is frustrating as an educator and as a student...I felt like it was just a way to make money. I passed the test. I had to retake one, so all-in-all cost me about \$600 on top of what I was already paying, and if you do not pass them, you cannot go on.

Teachers appreciated having observations and being evaluated. Nicole, for example, suggested the edTPA should simplify the prompts, change how they do the video and how to prove that you have done all of the requirements on the prompt. “I would make it shorter, so that

it is not the main focus of the field experience, to make it more reflective, and I would suggest not doing it during student teaching.”

**After graduation.** Wendi suggested, “Keeping communication open between colleges and teachers after graduating would be beneficial.” Karla recommended teacher preparation programs to offer some professional development, which could be in the form of an extended curriculum, during the first year of teaching. “The more we can have a collaboration between current school teaching practices and our teacher preparation programs, the better our programs are going to be.”

Karla recommended having a “bridge” year in which teachers get to have 1 or 2 years of working for a system as assistants before they begin working as teachers. Lucy expressed colleges needed to reorganize their programs in a way that benefited the students, making sure they get the required and adequate theory, but at the same time to provide sufficient time in the schools.

### **Research Question 3**

**What are teachers’ perceptions about their teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?**

Fourteen teachers agreed that there was a connection between the initial field experiences and college courses and all teachers agreed that student teaching had made the most significant impact on their teaching. For 10 teachers the benefit came from having a yearlong student teaching experience and being able to experience the preparation of the classroom of setting up the classroom and organizing the routines with children at the beginning of the year. Wendi acknowledged that: “Having a yearlong student teaching including the first 2 weeks of school

helped me set procedures and build classroom community. That is your foundation for the whole year! I appreciated the full year!” Sara affirmed that during student teaching

Modeling and learning from an experienced teacher prepared me to understand the importance of solid classroom management, effective planning, quality assessments, and valuable feedback through grading and day-to-day interactions. However, I give this field experience double thumbs up for helping me understand diversity outside my own rural community.

Julia talked about working in low-income schools during her field experience and student teaching. She realized what poverty looked like, the different teaching styles, the learning needs of the students, and small details like the benefit of having classical background music in the classroom. “It was eye-opening regarding students in low-income schools. It changed my view of teaching. I realized school is not just about learning.” Laura explained how they learned from shadowing their mentors during planning, parent-teacher conferences, afterschool activities, and teaching. Nicole, for example, credited all her knowledge to her student teaching. She had a Spanish major with a secondary teaching minor and described having no foreign language courses and no connection between Spanish and education. Nicole reflected being confident to teach because of the modeling and teachings from her mentor teacher during her student teaching experience. “He gave me a lot of practical things to use. Up to that point, I was learning many theories, which is good, but was missing the practical side. I could see myself stepping into that role after doing that.”

All teachers agreed that field experiences were helpful because they let them see different classes, schools, teaching styles, and grade levels. By doing so, they were able to watch things they wanted to implement and others they would try to avoid. About half of the teachers shared that they learned about what routine looks like in a classroom, how to use technology, and classroom management strategies. Stephanie noticed that several of the things that happen in the

classroom in real life were unexpected, Wendi learned to set procedures and build a community in her classroom, and Susan benefited primarily from the constructive advice given by her mentor teacher during her student teaching. She emphasized the benefits of having both theory and practice, as she was able to see some of her classmates take advantage of the “transitional teaching license.” In their case, they had a job, and instead of doing student teaching and being evaluated by the professors, they began working without the student teaching experience and had salaries as regular school teachers.

A lot of them did not succeed in teaching. The student teaching was probably about the best thing that I could have done. To go through and have someone next to my side for an entire year, telling me what to do, tell me what not to do, but it was not my responsibility yet. Basically, they fell in their faces during their first year because they have not had any classroom experience before that.

Teachers appreciated the feedback and guidance given by their mentor teachers during their field experiences and student teaching, as well as the feedback given by the university supervisors when their supervisors observed them teaching lessons at their school placements. The teachers reflected on the benefit of designing and teaching their lessons and having their mentor teachers in the room in case they needed help. Lucy, for example, was thankful for her mentor teacher, since she trusted her teaching lessons early on in her student teaching. “She would teach the first period, we would co-teach the second period, and I would teach the third period. That was really beneficial.”

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

All teachers expressed that they would have benefited from more field experience. They suggested having it sooner, for more extended periods, and having more placements throughout their college experience. Mark considered that field experience should be the essential part of the program, with theory added to the classes.

Currently, field placements are just an added thing on top of an already very full workload. I think that is the most important thing... I think that any time that you can get around teachers, and talk to teachers, and different teachers. Not just having one placement for a long time, but just going to different teachers to take different things is very important.

Considering the importance of field experience, all teachers suggested having more intentional placements. Mark, as a PE teacher, did not appreciate having a placement in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, "I had to do 15 hours of observation, but since there were 20 PE students, I ended up in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. It was fun, but had nothing to do with PE." Susan was a math major with a secondary education minor pursuing a 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-grade teaching license, and she had to do 30 hours of observation in Kindergarten "That was not good!" She recommended making sure the assignments were related to licensure requirements. Nicole applied to the College of Education knowing that she wanted to teach Spanish and her only placement, before student teaching, was with a librarian. Irene posited that there was too much emphasis on the theory taught in each course and suggested that every single course should have at least 30 hours of field experience. Mark explained that practice should not be an addition to the theory, that it should be the bulk of the course including the required theory each the field experience. Irene added that the college should "Make sure candidates are exposed to all the grade levels of their licensure."

One of the teachers shared that she had a placement change because she was not learning enough. Conversely, Laura complained that their programs did not help them when needing placement changes because they were not learning. She explained that three of her placements were not an adequate fit; during her only field experience before student teaching, she had to sit and listen to a teacher read a book. "I had talked to my professor about it, and I could not do anything. The teacher would only let me come at that time." During her student teaching, the



experience did not improve; she had to take a summer class with the purpose of learning how to set up the classroom and learn about the first days of school.

I was assigned to a school that has a year-round schedule, so I was not able to help setting up since they were in class already. That classroom had an interim with no experience, so I helped her in the class, but did not learn much. I was later changed from placement to a different school due to low-test scores from the original teacher. During the fall, I was supposed to go several hours, and the teacher I was placed with did not let me do the assignments I had to do with my students. The College of Education told me to talk with the principal of the school, who changed me and finally was able to finish my ST. Therefore, I ended up doing my assignments several times, which was frustrating.

Laura's suggestion was for the colleges to be intentional in their placements, to communicate with mentor teachers about the students' expectations, and to help students when their placements were not adequate. Almost all teachers agreed that student teaching should last at least a whole year. The teachers that had only one semester did not feel as prepared to teach as the ones that had a full year including the summer to help set up the classrooms. Karla added that Colleges of Education should require students to follow the same schedule than their school placements' schedule. "Colleges have a different schedule than schools. Therefore, I called my mentor teacher and went when schools started. For me, there was not much information to guide me, considering how important student teaching is."

Once students are in their placements, their supervisors become a great resource. Teachers liked their supervisors and learned from their feedback. Susan proposed having supervisors with the same experience as their students' majors; otherwise, the evaluations were not as useful. "When my supervisor came to evaluate me, he would say that I did things greatly. Once he was gone, my mentor teacher would tell me that yes, it was good, BUT, there were several things I could have improved."

#### **Research Question 4**

##### **What do teachers believe colleges and universities can do to make the transition from college to teaching more successful?**

Teachers explained that colleges were doing an adequate job in some components of their teacher preparation program but also commented on areas for improvement to help teachers be successful. The answer provided to this question is a combination of positive comments that teachers gave as well as some suggestions that they shared.

##### **Program Organization**

All teachers suggested increasing the time in the field, with Mark and Laura proposing to organize the program around field experiences beginning the first semester of the program. Teachers also advocated for having theory courses connected field with experience, and to provide a full year for student teaching, requiring students to follow the schedule that their school placement follows. Jessica and Irene recommended making sure teacher candidates observed every single grade level included in their teaching license.

Julia, Heather, Lucy, Martha proposed organizing the program with teacher cohorts. They shared the benefits of having teacher candidates take advantage of group support and collaboration. Mark recommended eliminating general education prerequisites, while Karla suggested that if needed only to add classes as writing for English, finance for math, and wellness for science. Erika and Hanna shared the idea of taking away classes that are not specific to the program of study and using that time for field experience. Laura and Emma asked professors to be open regarding assessment techniques such as the edTPA and to avoid doing it the last semester of student teaching. Emma suggested beginning with the test during Residency I.

Julia advised requiring professors to visit schools and be aware of their current reality, their students, and their environment, and Lucy shared that the college should make sure that the teacher preparation program is composed of a group of individuals ready to support the teacher candidates to complete their programs and succeed as teachers.

### **Field Experience Requirements**

All teachers suggested having more field experience before the student teaching year and offering one whole year for student teaching including the two weeks before school starts, requiring teachers to follow the schedule of the school they were assigned. Moreover, they recommended the college to be intentional about the field placements and selection of mentor teachers. Sara and Wendi recommended improving the communication between college supervisors and mentor teachers about the requirements teacher candidates must accomplish during field experiences, and Susan requested to have field experience supervisors have the same area of expertise as the major of the student to increase appropriate feedback when teaching their first lessons.

### **Theory Courses Requirements**

All teachers advocated establishing a curriculum that includes adequate courses on educational psychology, brain development, trauma-informed teaching, special education, English as a second language, and more classroom management strategies. Five teachers voiced their request to include courses on how to teach all the areas teachers will be required to teach. For example in elementary education, it should include courses on how to teach math, science, social studies, and ELA. Lucy, Sara, Susan, Laura, and Karla suggested that professors model a variety of teaching strategies they want teacher candidates to practice and explicitly clarify how to use those strategies in their classrooms. The same suggestion came from Mark, Irene, and

Nicole, related arts teachers, who requested the colleges to be intentional in creating programs that focus on the major chosen by the candidate and, at the same time, connected to education.

Wendi, Erika, and Laura asked for explicit instruction on how to do guided reading groups, how to teach reading and how to assess reading. Erika also suggested the need for professors approaching all the ELA components and how to teach them, not just reading theory. Erika, Laura, and Martha recognized they needed guide in different ways of setting up their classroom, organizing schedules for the whole day and planning for whole units instead of only for lessons. Julia, Jessica, and Sara expressed their need for differentiation and on how to help students with various grade levels inside the same classroom.

Heather and Lucy wished they included innovative practices such as standards-based-grading and project-based-learning, making sure to teach teacher candidates how to implement those in their classrooms. They also suggested including case studies in their theory classes. Julia and Susan requested to have professors invite novice teachers to the college classes to talk to teacher candidates and answer questions regarding their experiences.

### **Assessment**

Five teachers advocated avoiding the use of only standardized testing as a requirement for graduation. Suggesting to have supervisors and mentor teachers observe teacher candidates in their classrooms instead of requiring short videos, which do not show the whole picture. Lucy and Karla proposed incorporating self-assessment and more reflections as part of the evaluation system.

### **Job Preparation**

Martha, Sara, and Wendi asked for help regarding strategies to build relationships and communication with parents and students who have experienced high amounts of trauma and to

prepare teachers on how to communicate during parent-teacher-conferences, 504s, and IEPs. Jessica and Emma requested to include interview preparation, Wendi asked for help finding a job, and Karla proposed creating an assistantship path for new teachers to get a job

### **After Graduation**

Wendi, Heather, and Karla suggested colleges promote communication between teacher preparation programs and teachers, also implementing professional development given by the teacher preparation program and novice teachers as a way of extended support.

## **Research Question 5**

**What are the teachers' perceptions regarding their induction, mentoring, professional development, coaching programs, and feedback provided at their respective schools?**

### **Induction**

From the 17 teachers interviewed, 10 acknowledged receiving some New Teachers' In-service. Most of them located at the Main Office for their district. They all articulated that the meetings lasted from 2 to 5 days, and they included all new teachers in the district. Julia remembered meeting people working at the Main Office, "People from all areas of the district spoke during the in-service: principals, human resources, a lawyer, and technology." Teaching was not the focus of the meetings, according to Lucy, "They shared district-wide information. They explained the legal area, benefits, retirement. It was very beneficial."

### **Mentoring**

Almost all teachers remembered having a mentor during their first year of teaching. Only 2 teachers hired after school started did not. Their experiences varied greatly depending on how the program functioned, the relationship between the mentor and the teachers, and external conditions, which helped or hindered the benefits of mentoring. For most teachers the support

was positive, and they appreciated it. In most cases, it was someone who taught the same subject and usually was on the same team.

Ten teachers appreciated having help with the academic area and many planned together collaboratively. Even though those teachers were thankful for that time to plan together, Wendi explained that it would be even better if mentors taught in a different grade level in the same school. She assumed that when having a good team, the team would provide support, but when the team is dysfunctional, the mentor would be even more beneficial.

That way you can have someone to talk to about how to navigate that first year with that team. I do not think the mentor needs to teach the same area you do. I see a mentor as the emotional support more than academic. You have coaches as academic support. Mentors should be the people you can say: This is exhausting, mentally, physically, and emotionally!

Wendi proposed, “Having mentors to help for 2 years with the intentionality of looking for growth and helping the mentee by pointing out such growth through the 2 years.” More importantly, Erika and Martha suggested having a more formal protocol for their mentors, including a regular time for their meetings, avoiding, as much as possible, any interruptions. Stephanie emphasized having the same planning period, because she did not have it with her mentor, and “The only time we can meet is after school, which is challenging between schedules.” Jessica verbalized the support given by her mentor, not only with the curriculum but also with daily things and just being present. She explained that her school had implemented a formal approach for mentors, and she was able to work as one the previous year.

My job was to work with people in the entire building that were new teachers or that had been teaching like 2 or 3 years the most. It is for teachers new to the building; it did not matter how long or where they taught before.

### **Additional support**

Teachers expressed areas aside from induction and mentoring that came from the district as formal support. For example, having meetings for new teachers within the school. Julia explained, “It did not matter if you were a teacher or a cafeteria worker; we got together once a month with the principal.” Lucy added that they sometimes brought people in and “talked about retirement, investment, and evaluation model.” About half of the teachers communicated the support they received from their principals and how they regularly walked in to see their classrooms and how they were doing.

### **Informal Assistance**

Teachers were very thankful for the informal support they received by people in their buildings. Only one teacher remembered being very lonely and with no support. The rest of the teachers spoke highly about the teachers they worked within, their teams, and their schools. Wendi explained, “I had a teacher assistant that had been a teacher for 30 years. She was very instrumental.” Laura’s team advised her how “to deal with parents, administration, and students.” Julia received “welcoming messages and Facebook requests from teachers at the school” as soon as she accepted the job. Heather thanked her counselors, who “would tell me that the kids were happy to have me. That gave me a boost!” Martha remembered, “While I was setting up, I would find things on my desk with nice welcoming messages from people all over the building. It made me feel wanted and supported. Parents were also overwhelmingly supporting that year.”

### **Suggestions for Better Adaptation**

Some teachers included comments of actions that helped, like Julia, who expressed the benefits of “Having a second year in the same school, grade, and content. I feel more confident.” She also talked about the different levels in her classroom and stated that she does not agree with

not holding students back. Julia clarified that some students are not ready to move to the following grade level and that by promoting them, the gap keeps increasing, making it difficult for teachers to address. Irene shared that having meetings outside of school for special occasions like Christmas and Valentines helped her build teacher relationships. Sara expressed the benefit of peer observations and “having informal feedback from them when they watched me.”

Teachers spoke about the areas they had support; however, they also expressed suggestions for schools or districts to incorporate or change. Heather proposed having teachers observe other same content teachers in the building, and Jessica advocated for having a specific person that could work as a mentor for all new teachers in the school, in each grade level. Laura considered her school a safe place but also noticed there were preferences in the building coming from the administration. She preferred to have objective evaluations that included detailed explanations, more practical on how to improve her practice. Laura noticed the change of environment once her administration changed.

Nicole, a Spanish teacher, wished she had related content area meetings with other teachers in the district. Karla was disappointed about having no support at all. “I did not know what questions to ask. I did not know who to ask. I did not know it was a problem until it was, and then I did my best to solve it.” Both Karla and Nicole remembered being isolated and suggested finding a way to help related arts teachers interact with others in their building.

### **Professional Development**

All teachers expressed that their school systems provided them with enough professional development to complete the required 30 hours to renew their teaching licenses. In general, teachers talked about having a district-wide technology day, monthly meetings to work with their content teams, half-days or full days for district meeting with all the other teachers working at



the same grade and subject, or professional developments of different topics at school level.

Three teachers were technology leaders for their buildings, five were able to attend conferences outside the district, and six had the opportunity to share their expertise with their peers or at the district level.

Martha was thankful for the opportunity to attend the Elite's Training during one summer. "It has made an impact on the way I teach all subjects," and Nicole explained that her school was preparing teachers to learn about Trauma-Informed Teaching and being able to help students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). Several teachers shared that their schools or their districts provided ACES training recently. Emma explained that various actions were taking place at her school as a follow up from the ACES training. Susan remembered her administration bringing into their school a speaker to talk about school culture and formative assessment. One district also provided regular 2-hour sessions throughout the month, which were voluntary and of a variety of topics. During the summer, some districts set 7-hour professional development days for teachers to work with their content teams at district level before school started.

### **Learning Team**

All teachers worked in learning teams in one way or another. Related arts teachers only had their team and met for professional development as a group, content area teachers had either one or two groups, and it would depend on how the grade level or school was organized and in middle school, all content area teachers had two groups, one for content and one for the group of students they taught. All teachers were thankful to have those teams to learn from and get support. Laura suggested that principals should encourage teams to plan together; however, she did not consider that it should be mandatory since in her case, the teachers' personalities did not

work appropriately. Jessica explained that her team has weekly meetings, “We have PLCs on Tuesdays... each week is a different focus... one week is curriculum, one week is behavior, one week we analyze data, and the last week is our book study.”

Susan moved from high school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and enjoyed being able to work with a team and have the same students. “It has been so helpful! We do all together. They help me a lot with things like paperwork or setting up parent-teacher conferences.” Lucy explained that her content team had continuously changed since she first began working. She shared it was frustrating because:

ELA is hard to stay. Somedays I want to run. There is so much gray area. So subjective! Like theme and inferencing. It all depends on the different backgrounds, and we need support and guide in what we are supposed to expect, to look for... So we have clear standards, but not clear goals of how we want to achieve them.

## **Coaching**

All but one content area teachers talked about having a coach. Teachers, for the most part, were very thankful for the resources and guidance they received from their coaches. Most (10) teachers met with their coaches on a weekly basis, or sometimes more frequently. All coaches seemed to be available through email in case teachers needed something before their meetings. Jessica explained that her coach would even teach lessons for her in order to model specific strategies.

Erika explained that in her case coaches were not working as a support resource,

I get to see her twice a month during planning. She overwhelms me with a bunch of new things that I feel are not practical right now. I would like to have a 2-way conversation with her, but I feel she does not have time to listen to my questions. She does tell me to ask her any question, but I have too many!

Martha posited that the relationship with the coach should be “more specific than ‘if you need me.’ I do not know what I need. Maybe observing me and having that feedback, but making

it mandatory, not an option.” Hanna also concluded that the coach was beneficial when asking her questions, but

There are not much interaction, resources, or ideas. It would be better if she would do some modeling, or if I could go see other teachers. During the 1<sup>st</sup> year, I was happy with the resources she gave us, but now I want to go deeper with my students, and I do not know how. I would like more support for that.

Lucy shared that when she first began, the coach was an asset, but now she had different feelings, “The coach’s role has changed too, and I am not sure it is for the better.” Laura proposed asking coaches to share problems occurring at other schools before they happen in the next one. Most coaches worked at different schools, which gave them the opportunity to be aware of demanding standards or lessons.

## **Feedback**

All teachers communicated that they appreciate honest and constructive feedback. All teachers trusted their current administrators and were comfortable with the administrators coming into their classrooms to have either hour-long observations or short check-ins. Nine teachers suggested having not just their coaches, but also their principals and peers coming in and having informal observations of their practice. Hanna reflected that during the last year, “The administrator gave me specific things to work on and I have been able to improve in following evaluations.” Julia noticed that her principal was serious in trying to help her after having a difficult evaluation. “His words and actions matched. He let me know he supported me, and we had a positive conversation after the evaluation.” Karla shared that being aware that someone was going to observe her made her reflect on her actions. The new administrator gave her more concrete and constructive feedback, “with areas in which I can actually improve and with ideas on how to work on those areas. My previous administrator would tell me a random area to work on and never told me how to do it.” Sara explained that feedback has, “Helped me

grow...It helps me put into perspective what sometimes you think might be doing, but you are not.”

In general, teachers wanted to improve their practice and liked having educators observing them. Mainly, they appreciated the feedback coming from those observations.

Stephanie described that during the post-conference,

We go over what they say. They asked questions that really make you think about, why you are doing what you are doing and its purpose. They may even ask what you thought was the best part of your lesson or something. It makes you reflect.

Laura suggested that administrators are aware of how they communicate their messages. She wanted to learn about the positive and negative things she was doing, “but not on a negative way,” suggesting that principals needed to be more encouraging on how to improve: “How we say it matters.” Karla commented on her administrators gathering the teachers in the building to talk about how to improve in some rubric descriptors that most teachers at the school needed to improve. She shared how “level 5 teachers” shared how they work on the needed areas. “They guide us in how to meet the rubric expectations well.”

Six teachers did not agree with the state required rubric that administrators have to use to evaluate them. As explained by Lucy, when observed, administrators need to use the TEAM rubric and score the teachers based on the rubric descriptors. “It is designed for a unit. They are evaluating us in one day, one hour! ...but to expect us to meet every single one of those expectations every single day, I mean, it is designed for a unit!” She is open about having evaluators in her room, she wants them to know her kids, and suggests they should come more than the four required times each year, but does not agree with the use of the rubric and the stress it involves. Julia, Hanna, Wendi, Laura, Stephanie, and Nicole were honest about the stress the rubric generated. Other teachers like Mark went to the opposite end and did not care about it. “I

do not pay attention to it; I do not think about it. When I am evaluated, I teach the way I always teach.” He understood why some teachers did not like the observations and recognized that “It is impossible to do all the things they want you to do.” He explained that he did not care enough to make it work. “Some of those things just do not lend themselves... So I am not going to stop my PE class to have them write...I think that is silly!”

Mark reflected on his last evaluation, and on how teachers are required to differentiate and find ways to help all students learn, but,

Every single teacher in the state is evaluated with the exact same rubric. So a welding teacher, and a chemistry teacher, and a PE teacher, we are all expected to teach a class the same way, and we are graded on it the same way.

He complained about how some teachers had 90 minutes for their lesson and others 45 and expected to do the same amount of things. He was aware of the subjectivity it involved, especially after having evaluations from three different principals, including one who was a previous PE teacher. He explained that each one would see his same action with a different view, and graded differently, without Mark changing his teaching style. He acknowledged that teacher evaluations were complicated due to their subjectivity; however, Mark considered that the problem was the weight placed in such observations graded by the rubric. “It should be something that you look at, and you see what you need to get better at, and you do. Ideally, it is that you can improve on. Not so you get a pay raise.”

Hanna who got her teaching degree and worked in a different state shared that the evaluation system in Tennessee was “interesting” and more intense than in her previous state. “It was encouraging; there were no numbers tied to it; we felt we got feedback to put in practice. The numbers system stresses teachers. A lot!” Wendi recognized that it affected her lesson planning. “I add many things that I do not really need to teach a good lesson.” She confessed she

tried to be authentic, “but when the stakes are high, and you are assigned a number, and that is your value as an educator, that is going to lead to competition.” Wendi was frustrated because in some evaluations, she did not get great scores, neither did she receive a clear answer to why. She verbalized being able to accept low scores, but she also wanted a good explanation of why and how to improve it. She reflected that it was like putting up a show, “We have the same rubric in grades K-12. There are things on that rubric that 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will not get.” Wendi complained feeling held to the standard of a general teacher instead of a second-grade teacher. “I do not agree with the rubric. It needs to be differentiated.”

Laura articulated that in college, she saw the rubric as a positive tool for growth.

However, when she began working it discouraged her,

When outsiders (Main Office Directors) do not know me as a person, as an educator, do not know my kids, they do not know their names, what they do on a daily basis, their disabilities or home environments, and give me a score in 1 hour!

Laura elaborated that to get a higher score “you need to implement things that are not realistic for a classroom daily.” She explained that she altered her lesson plans, but was aware, just as Lucy, that the rubric asked for a whole unit, not a lesson. Laura questioned if administrators would come to see the whole unit. She was emphatic in saying, “I do not use it daily and they still grow, if I did, I would be only planning, not teaching. I do what I do for my students. Not for the rubric!” She explained that she did not care for the evaluation process; she cared about being a good teacher. Laura was blunt and said, “I do not care about the score. I know teachers that have gotten 5s and their students are miserable daily.” She stated that it was not an accurate assessment when considering, “If you are a valuable, good, honest, hard-working teacher.”

Martha had the same perspective regarding the observations from people working outside the building. “In order to see how I teach you needed to see the big picture, and 1 hour is not enough.” She explained that because of how the rubric is set up, her administrators are encouraging them to offer the whole unit plan and not just the lesson. Irene manifested that her last evaluation was unannounced, and it took place the day after they switched students for related arts. Therefore, she had seen all her students for one day before the evaluation. Irene agreed with the descriptor of not knowing her students. “The principal apologized for coming that day, but the score stayed the same, even though there was nothing I could do for that.” She also clarified that during her previous evaluations at a different school, the principal would always give her high scores and tell her she was doing things great. Even though at the new school the scores were not as high, Irene was happy to have areas to improve on, since her new principal was able to give her more concrete areas to improve.

Jessica commented that even though the rubric descriptors fall in place with what teachers need to do, and help her reflect on her practice, using the rubric is not a daily practice for her. “When I am not being observed I focus on the kids’ needs.” Sara, who teaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA, explained that to get the highest score on one descriptor, teachers needed to incorporate three or more high-order thinking activities in their lesson, “I think that can get to be a little overwhelming. Might be pushing too much. I feel the rubric sometimes does not see the day to day teaching that is required.” Nicole, a Spanish teacher, did not see the rubric expectations and the requirements to be applicable to teach a foreign language. She explained that language is unique and personal, that learning how to speak a language was challenging, especially when students are trying to speak it. Therefore, mastering language pronunciation would probably not occur in one lesson.

I think evaluation and assessments should be more subjective to the teacher that is teaching it. Have the trust that we are doing what we are supposed to do, but not checking from this checklist. I feel so constricted when I have to do that.

Lucy explained that the observations “create undue stress.” She supported accountability for teachers, “Please hold me accountable! Every job I have ever had has included an evaluation process, but it is not as ridiculous as the one for teachers.” She explained that the whole point of observing teachers and evaluating them was to “prove that I am learning and that my kids are learning.” She reflected, “It is about them especially!” She ventured into how state testing of children also affects teacher evaluations.

So much of your evaluation is on how your kids do at the end of the year, on a multiple-choice test, on one day, that could be the worst day of that kid’s life, or they have severe testing anxiety. I never was a great test taker, but I was an awesome learner and a hard worker. However, my test-taking skills were not amazing.

Lucy understood there is not a perfect way to let students show their learning but considered that current assessments were not helping. “I think it is harmful to the teachers, for the administrators, and I think it is very harmful to the students.” She alleged the evaluation of students should be “consistent, realistic, consistent with the way their teacher is teaching, consistent with the way their teacher is assessing,” and struggles with the idea of teaching to help students pass a state test. Lucy added,

We have no access to what they are being assessed. We cannot see it, and we cannot know about it. I do not understand it. It makes us feel untrustworthy, but we are trusted with the lives of kids, our students, in our classrooms, every day. So it makes no sense!

Lucy also questioned, for example, the existence of self-scores in the evaluation process when using the TEAM rubric. Her question pointed to how those scores help evaluators change their minds whenever there was an apparent reason for why teachers did something. She considered that since teachers’ scores depended on the observation, and it should be fair for teachers to explain their actions and have the opportunity to improve those scores if the evaluator



agreed. “If that is not the case, why are those scores there?” Lucy also advised that teachers’ evaluations should be different considering the number of SPED children, English language learners, and high achievers in their classrooms.

### **Research Question 6**

#### **How can schools ensure novice teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?**

Teachers were thankful for the support given by their administrators and gave suggestions for improvement. They were all content at their schools, and they all wanted to continue growing as educators. They based their suggestions on areas they either benefited from or lacked when working during their first years.

#### **Induction**

All but three teachers attended new teachers’ meetings at the district’s office. This gave novice teachers the opportunity to meet administrators and understand how the district worked. Jessica and Lucy proposed the creation of novice teachers’ in-service for each school, including paperwork organization and administrative aspects of teaching. Four teachers suggested creating a handbook for new teachers at each specific school. Include names of safe people for new teachers to ask for help, a list of resources that are available at the school for each content area, and a guide of essential procedures to follow within the school. Jessica advocated for providing new teachers a person to guide them with ideas on to how to set up their classrooms, get to know the building, and access to the curriculum.

#### **Mentoring**

Six teachers proposed having structured mentorship programs with periodic meetings. Wendi and Hanna talked about the benefits of assigning mentors outside the teaching team,

while Erika and Martha proposed having a specific time for mentors and mentees to work together.

### **Additional Support**

Seven teachers suggested fostering a welcoming and supportive environment, with Erika and Stephanie talking about a positive culture that embraces new teachers. Five teachers expressed the benefits of establishing well-structured new-teachers' meeting at the school. Wendi proposed administrators to be patient with new teachers and to provide them with time and support for them to grow. Julia suggested providing teachers the opportunity to improve their craft by giving them the same school, content, and grade level the second year of teaching. While Laura recommended giving teachers practical support with adequate explanations on how to change. "Show me, not just tell me."

Martha and Erika requested to avoid interruptions during planning time. Martha suggested administrators be present and visible in the building, and Sara proposed to guide teachers on how to build relationships and communicate effectively with students and their families. Martha and Heather recommended providing teachers with the freedom to develop of assessments that can let students show their learning in various ways, and Lucy asked to have action research and increase communication between schools and teacher preparation programs.

### **Professional Development**

Six teachers suggested districts to provide constant support on classroom management training specific to their grade level and trauma-informed teaching to help ACES, and 5 teachers talked about the benefits of going to conferences. Six teachers considered it beneficial to provide professional days or setting mandatory hours to observe other educators teaching the same content in their schools or in a different one, and providing informal feedback to the teacher

observed. Other three teachers expressed the benefits of having team meetings once a month including professional development done by one of the teachers of the team. Erika and Heather spoke of the benefit of having professional development opportunities during the summer such as tech day, while Julia and Jessica recommended for administrators to guide teachers with specific books to read individually or as a team.

Karen advocated for the creation of more professional development through the College of Education of close-by universities during the first year of teaching, while Lucy expressed the benefit of bringing speakers to the school. Sara recommended including age-related topics during faculty meetings and talking about problems students might be facing, which could persuade teachers to be aware of what students are going through. Karen also suggested having teachers share at school level what works for them, and just as Nicole, to find venues and strategies for related arts teachers not to be so isolated.

### **Coaching**

Coaching recommendations depended on the experience of the teachers. Laura, Sara, and Martha wanted coaches to observe them and provide them with informal feedback. Hanna suggested coaches to model lessons for teachers and Martha proposed to have time for data analysis connected to strategies to help students improve. Laura advocated for coaches to share solutions to problems other teachers have had. Talk about future problems before they occur.

### **Supportive Teams**

All teachers expressed the benefits of having a team for learning. Hanna and Julia appreciated having a content team and a team for their group of students. Erika recommended setting up a planning date after school if necessary, and Laura recommended administrators to respect the relationships and functioning of teams. Some teams do well planning together and

some that need their space, therefore, mandating teams to plan together is not always the best for the students.

### **Feedback**

Four teachers suggested administrators should visit their classrooms more often and to give feedback that is more informal. Karla requested principals also to include related arts in the informal feedback. Erika proposed to have follow-up meetings after evaluations and Laura advocated for evaluators to give clear explanations of what to grow and how to do it, being aware of how to communicate feedback. Laura suggested sharing positive and negative things, but doing so in an encouraging way.

Some (6) teachers advocate the state to eliminate the numbers from observations and evaluations, to create a differentiated TEAM rubric, making it more realistic for a one-hour lesson or let the observer visit three lessons in a row. They also suggested shifting the objective of the observations and proposed observing with the purpose of letting teachers grow, not judging them with a number.

### **Research Question 7**

#### **What do teachers believe is the purpose of school?**

Most teachers shared the same idea of what should be the purpose of schools. Erika summarized it as,

To help you be a successful citizen, preparing you to be a person who is productive as an adult, whether that means you work with your hands on something, or you go to college and get an advanced degree. Learning not just academics like how to read and do math, but how to interact with people, work in a group, and figure out whom you are, so that you can know what you want to do later on.

Julia reflected it was to “learn academic, social, and emotional skills. Learning in general. Learning how to be friends and handle situations.” Hanna had multiple purposes for school,

“Teaching the content, building social skills, collaboration, helping kids develop empathy, character development, and the process of learning.” She explained that learning the academic content was relevant, but learning the process of being a life-long learner was more critical. Wendi considered that our job as teachers was to help students figure out who they are and help them reach their full potential.

To produce good, productive members of society. Kids should be loved, nurtured, and cared for; while having discipline, expectations, and accountability to reach their full potential. Be able to at 18 or 22 get into society, work, and be good citizens.

Irene held, “School is for learning and having a better future.” Karla spoke about preparing students for their life. “Not just knowledge to succeed, but also life skills and the encouragement to succeed. She explained that several schools are in charge of,

Feeding these kids, clothing them, hugging them, and teaching them, and that is the kind of turning into the purpose. It is just being there for them and giving them the same things we would want for our kids. Making sure everybody’s kind of got an even footing for when they get to high school.

Martha saw the purpose of school as the place to “create a balanced individual.”

Someone able to communicate effectively with others, able to get along with and respect others and their needs without being egocentric. “To be able to respect other people, their cultures, their ideas, or their beliefs.” She included “helping them to learn how to learn, how to relate to others, have a discussion, and find the answers they need.” The purpose of school for Jessica was to “create life-long learners, people ready to be in the workforce and college ready.” She described Northeast Tennessee as a high poverty area and was aware that many students would not be able to go to college. “We want to make sure that they are ready to be thriving adults. To be able to work and provide for themselves.” Sara commented on “finding out what is interesting to you, how do you want to leave an impact on this world. What you may want to do for the rest of your life.” Stephanie shared there were many purposes of school. “The opportunity to learn, to let

your social skills grow, to make friends, learn to be a good citizen, and to be part of a group.” Susan described it as to be prepared for life, to get a job and to know how to respect others.

For Heather, the purpose was to “prepare students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.” Nicole defined it as getting a spark to help students learn how to learn. Lucy elaborated, “It is to gain an understanding of the world around you so that you can become a contributing member of society.” Emma included that every child “Has the right for an education, to have interaction with other students, to enjoy physical exercise, and being with people at school.”

### **School Expectations and the Purpose of School**

Mark construed that the purpose of school was to prepare students for their next stage in life whether it is going from elementary to middle school or from high school to their life after school. “I feel high schools is to prepare to be adults. I think many of our students are not there yet.” He had an interesting point of view, because he taught PE in elementary grades, and was a high school coach. Mark reflected that administrators are not letting students fail at any level. “Students cannot fail; they must succeed all the time, in every aspect of everything.” He explained how in high school teachers could not give any grade below 50 during the first nine weeks of school with the excuse that student will not try to study the second nine weeks. He expressed it was not helping them.

I believe that if they do not earn the grade, then they should not pass the class, and they should suffer the consequences. I think that we baby kids. I think we do not prepare them for the real world. Where people do not care why you did not get the job done, they care that you did not get the job done. There are no excuses. You do not get online credit recovery for your job.

Mark also understood the administrative perspective “Certain amount of federal funding comes from you having a graduation rate, and I think that is wrong. That is a flaw in the system.” He stated that in a way we needed to play the system’s game to get the money and “be able to

give your kids the services that they need.” Just as Mark, several teachers expressed their concerns regarding the existing gap between what they understood was the purpose of school and the expectations from controlling agencies such as the State Department of Education and Policymakers. Teachers in every grade level noticed the mismatch, and most of them inferred that at policy-making level, the purpose of school had become to achieve higher test scores and academic knowledge with the excuse to go to college.

For Laura, the purpose was to help students “become a citizen, to learn and to grow in all areas. From how to treat people, to read, write, and do math. Years of growing as a person,” but later added, “I think it has been narrowed to grow academically.” Lucy, as well as Laura and Mark, began her statement by saying, “I feel our system is broken...I think that many schools leave out the social-emotional part, and I think that is killing our students, literally!” Lucy’s explanation gravitates around those students who do not have an adequate home environment to have the same opportunities as the students that are lucky enough to have them. Just as Karla expressed, Lucy shared that taking care of those students was not “our” job as teachers, “but really it is our job.” Lucy recognized that some parents do not know how, some do not care, and some care too much. Therefore, several children attended school and had to follow rules that they could not comprehend.

We have three school rules: be ready, be respectful, and be responsible. What does that look like? To be ready: I have to teach them how to study, to be ready. I have to teach them how to organize their things, to be ready. I have to teach them how to manage their time, to be ready.

Lucy considered that her mission as a teacher was to “help them figure out how to behave appropriately, how to study, what we are expecting from them.” She noticed those expectations were an issue related to discipline problems at schools. “Some kids will not care about punishment because they do not understand what they are doing wrong.” Lucy expressed she

wanted to be part of the solution, not the problem, but also complained that most of the problems occurred “because we only have time to teach content! We need to begin by teaching them how to study. Our kids do not know how to study. That should be our job. We are not teaching them how to study.” She explained that good teachers try to include teaching those skills into their day, but it was not a requirement. “If we are going to teach them how to be contributing members of society, we have to help them get there!”

Lucy was not the only frustrated teacher. Erika considered that the purpose of school goes beyond learning academics, like reading and math, but academics seemed to be the only expectation. “I wish I had more time to focus on more social-emotional development and figure out how to regulate your emotions more than just academics.” She demonstrated frustration when saying,

Education in America is just getting your test scores up and using data constantly to inform your instruction. You can do great in schools that are focused on test scores and have no idea how to interact with people, you do not understand yourself, or you have not had the opportunity to explore things like music, athletics, and art. Then you are not fully developed, and your education was not as good as it could have been.

After teaching a different state, Hanna noticed the emphasis and pressure that Tennessee had in academics. She communicated that teachers are meeting the purpose of education in the academic side, “We fall short in the character development, in the social skills that the kids need.” Sara shared these same notions, of not meeting the purpose of school:

We say that we are pushing for workforce ready, yet we are so consumed with testing. I feel like we have all communicated so much that we are not concerned about the test. When you look at the state's perspective, it is almost as if we are letting go of just the character development.

Sara alleged we should be “making sure that we are being good people, making sure that we are using curriculum that is engaging and motivating, not just because it is challenging.”

Wendi just as Sara considered we were going in the wrong direction. “The current Department of



Education impacts down to the school level. The value is on data and testing.” She acknowledged being a person driven by data but clarified that she uses it to inform her teaching, not to give students a number. Wendi saw the need to help students with social and emotional issues and explained that it takes time to develop them. Moreover, the time invested in social and emotional issues takes time from teaching academics, which reflects in lower academic scores. Wendi explained and that time reflected in academics areas because it takes time out of academics. Wendi shared that she has the support of her principal to address social-emotional issues, but she could also understand teachers that without the support decide not to help students in those areas. “We have internal pressure to improve scores because of the external pressure we get, but in the process, our kids are not encouraged to be kids.”

Nicole wished schools expectations matched the purpose of schools, but reflected that schools were taking too much away from kids, “I think that it reduces kids to a data-score, which is sad. I think the best teachers are the ones that are not concerned about that so much, that they miss the humanity of their kids.” She shared her father’s position regarding students that have difficult environments at home, being a teacher himself, he reflected on students who have been through serious traumatic events, for whom a school is a safe place. “We are telling them that they have to sit up all day long, and not goof off, and act silly, and this is the one place where they do feel safe enough to do that.” Nicole’s father told her, “Take care of your kids, and they will take care of you. If your kids are safe, if they feel loved and appreciated, they are going to learn better.” Nicole also reflected, “We are so focused about the test and all the stress around it, that it's hard for us to see that kid.” She recognized that the best teachers were the ones who prepare their students to excel academically but do not keep academics as their only goal.

“The most important thing is kids. You have to take care of Maslow before you get to Bloom’s. Gosh, that is hard when you do have all the State Testing breathing down your back!”

From Emma’s point of view, America has focused on preparing students academically, “As a country, we have failed to represent and instill in children those certain beliefs and values that children need to have to grow up to be successful adults.” She explicates that even though teaching kids about how it looks to be a good friend is not a requirement, it is a big part of her day. She added that one of the requirements teachers have is to use research-based strategies, and “I have not seen the research behind standardized testing being beneficial for students.” She remembered taking tests for No Child Left Behind, “I hated them! It did not show how much I learned. Being in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile does not make you a better person, a better learner, or a better student.” Emma complained openly and questioned the reasons to make the kids go through those tests.

Mark did not see any connection between the purpose of school and current school expectations. He based his response in relation to state testing and explained that he is a great proponent of accountability, but he did not think that testing is really set up in an effective way. He did not agree with the emphasis placed on test scores. “I am a huge proponent of accountability, but to put all this emphasis on ‘did this student learn or did not learn’ based on this one test, I think it is not a good thing to do.” Mark explained that in high school there are students who are terrible test takers, some who really get nervous and do not do well, some who are very smart but have trouble testing, and some who do not care about the test and speak openly about not doing their best in the test. “That test is not a reflection of their ability.” He reflected that in education,

We have to have these nice clean snapshots that tell us the whole story, and we want to have a solution for every single problem. That is not realistic. I do not think that you can

change policy and correct a problem every single time. I think that there are some problems, which are going to be problems. I think that student attendance is one of those...There are kids that are not going to come to school. You can do this, you can do that, and that is great, that kid might still not come to school.

Mark elucidated that maybe if high school incorporated more choice into the lives of students, they could choose from different types of degrees, each one with different requirements. That way,

If I know I am going to go be a PE teacher; I do not need to have history before 1877. If I know that my dad is a welder, my grandpa is a welder, and I want to be a welder, I do not need chemistry or three math classes, I need to go to a good vocational school, and I need to take welding classes.

He speculated that if high schools gave students more choice, they would go to school and attendance would not be the problem it now represents. He communicated the lack of choice and the amount of mandates and requirements affected effort and test scores; "Any time that you can let, especially the high school age student make their own choice, they are going to put more effort into that choice instead of something they are being told by an adult to do."

Martha expressed that we are actually going in the opposite direction of the purpose of school. She recalled the fact that teachers were expected to differentiate, take each child as an individual, but at the same time, "You are expected to have covered this material or tested on this, and there's a certain score that we really need to get to," because of testing and the standards. She also reflected that at the end of the day, it comes to a personal decision.

You can let it drive you crazy, or you can focus on your passion, and again with me, that call, and know there's a higher purpose while you're trying your best to honor and please the request of those who are above you, and be respectful of all that.

### **Teachers Helping Students Achieve the Purpose of School**

Martha's comment set into perspective what teachers did to make sure they contributed to their students' lives. Teachers perceived that the stress and pressure came from state

requirements, and they did not agree with them. However, they have found ways to follow their call to work as teachers and help students achieve the purpose of school. All teachers tried to help students grow as individuals, better human beings, and citizens integrating their academic content with social-emotional lessons. Erika and Sara chose reading stories and books that included characters that relate to the lives of their students, and that give messages to the students. Most English language arts (ELA) teachers did the same. Lucy explained how she addressed her students' personal interests through various types of reading, and Julia recalled helping her students understand empathy by reading "Ugly" and connecting the book's message with their restorative circles.

Seven teachers, from different districts, expressed working with "Restorative Circles," Stephanie explained those are classroom meetings that take place daily or on weekly bases, with the purpose of letting students express themselves and solve problems. All teachers communicated that by doing restorative circles, students have been able to open up and build communities within their classrooms. Three teachers in lower grades had also implemented community-building strategies. Wendi, for example, explained that all her team included the "7 Habits of Happy Kids" to their classrooms. "We set up the language for working with each other, problem solving together, etc." They have also created classroom expectations "honest, kind, safe, respectful, to be an example, and to be ready to learn," which guide students on how to behave in the classroom and also helps them also think of consequences when they have failed to behave as a good citizen of the classroom. "Nobody is a bad kid; they are working in one aspect of themselves. That is why they are the ones deciding on their consequences. I approve of them or not."

Laura explained, “I come here to make a difference, not just in their intellectual ability, but in life in general.” Her purpose gravitated around relationships, so she focused on talking about the problems with the children, make sure they adjusted in class, and that all children had open spaces to ask her questions. “I try to teach them how to be kind, positive, and helpful people.” Nicole, who teaches Spanish, and did not have the pressure of testing as other teachers do, kept as a goal to try to give her students 45 minutes of creativity, with free space for them to relax and learn a different language. Susan, a mathematics teacher, tried bringing real-world connections to the math concepts she teaches. “I try to reach my students, to make math significant to them, and to build a relationship with them. If not, they will never learn.”

Lucy explained that she tried to give her students choices on how to present their learning.

Some kids want to write a novel, some kids want to do a commercial, some kids don’t want to talk, and don’t want to write, so they can create a game for people to play that assesses that same learning, but also the other people would learn from them.

Even though doing those types of projects generated more work for teachers, Lucy was convinced that students need more choice in their learning, and she did not mind the extra work. She actually hoped for a day in which students could learn all the standards in a way that was interesting to them, and was convinced that by doing so, students would be happy to learn, to be in schools, and would be able to show what they learned. Lucy clarified that assessing multiple-choice tests and worksheets was easy for teachers, but questioned if “is it really assessing that they understand what they learned or what we have taught?”

### **Teacher Preparation Programs and the Purpose of School**

Even though all teachers were clear about their purpose of school and their reasons to be in the classroom, they had mixed perceptions about how their teacher preparation program

helped them to accomplish the purpose of school. In general, teachers did not feel prepared to teach according to the level of development of their students, specifically when each class included various levels of development regarding academic levels. The teachers were aware that student teaching helped them the most to comprehend what occurred, developmentally speaking, in real classrooms. Teachers had mixed opinions about the purpose of school. Some, like Erika and Wendi, considered doing a good job; others like Mark and Irene had the opposite perception. In general, teachers perceived that the programs prepared them more in the academic area and noticed the lack of guidance on the social-emotional arena.

### **School as Work Setting and the Purpose of School**

Most teachers were positive when talking about the support given by their school setting and helping them fulfill the purpose of school. Almost all schools are promoting Restorative Circles. All districts are promoting Trauma Informed Teaching and training with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and providing professional development for their teachers. Jessica shared that besides doing Restorative Circles daily; her school began using Zones of Regulation. She explained,

It is a way that kids can identify their emotions, and how they are feeling. We spend a lot of time talking about that also in our circles. They take 4 colored zones, and each zone has different emotions, so green is ready to learn, focused; blue is if you are sad or sleepy or tired; red is if you are mad or angry, and then yellow is hyper or excited. So the kids will talk about each day, they come in, and they choose what zone they are in.

Jessica articulated having conversations with her students about what to do if they are in a different zone other than green, “How can you get back to green so that you are ready to learn?” She noticed a difference in how children are able to take charge of their feelings. “Those are good things that have helped me as a teacher. Even though it is school wide required, if I move, I would consider doing that, because it is beneficial for the kids.”

Karla, an art teacher, explained that she wanted to help students with their social-emotional areas, but shared that she was not able to see her impact. “We only get them for 9 weeks, and I might see them for 9 week term in 7th grade, and I may see them in a 9-week term in 8th grade... I can't take too much credit; it is only 9 weeks.” Irene also commented on the transition of students every nine weeks and explained how it took time for her to get to know her students and organize routines every nine weeks. She also communicated the difficulty of making relationships with students by having them for only nine weeks.

### **Research Question 8**

**What relationship exists between the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their preparation and professional support and the achievement of the purpose of school?**

Teachers express their perceptions regarding their teacher preparation program and the support they received by their school districts during their first years of teaching; they also gave specific suggestions to teacher preparation programs and to school districts on how they could be better supported to accomplish the purpose of school. Once prompted about the purpose of school, all teachers understood that the aim should be to promote the development of productive, responsible, and successful citizens, and even though academics was part of the purpose of schools, it was not the only purpose, nor the most important. More than half of the teachers voiced their concern for the lack of emphasis placed in social-emotional issues, character building, and appropriate development expectations. They also shared that even though students were academically well prepared, the idea of assessing the academics mainly through standardized testing was not providing adequate information regarding the actual knowledge students were acquiring in school, and it was hindering teachers to teach in a developmentally appropriate way for students to be successful. Almost all teachers shared their concern on how

the system is not necessarily helping students become productive citizens, and explained that some of the reasons for not achieving this purpose were the regulations and expectations set up by the state in order to receive federal funding.

Nicole talked about the need teachers and the education profession have for trust. “How doctors and lawyers get their certifications and can do their job without anyone telling them how to do it.” She reflected that teaching did not get the trust that should come from society. “It is hard when on a society level there seems to be a lot of mistrust towards teachers...I feel like if we had support from lawmakers and from everywhere, we could help all kids.” She alleged teachers needed to become more active in policy-making. “I would love to see more educators in politics.” She reflected there is a lack of connection between policy-making and the actual classrooms, as well as a lack of connection between Universities and classrooms. She expressed that politicians should be required to have a connection with education and “spent time observing classrooms, just like college students do... so they can see what it is actually like.”

Nicole and Lucy elucidated the reason for lack of trust could be because some teachers did not do their job correctly. They both agreed it was not the case with the majority of teachers, and both corroborated that most of the teachers they knew were in schools for the right reasons. Lucy revealed that some teachers get distracted from the purpose of school due to the “expectations of the state.” She considered administrators are not the ones to blame either, “Because administrators are doing what they have to do, based on what comes from the top. And the top has been a hot mess!” Lucy began education as her second career and was able to notice how teaching looked for outsiders and how differently it looked from within the profession.

Teaching was much more stressing that it seemed. I went from having complete autonomy to feeling I could not move. I had not the time to go to the bathroom, not enough planning time, with luck some lunch, and it was mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting.



She explained, “From the outside, it looks a lot easier than what it really is. I knew it would be stressful, but I never thought it would be at this point. At some point, it is hard to leave work at work.”

Lucy expressed that as teachers, “We need to be trusted, we need to be supported, and we need to be regarded.” She elaborated on how society portrayed teachers and how different it looks from the inside when having so many expectations and little support and time. She advocated for teachers to have constant support within the schools, especially with professional development related to how to help behavioral problems and SPED diagnosis. “I do not understand Defiant Disorder; I don’t understand what does it look in the classroom. I do not completely understand autism, and I have had kids with all levels of it. How am I best meeting them?”

Lucy also connected her experience as a teacher with her experience as a parent. Both of her own kids are great students, but their social-emotional lives were crumbling because of the structure, requirements, and lack of focus on the real purpose of school. “Dealing with that as a parent with teachers that seem not to care? ... I think we want to blame teachers for that, but understanding my job as a teacher, I can see it is systemic.” Lucy added, “I think the system is messed up. It does not support teachers, and it does not support children. I think that systemically the way schools are run is not the best for every student.” She acknowledged not having a solution, but,

We have to teach the whole child, and we have to take into consideration what is happening in the classrooms and even in the halls of the school when they are not in class. Because in middle grades that is detrimental. I think we need more counselors and I think it is going to get worse.

Lucy suggested teachers needed more preparation and more learning, more hands-on experiences and presenting academics in a more motivating way with the purpose of avoiding discipline problems, and “learning how to assess their learning in a fair way.”

Mark requested to have more freedom, to let teachers teach based on their knowledge and purpose. He also spoke about policy, “I think probably fewer people who are in positions of power at the state level making decisions that they do not know very much about.” He suggested that legislators working with education should have an education background. “It is my opinion that most of the people that are making the laws that teachers are going by, do not really know very much about education or public education.” He voiced that people that know how to teach should have the freedom to teach, and people that are not knowledgeable about teaching should not be putting for the education bills. Heather, whose goal is to work at the state level and change policy shared, “As much as I am not a fan of charter schools, I do feel that those schools have the fun to get to try some things without as much regulation.” She was cognizant that teachers need to have time to make these changes happen; teachers need the freedom, professional development, and the opportunity to visit a different type of schools in order for changes to happen.

The relationship between the perception of teachers regarding their teacher preparation program, the support received during the first years of teaching, and the purpose of school related to the reason teachers had to become teachers on the first place. All teachers decided to become educators to help students learn and impact their lives in a positive way and to build long-lasting relationships with their students and their families. Laura shared, “Teachers had a great influence in my life. I wanted to make a difference in the life of others. I can do that

through teaching,” and Wendi explained, “I always wanted to become a teacher. I wanted a career in which I could build relationships and help people.”

Teachers were frustrated because the pressure for accountability and higher test scores were hindering their students from accomplishing the purpose of school. More than half of the novice teachers were aware of this problem, and their personal mission for teaching focused on making sure students were able to enjoy school while being in their classrooms. Martha, and Nicole, Wendi were open about making sure students were safe, learned, and grew as whole individuals in their classrooms. Laura talked about wanting to teach for the next 30 years but was frustrated about the state requirements constantly pressuring teachers. In general, the suggestions given by teachers regarding the support needed to help students accomplish the purpose of school were the following:

### **Teacher Characteristics**

Stephanie stated that teacher candidates needed to have compassion as a person and to model compassion for students to want to try to be compassionate. Laura reflected that teachers needed to understand students and their different backgrounds and home life, to get to know their students. Sara suggested teachers assess their personal philosophy of education, with a constant reflection of teaching and instruction, and Susan considered that teachers needed to have a heart and love for kids, not just for teaching.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Almost all teachers suggested teacher preparation programs to increase the time in field placements. Mark proposed to reorganize all programs with field experiences and exposure to schools as their primary objective, selecting adequate theory as a requirement for the experiences. All teachers asked for student teaching to last at least one year including the two

weeks before school started. More than ten teachers requested to include more courses related to educational psychology, SPED, ESL, trauma-informed teaching, and classroom management throughout their career in college.

Wendi recommended increasing communication between colleges and schools. Julia suggested that professors should visit schools continually, to learn about current educational practices and about students' needs. A couple of teachers also suggested providing job preparation, interview practice, and strategies to communicate with parents.

### **School Districts**

**Support.** Teachers asked for continual support. Julia and Erika wanted to remind administrators and counselors to help teachers meet the social-emotional needs of their students. Julia expressed the benefit of teamwork and Karla suggested including related arts teachers in different teams so that they did not feel isolated. Irene suggested promoting open communication from counselors to teachers, especially important information related to SPED students and their accommodations before students come to related arts teachers. Counselors must prevent problems and make sure teachers are ready to serve those students adequately. Jessica considered that having a teacher helping as a mentor who is continuously available and could help teachers disregarding the years of experience. Karla requested smaller class sizes, "Teaching 6 classes of 45 students each. It is hard to establish relationships and help with emotional areas besides teaching."

**Time.** Five teachers requested to have more time. Martha and Heather considered they needed time to plan for project-based learning and standards-based Assessment. Erika added having a better organization for meetings that take time away from planning. Heather stated,

“We have our days packed with all types of meetings. That takes planning time away. As much as I have all these dreams, at 5:00 o’ clock, I let myself go be a human.”

**Resources.** Just two teachers talked about needing resources. Martha suggested having adequate resources for science projects and project-based learning, and Julia discovered the need for teachers to have resources like food and clothing to provide students lacking basic needs and attending low-income schools.

**Professional Development.** Wendi and Hanna noticed the importance of constantly training teachers, Karla share the benefit of collaborating with same content teachers, and Karla wanted to learn more about how to use technology in her classroom.

### **Department of Education and Policy Makers**

**Trust.** Five teachers were open about the need to be trusted. Nicole, Martha, Lucy, and Laura suggested being trusted in creating their own assessments for their students. Mark agreed with them and added the need for policymakers to trust educators doing their job, by letting them teach what they know and how they know. These teachers requested that policymakers should be knowledgeable about education and reducing regulations on schools.

**Support.** Nicole considered that the state should promote supporting teachers from everywhere. “Support from the State, support from the administration at schools, support from the district, from fellow teachers, and from parents. This is a job that you cannot do by yourself!”

**Freedom.** Six teachers talked about freedom. Erika, Julia, and Wendi recommended providing teachers more time to spend on emotional and social areas and character education. Wendi added to have freedom and time to work on team building and leadership activities. She explained that these activities would benefit academics in the end, “They will benefit your classroom community. When students can work together, it frees up time for other things, but it

takes time on the front end. Teachers don't do it because on that time." Heather requested the State to reduce regulations for teachers. "Teachers need to have time to try new things and make changes," and Mark suggested the State to provide space for teachers to teach and to evaluate based on their educational knowledge.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this study, teachers shared their perceptions about their teacher preparation programs, the support given by their schools and school districts, and the purpose of school. Teachers recognized the positive components from their teacher preparation programs as well as suggesting areas for improvement. They also communicated the various support systems school districts have in place for teachers to be able to help students learn, and gave recommendations on how to improve the support systems they have in place.

All teachers were prompted about the purpose of school, expressing that schools' purpose was to help students become thriving adults and productive, respectful, and successful citizens. However, teachers were worried because they noticed that the requirements set by the state were taking students in a different direction. They noticed that those requirements were too fixated on academic achievement and were lacking character development and social-emotional areas.

In general, teachers suggested reorganizing teacher education programs based on field experience and adequate theory, improving the support already given by school districts, and for the state to incorporate social-emotional learning and character development within the curriculum, while giving teachers freedom and promoting trust for educators by reducing the regulations placed on educators, schools, and school districts.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perception of teachers in grades K-8 serving their 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> years of teaching regarding their teacher preparation programs, the support given to them by their school districts during the first years of teaching, and the purpose of school. The researcher conducted 17 in-depth interviews with teachers from three different school systems in Northeast Tennessee. After transcribing the information and letting teachers validate it, the researcher coded and analyzed the data. This chapter provides a summary of the findings and recommendations for practice as well as for research.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The U.S. has evidenced an emergence of serious social problems like school shootings, drug abuse, and youth suicide (The Jason Foundation, n.d.; Patel, 2018; Gregory et al., 2018; Reilly, 2018) which could be a consequence of the lack of engagement of the youth in schools (K. Henry et al., 2012). Therefore, individuals who are not engaged in school not only have less probability of becoming productive and successful citizens but also could have a higher probability of becoming a problem for society.

Educational reforms focused on standardized test scores could prompt adverse consequences on students (Meier & Wood, 2004; Rose, 2015). High-stakes testing and the pressure to attend college have led students to live unhealthy, stressful, and unbalanced lives (Abeles & Rubenstein, 2015). Abeles and Rubenstein (2015), Couros (2015), Glover (2013), Kallick and Zmuda (2017), and Schlechty (2011) suggested that to promote individuals who are successful and productive citizens in the present and future job markets there needs to be a shift

in the educational system. The system should move away from standardization and high stakes testing to a more significant experience of school.

Ell et al. (2017) and Mehta et al. (2012) explained that besides family background and support at home, teachers are the most meaningful influence affecting student learning in schools. Cochran-Smith et al. (2014), Ell et al. (2017), and Glover (2013) explained that teaching is part of a complex system, which makes it a challenging profession with several factors influencing students' learning. For this reason, the researcher decided to learn about the perceptions of teachers regarding their preparation, support, and purpose of school.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their teacher preparation programs, the support their school districts gave them, and the relationship of their perceptions with the purpose of school. The findings of this study could provide valuable information for colleges and universities and to school districts regarding the support needed by teachers to achieve the purpose of school. It could also guide policymakers on how to support teachers to promote the fulfillment of the purpose of school.

The original purpose of this study was to learn about the components that Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs) need to include in their programs to prepare teachers to accomplish their mission. The researcher also considered analyzing other influences such as the support that school systems provide to novice teachers during their first years of teaching and how that support shapes their impact on students' learning, and also the perceptions of teachers regarding the purpose of school. It is important to clarify that the researchers' beliefs and bias might have influenced the presentation of the findings. It is also relevant to consider that some novice teachers might have decided to participate in the study because of their commitment to the



purpose of school and to education. Therefore, it is not appropriate to generalize the findings of this study without further research.

### **Research Question 1**

#### **What do novice teachers in grades K-8 have in common in terms of experiences and preparation?**

Seventeen teachers working in three districts in Northeast Tennessee participated in the study. Thirteen teachers completed a 4-year traditional teaching preparation program in colleges or universities in the area. The remainder of the teachers completed their programs either out of state or through a different route. However, all teachers decided to be educators to help others and develop relationships. All teachers planned to stay in education either in the classroom, in administration, instructional positions within their schools, or as professors in college, and one indicated a desire to move to a position making policy.

Of the 17 teachers, nine held a Master's degree and the remainder were planning to get advanced degrees or special endorsements. Considering that the study included only novice teachers, the interest of teachers on improving their practice was evident. All teachers wanted to stay in the classroom or continue their careers in education. According to Will (2018a, 2018b), education is not a profession that generates wealth, especially in the U.S., where individuals shy away from teaching because of its salary (Bland et al., 2014; Kappan, 2018), meaning that teachers do not choose to teach for personal interests, but for the gratification of helping others and building relationships.

More than half of the teachers expressed that the regulations from the state generate pressure. Laura explained that in the long run those regulations burned teachers out. She wished to teach for the next 30 years; however, she would consider moving to administration to avoid

burnout. Arbaugh et al. (2015) and Bland et al. (2014) explained that individuals decide not to be educators because of the lack of autonomy in the classroom and the requirements set up by policymakers. In this case, the perceptions of teachers relate to research and suggest that the pressure and requirements set by policymakers are not just shying individuals away from teaching, but are also taking some teachers away from the classroom.

## **Research Question 2**

### **What are teachers' perceptions regarding their teacher preparation programs concerning required courses?**

Eight teachers considered their teacher preparation programs did a good job. Nevertheless, 9 of 17 teachers mentioned they were not well prepared to teach at the time they finished their programs, and even though some teachers might be better prepared than what they perceived, it sends a message that there is room for improvement. As explained by four teachers, nobody can prepare you for the first year teaching. Wendi explained it was like learning how to drive, you can know the theory, but driving on your own is different. However, when someone begins driving and feels prepared to do it, that person will begin driving with more confidence.

As explained by theory, education is a complex system and several components come into consideration when a teacher feels or does not feel prepared to teach. Even though eight teachers were satisfied with their preparation, nine expressed the opposite, and they all gave suggestions to teacher preparation programs regarding areas that affected their learning, and which could guide them to improve their programs.

### **General Prerequisites**

Four of 17 teachers suggested eliminating or changing the requirements for general education prerequisites since they expected their investment in college focused on the career they

chose. All programs should prepare well-rounded individuals including a variety of general education courses, but there should be a balance on the number of courses and the relation those courses have to their educational major. Karla and Erika stated that colleges could offer courses as electives but stated that required courses must relate either to the focus of the major or to the life in college. Mark suggested that removing prerequisites that have no connection with students' majors might be a motivation for some students to attend college.

Will (2019) indicated that for elementary PRAXIS, "Just 46 percent of teacher candidates pass the test on their first attempt" (para. 4). The reason seems to be related to teacher preparation and the lack of general education courses preparing teachers with the required content for elementary grades expected by PRAXIS designers. Will (2019) suggested teacher preparation programs in states requiring PRAXIS tests to provide the necessary general prerequisites for teacher candidates to pass it in their first attempt.

### **Communication**

Wendi and Laura noticed that communication was a problem. They suggested improving communication, especially from program directors to their professors and then to mentor teachers in schools and teacher candidates. Both teachers were frustrated because of the lack of accurate information among all stakeholders. Julia was discouraged when a professor found her field placement experiences "hard to believe," and noticed a lack of connection between her program and school realities and expectations. This was supported by Darling-Hammond (2006) who described several exemplary teacher preparation programs across the U.S. She advocated for higher communication between programs and schools, and explained that linking theory with numerous hours of candidates working in schools and receiving from their mentor teachers the same message that their professors helped promote strong teachers. To do so, mentor teachers

had regular meetings with college professors to make sure the experience of teacher candidates was adequate.

### **Courses and Theory**

Almost all teachers remembered having theory courses with additional hours of observation. Karla, Laura, and Heather reported having professors that modeled classes for them and who influenced their practice, but the rest of the teachers remembered their professors mostly lecturing. Nicole and Irene complained about not having foreign language courses when pursuing teaching Spanish while four teachers would have liked to learn how to teach all the components of ELA and guided reading and not just reading theory. Irene and Mark complained about having too much theory not related to practice. However, all teachers noticed the need for more Special Education (SPED) theory, trauma-informed teaching, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Training, educational psychology, brain development, Response to Intervention (RTI), and differentiation. Additionally, teachers suggested having those courses related to practice and field experiences.

Even though some teachers appreciated the lesson plan structure required by edTPA, two of them advised focusing more on unit plans. Heather reflected that teacher preparation programs should promote innovation, and expose teacher candidates to strategies like standards-based assessment and project-based learning and teach them how to apply those strategies in their classrooms. This comment corroborated Jessica's frustration of noticing that her strategies were outdated once she began working.

### **Assessment**

Assessment for teacher candidates was an emergent theme in this study. The teachers discussed their experiences with the edTPA and PRAXIS tests, and even though some

considered the edTPA beneficial, they all agreed that it was a challenging endeavor. Two teachers reflected that professors should be more specific and clear about the test and four teachers did not appreciate having the edTPA during the same semester as student teaching because they felt that the test took time away from their student teaching experience. Teachers considered that the videography required by edTPA limited the scope of what was happening in the classroom and that having a person in the room observing them would be more realistic. Mark shared that it was difficult to videotape his PE class, and that his mentor teacher had to follow him with the camera during class. Mark failed his edTPA because the video did not include all the components he needed, but his complaint was that the camera was not able to capture all the strategies that he did during the class.

The edTPA evolved from the original idea of Darling-Hammond, Newton, and Wei, (2013) who created the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) with the purpose to test the candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions learned from their programs. When Pearson acquired it for mass marketing to adopted it as a graduation requirement for education (Prince, 2014). One of the requirements of the edTPA is that teachers must "videotape a segment of their teaching pedagogical work and make the video speak to several specific, prescribed standards. The video is essentially mailed to an 'external' reviewer; that reviewer works effectively for a major oligopoly, Pearson Education Inc." (Price, 2014, p. 220). Teachers were not against having observations, they did not agree with having a video that failed to capture their real teaching ability for such an important test.

The teachers explained that they learned from the edTPA, which came as a surprise for the researcher since the edTPA is a test. Teachers explained that while they were doing the test, they were also doing their student teaching every day and going to evening classes for content

subjects. Behizadeh and Neely (2019) detected that edTPA does not support student learning when done during student teaching. Moreover, the teacher candidates interviewed by Behizadeh and Neely (2019) explained that more than promoting dispositions and social justice orientation, it was based on following procedures, which did not help candidates learn. They also complained about the price of the test, the stress it generated, and external scoring.

Even though Kortagen (2010a) explained that candidates need theory while practicing, it seemed overwhelming to learn how to teach subjects with courses during the afternoon, learning from student teaching, and at the same time learning from the requirements of a test. Emma expressed that such overload made her and her friends question if the process was worth the stress it caused. She considered that having edTPA requirements divided in two semesters would be more beneficial than trying to accomplish all those tasks during such a busy semester. She explained that during the first semester of student teaching teachers do not go to school full time, what would give teacher candidates more time to reflect on the prompts and later learn more from their full time student teaching.

All teacher candidates were required to pass the PRAXIS tests to access to the state teaching license. Three teachers were against having standardized testing, due to the lack of accurately measuring their teaching ability. Laura explained that for her the PRAXIS series was just a way to make money and that she noticed how some of her classmates decided to leave education because of PRAXIS requirements. Will (2019) and Petchauer (2019) supported Laura's perceptions who explained that there is not enough evidence that correlates standardized licensure exams and teaching effectiveness.

### Research Question 3

#### **What are teachers' perceptions about their teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?**

All teachers reported the need for more field experience. Six teachers expressed disappointment with at least one of their field experiences and noticed the need for intentional placements. Teachers recommended adding field placements to all semesters of the program and being able to visit classrooms in all grade levels included in the teaching license they were pursuing. They reflected that practice should have a clear connection with theory, and two teachers considered that supervisors should be in charge of helping teacher candidates in the event of misplacement or an inadequate placement. Darling-Hammond (2006), in her study about exemplary programs, noticed that all the colleges were methodical when looking for intentional field placements and growth based on partnerships between colleges and school systems.

For 10 teachers the benefit of their program came from a year-long student teaching, which included 2 weeks of helping their mentors set up their classrooms. Erika had only 6 months of student teaching, and she was frustrated and did not consider herself to be successful. She was not able to see how school started and shared that “It was overwhelming to plan for a real 7 hour day that included beginning and end of day procedures, all subjects, recess, and lunch.” Her suggestions were to increase student teacher to a full year and include those 2 weeks before school starts as part of student teaching. Karla expressed the importance of student teaching and requested to make it a requirement for teacher candidates to have the same schedule as schools.

## **Research Question 4**

**What do teachers believe colleges and universities can do to make the transition from college to teaching more successful?**

### **Dispositions, Inquiry, and Reflection**

Four teachers appreciated having cohorts to support each other during their preparation, which was highly recommended by Glover (2013) and Korthagen (2010a, 2010b). Eight teachers valued having lessons that included hands-on activities and four teachers talked about the endless opportunities for making reflections and connecting their reflections with theory and practice, which seemed to be one of the benefits from edTPA. Two teachers benefited from solving case studies and reflecting on the various ways to solve them. Bialka (2016) suggested that professors use narratives, case studies, surveys, and video materials to help teacher candidates to attend dispositions. Moreover, Bialka (2016) explained that candidates need deliberate spaces of reflection to challenge their perceptions about their students, and about teaching and learning. When doing so, teachers begin to question their actions as a habit and promote social responsibility, necessary for a democratic society (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

### **Knowledge and Practice**

Related arts teachers expected their programs to be connected between their majors and Colleges of Education, assuring enough theory and practice in their subject of study. Nine teachers noticed the need for professors visiting the schools assigned for their practicums and making sure they understood the realities of schools and their students. Again, all teachers expressed that they would have benefited from more field experiences, while almost all teachers expressed that having a full year of student teaching was the best way to prepare for teaching.



Teachers discussed the benefit of experiences linked to theory and related to the age group of their licensure, as well as having intentionality in choosing adequate mentor teachers. Laura explained that while doing student teaching and working with an English Language Learner (ELL), she approached her former English professor for help. She recognized that the professor taught the theory during the course, but the lack of practice did not help students make connections between theory and practice. “We just did not have real-world context . . ., so it kind of seemed a little crazy to us, but once you are in a classroom, it was like this is what Dr. . . . was teaching us!” Korthagen (2010a) suggested that teacher candidates should have field experiences early on, find what the problems are, and relate those with theory. Laura’s class would have benefited from having classroom experience and learning from theory at the same time.

Laura’s lack of connection to theory was reinforced by Korthagen (2010b) explained that teacher candidates need experience in a classroom while learning how to teach. He posited that teachers do not learn by listening to their professors, that they learn by doing. “Learning emerges from our actions in relation to those of others. Thus, the learning outcomes are socially constructed.” (p. 99). When teacher candidates observe others teaching, they reflect on their actions understanding the theory and responding to situations with more knowledge. Korthagen clarified that having classroom experienced did not mean being in charge of the class since when teachers lack practice and observation, tend to react unconsciously and based on emotions.

### **Innovation**

Jessica realized that the information she learned in college was outdated when she began working. Her perceptions relate to Heather’s reflections about her knowledge of best practices such as standards-based assessment and project-based coming from professional development at her school. Even though Heather considered that colleges should be innovative and venture with

new practices, she did not see teacher preparation programs doing so unless the state pushes for innovative ideas, she commented, “Sadly I do not see this happening at the state level in the next 5 to 10 years.” Kelchtermans et al. (2017) explained that teacher professors needed to stay current in educational trends and, in collaboration with schools, provide induction and professional development programs for schoolteachers and mentors. This idea corroborated the recommendations teachers have for professors to visit schools and to have more hands-on activities, avoiding excessive lectures.

### **Research Question 5**

#### **What are the teachers’ perceptions regarding their induction, mentoring, professional development, coaching programs, and feedback provided at their respective schools?**

The perceptions of novice teachers regarding the support they received from their schools seemed positive. All teachers were happy at their schools, and the support from their peers made the difference. When compared with theory, school districts seem actively adopting new strategies to help teachers succeed. Induction, mentoring, new teaching meetings, working with teams, coaching, professional development, and adequate feedback were all described as positive components for schools to provide to novice teachers with the purpose of promoting student achievement and retention.

Ten of the teachers were required to attend a 2 or 3-day induction session given by their districts’ office. The teachers explained it contained general information, not related to teaching, but was beneficial. Ten teachers had a mentor assigned to them, which in general terms, was the best support some of the teachers had. Not all mentors had the same impact on new teachers and the differences related to the protocol for mentorships in each school. Teachers appreciated having mentors in the same content area and grade level. However, Wendi explained that it

would be more beneficial to have a mentor outside the content team. She explained that the team would take care of the novice teacher with academics, but that mentors could help new teachers with emotional support, by having someone to talk to about the hardships of teaching. Moreover, she recommended extending mentoring to a second year, since that would help teachers notice their growth in time.

Erika suggested having a more intentional mentorship program. In her case, she did not have an adequate fit and considered having almost no support; it did not benefit her to have a new principal in her building either. Mena et al. (2017), Moir (2009), and Zembytska (2016) explained that when the culture supports teachers and learning, mentor programs work. Moreover, they promote teacher retention (Langdon & Alansari, 2012; Moir, 2009; Zembytska, 2016). As noted above, all the teachers liked their schools and had no plans for moving.

In most cases, the assistance given by other teachers was what made the difference with teachers feeling accepted and supported. Some schools provided meetings for new teachers organized by their administrators with the purpose of listening to the concerns, not only of new teachers but also from all new employees. Teachers, in general, spoke highly about the professional development given by their district and how, in some cases, they were able to assist conferences in different topics. All teachers noticed the support of their working teams. They all had at least one working team if not two, a content team and a grade level team. Related arts teachers expressed being isolated since they did not have a working team in their specific content. They suggested finding a way to help them adjust better and find more connections with other teachers in the building.

Coaches were available for most of the teachers in elementary schools and tested subjects. The teachers noticed that coaches could differentiate their support concerning their

years of experience. Novice teachers accepted all suggestions and were thankful to their coaches. Erika was frustrated because she met with her coach about twice a month and considered her meetings just one-way communication. Teachers with more experience suggested having more in-depth strategies to help their students and the need for mentors to model those strategies to them in their classrooms. Therefore, the suggestions for coaches were to have a more differentiated approach regarding the preference of each teacher. When compared with theory, it was clear to see that teachers who were able to meet with their coaches once or more times during the week took better advantage of them as a resource. When coaches were in the school and had a relationship with the teachers, their effect was more significant. Boehle (2013), Fontenot (2016), and Knight et al. (2015) explained that coaches help promote student growth when frequently meeting with the teachers and after analyzing instructional strategies, set short and long-term goals.

Nine teachers wanted to have not just administrators but also their peers and coaches in their classrooms and to learn from their feedback; they appreciated principals with clear objectives for improvement, who were able to state precisely how, and where to grow. Six teachers reported that the TEAM rubric was not an adequate instrument to assess their ability to teach or helping children learn. They did not appreciate having only one rubric for the whole system. Their feelings related to the subject they taught and the age of their students. They communicated it was unrealistic and described the rubric as a tool to assess a unit and not a single lesson. Even though some teachers liked having a space for self-scoring, others questioned it, especially since those scores did not provide an opportunity to change the evaluator's opinion.

Teachers reflected that having number scores for teacher evaluation generated stress and expressed the need to set rubrics as a tool for growth instead of judgment because it promoted

competition and teaching to the rubric. The use of numbers for evaluations relates to the market based idea that higher scores represents better teaching. Adams et al. (2009) clarified that “In general ...public employees (including teachers) are relatively more motivated by a belief in the goals of the organizations, while private employees are relatively more motivated by financial rewards.” (p.93), which relates to what Wendi and Laura shared, they wanted more precise feedback to improve their craft, but did not appreciate the lack of autonomy or being observed with the TEAM rubric, which they considered rigid. They explained altering their practice to fit the requirements of the rubric in order to receive a higher score. Adams et al. (2009) added, “Failure to properly understand and utilize the motivations of public employees may lead in the short term to poor job performance and the long term to permanent displacement of a public service ethic.” (p.94), which relates to the statements given by Wendy and Laura, who on a daily bases work for their goal of serving others, but when evaluated alter their practice.

### **Research Question 6**

#### **How can schools ensure novice teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?**

According to teachers’ perceptions, schools seemed focused on helping their teachers succeed. All teachers spoke highly of most of their administrators and especially of their peers. Not one teacher mention wanting to change schools because of lack of support. The complaints and suggestions given by teachers were aligned with theory and related to the educational environment set up by regulations coming from the state.

Teachers who attended new teachers’ in-service and new teachers’ meetings stated those were highly beneficial to understand how the system and school functioned. Four teachers reflected on the need for having a school handbook for new teachers and new teachers’ in-service for each school, which could focus on how to handle paperwork and administrative

requirements. Six teachers shared the benefit of structured mentorship programs, including periodic meetings, and mentors who were not members of their working teams. All teachers valued being accepted and having the support from other teachers in the building and appreciated the favorable school climate of their schools.

All teachers were thankful for professional development, especially the help related to trauma-informed teaching and helping ACES. Even though schools had implemented more help with the social-emotional area, teachers understood that the focus on academic achievement hinders the development of the whole individual. Teachers noticed the need for more time to work on character development, and on applying the knowledge from trauma-informed teaching training.

Teachers appreciated the opportunities provided by their districts to attend small workshops given by their peers, conferences, and summer opportunities, as well as presenting their knowledge and expertise to teachers in the same school or at the district level. Content area teachers acknowledged the help they received from the instructional coaches provided by the district. The suggestions for improvement for the coaches' impact included having a different approach with teachers according to their years of experience, making sure newer teachers have more time to ask questions and for more experienced teachers to have more guidance on in-depth teaching, more modeling, and observations in their classrooms. Supportive Teams benefited novice teachers' adaptation and success in school. Teachers' suggestions regarding their working teams were mainly to have the freedom to approach their planning and standards in a way that matched their teaching style and their students' learning and personalities.

One teacher recommended that administrators be patient with new teachers. Julia appreciated her principal being supportive of her mistakes and wanting her to improve her

practice, while Laura was discouraged because her principal pointed out mistakes in a non-encouraging way. Teachers noticed that one component of their growth during their first years was the feedback given by their administrators and the opportunities to observe and be observed by their peers and coaches. Cochran-Smith (2012), and Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) described teaching as a profession in which people grow with practice and reflection which takes time.

### **Research Question 7**

#### **What do teachers believe is the purpose of school?**

What teachers believe is the purpose of school aligned with the theory presented in Chapter 2. In their own words, most teachers concurred that the purpose of school was to promote productive, successful, and respectful citizens who are life-long learners able to grow in all areas and support themselves in a career of their choice. Twelve teachers expressed that academics were just one part of such purpose and complained that there was not enough emphasis in other areas. Eleven teachers did not see a match between the expectations of school coming from policy-making level and the purpose of promoting whole individuals. However, even though they noticed the pressure for data and standardized testing achievement, they were trying to help students in their classrooms not to feel that pressure.

Ten teachers inferred that their teacher preparation programs did little to help them accomplish what they believed is the purpose of school, while seven believed that at least one component from their teacher preparation programs focused on how to help teachers accomplish what they believed is the purpose of school. These teachers suggested more courses in social-emotional areas. Teachers recognized that their schools had stepped up to help students and even though it was not an evaluated requirement, they appreciated the support from their

administrators and district. The support included classroom time for social-emotional development, restorative circles, and resources in the form of professional development related to Trauma Informed Teaching, ACES, and conferences on how to approach different learning styles and brain development. Nevertheless, some teachers were discouraged and voiced their concerns regarding the purpose of school and the future of the students.

Emma, a 1st-grade teacher, explained that the standards did not match the level of development of some students, and only a few students were mastering them before moving on, but several would go to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and were not ready. She stated that in math especially, they were moving too fast, that several of her students were not able to add two numbers together, but were required to find a missing addend. Laura also taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade and explained the need to teach several strategies for students to add mentally and on paper. She expressed that most students were having difficulties. Wendi, a 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade teacher, related to that perception explaining that her students were able to master the standards, but the problem was on time, “Can they master all of this in the time that we give them?”

Emma was worried about some students not being ready to move to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and Julia in 5<sup>th</sup> grade had the challenge of trying to fill in the gaps carried over grade by grade. She complained about not being able to retain students, and how the difference of levels in her classroom, made her first year difficult, explaining that kids with higher ability suffered the consequences. Heather commented that differentiation was one of her principals’ objective of moving to standards-based grading and project-based learning. She related to the students that were able to learn more, but because of the standards and the class level, were not able to learn at their speed. Therefore, by having just one set of standards, not all students were able to achieve



the purpose of school. Some were not reaching the goal set for them, and others were not learning more, due to the lack of opportunities to surpass the set standards.

Eight teachers reflected that the purpose of school seems to be achieving the highest test scores and that it should consider the social-emotional aspect as well. Lucy shared that schools expected students to know skills that teachers were not teaching, like the school's rules. She revealed that teachers were not teaching students how to be ready, how to be responsible, or how to be respectful, however, expected them to be ready, study and behave without clearly explaining how. Lucy explained that one of the problems was that teachers did not have to teach those skills and the requirements for content took the time from the non-required skills. Therefore, discipline problems occurred and students received consequences for reasons they did not understand.

Karla, as a related arts teacher, commented that even though her school wanted to be able to help students with their social-emotional areas, her influence was not long lasting because of having the same students only nine weeks. Hence, promoting shifting the schedule in such a way that students could have all related arts classes fewer times each week, but during the whole year. Doing so could help teachers build better relationships with students while providing students the opportunity to improve their skills in related arts throughout the year.

According to Mark and Lucy, the fixation on standards and the expectation of having every student achieving the same goal by taking a previously established number of credits and subjects was not motivating students. These teachers concluded that students needed to have more choice to be motivated to attend school and to work hard enough to graduate, which was supported by Kallick and Zmuda (2017), and Rickabaugh (2016). Couros (2015) posited that providing students with more choice motivates them and they enjoy coming to school.

Mark clarified that students had to take specific courses, but that teachers had to keep grades high enough for them not to fail and reach an adequate graduation rate. Mark considered it wrong and explained that it seemed like a game all teachers needed to play. He did not agree with the requirements, nor with the lack of accountability for students. On the long run, students were not learning what hard work meant, and they were not getting prepared for the real world. These regulations go against the suggestions Armstrong (2006) gave regarding high school students, in which teachers should act as mentors to apprentices, guiding students to be independent and responsible in their lives outside of school.

Lucy and Mark voiced their concerns regarding the future of the students. However, more than half of the teachers were aware that several students were not achieving the purpose of school. As explained in the literature review, education is a complex system, and when one mandate impacts one component of the system, such a mandate affects the whole system. By focusing on standards and regulations, students do not develop their potential, and teachers have a hard time trying to address the needs of every student while pleasing the requirements set by policy-makers. Therefore, the requirements of accountability set for education without the appropriate educational knowledge were harming more than helping students. Unexpected social problems explained in the literature review might be the cause of school dropout, drug abuse, and suicide.

### **Research Question 8**

**What relationships exist between the perception of novice teachers regarding their preparation and professional support and the achievement of the purpose of school?**

In general, teachers reflected that to accomplish the purpose of school, they needed support from all stakeholders. Three teachers considered that to accomplish it, teachers needed to

develop compassion, be positive role models for students, and be able to understand the reality of students and their backgrounds. They were aware of the importance of regularly evaluating their educational philosophy and reflecting on their practice. Brown (2017) spoke about the “second backpack.” He explained that the backpack carried the stories the student brought to school. Teachers should be good role models that some students might not have at home. Teachers were aware of the reality of students, and some of them cared dearly for the neediest students, some worked in after-school programs, others wanted to pursue advanced certifications to help select students, and others learned how to be aware of the needs of their students. Karla explained that schools were feeding, clothing, and doing their best to teach students, but first making sure, they all had the same opportunities. As explained in the literature review, that was the job entrusted to teachers, but Ravitich (2013) requested, it should be the government’s responsibility to help those students in need.

Teachers seemed professionally prepared to achieve the purpose of school. In some cases it was connected to their decision to become teachers, in others was related to experiences during their field placements, for example, Martha, Laura, Wendi, Lucy, and Mark were clear on why they were teaching and did not let the pressure interfere between their personal goal and the purpose of school. They had a clear goal for being teachers, and they achieved it in different ways. Martha and Mark disregarded the pressure and did what was professionally adequate, while Wendi and Laura played the game of the requirements, making sure students were provided with what they needed. Julia learned about the reality of low-income students during her student teaching, changing her understanding of education. Karla was devoted to after-school programs, and Sara acknowledged learning about diversity and reflecting on her practice during her preparation and field experiences. Since teachers had a clear purpose of school, they were

frustrated for not able to achieve it. Therefore, Teachers were outspoken about the number of regulations and confessed to playing the game of the system to please regulations while making sure they were helping students appropriately on a daily basis.

Teachers, in general, expressed their appreciation to their school districts for their support with professional development regarding the social-emotional needs of students. However, Karla noticed the need to keep class sizes small, while nine teachers expressed that having more informal feedback and guidance from administrators in the building would be beneficial. Irene proposed that counselors communicated effectively with them, especially about students that required more assistance, and suggested having information regarding SPED students before school started or before related arts rotated. Teachers also requested time, especially for planning.

About half of the teachers voiced that the teaching profession needed support from society as well as from the Department of Education and policymakers. They advocated for trust, freedom, and time. Four teachers were frustrated with the academic expectations set for the students; others of them considered that some standards and pacing were not appropriate to the level of development of their students. In general, several teachers considered suffocated by requirements that according to their professional knowledge did not help them accomplish the purpose of school.

Teachers reported the need for more freedom to work professionally and to have professional evaluations. They expressed their discomfort with the use of standardized testing for themselves when finishing their teacher preparation program, as well as a measure to define the knowledge of students at the end of the year. Six teachers commented about the disadvantages of standardized tests and explained that they did not show students' learning. Mark illuminated that

various students did not even do their best on the test because they saw no value in them.

Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010), Kamii (2000), Popham (2008), and Ravitich (2010) explained that standardized tests do not measure student knowledge. Moreover, Ravitich (2013) cited Todd Farley regarding the lack of seriousness provided by test taking companies, making those scores an inappropriate measure of student learning. Therefore, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), Sahlberg (2010), and Wiggins and McTighe (2007) suggested that teachers should design purposeful, complex, and authentic final assessments, which would demonstrate the skills and knowledge students acquired during the learning process.

Lucy also spoke against being evaluated with her students' standardized tests. Meier and Wood (2004) and Rose (2015) explained that when part of teachers' evaluations included the standardized test scores from their students, they tended to teach to the test, and even though some test scores were higher, students did not learn more. Teachers in this study considered the pressure, as explained by Wendy, it generated competition, and the consequence of such competition impacts the students' lives because it takes time away from social-emotional areas.

Lucy revealed a personal experience with her family. She explained that her daughter, a great student, was depressed because of the expectations of school and lack of engagement at school. As a parent, she disregarded the academic side and worried about her daughter being happy and feeling successful. The same had occurred with her son. The higher the grade level, the less he cared about school. Lucy's son had too much homework and did not have time to enjoy his friends and being a kid. Lucy's comments related to what Abeles and Rubenstein (2015) described. Lucy's first reaction was to blame teachers, but now that she was a teacher, she was able to understand that it was not solely their teachers' fault. She recognized the pressure that state regulations have on teachers, and how some teachers focus on the rewards and forget about

the purpose of school. Laura shared seeing “level 5” teachers with students suffering daily in their classrooms. Heather commented that even though she did not agree with charter schools, those schools were able to have “fun” and “innovate.” She explained that those schools had more funding besides fewer regulations. Research explained that some charters could help students achieve their purpose; it all depended on how those schools were lead. Ravitich (2010) explained that in most cases charters were businesses lacking knowledge in education and focusing solely on test scores.

Lucy explained the differences she found between her two jobs. She clarified that teaching seemed a lot easier than what it was, and described feeling that she had no freedom when comparing it to her previous job. Pink (2009) posited, “By neglecting the ingredients of genuine motivation – autonomy, mastery, and purpose – they limit what each of us can achieve.” (p. 47). Lucy also explained that her content team had continuously changed because of the regulations of unclear achievement, which had driven teachers away, and some days she questioned herself about having the energy to continue.

One of the requests made by Mark was to require policymakers to have practice and knowledge in education, with the intent to promote freedom, time, and support to a profession undermined by the public, and over regularized with the purpose of accountability. He reflected that the regulations created to avoid some educational problems were promoting and in some cases increasing the same problems. He explained that education will always have problems, and considered that no policy would eliminate them all. He noticed that the regulations were making those problems worse. Pink (2009) and Adams et al. (2009) explained that imposing regulations on groups who work for serving the public might end up augmenting the problem for which the regulations existed. The comment related to Mark’s opinion about graduation rates and the lack

of choice students have, which keeps them from coming to school. Because of his knowledge and experience of schools, Mark was able to connect two areas of the system, which are not always clearly connected. Therefore, as Van Geert and Steenbeek (2014) explain, it is essential to understand the whole system before making changes that can alter all of its components.

Considering Sinek's (2009) terms, teachers were able to articulate "why" they were teaching; they wanted to help people and build relationships. They wanted students to be able to become successful and productive citizens, who could decide their path to feeling accomplished. Teachers were able to explain "how" to do it appropriately, they understood the requirement of constant professional development and help in social-emotional areas, and they suggested teacher preparation programs change their structure and to graduate prepared teachers. Nevertheless, they were frustrated to operate under the "how" set up by state and policymakers, since they understood that by doing so, they would hardly achieve the "what" they were searching. Just as some researchers (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitich, 2010), teachers noticed that unless there were changes to educational regulations, several students might not achieve the purpose of school, increasing the probability of continuing with the social problems affecting the U.S.

### **Nancy Dillon's Study**

One of the objectives of this study was to compare the current perceptions of teachers with the recommendations given by Dillon (2004). Dillon's study provided five conclusions and recommendations for practice:

1. Teacher preparation programs need to reflect the realism of today's classrooms.
2. Schools and colleges should develop a closer relationship and investigate the possibility of creating a professional development school.

3. School systems should develop and implement quality induction programs.
  - a. School procedures and introduction to faculty,
  - b. Classroom management, student assessment, and curriculum mandates,
  - c. Mentor,
  - d. Assessment of new teacher performance.
4. Hiring education faculty who "walk the talk" can have a positive influence on the development of beginning teachers.
5. Teacher candidates need as much field experience in a variety of settings as can be integrated into their teacher-training program.

At the time of Dillon's study, all teacher preparation programs offered student teaching that lasted just one semester, and there was not a state requirement to assess teachers based on the TEAM rubric. The recommendations from Dillon's study highlighted some of the changes in education. Only some teacher preparation programs have increased their student teaching experience to one year, and others still offer it only for one semester. However, teachers are still asking for a change in field experience.

Two areas that are still a concern are the need for communication between schools and colleges and the complaint of professors being outdated in theory and disconnected from school reality. Some teachers recognized that their professors provided adequate teaching strategies, but others suggested professors mostly lecturing. Karla expressed that, "The more we can have a collaboration between current school teaching practices and our teacher preparation programs, the more communication there, the better our programs are going to be." Wendi and Heather also talked about increasing communication between colleges and recent graduates, to make sure they had the support from their professors in case they needed during their first years of teaching.



It seemed that school districts in the area are assuming responsibility for providing professional development and adequate strategies to support teachers. District level induction programs are a common requirement. Schools are improving their support for new teachers with meetings and most mentors were the critical factor for teachers to be well adjusted. Teachers still requested more help in classroom management, which was a combined factor between colleges and school districts; however, coaches had filled the space of support for curriculum mandates and assessments.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The accountability measures required by policymakers seem to be counterproductive toward the goal for which they were created. Therefore, considering the suggestions given by teachers in this study, the researcher has proposed the following recommendations for practice for Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs), school districts, and policymakers.

#### **Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs**

**Communication.** TPPs should improve their communication with teacher candidates and be clear about all the expectations and requirements for their courses. Doing so would benefit teacher candidates to understand how the program works, its requirements, and the reasons for having each one of its components before they begin their programs, for example general prerequisite courses. This would help teacher candidates comprehend the importance each component of the program and communicate with professors when the component is not serving its purpose. It would also help professors evaluate the components of the programs and to provide teacher candidates valid explanations for the reasons to include each one of the components and requirements for the programs. This communication could help the teacher

preparation system improve, by considering the perceptions of professors, teacher candidates and including teachers that left the program.

**General prerequisites.** Even though some teachers did not express any problems about general education prerequisites, four of them had strong comments against those courses, mainly because they had no connection to their major and they did not see any benefit on taking them. Colleges should consider the diversity of individuals' preparation and career choice when applying for their programs, and should offer a variety of options for their studies, keeping in mind teacher candidates will need to pass the PRAXIS tests before getting their teaching licenses. Colleges should consider taking diagnostics test to teacher candidates to learn about their areas of need and to focus on helping them on those areas during their programs in order for them to pass the PRAXIS tests. Doing so would create a connection between the general prerequisites needed by teacher candidates and their education major. Since every student will have a different requirement, general prerequisites should be set as a requirement after taking the diagnostic test and learning the needs of each candidate. Having a personalized program can motivate teacher candidates to improve in their weaknesses and to understand the need for some of those courses during their programs. If TPPs provide the required content courses throughout their programs, teacher candidates would have more time at the beginning of their programs to observe classrooms and notice the importance of mastering the content to be taught, besides being able to recall the content information when it is time to take the PRAXIS test. This would also help the TPPs help teacher candidates increase the percentage of teachers that pass their PRAXIS tests to acquire a teaching license.

**Practice and theory.** Teacher preparation programs should reevaluate the admission to their programs and about the theory and field experiences they provide their candidates. Even

though some professors were innovative and offered hands-on activities, teachers complained about various professors lecturing and having no connection with schools. Consequently, professors should be required to visit the schools in which teacher candidates have field experiences and be exposed to the reality of the schools and the students attending those schools. Professors should also clarify to students that the activities they are practicing in class are strategies they could use in their future classrooms and make a clear connection of how teacher candidates could plan those strategies according to the level of development of their students. Another strategy that could be included in theory courses are case studies, which demonstrate teacher candidates different ways to approach a problem and the type of results their actions can have.

Teacher preparation programs should redesign their programs of study considering the suggestions coming from the teachers in this study, placing practice at the center of their programs and connecting practice with adequate theory. Such practice should incorporate educational psychology every semester, with courses on brain development, and special education. Programs should promote teacher candidates observing a variety of teachers and schools in all grade levels included in their licensure and connecting their experiences with theory, while providing candidates enough time to share and reflect on their experiences. Teacher candidates should be exposed to current educational problems and policy. It would be beneficial for the system to have teachers that understand their profession and its constraints. Teacher candidates need to be knowledgeable about adequate teaching practices and ways to promote equity in schools. They should understand the reasons for market-based strategies to go against educational purposes and recognize educational strategies that are not adequate to help students learn.

Field experiences should be consciously designed regarding the grade level, subject, and mentor in relation to the licensure areas of each teacher candidate. Student teacher should last one whole year, including the two weeks before school starts, with candidates having the same schedule as the school where they are student teaching. Individuals graduating from TPPs should be knowledgeable about the level of development of students in every grade level included in their area of licensure, and even though the state requires the PRAXIS tests, TPPs should not graduate individuals who are not ready to help students learn in the area they are qualified.

**Assessment.** Assessments of teacher candidates should require candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and performance of teaching. TPPs should prepare teachers to be successful teachers, to demonstrate their knowledge, and to be able to acquire their teaching license without stressing about passing state tests. Teachers expressed the benefits of the edTPA, but also noticed its weaknesses. Some teachers expressed that having edTPA while doing student teaching took learning time away, so TPPs could extend edTPA during the whole student teaching year, and clarify the expectations from teacher candidates.

Considering that more than half of students taking the PRAXIS does not pass it the first time, TPPs could provide general prerequisites that prepare teacher candidates for the PRAXIS tests. They could also reduce the number of general prerequisites not connected to education and provide methods courses that could teach candidates general subjects applied to education. They could increase field experience time in schools, theory connected to their field experience at college, and time to reflect on their field experience and its connections with theory before student teaching.

Standardized tests alone do not provide enough evidence of teacher preparation. It makes no sense to grant a teaching license for passing the Spanish PRAXIS test to a teacher who did not

take enough methods courses to teach a foreign language, and who does not feel prepared to teach, as was the case with one of the interviewed teachers. Therefore, TPPs should advocate for the development of adequate teacher assessments and communicate with policymakers regarding the content and ability needed by teacher candidates to succeed in their first years in as teachers. Doing so could help the education system invest in adequate preparation and assessments that ensure suitable evidence of teacher candidates' knowledge and ability to teach.

**Partnerships.** Teacher education programs should improve their communication with school districts and encourage the creation of partnerships. By having strong partnerships, TPPs could learn about the needs of students and teachers in a faster way and innovate their practices. Professors could work with principals and mentor teachers as a team, making sure that they understand the reality of schools and getting to know educators that could be potential mentor teachers for their students in college, assuring teacher candidates adequate field experiences and modeling to help students learn. Professors could also be intentional in communicating with previous teacher candidates who are working as novice teachers and be a resource for them. Continuing communication between professors and novice teachers could facilitate professors finding novice teachers to visit their college classes and talk to teacher candidates about their experiences as novice teachers and sharing their problems and solutions.

Partnerships provide common interests and could improve results in various areas of the system. Colleges could be better prepared to help teachers searching for jobs, practicing for interviews, and making sure teacher candidates know how to communicate with colleagues, administrators, and parents. Those partnerships could have a clear pathway for teaching, which could be, as suggested by the teachers, a year in which candidates could be hired as assistants in schools, work as substitutes within the school when needed, and have the support from their

professors as well as from the system. This would increase the teaching experience before graduation, could help candidates financially, and could help schools by forming their assistants to be future teachers who are already part of the culture of the school. Partnerships could also help TPPs and school systems advocate for changes in the system at policy level. The consequences from reforms and regulations set by policymakers affect TPPs and schools, and when working together, it could be easier to communicate with policymakers regarding the regulations and their consequences with the goal to improve the system. When both areas notice either positive or negative effects, they could articulate those consequences and generate more pressure at state level. When proving successful, these partnerships could be able to suggest for funds to innovate with programs that would benefit both TPPs and schools, which could likewise generate support for an investment that has a clear goal for education. When there are programs that provide positive results to both areas there could be a better opportunity to finding investment sources in both public and private sectors.

### **Recommendations for School Districts**

School districts should continue to improve the programs they have in place to support teachers. They should continue with their in-services for new teachers at district level, and should encourage their schools to provide in-services to their new teachers concerning the individual school procedures. Some teachers talked about the benefits of having a new teacher handbook and new teacher meetings.

School administrators should maintain a mentorship protocol to assure adequate benefits from mentors. Include weekly meetings during planning time, and assign mentors who are not in the same working team as novice teachers. Increment the time of mentorship for 2 years with the purpose of helping novice teachers be objective regarding their growth. This second year could

include less instructional support during the year. Coaches, just as mentors, should have a more tailored approach to each teacher considering their years of experience and specific needs. Administrators should monitor the support received by their new teachers, making sure that new teachers have enough support to have a successful first year.

Administrators should also be open to change some areas of school structure, especially in middle school and high school. For example rethinking school schedules. Students do not need to have a daily schedule that looks the same every single day and have it changed every nine weeks or every semester. Schedules could change to include projects integrating several subjects at the same time, or organized as weekly schedules that incorporate art, music, physical education, and foreign languages every week. Those subjects could be offered twice a week or once a week during the whole year. This would benefit students constantly developing their skills throughout the year and building relationships with related arts teachers in a long lasting way. It would ensure students to look forward to going to school every week because they would be exposed to classes they like, instead of having their favorite class only one quarter of the year.

Administrators should establish a certain number of hours for teachers to observe other teachers who teach the same content in the same grade level, one below and one above once a year. This would provide informal feedback to observed teachers and professional development time for teachers who observe. It also promotes awareness of student development one year earlier and their requirements for the following years. Administrators could also increase informal observation and feedback, and school districts should remind observers to be encouraging and supportive when pointing out teacher's mistakes.

Even though all school districts were promoting restorative practices in their schools, there were schools that did not include social-emotional time and resources. School districts

should continue to support teachers with strategies and professional development regarding trauma-informed teaching for ACES, restorative circles, positive discipline strategies, and time to develop them. When schools require teachers to work in social-emotional areas like restorative circles from 10 to 15 minutes every day, students notice the importance of cultivating relationships, respecting others, and building a classroom community. As one teacher explained, the second year of practicing “zones of regulation” her students were aware of their feelings and knew what to do to be ready to learn. Investing time in social-emotional development will also help students learn better.

School districts should advocate for a differentiated rubric to assess educators and for a different evaluation system. If school districts collaborate with TPPs, there could be a better opportunity to communicate with policymakers and establish adequate assessment tools for teacher and student growth. School districts should also advocate avoiding the use of standardized test scores as a measure to evaluate students, teachers, and schools.

### **Recommendations for the State Department of Education and Policymakers**

Policymakers should support education by making sure only well-prepared teachers receive a teaching license. They should avoid support for fast routes for teaching and conversely, should not only support, but also work together with colleges that offer TPPs to promote adequate teaching programs. Teachers need adequate preparation, support, and autonomy to improve their craft. According to this study, teachers are willing to pay for advanced studies and prepare themselves to progress in their career, but at the same time, they notice that state requirements are not congruent with their knowledge on best practices to achieve what they believe is the purpose of school. Policymakers should consider this information when faced with solving the teacher attrition problem.



Policymakers could allocate funds for TPPs to innovate their programs and work in partnerships with school districts to provide teacher candidates with a path to work which could include working as assistants in schools before getting their first teaching jobs. When considering low-income areas, state officials could provide high schools with scholarships funds to give to their best graduates to study education in local colleges and when graduated, to return to the same school system they attended and work as assistants and teachers. This would motivate other students to follow that same path and generate a sense of pride in the community besides increasing the number of teachers and the diversity of teachers who could stay in their placements and work for their community, approaching the teacher attrition program and teacher quality with a low-cost and long-lasting solution.

Assessment for teacher candidates is necessary and should be done with instruments that provide information regarding their ability to teach. Even though the edTPA provides adequate guidelines for growth, the videography could be eliminated, trusting professors with doing the teacher observations. Teachers also suggested extending the test to last 2 semesters of student teaching and increment the lesson plan preparation to a unit plan with more realistic focus. Policymakers should consider the lack of valid information provided by standardized tests like PRAXIS, and could consider a different tool to assess teacher candidates' knowledge and preparation to teach.

Instead of the support granted to programs providing fast routes for teachers like Teach for America, policymakers could provide resources to TPPs and schools to hire teacher candidates who are ready to graduate or newly graduates to work as teacher assistants for a couple of years and provide them a teaching position at the same school or school district. This would provide novice teachers with an easier adaptation, which would mean a more efficient use

of public school resources while improving the quality of teachers for schools. Policymakers should also be fair and give all public schools the same regulations, thus lessening the regulations set to public schools and making sure charter schools have the same regulations and funding as public schools.

State officials and policymakers should be aware of the inequality faced by public schools and should fund schools equally in all areas of the state. This means that all schools should receive the same per pupil amount of funds disregarding the neighborhood in which they are located. Schools located in low-income areas should also provide services such as preschool, early care and after care for their students. Considering that students in low-income areas have more social-emotional issues than students in affluent neighborhoods, those schools should have more resources in the form of school counselors and extracurricular activities to help students and motivate them to attend school. Likewise, standards should be differentiated to the level of development of students in a classroom and should consider the social-emotional development needs from students, requiring schools to set time aside to address those issues and promote relationship building.

Students in middle school and high school should be provided with more project-based learning and more choice regarding the courses they must take to graduate. High schools could offer a variety of graduation diplomas. If the purpose of school is to promote productive citizens, students should choose how to be productive. Different requirements should be according to the degree students want. Therefore, students who want to attend college should have a set of requirements decided by state officials and colleges, but students who want technical careers should have requirements set by state officials and technical schools. This could improve issues

with school attendance and could motivate students to complete a diploma according to their choice of graduation path.

Teachers should be trusted to implement assessments that provide information regarding the knowledge acquired by students during a year, for example standards-based assessments. Assessments should guide both students and teachers to grow, and should avoid judging student learning and teaching ability with standardized testing. Policymakers should promote collaboration between schools and teachers, and to do so, it would be necessary to eliminate grading schools and teachers since the pressure to succeed promotes risk management strategies and cheating. Education takes time, reflection, and practice. Therefore, teacher assessment could include teacher reflections regarding their practices and the results of their actions throughout the year. Those reflections could be revised after teacher observations, from 1 observation to the next, and from 1 year to the following.

Policymakers should be aware of the time it takes teachers to grow and comprehend the education system. As seen in this study, teachers have no personal interests more than helping students achieve their purpose. Those teachers take their time learning and practicing, and have no ties to corporations or making money. Therefore, state officials should trust teachers making educational decisions, should listen to their suggestions, and invite them to work at the state level. State officials should also avoid assigning policymaking positions to individuals whose experience relates to schools that are not public, or whose experience has been in the educational industry, due to the lack of knowledge and vision of the complex public education system. As seen in this study, good intentions with lack of knowledge could harm more than help the education system and hinder students from achieving the purpose of school.

## **Recommendations for Research**

This study included the perceptions of only 17 teachers in Northeast Tennessee. It would be interesting to amplify the study to more teachers in different areas of the state. This study included the perception of teachers who experienced colleges and school districts. Learning about the perception of college professors and school district administrators could also be enlightening.

It would be interesting to learn about:

- The perceptions for teachers all over the state or in different areas of the state regarding their teacher preparation programs, their professional support and the purpose of school.
- The perception of professors at colleges and universities in Northeast Tennessee regarding their programs of study and of how to accomplish the purpose of school.
- The perceptions of school directors in school districts located in Northeast Tennessee and the purpose of school.
- The perceptions of state officials and policymakers regarding education, teachers, and the purpose of school.
- The purpose of school of parents in Northeast Tennessee and their perception concerning the actual teaching practices and school requirements.
- The perceptions of parents in Northeast Tennessee regarding their children's teachers, schools, and administrators.

## Chapter Summary

The teachers who participated in this study shared their perceptions regarding their teacher preparation programs (TPPs), the support received from their schools, and the purpose of school. Most of their perceptions concerning the purpose of school were similar to the theory explained in the literature review. They noticed that the accountability measures required by policymakers seem to be counterproductive toward the goal for which they were created.

Teachers suggested colleges and universities to reorganize their programs of study around relevant field experiences and to connect those with adequate theory. They also suggested more theory regarding social-emotional areas and classroom management, and for professors to visit schools and innovate their teaching practices avoiding lectures. They also suggested TPPs to improve communication within their programs and with candidates, mentor teachers, school districts and former teacher candidates as a way of support.

School districts seemed to be assuming responsibility for providing professional development and adequate strategies to support teachers. Teachers appreciated their support and requested to keep improving the programs they already have in place, to augment time allotted to work in social-emotional areas, and to advocate for a differentiated rubric and evaluation system for teachers. Teachers suggested policymakers to support educators with adequate preparation, trust, and autonomy. They also suggested to implement differentiated standards and to avoid standardized testing for teacher accountability.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX: Interview Guide

#### **Interview Questions sent to the Participants before the Interview:**

##### From College to Teaching:

1. Describe your teacher preparation program.
2. Describe the field experiences you were required to fulfill. How were these experiences related to your courses? How did those experiences prepare you to succeed as a teacher?
3. How do you think your college or university program prepared you for your first year teaching?
4. How did your college professors model the teaching strategies and theories they taught?
5. What components of your program have contributed to your success in teaching?
6. How did your teacher preparation program prepare you to teach according to the level of development of your students?
7. What could be done to make the transition from college to teaching more successful?
8. If you could design the teacher training program at a college or university, what would you include? What would you exclude?

##### **Interview:**

1. Did you graduate from a traditional 4-year teacher preparatory program, a 5-year program, or did you get your license through an alternative route?
2. Is this a second profession? If yes, what was your first one?
3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
4. Why did you become a teacher?

5. What do you see yourself doing in 5 years?
6. What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?

About Teaching:

1. How were you assisted formally as a new teacher?
2. How were you assisted informally as a new teacher? Describe the support given by other faculty or staff at the school during your first year.
3. What would you keep and what would you change about the initial support you were given?
4. How do you think schools can help novice teachers be successful?
5. What type of professional development, learning team, or coaching program does your school provide to improve your practice? How does it work?
6. How has the evaluation process impacted your practice?
7. How has your school supported you in teaching according to the level of development of your students?

The Purpose of School:

1. What is the purpose of school?
2. How do school expectations match this purpose?
3. How are you helping your students to achieve this purpose?
4. How did your teacher preparation program prepare you to accomplish this purpose?
5. How has your school supported you to fulfill this purpose?
6. What do teachers need to be able to fulfill this purpose?

## VITA

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