

Public Abstract

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Title:PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES:
PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS

There is a gap in the research regarding structured collaborative processes and experiences that draws a parallel to the disconnections discovered between what is needed to be a successful teacher candidate in the field and what is taught through coursework and the lack of authentic experiences in teacher preparation programs such as collaboration.

This qualitative study seeks to expand the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact. With increasing demands and accountability placed on educators and the need to problem solve to meet these demands, and thus to improve student achievement an increased need exists to collaborate. Collaboration, teacher preparation programs, accountability, and novice teachers' perceptions, serve as supports to pursue the need for further, ongoing research in this area of adult learning. Teacher preparation programs can employ these factors to meet standards and mandates, but most importantly, to adequately prepare teacher candidates for the needs of students in their future classrooms.

Accountability systems, mandates, laws, and legislation provide the ongoing requisite to provide teacher candidates with authentic collaboration experiences. These authentic experiences must prepare them to meet these demands. The needs of students in K–12 classrooms are changing and involve significant collaboration and problem solving to address.

The study outlined one universities approach to strive to meet the competencies for accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators with a focus on collaboration. This qualitative case study investigated the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways in which collaboration impacted them and their teaching experiences and examined the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period.

Participants in this study agreed that their comfort level with collaboration was comfortable or very comfortable (95%). Frequency data analysis from the interviews and focus groups revealed four themes related to ways in which collaboration impacted them and their teaching: (a) open-minded, (b) unafraid, (c) confident, and (d) more strategies.

This study contains implications for teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates, and novice teachers. As universities strive to meet competencies for accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators, it is necessary to keep ongoing program improvements and research as the focus. Further research on the impact of collaboration on teacher candidates, novice teachers, their colleagues, and K–12 students and schools would support the conceptual frameworks and mission of the specific education departments, as well as support and inform the profession, and address gaps in the literature.

Given the findings from this research, and because few studies have investigated this angle of collaboration in teacher preparation programs, it seems important to use the results for program planning and further

research. This study could shed light on impacts and perceptions that may influence policymakers, leaders, institutions, teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates, and teachers themselves. In addition, with a gap in the literature on the structures of higher education programs that address collaboration and the outcome of collaboration on student achievement, this study could fill the gap in that literature, as well as provide a basis for further research. Last, as some participants indicated they are required to collaborate on many levels, but have had no further professional learning since being hired, universities could also assist in filling that gap in professional development in districts.

A suggestion for a future study would be to further examine the impact of these types of collaboration experiences by researching the perceptions of colleagues and administrators of these novice teachers, and how these teachers impact teams and student learning. A second area for further research would be to investigate the types of course content and experiences around collaboration offered to teacher candidates at other institutions of higher education with teacher preparation programs.