WHERE ARE ALL THE GOOD MEN?
A CASE STUDY OF MALE ELEMENTARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION MAJORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

A Dissertation Proposal
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

by
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May 2022
The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

WHERE ARE ALL THE GOOD MEN?

A CASE STUDY OF MALE ELEMENTARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MAJORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

presented by Katherine Ritter

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of educational leadership and policy analysis, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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This work would not have been possible without the teams of people who cheered me on throughout this journey. All the support I received truly made this dissertation possible.

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Where are all the good men? A case study of male elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri

Katherine Ritter

Dr. Nissa Ingraham, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The low number of male elementary and early childhood teachers is problematic in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Of the 1.8 million public school elementary teachers (pre-Kindergarten-6th grade) in the 2017-2018, and male elementary teachers accounted for 11% of the total (NCES, 2020). Colleges of education have also experienced low numbers of enrollment for male preservice teachers. This qualitative case study sought to understand the experiences of male preservice teachers and graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood education program at the University of Central Missouri. Interviews with current male preservice teachers, male graduates, and current and former faculty at UCM, as well as a focus group and observations, were conducted to understand the experiences of these male elementary preservice teachers. The study produced the overarching theme of the power of social connections, which influenced recruitment and retention of male elementary preservice teachers and male elementary teachers. Recommendations for practices of colleges of education include recommendations in the areas of administration, curriculum, faculty behaviors, and collaboration, all stemming from the overarching theme of social connection and the findings from interviews, observations, and focus grouping.
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE
Introduction to the Background of the Study

Teachers who are certified in early childhood education and elementary education teach children who range in age from birth to 6th grade in the state of Missouri (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). Teachers of these grade levels provide the base for children’s education, shape students’ perceptions of school, and are influential role models of positive support for a child. Many people remember their elementary teachers fondly and build long-lasting impressions from their interactions with these significant people.

The amount of male elementary and early childhood teachers is an area of concern in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020) and internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016) due to the low number of male teachers. Female teachers disproportionately represent the elementary and early childhood teaching field, with many countries documenting over 75% of their teachers as females (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). The low number of male teachers compared to female teachers in the early schooling years provide few male role models for children in these crucial early years.

Male elementary and early childhood teachers offer many benefits, including the ability to relate to male students, serving as powerful role models for all students, and bringing diversity to the teaching staff (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sargent, 2000). Despite these societal benefits, men are discouraged from teaching for many reasons including low salary, sexual subjectification, and social stereotypes (Cushman, 2007; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).
Men who choose to teach in the elementary and early childhood fields often do so with the encouragement of their family and influential role models (Buschor et al., 2013; Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Male teachers find the benefits of working with children and job security help them overcome barriers to teaching (Buschor et al., 2013; Frei et al., 2017; Thornton, 2001). Colleges of education play a vital role in providing preservice teachers with the necessary skills to be an effective teacher. Colleges of education can implement strategies to attract and retain male preservice teachers, such as providing a support network for current preservice teachers, implementing curriculum adaptations to meet the needs of the male students, and discussing stereotypes faced by men who choose to teach (Foster & Newman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Santos & Amancio, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The number of male public school elementary teachers in the United States is significantly lower than the number of female teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), there were 1.8 million public school elementary teachers (pre-Kindergarten-6th grade) in the 2017-2018 school year and male elementary teachers accounted for 11% of the total number. Male elementary teachers bring benefits to the classroom such as the ability to relate to male students, serving as role models for male and female students, and providing diversity to the teaching staff (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sargent, 2000). The low number of male teachers in the elementary school setting does not allow students and teaching staff to receive the benefits of male teachers.
The current body of literature examined male elementary preservice teachers and current male teachers in multiple ways. Studies included high school students interested in teaching (Buschor et al., 2013; Frei et al., 2017), current male preservice teachers (Foster & Newman, 2005; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Johnston et al., 1999; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sahin & Gelbal, 2016; Stroud et al., 2000; Thornton, 2001; Tucker, 2015; Weaver-Hightower, 2011), and current male teachers (Ponte, 2012; Santos & Amancio, 2019; Sargent, 2000; Skelton, 2009). While there have been multiple studies of potential and current teachers, no studies were found examining both current preservice teachers and graduates from the same institution. This study addressed the gap in the literature by determining practices which influenced recruitment and retention of elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri’s (UCM) College of Education by examining the experiences and beliefs of current male preservice teachers and men who graduated from UCM with a degree in elementary education or early childhood education.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to understand the experiences of male elementary and early childhood preservice teachers currently enrolled at UCM and male graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary and/or early childhood education. Male preservice teachers were defined as current college students who identify as male and declared elementary or early childhood education as their major at UCM. Male elementary teachers were defined as teachers identifying as males currently working as a
teacher in the preschool to 6th grades and graduated from UCM with an undergraduate
degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative case study answered the following overarching question: What are the perceptions of male preservice and early service teachers about their entry into the early childhood and/or elementary education profession? The additional probing questions to help understand this question were:

1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?
2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
3. What were the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?

**Conceptual Framework**

The social constructivist paradigm posits reality is constructed through an individual’s interpretation of the world (ASHE, 2006; Mertens, 2020). Social interaction impacts an individual’s understanding of the world and his/her place in it. Researchers who utilize the social constructivist approach strive to understand an individual’s experiences through that person’s specific point of view (Mertens, 2020). The social constructivist paradigm guided the current research because it sought to raise awareness of a specific group, male elementary educators, and examined the multiple constructed realities of the male teachers. Additionally, each male teacher’s point of view was
examined by investigating their specific experiences related to his college education experience and practice as a male teacher.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was developed from Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT states learning occurs in social situations through interactions with others and the environment. The theory emphasizes the power of social influence of external and internal factors on decision making such as economic conditions, family structures, personal standards, and self-regulatory influences (Bandura, 2001).

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) builds upon SCT and attempts to understand factors that contribute to the educational and occupational interests of individuals (Lent & Brown, 2013). Specifically, SCCT examines cognitive-person variables, such as self-efficacy and goals, and how these variables interact with other aspects of an individual, such as gender, to influence career development (Lent et al., 2000). The theory also explores environmental factors such as social support, barriers, and educational experiences, and how those factors influence career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013). Additionally, SCCT is concerned with the process of how individuals make career decisions and adapt to career tasks and challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013).

SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2000) was chosen as the theory through which to view the study. First, using SCCT, the study examined how outside influences, such as family and peer support, impact males in their decision making regarding their
choice of the field of elementary education. Additionally, SCCT aided in determining how external forces impacted the participants’ motivation to stay in the education field. Finally, the theory contributed to the examination of how preservice and former students’ goals of becoming teachers were influenced by societal factors.

**Design of the Study**

**Research strategy**

The researcher used a case study approach to explore male elementary preservice teachers and graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood program at UCM. Case study methodology focuses on a specific example or instance (such as a program of study) and how people interact with different aspects of the phenomena (Mertens, 2016; Yin, 2014). A single case study design investigates a phenomenon within a specific bounded system, which allows the researcher to examine the system in-depth (Creswell, 2013). The intent of this study was to develop a detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon (male preservice teachers and male graduates of the program) from the point of view of the participants (Mertens, 2020). Therefore, the researcher used qualitative research strategies to better understand male preservice teachers and male graduates of the program and their reasoning for pursuing a degree in elementary/early childhood education, why they chose to complete their degree at UCM, and the practices UCM implemented to encourage students to enroll in and complete the program.

**Setting**

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is located in Warrensburg, Missouri and has a second campus located in Lee’s Summit, Missouri. UCM was originally founded in 1871 as Normal School No. 2, a training school for teachers (University of
Central Missouri, 2021a). The university has grown to offer more than 150 academic programs and enrolls almost 10,000 students annually (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). UCM enjoys a positive reputation for training future educators based upon its long history as a training school for teachers. Therefore, UCM was chosen as the setting for the case study to examine practices to recruit and retain male elementary teachers.

**UCM College of Education**

The College of Education at UCM boasts a wide variety of education degrees and certifications (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The College of Education reported nearly 80% of UCM education alumni teach in Missouri at more than 75 Missouri school districts (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The Educator Preparation Programs in the School of Teaching and Learning are accredited by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (UCM catalog, 2018).

The UCM Educator Preparation Program is dedicated to preparing individuals who can positively impact student learning (UCM Educator Preparation Program, 2021). The Educator Preparation goals include integrating real-world experiences into coursework, aligning recruitment strategies with the demographics of the regions served by the institution, promoting equity and diversity, enhancing collaborative partnerships, and working to continuously improve practice for preservice teachers (UCM Educator Preparation Program, 2021).

UCM offers two options for students pursuing a bachelor’s degree in elementary education (BSE). The Early Childhood Education option leads to a Missouri teaching certificate to teach children ages birth-grade 3 (UCM catalog, 2018). The Elementary
Education option leads to a Missouri teaching certificate to teach grades 1-6 (UCM catalog, 2018). Both degree options include field-based junior and senior level courses that integrate core content with field work in the school system and require a minimum grade of C in all professional courses in order to graduate (UCM catalog, 2018). The UCM course catalog (2018, Bachelor of Science in Education section) listed the following outcomes for the early childhood and elementary education programs:

1. Promote child development and learning while building family and community relationships.
2. Observe, document, and assess to support young children and families.
3. Use content knowledge, appropriate pedagogy, and dispositions to build meaningful curriculum using developmentally appropriate practices.

The UCM College of Education reported an average of 597 students with a declared major of elementary education or early childhood education from the academic years 2010/11 to 2020/21 (Reine, 2021). Of those students, male students made up an average of 6% of the total enrolled students, with the highest average being 7.1% (2013/14 academic year) and the lowest being 5.0% (2020/21 year) (Reine, 2021). The range of male students who declared a major of elementary education was much higher than those who declared a major of early childhood education. The average percentage of males enrolled as an elementary major was 6.0%, whereas the average of males enrolled as an early childhood major was 1.9% (Reine, 2021). During the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, the College of Education documented its lowest percentage of males who declared majors in elementary and early childhood, reporting 5.1% and 5.0% respectively (Reine, 2021).
The National Center for Educational Statistics’s (2020) most recent data is for the 2017-2018 school year. That year, male elementary teachers accounted for 11% of the total number of educators nationally. The low percentage of male preservice teachers at UCM, compared to the national average, is an additional reason to target UCM as a bounded system for the case study.

Participants

The current study focused on male elementary and early childhood education teachers who completed, or are in the process of completing, their Bachelor of Science in Education degree at UCM during the time of the study. The researcher identified male graduates from UCM who completed their degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education in December of 2009 to May 2021. The researcher also identified current male students who declared a major in elementary education or early childhood education. The College of Education provided the researcher with the names and contact information for all individuals who fit the criteria for the study. While all past male students and current male preservice teachers were targeted (due to the small sample size) the data sample was considered to be a convenience sample (Mertens, 2020) because the sample was readily available through UCM.

The researcher emailed all men who fit the research criteria using the provided contact information and requested their participation in the study. The researcher also created a public Facebook post which detailed the purpose of the study. The Facebook post was shared by multiple individuals, many of whom were connected to the College of Education at UCM either as a former student, former faculty member, or current faculty member. The researcher also utilized a snowball sample strategy (Mertens, 2020) in
which current participants were asked to contact other men who met the criteria for the study.

The researcher contacted all men who completed the participation form provided by the researcher. Interviews were conducted with all the participants who completed the participation form, with the exception of one male who did not further contact the researcher. The College of Education recorded 71 male graduates from December 2009 to May 2021 who fit the parameters of the study. The researcher conducted interviews with 16 male graduates of the program. The College of Education reported 19 men, freshman to senior level, who fit the parameters of the study, for a total of 21 interviews of male participant filling the research criteria.

The researcher also conducted interviews with seven current/former faculty members at UCM. These individuals were selected for an interview due to their current role in the College of Education or as a result of male participants noting their positive influence on their educational journey.

Finally, the researcher conducted one focus group at the conclusion of the data collection. Focus groups are an interactive interview during which participants share their view and hear the thought of others (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus group was offered to all male participants as a follow-up from their first interview. Four men who participated in the interviewed (three current teachers and one current student) participated in the focus group. One additional male joined the focus group, a current student who recently changed his major to elementary education. The researcher identified this student during an observation for the study when he spoke to the Dean of the College of Education. The researcher invited the student to the focus group.
after speaking with his about his change of major. The focus group was one hour, 50 minutes in length.

**Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

Data collection was completed through qualitative methods. These methods included interviews with current male preservice teachers at UCM, interviews with faculty at UCM, interviews with males who graduated from UCM with a degree in elementary and/or early childhood education degree; a focus group with graduates from UCM and current students; and three observations within the College of Education. Utilizing multiple sources of information allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the case study and identify themes (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with current preservice teachers and graduates of UCM elementary and/or early childhood education programs. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to ensure the specific information was gathered from each participant for comparative purposes, but the interviews were flexible. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand and respond to new ideas brought forth by the participant. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two hours, 15 minutes. The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with UCM College of Education faculty and administrators in order to triangulate data and gather more information about the College of Education’s recruitment practices and teaching strategies.

The researcher provided an option for current male preservice teachers to participate in a focus group as an alternative to an individual interview. All current
students chose to participate in a one-on-one interview. The researcher also offered the option for all participants to participate in a focus group at the conclusion of all one-on-one interviews. The purpose of the focus group was to solicit feedback from participants on the themes identified by the researcher during the interviews with current and graduates of the program. Additionally, the focus group participants provided feedback to the research regarding recommendations for future practices in the College of Education as they pertain to male elementary and early childhood education majors.

The researcher conducted three observations in the College of Education to gain an understanding of the interactions of male preservice teachers with other preservice teachers. The relationship between the observer and the participants can be described in one of four ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The observer/participant relationships are: complete participant (observer is a member of group and conceals observer role); participant as observer (observation activities are known to the group); observer as participant (observer role is known and participation to the group is secondary); complete observer (observation purpose is hidden or in a public setting) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two observations were conducted as a complete observer where the researcher was in a completely public setting in the College of Education. The observations occurred during the passing time between classes in which current male preservice teachers were students. The researcher also conducted one observation in education classes in the College of Education in which three males were current students. This observation was also conducted as complete observer due to the participants not knowing the observation’s purpose.
Data Analysis

Data gathered throughout the course of the research was organized into a case study database in Google Drive spreadsheets as soon as the data were collected. Yin (2014) recommended organizing a systematic database that differentiates between data gathered in research and case study reports the researcher compiles. The database ensured all data were organized for quality of research and maintained a chain of evidence to ensure reliability.

All individual interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed electronically and were coded by the researcher. Open coding refers to categorizing general topics or themes from sections of text without any limit on the topic identified (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher identified recurring codes and developed overarching topics within the data through axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher reviewed all transcripts after the interviews and focus group was completed to ensure all coding was complete. Additionally, notes taken during the observations were also examined to determine if the themes identified from interviews were present. The researcher then created a document in which the findings from the interviews were categorized and quotes from individual interviews were organized according to the topic. The researcher was able to identify the topics most frequently mentioned in interviews with the participants, which increased the reliability of the study.

The researcher used constant comparative analysis throughout the data analysis process. Constant comparative analysis is the practice of constantly making comparisons between the data and emerging topics as data are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By constantly comparing themes with data from interviews,
observations, and focus group, the researcher increased reliability in the research to ensure data analysis was conducted systematically.

Efforts to Support Quality of Research

The researcher ensured credibility of the study by interviewing male preservice teachers, male graduates, and faculty in the elementary and/or early childhood program(s) at UCM. The number of male graduates and current students is a small number in comparison to female graduates; therefore, the researcher contacted all eligible participants through an email address provided by the College of Education. The researcher protected the participants’ identity by following protocols from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Missouri, including assigning pseudonyms to participants and keeping the participants’ identity confidential. For example, while all participants were assigned a pseudonym, some quotations from participants will be noted as “current student” or “graduate” due to the personal nature of the anecdotes shared by participants. The researcher opted to add this additional layer of confidentiality to protect participants’ identities because of the small sample size.

The researcher triangulated data gathered by comparing information from the interviews, focus group, and observations. Mertens (2020) recommended using triangulation of multiple data sources to support interpretations and conclusions in qualitative research. The researcher maintained a specific research protocol which detailed each step of the research process to ensure dependability. Specifically, interviews were recorded with an audio recording device and through Zoom (if the interview was virtual). All recordings were uploaded electronically to the researcher’s Google Drive before transcription occurred. The original recording and transcription
were kept separately from the coded transcription. Therefore, the researcher was able to compare the recording to the transcription. Confirmability was ensured as the data was tracked to the participants by use of recording and transcription of interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted the importance of utilizing consistent data collection to ensure the results reported are consistent with the data collected.

The researcher worked to ensure transferability in the study by providing a rich description of the case study based on information gathered from interviews, observations, and the focus group. Mertens (2020) noted thick descriptions allow readers to judge if the information can be transferred to another research setting. Therefore, other colleges of education may judge if the findings could transfer to their student population and college. Finally, transformative criteria were met by providing a balanced and fair view of the phenomenon of male elementary teachers and preservice teachers. The researcher worked to better understand the community in which the research is taking place (UCM) and will give attention to the voice of male elementary/early childhood preservice teachers and graduates, which are often viewed as a marginalized group in this context. The researcher ensured all participants understood their current standing in the College of Education was not impacted by their participation/non-participation in the study.

One limitation to this study was related to the research design. Because this was a bounded case study which focused on males who are/were enrolled at the UCM, the focus of the study was narrow. Creswell (2013) noted the narrow focus of case studies may decrease the transferability of the findings. The findings of this study may not be transferable to other education preparatory programs that are attempting to recruit/retain
males. Additionally, the findings may not be transferable to females who are majoring in elementary or early childhood education.

The positionality of the researcher within the context of the study is important to note. The researcher is a current adjunct teacher in UCM’s College of Education. Additionally, the researcher hosts UCM preservice teachers at various points of study in different field experiences in the public school setting as an elementary teacher. The researcher did not have any students during the course of the study who met the criteria for the study. Several former students from UCM courses and previous students who were hosted in the researcher’s first grade classroom participated in the study. These participants agreed to participate in the study as soon as the request was sent by the researcher. The former students who participated also encouraged other men they knew from the program to participate following their interview. The researcher surmised the former students trusted the researcher based on their past experiences and were therefore more willing to participate in the study than other men who may not have an acquaintance with the researcher.

The researcher disclosed to the participants that she was a current student and employee at UCM at the time of the study, and was a current elementary teacher. The participants’ perception of the researcher (a female, classroom teacher who is an employee of UCM) may have impacted what they did or did not share during the interviews. It is possible a different researcher may be perceived differently by the participants, which may produce varied findings.
Definition of Key Terms

**Early childhood education major.** Students who are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) degree in Early Childhood Education. The Early Childhood Education major at UCM provides students with a “comprehensive understanding of early childhood education based upon developmentally appropriate practice,” (UCM College of Education, 2021). Completion of the BSE in Early Childhood Education degree fulfills curricular requirements needed to obtain certification to teach children ages birth to age eight (3rd grade).

**Elementary education major.** Students who are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Education degree in Elementary Education. Completion of the BSE in Elementary Education degree at UCM fulfills curricular requirements needed to obtain certification to teach children in grades 1 through 6 (UCM College of Education, 2021).

**Elementary teacher.** For the purpose of this study, elementary teacher is defined as an individual who has completed the requirements to teach children from birth to 6th grade. The term *elementary teacher* refers to individuals who graduated with a BSE in Early Childhood Education and/or Elementary Education.

**Preservice teachers.** Students in an undergraduate program who declared a major of early childhood education and/or elementary education.

**Teacher education program.** An institute of higher education which offers academic programs leading to professional educator certification (DESE, n.d.).

Discussion of the Findings

This case study was conducted to explore the perceptions and experiences of men who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at the University
of Central Missouri. The discussion section will summarize the research question findings, the overall theme discovered, and how the findings relate to current literature and theory.

**Table 1 Male Interview Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Work Status</th>
<th>Current Teaching Level</th>
<th>Current Level in College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brad</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Charles</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Early Elementary**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shane</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Keith</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Brandon</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<td>6. Zane</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<td>7. Justin</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Robert</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Early Elementary</td>
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<td>9. Owen</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher less than 5 years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<td>10. Landon</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>Teacher less than 5 years</td>
<td>Early Elementary</td>
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<td>11. Jacob</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher less than 5 years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<td>12. Rodney</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher less than 5 years</td>
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<td>13. Anthony</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<td>14. Andrew</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<td>15. Ethan</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher less than 5 years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Joel</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Not teaching</td>
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<td>17. Seth</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
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<td>18. Hayden</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<td>19. Todd</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Jack</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
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Research Questions Answered

This case study explored three research questions related to male elementary and early childhood preservice teachers and graduates at UCM. The following section will summarize the findings for each research question. Additional information related to the findings can be found in Appendix H.

Research Question 1: What Led Men to Pursue and Elementary and/or Early Childhood Degree?

Four findings were presented that related to the first research question. These included: encouragement and support from trusted adults, elementary education was not the first choice, experiences with children in high school and college, and making an impact.

Encouragement and Support from Trusted Adults. All participants noted encouragement and support from trusted adults motivated them to pursue a degree in education. For most of the participants, the primary means of support came from family members. Rodney discussed his family’s reaction when hearing of his decision to major in elementary education. He shared, “They’ve always been supportive of anything that I’ve done, but just with how I interact with kids my whole life, they were all pretty excited.” Hayden also recalled his family’s reaction when he changed his major from nursing to elementary education. He stated, “They were all super supportive of it. They thought it was more aligned with who I am as a person than what nursing would be and
they thought I would enjoy that [education] more.” Jack reflected on how his family helped alleviate concerns he had about living on a teacher’s salary. He recalled,

    I was kind of scared to go into elementary because it’s not a lot of money and I’m a worry freak. And so going into a major where there’s not a lot of money, especially for teachers, kind of scared me at first. My parents [said] if you’re doing what you love, the money will work itself out.

Participants also recalled the support they received from other trusted adults. Rodney described an experience he had when he was an A+ tutor in a preschool classroom. Rodney stated:

    I was actually in one of my best friend's mom’s rooms. She was the teacher and she said, ‘Some people have it, some people don't have it.’ And she said I just kind of have it. I thought, I would kind of enjoy it [teaching]. And so it always was kind of in the back of my mind, but I never really actually thought I would do that until I decided to switch. And I was like, Oh, this is actually kind of what I want to do.

Another participant, Owen, said, “I didn’t have much support from friends or family.” However, he described how encouragement from teachers at his high school led him to pursue a teaching career. Owen said,

    I did Student Aid one summer with my old third grade teacher. I just enjoyed it. The kids were fun to be around. I got to be goofy and I got to have fun. The kids still showed respect. They were a great group. I learned how to deal with conflicts between two kids instead of sitting there trying to tell one person what to do and how they actually fix it. First day senior year of high school, I got called to the
superintendent's office. I talked with [the superintendent, principal, and vice principal], and they all told me I need to go into elementary ed. because of all the parent phone calls they got from the summer school kids. That's why I chose elementary ed.

Support from trusted adults, whether it be family members or teachers, encouraged many participants to pursue their degree in education. The encouragement from these adults also motivated them to continue when faced with discouragement.

**Elementary Education Not First Choice.** Seventeen of the 21 participants in the current case study pursued another degree program or job before ultimately majoring in elementary education. The participants’ original degree programs included a variety of majors including business, aviation, criminal justice, and secondary education.

Five participants began college with the intent of majoring in another area in education. For example, Zane started his college career as a history major then switched to elementary education. He recalled that he enjoyed elementary because, “It’s just more hands-on and I get bored really easily. And so teaching high school just was not my forte, so I switched over.” Jacob also began in the education field as a music education major, but then found the field was “just not really conducive to how I saw myself or how I fit.”

Twelve participants began their college experience in completely different fields of study. Hayden began as a nursing major before switching to elementary education. He remembered,

It [education] was always something that I thought about, but the money definitely deterred me. But I went and took one of those tests that tell you what careers you would be good at. And teaching was really high up on there. And
I have a few teachers in my family and I've always loved working with kids. So I think it was just a combination of all those different things that led me to choosing it.

Robert began as a business major. He said,

I took classes all of my freshman year for business and was miserable. I did not enjoy it at all. And it took some deep thinking and the career counseling that they offered there at UCM and I ended up realizing the obvious: I've always been meant to be a teacher. As soon as I started that path, I knew this is what I'm supposed to be doing.

When men decided to change their majors to elementary education, they recalled the support they received from their family. Landon remembered his parents’ words of encouragement when he was concerned about living on a teacher’s salary. He said, “When my parents asked me, ‘Well, if you could do anything and pay didn’t matter, what would you do?’ I was like, ‘Probably work with kids’. Then they said, ‘How can you turn that passion into a career?’” Robert also recalled his family’s reaction when he changed his major. He said, “They knew that I was not really feeling fulfilled with the business courses. And so they were very happy that I finally found my niche.” The encouragement from the trusted adults in their life helped many men transition into the elementary degree program.

**Experiences with Children in High School and College.** All participants noted experiences working with children in high school and college led them to consider elementary education as a career. For many of the participants, these experiences helped
them to reconsider their first major in college before ultimately changing to elementary or early childhood education.

Justin discussed gaining step-siblings when he was in high school. He remembered, “They were 5 and 3. They probably had a big influence on me being comfortable.” Shane also noted his experiences with family helped shape his career choices. Shane said, “I come from a big family, lots of nieces and nephews, like 17. So I've always been around kids. So for me, working with children was like second nature.”

Participants also described experiences with children outside their family units influencing their decision to be a teacher. Robert remembered working at a summer camp. He recalled, “I spent most of my summers in high school volunteering at summer school, and I did many hours in the high school setting, working with the elementary students as I could, and I knew it was something I always enjoyed.” Other participants described working at Scout Camp, Mother’s Day Out Programs, and working as camp counselors helped them to consider elementary education as a career choice.

Many participants worked with elementary students as a requirement for the A+ program in high school. Sawyer stated his A+ hours and working at an after-school child care program helped him realize his enjoyment working with children. Sawyer shared, “I helped those kids with their homework. It was a pretty good experience and I enjoyed it. And then I kind of put that to the back of my mind for a little bit.” Charles also remembered how tutoring during summer school for his A+ requirements prompted him to change his plans of majoring in architecture. Charles said,

I was paired with a family friend who teaches first grade. And I never thought I wanted to be a teacher. I remember after doing that, I really enjoyed it. And it was
a few weeks later, my mom was talking to me and she said something about trying to look at colleges or something. And I remember exactly. I said, ‘Well, I don't want to do architecture anymore.’ And she was like, ‘What?’ She was shocked by it.

Ethan also started out in a different major in college. He recalls being in his first degree program and not enjoying it. Ethan said, “I just went back to [considering] teaching in the tutoring that I did in high school, which was actually with preschool. But I remember I just loving being around them and then ended up switching.”

For the participants, their experiences working with children in high school and college led them to consider elementary education as a degree program. For the men who felt unfulfilled in their first choice of major, reflecting on their positive past experiences with children motivated them to change their major to elementary education.

**Making an Impact.** Nine participants stated making a difference in the lives of children was a reason they chose to pursue a degree in elementary education. Anthony wanted to make a difference in children’s lives. He shared,

The biggest thing was just, and I know this might sound cliché as I say it, but just being able to make a difference in children's lives. It's just being able to make a difference, whether it be in the classroom or academically or just on a personal level, just getting to know that kid and building that relationship with them to make sure that they feel safe and comfortable at school.

Charles shared how his past experiences helped him choose teaching. Charles said,
I did struggle in school and it wasn't until middle school where teachers started noticing. So I was that student stuck in the cracks, and I really wanted to catch that early intervention at the younger age and help them be successful.

Brandon also shared about the impact he felt he could make on students. Brandon shared, “With those young boys, you are that dad figure. You’re giving him somebody to look up to someday. And it’s something that we could provide and we can drive with to get the best out of them.”

Once men found moved forward with their desire to be a teacher, things became quite simple for many participants. Shane summed it up when he said, “I think education is my calling, so I went with that.”

**Research Question 2: What Practices Were Effective in Recruiting and Retaining Men?**

Current preservice teachers and graduates from the program were asked questions about their experiences in the teacher education program and what assisted them to remain in the program. These questions aided the researcher in determining effective practices to increase the recruitment and retention of male undergraduates. Four findings were uncovered which relate to research question two: support from instructors, logical progression of classes, field experience, and direct communication.

**Support from Instructors.** All research participants described the depth of support provided by the faculty during their undergraduate degree program. Many men credited the support provided by their professors as the primary reason they successfully completed their program.
Professors’ willingness to offer help to students was something many participants described. Todd, a current student, said, “Every single professor I’ve had, they're always saying, ‘Reach out if you need anything.’ And I have, and they're quick to respond and help me.” Another current student, Jack, shared,

All of them were very helpful. Any time I had questions, they were always right there to answer and they just always were very supportive of me. So I feel like they were looking out for me the entire time in a way because I was the only guy. Andrew also described the professors’ openness and willingness to help him as a learner. He said:

They made a huge difference in how I learned. I can think back to my very first learners block, and all of my instructors were all very open to talking about if I'm struggling with something or they were always giving me tips on how I can do things better. I had all great instructors, and I think for me that made the biggest difference for me, regardless of if I was in a class of all girls or not. I think that it made a huge difference that the instructors were having a positive relationship and building that with me and knowing that, you know, you can do just as good of a job as anyone here.

Participants also described their professors’ willingness to take the extra time to talk with the men and get to know them. Anthony reflected,

I could go to and just honestly sit in her office and talk to her about what's going on, things that I was still struggling with or whether it just be general topics in the classroom or things that I was celebrating. I would honestly feel comfortable going to her and talking to her about things that would help me out in the
classroom. But I think that that was kind of the biggest thing - just being able to have that relationship with all my instructors. I felt comfortable enough to really go to any of them and discuss anything that might be challenging for me or also things that I can celebrate.

Charles also shared the relationships he developed and still maintains with his professors:

Your professors get to know you and still to this day, you being able to talk to them or with them on Facebook and see what they're doing. They're commenting on how things are doing in your life and your families, and that's just kind of cool.

Many men also described very personal experiences of how specific professors helped them through difficult times. These experiences left a lasting impression on the men and several of the participants became emotional when they shared their personal stories. The following stories shared in the study lack pseudonym to further protect participants’ identities.

One man shared how multiple professors helped him during a trying time in his life. He told the researcher,

So when I think about my most positive experience, it's the fact that I absolutely hit rock bottom. And these teachers that I had known for less than 12 months, they’re the sole reason I was able to graduate college. I was the first person in my family to ever graduate college, and I did it with very, very, very limited support from my family.

Another individual shared his experience of going through a faculty panel to determine his future in the education program. He reflected,
The panel I went through and talking through everything, that's truly when I felt the most supported. So when essentially I was at my lowest, I felt supported in that. For me, being able to talk with them and answer the questions and knowing that those people were there for me, supporting me, making sure I was on the right path and really being able to listen to me and listen to my perspective.

Many participants also described the family-like atmosphere where they felt supported and safe. Charles described a professor who helped develop this atmosphere. He recalled,

You go in that class and she treats you like you are family. And she was just one of those people I think sticks out to me because she was so fantastic about making you feel welcome and always supporting us and encouraging us.

Another participant described the welcoming atmosphere in Lovinger [the building in which education classes are held] when he shared,

Oh, I like my education classes so much more [than my first major] and I just love the people in them. I love the professors and had such a good experience there. So once I made the shift [to major in elementary education], it was like, I just love it here. I could spend all day in Lovinger and be totally happy.

Charles summed up the feelings of many participants when he described what helped him stay in the education program as an undergraduate. He said,

Having that small setting where you could create those relationships with your professors and them always supporting you and encouraging you to keep going. It was just nice to know that they would always say things like, ‘You can keep going.’ You would hear them talk to other people, [saying] like, ‘Keep going and
don't give, don't stop now. And just, you're almost done like you guys are seeing the end.' And I think that was a big thing, I just felt very supported and welcomed from the get go. I think that was like my big thing, just always being supported and knowing that you could be supported.

The support from professors within the College of Education at UCM was described by all participants as a reason for them staying with the degree program. The family-like atmosphere and the extra time the professors took to engage in the men’s learning was very impactful to all participants.

**Logical Progression of Classes.** The logical progression of classes, specifically how the course work and field experiences related and built upon each other, was noted by many participants as a positive attribute of the program at UCM. Sawyer described the reasons why he chose UCM over other colleges for his education program. He stated,

The teacher program was the whole reason I chose UCM. When I toured, I was blown away by it and they gave me the whole rundown of what the next two, two and a half years are going to look like...I was thinking about was how everything kind of worked together, like taking all these individual classes. And then as I go along kind of seeing how it all fit together.

Rodney also appreciated the progression of classes. He shared,

I like how they structured it where the first year you go into the room and you observe and then you just learn the basics. Then they move you to the next spot where you go in and then you teach the kids, you have your little small group. You teach that. And then, finally, you move into the student teaching part where
you have the full class. So I think how they step it like stair step, it's where you're not just thrown into the fire right away.

Participants also discussed how the content of the classes built upon the previous classes and prepared them for their time in the classroom. Rodney reflected, “I think the way ours is set up is really, really helpful about how you can take the small progressions and you get small groups and then you get a bigger group.” The clear progression of content, and its connection to field experience was noted as a positive aspect for many participants.

**Field Experience.** Participants described the multiple opportunities for field experiences in schools and working with children as a large reason they came into the education program at UCM and were retained as a student. Keith shared,

I feel like we got in the classroom a lot sooner than other colleges because I'd heard horror stories of people who didn't get to go into a classroom until their junior year. Like, no, I'm not doing that. I think I went in my very first semester to a classroom, so I love that.

Hayden, a current student, also shared, “I really like the fact that my first semester there, I got to go into the classroom and experience what it was like being in the classroom and getting to watch teachers.” Jack, another current student, also described his field experiences in the classroom. He said,

Another positive was just being in the classroom and figuring out that this is what I want to do. I think that's a very big thing. That was a very reassuring thing for me that I was doing something that I don't mind doing for life…So I think that's kind of something that sets our program apart.
For many of the participants, the field experiences in the classroom also gave them the opportunity to enjoy first-hand interactions with students. Justin described the impact field experiences had on him as a future teacher. He said, “Being around the kids and realizing the relationship you're going to have with students. You start to build those relationships and see what it's like to spend a lot of time around these kids.”

Ethan summed up the feelings of many participants when he responded to the question of what helped him to stay in the program when things were difficult. He said, “Going in the classrooms, the kids, the same reason why we go back now as teachers.”

**Clear, Direct Communication.** An appreciation for direct, clear communication between their peers and professors was expressed by seven participants. The direct communication assisted many participants with learning expectations in the classroom, in their field experience, and how they needed to improve as a future teacher. Brad described how direct communication assisted him as a student.

I like when you're more direct, because then you know, exactly, hey, I should have done this. Or if they're like, ‘Hey, you should try doing this’, that would be nice. I think if you do sugarcoat it, though, it comes off as like, ‘Hey, you should try this. But your way was fine, too.’ And I think that if you do that, it kind of is misleading that you're basically saying your way was fine, but this way is also okay. You can try this next time, but you don't have to.

Several professors also indicated direct communication was used frequently with their students, particularly males. A professor recognized by multiple participants in their interviews as a positive influence, shared about their communication style. They said,
I'm your teacher coach. And much like you would want me to be very specific about how to do a layup correctly, I'm going to teach or I'm going to talk about how you need to do this this way so that you get more bang for your buck or you get more engagement. I'm a straight shooter anyway. So if I notice that you need to iron your clothes, I'm going to tell you to iron your clothes. I'm just me. I think they're [men] involved. They've committed themselves and they've committed time and money. And for me to beat around the bush and tell them, you know, foo stuff - no.

Rodney described how communication helped him to become a better educator. He said, “They [the professors] were very honest with you, and I felt like that time I was learning what I needed to learn and to be a successful educator.” This direct and honest communication from professors was beneficial to many participants.

**Research Question 3A: What Were the Collegiate Experiences of Men?**

Current preservice teachers and graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood program at UCM were asked about their experiences while in the program. Through these discussions, four main themes were brought forth by the participants. These included: field experiences in schools, support from professors, learning to communicate with females, and class involvement.

**Field Experiences.** All participants shared stories about their field experiences in the public school setting. These men shared multiple positive experiences from the field, far outnumbering the few negative experiences described by participants. Faculty members at UCM also described the many positive experiences they witnessed while observing men in the field.
The field experiences within the school gave these men the opportunity to engage with students. Participants noted the multiple experiences in the field, beginning with their observations in Foundations class to their Senior block, reaffirmed their decisions to become a teacher. Brad explained,

The kids were excited just because I was a guy teacher. Every time I came in, they were just so excited that I was there even with student teaching. The kids, they were excited and I try to interact with them and go out and play with them at recess and stuff like that. But I think especially the younger boys they really latch onto that like you as a male role model. That's part of the reason that I think I wanted to continue with it. I saw that the impact was going to be good for these young men and, honestly, girls as well, and to hopefully carry that on.

The professors also observed the engagement with students in the classroom. One professor described the interactions she witnessed when she shared, “Every single one of them. I mean, the light turned on. They were engaged. I never had to have any discussions with, ‘Hey, I am not seeing you engaging in the way that you're supposed to be as an educator.’”

Participants also highlighted the positive interactions they experienced with their host teachers and other adults in the host building. Joel shared,

Some of the positive experience were a lot of the teachers. The number one comment? ‘Thank you for being for being a male in education.’ A lot of the teachers that I talked to were more than willing to step up and go, ‘Oh no, no, here, let me let me, you know, open my head and pour this information on you.’
Rodney also shared, “I felt like they worked hard to place us with very thoughtful peers, knowing they would be someone to help inspire us and teach us. I loved working with the teachers and I felt like they trusted us as well.”

The multiple field experiences also taught participants different ways to be an effective teacher, with both female and male host teachers. Justin shared,

I enjoyed being in all the different classrooms and seeing all the different ways that people set up and seeing different ways people taught and meeting the different teachers and meeting the different principals. I was just young and hungry and wanted to learn as much as I could about the education.

Jacob also shared his experience of being placed with a male host teacher:

I did feel like it gave me the confidence to see that men can be really great quality elementary educators and be passionate about what they do and not just be doing it. And so it showed me like, wow, there are men who are really good teachers. They didn't just get jobs because they were men!

The field experiences were an influential part of the participants’ undergraduate education. The interactions with students, host teachers, and understanding of how to be a teacher all helped the students in their educational journey.

**Support from Professors.** All participants related how supportive the professors were throughout their time in the education program at UCM. The support from the professors was a finding described in Research Question 2, however, this theme was also apparent when participants reflected on their collegiate experiences. In fact, the only negative experiences participants shared during their interviews were from those participants who graduated at least eight years prior to the study (2012 or earlier).
Many participants shared specific stories of when professors providing extra support for the students outside their coursework. One participant recalled when he hit “rock bottom” and how his advisor and professors gave him the extra support he needed. He shared,

It was like such an overwhelming feeling of one thing just piles on to another.
And she [the advisor] was like, ‘Well, you could go and talk to your teachers and see if they'll give you the exempt. And at that point, you know, we'll see what we can do. However, many teachers give you the exempt. Come back in a couple of days after you talk to them.’ And every single one of them gave me the exempt.
So when I think about those positive experiences and I think about those teachers, the fact that they gave me that second chance, it is something I will never forget and never, ever be able to repay them for.

While many participants described how specific professors provided additional support, all noted how professors in general helped them during their college experience. All the participants, when asked “What positive experiences did you have in the program?” listed their professors in the education department.

These experiences began with their first interactions in the college. For example, when visiting Lovinger, prospective students are able to meet with the Dean, School Chair, and/or faculty as they are available. During an observation, the researcher witnessed a prospective male student come to the Dean’s office (without an appointment) to discuss changing his major. The Dean sat down with the prospective student to discuss the program and then personally walked with him to the certification office to discuss his potential program of study. After meeting with the Dean, the researcher chatted with the
potential student about his visit. The student later emailed the researcher to inform her of
his decision to change his major to elementary education. He shared, “I am so excited
about this change and am very excited to get started next semester!”

The support continued for students once they are a student in the program. Shane
shared, “I'd be frustrated but the professors were always there to support you. One
hundred and ten percent. And I think that was my biggest way to keep going.” Jacob also
reflected,

They wanted me to be successful. They wanted me to learn, and they pushed me
really hard to be great. But they also gave me great feedback. They gave me
positive feedback about the things that were going well and then corrective
feedback on the things that I could improve on, and I constantly felt like I was
getting better. I got coached up really is what it was.

Many participants still keep in touch with their professors after graduating. In fact, three
of the men in the study signed up to participate solely because their former professor
shared the information about the research on her personal Facebook page. Charles
described the relationship he still has with many of his professors to this day, ten years
after graduating. He said,

Your professors get to know you and still to this day, you being able to talk to
them or with them on Facebook and see what they're doing. They're commenting
on how things are doing in your life and your families, and that’s just kind of
cool.

The support and relationships the professors built with participants was a
significant part of the collegiate experience of these men. The support the professors
provided in the classroom, out of the classroom, and finally, after graduation, was an impactful experience for all the male participants.

**Communicating with Females.** All participants discussed navigating classes and field experiences in which the majority of the individuals were female. Often, the participants were the only male in a class. As a result, the men described their experiences in learning how to communicate effectively and appropriately with females. Jack, a current student, described his entry into his education courses. He shared, “When I got into my first education classes, it was just me and 20 girls. And so I had to learn very quickly how to get along with girls.”

Sixteen participants described how they adjusted their style of communication when speaking with females. Additionally, nine participants specially discussed being respectful in their communication with their female counterparts. For example, Andrew shared, “It's more just like how to say things nicely and not being blunt.” Ethan stated, I remember choosing my words very carefully as far as what I say and if I type it, how I type it, so it's not personal. So it is something I feel is being strictly professional with both the professors and classmates. I adjusted it all on my own. But I think when I first started, I didn't think about it. I mean, I did kind of start doing that and become more mindful of it relatively quickly.

Participants also described the code-switching that occurred when they communicated with their female colleagues. Jacob shared, “I think any group of people that you hang out with, there's code switching that goes on. I got pretty good at, I guess, code switching.” He continued, describing a discussion with his male host teacher at a field experience,
The female teachers would get to talking about female things, and I would obviously be visibly uncomfortable. And so [my host teacher] at the time leaned over me is like, ‘Dude, you're going to have to get used to this. You're going to be working with primarily women, the rest of your career. So just get used to it.’ And so that was a piece of advice- you're just going to have to get used to it, you know, things that people would consider more feminine conversations in regard to teaching.

One professor described this phenomenon when they said, “It's funny because you've got these men in a predominantly female kind of profession. But a lot of them learn that if they’re going to get in this world, they’ll need to work with these women and connect with them.”

Learning to communicate appropriately and effectively with females was something all participants experienced while in the female-dominated degree program at UCM. For some men, the adjustment came easily, but for others, it involved a lot of observation and learning the norms of the group.

**Class Involvement.** Participants described their involvement in the classroom at UCM. For many of these men, they initially were not highly participatory; many participants described sitting back and observing before they became active in class. Brad explained, “I didn't want to come off as the creepy, weird guy in the class. I would just kind of sit back and take it in and if it was my turn to talk, I talk.” Professors also noted how many men are slow to become involved in classroom discussions. One professor shared, “Most of them start up quiet, sitting back and letting the ladies come first and they just sit back and kind of get a feel for it.”
While some men noted their tendency to observe the norms first before engaging, other discussed how once they become comfortable, they became much more involved in class. Brandon described his experiences of a professor helping him to become more involved in class.

She really got on me to get out of that shell and be myself…It fell into place where I had a class with Dr. Brant, and it just started and I can't pinpoint when it happened. But it took me from feeling very jaded about it, kind of disinterested or just like, okay, I'm treading water until I'm not. And it suddenly turned it into a situation where now I started to thrive at it because I kind of got out of my shell. I was learning more. It was becoming a better experience for me because I wasn't that quiet kid in the back where, okay, boom, time to leave. I'm out. I asked questions. I got up there and put myself out there, and it just things started to snowball quickly from there.

Learning how to become part of a classroom community through understanding the norms helped the participants feel comfortable in the classroom. Support from their professors and increased interactions with their classmates helped many to become comfortable sharing their ideas in class.

**Research Question 3B: What Were the Experiences of Male Graduates?**

Participants highlighted many of their post-graduate experiences as teachers in the public school setting. During the interviews with participants, four findings related to post-graduate experiences emerged. First and foremost, men noted they made a difference in the classroom by being a male presence for students. Participants also addressed misconceptions associated with being a male teacher and how they worked to
overcome those misconceptions. These men also spoke of the importance of being their true self as a teacher. Finally, the support of coworkers, both teaching staff and administrators, helped them to be successful in the classroom.

**Making a Difference: Male Presence.** The most frequently noted experience of post graduate participants was the difference they made in the lives of their students. Many of these men discussed how their gender was a contributing factor to that influence on students. Participants discussed their ability to serve as a male role model, a father figure, and their ability to build relationships. Jacob discussed how he is a role model for his students. He said,

> It's helpful for some of my male students to see themselves in me as a professional, as a support system, as somebody who has been through an educational journey and seen it through, I think it just opens up a lens or creates another frame that they can see themselves.

Three participants also noted the importance of modeling different emotions for students. Robert shared,

> I think that giving them a positive role model is important. I try not to fit the mold of the tough macho. I'm teaching them it's okay to be emotional. It's okay to get scared. It's okay to be nervous and that men feel that, too. And I think that's sometimes shocking to them when I have those real life conversations with them that I will feel stress sometimes. I think that that's very powerful for them to see that. And hopefully that is something that will stick with them.

These men also noted that students were often placed in their classroom who do not have a father figure in their home. Brandon reflected, “You get to be that figure
where they trust you and they'll talk to you and you get through it. You're giving him that somebody to look up to, somebody that they might not see at home.” These participants also described building relationships with students by discussing topics of interest with the students and attending sporting events. These actions helped build positive relationship with families and students and support the trusting relationship these male teachers build with the students.

The participants noted the important job they have in the lives of their students. The role as a positive male role model was one they took seriously. Justin explained, “I think of it as a huge responsibility. You cannot let those kids down. You cannot wreck those kids by not holding that responsibility in a high regard.”

**Fighting Against Misconceptions.** Many participants discussed the extra scrutiny they face as a male elementary teacher. For four participants, there were specific instances where there were negative reactions from others which directly related to them being a male teacher. All participants described the adjustments they need to make as teachers to protect themselves from the appearance of impropriety.

Participants described interactions they experienced when parents learned their child’s teacher was male. Three participants shared specific stories of positive reactions when parents found their child’s teacher was a male Jacob shared, “I think there are some parents that get really psyched about having me since I am a male teacher.” Other participants recalled parents being excited to have a male teacher for their child who did not have a male presence in their home.

Four men in the study described negative reactions from parents. While there were not as many negative experiences recalled, for the participants, these experiences
were very impactful. Keith recalled a negative experience from his first Meet the Teacher night. He said,

I had a parent come in for Meet the Teacher night and just this look on her face of disgust. And I wasn't quite sure if it was just because she had other things she'd rather be doing that night or not. So then I went up and introduced myself and said I was glad to have their student in class, and she goes, ‘Yeah, we're not very happy.’ Their negative thoughts were immediately just because I was a male teacher.

Men in the study also described the need to be extra considerate and vigilant in how they interact with students. Many participants discussed how their general presence in the classroom, as a male teacher, gave rise for concern. For example, Anthony said, “I've already noticed, just in my limited amount of teaching experience, that I have to be careful with things, and that females in the classroom might have a different presence than I would in the classroom.” Men also discussed specific interactions they are mindful of when they interact with students. Keith explained,

I'm always extremely cautious when it comes to that physical connection that they [students] want. I'm always extremely cautious to do like a side hug, or I'll try and see if I can get them to bump a fist or high five or something instead. Just because I feel like the male population is more scrutinized for showing physical touch for like a hug or whatever to a student as opposed to the female teachers.

Men also discussed the need to be vigilant in their actions and to consider how their actions could be interpreted. Brad explained, “I feel like you're more vulnerable to things like claiming to be like a sexual assault or something like that. And so that's
something I always try to steer away from because obviously nobody wants that.” Josh reflected on advice he received from others about being a male teacher. He said, “Families are going to look at you differently. Communities are going to look at you differently. So you just have to be very conscious of how you present yourself in regards to physically with the students.”

The fight against the misconceptions of male teachers is one these men prepared for in college. Participants noted how discussions in college prepared them to be a teacher in a profession dominated by women where men are scrutinized. For many men, the support of their coworkers and staying true to themselves helped them to overcome these misconceptions.

**Stay True to Yourself.** Participants noted the importance of staying true to yourself as a teacher. For five of the men, this meant being silly and goofy with students; three participants specifically described showing emotions in the classroom. For example, Rodney explained, “Just be you. You don't have to change who you are. Just because you're a male in a female dominated occupation, you don't have to change who you are.”

Many men in the study felt that when they were true to themselves as teachers, they were able to reach more students on a personal level and be better teachers. Robert shared this advice for male teachers,

It would be important for the males to know not to hold back because they may be uncomfortable. Don’t hide who you really are when you're in there because of your surroundings. So I think the more authentic we are, the more authentic we will be as teachers.
For many of these men, being their true self in the classroom helped overcome challenges and reach students. Charles explained how important it is to be true to yourself. He described how men are often viewed people who sit behind a desk all day and do not interact with kids. He said, “If you think about what a stereotypical male is and you don’t want to be that, do everything in your power not to be it. Be who you want to be. You will make a bigger impact than you realize.” Being their true self, whether it is a man demonstrating emotions are safe to display or being silly when learning is acceptable, was something that many participants described as an impactful part of their teaching experience.

Support from Coworkers. Support from coworkers was a common theme from many participants. These men described support from their grade level team, their administration, and other teachers within their school. Keith said,

All of the other teachers are phenomenal, as well. I feel like the building I work in is more of a family than other buildings, and they will have your back no matter what and try and help you out, no matter what. I feel like they were all just really supportive.

Men also shared how their coworkers showed support in different ways, such as helping them decorate their room, giving them teaching resources, and being a sounding board.

While the participants worked in a predominately female environment, some participants worked in schools with other male teachers. Jacob shared, “It's nice to see somebody who has lived experiences that are similar to yours that some of my female counterparts just simply can't relate to because they will never have those life
experiences.” Owen described how he built a relationship with other men in his building. He said,

I didn't hang out with a lot of guy teachers last year because I just went home and slept. So last year was exhausting for me. And then one day I was like, you know, I need to work out. I'm very social, I like to talk to people. So I was like, you know what? I'm going to shoot my shot here. I'll call Mr. [another male] up out of the blue.

He continued,

We started to go drinking together and all that stuff like a normal adult man…Then this year, [new male teacher] comes in [to our building] and I was like, I don't want him to feel the way I feel ever…like that nervousness that self-doubt, that overthinking of, did you do everything the right way? And then we became really cool friends because like, we go out for a couple beers on a Saturday and we get along very well about that and we go and do fun stuff together.

Whether male or female, teachers or administrators, the participants found support from others in their school building aided them in their teaching career. As Landon concluded, “Find people who can support you and who you can open up to, and you don't have to be perfect. You can make mistakes, everyone. Most people are there to support you. Most people want you to do well.”

Findings Related to Theory

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2013), attempts to understand the factors which contribute to the educational occupation interests of
individuals. Cognitive-person factors, such as the ability to adapt to tasks and challenges and the role of interests and abilities, influence an individual’s ability to make career decisions (Lent & Brown, 2013). Additionally, contextual factors, such as support within an individual’s environment and personality traits, play a large role in a person’s ability to adapt to occupational challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013).

The findings in the case study illustrated the power of cognitive-person factors, as well as contextual factors on the career decisions made by the participants. Cognitive-person factors, such as personal interests and abilities, can influence decision-making for career choices. The majority of the participants in this case study were initially interested in or pursued another degree program than elementary education. However, after reflecting on their interests and abilities, those participants ultimately chose a field which drew on their strength and interest in working with children. Men drew upon their past experiences of working with children during high school or college to help them determine an appropriate career path. Current teachers also discussed the importance of “staying true to yourself” as a teacher. The participants described the importance of not changing their style of teaching, whether it be as an emotional teacher or a “macho” teacher, as a result of societal influence. The participants’ identification of the importance of their individual personality traits within their field further bolsters SCCT’s theory of the importance of cognitive-person variables. Many current teachers in this study also discussed their plans for their future. These men noted the assumption they would move onto administrative roles quickly. However, most participants noted their plan to stay in the classroom due to their enjoyment of, and impact on, working with students.
SCCT also explores how environmental factors, such as social supports and barriers, influence an individual’s career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013). For the men in this case study, social support and perceived social barriers influenced their decision-making in their careers. As noted earlier, most men in the case study (17 out of 21 men interviewed) considered and/or pursued an alternative career before majoring in elementary education. Many men noted salary as a concern they experienced, as well as friends and family, when they chose to change their major. Men also described how society perceives elementary teaching as a “woman’s job” and the associated barriers they experienced as a result, such as some parents expressing concern when they found their child would be in their class. The men also described the barriers they encounter as a male teacher, primarily needing to protect themselves as a result of society’s misconception of male teachers by being mindful of physical affection shown to students.

While these men acknowledged the barriers they encounter as male teachers, the participants spoke at much greater length about the supports they had as students in college and as teacher. The participants described the plethora of support given by professors while in the education program at UCM, many describing very specific circumstances which led to their retention in the program. The participants also reflected on their support of their parents and friends, which many of these men acknowledged was a factor in pursuing an elementary education degree. Finally, the support of students’ parents and coworkers was also an influential factor for the men in the study.

The researcher was able to use the SCCT framework to understand the factors which contribute to the educational interests and occupational goals of the individuals within the study. The factors which contributed to the participants pursuing a degree in
elementary education and remaining in the field of elementary education include pursuing a career aligning with personal interests and ability, and having support and encouragement from influential individuals.

**Findings Related to Literature**

This case study echoed findings from past research pertaining to male elementary teachers. Common findings included perceived barriers of male elementary and preservice teachers, why men choose to teach despite barriers, and practices that men found to be beneficial to their retention in the elementary education program and field.

**Barriers**

Men in this case study recognized the perceived barrier of the low salary of teacher. Santos and Amancio (2009) found in their study low salary was a contributing factor associated with the small number of male elementary teachers. Cooney and Bittner (2001) found men expressed their concern of providing for their family on a teacher’s salary. The participants in this case study also noted concern of salary expressed by their family and their own personal concern. However, the participants in this study chose to pursue their degree in teaching, many with the encouragement and blessing of their family, despite these concerns. One participant, Jack, recalled a conversation with his parents. He said, “My parents said if you’re doing what you love, the money will work itself out.”

Another barrier the participants noted in this case study was their fear of being perceived as a threat to children. Weaver-Hightower (2011) defined sexual subjectification as male teachers being, “sexually objectified, or perceived as always already sexual initiators or, worse, aggressors” (p. 109). The participants in this case
study noted extra scrutiny they experienced as male teachers, reflecting the findings of Sargent’s (2000) qualitative study of male elementary teachers. The participants in this current case study also described precautions they took as male teachers, such as giving side hugs to students as opposed to hugs from the front and keeping the classroom door open when they are working with a student one-on-one. Participants also described instances of extra scrutiny and fear expressed by parents when their child was placed in the participant’s classroom. This corresponded with another finding noted in Foster and Newman’s (2005) focus group of male teachers.

**Why Men Choose to Teach**

Participants in the case study described many reasons why pursued a degree in elementary education and become teachers despite barriers. These reasons reflected many findings from past research. Participants in this study noted the encouragement and support from trusted adults and benefits of working with children to be the primary factors for choosing to teach elementary-aged children.

Many participants in this case study described the support and encouragement they received from trusted adults in their life as a reason they pursued teaching and have remained in the profession. The participants described encouragement from teachers in high school, parents, family members, and friends as a motivating factor for them to continue when they experienced challenges. The findings from this case study echoed past research. Buschor et al. (2013) and Mulholland and Hansen (2003) found that family support was a large factor in the participants’ motivation to pursue a degree in elementary education. Buschor et al. (2013) and Ponte (2012) also discussed the findings from their
studies which indicated the importance of current and former teachers’ encouragement on the participants decision-making.

Participants in this case study also described the joy of working with children as a motivating factor for both pursuing a degree in education and remaining in the classroom as an elementary teacher. Many participants fondly remembered working with students in high school as an A+ tutor or working in child care settings. For many, these experiences led them to consider a degree in education when they became dissatisfied with their original degree program. Past research also found that working with children was a large factor for men to pursue a degree in education (Huber et al., 2000; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011).

All men in this case study also discussed the impact they make on the lives of their students as a role model, father figure, and being a positive presence in the lives of students. Many of these men noted specific instances in which they made a positive impact, while others reflected on this altruistic goal. These themes were present in other research pertaining to male teachers. Participants in Thornton’s (2001) and Ponte’s (2012) studies described their goals of making a difference in the lives of children. Additionally, Malaby and Ramsey (2011) and Stroud et al. (2000) noted participants in their studies hoped to fill gaps in the lives of students by serving as a father figure and role model for students.

**Recruitment and Retention of Men in Elementary Education**

This case study sought to examine the experiences of male preservice teachers and current teachers in the elementary field. In addition, the researcher hoped to gain an understanding of effective practices to recruit and retain men in the elementary education
field. This case study uncovered several factors which influenced the participants to stay in the field. These included support from instructors, logical progress of classes, field experience, and clear, direct communication.

Past research noted several factors that may increase retention within colleges of education. While these findings are not directly related this current case study, there were overlapping themes. For example, past researchers found that participants preferred practical, hands-on learning activities (Geerdink et al., 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). The participants in this current case study discussed how the field experiences in the classroom, which included working with students, impacted their retention in the program. Additionally, Geerdink et al. (2003), Mulholland and Hansen (2003), and Skelton (2009) noted men tend to appreciate external factors such as content knowledge rather than internal teaching practices, such as theory. The participants in the current case study also discussed their appreciation for classes modeling instructional methods that can be used in the elementary classroom, such as demonstrating of teaching strategies rather than a simple description of a teaching strategy.

Past researchers also recommended colleges of education acknowledge and confront bias that is experienced by male elementary teachers (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Nelson, 2002). Specifically, Nelson (2002) recommended having up-front conversations with male preservice teachers about challenges they may face in the field. Participants in this case study also discussed the need to have open conversations while in college about challenges men face as elementary teachers. They reflected on how having conversation while in college about physical interactions with students would have helped them to be ready for challenges that may occur. One current teacher reflected, “I hate to say it, but in
this day and age, the more discussions, the better. I wish we would have had it done before I started doing any kind of student teaching, even observations.” Having up-front conversations about bias experienced by male elementary teachers would prepare preservice teachers for situations that may occur when they are in the field.

**Overarching Theme**

Throughout the analysis of the interviews, focus group, and observations, the theme of connections became more and more apparent. At each stage of the participants’ journey to become a teacher, the connections in their lives helped to shape and guide them into the professionals they eventually become.

From the beginning of their journey, participants highlighted the importance of relationships on their decision to become a teacher. The relationships they built with students during their high school A+ experiences or Scouting experiences demonstrated how they can have a positive impact on children’s lives. The support these men had from family and friends as they considered, and ultimately chose, elementary education as a career path helped them gain confidence in their decision.

While in college, the importance of the connections with professors was evident as these men shared story after story of how their teachers helped, guided, counseled, and motivated them to become successful teachers. The participants in the study also counted on the support of their classmates in college and host teachers while in field experience. And, as these men navigated their college experiences with primarily females, the ability to communicate effectively with their peers and professors enabled those connections to grow.
Finally, the relationships they built with their students, families, coworkers, and administration provided a sense of support and safety, which helped them to be authentic teachers. When these men finally entered their teaching career, they again described the importance of those connections with influential individuals is their life. Those social connections provided motivation to stay in the teaching field, even when faced with challenges.

Over and over again, the imagery of connections built between the men in the case study and those individuals who influenced them grew to illustrate a connective web supporting these men as they strove to become teachers. Even when a participant experienced a weak link in their web, such as the participant who did not have supportive parents, other individuals supported him by building a stronger connection.

Much like the connections in a spider web, once these men were in those connections, they continued on their path to become an elementary teacher. This imagery is important to consider when reflecting on effective practices to recruit and retain male teachers. First, providing men with early, positive experiences with children can provide the foundation for a future in education. Supportive people, such as teachers in high school and host teachers for A+ placements, can also provide the first strands in this connective web. For colleges of education, the first experiences within the college, such as touring the building and speaking with faculty, can provide prospective students a sense of connection to the college. Most importantly, the atmosphere and culture within the college of education, from the interactions in the hallway to the interactions within the classroom, provide the necessary tools to build more connections, leading to retention of male students in the education program.
Implications for Practice: Recommendations

The focus of the recommendations centers around the need to retain male teachers with colleges of education. While the need for male teachers is great and recruitment practices should be examined, the researcher believed the analysis of the current case study findings produced recommendations which pertain to the retention of male preservice teachers. The following recommendations are based upon four core areas: administration recommendations, curricular recommendations, faculty recommendations, and recommendations for collaboration.

Administration Recommendations

The first area of recommendations pertains to administrative tasks within the College of Education. These tasks involve scheduling and placement opportunities to increase student engagement and increase connections with other males while in the undergraduate program.

The first recommendation is to place male preservice teacher in the same course section during their Junior and Senior block classes. During preservice teachers’ Junior and Senior year, they are placed within a block of classes on campus for their course work. There are multiple sections within each block. It is the researcher’s recommendation to place at least two male preservice teachers together in the same section during the block classes. The importance of connections was revealed during the analysis of the data, as was the importance of having support from peers. Men discussed the challenges of connecting with classmates and the benefit of having other males with shared experiences. Therefore, it is recommended the College of Education, when placing
male preservice into blocks for their Junior and Senior year, place at least two male students together in the section, when possible.

The second administrative recommendation is placing male preservice teachers in at least one field experience with a highly effective male host teacher. The College of Education ensures all preservice teacher have at least one field experience in a rural, suburban, and urban school district, respectively. Elementary education is a predominately female occupation; therefore, the majority of field experiences involve a placement with a female host teacher. However, it is important for male preservice teachers to have at least one placement for field experience with a male host teacher, when possible.

Participants in this case study discussed their field experiences in the elementary field. Most participants did not have a field experience with a male host. While they understood finding a male host is difficult, they lamented their inability to see a male teacher in action. One participant shared, “I do think seeing a male teacher in action and how they interact with the kids would be a really good experience just to so that you know what you can do and say [as a male teacher].” Participants placed with male hosts shared the positive experience of seeing how male teachers interact with students. This gave the participants a model of how they could interact with students in the classroom. Jacob shared about his experience with a male host. He said, “It gave me the confidence to see men can be really great quality elementary educators and be passionate about what they do!” Seven of the participants, who were only placed with female teachers, said they believed it would have been very beneficial to be placed with a male teacher at least once. The participants who commented on the benefits of a male
host teacher had a common theme of wanting a role model whom they could observe interacting appropriately with others. Joel said, “It would have been helpful…to not only be told information but to see that information in use. [The male teacher could tell you] ‘you may have to this or you may have to say this.’” Landon also shared, I know it’s hard because there’s not hard because there’s not many of them (male teachers). But I do think seeing a male teacher in action and how they interact with the kids would be a really good experience just so you know what you can do…and what you’re doing is okay and correct...Men with children, it’s a completely different dynamic than women with children. The participants also shared how their past male hosts became mentors for them when they became teachers. Therefore, the second administrative recommendation is to place male preservice teachers with a highly effective male host teacher for at least one field experience.

The final administrative experience is to continue to employ at least one male professor within the College of Education. At the time of the study, there is one male faculty member in the College of Education who has the opportunity to teach male elementary teachers in one of their first education course. Several recent graduates of the program and current students discussed the benefits of having a male professor. This included the different communication style of the professor, the ability to see representation of males within the College of Education, and being able to relate to the male participants as a male teacher. Former students who did not have experiences with male professors discussed how it would have been beneficial to see male representation within the College in addition to the benefit of having a male to share their experiences as a teacher.
Curricular Recommendations

Male teachers face additional scrutiny within the elementary education field (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Current teachers in this case study discussed the extra precautions they take as male teachers in order to protect themselves from the misconceptions of being male predators. While the men discussed issues they needed to be aware of as a male teacher, few men had discussions on these topics as a preservice teacher. When asked, all men believed these discussions would have been extremely beneficial to them as a future teacher. One current student stated, “I think it would be helpful just because it's something that's going to happen, something I'm going to encounter. So any more information that could be discussed about it would be helpful.” The participants also stated these discussions should happen multiple times, in a whole class setting. The participants, in individual interviews and in the focus group, discussed topics which should be discussed early in their college education before they begin field experience and topics which should be covered more in-depth as they advance in the degree program.

The researcher makes the following curricular recommendations. First, the researcher recommends during one class session in the Introductory Field Experience course (typically one of the first classes preservice teachers take that include field experience), a panel of current teachers discuss professional ethics and etiquette with the preservice students. The panel should include current male and female teachers. The researcher recommends topics for male and female teachers be discussed, as shown in Table 2.
Table 2  Topics of Discussion for Panel in Introductory Field Experience Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-professional dress</th>
<th>-interacting appropriately with teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-interacting appropriately with support staff</td>
<td>-effective means of communicating with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-appropriate physical interaction with students (male and female)</td>
<td>-appropriate verbal interaction with students (male and female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-how to identify when students are uncomfortable</td>
<td>-professional ethics – how to hug, interact, and address students appropriate (male and female teachers)</td>
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</table>

The researcher also recommends discussing scenarios that have occurred in the panelists’ teaching career to provide examples of how to handle different situations in school. The researcher recommends these topics for discussion to help preservice teachers consider different situations that may arise and how they can appropriately handle the different situations. The researcher recommends a panel discussion at the onset of field experience for several reasons. First, it is important for these discussions to occur before preservice teachers begin their field experience. Brandon noted having the discussion early in your education would provide a “safety net.” He explained, “In the beginning in your foundations class they [men] feel like they have that network, that safety net. They can talk about their experiences, what they’re struggling with, and everybody’s kind of aware of it.” Brad also noted it is important to have discussions about etiquette before entering the classroom. He said, “It would be best to do it before you’re in the classroom. When you get to the setting, then you already know, hey, this is how I need to conduct myself.” Jacob also brought up an interesting point about how these discussions could increase retention of male teachers. He said,
So I wonder if there's any chance that we could increase retention if we bring it up early, like maybe somebody won't leave the program because they feel like, ‘Oh, wow, they brought it up and people don't assume that generalization about me early on.’ If you bring it up in junior block, all those people are probably there for the long haul. But if bringing it up early could save even one person… then I think it's worth it.

The second recommendation is to have a second panel discussion with current male and female teachers during the preservice teachers’ Junior block or at a preliminary meeting for Senior 1 students. The researcher recommends that second panel discussion discuss topics more in-depth than the previous panel. It is also recommended that current preservice teachers compile questions for the panelists. Table 3 includes recommendations for topics of discussion.

### Table 3 Topics of Discussion for Panel in Junior or Senior Block Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-hug from the hip</td>
<td>-terms of endearment (no ‘honey’ sweetie’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-no winking</td>
<td>-not having door closed with one student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-no children in lap</td>
<td>-be aware of students’ comfort level (past trauma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-how to handle bathroom issues (buttoning, wiping, accidents)</td>
<td>-how to handle hygiene issues (body odor, feminine products)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-how to handle inappropriate dress</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The researcher recommends a second panel discussion for several reasons. First, it is important for these discussions to occur before preservice teachers begin their field experience. The discussion points recommended in Table 2 are general topics that are important for preservice teachers to be aware of at the beginning of their preservice experiences; however, many preservice teachers may take their Foundations of Education
course at a community college or during high school for dual credit. Therefore, a second panel would ensure preservice teachers hear the information covered in the panel at least once. Secondly, the topics covered in the second panel discussion are more in-depth and reflective of the preservice teachers’ additional time spend in the classroom. The students in their Junior/Senior blocks will spend more time in their field experience classroom. It is important these topics are discussed in order to assist preservice students on how they would approach different scenarios.

**Faculty Recommendations**

All participants spoke positively of the faculty within the College of Education. In fact, the only negative experiences described by participants occurred with faculty prior to 2012. The faculty within the college were described as family-oriented, helpful, consistent, communicative, caring, and supportive. The researcher therefore recommends the faculty and instructors within the College of Education continue their current practices of creating and maintaining a supportive environment for all students. It is apparent the current culture within the College of Education is nurtured and encouraged throughout the faculty, and this culture created a positive experience for students.

The researcher recommends two additional practices for the faculty. The first recommendation is the continued consideration of how to best communicate with students within the College of Education. The male participants in the study noted clear, direct communication was a preferred means of communicating expectations. It is, therefore, recommended that faculty continue to assess students on a case-by-case basis and adjust their communication styles accordingly. For example, participants in the study discussed how they preferred direct communication on how they need to improve their
teaching methods, interactions in the classroom, or how to revise assignments. These men preferred a so-called “give it to me straight” method, as Owen described it, rather than “sugarcoating.”

The researcher also recommends faculty be mindful of how they describe the ability of male teachers to easily get jobs. Many men in this study discussed their frustration of people, for example faculty and peers, saying male teachers will easily get a job after graduation. For many of the participants, this felt as though they were not given credit for the work they do in their undergraduate degree. Others felt frustration with people who gave the impression the participants would get a job simply because they are male. The participants also pointed out when they began to apply for jobs, many did not get hired right away. In fact, several men in the study experienced difficulty finding a job. Therefore, it is recommended the faculty and instructors be mindful of their discussion of the employment of men in the elementary field.

Recommendations for Collaboration

Creating and maintaining connections was the main theme found during the analysis of the data. Male participants discussed the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with others during their educational and teaching journey. Participants also described the importance of having connections with other male teachers with whom they can relate. For some men, they established these relationships in college or in their school once employed. Others, however, do not have another male teacher with whom they can relate. Previous research indicated the importance of creating collaboration and fostering connections with male teachers (Cooney & Bittner,
Therefore, the researcher recommends two methods of collaboration of male preservice and current teachers.

First, the researcher recommend the College of Education compile a list of current males within education who would be willing to serve as a mentor for male preservice teachers. Much like beginning teachers having a mentor teacher within their school, this male mentor would be available to answer questions, share their experiences, and provide advice for a current male preservice teacher. Several participants spoke of their desire to help other male elementary teachers or current preservice teachers. It is the hope of the researcher the College of Education can provide the means to connect male preservice teachers with practicing male teachers in order to develop positive connections and a role model in the classroom.

The second recommendation of the researcher is one recommendation for the male preservice teachers and male graduates. The researcher recommends men who are current students or graduates of the program at UCM create a private Facebook group for men who are or will become elementary teachers. The goal of the Facebook group is to provide male teachers with an avenue to exchange ideas, seek advice, and provide support for each other outside the influence of the College of Education. In order for the male preservice and current teachers to feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and concerns, the researcher believes it is important that it is a male-only group, without ties to faculty at UCM. Because of the nature of the group, the researcher recommends current male students or graduate of the program create, maintain, and moderate this group.
Significance of Study

Male teachers are disproportionately underrepresented in the elementary education field in the United States and around the world (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Male teachers bring many benefits to the elementary classroom; however, barriers exist that discourage men from exploring the field of elementary education (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). The University of Central Missouri was founded as a training institution for educators 150 years ago in 1871; however, UCM experiences a low percentage of male students enrolled in the elementary and early childhood education majors, with the average percentage of male students enrolled being 6.0% from 2010/11 to 2020/21 (Reine, 2021).

The current study makes contributions to Colleges of Education who aim to increase enrollment of males in the elementary and early childhood education fields. Further, the study will significantly contribute to UCM because it examined male teachers who were currently enrolled at UCM at the time of the study or who graduated from UCM with a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education. By focusing on a single institution, the researcher gained a deep understanding of practices participants believed to be beneficial in their education program. Further, the researcher gathered data from program graduates as they reflected on their college experience and its impact on their ability to effectively teach. The researcher made recommendations to the UCM College of Education in order to increase retention of male preservice teachers. Recommendations for male students were also provided using study findings. UCM
College of Education leaders can use this study’s findings and the researcher’s recommendations to determine the best practices for recruiting and retaining males in the program in order to increase enrollment into the program.

Past research on male preservice and elementary teachers was conducted in bounded studies nationally and internationally (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Foster & Newman, 2005; Frei et al., 2017; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; Mills et al., 2004; Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004; Sahin & Gelbal, 2016; Stroud et al., 2000; Tucker, 2015; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Despite the wide variety of studies concerning male elementary teachers, only one was found which examined both current preservice teachers and current teachers in the same study (Cooney & Bittner, 2001) and no research was found with current and former students at the same institution in the same study. This study makes contributions to research regarding male elementary teachers by focusing on best practices for colleges of education to recruit and retain male teachers. This study’s recommendations may have significance for other colleges of education and may be implemented at other institutions to target male teachers in the elementary education program.

**Summary**

A disproportionately low number of male elementary teachers exist in the United States and internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Male teachers bring many benefits to the elementary classroom staff such as serving as role models to male and female students (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sargent, 2000); however, barriers such as low salary, sexual subjectification, and social
stereotypes discourage men from entering the teaching field (Cushman, 2007; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

The case study examined current male elementary preservice teachers at UCM and males graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education from December 2009 to May 2021. Qualitative research methods were used including one-on-one interviews with current and former UCM students and UCM faculty and a focus group of male preservice students and teachers. Additionally, observations of male preservice teachers occurred in public settings in the education building and classes for current education students. Data gathered was coded by the researcher during the research process. The researcher used constant comparative analysis to make continuous comparisons as data were gathered to increase reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

The researcher found an overarching theme of the importance of social connections to the participants within the study. As men in this study considered the elementary teaching field, their connections to early experiences of working with children and their support from trusted adults supported their choice of the elementary teacher career path. During their time at UCM in the education program, the positive connections with professors, peers, and host teachers assisted participants in successfully navigating their college experience despite challenges. Finally, men who graduated from the UCM elementary and/or early childhood program discussed the importance of connecting with their students, students’ families, and their coworkers when they became teachers.
SECTION II: PRACTITIONER CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY
Introduction

The University of Central Missouri has a long-standing history of educating future teachers (University of Central Missouri, 2020b). The College of Education provides two degree programs for individuals pursing a degree for educating children: elementary education (grades 1-6) and early childhood education (birth to grade 3) (University of Central Missouri, 2020a). UCM and the College of Education should consider factors that lead to males pursuing a degree in elementary or early childhood education and well as factors that influence the retention of males in the program. Using the structural and human resources frames presented by Bolman and Deal (2017), the communication and collaboration between different levels of leadership at the university, as well as the factors contributing to the recruitment and retention of male preservice teachers, can be considered.

The following sections will provide a history of the organization and an analysis of the organization and the leadership within. Implications for research as it relates to the organizational history, structure, and leadership will be included.

History of Organization

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) was founded in 1871 as the State Normal School No. 2 with an enrollment of 30 students (University of Central Missouri, 2020a). Normal School No. 2 was recognized through an act of the Missouri General Assembly with the purpose of educating and producing teachers through the school training program (University of Central Missouri, 2021b). The main UCM campus is located in Warrensburg, Missouri and an additional campus is located in Lee’s Summit,
Missouri. UCM offers on-line courses and degree programs (University of Central Missouri, 2021b).

UCM has undergone name changes since its establishment as State Normal School No. 2. In 1919, the school was renamed Central Missouri State Teachers College until 1946, when the name changed again to Central Missouri State College. The University was again renamed in 1972 to Central Missouri State University and held that name until 2006, when the current name, University of Central Missouri, was adopted (University of Central Missouri, 2021b).

UCM is a four-year university offering undergraduate and graduate programs. UCM provides over 150 programs for undergraduate students and over 40 programs for graduate students (University of Central Missouri, 2021c). All programs at UCM are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (University of Central Missouri, 2021c). Additionally, undergraduate programs at UCM are accredited by 27 national accrediting organizations, and the graduate programs are accredited by 15 national organizations (University of Central Missouri, 2021c). UCM is the longest continually accredited institution in the state of Missouri by the Council of Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (University of Central Missouri, 2021a).

**University Organization Structure**

Manning (2013) noted the organizational structure of universities has varying levels of authority responsible for different areas within the organization. Similarly, UCM is organized into different levels, each with their own powers and responsibilities. The Board of Governors for UCM is comprised of eight individuals, all from the state of Missouri, who have statutory powers to adopt regulations and rules for the guidance of
the university (University of Central Missouri, 2021d). The Board of Governors has the authority to offer guidance pertaining to the supervision of students, regulate terms of employment, and determine causes for removal of the university president (University of Central Missouri, 2021d).

The university president’s duties consist of overseeing all aspects of the university, including the budget, educational opportunities for students, alumni engagement, and developing fundraising markets (University of Central Missouri, 2021d). In the organizational hierarchy, seven roles fall under the university president and Board of Governors who serve as the strategic apex (Mintzberg, 1979/2005) of the organization (see Figure 1). These seven roles include the Vice Presidents for Finance and Operations, Academic Affairs, and Student Experience and Engagement (University of Missouri, 2021d).

**Figure 1**
*UCM Leadership Organizational Chart*

Within UCM’s structure, the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs oversees the four academic units (colleges) which oversee the programs of study for undergraduates and
graduate students. The four academic units include Health, Science, and Technology; Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; Business and Professional Studies; and Education (University of Central Missouri, 2020b) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
UCM Leadership Organizational Chart: Vice President of Academic Affairs

Each of the four colleges has its own hierarchal structure, which include some (or all) of the following roles: dean of the college, associate dean(s), department chairs, program coordinators, and faculty, instructors, and adjunct instructors (University of Central Missouri, 2020b). Manning (2013) noted leaders within the hierarchy should utilize communication both laterally and vertically within the organization, though the
movement within the organization occurs through a specific chain of command within the bureaucracy. At UCM, the same principals of communication within the hierarchy apply.

**Organizational Structure: College of Education**

The College of Education is led by the dean of the college whose role is similar to that of the university president, though within the scope of the College of Education (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The dean is assisted by the associate dean of the college (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). Within the College of Education, there are two schools. The School of Professional Education and Leadership has a school chair who leads the faculty within that school (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The School of Professional Education Leadership offers programs for undergraduate and graduate degrees in seven program areas, including Career and Technical Education, College Student Personnel Administration, Counseling Education, Educational Leadership, Educational Technology, and Library Science and Information Services. Each of the seven programs has a program coordinator that oversees the program and reports to the department chair (University of Central Missouri, 2021a).

The second school in the College of Education is the School of Teaching and Learning, also led by a department chair (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The School of Teaching and Learning offers 13 programs of study including Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education. Each program has at least one program chair or coordinator(s); the Elementary Education program has an undergraduate program coordinator and a graduate program coordinator (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). The hierarchy within the College of Education allows for communication within each of the departments through the various levels of the college,
which can assist in the sharing of knowledge in the various schools and programs within the college.

**Organizational Analysis: College of Education**

A structural frame within an organization allows for successful coordination of duties and responsibilities throughout the various levels of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Perrow, 1970/2009). A structure outlines the division of labor, the hierarchy of offices/personnel, and rules that govern the ability of the organization and individuals to perform the required duties (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The College of Education at UCM utilizes a hierarchal structure in which the dean of the college oversees operations of the college. However, the school chairs, department chairs, and program coordinators each have leadership roles within their specified area. This loose coupling, or the ability of one area to make small changes without affecting the entire organization (Weick, 1978/1983), allows for the different programs within the College of Education to respond to situations and make small changes.

While the College of Education employs vertical coordination with the higher levels of authority coordinating the college through planning, rules, and policies, lateral coordination also occurs. Lateral coordination techniques are less formal techniques to coordinate duties and responsibilities, such as meetings, task forces, and coordinating roles (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The use of lateral coordination, such as cooperation and planning between program coordinators and faculty, fosters teamwork and coordination of services for the benefit of the students’ learning experiences (Levi, 2017). Structured communication, such as monthly meetings with the school chair, monthly meetings between the elementary and early childhood education program coordinators, and
semester meetings with faculty help leadership review data and make plans for the programs (N. Tye, personal communication, July 5, 2021).

The use of lateral coordination is especially important between full-time faculty, full-time instructors, and part-time adjunct instructors. Some employees within the College of Education are not full-time employees and are, therefore, not always involved/informed of vertical coordination, nor are they always available for synchronous meetings. For example, the program chair for the early childhood department creates shared Google documents with links to content areas to all faculty who teach within the program (N. Tye, personal communication, July 5, 2021). Lateral coordination helps to provide continuity between classes, course expectation, and program requirements.

Bolman and Deal (2017) stated organizations must use both vertical and lateral procedures to coordinate processes within the structure of the organization. The use of both allows the organization to be flexible to meet the procedural and policy needs of the organization while maintaining flexibility within the structure (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The College of Education is able to use both forms of coordination to address stable tasks in the organization (vertical), as well as complex tasks within a changing environment (lateral).

The human resources frame should also be considered when analyzing the organization. The human resources frame examines what people do for, and with, one another within an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Conditions within an organization contribute to one’s ability to function well within their role and therefore contribute to the output of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Maslow, 1932/2005). The ability of the leadership in the organization to communicate, build trust, and
effectively collaborate with instructors within an organization positively influences the overall morale and productivity of the group (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Examination through the human resources frame typically occurs between employees and the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017); however, these same considerations can be applied within the context of the university (organization) and the students within the university and the relationship between the two. One assumption of the human resource frame is that the organization exists to serve human needs (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In this case, the College of Education exists to meet the needs of education students as they work to fulfill the requirements to obtain their degree and gain knowledge to be an effective teacher. Another assumption of the human resource frame is that the organization and people need each other (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Just as the university would not exist without the students, the students would not attend the university without the faculty and leadership. If enrollment at the university declines, or if enrollment in the College of Education declines, the faculty within the college may be at risk of losing the entire educational program and/or their job at the institution. Therefore, it is important to understand factors which contribute to recruitment of students, as well as how to effectively retain current students into the programs.

Leadership Analysis

The College of Education’s organizational system, which consists of different levels of leadership throughout the departments, encourages collaboration between and through the different departments (N. Tye, personal communication, July 7, 2021). The dean of the College of Education must be the gate keeper of this communication within the College as the top of the organizational ladder. Drucker (2004) stated leaders must
identify what is needed for the organization and ensure stakeholders will benefit from the decisions. Within the College of Education, stakeholders include the department chairs, program coordinators, faculty, alumni, and the current students in the programs. The dean of the College sets goals for the college based on directives, limitations, and expectations put forth by the Provost and UCM’s President (University of Central Missouri, 2020b). The goals are included in action plans, with check-in points to determine if the goals are being met. Drucker (2004), as well as Goffee and Jones (2000/2011), maintain these are important characteristics of effective leaders. Using distributive leadership, the dean relies on the strengths of the other leaders within the college. The use of distributive leadership ensures goals are met and interaction between the levels of the organization are present (Ancona et al., 2007/2011; Konradt, 2014).

The school chairs must then evaluate the directives set forth and communicate with department chairs and program coordinators. Holmberg and Tyrstrup (2010) noted leaders must interpret directives, make adjustments, and formulate solutions. Lateral and horizontal coordination (Bolman & Deal, 2017) requires consistent cooperation and communication through all levels. Again, distribution of leadership allows the leadership to be flexible in their decision making, especially when leadership is present from different levels (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Konradt, 2014).

In addition to the communication necessary through the lateral levels of the College of Education, the Early Childhood Education program and the Elementary Education program require a consistent open line of communication. Bolman and Deal (2017) noted challenges occur within organizations when specialized units only focus on their own goals and priorities. Because the degree programs overlap in many ways, such
as the same classes being required for students in both programs and faculty/instructors teaching in both programs, it is important to streamline communication between programs. The program coordinators of each program communicate regularly through in-person meetings and emails as they evaluate current practices and plan for the future (N. Tye, personal communication, July 5, 2021). Cooperation between these team members is a necessary component for the success of the two teams (Levi, 2017). Further, open communication allows for the exchange of ideas for the betterment of programs (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Levi, 2017). Additionally, the program coordinators in both departments must consistently communicate with the faculty and instructors in their respective departments. Drucker (2004) noted effective leaders must ensure that decisions are properly communicated to all stakeholders and take responsibility for coordinating and gathering input from people at all levels of the organization.

Leadership at all levels of the College of Education requires flexibility, cooperation, and communication. Bolman and Deal (2017) noted leadership is “situated not in the leader but in the exchange between leader and constituents” (p. 337). The ability to communicate goals, mission, and vision for the future and achieve support from all levels is required for the success of the college (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Levi, 2017; Northouse, 2019) and is necessary for all levels within the college, from the dean to faculty. Further, developing trust through each level of the organization is key to the successful implementation of plans in an organization (Ettling, 2012; Gill, 2012; Levi, 2017; Taylor, 2009).
Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Understanding the setting of the study, the history of UCM, and the organizational structure of both the University and the College of Education at UCM has implications for research in the practitioner setting. The researcher seeks to increase the College of Education’s knowledge about the factors that influence men to seek a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education and what impacts their decision to attend UCM for this degree. Further, the researcher seeks to understand the experiences of men who are current students in the elementary and early childhood education programs in order to influence retention in the department. Finally, the researcher strives to gain an understanding of the experiences of graduates of the programs to gain knowledge about successful educational practices. The knowledge gained through this research will influence the College of Education’s ability to recruit, retain, and educate men in the elementary and early childhood education fields.

History of the Organization

UCM has a long-standing history of educating future teachers. For 150 years, beginning in 1871, UCM programs for educators have met the needs of graduates, with almost 80% of the college’s graduates teaching in Missouri school districts (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). From 2009 to 2020, the College of Education had an annual average of 399 students with a declared major in elementary education and 198 students with a declared major of early childhood education (Reine, 2021). However, the College of Education has experienced a steady decline of enrollees in the programs, with the 2020/2021 year showing the lowest enrollment to date in elementary education (316) and early childhood education (164) (Reine, 2021). The pattern of declining enrollment at
brick and mortar universities is also evident nationwide (Koenig, 2014). While there are many factors which may contribute to the decline in enrollment at universities, Koenig (2014) noted the rise of virtual for-profit undergraduate programs draws many prospective students away from in-person universities. Additionally, Koenig (2014) and Sawchuk (2015) noted low salary, increased scrutiny, and the added stress of high-stakes testing may contribute to the decline of prospective teachers.

The overall enrollment decline within teacher preparation programs is problematic. Additionally, the number of male educators in the elementary and early childhood fields continues to show low rates when compared to females (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). At UCM, the number of males declaring a major in elementary education has steadily declined since 2010, with the 2020/2021 school year seeing an all-time low of declared male majors with 21 (Reine, 2021). Similarly, the number of males with a declared major in early childhood education has remained low, with an annual average of three males; however, this average has remained steady since 2015 (Reine, 2021). Males face some of the same barriers that females face; however, males also encounter barriers such as sexual subjectification and social stereotypes (Cushman, 2007; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

It is important to explore what factors influence males’ decisions to explore a career as an elementary teacher. Additionally, it is essential for UCM to discover what brings males to UCM as their college for teacher education. Understanding these factors may contribute to an increase of males enrolling in UCM with a major in elementary education or early childhood education.
Implications within the Organization

The structural frame and human resources frames were used to view the current problem in practice. Reframing allows an individual to consider situations from different angles in order to better understand the situation (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This study seeks to examine what attracts men to the fields of elementary and early childhood education, what led those individuals to choose UCM as their university, and what factors led to their retention in the program. Therefore, it is important to consider the structural make-up of the organization and how that influences the communication of goals and plans within the College of Education. Additionally, it is important to consider how the College of Education meets the needs of male education majors and what may influence future growth in the program.

The structural frame allows the researcher to examine how the leadership within the organization communicates the mission, visions, goals, and plans within the university structure. This is especially important to understand considering the different levels within the hierarchy of UCM, from the Board of Governors to the program coordinators. As enrollment rates for on-line universities increase (Lee, 2017), brick and mortar institutions need to find ways to increase enrollment. Additionally, it is essential that the leadership at all levels at UCM have clear vertical coordination to ensure action plan items are carried out successfully. Finally, lateral coordination between school chairs, program coordinators, and faculty is important to meet the needs of the students and ensure a cohesive and strong program plan.

The human resource frame encourages the researcher to study how the needs of individuals and organization are met. While the human resources frame typically
considers the relationship between the employees and organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017), the same assumptions and principles found in the human resources frame can be applied to the relationship between the students in the College of Education and the university organization. Understanding the reasons why men choose the field of elementary education as an area of study and why they choose to attend UCM from their degree program is important in order to meet the needs of current and prospective students.

The College of Education needs to be aware of the specific needs and barriers men experience when entering the elementary education field. Bolman and Deal (2017) indicated an organization needs to respond to individual’s specific needs, desires, and help them to fulfill those individual’s lifestyle needs. The College of Education must first examine what attracts men to the elementary education field. It is also important for the College of Education to consider what attributes of the program of study will encourage or discourage enrollment into the program. For instance, Bolman and Deal (2017) noted a good fit between the organization and the individual leads to a “meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed” (p. 133). When organizations create a positive environment for all people, including those who may be considered outliers of the organization, in this case, males, individuals will be more motivated to sustain in their degree program.

**Implications within Leadership**

Leaders within organizations influence a group of individuals as they work toward common goals (Northouse, 2019). Strong leaders should maintain core values of leadership, including community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity (Schultz,
The UCM leadership hierarchy is one with many different levels, and while loose coupling is possible within the different levels, the University must operate with two main goals: provide an adequate educational experience for all students in their program of study and maintain a sustainable base of students. Communication and collaboration is necessary both laterally and vertically through the organization to ensure these goals are met.

Within the College of Education, enrollment numbers for all students has decreased (Reine, 2021). Additionally, the percentage of male students, when compared to their female counterparts in the programs of elementary education and early childhood development, has remained low (Reine, 2021). In order to address enrollment decline in the College of Education and the low rates of male prospective teachers, the leadership must identify the needs of the students and create action plans for meeting these needs.

Good leaders understand while they create a vision for the organization and set goals, it is the team that creates opportunities for successful implementation of the plans (Levi, 2017; Northouse, 2019). Within the College of Education, while there are many different levels of leadership, the faculty and instructors for the programs of study are the individuals who maintain sustainable contact with students. It is important for the leaders within the College of Education to empower these operating core employees (faculty, instructors, and adjunct employees) to share their knowledge of classroom strategies, instructional strategies, and interpersonal skills that meet the needs of male students. Empowering individuals to share their knowledge is a hallmark for effective leaders who work to build their team and capitalize on the knowledge and skillset of the team members (Kotter, 1990; Levi, 202017; Northouse, 2019). It is necessary for all
individuals of the College of Education to work together, under the guidance of the leadership, to identify how to meet the needs of male elementary and early childhood education majors in order to increase enrollment into the degree programs and retain current students.

**Summary**

The elementary and early childhood education fields experience low rates of male prospective teachers nationally (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). UCM enjoys a long-standing history as an effective institute for educating future teachers (University of Central Missouri, 2021a). Despite its history of success, UCM has noted a decline of elementary and early childhood education majors and has a consistently low average number of male enrollees in these programs (Reine, 2021).

The university needs to address the enrollment trends of male prospective students by examining what influences males to become elementary teachers and what leads them to enroll in UCM for completion of the degree program. The structural frame can be used to examine how UCM can communicate goals to different levels within the organizational structure. Additionally, the human resources frame can provide a framework to determine effective strategies the university can implement to meet the needs of students. The need for research in the area of male elementary teacher recruitment and retention is needed in order for UCM to grow and maintain enrollment for men seeking to teach in the elementary field.
SECTION III: SCHOLARLY CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY
Introduction

The low number of male elementary and early childhood teachers is problematic in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Male teachers also represent a low percentage of elementary and early childhood teachers internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Female teachers disproportionately represent the elementary and early childhood teaching field, with many countries having over 75% of their teachers as females (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016).

Male elementary and early childhood teachers provide many benefits to students and schools, including the ability to relate to male students, serving as role models for male and female students, and bringing diversity to the teaching staff (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sargent, 2000). Despite these benefits, men face barriers which discourage them from teaching, including sexual subjectification, social stereotypes, and low wages in the teaching profession (Cushman, 2007; Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

Men who choose to teach often do so with the encouragement of their family and influential role models (Buschor et al., 2013; Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Some men find the benefits of working with children and job security help them to overcome barriers to teaching (Buschor et al., 2013; Frei et al., 2017; Thornton, 2001). Colleges of education can implement strategies to attract and retain male preservice teachers by providing a network of support, consider curriculum adaptations, and discuss stereotypes faced by men who choose to teach (Foster & Newman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Santos & Amancio, 2019).
The purpose of this case study is to understand the experiences of male elementary and early childhood preservice teachers currently enrolled at UCM and male graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary and/or early childhood education. Furthermore, the case study will fill the gap in the literature surrounding the topic of male preservice teachers and graduates from UCM who major in elementary and/or early childhood education. The literature relevant to male elementary and early childhood teachers will be presented in this literature review, which will now be referred to as “elementary teachers” unless the existing research pertains specifically to early childhood teachers. Additionally, the theoretical framework identified for the study will be reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher will utilize the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to critically examine the factors that contributed to the participants’ career choices. SCCT is a subset of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the social constructivist paradigm (ASHE, 2006; Bandura, 1986; Mertens, 2020). The following sections examine the constructivist paradigm and its relationship to SCT. SCT will then be narrowed to focus on SCCT and why it is an appropriate framework through which to view this case study.

Constructivist Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm is centered on the core tenet of the theory: reality is socially constructed by individuals (Mertens, 2020). Researchers utilizing the constructivist approach are interested in the views, values, feelings, and beliefs of individuals rather than gathering facts (Creswell, 2007). A basic assumption of constructivism is the knowledge gained through the research is constructed by the
researcher and the participants (Mertens, 2020). The researcher identified the social constructivist paradigm as a guide for the current study because it seeks to raise awareness in a specific area, male elementary teachers, and their constructed reality.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

The Social Cognitive Theory utilizes an agentic perspective to development, learning, and change (Bandura, 2002). Bandura (2002) posited there are three modes of agency: personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency. Personal agency occurs when individuals work on their own for a desired outcome, whereas proxy agency occurs when people influence others to achieve an outcome. Collective agency occurs when individuals act in concert with each other to influence events. As such, learning occurs as a result of interactions with others and the environment to achieve a specific result (Bandura, 1986).

SCT further emphasizes the power of social and cultural influences on individuals. External and internal factors both influence an individual’s actions and decision making (Bandura, 2001). External social factors influence decision making and include economic conditions, family structures, and cultural influences (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2002) stated the most important internal factor influencing an individual’s actions is self-efficacy, the belief one produces desired results through actions. Self-efficacy influences an individual’s ability to motivate themselves, persevere in times of difficulty, and decision making (Bandura, 2002). The level of self-efficacy an individual has impacts occupational pursuits (Bandura, 2002). Bandura (2002) noted the higher an individual’s self-efficacy, the greater their ability to pursue occupational requirements, cope with hardships, and overcome external influences.
Social Cognitive Career Theory

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) builds upon SCT and attempts to understand the factors contributing to educational and occupational interests of individuals (Lent & Brown, 2013). SCCT examines cognitive-person variables, such as self-efficacy and goals, and how the variables interact with aspects of an individual, such as gender, to influence career development (Lent et al., 2000). The theory explores environmental factors such as social support, barriers, and how those factors influence career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013).

SCCT is concerned with how individuals make career decisions and adapt to career tasks and challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013). Lent and Brown (2013) described specific traits influencing an individual’s ability to adapt to career tasks and challenges: cognitive-person factors, contextual and personality factors, and the role of interests and abilities. Cognitive-person factors include several self-efficacy traits, specifically content or task-specific self-efficacy, coping efficacy, and process efficacy (Lent & Brown, 2013). Contextual and personality factors pertain to an individual’s support within their environment, as well as their personality traits (Lent & Brown, 2013). Finally, a person’s abilities and interests play a large role in an individual’s ability to adapt to occupational challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013).

SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2000) was chosen as the theoretical framework through which to view the study for several reasons. First, SCCT examines how outside influences, such as family and peer support, impact males to choose the field of elementary education. Additionally, SCCT will aid in determining how external forces impact motivation to stay in the education field. SCCT will also aid in identifying how
participant’s internal factors, such as self-efficacy, influenced their ability to complete their degree and cope with barriers in a predominately female occupation. Finally, the theory will contribute to the examination of how preservice and current teachers’ goals of becoming teachers were influenced by societal factors.

**Disproportion of Male Teachers in Elementary and Early Childhood Education**

The elementary teaching field represents about one third of the United States national public school teaching force (Ingersoll et al., 2018). From the 1987/1988 school year to the 2015/2016 school year, there was a 27% increase in the number of elementary teachers in the United States. Additionally, the number of new teachers joining the teaching field increased from 65,000 first-year public school teachers to 191,000 first-year teachers in the same time period (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Despite the expansion of the number of elementary public school teachers, the rate of male elementary teachers remained low. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), there were 1.8 million public school elementary teachers (pre-Kindergarten-6th grade) in the 2017/2018 school year. Male elementary teachers accounted for 11% of the total number of educators, a decrease of rate from the 12% experienced in the 1999/2000 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).

The United States is not the only country concerned with the disproportionate number of male elementary teachers. Multiple countries examined the need to increase the number of male teachers in the preschool-6th grades (Cushman, 2007; Frei et al., 2017, Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). Cushman (2007) stated male elementary teachers in New Zealand decreased from 42% to 18% between 1955 and 2005. Frei et al. (2017) noted
only 18.3% of primary school staff are male in Switzerland, despite the country providing teachers a higher salary than the United States. Sweden also experienced low rates of early childhood male teachers where 95% of preschool teachers were female (Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). In fact, the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) noted in most European Union states (except Finland) females are overrepresented in the primary and lower secondary education; most countries world-wide reported over 75% of their teaching staff are female.

### Need for Male Teachers

The disproportion of males in the primary teacher level is well documented. Multiple studies in the United States and internationally noted the low levels of male teachers in the elementary and early childhood levels. According to Malaby and Ramsey (2011), the 1991 study on gender factors by the American Association of Women ignited research into the field of gender equality in schools. Since then, multiple studies have been completed which document the low rates of male teachers (Ingersoll, et al., 2018; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).

The low rates of male elementary teachers led researchers to examine the need for males in the primary teaching field. Factors examined to explore the need for male teachers and their impact on young children included male teachers’ ability to relate to boys, male teachers as role models, and increasing diversity in staff (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Mills et al., 2004; Santos & Amancio, 2019).

### Ability to Relate to Male Students

The ability of male teachers to relate to male students was noted as a benefit of male teachers (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Santos &
Amancio, 2019). Santos and Amancio (2019) called for a balance between male and female elementary teachers because males can be references for boys. Additionally, they posited male teachers can relate better to boys than their female counterparts.

Mills et al. (2004) stated teaching has become highly feminized with a disproportion of female teachers, which negatively effects boys. The feminized aspect of teaching often emphasizes specific subjects, such as reading and writing, as opposed to more active topics, such as creating and building (Mills et al., 2004). Hedlin and Aberg’s (2013) study participants (male and female preservice teachers) said men bring a different dynamic to the classroom - they play differently (more daring) and males see things from a boys’ perspective and react differently to situations. Teachers and female research participants also noted some male teachers share the same interests with many boys, such as sports and building things, and could therefore relate to the students’ interests better than their female counterparts (McGrath & Sinclair, 2016).

The benefits of relating to the same gender do not only pertain to extracurricular interests. Cushman (2007) pointed out boys prefer to talk to other males when discussing personal or emotional issues. Likewise, McGrath and Sinclair’s (2016) research indicated male students preferred to talk with male teachers when dealing with specifically male issues, such as puberty. Interestingly, female students also indicated a personal benefit for having male teachers. Elementary female students discussed how they found benefit in having male teachers because they were able to learn how to interact appropriately with males outside of their male family members (McGrath & Sinclair, 2016).

The ability to relate to male and female elementary students is a benefit for male elementary teachers. Relating to students with extracurricular interests, personal issues,
and modeling positive interactions are strengths which male teachers may bring to the elementary classroom.

**Males as Role Models**

The benefits of male role models for elementary students have been widely noted. Cooney and Bittner (2001) stated male role models for children, particularly students in single-parent homes, is the main factor in many policies urging more male teachers. In fact, almost all studies concerning male elementary teachers contain descriptions of the benefits of males as role models in the elementary classroom (Cushman, 2007; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003).

Males as role models was also a theme expressed in many interviews and surveys of elementary students, parents, preservice teachers, and current male teachers (Foster & Newman, 2005; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Parents of elementary students expressed the need for positive role models for their male children. Foster and Newman (2005) noted several parents from single-parent households expressed excitement when discovering their male child would be in a class with a male teacher because their child needed a good male role model. Similarly, parents in McGrath and Sinclair’s (2013) study stated male teachers can act as a father figure for their children in class and can provide a good example of a male role model for both their female and male children.

Current male preservice teachers and elementary teachers recognized the importance of being a role model for their students. Study participants in Malaby and Ramsey’s (2011) study stated being role models for their students was the primary motivation for becoming a teacher. Likewise, participants in Sargent (2000) and Ponte’s (2012) studies desired to fill a role for male students in their elementary classroom and be
a positive impact on others. Montecinos and Nielson (2004) stated the participants in their study of male elementary teachers “heard and answered the call” (p.6) to be role models, especially when fathers were absent in families.

The importance of male teachers as role models is a sentiment echoed by parents, students, preservice teachers, and current elementary teachers (Foster & Newman, 2005; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Ponte, 2012; Sargent, 2000). Male teachers can help set examples for students and fill the needs of elementary students.

**Diversity in Staff**

Diversity in staff in elementary buildings is a benefit for students. Malaby and Ramsey (2011) pointed out teachers should represent the demographic of the population. Hedlin and Aberg (2013) further expanded on this notion and pointed out that schools should diversify not only in gender, but race and ethnicity as well.

Male teachers are often recognized as bringing a different facet to the classroom. Hedlin and Aberg (2013) stated males and females are perceived as having different ways of thinking and reasoning. Both gender perspectives represented in the school is appreciated by staff and students. Santos and Amancio (2019) found participants in their study believed males were more objective in their thinking and not reactive to situations, which helps to bring balance to the school building. McGrath and Sinclair (2013) articulated the need for balance in the school among genders, similar to the mother/father balance in the home. Further, Johnston et al. (1999) expanded on that notion when they stated it is important to have both males and females to guide and give instruction to students in the elementary level.
Male elementary teachers also help dispel perceived stereotypes in the school. Hedlin and Aberg (2013) noted when students see males and females working side by side on the same tasks it helps to dispel the view that females are the appropriate gender for elementary school teaching. Further, male elementary teachers believed they were serving as a cultural and behavioral counterweight in what is a predominately female job (Johnston et al., 1999), while participants in Santos and Amancio’s (2019) study thought they were providing a more balanced male reference for students in elementary school.

While it is significant to have more gender parity in elementary school, it is important to be careful that stereotypes are not furthered. Sargent (2000) noted male teachers are often asked to take on roles seen as more masculine, such as lifting heavy objects, solving technology problems, and confronting the school administration when problems arise. While the participants in this study accepted these roles, they did so with feelings of frustration. Malaby and Ramsey (2011) also found males were often seen as disciplinarians in schools, which is counter to how many male teachers wish to be viewed. Instead, male teachers desired to be perceived as paternal in their interaction with students, leaving the discipline matters to the school administration (Foster & Newman, 2005).

Increasing the diversity of teachers in the elementary level can have many positive effects on the students and staff. Cushman (2007) stated enhancing the diversity in male and female teachers better reflects the student and community diversity and is an important equity goal for schools. Male elementary teachers bring many benefits to students, male and female, and staff. Students can have male teachers to relate to in extracurricular areas and personal matters. Additionally, males can serve as role models...
for both boys and girls within the elementary school. Finally, the diversity in staff help to reflect the diversity seen in the home and community and provide equity for schools.

**Perceived Barriers of Male Preservice Teachers**

Many factors contribute to the lack of males teaching in the elementary levels. According to Skelton (2009), teaching in the primary level has historically been considered an inappropriate career choice for men because it is seen as a role only suited for females. Moss-Racusin and Johnson (2016) stated men in the elementary field often experience backlash for working in roles which violate gender stereotypes and societal expectations. Cushman (2005) noted negative reactions expressed by parents that males encounter when choosing to enter the elementary teaching role. Weaver-Hightower (2011) also explored discouragement from peers and families experienced by males entering the teaching field. Many barriers, explored in this section, may keep males from entering the elementary teaching field.

**Historically Female Role**

Teaching, particularly at the elementary levels, has historically been viewed as a female role (Martino, 2008). As schooling became compulsory in the 1800s, male teachers began to leave the primary level to teach at higher education institutions or more prestigious jobs as women joined the workforce (Malaby & Ramsey, 2011). Teaching emerged as an extension of mothering and nurturing children and was a role many young women filled until they were married (Martino, 2008). The idea that caring for and nurturing children was a primarily female role continued from the 1800s to the 1900s as more women entered the workforce and kindness, morality, and love were associated as women’s qualities (Hedlin & Aberg, 2012).
The perception of elementary level teaching being suited for females continued to the present day. Johnston et al. (1999) found in their qualitative research that both male and female preservice teachers perceived primary teaching to be more suited for females. The feminization of the role of teaching continued to contribute to the division of sexes in the teaching field, particularly in the primary grades (Martino, 2008).

**Low Salary**

Mills et al. (2004) noted the feminization of elementary teaching led to the opinion that teaching is a lower status position. Santos and Amancio (2019) stated low salary and status is one of the main contributors associated with lack of male teachers. Katz et al. (2018) reported, on average, inflation-adjusted teacher salary has changed little since the 1990s in the United States. In fact, current average teacher salaries in many states do not cover the cost of living (Katz et al., 2018). Johnston et al. (1999), in their study of preservice teachers, found men placed a higher emphasis on salary than women did. This statistically significant finding illustrated how salary can influence decisions to teach. Additionally, Hughes (2012) noted teachers who were satisfied with their salary were twice as likely to stay in the teaching field until retirement.

Male preservice teachers also expressed their fear of how lower salary may impact their family. In Cooney and Bittner’s (2001) focus group study, low salaries were discussed by male participants in each of their focus groups. Main points of concern were the inability to provide for their family in a low-paying job, as well as giving their spouse the ability to stay home with their own children and not work (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). Tucker (2015) also found evidence of salary being a perceived barrier when one of their male participants stated, “our society values money and the American ideal of
masculinity” (p. 14). Stroud et al. (2000) reiterated salary was a concern for many men, with male teachers working extra jobs during the summer to support their family or moving quickly from the classroom to higher paying administrative positions in the school.

**Sexual Subjectification**

Another barrier for male preservice teachers in the elementary level is sexual subjectification. Weaver-Hightower (2011) defined sexual subjectification as male teachers being, “sexually objectified, or perceived as always already sexual initiators or, worse, aggressors” (p. 109). Weaver-Hightower (2011) elaborated male elementary teachers expressed fear they will be perceived as homosexual or perceived as pedophiliac in their interactions with students. This is especially apparent in the elementary level where displays of affection are more prevalent than in secondary levels.

Moss-Racusin and Johnson (2016) found males were perceived to be a greater safety threat to children than their female counterparts. Skelton (2009) echoed this sentiment when she noted the societal implication that men may become a teacher to accomplish a sexual agenda. These feelings can lead to extra scrutiny from parents and employers, as Moss-Racusin and Johnson (2016) pointed out by noting, “men appear to be uniquely vulnerable to being labeled as gay when they encounter backlash for stereotype violations, which could significantly limit their enthusiasm for counter-stereotypic occupations such as teaching” (p. 388). In addition, in a 2000 survey of 440 NAEYC members (National Association for the Education of Young Children), one quarter of the respondents noted fear of abuse is a reason that men do not work with
young children and employers need to consider the legal liability for any accusations of abuse before hiring a male early childhood teacher (Nelson, 2000).

In his 2000 qualitative study, Sargent found most of his male participants described a level of scrutiny in their work as elementary teachers. The teachers described their reluctance in showing affection towards their students for fear they may be perceived as a homosexual or a may be perceived as a pedophile. Stroud et al. (2000) and Foster and Newman (2005) also described the extra caution and measures males take when interacting with elementary students, such as building trust with families before engaging in signs of physical affection with students. Several participants in Foster and Newman’s focus group described situations in which parents expressed concern their child(ren) were in a class with a male teacher. The male teachers also stated they felt extra scrutiny their female counterparts did not experience (Foster & Newman, 2005). A male teacher articulated his feelings when he stated “women’s laps are a place of love. Men’s are places of danger” (Sargent, 2000, p. 416).

Males face many barriers when considering entering the elementary level of teaching. As a historically female role, males encounter backlash from individuals who feel the job is suited for females. Additionally, low salary is a barrier for men who feel they need to be the breadwinner in a family. Finally, sexual subjectification is a difficulty many men encounter as they encounter individuals who feel they are predators in the classroom. Foster and Newman (2005) stated, “if we are to encourage more men to enter, and stay in, primary school teaching (rather than retreat into management), the privileges, disadvantages and assumptions about male primary school teachers must be questioned
and examined” (p. 355). These barriers must be examined and discussed in order to break down obstacles for male elementary teachers.

**Why Men Choose to Teach**

Barriers exist for men who consider entering the teaching field for primary students. Many reasons exist as to why men choose to continue to pursue teaching elementary children despite the barriers. It is important to consider the reasons why men choose to teach in order to identify and recruit future teachers.

**Encouragement from Family and Role Models**

Encouragement from family members was a large factor for many male teachers who pursued teaching in the elementary level (Buschor et al., 2013; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Male high school students interested in the teaching field noted they had family members who recognized the fit between the students’ abilities and the job requirements of the profession (Buschor et al., 2013). Mulholland and Hansen (2003) also recognized the importance of family member encouragement: all participants in their study noted support from both parents, while one specifically noted encouragement from his father. Some male teachers also shared experiences of family members recognizing the joy the men exhibited when they were in the classroom. One participant left the field of education to work a higher-paying job, only to be encouraged to return to the teaching field by his spouse because he was much happier as a teacher (Cooney & Bittner, 2001).

Male preservice teachers and current teachers recognized the impact of having a family member as a teacher (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Frei et al, 2017; Ponte, 2012; Tucker, 2015). Frei et al. (2017) found out of 13 study participants, ten stated they had a family member who was a current teacher who encouraged them to pursue a career. One
of Tucker's (2015) study participants detailed how working in his mother’s classroom growing up helped influence his decision to become a teacher. While this participant did not originally major in education, he decided to change his major when he realized how much he enjoyed working with children. Males who grew up with family members as educators were uniquely positioned to not only see first-hand the experiences of teachers, but were also able to interact with children from an early age (Cooney & Bittner, 2001).

Encouragement from role models was another important reason for males to become elementary teachers. Buschor et al. (2013) noted 12 out of 13 prospective students described experiences with close role models who encouraged them in their desire to be a primary teacher. Male preservice teachers and current teachers were also inspired by former teachers. Ponte (2012) noted participants who had favorable impressions of former teachers and role models were likely to become a teacher. Inversely, the participants in Ponte’s study also noted poor teachers also inspired them to become teachers. Role models are so important, one study found, “the most significant factor for students choosing education as a career seems to be the influence of a professional educator (teacher, principal, counselor) who served as a role model or mentor,” (Stroud et al. 2000, p. 57).

Families and teacher role models are uniquely positioned to either encourage or discourage male teachers to enter the elementary teaching field. Encouragement from those closest to prospective teachers has a positive impact on enrollment and retention in the teaching field.
Working with Children

Past work experiences with children motivated many males to pursue teaching at the elementary level. Many males noted their skills to work with young children, something their strong relationship with their mother helped develop (Malaby & Ramsey, 2011). Working in childcare roles, such as day cares or after-school programs, helped men find enjoyment and refine their motivation for working with children after their initial positive experiences working with children (Huber et al., 2000; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Coaching children in sports was also identified as a motivating factor for pursuing teaching (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003).

In addition to the tangible experiences from working with children, many preservice teachers also noted altruistic reasons for pursuing a teaching degree. Preservice teachers in England described working with children as enjoyable and challenging and they were excited to make a difference in the lives of children (Thornton, 2001). Ponte (2012) also stated participants looked forward to imparting knowledge and encouraging future students in their classrooms, reflecting the findings from Stroud et al. (2000) that preservice teachers hope to make a difference in the lives of children. One preservice teacher described how he wanted to help fill gaps left by absent father figures in his future classroom, as he experienced a lack of relationship with his father when he grew up (Malaby & Ramsey, 2011). Whether the motivation for working with children was tangible or altruistic, men overwhelmingly described working with children as a motivating factor for pursuing elementary education (Frei et al., 2017).
Job Security

Job security was another reason provided by many male preservice teachers and current teachers for pursuing a career in teaching. Despite the low salary, preservice teachers in Switzerland noted the high demand for teachers and job security as a reason for studying to become a teacher (Buschor et al., 2013). A participant in Mulholland and Hansen’s (2003) study shared he was encouraged by his father, who was a plumber, to pursue a teaching degree because of the good hours and job security. Johnston et al. (1999) also noted extrinsic factors, such as salary and job security, to be a significant reason why males pursue a teaching degree. Finally, in Turkey, male preservice teachers also listed the work conditions, another external factor, as a reason to pursue teaching, as opposed to the intrinsic reasons noted by female students (Sahin & Gelbal, 2016).

There are many reasons why males pursue teaching in the primary grades. For many men, the joy of working with children intrinsically motivates them while others described external factors, such as job security and easy working conditions, as a reason to pursue teaching. Finally, many male teachers were encouraged by family members and other role models to pursue the career. It is important to note reasons why men pursue teaching in order to understand how to best recruit men to the teaching profession.

Recruitment and Retention of Male Preservice Teachers

The low number of men interested in teaching in the primary level is apparent. Understanding factors which drive men to teach, as well as the barriers that influence them, are important to understand when examining recruitment and retention. Skelton (2009) noted, “Issues around gender and teaching careers continue to require consideration, and attention should be given to these in policy and promotion practices
and procedures” (p. 42). It is important to consider practices and policies implemented to recruit and retain male teachers, as well as explore the thoughts and experiences of current preservice teachers and male elementary teachers.

**Recruitment of Preservice Teachers: International Strategies**

Low college enrollment of men into the elementary and early childhood fields is experienced both in the United States and internationally. Countries have implemented strategies and policies to recruit more males with limited success. In Sweden, measures to recruit more males to the early childhood field began in the 1970s with free quotas, or opening up more seats for men who did not meet enrollment requirements; however, this did not increase the overall number of applicants (Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). Scotland also enacted a quota system for enrollment with little success (Cushman, 2007). Australia implemented several recruitment strategies aimed to increase enrollment, including scholarships specifically for men interested in teaching, as well as mentoring programs (Cushman, 2007; Mills et al., 2004.) While these strategies have been met with limited success, exploring practices and policies implemented in other countries can provide insight for what could be implemented in the United States.

**Recruitment and Retention: What the Men Say**

Examining the thoughts and experiences of current preservice teachers and current male teachers provide insight into successful practices for recruiting and retaining male elementary teachers. The following section examines practices which may be implemented in Colleges of Education and public schools to increase the number of male elementary teachers.
Male Mentors

Many male preservice teachers and current teachers described feelings of isolation during their college training (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Thornton, 2001). Participants in Mulholland and Hansen’s (2003) research described feeling left out in their college classes when they did not have other males with whom to communicate. The participants discussed seeking out opportunities to engage in more masculine activities with other men to make up for the lack of interaction with other males in education classes (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Thornton’s (2001) participants also described the need to be able to share college experiences with other men who are either familiar with the elementary field or who are current education students themselves.

The use of male mentors for preservice teachers was a recommendation provided by both participants and researchers in multiple studies (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Huber et al., 2000; Nelson, 2002; Skelton, 2009). Huber et al. (2000) recommended multiple support systems for men. "Professional organizations should include workshops, caucus groups, and male teachers in the field to serve as role models for men already in the field or those contemplating entering early childhood education" (Huber et al., p. 18). Cooney and Bittner (2001), Nelson (2002), and Skelton (2009) also recommended organizing men’s clubs and single-sex tutorial groups in college for male teachers in order to increase camaraderie and fellowship. Each of these strategies may help retain more male preservice teachers.

Curriculum Considerations

Colleges of education can also examine their curricular practices based on recommendations provided by preservice teachers and current male teachers. Male
Preservice teachers preferred hands-on, practical learning activities rather than theoretical practices in the college classroom (Geerdink et al., 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Male preservice teachers also differed in their preferences for coursework. Participants noted their college courses were geared more toward females because of the emphasis on reading and writing in course expectations (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Men also believed females were better at planning and organizing for coursework than the men (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003).

Mulholland and Hansen (2003) and Skelton (2009) recommended colleges consider differences in learning styles when planning course work and curriculum. Men tend to focus more on external factors (hands-on teaching and content knowledge) rather than internal teaching practices (theory and pedagogy) and colleges can ensure both are included in the curriculum (Geerdink et al., 2003; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Skelton, 2009). Geerdink et al. (2003) noted:

They [men] find themselves in a training course that employs professional concepts foreign to them and an atmosphere that is often too feminine to their liking. As the training does not really link up with their ideas of what is important, they have to cross further barriers in order to stay motivated whereas what they really need are more extrinsic motivational stimuli for study in general. (p. 593)

Additionally, Skelton (2009) recommended “gender [consideration] occupies a more prominent position in initial teacher education and continuing professional development courses” (p. 46). Implementing both internal and external teaching practices can help to create well-rounded teachers with hands-on activities to help engage learning.


**Acknowledge and Confront Bias**

Acknowledging and confronting the differences and biases inherent in the elementary and early childhood education fields is important to retain preservice teachers. Nelson (2002) noted the importance of recognizing and eliminating stereotypes present in college classes. For instance, Cooney and Bittner (2001) noted participants described textbooks that were biased towards female teachers and did not show examples of men teaching at the primary level.

Male preservice teachers also described biases experienced in their classroom from peers and instructors. Male participants described feeling as though they were considered to be “lazy” and “incompetent” and were not held to the same high standards as their female counterparts (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003, p. 221). Thornton (2001) also found male participants felt as though they were singled out because they were male and were treated as a novelty in the classroom. Huber et al. (2000) expanded on this description of tokenism when they described male participants being treated as a male representative (negatively or positively) for all males. Additionally, Santos and Amancio (2019) described how some males felt as though they were singled out more for their successes and failures because they were in the minority.

It is also important to acknowledge and discuss barriers and bias that may occur in the teaching field. Nelson (2002) recommended having up-front conversations about difficulties male teachers may have in the field, particularly related to concerns when working with young children. Foster and Newman (2005) agreed when they described “identity bruising” male teachers may encounter in the field when confronted with concerns about interaction with children and working in a feminized field.
Addressing issues of bias and barriers can be arduous. Foster and Newman (2005) articulated,

Raising these topics with trainee teachers is difficult, particularly at a time when a narrowing of the initial teacher training curriculum has left little space to address such issues. Male (and female) trainees are reluctant to acknowledge the significance of gender as an issue in relation to their identities as teachers although they generally accept that it may be an issue for their pupils in the classroom. (p. 355)

Despite these difficulties, engaging in these topics will help male students feel their difficulties are acknowledged and will demonstrate that steps are being made to increase their likelihood of success in college.

Summary

The elementary teaching field is a continually expanding field representing almost one-third of the public school teaching force (Ingersoll et al., 2018). In this large field, however, retaining quality teachers has proven to be difficult with a large portion of new teachers leaving the field within five years (Hughes, 2012). In addition to problems in retaining teachers, recruiting male teachers into the field of elementary education has proven to be problematic in the United States and internationally. Female teachers are disproportionately represented in the elementary and early childhood education levels, with many countries showing over 75% of their teachers in these fields as female (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).
The need for males in the beginning education levels has been explored in the United States and internationally. Research found men are able to relate to boys in the classroom through shared experiences (Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004). Male teachers also serve as role models for both male and female students (Cushman, 2007; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Finally, men bring diversity into a teaching staff in a field that is predominantly female (Cushman, 2007; Sargent, 2000).

There are several barriers which discourage men from choosing to teach in the primary level. First, teaching at the elementary level is an historically female profession and men who teach at that level are perceived to be breaking societal expectations (Cushman, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Low salary is also another barrier for men in a society which expects men to be breadwinners in the family (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Johnston et al., 1999). Finally, sexual subjectification, or the perception of being a sexual predator, causes many males to abstain from pursuing a teaching degree (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016, Nelson, 2002; Sargent, 2000).

While there are many barriers which keep men from choosing to teach, there are men who overcome these barriers. Encouragement from family members and influential role models are a strong reinforcement for men choosing to teach (Buschor et al., 2013; Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Additionally, the benefits of working with children and the source of job security are reasons why men choose to teach in the elementary levels (Buschor et al., 2013; Frei et al., 2017; Thornton, 2001).

Colleges of education can implement strategies to attract and retain male preservice teachers in the elementary field. A sense of community with other male
preservice teachers and male mentors in the field provides a network of support for preservice teachers (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Huber et al., 2000). Colleges should also consider curriculum considerations for male preservice teachers such as implementing hands-on activities which focus on practical aspects of teaching (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Finally, colleges of education, faculty, and students need to acknowledge and confront bias and stereotypes faced by men who choose to pursue a degree in the elementary teaching field (Foster & Newman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Santos & Amancio, 2019).

The review of literature highlighted the many issues surrounding the need for male elementary teachers, the barriers to becoming a teacher, and the steps colleges can take to recruit and retain male preservice teachers. Many men wish to simply be seen as a teacher. As one man discussed, “parents and pupils will look at me as a teacher—not as a man” (Foster & Newman, 2005, p. 352); however, steps need be to be taken in order for this to come to fruition.
SECTION IV: CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE
Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

The following presentation will be presented to the UCM College of Education and Provost. The College of Education at UCM has various avenues at which to present the research (M. Thomas, personal communication, June 29, 2021). The College of Education holds a Scholarship Symposium during which faculty within the COE present research to each other. The Dean of the College of Education also shared the Teacher Education Council, the College of Education Advisory Board, and meeting with UCM’s Provost would all be avenues to explore for dissemination of the research (A. McCoy, personal communication, June 14, 2021).

Each avenue presents different opportunities to share the information gained from the study with organizational leaders, as well as the faculty and instructors of the organization. Members of the leadership within the college have the power to initiate directives aimed at recruiting and retaining male elementary and early childhood teachers. Additionally, faculty and instructors will have the ability to implement practices within the college classroom that may increase retention of male preservice teachers.

The presentation is expected to be approximately one hour in length. The presentation will consist of a slideshow presentation. An executive summary will also be provided to those in attendance (see Appendix I).
I am excited to be here today to speak to you about the experiences of male preservice teachers and current teachers who majored in elementary and early childhood education at UCM.
The amount of male elementary and early childhood teachers is an area of concern in the United States and internationally due to the low number of male teachers. UCM experiences a low enrollment of male elementary and early childhood education majors, with an average of 6% of male enrollees a year. Male elementary and early childhood teachers offer many benefits, including the ability to relate to male students, serving as role models for students. Despite these societal benefits, few men choose to go into the elementary education field.
Male teachers are needed at the elementary level. Men have the ability to relate to male students, they can act as a role model for both male and female students, and they provide diversity to the teaching staff in elementary schools.
Though male teachers are needed, there are many factors contributing to the lack of men in the elementary field. Three main factors contribute to the lack of male teachers. These include elementary education being a historically female role, which is viewed as an extension of nurturing and mothering children. The low salary of teachers, which often does not cover the cost of living. Finally, sexual subjectification, when a male teacher is viewed as a sexual initiator or aggressor, and additional scrutiny was identified as another barrier described by male teachers.
Literature Review - Why Men Choose to Teach

Despite barriers, some men choose to teach at the elementary levels.

- **Encouragement from Family and Role Models**
  - Family members encouraged teaching pursuits, often pointing out the men's teaching ability (Buschor et al., 2013; Mutholland & Hansen, 2003; Porte, 2012)
  - Encouragement from role models, such as teachers and principals, is an important factor for male teachers (Buschor et al., 2013; Porte, 2012; Stroud et al., 2000)

- **Working with Children**
  - Past experiences with children (A+, daycare, after-school child care) encouraged men to teach (Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; Mutholland & Hansen, 2003; Thornton, 2001)

- **Job Security**
  - High demand for teachers provided job security (Buschor et al., 2013; Johnston et al., 1999)

Despite the perceived barriers of men entering the elementary teaching field, some men choose to teach. Encouragement from family and role models are an important factor for many men. Past experience working with children was also found to be a reason why men go into the field. Finally, job security, despite the low salary, was another factor which contributed to men teaching in the elementary levels.
Purpose of the Study

- The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the experiences of male elementary and early childhood preservice teachers currently enrolled at UCM and male graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary education or early childhood education.

By understanding the experiences of male preservice and current teachers from UCM, I hoped to gain an understanding of effective practices within the UCM College of Education.
This study answered the following overarching question: What are the perceptions of male preservice and early service teachers about their entry into the early childhood and/or elementary education profession? The additional probing questions to help understand this question were:

1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?
2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
3. What were the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?
Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) states learning develops in social situations through interactions with others and the environment (Bandura, 1986). The Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al. 2000) builds upon the SCT and attempts to understand contributing factors to the educational and occupational interests of individuals. Cognitive personal variables, such as self-efficacy and goals, and environmental factors such as social support, barriers, and educational experiences, influence how individuals make career decisions and adapt to challenges and career tasks.

This framework was identified for this study. External factors, such as social support and barriers, and internal factors, such as motivations and self-efficacy, were examined to determine the influence they have on the participants’ decision to become teachers.
The College of Education (Reine, 2021) reported an average of 597 students with a declared major in elementary education or early childhood education from the academic years 2010/11 to 2020/21. Of those students, male students made up an average of 6% of the total enrolled students majoring in elementary education or early childhood education (average of 36 men in elementary and average of 4 men in early childhood education).

The range of male students who declared a major of elementary education was much higher than those who declared a major of early childhood education. The average percentage of males enrolled as an elementary major was 6.0%, whereas the average of males enrolled as an early childhood major was 1.9%. During the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, the College of Education documented its lowest percentage of males who declared majors in elementary and early childhood, reporting 5.1% and 5.0% respectively.
The researcher used a case study approach to explore male elementary preservice teachers and graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood program at UCM. The intent of this study was to develop a detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon, male preservice teachers and male graduates of the program, from the point of view of the participants.
One-on-one interviews were held with current male students, program graduates, and faculty and administrators in the College of Education. A focus group was conducted after all interviews were completed and was offered to all current male students and graduates of the program who participated in an interview. During the focus group, initial findings as a result of the interviews were discussed with the participants. Additionally, the participants provided feedback on recommendations presented by the researcher. Finally, three observations were conducted within the College of Education: two in a public setting in the passing period between classes and one during a class session.
The 28 participants in this study consisted of current students, graduates of the program, and current and former faculty and administrators in the program.

The College of Education reported 17 current male students, freshman to seniors, who declared a major in elementary education or early childhood education. All students were contacted via email by the researcher and five students agreed to be interviewed.

There were 71 male students who graduated with a degree in elementary education or early childhood education from December 2009 through May 2021. The College of Education provided email addresses for men who fit the criteria for the study. Emails were sent to these men and a public Facebook post made by the researcher was shared by people with connections to the College of Education. Sixteen male graduates responded to the research request and were interviewed by the researcher.

Seven people affiliated to the College of Education were interviewed. These individuals included administrators within the College of Education, as well as current and former faculty members who interview participants noted were influential in their educational journey.

The focus group consisted of four men who participated in a one-on-one interview. An additional current student joined the focus group who was not originally interviewed. The current student was observed by the researcher in the College of Education and was invited to participate in the focus group.

Of the 21 male participants interviewed, eight participants were either former students of the researcher at UCM or were hosted in the researcher’s classroom as part of their preservice observation/student teaching experience.
Findings

RQ 1: What led men to pursue their degree in elementary or early childhood education?

RQ 2: What practices were effective in recruiting and retaining men?

RQ 3A: What were the collegiate experiences of men?

RQ 3B: What were the experiences of male graduates?

There were four main areas examined based upon the research questions. Each research question produced four main findings. These findings, as well as quotes from participants, will be highlighted in the following slides.
There were four main findings for what led the participants to pursue a degree in education. The following slides will detail these four findings.

Research Question 1: What Led Men to Pursue their Degree?

- Encouragement and Support from Trusted Adults
- Elementary Education not the First Choice
- Experiences with Children in High School and College
- Making an Impact
There were four main findings related to the questions of what led the participants to pursue a degree in education. First, the participants noted encouragement and support from their families and trusted adults, such as teachers, was a large reason they pursued a degree. All but one of the participants shared they had the full support of their family when they chose to pursue education. The participants also noted trusted adults, such as principals and teachers, had a positive influence on their decision-making.

Jack described the support from his family when he shared his concern about his income as a teacher. Robert also shared how his parents were always incredibly supportive of his decisions and were very happy when he found his niche in teaching.

Other participants, such as Owen, described the support he received from trusted adults in school. Owen described how the superintendent, principal, and assistant principal encouraged him to pursue elementary education after positive reports from parents whose children attended the summer aid program in which he taught. (I did student aid one summer. I just enjoyed it… First day senior year of high school, I got called to the superintendent's office. I talked with [the superintendent, principal, and vice principal], and they all told me I need to go into elementary ed. because of all the parent phone calls they got from the summer school kids. That's why I chose elementary ed.)

Landon, a graduate, also described the support he received from community members. He said, “I will talk to them and they were like “That’s really cool. What made you decide to do that? I think you’ll be a good teacher!”
Interestingly, of the 21 participants in the study, 17 of the men pursued another degree program or career before choosing elementary education. Some participants, such as Brandon, they originally considered another area of education. Brandon began as a middle school education major, but changed his major to elementary after substitute teaching. Zane, who began as a high school education major, also switched his major after substituting because he enjoyed the hands-on nature of the elementary classroom. For others, such as Robert, their original choice was completely different, such as criminal justice, architecture, aviation, nursing, or business. Two participants, Jack and Rodney, changed tried multiple degree programs before coming to the elementary program. They both described wanting to work with children in some way and how they felt fulfilled once they began their education degree program.
All participants discussed experiences they had in high school or college with children, such as working with before or after school child care or tutoring students for their A+ hours. The participants whose first degree program choice was elementary education, such as Keith, described multiple experiences of working with children. Keith described working with children in middle school, helping teachers in the classroom, and working with children in high school.

Participants who changed their major described how recalling past experiences with children helped them to choose to pursue elementary education. Jacob had completed two years in another education field before he worked in a summer program. After working with elementary-aged children, he decided to change his major to elementary education. Ethan, feeling unhappy in his physical therapy degree program, recalled the tutoring preschoolers in high school, which encouraged his to change his degree program. Jack, who changed his major three times, had a summer job in college working in a summer camp with 5-12 year olds. He shared he received several awards while working at the camp because he did well with the children, and his boss and coworkers encouraged his to be a teacher.
Finally, nine of the participants stated that making a difference in the lives of children led them to pursue a degree in elementary education. Anthony pointed out all the different ways he wanted to impact students, including academically and personally. Charles recalled the struggles he experienced in school and he wanted to be a person who could help students with early intervention who were struggling. Owen also described how being an elementary teacher would help him to inspire “tomorrow’s future.”
When examining what led men to the UCM education program and helped them to stay, there were four main areas that contributed to the recruitment and retention in the elementary and early childhood education programs. Each of these areas will be examined in the following slides.

Research Question 2: What Practices Were Effective in Recruiting and Retaining Men?

- Support from Instructors
- Logical Progression of Classes
- Field Experience
- Direct Communication
All participants described the depth of support from the faculty in the College of Education. The support was displayed professionally and personally. Many of the participants described the extra time the professors put into answering their questions during class and after class. Anthony and Zane both described the multiple times they went in to speak with their professors after class and how welcomed they felt during those discussions. The participants also shared how the professors wanted them to be successful as teachers. Jacob used the term “coached up” to describe how the professors encouraged him to reflect and refine his teaching practices during the program.

The professors also supported the participants personally as the professors demonstrated empathy and support for the participants. Many of these men shared personal stories of how their professors went the extra mile to support them. Charles described a professor, who was highlighted by other participants, and how she supported him throughout college and after he graduated. Other participants shared personal hardships they encountered while in college and how the professors were understanding and supportive during those times, such as when a family member passed away.
Five participants also discussed the logical progression of classes, noting the content and field experiences built upon one another. Sawyer described how the information he received on his tour from Dr. McCoy, such as the progression of classes, how the courses built upon each other, and the field experiences, encouraged him to choose UCM over the other schools he chose. Rodney, a graduate, also describe the progression of classes and observations built upon each other. He said, “The first year, you go into the room and you just observe and learn the basics. Then they move you into the next spot where you go in and teach the kids in your little small group. And finally, you move into the student teaching part where you have the full class. It’s where you’re not thrown into the fire right away.”
Research Question 2: What Practices Were Effective in Recruiting and Retaining Men?

- Field Experience
  - Multiple, early field experiences helped students to choose UCM as their college
  - The amount of time in the classroom impacted their retention

Another positive was just being in the classroom and figuring out that this is what I want to do. That was a very reassuring thing for me that I was doing something that I don’t mind doing for life.”

Jack, current student

The field experiences offered were something 11 participants noted. Four men noted they specifically chose UCM because of the amount of in-school observations and experiences which are built into the program; Jack shared the amount of field experience is something that sets the UCM program apart from other elementary education programs. Participants, such as Andrew and Brandon, described how the multiple field experiences helped them to see different teachers engage with students in different way. Then participants also described the positive experiences with their host teachers. Robert said he believed the university and schools worked hard to place the UCM students with someone who would help inspire and teach the future teachers. These men shared the time in the classroom with the students helped them to stay engaged. For example, Jack described how hard it was during COVID to be out of the classroom and only be involved virtually. However, being able to go back into the classroom for this senior block class encouraged him to stay in the teacher education program.
Finally, the direct communication from faculty gave the participants a clear understanding of expectations in coursework and how to improve in their field experiences. Brandon and Keith both described the specific, honest feedback they received from their instructors. Keith appreciated how the professors did not “sugar coat” their feedback. The professors also noted how the specific and direct feedback was appreciated by males in the program. Four of the instructors interviewed noted how male students tend to appreciate the direct feedback from professors and improve on those areas discussed. In fact, one professor, who was highlighted by three participants as an influential instructor, noted the following: “If I notice that you need to iron your clothes, I’m going to tell you to iron your clothes. They’ve committed themselves and they’ve committed their time and money. And for me to beat around the bush and them ‘foo, foo’ – no.”
The third research question examined the collegiate experiences of men. Current students and graduates were asked about positive and negative experiences while in the program. There were four main findings: field experiences, support from professors, communicating with females, and class involvement.
Current students and graduates of the program were asked about positive and negative experiences while in the program. All men described positive experiences from their time in the field including working with students, host teachers, and the staff. Only one participant noted a negative experience in their field experience, in which he did not feel fully welcomed into one of his field experience placement. However, the participants described many positive experiences of learning how to be a teacher and being supported in other placements.
The support the participants received from professors was noted on the previous research question; however, this theme continued to be apparent during the discussion of their college experiences. These men reflected on specific instances during which the professors supported them in the classroom and supported them through difficult personal times. For instance, the graduate highlighted in this slide shared about when he hit “rock bottom” and was struggling in his personal life and with classes. His advisor suggested he speak to his professors to get an exempt to be able to retake the courses. The second chance his professors gave to him impacted the participant greatly. Several participants became emotional as they shared they would not have completed their program had they not had the support of their professors.
The participants also shared how they navigated communicating with females. Sixteen participants discussed adjusting their communication styles when they interacted with their female classmates and instructors. Nine of the participants specifically addressed being respectful to their female peers in their communication, which included being aware of the words they used, using manners, and their being aware of their body language. Interestingly, seven of the participants preferred to communicate in a direct, even blunt, way. However, they discussed adjusting this communication style as they worked in a predominately female field. Joel recalled a conversation with his male host teacher in which the host told him, “Dude, you’re going to have to get used to this. You’re going to be working with primarily women the rest of your career, so just get used to it.”
Participants and faculty also discussed how men will often be observers during their classes, working to understand the classroom norms before they become involved in classroom discussions. Five participants specifically noted that they tended to observe in the classroom before becoming actively involved. Owen shared specific advice to incoming men in the program when he said, “Sit back and watch the norms. Because you could say something that could make someone very upset.” Three instructors noted the men in classes tend to observe in class before become engaged. Two professors shared male students are typically very involved in their field experiences with students, but tend to be more reserved in the classroom.
Male graduates discussed being a male teacher. Four main findings were produced: making a difference, fight against misconceptions, staying true to yourself, and support from coworkers.
The participants described their ability to be a positive male role model for their students, both female and male. Eleven of the 16 participants discussed how their presence in the classroom positively impacted their students. They shared stories of being a father figure to students and building positive relationships with students, particularly for students who do not have a positive male role model. Participants, just as Jacob, described how he can demonstrate positive actions, such as being able to emotionally regulate and be successful in education, can provide a good model for his male students.
The participants also shared how they need to be considerate of misconceptions directly related to them being male teachers. They described the need to be considerate and vigilant of how they interact with students, such as being mindful of how they physically interact and speak with students. Four of the 16 current teachers described specific negative experiences with parents when they initially found out their child’s teacher was a male; however, three of those participants went on to describe how those parent’s feelings changed toward them throughout the year. Four participants also described specific positive reactions from parents when the parents found their child’s teacher was a male.
The participants also described the importance of staying true to yourself as a teacher. For some men like Brandon and Brad, that meant being the sports-driven, rough and tumble teacher. For others, like Robert, that meant showing emotion in the classroom to students. Regardless of their personality type, it was important to the participants to not change themselves or their personality as teachers.
Research Question 3B: What Were the Experiences of Male Graduates?

- Support from Coworkers
  - Support from team and administration

Stick with it, but find people who can support you and who you can open up to, and you don’t have to be perfect.

Landon, graduate

Finally, these men described the positive support they received from their coworkers and the administration. Nine of the 16 participants shared specific stories in which their coworkers or administrators went beyond their expectations to help them. Rodney and Justin both described how their coworkers helped them starting in the summer with setting up their classroom. Shane, Ethan, Charles, Robert, and Keith all described their grade level teams as family who are very supportive of each other. Finally, Brandon and Anthony discussed how their administrators are supportive people who they feel comfortable reaching out to in times of need.
At each stage of the participants’ journey to become a teacher, the connections in their lives helped to shape and guide them into the professionals they eventually became. Participants highlighted the importance of support and encouragement from trusted people in their lives when they made the decision to become a teacher. Connections within the College of Education and in their field experiences provided the support they needed to face difficulties during their college experiences. Finally, as teachers, the connections with their students, families, and coworkers provided the participants with the support they needed to be successful teachers.
The imagery of connections is important to consider when reflecting on effective practices to recruit and retain male teachers. First, providing men with early, positive experiences with children can provide the foundation for a future in education. Supportive people, such as teachers in high school and host teachers for A+ placements, can also provide the first strands in this connective web. For colleges of education, the first experiences within the college, such as touring the building and speaking with faculty, can help prospective students begin to feel connected to the college. Most importantly, the atmosphere and culture within the college of education, from the interactions in the hallway to the interactions within the classroom, provide the necessary tools to build more connections, which leads to retention in the education program.
The following recommendations are centered around the need to retain male teachers within the College of Education at UCM and encourage the enrollment of male students into the elementary and early childhood education program. The following recommendations target four core areas: Administration, curriculum, faculty, and collaboration.
The first administrative recommendation for the College of Education involves placing men in the same course section during the block classes their Junior and Senior year. Preservice teachers in their Junior and Senior year at UCM are placed within a block of classes on campus for coursework. There are multiple sections in each block. By scheduling at least two males together in a section, the men would be able to have connections with other men and support from peers.

The second recommendation is to provide at least one field experience with a highly effective male host teacher for each male preservice student. Elementary education is a predominantly female occupation; therefore, the majority of field experiences involve a placement with a female host teacher. However, it is important for male preservice teachers to have at least one placement for field experience with a highly effective male host teacher. Graduates of the program who were placed with a male host described the benefits of observing and having a model of how to interact with students as a male teacher. A male host teacher would also provide another support system for current male students.

Finally, the last recommendation is to employ at least one male professor in the College of Education who works with students. The participants noted benefits of having a male professor. These included the different communication style of the professor, the ability to see representation of males in the College of Education, and being able to relate to another male.
Men face scrutiny as elementary teachers and current teachers in this study discussed additional precautions they take in the classroom. While the men discussed things they need to be aware of, few men had discussions of these topics in college. When asked, all men believed these discussions would have been extremely beneficial to them as future teachers. The men also believed these discussions should occur multiple times, in a group setting. During interviews and the focus group, the participants described different topics of discussion which would be beneficial for preservice teachers. Those topics were considered when making the following recommendations.

It is recommended that two panel discussions occur. The panel discussions should consist of current male and female teachers discussing and answering questions of the preservice teachers. The first panel discussion should occur during the Introductory Field Experience class. This is the first class many college students are in which involves time in the classroom. The first panel would focus on professional ethics and etiquette topics.

The second panel discussion should occur during the Junior block class. This is a time when students are in the same classroom working with small groups of students. It is recommended this panel discuss topics more in-depth and include a discussion of scenarios which may occur in the classroom and how the situation could be handled.

Curricular Recommendations

- Introductory Field Experience class - panel of current teachers to discuss professional ethics and etiquette
  - interact appropriately with coworkers
  - appropriate physical interactions with students (male and female)
  - effective means of communicating with parents
  - appropriate verbal interactions with students (male and female)

- Panel discussion during Junior block class - discuss topics in-depth, with discussion of scenarios
  - how to handle hygiene issues
  - how to handle bathroom issues (buttoning, wiping, accidents)
  - scenarios about physical and verbal interactions with students
  - be aware of students’ comfort level (past trauma)

“I think it would be helpful just because it’s something that’s going to happen, something I’m going to encounter. So any more information that could be discussed about it would be helpful.”

Todd, current student

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All participants spoke positively of the faculty within the College of Education. The additional time and effort put forth by the professors to help students in their educational journey was apparent. Many of these men spoke of the family-like atmosphere in the college. It is, therefore, recommended that the College of Education continue to create and maintain the supportive environment for the students.

It is also recommended the faculty continue to consider each student on a case-by-case basis and how the student prefers to communicate. The majority of the men interviewed preferred a direct communication style from professors. This “tell it to me straight” attitude was also the communication style of the instructors whom the participants recognized as being influential in their college career. Therefore, it is recommended the faculty consider how to best communicate with their students and adjust their style as needed.

Finally, it is recommended faculty be mindful of how they describe the employment experiences of men as elementary teachers. Many participants described faculty and fellow students saying things such as “you’ll get a job because you’re a guy” and “men will always get a job.” This was frustrating for many men who felt their hard work was not being recognized. Additionally, many of the participants experienced difficulty finding employment.
Creating and maintaining connections was a theme throughout the analysis of data. The participants discussed the importance of relationships with others and how beneficial it is to have other men with shared experiences. The two recommendations for collaboration involve connecting men in the elementary education field.

The first recommendation is for the College of Education to compile a list of current men in education who would be willing to serve as a mentor for current male students. These mentors would be able to answer questions, share their experiences, and provide advice for current students.

The second recommendation is the creation of a grassroots Facebook group created and moderated by male preservice teachers and graduates of an elementary education program. The goal of this group is to provide an avenue for men to exchange ideas, seek advice, and provide support for others in the elementary teaching field.
Discussion: Questions and Answers

I would be happy to answer any of your questions.
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SECTION V: CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP
Target Journal

The *Journal of Teacher Education* is the flagship journal of American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (ACTED) (SAGE Journals, n.d.). The *Journal of Teacher Education* aims to provide knowledge to prepare and support teachers and teacher education (SAGE Journal, n.d.). One of the *Journal of Teacher Education*’s fundamental goals is to “address the increasingly complex issues confronting teacher education at the national and global levels. These issues include but are not limited to...recruitment and retention of teachers from underrepresented groups,” (SAGE Journal, n.d. Aim and Scope). Published five times a year, the *Journal for Teacher Education* utilizes a blind peer review process with a 5% acceptance rate (Cabell, n.d.).

The *Journal for Teacher Education* was selected as the target journal for several reasons. First, the journal is the flagship publication for the AACTE which represents more than 800 postsecondary institutions, including the University of Central Missouri, with teacher education preparation programs. The AACTE’s mission is elevate teacher education preparation through research, professional practice, advocacy, inclusion, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (AACTE, 2021a). The AACTE’s mission of enhancing teacher education programs, as well as promoting diversity within the field of education aligns with the goals of the research: explore why men, an underrepresented group, pursue degrees in elementary and early childhood education. Further, the research will aim to identify successful practices for recruitment and retention of men in the elementary and early childhood education fields.

The *Journal for Teacher Education* also serves as a research forum for individuals who interact with and support future teachers (SAGE Journal, n.d.). While the research
will focus specifically on UCM and the male preservice teachers and graduates of UCM, the knowledge gained from the study can be generalized to other teacher education preparation institutions. Therefore, the journal provides an audience of practitioners who can utilize this knowledge gained from the study for the betterment of their institution.

The *Journal for Teacher Education* also displayed interesting analytics when viewed on Cabell’s Journalytics information (n.d.). For instance, the Altmetric Report indicated a median of 48 mentions per article from the journal. This median score is higher than other journals within the same scope of research. Additionally, the Altmetric Report indicated articles were mentioned on (to name a few) Facebook (37), blogs (25), Twitter (1,520) and Mendeley (32,507) (Cabell, n.d.). The frequency and types of mentions of articles from the journal indicated several things. First, the high number of mentions on Mendeley indicate a high frequency of researchers have saved article citations from the journal as a resource for reviews of literature and/or research. Therefore, articles published in the journal are recognized as research-worthy citations. Additionally, the high incidence of mentions in more contemporary avenues, such as Twitter and Facebook, indicates articles are also shared by practitioners in the field. The researcher desires to produce a dissertation in practice, and, 1) contribute to the field of study and 2) produce knowledge that is able to be disseminated easily for the practical purpose of increasing the recruitment and retention of male elementary and early childhood teachers. The Altmetric Report of the *Journal for Teacher Education* indicated articles published in this journal have found success in one or both of these areas.

Finally, the selected journal aims to use evidence from research to address teacher education issues present nationally and internationally (SAGE Journal, n.d.). The number
of males in the elementary and early childhood field are significantly lower than females internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Research into this area is one that has implications for teacher preparation institutions nationally and globally. Therefore, publishing research in a journal that has an audience in the global community is necessary.

**Plan for Submission**

SAGE Journal (n.d.) utilizes ScholarOne Manuscripts as the submission platform for journal articles. Researchers may submit an article at any time through the platform for the blind review process. The *Journal of Teacher Education* is published five times a year. After reviewing previous issues of the journal, it does not appear as though the journal limits published articles to a specific theme per journal. Therefore, the researcher will plan to submit a journal-ready article through ScholarOne Manuscripts, provided on the SAGE Journal website, following a successful defense of the dissertation in practice.

All journal submissions for the *Journal of Teacher Education* must be typed, double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point font (SAGE Journal, n.d.). Additionally, all submissions must follow *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) guidelines and not exceed 10,000 words (SAGE Journal, n.d.).
Where Are All the Good Men? A Qualitative Case Study

Abstract

The low number of male elementary and early childhood teachers is an area of concern in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020) and internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). This qualitative case study examined the experiences of 21 men who were either current students or graduates in an elementary and/or early childhood education program at a Midwest university to determine practices which influenced recruitment and retention in the program. Findings indicated positive social connections with professors, peers, students, and host teachers contributed to retention in the education program. This study presented recommendations focused on the retention of men in an elementary education preparation program.

Keywords: male preservice teachers, male elementary teachers, college of education, male primary teachers, early childhood education, elementary education, recruitment, retention

Introduction

The number of male elementary and early childhood teachers is an area of concern in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020) and internationally (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016) due to the low number of male teachers. The elementary teaching field represents about one third of the United States national public school teaching force (Ingersoll et al., 2018). From the 1987/1988 school year to the 2015/2016 school year, there was a 27% increase in the number of elementary teachers in the United States. Additionally, the number of new teachers...
joining the teaching field increased from 65,000 first-year public school teachers to 191,000 first-year teachers in the same time period (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Despite the overall expansion of the number of elementary public-school teachers, the rate of male elementary teachers remained low. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), there were 1.8 million public school elementary teachers (pre-Kindergarten-6th grade) in the 2017/2018 school year. Male elementary teachers accounted for 11% of the total number of educators, a decrease of rate from the 12% experienced in the 1999/2000 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).

Colleges of education play a vital role in providing preservice teachers with the necessary skills to be an effective teacher. Colleges of education can implement strategies to attract and retain male preservice teachers, such as providing a support network for current preservice teachers, implementing curriculum adaptations to meet the needs of the male students, and discussing stereotypes faced by men who choose to teach (Foster & Newman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Santos & Amancio, 2019).

This qualitative case study examined the experiences of 21 men who were either current students or graduates in an elementary and/or early childhood education program at a Midwest university to determine practices which influenced recruitment and retention in the program. While there have been multiple studies of potential and current teachers, no studies were found examining both current preservice teachers and graduates from the same institution. This study addressed the gap in the literature by determining practices which influenced recruitment and retention of elementary and early childhood education majors at the targeted university by examining the experiences and beliefs of
current male preservice teachers and men who graduated with a degree in elementary education or early childhood education.

**Literature Review**

The low rates of male elementary teachers led researchers to examine the need for males in the primary teaching field. Factors examined to explore the need for male teachers and their impact on young children included male teachers’ ability to relate to boys, male teachers as role models, and increasing diversity in staff (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Mills et al., 2004; Santos & Amancio, 2019).

The ability of male teachers to relate to male students was noted as a benefit of male teachers (Cushman, 2007; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013; Mills et al., 2004; Santos & Amancio, 2019). Hedlin and Aberg’s (2013) study participants noted men bring a different dynamic to the classroom - they play differently (more daring) and males see things from a boys’ perspective and react differently to situations. Teachers and female research participants also noted some male teachers share the same interests with many boys, such as sports and building things, and could therefore relate to the students’ interests better than their female counterparts (McGrath & Sinclair, 2016).

The benefits of male teachers as role models for elementary students have been widely noted. Cooney and Bittner (2001) stated male role models for children, particularly students in single-parent homes, is the main factor in many policies urging more male teachers. In fact, almost all studies concerning male elementary teachers contain descriptions of the benefits of males as role models in the elementary classroom (Cushman, 2007; Malaby & Ramsey, 2011; McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Current male preservice teachers and elementary teachers recognized the
importance of being a role model for their students: participants in Sargent’s (2000) and Ponte’s (2012) studies desired to fill a role for male students in their elementary classroom and be a positive impact on others.

Diversity in staff in elementary buildings is a benefit for students. McGrath and Sinclair (2013) articulated the need for balance in the school among genders, similar to the mother/father balance in the home. Further, Johnston et al. (1999) expanded on that notion when they stated it is important to have both males and females to guide and give instruction to students in the elementary level.

**Perceived Barriers of Male Preservice Teachers**

Many factors contribute to the lack of males teaching in the elementary levels. According to Skelton (2009), teaching in the primary level has historically been considered an inappropriate career choice for men because it is seen as a role only suited for females. Moss-Racusin and Johnson (2016) stated men in the elementary field often experience backlash for working in roles which violate gender stereotypes and societal expectations. Cushman (2005) noted negative reactions expressed by parents that males encounter when choosing to enter the elementary teaching role.

Mills et al. (2004) noted the feminization of elementary teaching led to the opinion that teaching is a lower status position. Santos and Amancio (2019) stated low salary and status is one of the main contributors associated with lack of male teachers. Johnston et al. (1999), in their study of preservice teachers, found men placed a higher emphasis on salary than women did. Male preservice teachers also expressed their fear of how lower salary may impact their family. In Cooney and Bittner’s (2001) focus group
study, low salaries were discussed by male participants in each of their focus groups, primarily the concern to be able to provide for their family.

Another barrier for male preservice teachers in the elementary level is additional scrutiny as a male teacher. Moss-Racusin and Johnson (2016) found males were perceived to be a greater safety threat to children than their female counterparts. Skelton (2009) echoed this sentiment when she noted the societal implication that men may become teachers to accomplish a sexual agenda. Stroud et al. (2000) and Foster and Newman (2005) also described the extra caution and measures males take when interacting with elementary students, such as building trust with families before engaging in signs of physical affection with students.

**Recruitment and Retention of Male Preservice Teachers**

The low number of men interested in teaching in the primary level is apparent. Examining the thoughts and experiences of current preservice teachers and current male teachers provides insight into successful practices for recruiting and retaining male elementary teachers, despite perceived barriers. The following section examined practices recommended by researchers which may be implemented in colleges of education to increase the number of male elementary teachers.

Many male preservice teachers and current teachers described feelings of isolation during their college training (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Thornton, 2001). Participants in Mulholland and Hansen’s (2003) research described feeling left out in their college classes when they did not have other males with whom to communicate. Thornton’s (2001) participants also described the need to share college experiences with other men.
who are either familiar with the elementary field or who are current education students themselves.

The use of male mentors for preservice teachers was a recommendation provided by both participants and researchers in multiple studies (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Huber et al., 2000; Nelson, 2002; Skelton, 2009). Huber et al. (2000) recommended multiple support systems for male teachers. Cooney and Bittner (2001), Nelson (2002), and Skelton (2009) also recommended organizing men’s clubs and single-sex tutorial groups in college for male teachers in order to increase camaraderie and fellowship. Each of these strategies may help retain more male preservice teachers.

Colleges of education can also examine their curricular practices based on recommendations provided by preservice teachers and current male teachers. Male preservice teachers preferred hands-on, practical learning activities rather than theoretical practices in the college classroom (Geerdink et al., 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Mulholland and Hansen (2003) and Skelton (2009) recommended colleges consider differences in learning styles when planning course work and curriculum. For example, men tend to focus more on external factors (hands-on teaching and content knowledge) rather than internal teaching practices (theory and pedagogy) and colleges can ensure both are included in the curriculum (Geerdink et al., 2003; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Skelton, 2009).

Acknowledging and confronting the differences and biases inherent in the elementary and early childhood education fields is important to retain preservice teachers. Nelson (2002) identified the importance of recognizing and eliminating stereotypes present in college classes. For instance, Cooney and Bittner (2001) noted participants
described textbooks as biased towards female teachers and did not show examples of men teaching at the primary level.

Male preservice teachers also described biases experienced in their classroom from peers and instructors. Male participants described feeling as though they were considered to be “lazy” and “incompetent” and were not held to the same high standards as their female counterparts (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003, p. 221). Thornton (2001) also found male participants believed they were singled out because they were male and were treated as a novelty in the classroom.

It is also important to acknowledge and discuss barriers and bias that may occur in the teaching field. Nelson (2002) recommended having up-front conversations about difficulties male teachers may have in the field, particularly related to concerns when working with young children. Foster and Newman (2005) agreed when they described “identity bruising” male teachers may encounter in the field when confronted with concerns about interaction with children and working in a feminized field (p. 343). Despite these difficulties, engaging in these topics may help male students feel their difficulties are acknowledged and will demonstrate that steps are being made to increase their likelihood of success in college.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was developed from Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT states learning occurs in social situations through interactions with others and the environment. The theory emphasizes the power of social influence of external and internal factors on decision making such as economic
conditions, family structures, personal standards, and self-regulatory influences (Bandura, 2001).

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) builds upon SCT and attempts to understand factors contributing to the educational and occupational interests of individuals (Lent & Brown, 2013). Specifically, SCCT examines cognitive-person variables, such as self-efficacy and goals, and how these variables interact with other aspects of an individual, such as gender, to influence career development (Lent et al., 2000). The theory also explores environmental factors such as social support, barriers, and educational experiences, and how those factors influence career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013). Additionally, SCCT is concerned with the process of how individuals make career decisions and adapt to career tasks and challenges (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Research Question

The research question was answered by collecting and analyzing the data gathered from individual interviews, a focus group, and observations. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identity of all participants. The research question that guided the study was:

1. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at the college of education?

Methodology

Setting

This qualitative case study was completed within the College of Education at a mid-sized Midwest university. The College of Education at this university offers academic programs accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator
Preparation (CAEP) and the state’s education department. The College of Education offers two options for students pursuing a bachelor’s degree in elementary education: elementary education and early childhood education. Both degree programs include field based junior and senior level courses integrating core content with field work in the public school system.

The College of Education reported an average of 597 students with a declared major of elementary education or early childhood education from the academic years 2010/11 to 2020/21. Of those students, male students made up an average of 6% of the total enrolled students. During the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, the College of Education documented its lowest percentage of males who declared majors in elementary and early childhood, reporting 5.1% and 5.0% respectively.

**Data Collection Tools**

The researcher conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with 28 participants. These participants included five current male students enrolled in the elementary education or early childhood education program, 16 male graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood education program from 2009-2020, and seven current or former faculty and administrators in the College of Education. A focus group was led with three graduates of the programs and two current students after interviews were completed. The focus group participants were asked for feedback regarding initial themes found as a result of interviews. Additionally, focus group participants discussed the recommendations proposed by the researcher for future practices for the College of Education. Finally, three observations were conducted within the College of Education. Two observations occurred during passing time between classes in which current male
preservice teachers were students. The researcher also observed in an education class in which three males were current students. Utilizing multiple sources of information allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the case study and identify themes (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

The case study focused on male elementary and early childhood teachers who completed, or were in the process of completing, a Bachelor of Science in education degree. The College of Education provided the researcher with the names and contact information of male graduates from the university who completed their degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education from December of 2009 to May 2021, and current male students with a declared major in elementary or early childhood education. The researcher emailed all men who fit the research criteria and requested their participation in the study. The researcher also created a public Facebook post about the study, which was shared by multiple individuals connected to the College of Education. Interviews with current and former faculty and administrators in the College of Education were conducted after the interviews with the male participants. These individuals were selected for an interview due to their current role in the College of Education or as a result of male participants noting their positive influence on their educational journey.

Interviews were conducted in-person at the College of Education or Zoom, at the participants’ request. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two hours, 15 minutes. The focus group was conducted via Zoom and lasted one hour, 50 minutes. The observations averaged a length of 30 minutes.
Data Analysis

Data gathered throughout the course of the research was organized into a case study database in Google Drive spreadsheets as soon as data were collected. The database ensured all data were organized for quality and maintained a chain of evidence to ensure reliability.

All individual interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed electronically and coded by the researcher. The researcher identified recurring codes and developed overarching topics within the data through axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher identified topics most frequently mentioned in interviews with the participants, which increased the reliability of the study.

The researcher used constant comparative analysis throughout the data analysis process. Constant comparative analysis is the practice of constantly making comparisons between the data and identifying emerging topics as data are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By constantly comparing themes and triangulating the data from interviews, observations, and focus group, the researcher increased reliability in the research to ensure data analysis was conducted systematically.

Findings

Current preservice teachers and graduates from the program were asked questions about their experiences in the teacher education program and what assisted them to remain in the program. These questions aided the researcher in determining effective practices to increase the recruitment and retention of male undergraduates. Four themes were uncovered which answer this research question. These included support from instructors, logical progression of classes, field experience, and direct communication.
Support from Instructors

All research participants described the depth of support provided by the faculty during their undergraduate degree program. Professors’ willingness to offer help to students was something all participants described. Todd, a current student, said, “Every single professor I’ve had, they’re always saying, ‘Reach out if you need anything.’ And I have, and they’re quick to respond and help me.” Andrew also described the professors’ openness and willingness to help him as a learner. He said,

I think that it made a huge difference that the instructors were having a positive relationship and building that with me and knowing that, you know, you can do just as good of a job as anyone here.

Participants also described their professors’ willingness to take the extra time to talk with these men and get to know them. Anthony reflected, “I felt comfortable enough to really go to any of them and discuss anything that might be challenging for me or also things that I can celebrate.”

Charles also shared the relationships he developed and still maintains with his professors:

Your professors get to know you and still to this day, you being able to talk to them or with them on Facebook and see what they're doing. They're commenting on how things are doing in your life and your families, and that’s just kind of cool.

In addition to descriptions of how the professors supported them in the classroom, four participants described very personal experiences of how specific professors helped them through difficult times. These experiences left a lasting impression on these men.
and the participants became emotional when they shared their personal stories. One man shared how multiple professors helped him during a trying time in his life. He told the researcher,

I absolutely hit rock bottom. And these teachers that I had known for less than 12 months, they’re the sole reason I was able to graduate college. I was the first person in my family to ever graduate college, and I did it with very, very, very limited support from my family.

Many participants also described the family-like atmosphere where they felt supported and safe. Charles described a professor who helped develop this atmosphere. He recalled,

You go in that class and she treats you like you are family. And she … was so fantastic about making you feel welcome and always supporting us and encouraging us.

Another participant described the welcoming atmosphere in the building in which education classes are held when he shared, “Oh, I like my education classes so much more [than my first major] and I just love the people in them…I could spend all day in [the education building] and be totally happy.”

The support from professors within the College of Education was described by all participants as a reason for them staying with the degree program. The family-like atmosphere and the extra time professors took to engage in these men’s learning was very impactful to all participants.
Logical Progression of Classes

The logical progression of classes, specifically how the course work and field experiences related and built upon each other, was noted by many participants as a positive attribute of the program. Five participants specifically attributed their engagement and commitment in this program to the logical progression of the coursework. Sawyer described the reasons why he chose the program at this Midwestern university over others. He stated,

They gave me the whole rundown of what the next two, two and a half years are going to look like ... I was thinking about was how everything kind of worked together ... And then as I go along kind of seeing how it all fit together.

Rodney also appreciated the progression of classes. He shared, “I like how they structured it ... how they step it like stair step, it's where you're not just thrown into the fire right away.”

Men in the study discussed the sequencing of the classes which built upon the previous classes and prepared them for their time in their field experience. Sawyer appreciated the structure of the topics addressed. He shared,

I think a lot of it is kind of the way things are structured, like the collaborative stuff in class. I started noticing this more when I got into the blocks, how everything is just modeled, what comes of the teaching strategies.

Rodney reflected, “I think the way ours is set up is really, really helpful about how you can take the small progressions and you get small groups and then you get a bigger group.” Seth, a current student working in the education setting, shared that the coursework he has “is connecting with what I'm experiencing in my job every day.” The
clear progression of content, and its connection to field experience was noted as a positive aspect for these participants.

Field Experience

Participants described the multiple opportunities for field experiences in schools and working with children as a large reason they came into the education program at the targeted university and were retained as a student. Keith said,

I feel like we got in the classroom a lot sooner than other colleges because I'd heard horror stories of people who didn't get to go into a classroom until their junior year. Like, no, I'm not doing that. I think I went in my very first semester to a classroom, so I love that.

Hayden, a current student, also shared, “I really like the fact that my first semester there, I got to go into the classroom and experience what it was like being in the classroom and getting to watch teachers.” Jack, another current student, also described his field experiences in the classroom. He said, “That was a very reassuring thing for me that I was doing something that I don't mind doing for life…So I think that's kind of something that sets our program apart.”

Former students described field experiences that shaped their college education experience and benefited them as future teachers. Justin shared,

When you observe in classrooms, it was eye opening how different the grade levels are. I had to do observations in a rural, a suburban, and urban school. I enjoyed being in all the different classrooms and … seeing different ways people taught and meeting the different teachers and meeting the different principals.
Participants also described how their host teachers welcomed them into the schools and shared their expertise. Brad reflected, “I think going to the classrooms really helped. You can see how different teachers do different things, how you could do things, how you could pick up things.” Justin also said, “A lot of the teachers that I talked to were more than willing to step up and you know, open my head and poured this information in.”

For many of the participants, the field experiences in the classroom also gave them the opportunity enjoy first-hand interactions with students. Justin described the impact field experiences had on him as a future teacher. He said, “Being around the kids and realizing the relationship you're going to have with students. You start to build those relationships and see what it's like to spend a lot of time around these kids.”

Of the 21 participants, only four had field experience placements with a male teacher during their college career. These participants described benefits of being placed in a classroom with a male elementary teacher, such as seeing how a male teacher interacts with students and other adults in the school setting. Jacob explained how his confidence increased after observing male teachers in the field. He said, “It gave me the confidence to see men can be really great quality elementary teachers and be passionate about what they do.” Seven of the participants, who were only placed with female teachers, said they believed it would have been very beneficial to be placed with a male teacher at least once. The participants who commented on the benefits of a male host teacher had a common theme of wanting a role model whom they could observe interacting appropriately with others. Joel said, “It would have been helpful…to not only
be told information but to see that information in use. [The male teacher could tell you] ‘you may have to this or you may have to say this.’” Landon also shared,

I know it’s hard because there’s not many of them [male teachers]. But I do think seeing a male teacher in action and how they interact with the kids would be a really good experience just so you know what you can do…and what you’re doing is okay and correct…Men with children, it’s a completely different dynamic than women with children.

The field experiences for the participants were impactful for the learning of the men. Ethan summed up the feelings of many participants when he responded to the question of what helped him to stay in the program when things were difficult. He said, “Going in the classrooms, the kids, the same reason why we go back now as teachers.”

**Clear, Direct Communication**

Participants also noted an appreciation for direct, clear communication between their peers and professors. The direct communication assisted many participants with learning expectations in the classroom, in their field experience, and how they needed to improve as a future teacher. Owen described his preferred communication style. He said,

Hey give it to me straight. And what's crazy is they [the professors] didn't find it offensive when I told them… And like, they didn't take offense, they took that into consideration. They knew what my intentions were and they gave me that and I built off of that.

Brad described how direct communication helped him as a student.
I [like it] when you're more direct, because then you know, exactly, hey, I should have done this. Or if they're like, ‘Hey, you should try doing this’, that would be nice.

Rodney described how communication helped him become a better educator. He said, “They [the professors] were very honest with you, and I felt like that time I was learning what I needed to learn and to be a successful educator.”

Three professors also indicated direct communication was used frequently with their students, particularly males. Professors noted they treated each individual student on a case-by-case basis with their communication. For instance, one professor shared, “You start off gently finding out what works with them. Here's a person in front of me. I will look at their face and see how they're reacting to how we're starting this conversation.”

While all the instructors noted they see each student as an individual, several recognized the common theme of men needing and desiring more direct communication than their female counterparts. One professor shared,

You have to be very, very specific in your feedback with them [men] and not in a mean way. It's just they're just different than women. I feel like women tend to read between the lines for better or for worse … Whereas guys, you can just say ‘You're going to need to do this.’ And then you tell them what to do. And then they just they go, ‘Oh, okay,’ and then they do it.

A professor recognized by multiple participants in their interviews as a positive influence, discussed their communication style. They said,

I'm your teacher coach. And much like you would want me to be very specific about how to do a layup correctly, I'm going to teach or I'm going to talk about
how you need to do this this way so that you get more bang for your buck or you get more engagement

Overall, the men in this study appreciated the direct, honest feedback they received from their professors. This direct and honest communication from professors was beneficial to many participants.

**Discussion and Implications**

This case study sought to examine the experiences of male preservice teachers and current teachers in the elementary field. In addition, the researcher hoped to gain an understanding of effective practices to recruit and retain men in elementary education. This case study uncovered several factors which influenced participants to stay in the elementary education program. These included support from instructors, logical progress of classes, field experience, and clear, direct communication.

Past research noted several factors that may increase retention within colleges of education. While these findings are not directly related to this current case study, there were overlapping themes. Past researchers found participants preferred practical, hands-on learning activities (Geerdink et al., 2001; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). Participants in this current case study discussed how the field experiences in the classroom impacted their retention in the program. More significantly, the participants recognized the amount of time spent in the field as a factor for retention. Therefore, multiple, hands-on field experiences were significant to the retention of the participants.

Geerdink et al. (2003), Mulholland and Hansen (2003), and Skelton (2009) noted men tend to appreciate external factors, such as content knowledge, rather than internal teaching practices, such as theory. The participants in the current case study also
discussed their appreciation for classes modeling instructional methods to be used in the elementary classroom, such as demonstrating teaching strategies rather than a simple description of a teaching strategy. This case study also revealed the importance of coaching and direct communication from professors with male preservice teachers. As evidenced by the interviews, participants desired direct communication from their instructors about what they were doing well, what they needed to improve upon, and how they could work to improve themselves. This direct communication was not limited to teaching strategies. As described by a professor, “If I notice that you need to iron your clothes, I’m going to tell you to iron your clothes.” Interestingly, while all participants shared how much they appreciated their professors and their support, the specific stories of acknowledgement from participants were primarily about professors who utilized direct, specific communication about professional and personal practices.

Past researchers also recommended colleges of education acknowledge and confront bias experienced by male elementary teachers (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Nelson, 2002). Specifically, Nelson (2002) recommended up-front conversations with male preservice teachers about challenges they may face in the field. Participants in the study noted few opportunities to observe male elementary teachers and their interactions with students while in the field. The participants also discussed the need for open conversations while in college about challenges men face as elementary teachers. They reflected that having conversations while in college about physical interactions with students would have helped them to be ready for challenges that may occur. One current teacher reflected, “I hate to say it, but in this day and age, the more discussions, the better. I wish we would have had it done before I started doing any kind of student
teaching, even observations.” Having direct conversations about bias experienced by male elementary teachers would prepare preservice teachers for situations that may occur when they are in the field.

**Implications**

Through analyzing of the interviews, the focus group discussion, and observations, the theme of connections became apparent. At each stage of the participants’ journey to become a teacher, the connections in their lives helped to shape and guide them into the professionals they eventually became.

The importance of the connections with professors was evident as these men shared story after story of how instructors helped, guided, counseled, and motivated them to become successful teachers. Participants in the study also counted on the support of their classmates in college and host teachers while in the field. And, as these men navigated their college experiences with primarily females, the ability to communicate effectively with their peers and professors enabled those connections to grow.

Much like the connections in a spider web, once these men made connections, they continued on their path to become an elementary teacher. This imagery is important to consider when reflecting on effective practices to recruit and retain male teachers. For colleges of education, the first experiences within the college can provide prospective students a sense of connection to the college. Most importantly, the atmosphere and culture within the college of education provide the necessary tools to build more connections, leading to retention of male students in the education program.
Recommendations

Past research of male elementary teachers, as well as the interviews and focus group with the participants in the current case study, formed recommendations for future practices. Colleges of education may use these recommendations to increase recruitment and retention of men in the elementary and early childhood education field. The following recommendations are based upon four core areas: administration recommendations, curricular recommendations, faculty recommendations, and recommendations for collaboration.

Administration Recommendations

The first area of recommendations pertains to administrative tasks within colleges of education. These tasks involve scheduling and placement opportunities to increase student engagement and increase connections with other males while in the undergraduate education program.

The first recommendation is to place male preservice teacher in the same course sections if multiple sections are offered at the same time. During participants’ Junior and Senior year at the Midwest university, students are placed within a block of classes on campus for their coursework. There are multiple sections within each block. The importance of social connections was revealed during the analysis of the data, as was the importance of having support from peers. Men discussed the challenges of connecting with classmates and the benefits of having other males with shared experiences. It is recommended to place at least two male preservice teachers together in the same section during the block classes or other education courses that have multiple sections offered at the same time.
The second administrative recommendation is to place male preservice teachers in at least one field experience with a highly effective male host teacher. Elementary education is a predominately female occupation; therefore, the majority of field experiences involve a placement with a female host teacher. However, it is important for male preservice teachers to have at least one placement for field experience with a highly effective male host teacher, when possible.

Most participants in this case study did not have a field experience with a male host. While they understood finding a male host is difficult, they lamented their inability to see a male teacher in action. One participant shared, “I do think seeing a male teacher in action and how they interact with the kids would be a really good experience just to see that you know what you can do and say [as a male teacher].” Participants placed with male hosts shared the positive experience of seeing how male teachers interact with students. Jacob shared about his experience with a male host. He said, “It gave me the confidence to see men can be really great quality elementary educators and be passionate about what they do!” Participants also shared their male hosts became mentors for them when they became teachers. Therefore, the second administrative recommendation is to place male preservice teachers with a male host teacher for at least one field experience.

The final administrative recommendation is to employ at least one male professor within the college of education. At the time of the study, there was one male faculty member in the College of Education at the university studied who had the opportunity to teach male elementary teachers in one of their first education course. Several participants discussed the benefits of having a male professor. This included the different communication style of the professor, the ability to see representation of males within the
College of Education, and being able to relate to the male participants as a male teacher. Former students who did not have experiences with male professors discussed how it would have been beneficial to see male representation within the College of Education, in addition to the benefit of having a male to share their experiences as a teacher.

**Curricular Recommendations**

Male teachers face additional scrutiny within the elementary education field (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Nelson, 2000; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Current teachers in this case study discussed the precautions they take as male teachers in order to protect themselves from the misconceptions of being male predators. While these men discussed issues they needed to be aware of as a male teacher, few had discussions on these topics as a preservice teacher. In the interviews with the professors, one professor shared side hugs were discussed at a general meeting before their senior block field experience; however, the other professors indicated this was not a topic discussed in class and expressed surprise the male participants wanted these conversations to occur.

When asked, all participants believed these discussions would have been extremely beneficial to them as a future teacher. One current student stated, “I think it would be helpful just because it's something that's going to happen, something I'm going to encounter. So any more information that could be discussed about it would be helpful.” The participants also stated these discussions should happen multiple times, in a whole class setting. In interviews and in the focus group, the participants discussed topics which should be discussed early in their college education before they begin field experience and topics which should be covered more in-depth as they advance in the degree program.
The researcher makes the following curricular recommendations. First, during one class session in an introduction to education/field experience course, a panel of current teachers discuss professional ethics and etiquette with the preservice students. The topics for this introduction to education/field experience course are general topics which are applicable to all preservice teachers, male/female and K-12 (as these introduction courses are often comprised of preservice teachers from multiple majors). The panel should include current male and female teachers. The researcher recommends topics for male and female teachers be discussed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Topics of Discussion for Panel in Introductory Field Experience Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-professional dress</th>
<th>-interacting appropriately with teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-interacting appropriately with support staff</td>
<td>-effective means of communicating with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-appropriate physical interaction with students (male and female)</td>
<td>-appropriate verbal interaction with students (male and female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-how to identify when students are uncomfortable</td>
<td>-professional ethics – how to hug, interact, and address students appropriate (male and female teachers)</td>
</tr>
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The researcher recommends a panel discussion at the onset of field experience for several reasons. First, it is important for these discussions to occur before preservice teachers begin their field experience. Brandon noted having the discussion early in your education would provide a “safety net.” He explained, “In the beginning in your foundations class they [men] feel like they have that network, that safety net. They can talk about their experiences, what they’re struggling with, and everybody’s kind of aware of it.” Brad also noted it is important to have discussions about etiquette before entering the classroom. He said, “It would be best to do it before you’re in the classroom. When
you get to the setting, then you already know, hey, this is how I need to conduct myself.”

Jacob also brought up an interesting point about how these discussions could increase retention of male teachers. He said,

So I wonder if there's any chance that we could increase retention if we bring it up early, like maybe somebody won't leave the program because they feel like, ‘Oh, wow, they brought it up and people don't assume that generalization about me early on.’ If you bring it up in junior block, all those people are probably there for the long haul. But if bringing it up early could save even one person… then I think it's worth it.

The second recommendation is to have a second panel discussion with current male and female teachers during the preservice teachers’ junior or senior year, when the preservice teachers are in field experience placements for longer amounts of time. The researcher recommends that second panel discussion discuss topics more in-depth than the previous panel. This recommendation is due to the preservice teachers’ extended time in the classroom. Additionally, the topics in this panel can focus more specifically on concerns in the elementary and/or early childhood age. It is also recommended that current preservice teachers compile questions for the panelists. Table 2 includes recommendations for topics of discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Topics of Discussion for Panel in Junior or Senior Block Class</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-hug from the hip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-no winking</td>
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<tr>
<td>-no children in lap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher recommends a second panel discussion for several reasons. The discussion points recommended in Table 1 are general topics important for preservice teachers to be aware of at the beginning of their preservice experiences; however, many preservice teachers may take their initial education course at a community college or during high school for dual credit. Therefore, a second panel ensures preservice teachers hear the information at least once. Secondly, the topics covered in the second panel discussion are more in-depth and reflective of the preservice teachers’ additional time spend in the classroom. It is important these topics are discussed in order to assist preservice students on how they would approach different scenarios.

**Faculty Recommendations**

All participants spoke positively of the faculty within the College of Education. The faculty were described as family-oriented, helpful, consistent, communicative, caring, and supportive. The researcher therefore recommends faculty and instructors within colleges of education strive to create and maintain a supportive environment for all students. It is apparent the current culture within the participants’ College of Education is nurtured and encouraged throughout the faculty, which created a positive experience for students.

The researcher recommends two additional practices for faculty in colleges of education. The first recommendation is the continued consideration of how to best communicate with students. The male participants in the study noted clear, direct communication was the preferred means of communicating expectations. It is
recommended that faculty assess students on a case-by-case basis and adjust their communication styles accordingly. For example, participants in the study discussed how they preferred direct communication on how they need to improve their teaching methods, interactions in the classroom, or how to revise assignments. These men preferred a so-called “give it to me straight” method, as Owen described it, rather than “sugarcoating.”

**Recommendations for Collaboration**

Male participants discussed the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships during their educational and teaching journey. Participants also described the importance of having connections with other male teachers with whom they can relate. For some men, they established these relationships in college or in their school once employed. Others, however, do not have another male teacher with whom they can relate. Previous research indicated the importance of creating collaboration and fostering connections with male teachers (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Huber et al., 2000; Nelson, 2002; Skelton, 2009). Therefore, the researcher recommends two methods of collaboration for male preservice and current teachers.

First, the researcher recommends colleges of education compile a list of current male school teachers in the region who would be willing to serve as a mentors to male preservice teachers. Male mentors would be available to answer questions, share their experiences, and provide advice for current male preservice teachers. Several participants spoke of their desire to help other male elementary teachers or current preservice teachers. It is the hope of the researcher that colleges of education can provide the means
to connect male preservice teachers with practicing male teachers to develop positive connections and a role model in the classroom.

The second recommendation is one for male preservice teachers and male graduates. The researcher recommends men who are current students or graduates of elementary education programs create private Facebook groups for men who are or will become elementary teachers. The goal of a Facebook group is to provide male teachers with an avenue to exchange ideas, seek advice, and provide support for each other outside the influence of the colleges of education. In order for the male preservice and current teachers to feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and concerns, the researcher believes it is important these are male-only groups, without ties to faculty at a degree granting institution. Because of the nature of these groups, the researcher recommends current male students or graduates of the program create, maintain, and moderate these group.

**Conclusion**

This case study examined current male elementary preservice teachers and graduates of a mid-sized Midwest university and male graduates with a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education from December 2009 to May 2021. Qualitative research methods were used including one-on-one interviews with current and former students and faculty, a focus group of male preservice student and current teachers, and observations of male preservice teachers in the college of education building.

The researcher found an overarching theme of the importance of social connections to the participants within the study. During their time in the education
program, support from instructors, logical progression of classes, early and frequent field experiences, and clear communication increased the retention of males in the education program. As a result of the findings, recommendations for colleges of education were provided in the areas of administration, curriculum, faculty, and areas of collaboration.
References


SECTION VI: SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION
On many occasions, a wise professor shared with our cohort that our doctoral journey is like a tornado (S. Hutchinson, personal communication, 2019). We start small, whirling and swirling, and as we learn more our funnel build and builds, continually sweeping back around to touch on topics we learned. Leadership, diversity, research, program evaluation, organizational analysis, ethics, policy – each of the strands of our degree program build upon each other to culminate in the writing of a dissertation. What is not always evident, though, is that while the two years of classes and coursework of the doctoral degree are like a tornado - everything swirling quickly in controlled chaos - the dissertation process is the aftermath of that tornado. Suddenly, the storm stops, and you - the scholar - are left to pull what you can from the storm to produce a dissertation worthy of your degree. You are now on your own, tasked with building and conducting a research study that will, hopefully, have a positive influence on your profession, scholarship, and those within the scope of your study.

This dissertation proved to be one which required me to pull from all I have learned: how to look at a problem in practice as a leader, how to evaluate practices within the college of education, how to examine the diversity (or lack thereof) of preservice teachers, how to ethically examine a problem and present the findings accurately. Most importantly, though, this experience required me to practice the quieter side of leadership: how to listen and not judge, how to probe to discover more from an individual, and how to build bonds of trust between the researcher and participant. As I reflect on this dissertation journey, I am reminded of an acronym shared during our second year of classes: FAIL (S. Hutchinson, personal communication August 26, 2020).
While there were certainly times I felt discouraged or stressed, I realize the dissertation caps the doctoral journey, FAIL: For All I’ve Learned.

**Dissertation Influence on Educational Leadership Practices**

The dissertation process assisted me to be a better leader within my organizations. Rooke and Torbert (2005) stated “those who are willing to work at developing themselves and becoming more self-aware can almost certainly evolve over time into true transformational leaders” (p. 161). The dissertation process forced me to continually examine my practices as a learner, a researcher, an ethical practitioner, and a leader.

At the beginning of our coursework, we delved into examining our leadership strengths. As a teacher-leader in my school and a co-pastor in my church, my identified leadership strengths of collaborative and participative leadership styles connected with my leadership roles. However, as I began my dissertation, I began to focus on leadership areas which were not as strong, particularly conceptualizing and creating a vision and plan for an organization.

The goal of this dissertation was to understand the experiences of male preservice teachers and male teachers in the elementary field. Additionally, I strove to understand experiences which led to their retention in the education program and teaching field. During the hours of interviews and discussions with the male participants in the study, I began to critically think about practices that could increase retention in the program. These ideas began to take shape as I discussed them with men in the focus group and faculty in the College of Education during their interviews. Writing those ideas, which came a result of reviewing literature and interviewing participants, into recommendations for the College of Education was a daunting, but exhilarating experience. As one faculty
member discussed during our interview, these are the types of recommendations that change teaching practices and programs. Realizing the research and findings from my dissertation could impact the elementary education program at UCM for male preservice students, and, perhaps other colleges of education, is humbling.

As a first-grade teacher in a program dominated by individuals who are administrators in K-12 education or higher education, it was difficult at times to place myself in the context of leadership within my role as an educator compared to my peers. However, as I look back on my dissertation journey, I remember what Taylor (2009) said about transformative learning occurring when one identifies problematic ideals and beliefs and critically assesses assumptions; this transformation of learning is one that is ever shifting and occurs as one considers their perspective in relation to the world around them (Taylor, 2009). This dissertation process helped to solidify my perspective as an educational leader. I am a learner. I am a researcher. I am an ethical practitioner. I am a leader.

**Dissertation Process Influence as a Scholar**

The dissertation process was one that began for me before coursework commenced. Prior to coursework beginning, the current chair of School and Teaching and Learning at the time, Dr. Ann McCoy, approached our program coordinator about the possibility of a doctoral student researching male preservice teachers at UCM for their dissertation. Dr. McCoy hoped a researcher would be willing to examine practices to not only increase the number of male preservice teachers at UCM, but also the number of male elementary teachers in general. I was approached regarding this research topic based on my background as an elementary teacher who hosted preservice teachers and an
adjunct professor at UCM. Over the next three years, what started out as an inquiry from a leader within the College of Education grew to be a research topic that became very near and dear to my heart.

A scholar begins a research process by examining why a topic should be researched (Colquitt & George, 2011). As a practicing elementary teacher and instructor in a teacher preparation program, I observed the small number of male elementary teachers. However, as scholar, it was necessary to acquire data to confirm my observations. Additionally, based on past conversations with male teachers and my own experiences as a teacher, I could make assumptions as to why there was a low number of male teachers, but an examination of past studies was needed to determine what previous research uncovered.

Examining past research on a topic can be likened to falling down a rabbit hole. Reading one article leads to another article, which then leads to additional article. This domino effect can be a researcher’s dream or nightmare, depending upon their interest in a topic. Fortunately for me, each article I examined open my eyes to additional possibilities on how I could approach the topic of male elementary teachers. As an additional bonus, the review of literature had me to considering my own practices in instructing male preservice teachers. Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) noted gap-spotting in past research is the dominate way for researchers to develop research questions. As a result of the review of literature, I was able to find gaps in research, which helped me to formulate the research question and methods I would use in my dissertation, specifically, examining current preservice teachers and graduates from the same institution, which had not been researched previously.
Qualitative research methods were chosen as the avenue to examine the experiences of male preservice teachers for this dissertation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated qualitative research strives to understand how participants interpret their experiences, construct their world, and the meaning they attribute to their experiences. The past qualitative research opportunities in the doctoral coursework were extremely enlightening for me, and through those experiences I discovered how much I enjoyed listening and learning from others share about themselves and their experiences.

Learning to be an effective interviewer was a process for me. Past experiences of interviewing individuals for coursework assisted me in determining areas in which I need to improve, such as allowing wait time and following up on unclear responses. Seidman (2019) noted interviewing techniques are important skills for a researcher to practice. These techniques, such as listening for the inner voice of the participant, being aware of non-verbal cues, and trusting my instinct, assisted me throughout the interview process.

Seidman (2019) stated “Interviewing is both a research methodology and a social relationship that must be nurtured, sustained, and then ended gracefully” (p. 101). The relationship established between the interviewer and the participant is one that may be impacted by age, race, gender, or status (Seidman, 2019). For the purposes of this research, my status as a female and a practicing teacher interviewing males was something I was particularly considerate of during the interviews. However, I found I was able to build a rapport with participants with whom I did not have a previous connection. It is my belief the participants felt comfortable during the interviews, and felt open enough to share their experiences, concerns, and emotions throughout the interviews. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with male preservice teachers or
graduates as a part of this dissertation, ranging from 45 minutes to two hours, 15 minutes. Each of these individuals brought new insight, shared their stories, and allowed me to hear about their experiences, and I am grateful they allowed me to be a part of this shared experience. Engaging with the participants influenced me as a scholar, demonstrating the power of qualitative research methods.

A dissertation is seen as a culmination of a doctoral degree. However, for a scholar, it should be seen as a starting point to contribute to future practices. The Dissertation in Practice framework assisted me to develop how I would share the research findings with others. Journal articles, presentations to UCM, and presentations to state and national audiences are all ways in which I plan to contribute to the enhancing the educational experiences of male preservice teachers and, hopefully, influence the recruitment and retention of men into the field of elementary education. This process demonstrated my work on this topic does not end with a written dissertation. Instead, this is a jumping point for future scholarly endeavors.

As an educator, I often find myself desiring to advocate, help, and care for others. The process of completing this dissertation was no different. As a listened to the stories of the participants, I couldn’t help but think about what I could do as a host teacher and an instructor to enhance the educational experiences of the men whom I instruct. When analyzing the data from the participants, my considered what actions could be taken to assist students in their difficulties and bring about positive experiences. Finally, considering the needs of the male participants assisted me in compiling recommendations for future practices. This dissertation provided another avenue through which I could use
my strengths of advocacy and care for others to bring light to a population that is underrepresented in the elementary education field.

I have heard people say it is very common for a researcher to become “sick of” their dissertation throughout their research process. The deep dive into past research, interviewing, the analysis of data, and the writing of a dissertation can become tedious for many. However, I was fortunate to examine a topic in which I was continually engaged, inspired, and driven to give voice to the men who choose to teach elementary children. This process truly enabled me to grow as an educational leader and scholar.
REFERENCES


University of Central Missouri. (2021d). *Board of Governors policies and procedures manual.* University of Central Missouri. Retrieved from


University of Central Missouri Educator Preparation Program. (2021, June 28). *UCM educator preparation program belief, vision, and mission statements: Draft for PEF review*.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP: MALE PRESERVICE TEACHERS

1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?

2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
   a. What practice/strategies would be beneficial for UCM to employ to recruit and/or retain male elementary and/or early childhood education majors?

3. What are the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at the University of Central Missouri?
   a. What were the collegiate educational experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who major in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?
   b. What are the experiences of male graduates from the elementary education and/or early childhood education programs at UCM?

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<td>What year are you in college and when do you anticipate graduating?</td>
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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW: MALE GRADUATES QUESTIONS

1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?

2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
   a. What practice/strategies would be beneficial for UCM to employ to recruit and/or retain male elementary and/or early childhood education majors?

3. What are the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at the University of Central Missouri?
   a. What were the collegiate educational experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who major in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?
   b. What are the experiences of male graduates from the elementary education and/or early childhood education programs at UCM?

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<th>Tell me about yourself.</th>
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<th>When did you graduate college and what degree did you graduate with?</th>
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<th>What employment have you had since graduating?</th>
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<td>1. What led you to consider a degree in elementary/early childhood education?</td>
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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW: UCM FACULTY QUESTIONS

1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?

2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
   a. What practice/strategies would be beneficial for UCM to employ to recruit and/or retain male elementary and/or early childhood education majors?

3. What are the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary education and/or early childhood education at the University of Central Missouri?
   a. What were the collegiate educational experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who major in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?
   b. What are the experiences of male graduates from the elementary education and/or early childhood education programs at UCM?

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tell me about yourself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your current position in the College of Education?</td>
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<td>What interactions do you have with male preservice teachers?</td>
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<td>RQ 3 1. Reflecting on male preservice teachers you have taught, how would you describe their academic experiences?</td>
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<td>RQ 3 2. …..their experiences in the K-12 classroom?</td>
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<td>RQ 2/3</td>
<td>12. In reflecting on past male students, what percentage of male students have successfully completed the program?</td>
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<td>RQ 3</td>
<td>11. What practices, if any, have you employed to assist males in these specific struggles?</td>
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<td>RQ 3</td>
<td>10. What ways, if any, do you find males struggle in the program? How did males excel in the program?</td>
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<td>RQ 3</td>
<td>9. What is the gender make-up of the instructors in the program for elementary/early childhood education classes? How do you think this make-up impacts male students?</td>
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<td>RQ 2</td>
<td>8. What strategies does the program use to assist students</td>
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<td>7. What practices does the College of Education employ to retain students to the program?</td>
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<td>6. What practices do you believe the College of Education could employ in the future to recruit students to the elementary program?</td>
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<td>RQ 2</td>
<td>5. What practices does the College of Education employ to recruit students to the elementary program? What practices, if any, are specifically targeted to recruit males?</td>
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<td>RQ 1</td>
<td>4. In reflecting on your conversations with male preservice teachers, what have they shared that led them to pursue an elementary teaching degree?</td>
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<td>RQ 3</td>
<td>3. .....their social interaction with other preservice teachers</td>
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<td>2. What practices do you believe the College of Education could employ in the future to recruit students to the elementary program?</td>
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<td>7. What practices does the College of Education employ to retain students to the program?</td>
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<td>3. .....their social interaction with other preservice teachers</td>
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<td>13. What percentage of those students are still employed as an elementary teacher after five years?</td>
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<td>14. Is there anything else you’d like to add?</td>
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APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT EMAIL: PRESERVICE TEACHERS

Good afternoon,

My name is Katie Ritter and I am a current doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Central Missouri. I am conducting a research study examining the experiences of current male elementary and/or early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri. Additionally, I am examining the experiences of males who graduated from the University of Central Missouri with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree in Elementary Education or Early Childhood Education in the years 2010/2011 to 2020/2021.

You are being invited to participate in this research study by participating in a one-on-one interview or a focus group about your experiences. A focus group is a small group of individuals who share common experiences, such as majoring in elementary education or early childhood education, who come together to discuss their experiences as a group. A one-on-one interview is a discussion of an individual’s experiences with one other person. Both the interview and focus group is anticipated to take no more than one hour and will be conducted either face-to-face or over Zoom, at your discretion. The benefits of participation in the research study include sharing your experiences which may impact future education majors.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. An informed consent form, which provides additional information about the research study, is attached to this email.
If you have any questions, please contact me at katteritter2006@gmail.com or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Nissa Ingraham at Nissal@nwmissouri.edu.

If you would like to participate in the research study, please click on the following link to the Google Form to indicate your preference for being in a focus group or participating in a one-on-one interview.

{insert link}

Thank you for your participation,

Katie Ritter
APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL: MALE GRADUATES AND UCM FACULTY

Good afternoon,

My name is Katie Ritter and I am a current doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Central Missouri. I am conducting a research study examining the experiences of current male elementary and/or early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri. Additionally, I am examining the experiences of males who graduated from the University of Central Missouri with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree in Elementary Education or Early Childhood Education in the years 2010/2011 to 2020/2021.

You are being invited to participate in this research study by participating in a one-on-one interview about your experiences. The interview is anticipated to take no more than one hour and will be conducted either face-to-face or over Zoom. The benefits of participation in the research study include sharing your experiences which may impact future education majors.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. An informed consent form, which provides additional information about the research, is attached to this email.

If you have any questions, please contact me at katieritter2006@gmail.com or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Nissa Ingraham at NissaI@nwmissouri.edu.
If you would like to participate in the research, please click on the following link to the Google Form.

{insert link}

Thank you for your participation,

Katie Ritter
APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Project Title: Where are all the good men? A case study of male elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Katherine L. Ritter   IRB Reference Number: 2059042

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in a research project. You must be 18 years of age or older. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop being in this study at any time. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the experiences of male elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) and male post-graduates of the elementary and/or early childhood education program at UCM. 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.

Why is the study being done?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of male elementary and/or early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) and male post-graduates of the elementary and early childhood education program at UCM.

What am I being asked to do?
You are being invited to participate in the research by consenting to a one-on-one interview or focus group with the primary researcher. You will be asked questions about your experiences related to being a male in the elementary and early childhood teaching profession. During the interview, I will take notes and audio record the interview.

How long will I be in the study?
The study will take 30 minutes to an hour for each interview. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

What are the benefits of being in the study?
Your participation will benefit the elementary and early childhood education programs by increasing the teacher education’s understanding of men in the elementary/early childhood education programs and the teaching profession. You may also enjoy sharing your experiences with the researcher.

What are the risks of being in the study?
The risks to this study are similar to the risks of everyday life discussions.

What are the costs of being in the study?
There are no costs to you.

Confidentiality
The interviews will take place behind closed doors to maintain confidentiality if held in person. If the interview is held through Zoom, the researcher will be in a room by herself during the interview to maintain confidentiality. You will be assigned a pseudonym as an additional safeguard in your confidentiality. The audio recordings of the interviews and focus group will be kept for seven years after the conclusion of the study. Information produced by this study will be stored in the researcher’s files and will be identified by a pseudonym only. Information contained in the 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.

**What will I be compensated for participating in the study?**
You will receive no money for taking part in the study.

**What are my rights as a participant?**
Participation in the study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in the study. You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of the study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in the study.

**Who do I contact if I have questions, concerns, or complaints?**
Please contact Dr. Nissa Ingraham, Dissertation Chair, Nissal@nwmissouri.edu if you have questions about the research.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**
If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

A copy of this Informed Consent will be given to you before you participate in the research.
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION EMAIL

Dear xxxxx,

Thank you for your willingness to be a part of a one-on-one interview about your experiences in the elementary and/or early childhood education programs at UCM.

Your interview has been scheduled for:
- **Date:**
- **Time:**
- **Location:**

I look forward to meeting with you. Should you have any questions or concerns leading up to our scheduled meeting time, please feel free to contact me, Katie Ritter, at katieritter2006@gmail.com or 660-525-0229

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research process.

Sincerely,

Katie Ritter
APPENDIX H: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the experiences of male elementary and early childhood preservice teachers currently enrolled at UCM, and male graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary and/or early childhood education. In the following section, the findings for each of the research questions are answered. Quotations from participants are included to further illustrate the case study findings.

Interview Findings

Individual interviews were conducted with a total of 21 men. The participants included 16 males who graduated from UCM with a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education between December 2009 to May 2021. Five participants were current students in the elementary education program at UCM at the time of the study were also interviewed.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Work Status</th>
<th>Current Teaching Level</th>
<th>Current Level in College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brad</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Charles</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Early Elementary**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shane</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Keith</td>
<td>Double major</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brandon</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Zane</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Teacher 5+ years</td>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Justin</td>
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<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Robert</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Grade Level</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Owen</td>
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<td>Upper Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Landon</td>
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<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Anthony</td>
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<td>Upper Elementary</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Andrew</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ethan</td>
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<td>Upper Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
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<td>Double major</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Hayden</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Todd</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *Early Elementary = teacher in grades Preschool-2\textsuperscript{nd}; **Upper Elementary = teacher in 3\textsuperscript{rd}-6\textsuperscript{th} grade

In addition to the 21 male participants, seven current faculty members and/or administrators in the elementary or early childhood programs within the College of Education were interviewed. Interviews lasted an average of one hour and thirty minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 45 minutes and the longest interview lasting two hours and fifteen minutes.
RQ One Answered: What Led Men to Pursue and Elementary and/or Early Childhood Degree?

The first research question examined was what led men to pursue an education degree. Four main findings were discovered. All participants noted encouragement and support from trusted adults, as a motivating factor for pursuing an education degree, including family members, friends, and teachers. Many participants recalled experiences in working with children in high school or college led them to consider elementary education as a viable career option. Additionally, of the 21 men interviewed, 17 participants discussed pursuing another career path before ultimately choosing education as their degree program. Finally, men noted the desire to make an impact on future students and felt they were called to be a teacher.

Encouragement and Support from Trusted Adults.

All participants noted the support and encouragement from trusted adults encouraged them to pursue a degree in education and provided perseverance when faced with obstacles. For most participants, the primarily means of support came from their parents and siblings. Several men, including Seth and Andrew, came from a family of teachers who encouraged them to pursue the career. Other participants also listed their family as their primary support system.

Participants noted their family and friends recognized the participants’ ability to work well with children. Rodney discussed his family’s reaction when hearing of his decision to major in elementary education. He shared, “They’ve always been supportive of anything that I’ve done, but just with how I interact with kids my whole life, they were all pretty excited.” Anthony also described how his family recognized his strengths in
working with children and their reaction when he changed his major to education. He said, “They were all very supportive of it. They knew that with me working with kids before it was kind of an easy transition.” Hayden also recalled his family’s reaction when he changed his major from nursing to elementary education. He stated, “They were all super supportive of it. They thought it was more aligned with who I am as a person than what nursing would be and they thought I would enjoy that [education] more.” Jack also described his parents’ response when he shared his decision to major in elementary education. Jack said, “When I called and told them, they could tell how excited I was and how happy I was to be in the classroom and be working with kids and trying to help kids learn.” Justin recalled his friends seemed really surprised when hearing about his decision to pursue education, but “once they started thinking about it, it made a lot of sense.”

Trusted adults were also a source of encouragement for many participants.
Rodney described an experience as an A+ tutor in a preschool classroom. Rodney stated:

I was actually in one of my best friend's mom’s rooms. She was the teacher and she said, ‘Some people have it, some people don't have it.’ And she said I just kind of have it. I thought, I would kind of enjoy it. And so it always was kind of in the back of my mind, I guess, but I never really actually thought I would do that until I decided to switch. And I was like, Oh, this is actually kind of what I want to do.

Landon described how friends and community members showed support by asking him about his classes when he was in college. Another participant, Owen, said, “I didn’t have much support from friends or family.” However, he described how
encouragement from teachers at his high school led him to pursue a teaching career.

Owen said,

I did Student Aid one summer with my old third grade teacher. I just enjoyed it. The kids were fun to be around. I got to be goofy and I got to have fun. The kids still showed respect. They were a great group. I learned how to deal with conflicts between two kids instead of sitting there trying to tell one person what to do and how they actually fix it. First day senior year of high school, I got called to the superintendent's office. I talked with [the superintendent, principal, and vice principal], and they all told me I need to go into elementary ed. because of all the parent phone calls they got from the summer school kids. That's why I chose elementary ed.

Some participants described concerns about making money were brought up by their family. Zane stated his family’s concern he would not make enough money. Todd’s also recalled his friends’ reaction to his decision to pursue teaching. Todd said, “Well, a few of them were like, ‘you’re not going to make much money.’ And I was like, ‘I want to be a teacher.’ And after that, they were all supportive and are always asking me how are things going.” One faculty member elaborated on the struggles some men may have when considering teaching as a career. They said,

I think all the noise you hear when you’re starting up college about ‘don’t go into teaching, you’ll never make any money.’ And some of that’s well intentioned. You know, parents are people, but I think guys would tend to listen to that more than females and would sometimes be directed away from education.”
While some families shared their concerns with the participants about income, others helped alleviate concerns. Landon remembered his parents’ words of encouragement when he was concerned about living on a teacher’s salary. He said, “When my parents asked me, ‘Well, if you could do anything and pay didn’t matter, what would you do?’ I was like, ‘Probably work with kids’. Then they said, ‘How can you turn that passion into a career?’” Jack also described his concerns about going into education. He recalled,

I was kind of scared to go into elementary because it’s not a lot of money and I’m a worry freak. And so going into a major where there’s not a lot of money, especially for teachers, kind of scared me at first. My parents [said] if you’re doing what you love, the money will work itself out.

*Elementary Education Not the First Choice*

Many participants interviewed did not originally plan on a career in elementary education. In fact, of the 21 men interviewed, 17 pursued another degree before ultimately going into education. From aviation to business to criminal justice to secondary education, the participants began their college careers with a different job path in mind, but eventually changed their majors to elementary education.

Several men began their college career within the sphere of education. Brandon started out planning on teaching middle school, but then began substituting at the elementary level. He recalled, “I just kind of fell in love with it. And from there, I just kind of got hooked and that’s when I knew that’s what I wanted to do.” Zane started his college career as a history major then switched to elementary education. He recalled that he enjoyed elementary because, “It’s just more hands-on and I get bored really easily.”
And so teaching high school just was not my forte, so I switched over." Jacob also began in the education field as a music education major, but then found the field was “just not really conducive to how I saw myself or how I fit.”

Other participants first majors were in completely different fields. Rodney tried out several different majors including criminal justice. He recalled thinking,

I'll be like a juvenile probation officer or something like that so I could work with kids and then I was like, ‘Well, this is kind of hard, you know, I don't know if I could get a job very well. I don't know what's available.’ And then my mom and my soon to be mother-in-law, were both like, ‘Why don't you just do teaching instead?’ And I thought, you know, it's not a bad idea. I could work with kids and do elementary and stuff.

Hayden began as a nursing major before switching to elementary education. He remembered,

It [education] was always something that I thought about, but the money definitely deterred me. But I went and took one of those tests that tell you what careers you would be good at. And teaching was really high up on there. And I have a few teachers in my family and I've always loved working with kids. So I think it was just a combination of all those different things that led me to choosing it.

Jack tried two different majors, counseling and criminal justice, before elementary education. He recalled thinking,

I can at least try out education and see if I like it. And then as a sophomore, I got placed in the first education block and then we started going every Wednesday,
and I was like, ‘Yeah, I really like this’, and then I just kind of kept going from there.

Robert began as a business major. He said,

I took classes all of my freshman year for business and was miserable. I did not enjoy it at all. And it took some deep thinking and the career counseling that they offered there at UCM and I ended up realizing the obvious: I've always been meant to be a teacher. As soon as I started that path, I knew this is what I'm supposed to be doing.

**Experiences Working with Children in High School and College**

Participants recalled experiences working with children in high school and college led them to consider elementary education as a career. For many of the participants, these experiences helped them reconsider their first major in college before ultimately changing to elementary or early childhood education.

Some participants stated working with children growing up helped them to decide to pursue elementary education. Justin discussed gaining step siblings when he was in high school. He remembered, “They were 5 and 3. They probably had a big influence on me being comfortable in doing that.” Shane noted his experiences with family helped shape his career choices. Shane said, “I come from a big family, lots of nieces and nephews, like 17. So I've always been around kids. So for me, working with children was like second nature.”

Other participants stated experiences outside their family unit influenced their decision to become a teacher. Keith recalled,
When I was in middle school, I worked with younger elementary, helping the teachers do stuff. And then in high school, I actually led some of the things and I just really enjoyed doing that. So I thought, ‘Yeah, why not go into teaching?’

Jack remembered working at a summer camp. He said, “I just kind of showed up and went to work every day, and then they gave me awards because I was doing so well with the kids. Then I was like, ‘Oh, maybe should consider this as a major.’” Robert worked with children during summers. He recalled, “I spent most of my summers in high school volunteering at summer school, and I did many hours in the high school setting, working with the elementary students as I could, and I knew it was something I always enjoyed.” Joel remembered working at Scout camps for four years and Hayden also worked as a nature camp counselor. Landon fondly remembered working with kids at his mom’s Mother’s Day Out program during the summers.

Many participants worked with elementary students as part of their A+ requirements in high school. Todd recalled tutoring 2nd graders and said, “I just feel like I can connect better and help younger students more than if I was working in middle school or high school. I tutored for 50 hours.” Sawyer stated his A+ hours and working at an after-school child care program helped him realize his enjoyment working with children. Sawyer shared, “I helped those kids with their homework. It was a pretty good experience and I enjoyed it. And then I kind of put that to the back of my mind for a little bit.” Charles remembered how tutoring during summer school for his A+ requirements prompted him to change his plans of majoring in architecture. Charles said,

I was paired with a family friend who teaches first grade. And I never thought I wanted to be a teacher. I remember after doing that, I really enjoyed it. And it was
a few weeks later, my mom was talking to me and she said something about trying to look at colleges or something. And I remember exactly. I said, ‘Well, I don't want to do architecture anymore.’ And she was like, ‘What?’ She was like, shocked by it.

Ethan also started out in a different major in college. He recalls being in his first degree program and not enjoying it. Ethan said, “I just went back to [considering] teaching in the tutoring that I did in high school, which was actually with preschool. But I remember I just loving being around them and then ended up switching.”

Andrew first considered majoring in secondary social studies. However, he recalled, “I worked part-time at a day care in college. And I knew and liked being around kids and helping kids. So I decided on elementary and kind of went for it.” Anthony also had experiences working with children while in college that helped him reconsider his plan to be an architect. He said, “Once I started working with the before and after school program when I was in college…that definitely helped me kind of decide more of where I wanted to go.” Jacob’s work in a summer program while in college also contributed to him changing his major from music to elementary education. He stated

I loved working with that age group and I got to be a part of or in charge of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade group of kids that summer. At the end of that summer, I was kind of like, ‘Wow, I love this. I can do this for a job!’ And immediately just felt like a weight had lifted.

Making an Impact

Participants stated making a difference in the lives of children was a major reason for choosing to pursue elementary education. Andrew stated, “Male role models for the
kids to do well…I knew I could make a big impact,” and was a large reason he felt led to teach. Charles noted how being a male elementary teacher impacts students. Charles said, “So I think it was kind of like the whole signal: guys go to [teach] high school, you know, the girls go to elementary, I'm like, guys can be elementary teachers, too. I mean, look at Kindergarten Cop!” Anthony also wanted to make a difference in children’s lives. He shared,

The biggest thing was just, and I know this might sound cliché as I say it, but just being able to make a difference in children's lives. It's just being able to make a difference, whether it be in the classroom or academically or just on a personal level, just getting to know that kid and building that relationship with them to make sure that they feel safe and comfortable at school.

Charles shared how his past experiences helped him to choose teaching. Charles stated, I did struggle in school and it wasn't until middle school where teachers started noticing. So I was that student stuck in the cracks, and I really wanted to catch that early intervention at the younger age and help them be successful.

Owen also wanted to make an impact on students’ lives. He said, “It just felt like a calling. And I just took it by the horns. I was like, let’s do this. This is something I want to do to inspire tomorrow’s future.” Todd shared about his desire to be a teacher. He stated,

I've just always wanted to be a teacher from as early as first grade. I can remember just saying I want to be a teacher. The thing that solidified it was specifically a middle school teacher I had. She was amazing at every single thing
she did, and she made sure every student was included and they could learn from what she was doing. And I was like, Yes, I want to be a teacher.

Brandon shared about the impact he felt he could make on students. Brandon shared, “With those young boys, you are that dad figure. You’re giving him somebody to look up to someday. And it’s something that we could provide and we can drive with to get them best out of them.”

Once these men found moved forward with their desire to be a teacher, things became quite simple for many participants. Shane summed it up when he said, “I think education is my calling, so I went with that.”

**RQ Two Answered: What Practices Were Effective in Recruiting and Retaining Men?**

Participants were asked questions during the interview about their experiences in the teacher education program at UCM and what helped them complete their undergraduate degree program. These questions helped to inform the researcher about practices the College of Education used to maintain recruitment and retention of male undergraduates. All participants spoke of the positive interactions, communication, and relationships they developed with their instructors. Participants also noted the logical progression of classes and field experience helped to retained them in the program. Finally, clear, direct communication with faculty about the expectations and requirements of the program supported their completion of their undergraduate program successfully.

**Support from Instructors**

All research participants, both current and former students, described the wealth of support provided by the instructors during their undergraduate degree. Many of these
men credited the support given by the professors as the primary reason they successfully completed their undergraduate degree. The men spoke of professors’ willingness to offer help when needed in their classes. Rodney said, “We had a lot of professors that were just really helpful because, I mean, I didn't really know what I was doing when I first got in there, and they were all very helpful, very supportive.” Todd echoed Rodney’s thoughts when he said, “Every single professor I've had, they're always saying, ‘Reach out if you need anything.’ And I have, and they're quick to respond and help me.”

Another current student, Jack, shared,

All of them were very helpful. Any time I had questions, they were always right there to answer and they just always were very supportive of me. So I feel like they were looking out for me the entire time in a way because I was the only guy.

Further, Keith shared the professors’ willingness to help and provide feedback. He reflected,

I think the professors were phenomenal. You had a lot of support from professors. I never remember going to get extra help from a professor and them not being more than willing to help. I don't think I ever had any negative experiences with them being like, ‘What do you need?’ You know, I think they were always, ‘OK, hey, what can we do? Let's figure this out.’

Andrew described the professors’ openness and willingness to help him as a learner. He said:

They made a huge difference in how I learned. I can think back to my very first learners block, and all of my instructors were all very open to talking about if I'm struggling with something or they were always giving me tips on how I can do
things better. I had all great instructors, and I think for me that made the biggest
difference for me, regardless of if I was in a class of all girls or not. I think that it
made a huge difference that the instructors were having a positive relationship and
building that with me and knowing that, you know, you can do just as good of a
job as anyone here.

Brandon reflected on how one professor helped him become more engaged in his
learning. He described his experience when he said,

She really got on me to get out of that shell and be myself. So she was a big one
where it was like, I can do these things, I can be this guy. And yet, I could still be
the manly man. And it suddenly turned into a situation where now I started to
thrive at it because I got out of my shell. I was learning more. It was becoming a
better experience for me because it just I wasn't that quiet kid in the back where,
OK, boom, time to leave. I'm out. I ask questions. I got up there and put myself
out there, and it just things started to snowball quickly from there.

Jacob described how the professors pushed him to become better. Jacob said,

They wanted me to be successful. They wanted me to learn, and they pushed me
really hard to be great. But they also gave me great feedback. They gave me
positive feedback about the things that were going well and then corrective
feedback on the things that I could improve on, and I constantly felt like I was
getting better. I got coached up.

Participants also described professors’ willingness to take the extra time to speak
with male preservice students and get to know them. Anthony reflected,
I could go to and just honestly sit in her office and talk to her about what's going on, things that I was still struggling with or whether it just be general topics in the classroom or things that I was celebrating. I would honestly feel comfortable going to her and talking to her about things that would help me out in the classroom. But I think that that was kind of the biggest thing - just being able to have that relationship with all my instructors. I felt comfortable enough to really go to any of them and discuss anything that might be challenging for me or also things that I can celebrate.

Charles shared regarding the relationships he developed and still maintains with his professors:

Your professors get to know you and still to this day, you being able to talk to them or with them on Facebook and see what they're doing. They're commenting on how things are doing in your life and your families, and that’s just kind of cool.

Many men in the study described very personal experiences of how specific professors helped them through difficult times. These experiences left a lasting impression on these men and several of the participants became emotional when they shared their personal stories. The following stories are shared without using the participant pseudonyms to further protect their identities.

One man shared how multiple professors helped him during a trying time in his life. He shared,

So when I think about my most positive experience, it's the fact that I absolutely hit rock bottom. And these teachers that I had known for less than 12 months,
they’re the sole reason I was able to graduate college. I was the first person in my family to ever graduate college, and I did it with very, very, very limited support from my family.

Another individual shared his experience going through a faculty panel to determine his future in the education program. He reflected,

The panel I went through and talking through everything, that's truly when I felt the most supported. So when essentially I was at my lowest, I felt supported in that. For me, being able to talk with them and answer the questions and knowing that those people were there for me, supporting me, making sure I was on the right path and really being able to listen to me and listen to my perspective.

Another participant shared the impact two professors had on his college experience. He said,

I'm to name two in particular are Libby Dierking and Lesi Smart. They always pulled me back. And she was so positive and supporting and even if I mess up, she says, that's OK. And then if I do something great, she always celebrated it no matter what, it can be the littlest of things.

He went on to share how Mrs. Smart has continued to make an impact on his life. He reflected,

Negative impact and negative feeling can't have an impact on a person's life, but a positive impact has more of an outcome in a person's life. So people like Mrs. Smart sit there and care. She's my superhero. She really is. When I got promoted to Sergeant, I gave her my Sergeant chevrons along with Corporal chevrons because I was like, ‘If it wasn't for you, just like teaching me how to straighten
things up, I wouldn't be doing much better now.’ She didn't do anything like super
crazy. She just talked to me and was very honest with me and very considerate.

To many of the participants, the professors at UCM developed a family-like
atmosphere where they felt safe, supported, and cared for. Charles described a professor
who helped develop this atmosphere. He recalled,

You go in that class and she treats you like you are family. And she was just one
of those people I think sticks out to me because she was so fantastic about making
you feel welcome and always supporting us and encouraging us.

Another participant described the welcoming atmosphere in Lovinger [the building in
which education classes are held] when he shared,

Oh, I like my education classes so much more [than my first major] and I just love
the people in them. I love the professors and had such a good experience there. So
once I made the shift [to major in elementary education], it was like, I just love it
here. I could spend all day in Lovinger and be totally happy.

Charles summed up the feelings of many participants when he described what helped him
to stay in the education program as an undergraduate. He said,

Having that small setting where you could create those relationships with your
professors and them always supporting you and encouraging you to keep going. It
was just nice to know that they would always say things like, ‘You can keep
going.’ You would hear them talk to other people, [saying] like, ‘Keep going and
don't give, don't stop now. And just, you're almost done like you guys are seeing
the end.’ And I think that was a big thing, I just felt very supported and welcomed
from the get go. I think that was like my big thing, just always being supported and knowing that you could be supported.

**Logical Progression of Classes**

Many participants described how the logical progression UCM coursework that maintained their engagement and commitment to the program. Sawyer described the reasons he chose UCM over other colleges for his education program. He stated,

The teacher program was the whole reason I chose UCM. When I toured, I was blown away by it and they gave you me the whole rundown of what the next two, two and a half years are going to look like. I met with Dr. McCoy once I got here, it was probably the highlight of my UCM tour experience, I have to say. I was thinking about was how everything kind of worked together, like taking all these individual classes. And then as I go along kind of seeing how it all fit together. I think the biggest thing was just being able to meet with someone from the Education Department just to answer all my questions and explain it to me because I went to other places where I didn't get to meet with anybody from the education department.

Rodney also appreciated the progression of classes. He shared,

I like how they kind of structured it where the first year you go into the room and you observe and then you just learn the basics. Then they move you to the next spot where you go in and then you teach the kids, like you have your little small group. You teach that. And then, finally, you move into the student teaching part where you have the full class. So I think how they step it like stair step, it's where you're not just thrown into the fire right away.
Men in the study discussed the sequencing of the classes which built upon the previous classes and prepared them for their time in the classroom. Ethan said, 

I know in the beginning, especially the workloads, were more than I was probably expecting. Especially later on, you know, in student teaching, there were other student teachers from other colleges and hearing what they had to do was not really as much. I mean, it ended up being a good thing that we had to do all of that to help prepare us even more.

Sawyer appreciated the structure of the topics addressed. He shared,

I think a lot of it is kind of the way things are structured, like the collaborative stuff in class. I started noticing this more when I got into the blocks, how everything is just modeled, what comes of the teaching strategies. They will teach us, like we are the student and I feel like that really helped me.

Rodney also appreciated the progression of the coursework. He reflected, “I think the way ours is set up is really, really helpful about how you can take the small progressions and you get small groups and then you get a bigger group.” Seth, a current student who currently works in the education setting, shared that the coursework he has “is connecting with what I'm experiencing in my job every day.”

**Field Experience**

Participants described the multiple opportunities for field experiences in schools and working with children as a large reason they came into the education program at UCM and were retained as a student. Keith shared, 

I feel like we got in the classroom a lot sooner than other colleges because I'd heard horror stories of people who didn't get to go into a classroom until their
junior year. Like, no, I'm not doing that. I think I went in my very first semester to a classroom, so I love that.

Hayden, a current student, also shared, “I really like the fact that my first semester there, I got to go into the classroom and experience what it was like being in the classroom and getting to watch teachers.” Jack, another current student, described his field experiences in the classroom. He said,

Another positive was just being in the classroom and figuring out that this is what I want to do. I think that's a very big thing. That was a very reassuring thing for me that I was doing something that I don't mind doing for life…So I think that's kind of something that sets our program apart.

Former students described field experiences that shaped their college education experience and benefited them as future teachers. Justin shared,

When you observe in classrooms, it was eye opening how different the grade levels are. I had to do observations in a rule a suburban and urban school. I enjoyed being in all the different classrooms and seeing all the different ways that people set up and seeing different ways people taught and meeting the different teachers and meeting the different principals. And just, you know, I was just young and hungry and wanted to learn as much as I could about the education.

Participants also described how their host teachers welcomed them into the schools and shared their expertise. Brad reflected, “I think going to the classrooms really helped. You can see how different teachers do different things, how you could do things, how you could pick up things.” Justin also said, “A lot of the teachers that I talked to were more than willing to step up and you know, open my head and poured this
information in.” Andrew shared, “Teachers do a lot of stuff and there's a lot of different things you got to think about. So I thought that they prepare.”

For many of the participants, the field experiences in the classroom also gave them the opportunity enjoy first-hand interactions with students. Shane shared,

I'll say most of it [reason I stayed in the program] was all my placements I had. I don't think there's one teaching placement that I had that I didn't enjoy. So having that and getting those aha moments from the kids, even as an undergrad, seeing that, I was like, OK, this is really fun.

Justin described the impact field experiences had on him as a future teacher. He said, “Being around the kids and realizing the relationship you're going to have with students. You start to build those relationships and see what it's like to spend a lot of time around these kids.”

Ethan summed up the feelings of many participants when he responded to the question of what helped him to stay in the program when things were difficult. He said, “Going in the classrooms, the kids, the same reason why we go back now as teachers.”

Clear, Direct Communication

Participants noted an appreciation for direct, clear communication between their peers and their professors. The direct communication assisted many men in the study to know what was expected of them in the classroom, in their field experience, and how they needed to improve as a future teacher. Owen described his preferred communication style. He said,

Hey gave it to me straight. And what's crazy is they [the professors] didn't find it offensive when I told them. I've learned that I had to tell the people, ‘You have to
tell it and give it to me straight. You cannot try to save my feelings, don't save my feelings, hurt my feelings. I need it because if I want to be a good teacher, I'm going to need real feedback.’ And like, they didn't take offense, they took that into consideration. They knew what my intentions were and they gave me that and I built off of that.

Brad described how direct communication helped him as a student.

I [like it] when you're more direct, because then you know, exactly, hey, I should have done this. Or if they're like, ‘Hey, you should try doing this’, that would be nice. I think if you do sugarcoat it, though, it comes off as like, ‘Hey, you should try this. But your way was fine, too.’ And I think that if you do that, it kind of is misleading that you're basically saying your away was fine, but this way is also okay. You can try this next time, but you don't have to.

Several professors also indicated direct communication was used frequently with their students, particularly males. Professors noted they treat each individual student on a case-by-case basis with their communication. For instance, one professor shared, “You start off gently finding out what works with them. Here's a person in front of me. I will look at their face and see how they're reacting to how we're starting this conversation.”

While all the instructors noted they see each student as an individual, several recognized the common theme of men needing and desiring more direct communication than their female counterparts. One professor shared,

You have to be very, very specific in your feedback with them [men] and not, again, not in a mean way. It's just they're just different than women. I feel like women tend to read between the lines for better or for worse. And even when you
don't want them to read between the lines, they're reading between the lines.  
Whereas guys, you can just say ‘You're going to need to do this.’ And then you tell them what to do. And then they just they go, ‘Oh, okay.’ and then they do it. They just want to know what they're supposed to do to fix it and then they'll fix it because they're fixers.  
Another professor, who was a professor recognized by multiple men in their interviews as a positive influence, shared about their communication style. They said,  
I'm your teacher coach. And much like you would want me to be very specific about how to do a layup correctly, I'm going to teach or I'm going to talk about how you need to do this this way so that you get more bang for your buck or you get more engagement. I'm a straight shooter anyway. So if I notice that you need to iron your clothes, I'm going to tell you to iron your clothes. I'm just me. I think they're [men] involved. They've committed themselves and they've committed time and money. And for me to beat around the bush and tell them, you know, foo foo stuff - no.  
Overall the men in this study appreciated the direct, honest feedback they received from their professors. Rodney described how communication helped him to become a better educator. He began,  
But I find that sometimes, especially with adults more so than children, it's hard for you to give that constructive feedback. But I think that that's a valuable part of our education system and something that I think we need to work on again as a society. But in all aspects of education, it's just making sure that we are being very direct and thoughtful with our positive.
He elaborated, “They [the professors] were very honest with you, and I felt like that time I was learning what I needed to learn and to be a successful educator.”

RQ Question 3A Answered: What Were the Collegiate Experiences of Men?

Current and former students of the elementary and early childhood program were asked about their experiences while in the program. Through these discussions, four main findings were communicated: field experiences in schools, support from professors, learning how to communicate with females, and class involvement.

Field Experiences

The participants all shared descriptions of their field experiences in the public school setting. All participants shared multiple, positive experiences they had with host teachers and students, far outnumbering the few negative experiences described by participants. The faculty at UCM also discussed the many positive attributes the men brought into their field experiences.

Engaging with Students. For many participants, engaging with the students at their different levels of field experience to affirmed their career paths. From beginning of their first field experiences with observations to co-teaching during their Senior 2 [student teaching], working with students was a positive experience for participants. Rodney explained,

You can really pinpoint and see the kids that struggle and what they struggle with and how you can help them. And that was made easier for me because, obviously, I didn't have the whole class yet. So being able to kind of just sit back and observe and see everything and not have to deal with each kid at that time was very, very helpful, I would say, because and then also you got to help the teacher with things
that they needed. I got to build these relationships with these kids and then I could
help that student that was struggling at that one time. So that was the best part to
me.

Brad described the interactions with students while doing his field experience. He said,

The kids were excited just because I was a guy teacher. Every time I came in, they
were just so excited that I was there even with student teaching. The kids, they
were excited and I try to interact with them and go out and play with them at
recess and stuff like that. But I think especially the younger boys they really latch
onto that like you as a male role model. That's part of the reason that I think I
wanted to continue with it. I saw that the impact was going to be good for these
young men and, honestly, girls as well, and to hopefully carry that on.

A current student, Hayden, recognized the impact he had in the classroom on his male
students. He shared,

I think that the boys definitely respond a lot better to me. Even the teacher has
commented on it because we work in a school that's in a more impoverished area.
She said there's a few kid like boys in her class that don't have a male role model
in their lives. They've definitely responded well to me in the classroom.

The professors at UCM also described the positive engagements UCM students
had with students while in the field. One professor described the interactions she
witnessed when she shared, “Every single one of them. I mean, the light turned on. They
were engaged. I never had to have any discussions with, ‘Hey, I am not seeing you
engaging in the way that you're supposed to be as an educator.’” Another professor
explained,
Guys tend not to look the teacher part. They look like they're part of the classroom. I mean, if they weren't just so big, you would be able to walk in and you wouldn't know who was the kid and who was the teacher, just because they just get in there… I know that they're going to be great teachers when I see that because they tend to get kids together more so than girls do, and I'm going to say that is across the board, I have truly seen that with my guys.

These positive interactions in the classroom maintained participants’ engagement in the program and their field experiences. One current preservice teacher shared his experiences back in the classroom after virtual field experience for a semester: “I didn't really think about quitting the program, but being virtual in the classroom was really hard. But this semester has really helped to keep me focused on finishing the education.”

**Welcoming Host Teachers.** Participants, both current and graduates of the program, described their positive experiences with adults in their host buildings. Many participants shared stories of being welcomed into their building and made to feel a part of the school. Joel shared,

Some of the positive experience were a lot of the teachers. The number one comment? ‘Thank you for being for being a male in education.’ A lot of the teachers that I talked to were more than willing to step up and go, ‘Oh no, no, here, let me let me, you know, open my head and pour this information on you.’

Keith described the excitement that was displayed when he came into a field experience. He said, “Well, every classroom that I walked into, the teachers were always like, ‘I am so excited and I have this student and this student and this student that I want you to talk to.’” Keith further explained,
They were always excited to have one [man] come in the room just to do anything and not be a principal, but just come in and do something. And so I don't feel like I was treated any different. Talking to my other peers that were doing the same thing, I think it was just the initial excitement like, ‘Oh, yes, you're in here. That's good. We don't have male help in here.’

Jacob reflected on his positive experiences with his host teachers. He shared,

I had really positive relationships with all of my hosting teachers and the woman that I eventually student taught with. She was an excellent mentor. She asked me great, great coaching questions. She never put words in my mouth. She forced me to become a reflective practitioner. She would never tell me how I did. She would never tell me what went well. She would never tell me what didn't go well. She always made me come to those conclusions and then find either takeaways that I wanted to continue to do or solutions to problems that I was identifying in my own teaching and management.

Rodney also shared, “I felt like they worked hard to place us with very thoughtful peers, knowing they would be someone to help inspire us and teach us. I loved working with the teachers and I felt like they trusted us as well.”

**Learning to be a Teacher.** Men in the study described how multiple field experiences taught them different ways they could be an effective teacher. Justin shared,

I enjoyed being in all the different classrooms and seeing all the different ways that people set up and seeing different ways people taught and meeting the different teachers and meeting the different principals. And just, you know, I was
just young and hungry and wanted to learn as much as I could about the
education.

Brad discussed the opportunities the field experiences presented. He said, “I think going to the classrooms that really helped. You can see how different teachers do different things, how you could do things, how you could pick up things.” Andrew also explained, “The stuff we learn, you employ that on a daily basis and you use that stuff. But all the kids are different and there's a lot of different situations that teachers deal with every day to like help their students who are struggling.”

Some men in the study also had the opportunity to be placed in a classroom with a male host teacher. These participants described the benefit of observing a male elementary teacher perform in the field. Andrew shared, “I think it was helpful just to see how a male interacts with the kids.” Jacob also shared his experience of being placed with a male host teacher:

I did feel like it gave me the confidence to see that men can be really great quality elementary educators and be passionate about what they do and not just be doing it. And so it showed me like, wow, there are men who are really good teachers. They didn't just get jobs because they were men!

Support from Professors

All participants related how supportive the professors were throughout their time in the education program at UCM. Support from the professors was a finding in the previous section; however, this theme was also very apparent when participants reflected on their collegiate experiences. In fact, the only negative experiences participants shared
during their interviews were from participants who graduated at least eight years prior to the study (2012 or earlier).

The professors provided the support and encouragement for the participants throughout the coursework. The participants shared how open and welcoming the professors were, as well as experiences where the professors went the extra mile to assist students. For example, one participant recalled,

I broke my leg one year and it was the middle of December and class was on the third floor of the college. You know, they actually moved the class down to the first floor, so I could make it there without having to go up all the stairs and everything. Yeah, so just little things like that. I mean, we kind of seemed like a little family that was really helping to get through. And that's one of the reasons why I stayed with it.

Another participant recalled when he his “rock bottom” and how his advisor and professors gave him the extra support he needed. He shared,

It was like such an overwhelming feeling of one thing just piles on to another. And she [advisor] was like, ‘Well, you could go and talk to your teachers and see if they'll give you the exempt. And at that point, you know, we'll see what we can do. However, many teachers give you the exempt. Comeback in a couple of days after you talk to them.’ And every single one of them gave me the exempt. So when I think about those positive experiences and I think about those teachers, the fact that they gave me that second chance, it is something I will never forget and never, ever be able to repay them for.
Another former student reflected how his professor supported him when a family member passed away. He shared,

And that was the time frame that my grandfather passed away early in the fall of that semester, and he was super sick in the weeks leading up to his passing. And so I was in and out of classes and up here at home and back and driving to and from here. It was a mess and she was so supportive, emailing to check in on me. She was very understanding about being late for class, missing class, late assignments, and just gave me so much grace and understanding and compassion.

While many participants shared stories about specific professors’ support during difficult times, all participants expressed how the professors in general supported them during their college experience. In fact, all the participants, when asked “What positive experiences did you have in the program?”, listed their professors in the education department. For example, Anthony shared,

I could go to and just honestly sit in her office and talk to her about what's going on, things that I was still struggling with or whether it just be general topics in the classroom or things that I was celebrating. I would honestly feel comfortable going to her and talking to her about things that would help me out in the classroom. But I think that that was kind of the biggest thing - just being able to have that relationship with all my instructors. I felt comfortable enough to really go to any of them and discuss anything that might be challenging for me or also things that I can celebrate.
Shane shared, “I’d be frustrated but the professors were always there to support you. One hundred and ten percent. And I think that was my biggest way to keep going.” Jacob also reflected,

They wanted me to be successful. They wanted me to learn, and they pushed me really hard to be great. But they also gave me great feedback. They gave me positive feedback about the things that were going well and then corrective feedback on the things that I could improve on, and I constantly felt like I was getting better. I got coached up really is what it was.

Charles described the relationship he still has with many of his professors, ten years after graduating. He said,

Your professors get to know you and still to this day, you being able to talk to them or with them on Facebook and see what they're doing. They're commenting on how things are doing in your life and your families, and that’s just kind of cool.

**Communicating with Females**

Many participants discussed navigating classes and field experiences in which the majority of individuals were female. Often, the participants were the only male in a class. As a result, the men described their experiences in learning to communicate effectively and appropriately with females. Jack, a current student, described his entry into his education courses. He shared, “When I got into my first education classes, it was just me and 20 girls. And so I had to learn very quickly how to get along with girls.” He elaborated,
I don't really have a definitive moment where I was like, ‘Oh, I can work with females.’ It was just practice. I just had to work with them over and over again, and I had to understand how they thought and how they think things through and try to understand how girls think rather than guys. There was just me and them. So I didn't really have that much of a choice, which was fine. I would use my manners a lot more, I would say please and I would say thank you instead of being like, ‘Yo bro what’s up’, like you can't really approach a female like that. Otherwise it gives them the wrong connotation. So I had to learn how to talk to girls very respectfully and to make it seem like I wasn't talking to them in an inappropriate way, like I wanted to try to date them or anything.

He concluded,

You just watch your mouth and just keep your eyes up. And I feel like once that once I earned their respect, they trusted me a lot and they respected me, and I have a lot of friends from that.

Another participant, Owen, discussed how he navigated communicating with his classmates. He shared,

And it's like, okay, how do I talk to women without trying to flirt with them? So it was my mindset, and it was like I overthought the process. I was thinking, if I just talk about my wife or my fiancé, it will be fine. I thought, I won't get in trouble with her [the classmate] and then they'll leave me alone.

Some participants described how they adjusted their style of communication to be less direct. For example, Andrew shared, “It's more just like how to say things nicely and not being blunt.” Ethan stated,
Yeah, I mean, I remember even still choosing my words very carefully as far as what I say and if I type it, how I type it, so it's not personal. So it is something I feel is being strictly professional with both the professors and classmates. I adjusted it all on my own. But I think when I first started, I didn't think about it. I mean, I did kind of start doing that and become more mindful of it relatively quickly.

Participants also described code-switching that occurred when they communicated with their female colleagues. Jacob shared, “I think any group of people that you hang out with, there's code switching that goes on. I got pretty good at, I guess, code switching.” He continued, describing a discussion with his male host teacher at a field experience,

The female teachers would get to talking about female things, and I would obviously be visibly uncomfortable. And so [my host teacher] at the time leaned over me is like, ‘Dude, you're going to have to get used to this. You're going to be working with primarily women, the rest of your career. So just get used to it.’ And so that was a piece of advice like you're just going to have to get used to it, you know, things that people would consider more feminine conversations in regard to teaching.

One professor described this phenomenon when they said, “It's funny because you've got these men in a predominantly female kind of profession. But a lot of them learn that if they’re going to get in this world, they’ll need to work with these women and connect with them.”
Class Involvement

Participants described their involvement in the classroom at UCM. For many men in the study, they initially were not highly participatory describing sitting back and observing before they became active in class. Brad explained, “I didn't want to come off as the creepy, weird guy in the class. I would just kind of sit back and take it in and if it was my turn to talk, I talk.” Owen recommended,

So if you're in a school where the vast majority is female in the classroom, sit back. Be professional until you understand the norms of that classroom. That makes sense. Yeah, because if you don't understand the norms of the classroom, you're kind of burning yourself out, and you could possibly make things a lot worse.

Brandon described his experiences of a professor assisting him to become more involved in class.

She really got on me to get out of that shell and be myself…It fell into place where I had a class with Dr. Brant, and it just started and I can't pinpoint when it happened. But it took me from feeling very jaded about it, kind of disinterested or just like, okay, I'm treading water until I'm not. And it suddenly turned it into a situation where now I started to thrive at it because I kind of got out of my shell. I was learning more. It was becoming a better experience for me because I wasn't that quiet kid in the back where, okay, boom, time to leave. I'm out. I asked questions. I got up there and put myself out there, and it just things started to snowball quickly from there.
Professors also noted how many male students were slow to become involved in classroom discussions. One professor shared,

Most of them start up quiet, sitting back and letting the ladies come first and they just sit back and kind of get a feel for it. But the way I teach is that everybody's going to talk one way or the other. You know, you can sit back there as long as you want, but I'm going to call on you. But I would say mostly what they do is they do a lot of listening first.

Another professor wondered,

They're involved and they meet the expectations and they're collaborative, but I think they're just a little standoffish sometimes. I think they kind of keep that distance a little bit. I don't know other than, maybe, they lack the self-confidence. Finally, one professor described how they build their classroom community, encouraging students to become involved with classroom discussions. They shared,

The beginning of each semester, we do a lot of community building in the classroom, and we do that twofold. And you get this because of where you are in early childhood. We want them to mirror that experience of a student walking into a classroom and not knowing anyone. And how can you build that classroom community from day one and to see how powerful that is for a child to be able to express who they are and learn about other people and purposeful ways. So we do that. And then we also do this community building so that they are acclimated in their group because we know they're going to be with these other people for so long.
RQ Question 3B Answered: What Were the Experiences of Male Graduates?

Participants highlighted many of their post-graduate experiences as teachers in the public school setting. During interviews with participants, four findings related to post-graduate experiences emerged. These included: being a male presence in the classroom, overcoming misconceptions, staying true to self, and support from coworkers.

Making a Difference: Male Presence

The most frequently discussed experience participants described during interviews was the difference they made in the lives of their students. Many men attributed their gender as a contributing factor on that influence. Men spoke of their ability to be a male role model, a father figure, and their ability to build relationships.

Many participants noted the impact they as a role model for students. For many participants, their presence enables students to see them as a professional, caring individual. Jacob explained,

It's helpful for some of my male students to see themselves in me as a professional, as a support system, as somebody who has been through an educational journey and seen it through, I think it just opens up a lens or creates another frame that they can see themselves.

Jacob elaborated, “It will matter to those kids because they have never seen a male or spent time with a male elementary teacher. Some of them maybe have never spent as much time around an adult male as they have me.”

Owen described how he related to students in his classroom. He said,

There's some kids who need a male role model in a sense, because they have anger issues. And like, those are my favorite because I was a very angry child,
too. And so I know where they're coming from. I know how that feels. That sucks. I know what it's like to be in the bottom with the lowest of low and not being able to do anything like that. I can relate to that to them. I'm like, what can I do to help you out? Like, what can I do to make this environment better for you to have a good time?

Participants also described how they can set an example for their students as a positive model for the students. Robert said,

I think that giving them a positive role model is important. I try not to fit the mold of the tough macho. I'm teaching them it's okay to be emotional. It's okay to get scared. It's okay to be nervous and that men feel that, too. And I think that's sometimes shocking to them when I have those real life conversations with them that I will feel stress sometimes. I think that that's very powerful for them to see that. And hopefully that is something that will stick with them.

Jacob discussed his ability to set an example for his male students. He said,

I think some of my young boys are able to see themselves in me more, and they're able to see an adult that typically can emotionally regulate and can verbalize emotional regulation. I think it's helpful for them to see somebody who gets excited about learning. I think there's a stigma in school about what a successful student looks like, and it probably what pops into your head is typically like the quiet girl that sits at her desk and not necessarily the rowdy boy over there in the corner who can't sit still for five minutes. But I think they can see themselves in me because I'm bouncing all over the classroom, you know, and I'm excited about learning.
Participants described how building relationships in the classroom will often provide students with a father figure in their lives. Zane explained the positive impact he has in the classroom. He said his most positive experiences include, “...building relationships, especially with the kids who didn't have a positive male figure.” Anthony reflected, “I think the biggest thing is just being strong, show that your presence and just make sure that you're building those positive relationships with the kids that may not have that at home.”

The men in this study discuss how students are often placed in their classroom specifically because they need a male role model due to lacking a father figure in their home. Keith explained,

When they're making class list for the next year, they always say, ‘We're giving you so-and-so because they need a positive male role model.’ Now, I'm not saying that's not true in some circumstances, because it absolutely is for some. There's one I can think of right now that I had him last year. Dad was kind of estranged. The student kind of latched on and took hold, and this year he is struggling. But every time I see him, if he's going into kind of his little mood that he can get in, I can get him out of it in about two seconds flat.

Brandon reflected on being a father figure to some of his students. He said,

You kind of get to be that figure where they trust you and they'll talk to you and you get through it. When those young boys do, you have that dad figure. You're giving him that somebody to look up to, somebody that they might not see within, you know, no matter if it's dad, grandpa, you know, neighbor, uncle, they don't have that. And it's something that we could provide.
Justin explained how his presence as a male in the classroom impacts his students. He said,

The students get a different style. It's something different from the norm. What came to mind first for me, for the students was like those that don't have the dads at home…. Yeah, you know, you definitely noticed that those kids latch on. Which is a huge. It's rewarding, and I could see where some people would think it's a little odd. I think of it as a huge responsibility. You cannot let those kids down. You cannot wreck those kids by not holding that responsibility in a high regard.

**Fighting Against Misconceptions**

Participants described the many misconceptions they fought as a male teacher. These misconceptions directly related to them being a male teacher in a field dominated by women.

**Physical Interactions with Students.** Many participants described the need to be considerate and vigilant in how they interact with their students. Many men discussed how their presence in the classroom as a male teacher gave rise to concerns. For example, Anthony said, “I've already noticed, just in my limited amount of teaching experience that I have to be careful with things, and that females in the classroom might have a different presence than I would in the classroom.” Andrew continued, “It’s more just understanding the connotations that kind of go along with it [being a male teacher]. Just knowing what people think and just being able to have those conversations would have helped me prepare myself for my teaching.”
Men in this study discussed specific interactions they are mindful of when they interact with students. Keith explained,

I'm always extremely cautious when it comes to that physical connection that they [students] want. I'm always extremely cautious to do like a side hug, or I'll try and see if I can get them to bump a fist or high five or something instead. Right? Just because I feel like the male population is more scrutinized for showing physical touch for like a hug or whatever to a student as opposed to the female teachers.

Robert shared, “There are female teachers that will have a kid sitting on their lap while they're reading to help them. And that's just not something I feel like I can do, right?”

Robert continued,

I still 11 years into this, I still don't feel comfortable having a dress code conversation with a parent over their kindergarten child wearing strapless shirts. I feel like when I start the conversation, are they going to think that I'm sexualizing it? You know what I mean? There are definitely things that we have to keep in mind, such as that too, right?

Several men discussed how other individuals advised them on protecting themselves as a male teacher. Justin shared a discussion he had at the beginning of his teaching career with another male teacher at a conference. The teacher encouraged him to go to a Missouri State Teacher Association (MSTA) meeting to learn about the benefits of the organization. Justin said, “And he [the friend] said when he was in college, he went MSTA that he was told, ‘You need to stay and you need to protect yourself because it's not a matter of if you get sued, it's when, you know.’” Seth also shared his family’s concerns when he shared his decision to be an elementary teacher. He recalled,
They always thought it was a poor financial decision and that I would end up somehow in trouble because I would say something stupid or make a child or a parent angry, and I would be too easy of a target. And so there was some concern that way. They're all once they knew I wanted to do it, they were supportive, but they were a little worried that I would be one lie away from jail.

Participants also discussed the need to be vigilant in their actions and to consider how their actions could be interpreted. Brad explained, “I feel like you're more vulnerable to things like claiming to be like a sexual assault or something like that. And so that's something I always try to steer away from because obviously nobody wants that.” Keith shared,

I don't think there's anything big. It's just little things that you have to be cautious of just because of society. And I don't think it's individualized to just my school. I think it's widespread. It's just the way society is always looking at the negative light and you have to try and break through it and show something positive for it.

Josh reflected on advice he received from others about being a male teacher. He said,

Families are going to look at you differently. Communities are going to look at you differently. So you just have to be very conscious of how you present yourself in regard to physically with the students. You know, you don't have to deny hugs and different things, but just be very conscious that there's another adult present that it's like a sidearm pat. There were just tips, and I'm not going to say those are right. But they were they were conscious enough to tell me, this is just the reality of it. We're not saying it's right, either, but it is a stigma.
Interactions with Parents. Participants described interactions they experienced when parents learned their child’s teacher was male. For some, the parents reacted in a positive way. Jacob shared,

I think there are some parents that get really psyched about having me since I am a male teacher. So it's not even just all negative and then indifference. It's like their parents get really excited. Yes, I'm really excited for my student to have like a different type of teacher and see that as part of their educational journey and their experience.”

Other participants experienced negative reactions from parents. Charles recalled,

I remember my first year, actually, it was Meet the Teacher and I had a parent walk in and they had their kid and they said, ‘Where's Mr.__?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, that's me.’ And then they said, ‘Well, we're not going to have a male teacher.’ And they walked out and he went to the principal who was a male who allowed them to switch. And I think that was that was my first impression. I remember thinking to myself, the first person who walked in my very first Meet the Teacher. I was literally hired two weeks ago, and this is the first impression I have. I remember thinking, ‘What have I gotten myself into? What did I do?’ Like, could I have gone somewhere else that I should?

Keith relayed a negative experience at a Meet the Teacher night. He said,

The weirdest challenge to me is my very first year teaching. I had a parent come in for Meet the Teacher night and just this look on her face of disgust. And I wasn't quite sure if it was just because she had other things she'd rather be doing that night or not. So then I went up and introduced myself and said I was glad to
have their student in class, and she goes, ‘Yeah, we're not very happy.’ Their negative thoughts were immediately just because I was a male teacher. And I don't know the background of the family. I don't know if they had bad experiences before. I have no idea. But that was my very first year, my very first open house.

Charles later described another interaction with a parent in which the parent’s impression changed once he knew Charles as a teacher. Charles recalled,

He said, ‘I don't want my child having a male teacher.’ And I was like, ‘Well, you can speak to the office about this, but I'm the teacher who's been assigned to them.’ And then conferences in October, he came up to me and apologized to me, and he said, ‘I should have never just assumed anything.’ And that’s a family I still talk to today. They’re not even here anymore. It’s just amazing to know that I build that relationship from a family who didn’t even want me to now talk to me all the time on Facebook.

*Stay True to Yourself*

Participants noted the importance of staying true to yourself as a teacher. For some men, this meant being silly and goofy with students; for others, this meant showing emotions in the classroom. For example, Rodney explained,

Just be you. You don't have to change who you are. Just because you're a male in a female dominated occupation, you don't have to change who you are. I'm very laid back. That's how I'm going to teach. That's how I found my role in my classroom. You don't have to put on this male persona to be a better teacher, to get your kids to follow your rules. My only thing? Just be yourself. It's a lot easier
to teach whenever you just are how you are every day instead of trying to go to school and change who you are.

Brandon shared his personality as a teacher. He said, “I don't get rattled very easily. I kind of like roughhousing. I think the kids really get along well because it's just my room. It's kind of rough and tumble in that sense, where we give each other a hard time. We have fun.” He elaborated,

Sometimes you think you’re outcast or, you know, people are judging you. It's okay to be different going into that. Be yourself. Don't try to conform into what people have told you. Teachers should always be yourself and bring that energy to your classroom environment.

Rodney discussed how his personality impacts the students both inside and outside the classroom. He said,

I bring a lot of energy… I try to bring in my best face because sometimes kids don't like school and they don't want to be there. So if you can make it enjoyable and make it not, you know, just sit there and write stuff down. Do as much as you can to interact with them. And like I said, I'm a very personal guy and open guy. So I like to have open conversations, and I've been to multiple sporting events that some of my kids have. If they cheer, I'll go watch and cheer.

Some participants pointed out the importance of expressing emotions in the classroom to both their female and male students. Robert explained,

I try not to fit the mold of the tough macho. I'm teaching them it's okay to be emotional. It's okay to get scared. It's okay to be nervous and men feel that, too.
And I think that's sometimes shocking to them when I have those real-life conversations with them.

Robert went on to describe an interaction he had his first year of teaching. He remembered,

I had a boy my first year teaching. He wore purple for picture day and there were three or four kids that laughed at him. And so for the next week, the only thing I would wear was purple… [I want them to see] that you can be accepted no matter what you are, who you are.

Many men in the study felt when they were true to themselves as teachers, they were able to reach more students on a personal level and be better teachers. Robert shared this advice for male teachers,

It would be important for the males to know not to hold back because they may be uncomfortable. Don’t hide who you really are when you're in there because of your surroundings. So I think the more authentic we are, the more authentic we will be as teachers.

Zane also shared advice when he said,

The kids are still going to love you more than anything else because you might be the only positive person in their life. But I would say as the most thing, the biggest thing I could give another guy going in the field is, do it because you love it and don't fall for the entrapment of you have to go and be principal and be a superintendent. If you just want to be a teacher, be a teacher and just be the teacher you can be.
Support from Coworkers

Participants noted the level of support they received as teachers from their teaching team and administrators in the school building. For some participants, the support they received began when they first began teaching. Rodney shared,

I had my very first week. We went there to set up our rooms and stuff. I had multiple teachers - didn't even know their names yet - come and ask if I needed help with anything to help me set my room up. They sent me lesson plan templates that they use to help them. Just things to help me get situated and feel more comfortable being there.

Participants also noted the support they received from their grade level teams. Ethan recalled, “My first two years, I had the most amazing team I could have asked for. Having them next to me has been invaluable. And honestly, I think it would have been much, much harder without them being there.” Justin also shared, “You know, all those people help me out a ton.”

Men in this study also noted the support they received from other teachers in their building, as well as the administration. Keith said,

All of the other teachers are phenomenal, as well. I feel like the building I work in is more of a family than other buildings, and they will have your back no matter what and try and help you out, no matter what. I feel like they were all just really supportive.

Brandon shared, “I have those right guys in the area of leadership where it's like, I trust them. I respect how they've acted and what they've done. So I feel comfortable reaching out and leaning on them on those issues.” Anthony reflected,
My assistant principals - they've shown up and have actually helped me. And you know, my team has helped me out tremendously and one of my team members has 16 years of experience. I've always been showered with support, and I've heard from parents, I'm glad you're in the elementary. And I don't think I've really ever had a negative experience.

While all the men worked in a predominately female work environment, some participants worked in schools with other male teachers. Jacob shared, “It's nice to see somebody who has lived experiences that are similar to yours that some of my female counterparts just simply can't relate to because they will never have those life experiences.” Keith described his relationship with another male teacher when he said, “So we get along great and can joke around. It’s more of like a joking environment - like the females will joke some, too. But with the males, you can joke a little bit differently.”

Owen described how he built a relationship with the other men in his building. He said, I didn't hang out with a lot of guy teachers last year because I just went home and slept. So last year was exhausting for me. And then one day I was like, you know, I need to work out. I'm very social, I like to talk to people. So I was like, you know what? I'm going to shoot my shot here. I'll call Mr. [another male] up out of the blue.

He continued, We started to go drinking together and all that stuff like a normal adult man…Then this year, [new male teacher] comes in [to our building] and I was like, I don't want him to feel the way I feel ever…like that nervousness that self-doubt, that overthinking of, did you do everything the right way? And then we
became really cool friends because like, we go out for a couple beers on a Saturday and we get along very well about that and we go and do fun stuff together.

Whether male or female, teachers or administrators, participants found support from others in their school building helped them in their teaching career. As Landon concluded, “Find people who can support you and who you can open up to, and you don't have to be perfect. You can make mistakes, everyone. Most people are there to support you. Most people want you to do well.”
Where are all the good men? A case study of male elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri

Katie Ritter

Purpose of the Study
To understand the experiences of current male preservice teachers enrolled at UCM in the elementary education and/or early childhood education programs and male graduates from UCM with a degree in elementary education and/or early childhood education

Scholarly Context Themes

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<tr>
<th>Need for Males</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Why Men Teach</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to relate</td>
<td>Historically female role</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
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<td>Role models</td>
<td>Low salary</td>
<td>Working with Children</td>
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<td>Staff diversity</td>
<td>Sexual subjectification</td>
<td>Job Security</td>
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Conceptual Framework
The Social Cognitive Career Theory attempts to understand the factors that contribute to the educational and occupational interests of individuals (Lent & Brown, 2013). The theory examines self-efficacy and goals of an individual and how environmental factors, such as support and social barriers, influence career management and adaptation.

Research Questions
1. What led men to pursue an elementary and/or early childhood education degree?
2. What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining the male elementary and/or early childhood teachers in the education program at UCM?
   a. What practices would be beneficial for UCM to employ to recruit and/or retain male elementary and/or early childhood education majors?
3. What are the experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who majored in elementary and/or early childhood education at UCM?
   a. What were the collegiate education experiences of current male preservice teachers and male graduates who major in elementary education and/or early childhood education at UCM?
   b. What were the experiences of male graduates from the elementary education and/or early childhood education programs at UCM?

Study Setting and Participants
- Single, qualitative study in a bounded system (mid-sized midwest university)
- Current male students: 5 current male students (17 male students fit the parameters for study at the time of the study)
- Male graduates of the program: 16 male graduates (71 male graduates from December 2009 to May 2021 fit the parameters of the study)
- Faculty and administrators in the College of Education: 7 current/former faculty members and/or administrators in the College of Education
Where are all the good men? A case study of male elementary and early childhood education majors at the University of Central Missouri

**Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What led men to pursue a degree?</th>
<th>What practices were effective in recruiting/retaining men?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement and support</td>
<td>Support from instructors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary education not first choice</td>
<td>Logical progression of classes</td>
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<td>Experiences with children</td>
<td>Field experience</td>
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<td>Making an impact</td>
<td>Direct communication</td>
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<th>What were the collegiate experiences of men?</th>
<th>What were the experiences of male graduates?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Field experiences</td>
<td>Making a difference: Male presence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from professors</td>
<td>Fight against misconceptions</td>
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<td>Communicating with females</td>
<td>Stay true to yourself</td>
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<td>Class involvement</td>
<td>Support from coworkers</td>
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**Overarching Theme**

The importance of connections

**Recommendations**

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<th>Administrative</th>
<th>Curricular</th>
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<td>Place multiple male preservice teachers in the same course sections during block classes</td>
<td>Introductory Field Experience class: panel of current teacher to discuss professional ethics and etiquette</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place male preservice teachers with at least male host teacher during field experiences</td>
<td>Junior block class: teacher panel to discuss topics in-depth and teaching scenarios</td>
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<td>Employ at least one male professor in the College of Education</td>
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<th>Faculty</th>
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<td>Create and maintain supportive environment for students</td>
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<td>Consider students on case-by-case basis and adjust communication style</td>
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<td>Be mindful of saying, “men will get jobs”</td>
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| Collaboration | |
|---------------||
| College of Education compile list of current males in education to serve as mentors to male preservice teachers | |
| Grassroots Facebook group created and moderated by male students or teachers | |
Katherine (Katie) Ritter grew up in rural Missouri on her family’s century farm, raising cows, sheep, horses, and a plethora of dogs and cats. Attending a small Kindergarten through 8th grade public school, with a population of 50 total students, was a unique experience, and was further compounded by Katie’s mother being her principal (and PE teacher) throughout her elementary years.

After high school, Katie attended Central Missouri State University, now UCM, where she double majored in elementary education and early childhood development. After graduating in December 2005, Katie began her 16-year career teaching first grade in Warrensburg, MO in January and fell in love with teaching students in that grade level.

Katie’s love of learning continued after her completion of her bachelor’s degree. The desire to understand how to meet the needs of early elementary students led her to pursue a master’s degree in Literacy Education at UCM, which she completed in December 2007. This degree program also enabled Katie to receive her Special Reading certificate, allowing her to teach reading Kindergarten-12th grade. Katie’s excitement for learning, a desire to learn more about reading instruction, and the opportunity to choose specific classes not required for certification led Katie to the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU). At MU, Katie earned an Education Specialist degree in Reading in December 2010.

Katie’s love of sharing knowledge prompted her to engage in many exciting opportunities. She became an adjunct instructor at UCM in 2010, teaching preservice teachers at the college level. Katie also hosted countless UCM preservice teachers in her first-grade classroom, ranging from students in their first field experiences to students
who were completing their student teaching requirements. Katie also presented at multiple local, regional, and state conferences, sharing her knowledge on reading engagement, flexible seating, student data driven methods, and family engagement. Katie continues to engage in professional development and has received training in Brain Spring Phonics First, a dyslexia intervention program, and LETRS, a professional development course to train educators in the Science of Reading.

Katie continues to reside in rural Missouri on her family farm with her husband, Steve, and two children, Madelynn and Ethan, and teach first grade. Katie began her doctoral work through the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2019, following in the footsteps of her mother, Sandy Hutchinson (Cohort 1) and her husband, Steve (Cohort 7). Katie completed her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (Cohort 12) in May 2022.