PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES:

PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
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PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS

presented by Shantel Farnan

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Jennee Gregory
Dedication

As I reflect upon my learning throughout this dissertation, I realize the true dedication comes from and needs to be placed on the pursuit of learning for all students, and especially students with disabilities. Students, all students, are at the center of this dissertation and this dissertation is dedicated to learning for all. My passion has always been working with those with disabilities. Throughout the years, I have learned more from them than they learned from me. I learned to work hard and persevere. I learned to push through when things are difficult. I learned about love and kindness. Learning occurs throughout all of life, but for some children and adult learners, this learning takes all of us. Students need us to collaborate in order to find what works for all of them to learn successfully. All of this learning, effort, and perseverance is for all students. This dissertation is dedicated to all students I have had the opportunity to learn from in the past and will continue to learn from in the future. This dedication expands to the teacher candidates I have had the pleasure to teach and to the thousands of K-12 students they will influence for generations to come.
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PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES:

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

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 case study seeks to expand the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact. The study outlined one university's approach to strive to meet the competencies for accreditation and 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.
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

The needs of students in kindergarten through 12th grade (K–12) classrooms are becoming more diverse (Arick & Krug, 1993; Canillas Stein, 2011; Cook & Friend, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015; Tzivinikou, 2015; Vannest, Temple-Harvey, & Mason, 2009). Federal laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) are important to teachers and other educators. These federal laws enact legislation and assign criteria to address accountability, based on whether schools are meeting students’ diverse needs and are the thrust of many educational reforms. Educational reforms have been significant and prevalent in recent years (Goldstein, Warde, & Rody, 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Hamman, Lechtenberger, Griffin-Shirley, & Zhou, 2013; Ng, 2006) with many focusing on meeting the needs of all children in all settings (Arick & Krug, 1993; Canillas Stein, 2011; Cook & Friend, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015; Tzivinikou, 2015; Vannest et al., 2009). Many educational reforms were instituted to close long-standing achievement gaps between disaggregated groups of students (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2014).

Inclusion has been a key component and goal of education for decades (Borden & Pike, 2008; Duncan, 2010; Field, 2009; Goldstein et al., 2013; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997). The accountability of meeting the needs of all students has been significant through IDEA (1990) and NCLB (2001) and continues to be a focused goal of improvements to public education (O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997). A 2013 study found
94% of the student teachers reported students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Close to 75% reported three or more students with a variety of disabilities in their general education classroom, 45% reported five or more, and 28% reported seven or more. (Goldstein et al., 2013, p. 560)

At the same time, when people are addressing the negative aspects of federal legislation such as NCLB (Choi, Seltzer, Herman, & Yamahsiro, 2007; Ng, 2006, Skrla et al., 2004), it is hard to argue that educators want to leave any child behind. What school does not want to make adequate yearly progress? (Choi et al., 2007; Harvey et al., 2010; Vannest et al., 2009). “Significant resources must be invested to balance the current system of high-stakes testing with effective classroom assessment” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 236). Schools spend millions of dollars every year on professional development, studies, and interventions for at-risk children (Umphrey, 2009). Daily, districts implement new research-based interventions for children: all children, but especially those who are not achieving (Vannest et al., 2009).

Perhaps the most publicized finding from the Coleman report was that schools account for only about 10% of the variance in student achievement: the other 90% is accounted for by student background characteristics (Marzano, 2004). With those types of odds, students cannot afford for districts not to provide interventions for them that lessen some of the gaps in students’ background characteristics influencing the large gap in their achievement. Some district reforms have included collaboration, consultation, response to intervention, problem-solving models, and data-driven decision making, each of which increases the chances for all students to be successful and reach high levels of
achievement (Buffman, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Tan, 2011; Wade, 2004).

These pressures and challenges of diverse school populations such as accountability, educational access, and gaps in achievement (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004; Vannest et al., 2009) are part of the reason collaboration is no longer a choice in K–12 schools. Teachers cannot work in silos to solve problems; a group accomplishes more than an individual (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Thompson et al., 2004). Teachers must be prepared to teach any child, in any setting, those with disabilities, or identified risk factors, as well as those without an identified disability or noticeability identified at-risk factor. Problem-solving practices and collaboration are limited in typical preparation programs of adult learners seeking to be educators (Korinek & McLaughlin, 1996). With a focus on the conceptual framework of adult learning (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierema, 2014), these constructs require further research regarding collaboration, accountability of teachers at the federal and state levels, and teacher preparation programs, as well as discerning teacher candidates’ and novice teachers’ (Kim & Roth, 2011) perceptions of professional collaboration, in an effort to adequately prepare adult learners for the realities of the profession.

With national pressure from IDEA and NCLB, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in 2013 developed state standards for the preparation of educators. These standards include specifics regarding devotion to field experiences in collaboration with preschool through Grade 12 schools (MoSPE, 2013). “Professional standards provide a policy framework for the knowledge and skills thought to be important to the foundations of professional identities” (Boscardin, McCarthy, &
Delgado, 2009, p. 69). Teacher candidates in their induction or beginning years of teaching are expected to function in professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Thompson et al., 2004; Wade, 2004), problem solving teams, and department level teams, but the current professional education program at Midwest University (pseudonym), a prominent regional university, did not provide the essential elements of a key process: collaboration (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011). Therefore, a collaboration project for elementary education and special education majors was developed and is the focus of this case study. Midwest University realized the need for this collaboration practice among teacher candidates in 2011 (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011, V. Seeger, personal communication, fall 2011). From this realization, a collaboration project was developed in which elementary education teacher candidates and special education teacher candidates collaborated on a lesson the elementary education candidates were teaching in a regular education elementary classroom.

This manuscript will review the lack of modeling or practice for collaboration in teacher preparation programs for teacher candidates as adult learners. In addition, this paper will address the accountability and mandates of preprofessional teacher preparation programs and the importance of collaboration to meet those mandates. The researcher will also discuss the need for authentic processes to prepare teachers for students’ learning challenges and necessary interventions through collaboration.

**Statement of the Problem**

Ongoing changes to federal legislation have continued to increase the accountability of educators to meet all students’ needs (O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997). Since
publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), society holds ongoing perceptions that U.S. schools are failing (Senge et al., 2012). Goals 2000 continued the reformation of education and included “funding, conditional upon states developing complex sets of curriculum and student performance standards” (Mitchell, Crowson, & Shipps, 2011, p. 275). Pressures on public education to meet these ever-changing mandates have found their way to teacher preparation programs and have increased the accountability in higher education as well (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2015, MoSPE, 2013). “Legislators, accrediting agencies, the American public, and educators are raising questions about what students are learning in college and they are asking for evidence” (Barkley, Howell Major, & Cross, 2014). Public scrutiny of the lack of academic achievement performance in K–12 public schools (Mitchell et al., 2011) funnels back to the perceived lack of preparation of candidates in teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, results from prior studies continue to query whether teacher preparation programs provide sufficient experience and training in collaboration (Goldstein et al., 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Preparation programs lack modeling or practice in collaboration (Gallagher, Vail, & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Grisham et al., 2014). Teacher candidates are expected to work effectively with colleagues from other disciplines once they graduate and assume professional positions, yet these candidates receive little modeling or practice in collaborative roles (Korinek & McLaughlin, 1996).

With significant legislative and accountability pressure, some evidence exists for the importance of collaboration. With these mandates at the forefront of teacher
preparation programs, interprofessional collaboration can make important contributions to realization of those mandates (Pihl, 2011). Teacher preparation mandates, such as CAEP, state standards for the preparation of educators, and federal laws, such as NCLB, which focus on improved student achievement, supply a need and desire to provide teacher candidates with an authentic and explicit process in professional collaboration (CAEP, 2015; Grisham et al., 2014; Hamman et al., 2013; Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Meyer, Brodersen, & Linick, 2014; MoSPE, 2013). Teachers need these authentic experiences to prepare them to identify and assess learning challenges in students, intervene, and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Richards, Huntley, Weaver, & Landers, 2003).

Because evidence accrued through a literature review, does include studies specific to collaboration standards (Grisham et al., 2014; MoSPE, 2013; Nellis, 2012; Thompson et al., 2004) found in state higher education frameworks, a gap exists in the structural processes of organizations held to those higher education frameworks (Grisham et al., 2014; Nellis, 2012; Thompson et al., 2004). This lack of research coincides with disconnections discovered between what is needed to be successful in the teaching field and what is taught through coursework and experiences in teacher preparation programs. Researching existing practices used for collaboration, as well as planning future research on the beginnings of collaborative efforts in the organization could provide the professional education department the motivation to shatter the barriers of groupthink, an already formed ring of consensus (Janis, 1971/2005), as well as initiate the problem-solving process so vital to teacher candidates.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their teaching experiences. This study also examined the perceptions of these novice teachers on their comfort with collaboration during their induction period. In this qualitative study (Creswell, 2012), the researcher aimed to extend the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact. As universities strive to meet the 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, and K–12 students and schools would support the conceptual frameworks and mission of the professional education department, as well as inform the profession and address gaps in the literature.

Lack of Collaboration

Educators in the professional education department did not model collaboration at the higher education level in preservice programs for teacher preparation at Midwest University (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011; N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015). Until recently, this collaboration between special education and elementary education teacher candidates had not taken place at all (N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015). Students in the same courses or with the same major did not receive the same instructional experiences (J. Kreizinger, personal communication, spring 2013), indicating the scope and significance of this problem of practice. Historically, students had opportunities to collaborate informally
with others, if they were at the right place at the right time during a practicum or student teaching experience. Even then, this collaboration was with cooperating teachers and not with other teacher candidates (N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015). Over the 30 years during Wilson’s time at Midwest University, many discussions ensued about moving the strong knowledge, skills, and abilities teacher candidates possessed into application, but beyond a short practicum experience, this had not come to fruition (N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015).

**Collaboration Project**

Teacher candidates, as adult learners, have unique learning needs that include opportunities for field experiences in which they practice key components of their future work (Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Reynolds, Stevens, & West, 2013). Currently, several faculty members in the education department have been working together for a number of trimesters on the collaboration project involving students in literacy or social studies methods courses and special education courses (V. Seeger, personal communication, October 3, 2015). This action research involves modeling collaboration, as well as an authentic experience to practice collaboration. This study determined the impact of collaboration on new teacher candidates and their level of comfort with collaboration during the induction period of their first and second years of teaching. These data will fill gaps in available data on the problem of practice in the organization. Curriculum and instruction courses had not yet provided opportunities for teacher candidates to collaborate with one another on problem solving to increase student achievement (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011).
In the fall of 2011, three professors developed a collaboration project to provide opportunities for collaboration to teacher candidates prior to their first teaching job in which it would be required (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011; L. Linthacum, personal communication, September 25, 2013). This project has evolved over time, but the basic tenets have remained the same. Teacher candidates in an elementary education methods class and a special education methods class collaborated on a lesson the elementary education teacher candidates were teaching to elementary children at a local, rural elementary school, initially. Collaboration between elementary education and special education teacher candidates began in spring of 2012. Teacher candidates collaborated on a literacy lesson the elementary teacher candidates in the literacy class had developed and implemented at the elementary school.

The collaboration project has continued each semester and is now implemented at an urban elementary school. Elementary education teacher candidates teach a reading lesson, collect data on the reading skills of the elementary students, and identify a literacy need of the elementary student to address in the second instructional session. The literacy teacher candidates presented their findings and identified a concern to the special education methods teacher candidates who suggested instructional strategies that appropriately addressed the elementary student’s literacy or other concern. In addition, in recent semesters, the special education teacher candidates observed the initial lesson. The literacy teacher candidates implemented the strategies and reported the outcome. In recent semesters, the special education teacher candidates also observed the implementation of these strategies. Collaboration among teacher candidates (elementary literacy and special education methods students) has occurred either in face-to-face
meetings or in electronic discussions throughout the semesters in which this project has been implemented. All teacher candidates reflected on insights gained about collaboration and the value of collaboration among educators.

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question guiding this study was, How do collaboration processes and experiences as a teacher candidate in an undergraduate teacher preparation program impact later collaborative experiences as a novice teacher? The primary research questions follow:

1. How does collaboration between educators impact novice teachers?
2. How do collaboration processes and experiences provided through an undergraduate teacher preparation program impact novice teachers’ comfort with collaboration during the induction period?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this case study was adult learning, based on theories of andragogy. Andragogy is “the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). This theory focuses on the process of learning, including significant and distinct knowledge regarding the unique needs of adult learners, placing “experience front and center in understanding adult learning” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 106). “At the heart of adult learning is engaging in, reflecting upon and making meaning of our experiences” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 104). Authentic experiences in adult learning should be at the forefront of teacher preparation programs and embedded field experiences should set programs apart (CAEP, 2015).
Teacher-Preparation Programs

In this case study (Creswell, 2012), educators are creating experiences for adult learners to practice successful collaboration while in a teacher preparation program as a way to impact K–12 student achievement and work toward meeting accountability demands set forth at many levels (CAEP, 2015). Additional foundational development of emerging teacher candidates in the areas of collaboration, high-quality clinical practices, and partnerships are found throughout these ever-changing federal and state standards (CAEP, 2015; MoSPE, 2013). This is especially important and influential for adult learners in teacher preparation programs, so these programs can be structured to work effectively and in various contexts (Merriam, 2008) to prepare teachers with the 21st-century skills they need (CAEP, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Grisham et al., 2014).

This type of engagement and interaction, modeled and practiced by adult learners seeking to be teachers, brings about necessary “collaborative inquiry—thinking together about a complex matter” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 296). Adult learning focused on collaboration aligns with “‘Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development’ and the understanding that lies just beyond current knowledge and ability: what we cannot learn on our own at the moment, but can learn with a little help from our friends” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 37). These interactions, coupled with reflective practice, provide the foundation needed in teacher candidates to develop the skills and dispositions necessary to have a positive impact on student learning (CAEP, 2015, Senge et al., 2012).

Accountability

As educators at all levels problem solve salient ways to meet accountability demands, including federal mandates for improvement of K–12 student achievement
(Borden & Pike, 2008; Cates, Burns, & Joseph, 2010; CAEP, 2015, Grisham et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012), the need for collaboration continues to increase to meet these goals.

Collaboration and collaborative inquiry, teacher preparation programs with a focus on enhancing learning, and novice teachers and their perceptions, serve as pillars to support the need for ongoing research in the area of adult learning. Teacher preparation programs can and should use these tenets to propose change to meet standards and mandates, but most importantly to adequately prepare teacher candidates for the learners and expectations they will be facing in their first years of teaching, thereby impacting K–12 students’ success. As researchers more frequently and extensively review teacher preparation programs (Borden & Pike, 2008; Grisham et al., 2014; MoSPE, 2013; Scherer, 2012), it is necessary to indicate whether teachers graduating from those programs are prepared to teach in today’s classrooms (Gallagher et al., 2008; Goldstein et al., 2013; Grisham et al., 2014; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Scherer, 2012).

Educational reforms have been significant and prevalent in recent years (Goldstein et al., 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Hamman et al., 2013; Ng, 2006) with many focusing on meeting the needs of all children in all settings (Arick & Krug, 1993; Canillas Stein, 2011; Cook & Friend, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015; Tzivinikou, 2015, Vannest et al., 2009). The latest CAEP standards (2015) provide particular focus to clinical partnerships and field experience to better prepare teacher candidates.

**Collaboration**

The demands of educators are greater than ever and can be stressful (Harris, 2011) for teachers, especially those new to the field, to determine the most optimal research-
based interventions for students. As educators learn more about and address the needs of all students in K–12 classrooms, this skill, in the form of collaboration, is necessary for all teachers (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012). Secretary of Education Duncan noted, in a 2009 speech, “The nation’s colleges of education are doing a ‘mediocre job’ of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st-century classroom and need revolutionary change—not evolutionary tinkering” (as cited in Field, 2009, para. 1). Nicholas, Baker-Sennet, McClanahan, and Harwood’s (2012) study used data collection and collaborative inquiry to better inform interactions that supported Duncan’s request for teacher candidates to be data-driven decision makers (Field, 2009). These ongoing discussions and continuing research emulate the need to make instructional decisions based on data, with underpinnings stemming from collaborative inquiry and enhanced learning (Nicholas et al., 2012).

Researchers query if teacher preparation programs provide adult learners with sufficient experience and training in collaboration with colleagues and across disciplines (Gallagher et al., 2008; Goldstein et al., 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Preparation programs lack modeling or practice for collaboration (Gallagher et al., 2008; Grisham et al., 2014). New teachers are expected to have tacit knowledge (CAEP, 2015; Edmondson, 2012) about how to collaborate with their peers, yet do not receive the training they need to do so. Emerging research supports collaboration through partnerships with schools and universities to allow all to keep learning (CAEP, 2015; Nobles, Dredger, & Gerheart, 2012). The latest CAEP standards (2015) specifically address collaboration, clinical partnerships, and practice as a way to advance the learning of all students.
Design of the Study

The goal of this qualitative case study (Creswell, 2012) is to determine the perceptions of novice teachers on the professional education collaboration process experienced in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. Specifically investigating how collaboration impacts novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during the induction period was the focus of the research. To do this, the researcher gathered information from novice teachers who have been through the collaboration project. The researcher triangulated data (Seidman, 1998) through interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Fink, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009, Merriam, 2009).

Setting

Collaboration should be a naturally occurring phenomenon in K–12 and higher education environments (Korinek & McLaughlin, 1996), but is not commonly simulated during teacher preparation coursework. Historically, Midwest University’s curriculum and instruction courses did not provide opportunities for teacher candidates to collaborate with one another in solving problems to increase student achievement (N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015).

With the conceptual frameworks and mission of the professional education unit at Midwest University as a background, the organization needs to support and identify that “clear, well-understood goals, roles, and relationships, and adequate coordination are essential to performance” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 46). The professional education unit mission at Midwest University is to provide learning communities where students and professionals partner with families, communities, schools, businesses, and public
agencies. The goal is to assist students to gain the knowledge, skills and values that are critical to a democratic society. As a result, Midwest University aims to prepare students for leadership careers in the fields of business, industry, education, government, recreation, public service, and health and wellness.

As a teacher preparation program, this performance requires teacher candidates to apply these skills. As state mandates change to include higher accountability levels (CAEP, 2015), the achievement levels of the K–12 students reflect teachers’ performance in their classrooms (Field, 2009). As current teachers and administrators stress the importance of collaboration to meet student success in K–12 schools, that focus should funnel into teacher preparation programs.

**Participants**

Interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection are necessary to gather qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher sought stakeholders who could provide feedback on the topic of collaboration. The researcher used a purposeful convenience sample (Merriam, 2009) to conduct interviews and focus groups of novice teachers, selecting participants based on the courses in which they had previously taken at Midwest University. The researcher included teacher candidates who took literacy or social studies methods courses or special education courses between 2012 and 2015. Identified participants were recent graduates of the teacher preparation program and are now novice educators. Participants included those teaching in Region 5 of the Regional Professional Development Center or in areas Midwest University has identified as student teaching placements. Region 5 of the Regional Professional Development Center includes 15 counties in the corner of the state. The abovementioned criteria for participants provided
a bounded system to this case study. The researcher contacted these novice teachers to
determine their availability for focus groups or interviews, making initial communication
with teachers by e-mail, social media, or face-to-face contact.

**Procedures and Data-Collection Tools**

The researcher scheduled and conducted semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) one-on-one interviews with teachers in their inductive period, developing and following interview guides (Merriam, 2009). The researcher kept all data gathered during the study strictly confidential and secure, based on Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements (Pritchard, 2002). The researcher informed all participants of study results being presented in a doctoral thesis, making much effort to protect their anonymity, and informed them of their choice to withdraw at any time during the study (Pritchard, 2002).

The researcher audio recorded and documented interviews through field notes (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Interviews took place at the university, two of the university outreach centers, or at a location convenient to the participant, including a school building. The researcher formulated questions that would slowly engage interviewees, establish comfort, and address key indicators of adult learning, collaboration, teacher perceptions, and accountability measures (Emerson et al., 2011). Interviews lasted less than 30 minutes. After completion of interviews, the researcher reviewed field notes and had the recordings transcribed (Emerson et al., 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2009) through an online service (rev.com).

Focus group proceedings were held in the education building on the campus of the prominent regional university, one of their outreach centers, and at a centrally located school to accommodate participant convenience (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The
researcher took field notes and audio recorded discussions. Although the researcher developed questions before the focus group, the researcher maintained flexibility to make changes as needed. The focus group lasted no longer than 45 minutes. More than one focus group was required, due to locations of participants. The recordings were sent to an online transcription service (rev.com) and the researcher later improved transcripts by comparing them to field notes. In addition, the researcher collected and analyzed various artifacts (Emerson et al., 2011) including the vision, mission, and conceptual frameworks of the professional education department, as well as various syllabi and the teacher preparation unit handbook.

The idea of research of this nature was to improve practice through research, while maintaining a continuing emphasis on ethics and maintaining the standards of the IRB (Pritchard, 2002). Maintaining ethical practice can be perplexing, due to the conflicting judgments of these practices (Pritchard, 2002). The importance of the missions of researchers and IRBs raises an underlying conflict that arises as research is conducted using a practice model.

**Data Analysis**

The process of coding included labeling and sorting collected qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). Coding also served to summarize and interpret themes that emerged from the data (Emerson et al., 2011). Initially, the researcher implemented open coding (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to provide a basic structure for collected data, including interviews and focus groups. Themes developed from interview (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009) and focus group transcripts (Krueger & Casey, 2009), and from the review of existing artifacts (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).
The researcher mined data from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts using an inductive process, allowing for construction of themes and categories from small bits of qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher noted various important phrases, discovering correlations to emerging themes extant in the data. Included terms served as the foundation data to develop larger categories of data, known as cover terms (Spradley, 1980). The researcher compiled themes and notations in a document for comparison of consistency, ranked in order of prominence and relevance to the posed research questions, based on number of repetitions of certain words and phrases (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Limitations

Because this was a qualitative case study, respondents’ answers were limited to their own perceptions, which cautions readers about the validity and reliability of individual responses. Another limitation to consider is the lack of generalization when conducting a qualitative study, as well as the unlikelihood of being able to replicate the study. An additional limitation is the strong possibility the study will lack diversity among the population of proposed respondents, as the majority of novice teachers in the sample were Caucasian women. All respondents were novice teachers; therefore they have been successful in garnering a teaching job, imposing a limitation to the study as well. In a study of this nature, variables such as additional professional learning opportunities they may have been provided in their induction period, the design of the district’s induction system, location of the district in which respondents teach, and other demographic information could be considered limitations. Researcher bias, based on the researcher’s past experiences with collaboration, as well as having had some of the
participants in classes, were addressed as well, as these issues could have contributed to interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations of the study include the small sample size, due to the scope of the study in a specified, mostly rural, Midwest region, as well as being bounded by studying only novice teachers (Merriam, 2009). A specific design control issue in this study was variation in types of collaboration experiences, as some practices were face-to-face and some were electronic. In addition, some experiences may have taken place at rural schools and others in urban settings. These variances may be delimiting to the study and the results, yet also provide a richness to the study.

**Assumptions**

An assumption in this study is a possible gap between a teacher candidate graduating and being hired for their first teaching job, gaining them novice status for this study. Participants knew they were being studied, and answered honestly, based on their experiences with previous collaboration opportunities provided to them.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

*Accreditation.* According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008), accreditation is a process of assessing and enhancing academic and educational quality through voluntary peer review. Accreditation informs the public that an institution has a professional education unit that has met state, professional, and institutional standards of educational quality.

*Clinical field experiences.* A variety of early and ongoing field-based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, or conduct research.
Field experiences may occur in off-campus settings such as schools, community centers, or homeless shelters (NCATE, 2008).

*Collaboration.* The term “collaboration” refers to a collective learning and problem solving process (Pihl, 2011; Richards et al., 2003) in which educators across roles and programs organize to share and plan goals and strategies to improve educational outcomes for students with diverse needs. Collaboration includes identifying and assessing learning challenges in students, intervening, and evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention (Richards et al., 2003).

*Comfort.* Contented well-being (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

* Educator. The term “educator” refers to professional faculty working in a school district at the level of regular education teacher, special education teacher, instructional coach, specialist, therapist, administrator, or professional support staff, such as a counselor.


*Inclusion.* The term “inclusion” refers to including students with various disabilities and severity of disabilities in the regular education classroom for instruction (Goldstein et al., 2013).

*Induction.* The first or mentored years as a teacher (NCATE, 2008).

*Novice.* For the purposes of this research, a novice is a teacher who has been teaching two years or less (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).

*Practicum.* Experiences may include a combination of observation, tutoring, small-group instruction, and whole-group instruction, according to Midwest University.
Subgroups. Students representing various ethnic and racial groups, students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency (Choi et al., 2007).

Teacher candidate. The term candidate refers to individuals preparing for professional education positions (NCATE, 2008).

Teacher preparation program. Programs at the baccalaureate or postbaccalaureate level that prepare candidates for their first license to teach (NCATE, 2008).

Significance of the Study

Practice

As universities strive to meet competencies for accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators, programs must continue to improve and maintain a research focus. The research questions directing this study were guided by the overarching question, “How do collaboration processes and experiences as a teacher candidate in an undergraduate teacher preparation program impact later experiences as a novice teacher?” It is important to consider why others should care about a study of this nature. 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 in the structures of higher education programs that address collaboration and the outcome of collaboration on student achievement, this study could fill that gap in the literature, as well as provide a basis for further research.

As discussed previously, this study could be used to consider future required program requirements at Midwest University’s teacher education program, as well as
other universities’ requirements. This study reemphasizes existing state teacher preparation program standards and could influence revisions or modifications to these standards, as well providing professional significance. At the university level, this study could guide an increase in authentic collaborative opportunities and require increased embedded field experiences that include collaboration as a component. In addition, this study may yield recommendations for a significant schedule change, or even more of a competency-driven program to allow courses or experiences to take place on the same day with overlapped schedules to enable collaboration.

Scholarship

Further research on the impacts of collaboration on teacher candidates, practicing teachers, and K–12 students and schools would support the conceptual frameworks and mission of the professional education department, as well as address gaps in the literature. This study could be transferable to other universities and settings, as well as generalized to other content areas and settings. This study opens pathways, discussions, and richer partnerships surrounding collaboration in K–12 arenas, leading to the potential for future research, publication, and professional learning.

Summary

With increasing demands and accountability placed on educators and the need to problem solve to meet these demands, and thus to improve student achievement (Borden & Pike, 2008; Cates et al., 2010; Grisham et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012); 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 (Richards et al., 2003). The needs of students in K–12 classrooms are changing and involve significant collaboration and problem solving to address. With a focus on the conceptual framework of adult learning, educators must ask if teachers are prepared.
SECTION 2: PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

History of the Organization

Teacher training has been a pillar of Midwest University even prior to its inception as a college or university. In the early 1900s, it was believed the northern area of this Midwest state should have a teacher training school. A bill to provide this opportunity was passed in 1905, although the location of a normal school was still in question. Classes began at the normal school in the summer of 1906 and the first graduating class of students, who had mostly transferred from other state normal schools, was in August of that year. This provided the teachers a certificate rather than a degree, allowing them to teach for 2 years in schools in the state.

The first couple of years of the normal school involved many students and faculty coming to town and the development of a summer training school. The majority of the first students at the training school were uncertified teachers who had been teaching in rural schools. The training school was developed to provide observation and practice teaching to prospective teachers. This allowed the normal school students “practical experience in teaching” and would later be renamed Robertson Elementary Laboratory School. Still in existence, the school offers daily opportunities to observe teachers and give them first-hand experiences in teaching. Over time, the teacher training program also took on a system of supervision of several rural schools in the county that allowed for advisement, assistance, assessment, and early research.

The normal school continued to grow and develop with the focus on the education of teachers. The president’s leadership from 1913 to 1921 turned the normal school into a State Teacher’s College in 1919. Over this time period and beyond, as it moved from a
state college to a university, leaders provided a platform for Midwest University to hold a place of honor in the education world. The move from a normal school to a state teacher’s college occurred through the experience in rural education of one of its earliest presidents. This move was the first catalog change in which credits would be granted through semester hours, similar to other colleges. The first catalog development was also the first move toward granting degrees rather than certificates only. With the increase in programming and attainment of degrees came the need for the development of departments.

The next president was truly the one to spread the reputation of the college with work in various organizations including the State Teachers’ Association, the World Federation, and the National Education Association. It was also during this president’s tenure that radical changes occurred in catalogs and accreditation processes began and were accomplished. In 1934, a fundamental change in curriculum included the introduction of general courses.

The next president had also experienced teaching and had held positions of principal, superintendent, and head of the education department. This president’s tenure included development of the Administrative Handbook, providing the organizational structure of the college to acquaint faculty with the organization, policies, and procedures; raising standards for teachers in public schools; and glimpsing into graduate school programs. The first graduate courses were provided during the summer of 1955. This president suggested a name change for the Teachers College that would reflect a change in the focus of the college. After 10 years of this type of discussion and a change in administration, Midwest State Teachers College became Midwest State College. This
name change in 1949 brought an increase in students, faculty, and buildings, along with changes to curriculum, committees, and the development of a ranking system that focused on those with terminal degrees.

The Robertson Elementary Laboratory School continued with changes at many levels including in 1956, when it opened classrooms to train Midwest children with handicaps. This appears to have initiated what is now known as special education for students with disabilities under federal guidelines. This is remarkable because no formal law regarding special education was mandated until 1975 (Buscaglia & Williams, 1979).

The Midwest State College became a University in 1972 after much change and growth in previous years. Acting under the authority granted by the 1972 General Assembly, the name changed to Midwest University.

As the Robertson Elementary Laboratory School became the Robertson Learning Center in 1979, to avoid any confusion about scientific experimentation on children, its focus remained clear as a place to see learning processes in action. Another change occurred in the late 1970s when the school installed cables and power sources for computers in the learning center and various other buildings on campus. This was the beginning of technology in the world of education and teacher preparation programs at the university, as the teachers and students were able to access 63 terminals and could respond through these connections at once. In later years, Midwest became known as the “Electronic Campus” in which computing equipment was placed in every residence hall room and faculty/staff office.

In 1978–1979, the highest level of offering was a master’s degree and the types of programs at Midwest University were terminal occupation below the bachelor’s level,
liberal arts and general, and teacher preparatory. This is noteworthy as the university continued to be a force in the area of teacher preparation programs, following its earliest days as a normal school in 1905, although changes continued to take place at the university and Robertson Elementary. In 1978, the Board of Regents decided to discontinue operation of the seventh and eighth grades based on too few students to provide adequate programs. This may prove significant even today as Robertson Elementary School currently has a taskforce assembled to investigate the addition of a junior high school (S. Seipel, personal communication, fall 2015).

The 1979–1980 catalog noted the ongoing heritage of the college in training outstanding teachers. At that point, the College of Education was a member of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and was accredited by NCATE. The structure retained teacher preparation programs in the Curriculum and Instruction Department, as it was referred to until 2012 (D. Dunham, personal communication, spring 2012), giving teacher candidates the ability to experience practice in working with children.

For many years this experience has been known as a practicum and involved supervised practice teaching and weekly seminars in which students discussed problems in the area of teaching at Robertson Elementary School. Prior to being in a practicum experience, education majors, usually sophomores, observed in the classroom for 30 hours. This process has continued through the 1980s and 1990s and into the current 2015–2016 school year and is known as Observation and Activity. With the current work on redesign of the teacher preparation program, these field experiences and hours will be
embedded throughout phases and modules, including a year out in schools (S. Wood, personal communication, June 1, 2015).

In 2012, at a budget-cuts press conference and prior to a meeting, in an e-mail the school outlined those items to be cut, due to the evolving higher education landscape, including the merging of the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership the following fall (D. Dunham, personal communication, spring 2012). These cuts were described as hailing from a curricular perspective, rather than due to personnel decisions. Another change came in the increase in tuition for students attending Robertson Elementary School and a decrease in the number of days attended, as a result of state audit findings in which the school needed to stand more on its own (J. Piveral, personal communication, spring 2012). These changes caused a decrease in enrollment at Robertson Elementary School and a need to look for additional field experience opportunities for students in the teacher preparation programs.

As recently as 2012, the 35 members of the Professional Education Unit of Midwest University rewrote the conceptual frameworks. These frameworks summarize the unit’s beliefs and include exhibiting content knowledge, increasing pedagogical knowledge, using assessments to improve learning outcomes, demonstrating professional behaviors, enhancing learning through effective use of technology, cultivating dispositions, and embracing diversity. The frameworks were last changed in preparation for the accreditation visit in 2005 (A. Wilson, personal communication, October 1, 2015). These frameworks align with the Professional Education Unit’s mission to prepare highly effective, ethical, professional educators who possess the knowledge, skills, and
professional dispositions to embrace responsibility for the learning of all children in a diverse and dynamic society (NCATE, 2008).

The Midwest University curriculum and instruction courses had not provided opportunities for preservice teachers to collaborate in problem solving to increase student achievement. Based on informal interviews with professors and students, the researcher discerned that this collaboration was not modeled or experienced by undergraduate students. This lack of collaborative modeling and structure is found throughout the elementary education program, including the special education dual major. Interviews with previous leaders of the department (J. Kreizinger, personal communication, spring 2013; N. Wilson, personal communication, September 26, 2015) support the researcher’s inference regarding the lack of collaborative opportunities for teacher candidates throughout the history of the education department. This lack provides impetus for the need for collaboration to be modeled and practiced by teacher candidates at Midwest University, with those experiences being embedded in coursework and in the redesign of the program.

**Organizational Analysis**

In the earliest years of the Normal School, the president led the teacher preparation program. Over time, this structure has undergone transformation to its current structure of a president, provost, dean, chair, and coordinators (including a coordinator for special education programs; see Figure 1). As of this writing, this structure is in place, but due to the recent announcement of the retirement of the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, this too will be changing. The change will include a Dean of the School of Professional Education with the possibilities of other
organizational and leadership changes, based on the initial organizational structure change (T. Mottet, personal communication, October 16, 2015).

In the 1980s the College of Education was organized through a head, directors (including a Director of Robertson Elementary School), and faculty (including teachers at Robertson Elementary School) and programs included elementary education with specializations in general elementary teaching, elementary subject area, middle and junior high school, early childhood, special education including elementary or secondary learning disabilities, and elementary or secondary mental retardation. This organizational structure continued until the 1983–1984 academic year when there was still a head and directors. In the 1984–1985 academic year, this structure changed to include Dean of the College of Education with Chairpersons of the Department of Administration and Guidance and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. At that point, the school named coordinators for programs including the combined early childhood education,
elementary education, middle school and junior high school, and secondary education under one coordinator. Special education had its own coordinator beginning in the 1985–1986 academic year. Coordinators were appointed for educational field experiences and library science as well. A Director of Robertson Elementary was not noted during this academic year, according to the catalog. Special education programs continued to be designated by elementary or secondary focuses in the disability categories of learning disabilities and mental retardation.

The College of Education changed to the College of Education and Human Services, as noted in the 1996–1998 catalog. Prior to the 1996–1998 catalog, special education certification was divided by disability category and elementary and secondary levels. In the 1996–1998 catalog, the special education program led to a K–12 certification by disability category in the state.

In the 2002–2004 catalog, changes in special education programming were the most dramatic seen thus far, as the school moved to a K–12 certification in cross-categorical special education. At that time, the school no longer required a minor or second teaching field, as it had been throughout the 1990s. However, because so few additional hours would be required, the school suggested students give strong consideration to a second major in elementary education. This change aligned with state-certification requirements and required students to complete the appropriate state examination in each major to obtain certification. Throughout these catalogs, the courses for special education and elementary education were separate, with no evidence of collaboration between the two program areas.
Based on the increased diversity of student needs noted earlier, circumstances in schools have changed over time and this may bleed into higher education where “structures must be designed to fit an organization’s current circumstances” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 47). It is time to look at this need through a structural change in the organization to meet the goals of the schools where these teacher candidates will be working in the very near future.

This structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) change may require alterations in the organization including the scheduling of courses and the professors who teach those courses. Northouse (2013) provided a set of leader behaviors as part of path–goal theory that include directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented behaviors. These behaviors mirror those needed in future educators to improve student achievement through collaboration and therefore need to be a focus in higher education teacher preparation programs. Directive leadership often begins by “initiating structure” (Northouse, 2013, p. 139) that will be needed in the organization to proactively approach the barriers that may inhibit collaborative process being modeled in these higher education programs. Structural changes at the university level that are currently barriers include schedule changes, workload needed for collaborative opportunities, and budget implications.

**Leadership Analysis**

Schools and teachers work collaboratively to meet student needs and goals, aligned with path–goal theory (Northouse, 2013). Northouse’s (2013) basic ideas behind path-goal theory involve “defining goals, clarifying the path, removing obstacles, and providing support” (p. 138). A path–goal theory approach, as reframed through a
structural lens, would provide the beginnings of an authentic collaborative process for
teacher candidates, similar to the expectations they have on problem-solving teams in
their schools. With the conceptual frameworks and mission of the unit as a backdrop, the
organization needs to support and identify that “clear, well-understood goals, roles, and
relationships, and adequate coordination are essential to performance” (Bolman & Deal,
2008, p. 46). A teacher preparation program requires the application of these skills by
teacher candidates. As state mandates change to include higher accountability levels, this
performance is reflected in the achievement levels of the K–12 students these teacher
candidates will have in their classrooms (Field, 2009).

In the current leadership structure, the unit is organized through leadership roles
and committees, as well as departments and content areas. This structure also includes
leadership driven by the Dean who serves as Director of Teacher Education and also
includes a Certification Officer, Assistant Director of Teacher Education, chairs of
various content departments, as well as the Chair of the Department of Professional
Education. In addition, there are Directors of various entities and programming including
the Outreach Centers, Field Experiences, Teacher Education Student Services, Secondary
Education, and the Early Childhood Center, as well as a Principal for the Robertson
Elementary School. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

Higher education institutions have a history of failing to reward collaboration. In
that historical and somewhat symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2008) context, a tendency may
exist for decision-making that does not fit in the university’s mission of “student success,
every student—every day.” Current teachers and administrators stress the importance of
collaboration to meet student success in K–12 schools, which should funnel down to
teacher preparation programs. An opportunity for authentic collaboration for preservice teachers has not been in place and may require a transformational leader to provide the characteristics needed to move in that direction (Northouse, 2013).

Figure 2. Professional education unit organizational chart.

Janis’s (1971/2005) theory on groupthink involves an already formed ring of consensus, perhaps explaining why the college has not yet incorporated this collaborative modeling into the program. The term “groupthink describes a number of group decision-making flaws caused by the group’s desire to maintain good relations rather than to make the best decision” (Levi, 2014, p. 170). It seems possible that groupthink has motivated the unit not to collaborate. Previous practitioners with positive collaborative experiences in K–12 settings could identify those collaborative factors as missing in existing programs such as time set aside for collaboration, team building, communication, problem solving, modeling, and possibly an unwillingness to take risks.

As the changes from a college to a school are made and programs are redesigned to address areas not previously covered in these multiple programs, this may be the opportunity to begin further analysis of what is needed in a leader to make these types of
changes. Currently, program coordinators are leading the charge for these types of changes under the direction of the Chair and Assistant Chair in the Department of Professional Education. The college provided coordinator job descriptions for the first time this fall. As noted earlier, the existing Coordinator of Special Education Programs is responsible for leading accreditation reports, reviewing class schedules, organizing faculty by content areas to review curriculum, and recruit, advise, and retain students in the content area. In addition, coordinators are to attend conferences and workshops to stay current on trends, issues, standards, and changing requirements in the content area. The coordinator is also responsible for identifying and leading program changes such as those noted in this paper (D. Gordon, personal communication, August 6, 2015).

**Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Researching existing models and practices of collaboration in higher education systems, as well as using qualitative action research on the beginnings of collaborative efforts in the organization, could provide the unit and departments in that unit with the motivation to rethink the factors that had been continued to be followed due to the groupthink (Levi, 2014). If the organization makes structural changes to schedules and gives credit for collaborative efforts, these actions could initiate a problem-solving process that is vital for teacher candidates, as noted by the dean of the department: “the fact that we have a vision, but not always a pathway to the vision” (J. A. Piveral, personal communication, September 2013). With the goal being student success, every student every day, the path–goal theory’s participative and achievement-oriented leadership behaviors need to be further explored (Northouse, 2013). All participants in the organization need to see the future pathways to the vision. As the unit strives to meet
competencies for accreditation, as well prepare highly effective professional educators, it is necessary to keep ongoing program improvements as the focus. Further research on the impact of collaboration on novice teachers during their induction period would support and inform the conceptual frameworks and mission of the unit.
SECTION 3: SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

The purpose of this study was to examine an identified problem of practice in Midwest University and to determine the perceptions of novice teachers regarding teacher preparation collaboration processes and experiences. The literature review focuses on four major areas, summarizes the current status of the literature, and synthesizes and critiques the relevant extant scholarly literature. The first of four areas focuses on the conceptual framework of adult learning. The second section examines the accountability and mandates of teacher preparation programs and the lack of modeling or practice of collaboration for teacher candidates as adult learners. The third section analyzes ways to meet the learning and teaching challenges of students in 21st century K–12 schools while striving to meet national and state accountability standards. The final section reviews the importance of collaboration in all aspects of education and the impact of collaboration on teachers’ perceptions and student achievement.

Adult Learning Theory

Engaging in experiences has its roots in authentic opportunities (Rutherford-Hemming, 2012). Therefore, authentic experiences in adult learning should be at the forefront of teacher preparation programs and embedded field experiences should set programs apart (Grisham et al., 2014; Hamman et al., 2013; Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Meyer et al., 2014). Students in teacher preparation programs are adult learners and higher education faculty should place great importance on recognizing their unique learning needs (Reynolds et al., 2013) as they strive to understand learning theory to apply to future practice (Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2013).
To meet the needs of adult learners, these authentic experiences are essential (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2013; Rutherford-Hemming, 2012). Therefore, adult learning should encompass these abovementioned authentic experiences, which, in a teacher preparation program could include embedded field experiences, role-playing, and simulation (Hamman et al., 2013; Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Meyer et al., 2014; Rutherford-Hemming, 2012). These types of experiences create new knowledge, link new learning to prior knowledge, and provide candidates with more real-world experiences while integrating this new knowledge into their own learning surroundings (Rutherford-Hemming, 2012). Experiences at this level, with authentic significance, assist adult learners to embrace Knowles’s reference to the process of learning, and not just the content (as cited in Reynolds et al., 2013).

A significant component of teacher preparation programs is preparing adult learners to learn by doing and to then reflect (Edmondson, 2012; Mezirow, 1990; Milteniene & Venclovaite, 2012; Senge et al., 2012; Wade, 2004) on the learning as a way to transition from theory to practice (Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2013). Reflective thinking is encouraged in adult learning as a way to change schema (Knowles et al., 1998). This reflection in action practice (Knowles et. al., 1998) is especially significant in teacher preparation, as educators should continually engage in rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991) as they challenge their existing thinking. In other fields, such as the medical arena, Rutherford-Hemming (2012) identified a process in which participants “recall the encounter, reflect on what happened, review what was learned from the experience, and contemplate what could have been done in other ways” (p. 131). This type of reflection in action needs to be more embedded in teacher
preparation programs and in-service professional development (Milteniene & Venclovaite, 2012). Merriam and Bierema (2014) asked, possibly somewhat wryly, “Why is it that continuing professional development for medical doctors takes place on luxury cruises or at tropical resorts, but for teachers it usually occurs in the school cafeteria?” (p. 239)

Adult learners are always learning and in constant change (Sandlin, Redmon Wright, & Clark, 2011); therefore they need to reposition or reframe (Foote, 2015) the learning they have gleaned in order to apply it effectively. This reframing may begin with reflective processes with self, another, or a group (Merriam, 2008). Further synthesizing and analyzing the learning to tie into new contexts expands the application of the learning (Grisham et al., 2014) and assists in sense making (Foote, 2015; Mezirow, 1991). When learners make connections and new learning takes place, critical reflection and action (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1990, 1991) are necessary for the learning to embed itself for future, successful use. Gill (2010) saw individual learning taking place through reflection and determined reflection is “more likely to produce more accurate and useful learning” (p. 55).

These components of adult learning can be transformative (Brookfield, 2000; Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Merriam & Bierema, 2014, Mezirow, 1991) and increase self-efficacy (Foote, 2015), as well as subsequent behavior change (Knowles et al., 1998; Merriam, 2008). Transformative learning increases critical analysis and questioning (Brookfield, 2000), which are necessary for teacher candidates. Knowles’s (1980) andragogical model assists in identifying what motivates adults to learn, including that adults “tend to be more motivated toward learning that helps them solve problems in their
lives” (p. 149). This is especially important and influential for adult learners in teacher preparation programs, so these programs can be structured to work effectively and in various contexts (Merriam, 2008) to prepare teachers with the 21st-century skills they need (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Grisham et al., 2014).

Accountability

Teacher-Preparation Programs

Over the past 25 years (Borden & Pike, 2008; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997), the accountability systems for teacher preparation programs has been a source of national attention and inspection (Borden & Pike, 2008; Grisham et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012). Accountability through legislation such as NCLB (2001) was a springboard for increased mandates and accountability systems in higher education programs in the area of teacher preparation (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Harvey et al., 2010; Ng, 2006). The debates and controversies surrounding public education continue to be at the public forefront (Choi et al., 2007; Friend & Pope, 2005; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Ng, 2006; Skrla et al., 2004; Vannest et al., 2009) such that “today Democrats and Republicans alike are critical of higher education and calling for greater accountability” (Borden & Pike, 2008, p. 83).

Ongoing inspection of the overall quality of teacher preparation programs and this regulatory approach (Arick & Krug, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Grisham et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012) continues to be at the forefront of evaluations by policymakers, advocates, researchers, teacher preparation organizations, and teachers themselves (Meyer et al., 2014; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997). A higher level of accountability ensued, especially over the past two decades (Borden & Pike, 2008; Duncan, 2010; Field, 2009; Harvey et al., 2010; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997), based on perceptions of insufficient
training for teachers and a call for education to change (Field, 2009; Grisham et al., 2014; Harvey et al., 2010). State accountability systems continue to increase the standards for teacher preparation programs including grade point averages, basic-skills tests, content knowledge, and pedagogical assessments (Duncan, 2010; Meyer et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012; Youngs, Odden, & Porter, 2003). Few states have tracked performance of K–12 students to the teacher preparation program their teachers attended, but this too, has shown an increase in regulation (Duncan, 2010).

With mandates remaining on the forefront of teacher preparation programs in which partnerships are promoted (Meyer et al., 2014; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997), DESE has developed recent changes to state standards that include a standard devoted to field experiences in collaboration with PK–12 schools:

Field and clinical experiences, offered in collaboration with PK-12 schools, support the development of educators. Clinically based educator preparation creates varied and extensive opportunities for candidates to connect what they learn with the challenge of using it, while under the expert tutelage of skilled clinical educators. Candidates blend practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge as they learn by doing. They refine their practice in the light of new knowledge acquired and data gathered about whether their students are learning. A close partnership must exist between educator preparation providers. (MoSPE, 2013, p. 4)

With these expectations and standards, it is vital for teacher candidates to “be exposed to and practice the creative thinking process before they encounter problems in their future work, settings that require creative solutions” (Reynolds et al., 2013, p. 52).
The now yearly program evaluations of teacher preparation programs are based on several measures, including teacher candidates’ “grade point averages, content knowledge, and a rating from beginning teacher and school leader surveys that measure satisfaction with the quality of teacher preparation programs” (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 11).

**Student Achievement in K–12 Schools**

Teachers’ burdens are countless (Cates et al., 2010; Cook & Friend, 2010; Friend & Pope, 2005; Krechevsky, Rivard, & Burton, 2010; Ng, 2006; Skrla et al., 2004; Vannest et al., 2009; Wade, 2004). Practice problem solving may be partially covered in many preparation programs (Korinek & McLaughlin, 1996). Therefore, this paper provides the conceptual context and existing research on the need for collaboration to be modeled and practiced in higher education teacher preparation programs. The researcher examines the accountability and mandates of preprofessional teacher preparation programs and the lack of modeling or practice for collaboration in teacher preparation programs for these teacher candidates as adult learners.

As researchers more frequently and extensively review teacher preparation programs (Borden & Pike, 2008; Grisham et al., 2014; Scherer, 2012), it is necessary to indicate whether the teachers graduating from those programs are prepared to teach in today’s classrooms (Gallagher et al., 2008; Goldstein et al., 2013; Grisham et al., 2014; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Scherer, 2012). Educational reforms have been significant and prevalent in recent years (CAEP, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Hamman et al., 2013; Ng, 2006) with many focusing on meeting the needs of all children in all settings (Arick & Krug, 1993; Canillas Stein, 2011; Cook & Friend, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2015; Podgursky, 2014; Tzivinikou, 2015, Vannest
et al., 2009). Inclusion has been a key component and goal of education for decades (Borden & Pike, 2008; Duncan, 2010; Field, 2009; Goldstein et al., 2013; Harvey et al., 2010; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997) and the accountability of meeting the needs of all students has been significant through several revisions of IDEA (1990) and the development of NCLB (2001), and continues to be a focused goal of improvements to public education (O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997).

Hamman et al. (2013) noted this focus on inclusion; however, “preparation of new teachers to work effectively in inclusion settings has not kept pace with demands created by reforms” (p. 244). Limited coursework and field experiences in teacher preparation programs focus on adequately teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms; many programs only include one course in special education (Goldstein et al., 2013; Stayton & McCollum, 2002). Given the findings in the recent research literature and the results of this study, the question must be asked, “Can a teacher prep program that includes a single course on special education provide preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills to successfully teach students with disabilities? The answer appears to be no” (Goldstein et al., 2013, p. 564). In the United States, where the history of inclusion is over three decades old, current special educators’ professional standards clearly expect that certified special educators will enter the field with adept collaboration and co-teaching skills to optimize services for students with disabilities in inclusive setting (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 76).

Classrooms are changing, and, as noted earlier, teachers need to have the skills to address the diversity and composition of 21st-century classrooms and students (Canillas Stein, 2011; Friend & Pope, 2005; Goldstein et al., 2013; Warger & Pugach, 1996).
recent years, students with disabilities have attained greater access to the general-education curriculum and inclusive classrooms (Fleming Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005). A recent study found,

94% of the student teachers reported students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Close to 75% reported three or more students with a variety of disabilities in their general education classroom, 45% reported five or more, and 28% reported seven or more. (Goldstein et al., 2013, p. 560)

With this increase in the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Fleming Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005; Gallagher et al., 2008; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014), the skill of identifying evidence-based interventions (Musti-Rao et al., 2011; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997; Vannest et al., 2009) through collaboration is necessary for all teachers as well (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012). Overall, the focus must be “on fundamental principles for creating and sustaining classrooms in which all students can achieve. Particularly in this era of NCLB with its emphasis on high-stakes testing and professional accountability” (Friend & Pope, 2005, p. 56).

Meeting these challenges may force the continued redeployment of efforts among educational leaders to solve the “problems of practice inherent in a diverse, complex, high-stakes educational environment” (Boscardin et al., 2009, p. 68).

Collaboration

Like those working in other industries and society in general (Friend, 2000), teacher candidates are expected to work effectively with colleagues (Fleming Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005). New teachers have this expectation of effective collaboration (Scherer, 2012), yet receive little modeling or practice for collaborative roles (Korinek &
McLaughlin, 1996). Teachers in their induction phase, when they are a first or second
teacher, are expected to function in professional learning communities, on problem-
solving teams, and on department level teams (L. Linthacum, personal communication,
September 25, 2013). The Nicholas et al. (2012) study used data collection and
collaborative inquiry to better inform interactions. These ongoing discussions and
research studies underlie the need to make instructional decisions based on data with
underpinnings stemming from collaborative inquiry and enhancing learning at all levels
(Nicholas et al., 2012).

Researchers query if teacher preparation programs provide these adult learners
enough experience and training in collaboration with colleagues and across disciplines
(Gallagher et al., 2008; Goldstein et al., 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Preparation
programs lack modeling or practice for collaboration (Gallagher et al., 2008; Grisham et
al., 2014). New teachers are expected to have tacit knowledge (CAEP, 2015; Edmondson,
2012) about how to collaborate with their peers, yet do not receive the training they need
to do so. Emerging research supports collaboration through partnerships with schools and
universities to allow all to keep learning (Nobles et al., 2012). The latest CAEP Standards
(2015) specifically address collaboration, clinical partnerships, and practice as a way to
advance the learning of all students.

Current trends in collaboration and other school reforms often address a
comprehensive assessment of the whole child and strategies to address achievement, as
well as positive behavioral supports (Cook & Friend, 2010; Friend, Cook, Hurley-
Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Nellis, 2012). Interventions are more targeted and
research-based than ever before. Data on specific interventions and the accompanying
results are an important piece of these models. These types of models come from the guidelines of NCLB (2001). Schools must write improvement plans if they are failing to make adequately yearly progress and many of these targets are tracked according to subgroups including students representing various ethnic and racial groups, students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency (Choi et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 2014).

Collaboration is important: teachers who collaborate are more likely to fulfill federal accreditation mandates (Richards et al., 2003). Major legislation, K–12 accountability systems, and teaching and learning demands are highly regulated. Using collaboration to meet those mandates may be significant and important.

**Summary**

The three pillars of this study, collaboration and collaborative inquiry, teacher preparation programs with a focus on enhancing learning, and teacher candidates and their perceptions, support the need for ongoing research in the area of adult learning. Teacher preparation programs can and should be using these tenets to propose change to meet standards and mandates. Most importantly, programs must adequately prepare teacher candidates for the learners and expectations they will face in their first years of teaching, enabling them to impact students’ success.

The teacher preparation mandates and federal laws, such as IDEA and NCLB, focus on improved student achievement. They supply a catalyst and desire to provide teacher candidates with an authentic process to meet diverse student needs through intervention (Richards et al., 2003). These types of federal legislation provide the largest and most significant mandates on schools and teachers.
Educators have proposed models for collaboration skills and qualitative studies have been published to provide a more supportive and collaborative context (Gardiner & Robinson, 2011). These studies verify the need to enhance learning and provide teacher candidates with opportunities to identify learning challenges and strategies to improve student achievement (Richards et al., 2003). As educators explore ways to meet learning and teaching challenges, research is emerging to devise collaboration through partnerships with schools and universities (Nobles et al., 2012).

Through this initial review of the relevant extant literature, it is important to not only synthesize and critique the literature, but to note previously identified gaps in the literature. Little focus exists on “how the teaching practices course, which provides these real settings in which they (teacher candidates) can implement their theoretical knowledge contributes to the integration of skills” (Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014, p. 2295). Although researchers support collaboration in coursework for teacher candidates, scarce research describes how preservice special education teachers view collaboration, before entering the classroom (Fleming Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005; Gallagher et al., 2008, p. 78).

Researchers are studying the merits of collaboration through qualitative and quantitative studies (Thompson et al., 2004). With this knowledge of the benefits of collaboration, educators may incorporate these elements into teacher preparation programs. Grisham et al. (2014) indicated that current “research points to the importance of strong coursework and valuable field experiences, but provides little direction about the specific program elements” (p. 170). Few longitudinal studies describe the effectiveness of collaboration for teacher candidates (Grisham et al., 2014).
Researching existing models of collaboration (Richards et al., 2003), as well as planning future research on the beginnings of collaborative efforts in the organization, could provide the professional education department the motivation to rethink groupthink (Janis, 1971/2005), initiating the problem-solving process (McDavid, Huse, & Hawthorn, 2013) so vital to preservice educators. As universities strive to meet competencies for accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators, they must make ongoing program improvements and keep research as the focus. Further research on the benefits of collaboration to teacher candidates and their future students and schools would support and inform the conceptual frameworks and mission of the professional education department at Midwest University, as well as address gaps in the literature.
SECTION 4: CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

The target for dissemination for practitioner contribution is an interactive poster/paper session at the Teacher Education Division of the Council of Exceptional Children Conference in Lexington, Kentucky in November 2016. These sessions are 50 minutes in length and allow maximum interaction among presenter(s) and participants.

Type of Document

Presenters develop posters that provide a brief overview of their work and facilitate discussion with participants. Poster specifications will be provided upon acceptance. The proposal should include the conference topic area; abstract; session description, including a review of relevant literature and aim of the session; three to five learner outcomes based on the aim and objectives of the session; and a description of audience participation and is due June 1, 2016. The topic strand for this contribution will be Partnerships—Collaboration and partnerships with families, special education, and general education.

Rationale for this Contribution Type

The primary goal of the Teacher Education Division is as a special interest group of the Council of Exceptional Children, “the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, including students with disabilities and those identified as gifted” (para 1).
Outline of Proposed Contents

Abstract:

Objectives:

Materials/Methods: (Design of the Study)

Results:

Conclusions:

References:
Practitioner Document

PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS
Executive Summary for Poster Presentation
Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council of Exceptional Children Conference in Lexington, Kentucky
November 2016

By Shantel Farnan
Abstract
A gap in the research regarding structured collaborative processes and experiences (Grisham, Kreider Yoder, Smetana, Dobler, Devere Wolsey, Lenski, & Scales, 2014; Nellis, 2012; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004) parallels 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 (Richards, Huntley, Weaver, & Landers, 2003). This qualitative study sought to expand the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact. The study outlines one university’s approach to strive to meet the competencies for accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators with a focus on collaboration. This case study investigated the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their teaching experiences and examined the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period.

Objectives

• Investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacts them and their teaching experiences
• Examine the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period
• Extend the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study is:

How do collaboration processes and experiences as a teacher candidate in an undergraduate teacher preparation program impact later experiences as a novice teacher?

The primary research questions follow:

1. How does collaboration between educators impact novice teachers?
2. How do collaboration processes and experiences provided through an undergraduate teacher preparation program impact novice teachers’ comfort with collaboration during the induction period?

Theoretical Framework: Adult Learning Theory

| Teacher Preparation Programs | Accountability | Collaboration |
Design of the Study

The goal of this qualitative case study (Creswell, 2012) was to determine the perceptions of novice teachers on the professional education collaboration process experienced in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. The study specifically investigated how collaboration impacted novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during the induction period. To do this, the researcher gathered information from novice teachers who have been through the collaboration project. The researcher triangulated data (Seidman, 1998) through interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Fink, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009).
Results

- Participants in this study agreed that their comfort with collaboration is 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:
  
  o Open-minded
  o Unafraid
  o Confident
  o More strategies

Table 1
Themes About Collaborations Impact on Novice Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Response frequency</th>
<th>Categories included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>New ideas, Share ideas, Listen to other’s ideas, Others take my advice, Take others’ advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unafraid</td>
<td></td>
<td>To ask questions, To branch out, To approach others, To help others, Took away fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More strategies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>To try, Willing to try, Tons of strategies, Accommodations, Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

The views of participants were positive regarding their previous and current experiences with collaboration. Findings showed positive perceptions regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their current teaching experiences, as well as eliciting a high level of comfort with collaboration during their induction period. In relation to collaboration, most participant teachers were very comfortable or comfortable with collaboration during their induction period (first two years). Also, most participants emphasized that their previous teacher candidate collaboration experiences, and specifically the project was positive or good. As evidenced in this study, embedded collaboration and field experiences impacted novice teachers positively and increased their comfort levels with collaboration during their induction period, enhancing their ability to be open-minded, unafraid, and confident, as well as providing them more strategies to implement with their students.
Acknowledgements

To my committee Co-Chairs, Dr. Edmonds and Dr. Wall, as well as committee members Dr. Gregory and Dr. Seeger. Your expertise, time, feedback, and encouragement have been more than generous, exceptional, and greatly appreciated.

I feel honored to be in your presence and have you as my foundation in my scholarly ventures. A special thank you to Dr. Edmonds for your countless hours of reading, reviewing, revising, reflecting, guiding, supporting, and encouraging. Your legacy will live on for generations of future leaders and learners. To the novice teachers who participated in this study and so openly shared their perceptions on collaboration, my thanks.
References


Contact Information

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PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS

Shantel Farman, Ed.D.
Midwest University

ABSTRACT

The research examined collaborative processes and experiences of novices in teacher preparation programs. The theoretical foundation of the study was based on constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the role of collaboration in the learning process. The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding their collaborative experiences and the strategies they used to facilitate learning. The research methodology involved a qualitative approach using interviews and focus groups. The results indicated that novices highly valued collaboration, and they found it to be a valuable tool in their professional development. The study concludes with implications for practice and future research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013) was to examine the perceptions of novice teachers in teacher preparation programs. Specifically, the study aimed to understand how novices perceive collaboration and its impact on their learning. The data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorizing, and integrating the data to identify themes.

RESULTS

The results of the study revealed that novices highly valued collaboration. They found it to be a valuable tool in their professional development. Collaboration allowed them to share ideas, learn from each other, and develop a shared understanding of the subject matter. The study also found that novices were able to apply the concepts they learned from collaboration to their teaching practices.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Sharing ideas with peers, developing lesson plans together, reflecting on teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Fostering a growth mindset, enhancing problem-solving skills, improving communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Developing confidence in teaching, gaining feedback, building a professional network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that collaboration is a vital component of novice teachers' professional development. It enhances their learning, improves their teaching practices, and contributes to their overall professional growth. Teachers are encouraged to engage in collaborative practices to support the professional development of novice teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Teaching strategies that foster collaboration, such as peer teaching, group work, and reflections, are recommended. Teachers should create opportunities for novice teachers to work together, share experiences, and learn from each other. This will help novices build their confidence and improve their teaching skills.

REFERENCES


CLASSACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To Dr. Linda C. Johnson, Dr. Deborah Allen, and Dr. John D. Smith, for their continuous support and guidance throughout the research process.

NOMINATIONS

The study was funded by the National Science Foundation and the American Educational Research Association.
SECTION 5: CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

The target journal for publication is the *Journal of Special Education Leadership*. This is the journal of the Council of Administrators of Special Education: A Division of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Rationale for this Target

The primary goal of the *Journal of Special Education* is to provide practicing administrators and researchers of special education administration and policy with relevant tools and sources of information, based on recent advances in administrative theory, research, and practice. This journal prefers articles that have a broad appeal, wide applicability, and immediate usefulness to administrators, other practitioners, and researchers.

Outline of Proposed Contents

A 15–20 page article that has been validated and accompanied by accepted theory, research, or practice will include the following: Executive Overview with three to five bulleted major points made in the article; body of paper includes subheadings, but not the traditional ones such as introduction and summary.

Plan for Submission

Who: Journal of Special Education Leadership

When: Summer of 2016 or as soon as possible when the theme of the journal is consistent with the topic of the dissertation

How: Dr. Michel L. Miller O’Neal, Editor
PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS OF
NOVICE TEACHERS

- With legislative and accountability mandates at the forefront of teacher
  preparation programs, inter-professional collaboration can make important
  contributions to the realization of those mandates.
- One university’s approach to strive to meet the competencies for
  accreditation, as well as prepare highly effective professional educators with a
  focus on collaboration.
- Perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacted them,
  their teaching experiences, and their comfort with collaboration during their
  induction period.

Ongoing changes to federal legislation have continued to increase the
accountability of educators to meet all students’ needs (O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997). Since
publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education,
1983), society holds ongoing perceptions that U.S. schools are failing (Senge, Cambron-
McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2012). Goals 2000 continued the reforming of
education and included funding “conditional upon states developing complex sets of
curriculum and student performance standards” (Mitchell, Crowson, & Shipps, 2011,
p. 275). Pressures on public education to meet these ever-changing mandates have found
their way to teacher preparation programs and increase the accountability in higher
education as well (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2015).
“Legislators, accrediting agencies, the American public, and educators are raising
questions about what students are learning in college and they are asking for evidence” (Barkley, Howell Major, & Cross, 2014). Public scrutiny of the lack of academic achievement performance in K–12 public schools (Mitchell et al., 2011) funnels back to the perceived lack of preparation of candidates in teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, results from prior studies continue to query whether teacher preparation programs provide sufficient experience and training in collaboration (Goldstein, Wade, & Rody, 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Preparation programs lack modeling or practice in collaboration (Gallagher, Vail, & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Grisham, Kreider Yoder, Smetana, Dobler, Devere Wolsey, Lenski, & Scales, 2014). Teacher candidates are expected to work effectively with colleagues from other disciplines once they graduate and assume professional positions, yet these candidates receive little modeling or practice in collaborative roles (Korinek & McLaughlin, 1996).

With a significant amount of legislative and accountability pressure, some evidence exists for the importance of collaboration. With these mandates at the forefront of teacher preparation programs, interprofessional collaboration can make important contributions to realization of those mandates (Pihl, 2011). Teacher preparation mandates, such as those from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, State Standards for the Preparation of Educators, and federal laws, such as NCLB that focus on improved student achievement, supply a need and desire to provide teacher candidates with an authentic and explicit process in professional collaboration (CAEP, 2015; Grisham et al., 2014; Hamman, Lechtenberger, Griffin-Shirley, & Zhou, 2013; Izmirli & Yurkdakul, 2014; Meyer, Brodersen, & Linick, 2014; MoSPE, 2013). Teachers need these authentic experiences to prepare them to identify and assess learning
challenges in students, intervene, and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Richards, Huntley, Weaver, & Landers, 2003).

Because evidence accrued through a literature review do include studies specific to collaboration standards (Grisham et al., 2014; MoSPE, 2013; Nellis, 2012; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004) found in state higher education frameworks, a gap exists in the structural processes of organizations held to those higher education frameworks (Grisham et al., 2014; Nellis, 2012; Thompson et al., 2004). This lack of research coincides with disconnections between what is needed to be successful in the teaching field and what is taught through coursework and experiences in teacher preparation programs.

**Collaboration Project**

Teacher candidates, as adult learners, have unique learning needs that include opportunities for field experiences in which they practice key components of their future work (Izmirlı & Yurkdakul, 2014; Reynolds, Stevens, & West, 2013). Currently, several faculty members in the education department have been working together for a number of trimesters on a collaboration project involving students in literacy or social studies methods courses and special education courses (V. Seeger, personal communication, October 3, 2015). This action research involves the modeling of collaboration, as well as an authentic experience to practice collaboration. This study determined the impact of collaboration on new teacher candidates and the level of comfort with collaboration during the induction period of their first and second years of teaching. These data fill gaps in available data on the problem of practice in the organization. Curriculum and instruction courses had not yet provided opportunities for teacher candidates to
collaborate with one another on problem solving to increase student achievement (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011).

In the fall of 2011, three professors developed a collaboration project to provide opportunities for collaboration to teacher candidates prior to their first teaching job in which it was required (N. Foley, personal communication, fall 2011; L. Linthacum, personal communication, September 25, 2013). This project has evolved over time, but the basic tenets have remained the same. Teacher candidates in an elementary education methods class and a special education methods class collaborated on a lesson the elementary education candidates were teaching to elementary children at a local, rural elementary school. Collaboration between elementary education and special education teacher candidates began in spring of 2012. Teacher candidates collaborated on a literacy lesson the elementary teacher candidates in the literacy class had developed and implemented at the elementary school.

The collaboration project has continued each semester and is now implemented at an urban elementary school. Elementary education teacher candidates teach a reading lesson, collect data on the reading skills of the elementary students, and identify a literacy need of students to address in the second instructional session. The literacy teacher candidates presented their findings and identified a concern to the special education methods teacher candidates who suggested instructional strategies that appropriately addressed the elementary students’ literacy or other concerns. In addition, in recent semesters, special education teacher candidates observed the initial lesson. Literacy teacher candidates implemented the strategies and reported out the outcome. In recent semesters, special education teacher candidates also observed the implementation of
these strategies. Collaboration among teacher candidates (elementary literacy and special education methods students) has either occurred in face-to-face meetings or in electronic discussions throughout the semesters in which this project has been implemented. All teacher candidates reflect on insights gained about collaboration and the value of collaboration among educators. This is illustrated in the figure.

![Figure](Visual representation of collaboration process)

**Methods**

**Research Design**

The goal of this qualitative case study (Creswell, 2012) was to determine the perceptions of novice teachers on the professional education collaboration process experienced in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. Specifically investigating how collaboration impacts novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during the induction period was the focus of the research. To do this, the researcher gathered information from novice teachers who have been through the collaboration project. The researcher triangulated the data (Seidman, 1998) through interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Fink, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009, Merriam, 2009).

Interviews, focus groups, and artifact collection were necessary to gather qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). Stakeholders were sought who could provide feedback on the topic of collaboration. The researcher utilized a purposeful convenience sample
(Merriam, 2009) to conduct interviews and focus groups of novice teachers, selecting participants based on the courses in which they had previously been enrolled at Midwest University.

The researcher conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews at seven sites and over the phone over a 2.5-week time period. An online system (rev.com) transcribed the interviews verbatim from the audio recordings, which made them independent and blind to the purpose of the study. The process of coding included labeling and sorting collected qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). Coding served to summarize and interpret the themes that emerged from the data (Emerson et al., 2011). Initially, the researcher implemented open coding (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to provide a basic structure for collected data including interviews and focus groups. Themes emerged from interview (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009) and focus group transcripts (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The researcher mined data from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts using an inductive process, allowing for construction of themes and categories from small bits of qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher notated various important phrases, discovering correlations to emerging themes extant to the data. Included terms served as the foundation to develop larger categories of data, known as cover terms (Spradley, 1980). The researcher the themes and notations in a document for comparison of consistency, ranked in order of prominence and relevance to the posed research questions based on number of repetitions of certain words and phrases (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).
Participants

Participants were 19 first- and second-year teachers who were graduates of Midwest University and had taken either social studies or literacy methods course or a special education methods course between 2012 and 2015. Participation was voluntary and participants are referenced by numbers, rather than names. The researcher contacted participants through e-mail or social media with one follow-up contact if they did not respond.

Setting

The researcher recruited participants from those who had graduated from Midwest University and had taken literacy or social studies methods courses or special education courses between 2012 and 2015. Identified participants were recent graduates of the teacher preparation program and are now novice educators. Participants included those teaching in Region 5 of the Regional Professional Development Center or in areas Midwest University has identified as student teaching placements. Region 5 of the Regional Professional Development Center includes 15 counties in the corner of the state. The abovementioned criteria for participants and the setting provided a bounded system for the case study.

Interviews

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol to obtain perceptions of first- and second-year teachers on collaboration, as well as their comfort level with collaboration during their induction phase. Interviews took place at times and locations convenient to participants. All participants signed a consent form. The duration of the interviews ranged from 9 to 22 minutes and were audio-recorded, with field notes
kept for each. The researcher who conducted the interviews explained the need for audio recordings as well as field notes, prior to beginning recording. An online service (rev.com) transcribed the interviews.

**Focus Groups**

In addition to the review of artifacts and interviews, the researcher held three focus groups. Each focus group consisted of teachers in their induction period and ranged in length of time from 20 to 27 minutes. The focus groups were conducted at times and locations convenient to the participants.

**Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their teaching experiences. This study also examined the perceptions of these novice teachers regarding 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. Contained in themes were categories shown in Table 1 that more precisely describe commonalities from the data.

**Open-minded**

During the focus groups and interviews, the researcher asked questions regarding how these novice teachers perceived that early learning experiences (collaboration project) prepared them to collaborate with colleagues and what they carried with them as a result. Participants revealed these experiences opened them to new ideas, as well as to
sharing their ideas with others. These experiences taught these novice teachers to listen to others’ ideas and advice, and learn from them. This theme contained the highest number of responses from participants (34), noted in the categories previously described and shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Themes About Collaborations Impact on Novice Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Response frequency</th>
<th>Categories included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>New ideas, Share ideas, Listen to others’ ideas, Others take my advice, Take others’ advice, Learn from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unafraid</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>To ask questions, To branch out, To approach others, To help others, Took away fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More strategies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>To try, Willing to try, Toolbox of strategies, Accommodations, Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about what they carried forward as a result of the collaboration project, Participant 11 said, “Definitely to always come with an open mind. Be prepared to share ideas or bounce ideas back and forth off of each other.” Another respondent stated, “I think they allowed me to have an open mind and that everybody might have different ways or understanding.” In addition, to carrying forward familiarity with
collaboration and what to expect, Interviewee 4 said, “Knowing what other people can bring to the table, as well and being open-minded when it comes to their suggestions.” One focus group participant noted the reverse as well: “People are more comfortable to approach you because you’ll be more open to new ideas, and you’ll communicate with them.” One interviewee went as far as to share how they feel they were prepared by this experience, but also feel they are open to be the support for others by saying, “Being that support for them is super important.”

**Unafraid**

Several respondents mentioned generally not being afraid to collaborate, yet voiced that sentiment in various ways: not being afraid to ask questions, not being afraid to branch out, not being afraid to approach others, and not being afraid to help others. In addition, participants referenced these experiences as removing the fear sometimes associated with asking for help or asking questions. Participants designated not being afraid in regard to the questions described above in addition to the following questions: In what ways did your early collaboration experiences empower you in your teaching? How did your collaboration experiences impact your ability to plan for and implement effective strategies for the students in your classroom? Describe how the collaboration process has assisted you in seeking out others to support you in developing interventions for your students?

Four participants in various focus groups voiced not being afraid to ask questions or provide assistance to others as impacting or assisting them as novice teachers. One teacher noted, “Because we have experience, we’re not afraid to help.” Regarding how the collaboration process has assisted them in seeking out others to support them in
developing interventions for their students, a bold statement was, “I feel like I have no fear to ask questions and to reach out for help. Maybe I would if I didn’t feel confident in collaboration.” In that same focus group, another participant followed that statement by saying,

I believe I previously would have struggled to ask for help, but because I have these experiences, I ask all of the time. I’m branching out to more people instead of asking questions just to my mentor or just to one or two people, which goes back to confidence.

Another focus group participant shared finding it easy to collaborate with colleagues. This participant expressed the ease of sharing ideas by stating, “I could say, ‘Here’s my idea.’ ‘We were able to discuss it (the idea) and I was able to receive others’ ideas as well.” Participants tied their feelings of not being afraid to ask questions, share ideas, and receive ideas to their confidence with collaboration.

**Confidence**

When asked to share how the collaboration experiences impacted the first participant’s ability to interact with colleagues in faculty meetings, problem solving meetings, and grade-level meetings, the response was,

Coming in as a first year teacher it made it a lot easier for me to work with other people because I already knew-- was already confident and I already knew things.

It just helped me be able to talk to other people.

Another novice teacher noted these experiences changed the ways the teacher approaches collaboration by saying, “I’m much more confident in the way that I’m approaching collaboration with anyone.” Another question providing powerful results and statements
about confidence was. In what ways does your early collaboration experience empower you in your teaching? Responses included, “It gave me the confidence and knowledge to do it,” and “It gave me confidence that I will be a huge part of certain students’ learning, and that I will be making decisions and helping general education teachers make decisions. Decisions have not always been an easy thing for me.”

Participants believed the impact for them as novice teachers and the difference it made in working with colleagues focused on their confidence level, which is not often the case with novice teachers. Many participants indicated collaboration was uncomfortable for them at first when they were provided the experience as an undergraduate, yet confidence was one of the themes that emerged (25 responses) for those in their first and second year of teaching. In addition, 95% of participants designated their comfort with collaboration during their induction period to be comfortable or very comfortable (95%).

**More Strategies**

The importance of having more strategies to plan for and implement with students was evident in participants’ responses. Responses centered on the sheer number of strategies to try, as well as their willingness to try these strategies. In addition, they included the accommodations and resources they could add to their “toolbox” (Participant 4). One of the most powerful statements regarding strategies gained for students was during a focus group in which one participant expressed, “I strive to get the kids what they need.” Participant 6 responded in great detail regarding how the collaboration experiences impacted the ability to plan for and implement effective strategies for the students in the classroom. Participant 6 replied,
It helped me a lot because there are definitely things that you learn when you’re collaborating--what a great strategy. I never would have thought to use that had I not asked your opinion; had I not asked for your help.

Another respondent (who is a general education teacher) noted,

I get ideas from general education teachers about what they have done in their classroom and try to apply it to use in my classroom and vice versa so that there’s more of an integrated strategy throughout the classroom; throughout the school. This statement, along with the overall importance of sharing ideas and strategies, was a consistent thread throughout the interviews and focus groups, which showed the larger impact collaboration can have beyond problem solving on individual student issues.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their teaching experiences. This study also examined the perceptions of these novice teachers on their comfort with collaboration during their induction period. The purpose of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2012) was to extend the extant research by understanding and identifying perceptions and comfort with collaboration, as well as its impact.

The views of participants were positive regarding their previous and current experiences with collaboration. Findings showed positive perceptions regarding ways collaboration impacted them and their current teaching experiences, as well as a high level of comfort with collaboration during their induction period. Most participant teachers were very comfortable or comfortable with collaboration during their induction period. Also, most participants emphasized that their previous teacher candidate
collaboration experiences, and specifically the project, was positive or good. As
evidenced in this study, embedded collaboration and field experiences impacted novice
teachers positively and increased their comfort level with collaboration during their
induction period including helping them become open-minded, unafraid, and confident,
as well as providing them additional strategies to implement with their students.

**Limitations**

Because this was a qualitative case study, respondents’ answers were limited to
their own perceptions, which cautions readers about the validity and reliability of
individual responses. Another limitation to consider is the lack of generalization when
conducting a qualitative study, as well as the unlikelihood of being able to replicate the
study. An additional limitation is the lack of diversity among the population of
respondents, as all participants in the sample were Caucasian and 95% were women. All
respondents were novice teachers; therefore, they have been successful in garnering a
teaching job, imposing a limitation to the study as well. In a study of this nature,
variables such as additional professional learning opportunities in their induction period,
the design of the district’s induction system, location of the district in which respondents
teach, and other demographic information could be considered limitations. Researcher
bias, based on the researcher’s past experiences with collaboration, as well as having had
some of the possible participants in classes, must be addressed, because they could
contribute to interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012).

**Implications for Practice and Future Research**

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 Professional Education Department, 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 the following:

- program planning and further research
- shed light on impacts and perceptions that may influence policymakers, leaders, institutions, teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates, and teachers themselves
- fill the gap in that literature, as well as provide a basis for further research
- 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.
References


About the Author

Shantel M. Farnan, Ed.D. is a professor in the Department of Professional Education and Coordinator of Special Education Programs for Midwest University.
SECTION 6: SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

The purpose of this section is to synthesize and reflect on the ways this dissertation influenced my practice as an educational leader and how the process influenced me as a scholar. Reflection is an essential function to learning and the importance of this type of cyclical approach to learning and leading is significant. The doctoral and dissertation process have provided me with extensive content knowledge, leadership skills, and scholarly influence, well beyond my initial goals for myself and many times, beyond what I thought I was capable. These skills and corresponding confidence immediately started infusing into my practice, leadership, and scholarship.

Dissertation Influencing Practice as an Educational Leader

“Leadership is …” (Northouse, 2013, p. 2). This statement has many different endings depending on who is responding and what the person’s perceptions of their own or others’ leadership styles has become over time. This includes identification of one’s own strengths and deficits, as well as, most importantly, the reflection on both of those. “And having found strength, you feel compelled to nurture it, refine it, and stretch it toward excellence” (S. M. Farnan, personal communication, May 19, 2013). In the summer of 2013, all Doctoral candidates participated in an instrument to determine one’s strengths. It is ironic that one of the five most dominant themes of talent revealed by my responses to the StrengthsFinder is maximizer, which is defined as “strengths.” This is fascinating to me and to develop my talents into true strengths as a learner, leader, and scholar, I need to identify and understand my themes through the identified strengths: (a) discipline, (b) relator, (c) connectedness, (d) learner, and (e) maximizer (S. M. Farnan, personal communication, May 19, 2013). Through the completion of this dissertation, I
was able to continue to synthesize and analyze my strengths as they have been revealed, as well as identify who I am as a learner, leader, and scholar.

In considering myself as a relator and connector, as well as building on the words of Levi (2014) regarding teamwork, I noted in the summer of 2013, “I value the task part of teamwork more than the social” (S. M. Farnan, personal communication, July, 2013). As I continued to learn and develop throughout the dissertation process, the value of the successes of teamwork rose to the surface through my topic of collaboration and the amount of teamwork required to complete a dissertation. This revelation also assisted me as a leader, increasing my awareness of the teams I belong to and form, while becoming more aware of my own and others’ assumptions and biases, based on each person’s self-identified groups (Levi, 2014).

**Leadership through Teamwork**

In my earlier years in higher education, my frustration was that I allowed an environment and position to change my leadership qualities, when really I am the only one who has control over those qualities and whether or not they develop. With that said, I believe strongly in relationships and collaboration, so I need to use those factors to assist me in improving. The findings and conclusions of this dissertation have provided more proof of the strength of outcomes if they are rooted in collaboration. These conclusions have been and will continue to be transformational to me as a leader.

As I am more driven by the task than the social aspect of teamwork, I have to ensure the tasks are motivating and relevant to others and me and ensure I am using my strengths in team and collaborative environments. The completion of the dissertation was impactful when I reflect on the passion and motivation I had on the topic of collaboration.
Leaders demonstrate this factor when they focus on “someone’s strengths and addressing their deficits in a positive, constructive way … [which] may lead to increased motivation to the tasks at hand and the reactions to the goals and the behavior associated with an increase in motivation” (Maslow, 1943/2005, p. 167). This is evidence to me, as a leader, to try to focus on and direct others to areas in which they too have passion, which will lead to the motivation to persevere on even the most difficult tasks.

**Changes Due to Dissertation**

The results of this dissertation point to the positive results of having the teacher candidates learn and participate in authentic collaborative experiences to prepare them for the realities of working with others in their first two years of teaching. I believe the importance of this is that, as teachers, they will work successfully with one another to improve the individual learning of each unique student they teach. The human resource frame includes matching individual needs to unlock and harness talents for the good of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The human resource frame, when applied successfully, achieves an empowered, active, and productive work force in a given organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The efficacy that comes from working collectively and productively as a team is essential to future endeavors and change in on organization (Solansky, 2008). These philosophies, as well as the findings of this dissertation, provide the basis for collaboration to benefit each other as colleagues, and most important to improve outcomes for K–12 students.

For those in the field of education, these philosophies are also consistent with concepts comparable to professional learning communities in which leaders use the building of a compelling reason and collaboration for change (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).
Collaboration for change has been a driving force in the success of changes being made to teacher preparation programs. As these teacher preparation programs undergo significant changes, it is important to focus on the people involved and how they fit into the vision of these changes, supporting Kotter’s (1995/2011) view of a leader as “looking for the right fit between the people and the vision” (p. 40). I continue to challenge myself to look at new ways to do business as a leader, learner, and scholar in the midst of the redesign process undertaken in educator preparation programs.

**Changes in Practice**

With the dramatic changes educators are considering in teacher preparation programs, it is important to address these issues and analyze the culture of the organization. I have shared much of my dissertation scholarly research, as well as the findings, with the department and have brought new light to the need for changes such as increased field experiences and collaboration for teacher candidates. Martin, Wilson, Liem, and Ginns (2013) suggested considering these many pieces of the puzzle involved in change. The culture of the department when I came was one where rules were seldom written down and unwritten rules may have based on the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008), but this caused a lack of consistency and movement forward (Martin et al., 2013). The many shared meanings (Martin et al., 2013) were based on groupthink (Janis, 1971/2005).

Over the past year and a half, the elementary education group has been meeting monthly to develop meaningful shared paradigms, as well as operationalizing the definition of the educational culture (Martin et al., 2013). This collaboration alone has begun to change our culture. In the past, the department may have helplessly reacted to
the policies set forth by DESE, but in this case it is comprised of “active participants by integrating and reframing these complex systems” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 441). Department members are no longer seeing the “organization break down, despite individual brilliance and innovative projects because they are unable to pull their diverse functions and talents into a productive whole” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 441).

**Dissertation-Driven Changes**

As these noted policy changes come down from DESE, many internal policies that may have been viewed as effective may need to be revisited (Bardach, 2012). This is the time to look at the impact of the new proposed alternatives that have emerged from this research and department member collaboration because, when juggling possible decisions and scenarios, it is vital to anticipate the responses and even consequences as participants project outcomes. With a focus on the future and not the past, I believe the first alternative of leaving policies “as is” would definitely not ruffle any feathers, but is it what is best for students? This dissertation process provided positive findings and conclusions to further these discussions and support, inform, and influence change and future research.

Through personal communications in my department, members sometimes tend to “continue business as usual” (Bardach, 2012, p. 63) and make statements such as, “Well, that is how we have always done things here,” or “how do we know they did the work,” or “that takes too much time.” Thus, resistance may occur and decisions to move forward would require some proactive steps that would need to address all four frames introduced by Bolman and Deal (2008). The implications of these changes could be cyclical in nature and therefore all policies and practices need to be on a continuous cycle of
evaluation (McDavid et al., 2013). In addition, ongoing changes at the national and state levels affect institutional policy and programming; therefore, in all practical ways, these changes can significantly affect student success and progress. Research, such as this dissertation, ongoing data, and analysis of our programs could be used to support policy, budgetary, and programmatic changes at the university and program level, along with the use of ongoing evaluation models.

**Dissertation Process Influencing Scholarship**

**Content and Context for Learning**

As changes occur, institutions, programs, and departments may face the need to make critical decisions that aligns with Gill (2010), in which “organizational learning is a process of forming and applying collective knowledge to problems and needs” (p. 6). Learning should be intentional to achieve effectiveness, especially in lieu of the need for redesign. Creating a culture that supports continuous learning at all levels is imperative, including at the individual, team, whole organization, and community levels (Gill, 2010). As a leader and scholar, I have taken this to heart and have been actively involved in all the retreat days, the advisory council, and facilitating the special education team through a unique departmental redesign.

Gill (2010) recognized that organizations need to serve their communities and in this case, the community is the schools to which the college sends teacher candidates to teach. Leaders need to focus on the content and context for learning in college programs to meet the needs of the community. This dissertation clarified an essential need to research what educators are doing in their practices and determine if changes are effective. Research needs to be relevant, significant, valued, and provide meaning to the
organization. The facilitator of these opportunities begins with adult learners’ experiences and assists learners to “connect those experiences with new concepts, theories, and experiences” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 51). If the focus is on making connections to the learner’s prior experiences, the changes may not seem so overwhelming. I believe this was absolutely true for me throughout this dissertation. Researching a topic about which I was passionate and in which I was immersed through my own practice changed me and allowed me to see myself as a scholar. This assists in the division of work. Gill (2010) stated “participants become aware of what they want the organization to become, what they are doing and not doing to get there, and what will be needed in order to be successful” (p. 178). Gill’s concept could be applied to whole group and team learning as the organization makes intentional changes that tie back to each individual’s experiences and connections.

Facilitation of Learning

As I view my leadership role in the content and context of learning, I tend to see it as a facilitator; Bruffee (1999) would note that role should include having participants engage in conversations with one another, question actively, and synthesize. This process assists in transforming the “knowledge that everyone brings and apply it to new problems and conditions imposed by tasks” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 37). This focus and process is consistent with what I found in my dissertation research on collaboration. An effective reflection and by-product of this type of facilitation may be someone thinking, “I may be ready to understand a good deal more as a member of a working group than I would be ready to understand by myself alone” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 37). This type of improvement of thought leads to transformative learning (Taylor, 2009), which is essentially a learning
process of making meaning of one’s experience (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). If I, as a leader, continue to view adult learning in this way, it could cycle back to culture changes in which “culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved it problems of external adaption and internal integration” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 239) and lead to ongoing organizational analysis and policy changes.

**Learner as Scholar**

My noted strength as a learner identifies that I am drawn to the methods of learning and process more than to the content or the result; this realization was especially exciting for me (S. M. Farnan, personal communication, May 19, 2013). Thus, a cohort with a group of supportive learners with similar goals provided benefit to me, similar to a cohort benefit identified in the article by Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011). In addition, through my previous experiences as special education director, I was part of a district that journeyed through the process of becoming a strong professional learning community, similar to Gill (2010) focusing on whole, team, and individual learning. Being a learner enables me to thrive in dynamic work environments; in the past few years, in my professional practice and through this doctoral and dissertation process, this has proved to be true.

Regarding myself as a leader in adult learning, I believe critical reflection for adult learners is fundamental and I try to embed this in all the courses I teach, as well as the courses I have taken, and throughout this dissertation process. This process opened up the “possibility of improving the workplace by getting people to question and reflect on the practices of the workplace and their role in these activities and practices” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 93). That statement seems increasingly true as the environment in
which I work and teach is considering significant changes and starting to reflect on current practices, as well as future research. I feel my perspective in the area of adult learning has helped me influence others in my program and department and I have become a leader, a change agent, and a scholar.

Another large piece of learning is acquired through reflection on practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). “Reflection in action is what distinguishes the more expert practitioner from the novice” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 116). Reflection is a key piece to progress in education and in life. Unfortunately, many do not take sufficient time to reflect. Throughout this dissertation, I have begun to appreciate the opportunity to reflect on and describe my work, my learning, my research, and myself. This could be viewed as reviewing my philosophy as well. The research I will do as an educator should be reflected upon and viewed similarly. The information I have learned from course readings, activities, and discussions, and now my dissertation, have enhanced my knowledge and reflection on my philosophy regarding myself as a scholarly practitioner.

**Conclusion**

As I review my growth over this program and through the completion of this dissertation, my strengths and talents, and my future learning and scholarly research, I believe I will continue to be a learner, leader, and scholar. Without this experience, my change and growth in these areas would be much slower and more superficial (Levi, 2014). This cohort model Doctorate program, including the dissertation in practice, has pushed me as an adult learner, caused me to reflect on myself as a leader in my own adult learning environment, as well as moved me to be a scholar. This depth of learning has long lasting effects that will permeate my changes, learning, and leading, as well as those
factors in my organization and beyond. Learning at this level will continue for decades as I pass it on to my higher education students and teacher candidates and they continue this learning through their K–12 students.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE TEACHERS

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways in which collaboration impacts them and their teaching experiences. This study will also examine the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways in which collaboration impacts them and their teaching experiences. This study will also examine the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?

About 30 people will take part in this study of those teaching within Region 5 of the Regional Professional Development Center or within areas the Midwest University has identified as student teaching placements.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in an interview, focus group, or survey lasting no more than 30-45 minutes.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

This study will take six months approximately to complete. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?
Since this is a doctoral study, there is no direct benefit to you however, the results of the study may 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 in 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.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

There is no risk involved in this study except your valuable time. Participation does not involve any experimental procedures.

**WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

There is no cost to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal investigator will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time.

Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator’s file and identified by a code number only. The code key connecting your name to specific information about you will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

**WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?**

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

**WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

**WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional...
Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants’ rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study, contact Shantel Farnan at (660) 541-1495 or at sfarnan@nwmissouri.edu.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant’s Name (Printed or Typed):
Date:

Participant ‘s Signature:
Date:

Principal Investigator’s Signature/ Person Obtaining Consent:
Date:
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

While an undergraduate student at Midwest University you participated in a collaboration process with students in another course. Please answer the questions below about the experience(s) you had with as much details as possible.

1. Which of these did you participate in? Choose all that apply.
   a. Face-to-face collaboration based on students from a local, rural elementary school
   b. Electronic collaboration based on students from a local, rural elementary school
   c. Face-to-face collaboration based on students from an urban elementary school

2. Please describe the professional learning that you were a part of by writing about how you were involved in each of the activities above. Be specific about your role in each.

3. Think back. At the time you were involved in one or more collaborative experiences how did those experiences change the ways in which you approach collaboration.

4. Think back to the collaboration experiences you had as an undergraduate. What was that like for you?

5. What further professional learning have you had regarding collaboration since being hired as a teacher?

6. In what ways did your early collaboration experiences empower you in your teaching?

7. As you have engaged in teaching following participation in one or multiple collaborations in methods courses, what do you feel you have carried with you as a result?

8. What do you see as a next step in teacher preparation programs regarding collaboration? (How could the collaboration project be expanded or enhanced especially for those who have multiple opportunities to participate?)

9. What is your perception of how the collaboration process/experience impacts you as a novice teacher?

10. Describe any references to the collaborative experiences during your interviews for teaching positions.

11. How do you perceive early professional learning experiences, such as these, prepared you for collaborating with colleagues?

12. How did your collaboration experiences impact your ability to interact with colleagues in faculty meetings, problem solving team meetings, grade level meetings?

13. How did your collaboration experiences impact your ability to plan for and implement effective strategies for the students in your classroom?

14. Describe how the collaboration process has assisted you in seeking out others to support you in developing interventions for your students?
15. Describe your comfort level with collaborating with others within your school setting using the following descriptors below and any additional comments you would like to share:
   a. Very Comfortable
   b. Comfortable
   c. Uncomfortable
   d. Very Uncomfortable
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT/LETTER

Dear__,

Hello, my name is Shantel Farnan and I am a Doctoral Student at the University of Missouri-Columbia through the Northwest Missouri State University cohort. I am currently working on my dissertation, “Professional Collaboration Experiences: Perceptions Of Novice Teachers.”

This research is being conducted to investigate the perceptions of novice teachers regarding ways in which collaboration impacts them and their teaching experiences. This study will also examine the perceptions of these novice teachers and their comfort with collaboration during their induction period (first or mentored years of teaching). Since this is a doctoral study, there is no direct benefit to you however, the results of the study may 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 in 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.

Participants I am looking for include all of the following:

1. Previous students who were enrolled in literacy or social studies methods courses or special education methods courses from 2012-2015 and participated in the collaboration project
2. Recent graduates of the teacher preparation program who are now novice teachers who are within their first or second year of teaching

I am looking at beginning teachers perceptions and comfort with collaboration because of the full perspective you have on this experience. If you meet all of the criteria above, I would be happy to set up a time and date to speak with you about your experiences. Please use the information below to contact me to schedule an interview or participate in a focus group.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,
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Shantel Farnan was born March 13, 1973 in Bayard, Iowa, and graduated from Coon Rapids-Bayard High School in 1991. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Education Degree at Northwest Missouri State University with a dual major of elementary education and special education in 1995. In 1999, she completed her Master’s in Education in Educational Leadership: Elementary and went on to complete her Specialist in Superintendency in 2008, also from Northwest Missouri State University.

During the time she was completing her advanced degrees, she was a full-time special education teacher and coordinator at Northeast Nodaway R-V and later at Eugene Field Elementary School in Maryville, Missouri where she still resides. In 1999, after completion of her master’s degree she became the Special Education Director for Maryville R-II Schools and the Northwest Missouri Special Education Cooperative where she continued until the fall of 2011.

Mrs. Farnan is currently the Coordinator of Special Education programs and an Instructor in the Department of Professional Education at Northwest Missouri State University. She was awarded the Dean’s Award for Teaching in the fall of 2013. She continues to strive to facilitate collaborative endeavors in her department, with public schools, with statewide organizations, and with students and colleagues.