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An Exploration of Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy

Stephanie Boni

AN EXPLORATION OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY

By

STEPHANIE BONI

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Ginny Birky, PhD

Members: Suzanne Harrison, PhD

Terry Huffman, PhD

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This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

8/21/2014 Ginny Birky		Committee Chair
Date	Ginny Birky, PhD	Professor of Education
8/19/2014 Suzanne Harrison		
Date	Suzanne Harrison, PhD	Assistant Professor of Education
8/19/2014		
Date	Terry Huffman, PhD	Professor of Education

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews and participant reflective journals to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and sense of readiness to enter the teaching profession. The six participants were graduate students in a Master of Arts in Teaching program from the same university. The study took place at the end of their year-long field placement as they were completing a three-week solo teaching experience. Consistent with current literature, the participants identified the most influential factor to self-efficacy to be the relationship and influence of their cooperating teacher. Other areas of influence were classroom management, student achievement data, and ability to be flexible and adjust to the unexpected. Identified implications for future research are the exploration of influence of cooperative learning as a member of a cohort, an analysis of the impact that self-efficacy has on pre-service teacher performance as determined through evaluation, and a longitudinal study to examine how self-efficacy and readiness transform an individual as pre-service teachers become novice teachers.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this effort to my son, Hudson Robert Boni.

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I could not have possibly taken on a project like this while working full time and raising young children without an amazing support system whom I owe an immense amount of gratitude. To my husband Patrick who always encouraged me to find the strength to continue every time I wanted to fly the white flag of surrender. To my sweet Henry and Hayden who made sure to give me quiet time whenever I needed to do my homework and who have helped me stay the course by asking me daily when I would finally be a doctor. To my best friend Lindsey who has spent countless hours picking up my slack so I could devote time and attention to my research. My family and students are forever grateful to you for helping me maintain my roles as wife, mom, and teacher while I have pursued this dream. To my parents Lem and Shannon who instilled a love of education in me from a very early age and who always made me believe I could do and achieve anything I put my mind to. Your endless faith in me has helped me have faith in myself. To my fellow teachers at Bear Creek for your support and words of encouragement as I tackled this crazy year. To Ginny Birky for your hard work, patience, and help in turning me into a more scholarly writer, and to my other committee members Terry Huffman and Sue Harrison for taking the time to support this project. To the six participants who were so authentic and open in sharing their experiences with me and for your willingness to put in extra work during an already overwhelming time. And finally, to my sweet baby Hudson, thank you for giving me one more reason to want to achieve my goals. Sharing this experience with you is something I will always remember as being an incredible time in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For decades, statistical analysis has shown that nearly half of all teachers are leaving the profession by their fifth year of teaching (Lambert, 2006). While logistical factors such as low wages have been reported on a minor scale, Lambert believes it is typically the dynamics within the profession that emerge as the most prevalent themes. Regardless of the specific reason, the fact that this is happening to individuals shortly after leaving teacher preparation programs can lead us to assume that how pre-service teachers are being educated and trained has an effect on their ability and willingness to stay in the profession. While there have been studies devoted to the analysis of differences in programs, they are typically focused on the model of delivery. The two most common delivery models include the university system which offers licensure through a four- or five-year degree, and non-traditional programs such as Teach for America that train individuals for a specific purpose (Chung, Darling-Hammond, & Frelow, 2002). No matter what the model, there is still a need for increased understanding of how the specific variables that exist in different programs lead to successes and failures amongst both pre-service teachers and those early in their teaching careers.

As the standards continue to increase in terms of high academic achievement for all students, teachers are faced with more pressure than has been true in the past. No Child Left Behind brought about levels of accountability that forced school systems to devote time and attention to increase the awareness of teacher performance. Bransford and Darling-Hammond (2005) suggest the increased pressure is not only prohibiting qualified individuals from joining the profession, but is also frequently reported to be a reason teachers choose to leave. While minimizing the pressure is not necessarily an option within the new framework of accountability,

analyzing and improving the way we prepare individuals to enter the profession may increase the likelihood that the pressures they are bound to face are not going to define one's sense of teacher efficacy. This needs to start in teacher education program design in order to maintain a strong level of confidence in practice, while at the same time teaching, encouraging, and expecting high standards. Doing so will better enable teachers to work towards high achievement themselves with fewer adverse reactions towards expectations and standards (Bransford & Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Previous research has demonstrated that one of the most influential factors to a pre-service teacher's preparation is that of field experience. Student teaching is where students have the opportunity to connect the theory they are learning in their university classes with authentic practice in an existing school classroom. Coffey (2010) found the perceived experiences a pre-service teacher has during this component of a teacher preparation program is the most defining factor of the pre-service experience in shaping philosophy and personal theory, influencing heavily how teachers will perform in the beginning of their career. The experiences that prove to be the most beneficial were those where student teachers reported high levels of community participation and felt supported by the staff at their field placement site (Coffey). In particular, the relationship between the pre-service teacher and cooperating teacher demonstrated significant importance with evidence supporting the influence of the cooperating teacher's personal philosophy and style frequently adopted by the pre-service teacher (Le Cornu, 2009).

As a result of research that recognizes the significance of field placement in terms of developing teacher style and performance ability, university programs continually aim to improve how they structure this particular element of their program (Mantle-Bromley, 1998). One particular option that has gained momentum in the last ten years is to cluster students at the

same school site for an entire school year. In some cases this is done within the context of a professional practice school with very tight school district/university program alignment, where other programs simply offer their pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn in a cohort. In either case, the long-term placement at the same site is viewed as very advantageous for the pre-service teacher experience (Mantle-Bromley, 1998; Turner, 2008).

While research has identified several methods of best practice in terms of field placement, for a variety of logistical reasons they are difficult to implement on a wide scale basis. Kennedy (1991) identified duration of the experience, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, to be too short to properly prepare students to enter the profession. He suggests the most effective model would be to pay pre-service teachers to complete a long-term placement as they do in other fields in an on-the-job training model. However, Kennedy acknowledges our current education system would not have the funds to support such a program. Regardless of the pitfalls, he believed there are a variety of components to the ideal model we *can* implement, while remaining within the restraints of our current university program designs.

Allowing pre-service teachers the ability to complete their field practice in an environment that follows the general framework of a professional practice school, even if not done in its entirety, is a suggested recommendation of those who support this model for pre-service learning (Mantle-Bromley, 1998). Logistical factors have the potential to prohibit school districts and universities from full implementation. Sim (2006) suggests this learning environment will naturally address several of the criticisms student teachers have reported in terms of their field experience, including the lack of feeling properly prepared. She goes on to suggest that in a professional practice school where pre-service teachers are part of a community

of educators, the opportunity to teach in a cohort model at the same school site enhances the pre-service teacher's educational experience.

Evolving and improving upon teacher preparation programs is a national movement that currently receives a lot of attention at both the state and federal level. Numerous grants in the United States have been devoted to research and practice of innovative ways to improve the quality of educators. The Chalkboard Project, a foundation devoted to increasing quality education in the state of Oregon, is an example of an exemplary organization that is focused on addressing many of the challenges in our education system, one of them being teacher preparation (Wilson, 2013). Encouraging a tighter collaboration amongst school districts and university programs is one of the specific grant opportunities provided through this large-scale project. According to Wilson (2013), such partnerships lead to the importance of utilizing the time we have been granted to advance our knowledge base and determine how we can educate Oregon pre-service teachers to meet the demands of modern education.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to explore the perception of teacher efficacy among pre-service teachers who are working in a cohort with other pre-service teachers in a year-long placement at the same school site. I used a qualitative design involving personal interviews and pre-service teacher journal entries to examine the factors that contribute to a pre-service teacher's sense of teacher efficacy. Particular attention was given to the unique characteristics of working at one school for the entire school year as a member of a cohort of other pre-service teachers. Through this study I wanted to gain a greater understanding of the influencing factors pre-service teachers report as to what prepared them for teaching, or where they perceived a lack of preparation in their pre-service training. In doing so, I hoped to contribute to the current

movement to refine teacher preparation programs and provide insight into how we can increase efficacy and readiness in educators entering the teaching profession.

Research Questions

While this study is exploratory, the research questions specifically aim to identify the connections between teacher candidate perceptions of self-efficacy and their participation in a clustered cohort of other teacher candidates at the same school site. The following research questions will guide the study:

Research Question

To what degree do pre-service teachers feel prepared to enter the teaching profession based on their pre-service educational experience?

Sub-question 1

What are the factors that pre-service teachers perceive most prepared them to enter the teaching field and raised their sense of teaching efficacy?

Sub-question 2

What factors do pre-service teachers perceive to be most influential in developing a sense of teacher efficacy?

Sub-question 3

How does participation in a cohort contribute to a pre-service teacher's reported self-efficacy?

Key Terms

Cohort model- Teacher candidates who work within a designated group of other pre-service teachers and who are placed at the same school site for an entire school year.

Cooperating teacher- An experienced teacher who is assigned to mentor a pre-service teacher during their field practice. For the purpose of this study, these are the teachers who will provide

a classroom for the practical experience of the pre-service teacher.

Novice teacher- A teacher within the first three years of teaching after the completion of a teacher preparation program.

Pre-service teacher- A university student enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Another term that is frequently used is teacher candidate.

Teacher efficacy- A teacher's belief that he or she can effectively educate students to a desired level based on the pre-service teacher's effort and skills (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

Limitations and Delimitations

While this study addresses issues that are certainly relevant to the experience of pre-service teachers, the results are only based on their perceptions of self-efficacy at the end of the full time practicum experience. Having the opportunity to follow the participants into their first year of teaching would have the potential to lead to a clearer understanding of the implications of the pre-service experience, thus the short time frame is a limitation of this study.

To gather a diverse amount of information two data sources were used: personal interviews and daily reflective journals written by the pre-service teachers. With the specified learning environment, it cannot be assumed that the experiences of these particular pre-service teachers were similar to those participating in other field practice situations. However, identifying both pre-service teacher successes and failures increased our awareness of the effectiveness of this more purposeful model of field practice for pre-service teachers.

The small sample size of six participants was a delimitation as the range of perspectives to be analyzed was limited. It was a choice to allow the analysis to be more in-depth and to create a clearer and deeper picture of the experience for the selected participants. I

also selected four of the seven schools that would host pre-service teachers. One of the four school sites was the school where I am currently employed, which created another delimitation of the study. I had the opportunity to know the participants to some degree, which could have led to a level of personal or professional relationships. However, to avoid close and continual contact, none of the participating pre-service teachers were placed in my classroom for their field placement.

Another limitation was the newness of the practice of placing teachers in a cluster model at the same school site. Because the participating university had newly implemented the model that hosted the cohort of pre-service teachers, there was relatively little opportunity to refine the model based on existing similar programs. I did not expect implementation would be entirely smooth, particularly when considering the two separate entities, the school district and the university, that worked together for this opportunity to happen. In the infancy of such implementation, it is possible the pre-service teachers did not experience the true benefit of the research-supported model.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

For quite some time educational researchers have focused on retention rates of teachers, particularly for those in their novice years who are leaving at high rates. Not only is this a concern in terms of the education system's ability to educate effectively, but it is also estimated to cost millions of dollars each year (Ingersol & Smith, 2003). While a variety of contributing factors have been reported in terms of why teachers are leaving the profession, only a handful of them are within the restraints of a profession supported by government funding. The frustrations individuals report regarding insufficient compensation for a demanding work load do so under the premise that they were aware of this before they entered the profession. It is more often reported that novice teachers do not feel adequately prepared for the duties of a full time teacher. This factor is gaining more attention in the field of educational research as it is associated with the nationwide movement of increasing effectiveness in teacher preparation programs (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

The majority of research studies that inquired as to why teachers leave the teaching profession found that the lack of preparation was an overwhelming theme. Several studies reported it to be the most influential factor in a teacher's decision to leave the profession (Ingersol & Smith, 2003). Because those who leave at the highest rate are novice teachers who have recently completed a teacher preparation program, many believe that components of the university programs are in need of refinement. It is necessary then to investigate what novice teachers report as contributing factors to their perceived lack of preparation so we can specifically identify the areas on which to focus improvement in the university programs (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

While it is certainly necessary to understand the reasons novice teachers choose to leave the profession, it is equally important to analyze the experience of pre-service teachers as they finish their education. Mulholland and Wallace (2005) found the pre-service teaching experience to be one of the most defining indicators of successful induction into the teaching profession. If pre-service teachers leave their pre-service experience feeling negatively about their ability to educate potential students, they are more likely to have similar negative feelings during their first year of teaching. Negative feelings in regards to teacher effectiveness have been noted as a reason novice teachers leave the profession (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

Moore (2003) discovered it is necessary to inquire into both the negative and positive aspects of the pre-service experience, as they have been found to be of equal influence. She also suggests that research go beyond the structural components of university programs which are common occurrence in educational research. Instead, an emphasis on the perceptions and reflections of pre-service teachers is necessary as these are the qualities that will be carried into their induction years.

Teacher efficacy is one aspect of teaching that emerges regularly in educational research. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) define teacher efficacy as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 233). Under an almost identical definition, Pajares (1992) observed teacher efficacy as being tightly related to both motivation and teacher effectiveness, two areas that draw a lot of attention from scholars in the field. More specifically, from the perspective of a pre-service teacher, self-confidence is perhaps the most defining factor in determining whether a candidate will decide to enter the profession or not after completing their educational program. Therefore, it is imperative to engage in dialogue around

self-efficacy during the pre-service years just as much as it has been for novice and experienced teachers (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

While most educational scholars would agree that teacher efficacy is tightly related to teacher effectiveness, there is lack of consistency regarding definition and assessment (Hoy & Knoblauch, 2008). It is important to acknowledge teacher efficacy as a matter of perception, one which might not be measured by observation or other formal tools of evaluation. Assessing perceived teacher efficacy requires invested entities to allow educators the opportunity to engage in reflection on a continual basis as it relates specifically to the level of confidence in their practice (Beachum, McCray, Yawn, & Obiakor, 2013). While many strategies have attempted to increase the potential of engaging in meaningful dialogue, research on cooperative learning has continually demonstrated that it is both effective and easy to implement (Cannon & Scharmann, 1994).

Another important aspect of a pre-service teachers' experience is the completion of a field practicum. Field practice has demonstrated importance in the successful completion of a university program, ability to be hired into the profession, and ease of the induction year. Through their analysis of ten different university programs, Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, and Stevens (2008) found there to be considerable differences in how universities structure the field practice component of their program. They suggest the lack of consistency is a possible factor that influences the transition for novice teachers who may have been trained in a different format than their peers. Others such as Moore (2003) and Maheady, Jabot, Rey, and Michielle-Pendl (2007) support the claim that high quality field experience is not only fundamental to the development of teacher effectiveness, but also needs to be further explored to continue the expansion of best practice.

The aim of this literature review is to better understand the pre-service teachers' experience by examining the influence of teacher efficacy. I have reviewed literature on the influences of teacher efficacy, best practice in field based experience, and cooperative learning and reflection. Having identified trends in each of these main areas of focus, I have specifically explored research that provides identifiable connections of each of these areas to teacher efficacy and how they work together to influence the pre-service teaching experience.

Influences of Teacher Efficacy

Research related to teacher efficacy is continually emerging, however Bandura's research still influences heavily the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, dating back to 1970 (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008). Bandura was particularly interested in how environmental and social factors contributed to perceptions of self-efficacy. In terms of pre-service education, his work applies to how different placements are more conducive to a positive sense of efficacy. Exploring the cognitive processes individuals go through when developing their self-efficacy, Bandura identified specific areas of influence that are easily transferable to a variety of disciplines. His findings are particularly important to the development of pre-service educational research as a strong connection has been identified between teacher efficacy and early learning experiences, suggesting individuals will develop the majority of their sense of teacher efficacy early in their teaching career (Bandura, 1977, 1993).

With more evidence that supports a positive connection between teacher efficacy and teacher performance it is becoming increasingly common to find coursework that addresses how to promote development in this area. To do so it is necessary to first identify the individual factors that influence a pre-service teacher's sense of efficacy in order to understand how to best support and enhance it. Hoy and Knoblauch (2008) discovered the environment in which the

pre-service teacher works would have an effect on their perceptions of performance. They found those who were in more urban areas were more likely to report lower levels of self- efficacy, while those in suburban, more affluent areas were more likely to report higher levels of self-efficacy. This led to the conclusion that it may be necessary to differentiate how pre-service teachers are prepared to enter their field placement based on the unique characteristics that are present at their teaching site.

Bandura identified four areas that contribute most to how individuals form their beliefs of self-efficacy: "Mastery experiences, verbal feedback, vicarious experiences, and physiological and emotional arousal as a result of an experience" (Bandura, 1993, p. 121). As teaching has demonstrated itself to be an emotionally driven job, many have focused on this component of Bandura's theory in the quest to increase an understanding of teacher efficacy. Jamil, Downer, and Pianta (2012) used this element of Bandura's theory to form the basis of their research as they inquired into individualistic factors that were most likely to influence teacher efficacy. Focusing on teacher personality and perceptions of how students learn best, they were able to identify connections between how pre-service teachers believe students learn best and their own sense of teacher-efficacy. These authors discovered that pre-service teachers who were child-centered, progressive thinkers were more likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy than those who focused more on traditional, adult-centered views. They also found that pre-service teachers who perceived themselves as being outgoing, social, and having low levels of anxiety, also demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy. This trend was found to be true for novice teachers as well as experienced teachers.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) found similar factors that influenced teacher efficacy in an evaluation of the connection between self-efficacy, perceived collective teacher-efficacy,

external control, strain factors, and teacher burnout. Their survey of 244 elementary and middle school teachers support the conceptualization of teacher self-efficacy as its own individual construct. They were able to identify six specific variables that presented themselves as being associated with self-efficacy and the other characteristics. These variables were "instruction, adapting education to individual student's needs, motivating students, discipline, cooperating with colleagues and parents, and coping with changes and challenges" (p. 621). Slaalvik and Skaalvik recommended that these variables gain further attention to increase teacher competence and confidence.

While individual characteristics certainly have the potential to influence one's development of self-efficacy, they can also be heavily influenced by interactions with others. The interactions pre-service teachers have with their cooperating teachers are crucial for a variety of reasons, one of them being the development of teacher efficacy. Bandura (1986) described beginning learning experiences as a crucial component to long-term efficacy, making it necessary to have cooperating teachers who have the necessary skills to have a positive influence on the pre-service teachers with whom they will work. Johnson (2010) discovered this to be evident in her study which examined different types of role models pre-service teachers were exposed to in their field placement. Levels of content mastery, perceptions of a positive influence as reported by the pre-service teacher, and perceptions of a positive influence as reported by non-related staff, were all found to be influential in both positive and negative self-efficacy.

Another element related to how universities structure core components to enhance self-efficacy is through self-reflection. In a study on reported efficacy in relation to specific activities in which the pre-service teachers were engaged, Debus (2002) found a solid association between

efficacy and various teaching activities based on the analysis of teacher reflective journals. He claimed this was more easily observed through the use of deep reflection done after specific training on how to engage in reflection. Reflection opportunities where pre-service teachers described learning activities in which they encouraged their students to learn material beyond what was being presented to them, as opposed to learning solely for the purpose of rote reproduction were found to more likely lead to increased levels of self-efficacy. The findings of their study suggest self-efficacy is something that can be taught, practiced, and developed simultaneously with learning about teaching strategies and best practice.

Another area that has been found to contribute to self-efficacy in pre-service teachers is the experience they have before starting their teacher preparation program, particularly when it comes to the more challenging aspects of teaching. Peebles and Mendagllo (2014) inquired into course effectiveness of pre-service teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms, and found that those who entered with any level of prior experience started off with higher levels of self-efficacy. However, with the successful implementation of coursework and the field practice in which they were researching, all pre-service teachers reported higher levels of self-efficacy with the gap between those with prior experience and those without to be much smaller than when they started.

Reflection not only has a positive impact on self-efficacy, but has also been connected to student teachers who have been identified as being *distinguished*. Brannon and Fiene (2010) found that proficient student teachers were able to reflect on specific incidences that took place in their classrooms while distinguished teachers were able to identify strengths and weaknesses and design and implement a plan to improve upon their practice. This higher level of reflection was seen to be more influential in contributing to positive self-efficacy which was one of the

factors observed more in distinguished teachers. Based on their findings and the findings of others who have researched these topics, Brannon and Fiene also suggest that self-efficacy and reflection are heavily incorporated into teacher education programs.

Best Practice in Field Based Experience

As the teaching field continues to evolve to meet the increasing demands and expectations for high student achievement, teacher education programs are being examined more closely (Chung, Darling-Hammond, & Frelow, 2002). One reason is to ensure that student learning is not negatively affected when pre-service teachers are responsible for teaching duties. While there is certainly a learning curve that is granted to anyone beginning such a complex career, it is the intention of educational stake-holders to ensure that program design allows for proper preparation and active involvement by qualified individuals. Another reason for the increased political and scientific scrutiny is the necessary accountability to ensure that teaching programs properly prepare potential educators to successfully enter and stay in the field (Maheady, Jabot, Rey, & Michielle-Pendl, 2007). A common concern in the analysis of program effectiveness is how programs are integrating theory and practice. While variety exists in how pre-service teachers are completing their field practice, there are theories of best practice that are becoming more common.

In an inquiry into pre-service teacher's perceptions of readiness to enter the field practice portion of their education, based on the completion of the university classes on theory, Moore (2003) reported a lack of connection between theory and practice. Cooperating teachers who were interviewed reported a frustration that pre-service teachers were given very little formal instruction on components they felt were crucial to teaching success, such as classroom management, time management, and differentiation. Pre-service teachers however, did not feel

they needed more classwork before entering their field practice component as they overwhelmingly felt it was with actual practice that they would learn the most in these particular areas. Moore concluded that there needs to be more consistency amongst pre-service teacher and cooperating teacher perception, as pre-service teachers are heavily influenced by the attitudes and opinions of their cooperating teachers. If cooperating teachers express negative thoughts about their lack of confidence in how the universities prepare pre-service teachers to begin their field placement experience, they are likely to internalize those negative thoughts as part of their own self-efficacy (Moore).

All teachers experience some level of stress in completing the responsibilities that come along with the job, regardless of years of teaching experience. Therefore, it is not unusual for pre-service teachers to also experience some level of stress. Klassen and Durksen (2014) found that when pre-service teachers experience stress, they report lower levels of self-efficacy. This is particularly true for pre-service teachers who are not only expected to complete requirements for their university programs, but also try to develop the necessary skills to become a successful teacher (Lonnquist, Banks, & Huber, 2009). The potential burnout at this point in one's teaching career is higher than at any other point, which is why it needs to be addressed when pre-service teachers are completing their educational careers (Greer & Greer, 1992). Wadlington, Slaton, and Partridge (1998) emphasize it is not only important to examine how to alleviate stress for the professional growth of pre-service teachers, but also because it decreases effectiveness and possible student achievement. While these scholars do not claim it to be possible to avoid stress altogether, they identified potential factors that may help alleviate the level of perceived stress. One unique identified component was having a class that is purposefully designed to bridge the theory pre-service teachers are learning in their college classes with the pre-service learning

opportunities in which they are participating throughout their practicum experience. This happens with increased levels of support from personnel at the pre-service placement site as well as the university. Other examples these researchers identified were collaborative learning opportunities, solid modeling and coaching from experienced educators, and evaluation opportunities that were done in a non-threatening manner.

In a study to investigate how a teaching practicum influences stress and self-efficacy for pre-service teachers, Klassen and Durksen (2014) followed the experience of 150 pre-service teachers during a two-month long teaching practicum. The pre-service teachers filled out an online survey every week which demonstrated that reports of high stress led to lower levels of self-efficacy. In further analysis the researchers were able to identify four adaptive processes that influenced the pre-service teachers practicum experience. In some cases, a *positive change* was identified where the pre-service teacher was able to look at the challenges as a learning opportunity. *Assisted change* took place when the pre-service teacher identified the time of increased stress as needing extra support from those around them which decreased the negative impact on their self-efficacy. However, not all adaptive strategies were positive experiences, as pre-service teachers would also engage in *hindered change* which puts the responsibility for the increased stress on another's actions, or *withdrawal* where pre-service teachers did not exude the energy needed to avoid the negative impact on self-efficacy. They found the cooperating teacher to be the most identified agent to encourage the pre-service teachers to engage in the positive adaptive methods, and thus positively influence self-efficacy.

Making decisions about how to assess the field practice portion of the university program can be difficult due to the varying requirements set forth by each state's teacher licensing standards and the theory and knowledge of best practice. One thing becoming increasingly

common is assessing not only performance levels, but dispositional factors as well, which research has demonstrated to be associated with self-efficacy (Lin et al., 2014). Indicators on what dispositions are related to increased teacher performance have already been identified and supported by research making it an easy transition for pre-service educator assessment. This was the basis of a study conducted by Johnston, Henriott, and Shappiro (2011) in which they sought to discover new assessment tools on dispositions that were specifically related to pre-service educators in their field practice. They stress it is important to differentiate assessment to the field practice component due to the unique factors that the field experience may bring out as compared to the structure of the university classrooms when pre-service educators engage entirely with other adults. Johnston et al. were able to accomplish more developed explanations of how the already-supported desirable teacher dispositions could be adapted to meet the needs of the pre-service teacher.

Since research has supported the implications that field practice has on the development of teaching skills, self-efficacy, and sense of readiness for a pre-service teacher, it is important to understand exactly what it is that pre-service teachers are doing with their time. Maheady, Jabot, Rey, and Michielle-Pendl (2007) analyzed the number of hours pre-service teachers spent in the classroom, and exactly what types of activities they were doing. They also gathered data on what the outcome was for students based on each differing activity the pre-service teacher performed. For example, if a certain percentage of their time was assisting the teacher in prepping materials which was found to be a very common practice, a lack of connection to student learning was possible. The concern by these researchers was how to hold cooperating teachers accountable for how they directed their pre-service teachers to use their time while working in their classrooms. Maheady et al. believed this could be accomplished through

assessing the outcomes in a more systematic way. While to some degree, each pre-service teacher was required to perform an assessment related to their teaching, they found the amount of assessment was done on too small of a scale when considering the overall amount of time a pre-service teacher spent in the classroom. Furthermore, they suggested continued inquiry into how field practice sites can be held to tighter levels of accountability through more structure and increased requirements around the priority of pre-service learning opportunities.

Under the premise of what novice teachers reported as the most challenging aspects of entering their careers, several universities have shifted the focus of essential outcomes for their pre-service teachers in their field placement site (Watzke, 2003). Classroom management, discipline, and reaching diverse learners were among some of the most commonly reported difficulties, and have also been reported as being the most difficult to instruct. Kaya, Lundeen, and Wolfgang (2010) analyzed how a pre-service teacher evolved in two of these areas over the course of their pre-service experience with the intent of identifying specific variables that may influence their own personal theories. Overall, the participants reported significant changes from the beginning of their pre-service experience to program completion. Perhaps the most significant variable that was identified was the discipline model that was outlined by the cooperating teacher. Because pre-service teachers often begin their experience after the school year has already begun, there are already systems in place based on the methods of the cooperating teacher. Therefore, pre-service teachers are likely to perceive whatever model it may be in a positive light because it is their first exposure to a concrete model of practical education. Kaya et al. concluded by stating the importance of strong integration of theory and practice and also argued for more diversity in the field practice beyond the normal one or two cooperating teachers to whom the pre-service teachers are exposed. Kaya et al. suggested that

the more diversity they are exposed to, the more likely they will develop a theory of their own with more conviction and higher degrees of confidence.

As research continues to emerge in terms of best practice in field-based learning for pre-service teachers, university programs are transforming how they approach this aspect of their educational program. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) continually researches and reports on what universities have successfully done to advance the learning experiences of pre-service teachers. Several suggestions were made by the Blue Ribbon Panel to the NCATE in regards to the need for traditional student teaching practica to become more of a clinical-based experience that is long term, rigorous, and led by qualified individuals.

Cooperative Learning and Reflection

While cooperative learning and reflection each contain their own individual literature, they will be connected for the purpose of this literature review as it relates to this study. One identified benefit to the cohort model is the ability to reflect on a deeper level with those whom have shared experiences (Lee, 2005). This section will contain literature on cooperative learning and reflection as they influence pre-service teacher experience, as well as how they influence each other.

Cooperative learning has been a focus in teacher education for decades, almost exclusively supporting the model as being beneficial. Johnson and Johnson (1999) describe cooperative learning as the process of using small groups of students who are working together to maximize not only their own learning experiences, but the learning experiences of others as well. While this model has been widely integrated into schools across the United States, it is much more prevalent in K-12 education than it is in higher education. However, in the instances

where cooperative learning is incorporated into higher education, the benefits were found to be just as powerful as they are with younger students (Bruffee, 1999).

The learning environment of schools has changed over the last several decades to incorporate more collaboration and less teaching in isolation (Lu, Jiang, Yu, & Li, 2014). It is now the expectation that school personnel work together to benefit the academic achievement of students. Lu et al. (2014) analyzed data from 104 schools in Hong Kong that were utilizing a multilevel structural equation model to encourage collaboration and cooperative learning in order to see how it impacted self-efficacy and autonomy. The researchers found that at schools where collaborative learning was present and influential, higher levels of self-efficacy were reported. They further identified the role of the school's leadership as one of the most indicative factors of self-efficacy. Schools that exhibited inclusive principal leadership led to higher levels of self-efficacy and autonomy, where schools with administrative teams who were less involved in the day-to-day instruction were not seen to contribute to increased self-efficacy.

Cooperative learning can be particularly beneficial for pre-service education, due to the cohort model that is typically utilized by program developers. Veenman, Van Benthum, Bootsma, Van Dieren, and Van der Kemp (2002) found that while reflection was commonly taught to pre-service teachers in terms of how to utilize it in their own teaching, it was not being done to its effectiveness at the university level. For example, Veenman et al. noted that one of the most important things to consider was that physically placing students together does not ensure they will benefit from cooperative learning. They believe structuring interactions and activities that engage students in meaningful interactions is necessary to take this learning opportunity to a maximum level. It is this step that university programs are taking for granted. Many of the universities who participated in the research of Veenman et al. made the assumption

that when pre-service teachers were placed in a cohort learning environment, that a high degree of collaboration took place. Yet, that was not always the case.

Cooperative learning also has a benefit in pre-service education due to the implications it can have on the process of reflection. Lee (2005) found some of the most dynamic experiences of reflection that have long-term meaning and value don't necessarily happen alone. While a certain process has to be done on an individual level, he found pre-service teachers reported shared reflection with other individuals of similar experience that was leading to the deeper levels of reflection desired in the education field. He further suggested that engagement with individuals at the field practice site provided the environment for this type of reflection to take place. Acknowledging that each field service location offers unique qualities and characteristics, Lee believes we can assume that those at the same site would have deeper, more relevant conversations. It was also noted that pre-service teachers could engage in more meaningful reflection when cooperating teachers were more hands off, as they were less likely to interfere in the reflective process by their own experiences and perceptions.

As Hatton and Smith (1995) report, the majority of university programs claim to use reflection as a core component of their teacher preparation program; the term reflection is often ill-defined and its implementation is done so rather loosely as well. Hatton and Smith conducted a thorough literature review on four different aspects of reflection: definition and implication, strategies to engage in reflection, problems associated with reflection, and assessing reflection. They saw many discrepancies in all areas and concluded there was a need for further exploration of how to take the theory and support of reflection, and turn it into a more systematic approach with a clear definition and concrete modes of implementation. Similarly, Lee (2005) suggested

that educators need to develop a stronger understanding of how reflective practice is different during the pre-service years than it is for practicing educators.

In the literature regarding reflection, there are discrepancies between theory and practice. Examining the practices of three student teachers, Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) found that deep reflective practices led to meaningful connections between theory and practice when pre-service teachers were asked to reflect by using a variety of guiding questions and themes. They found the most important connection happened when asked to identify the "why" in observations conducted by the pre-service teachers, while also acknowledging that pragmatic concerns were often an obstacle in thinking at a deeper level. It was these instances which provided the most necessity to engage in reflection with outside sources with individuals who could encourage reflection beyond the logistical concerns of lesson designs. Orland-Barak and Yinon found that in order for reflection to increase meaning from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, we must figure out how to make pre-service teachers feel that what they are practicing in the classroom is a direct reflection of the theory they are learning at the university level. These connections might not always be possible and, when they are missing, it is just as necessary to understand and discuss why the theory and practice are not aligned in order to create more authentic learning opportunities.

Since research has shown both self-efficacy and reflective practices to have a positive influence across a variety of disciplines, Phan (2014) sought to discover what connections, if any, they had on each other. Following 260 college students over a two-year period, Phan analyzed the influence that reflective thinking had on self-efficacy and how they both influence academic performance. He concluded there was a mutual relationship between the two and that strong skills in each area were found to be influential to the other. Those with strong academic

self-efficacy engaged in higher level cognitive reflections, which led to academic growth and positive learning experiences.

Tan (2013) sought to discover what practices needed to take place to encourage pre-service teachers to move beyond using reflection as a way to organize experiences, and instead use reflection to improve practice and self-efficacy. While several different components of reflection were discussed in this research study, the one element that was noted as most influential was that of reflective dialogue. The reflection sessions in which pre-service teachers were observed as being most influential in terms of self-efficacy were interactive dialoguing with peers. Tan noted the topics were often based around common pitfalls of pre-service teaching experiences and observed a camaraderie that developed in the comfort of knowing that they were not alone in their feelings of failure. Tan believed this had a positive influence on self-efficacy during the early stages of teaching.

While reflective practices are helpful for pre-service teachers, the benefits of cooperative learning are consistent throughout the teaching profession. Gillies and Boyle (2007) analyzed the discourse of high school teachers who were engaged in cooperative learning and made reference to the benefit these experiences could have on those early in their careers. The participating teachers were not just asked to engage in cooperative learning, but they were also trained in how to engage with active discourse that increases skills on both the listening and speaking sides of engagement. This activity could benefit all levels of experience, as it has the potential to take the activity of reflection to another level.

While cooperative learning is typically viewed as a positive learning opportunity, there are certain reasons that make both students and teachers hesitate to engage in this practice on a consistent level. It is important to understand what these factors are in order to better understand

how to either avoid them, or work within them, because enough research has supported cooperative learning to make it worth incorporating into any learning experience. Erdem (2009) found that while the majority of students believed their learning was positively influenced by working with others, they were most hesitant with the idea that they would be evaluated as a whole. The activities perceived more positively were those in which students were able to interact and engage during the learning process, but were then still accountable on an individual level for how they would report what they learned. This finding would transfer nicely to a cohort of pre-service teachers, as they would be able to reflect and learn as a group, but would then be required to take what they learned and apply it in their own individual way at their respective pre-service site.

Conclusions

Pre-service education programs are going through many changes as they have become increasingly scrutinized to ensure they are properly preparing students to enter the teaching profession. As accountability has been mandated for schools over the last decade, it has become necessary for pre-service programs to evolve to meet the higher demands that have been placed on teachers. One of the ways this can be done is to engage in practices that increase teacher efficacy, a quality that research demonstrates to be tightly associated with a variety of desirable teacher outcomes. As efficacy is shown to be heavily influenced in early learning experiences, it is necessary for pre-service programs to contain components that will directly influence how to build confidence in practice.

While it is often debated which is more important, theory or practice, what is most important is that we begin to consider them as two intertwined components that need more focus on integration then separation. Field experience has been consistently reported as being more

influential to teaching style, particularly as it relates to teacher efficacy, which is why it has continued to gain increased focus for study. Understanding the factors within a field practice experience that lead to pre-service perceptions, both negatively and positively, will help us continue the reform to best meet the needs of both pre-service teachers and the students they will influence.

Cooperative learning and reflection can be used effectively to increase the understanding of how theory and practice intersect for pre-service teachers who lack the experience necessary to make the connections on their own. These two learning opportunities are unique for pre-service teachers, and while it is certainly beneficial to use the knowledge gained from research based on experienced teachers, it is important to consider how it can be adjusted to meet the needs of pre-service teachers. Utilizing the interactions and support of cohort members through cooperative learning opportunities will assist in increasing teacher efficacy and effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

This study explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy after completing the field practice component of their university program. In order to gather data on this topic I conducted semi-structured interviews and analyzed pre-service teacher's reflective journals. Using these tools, I identified factors that contributed to a sense of teacher efficacy with an attempt to answer the following questions:

Research Question

To what degree do pre-service teachers feel prepared to enter the teaching profession based on their pre-service educational experience?

Sub-question 1

What are the factors that pre-service teachers perceive most prepared them to enter the teaching field and raised their sense of teaching efficacy?

Sub-question 2

What factors do pre-service teachers perceive to be most influential in developing a sense of teacher efficacy?

Sub-question 3

How does participation in a cohort contribute to a pre-service teacher's reported self-efficacy?

Setting

This study took place in a Northwest town with approximately 80,000 residents. The school district had 17 elementary schools, five middle schools, and three high schools. The participating university is a branch campus supported by one of the largest public institutions in the state. This university had approximately 1,000 students at the branch campus and offered

upper division and graduate coursework. The participants were enrolled in a year-long Master of Arts in Teaching program which licenses approximately 35 students a year. The majority of the students were endorsed in early childhood and elementary education, with 10 to 15% pursuing an endorsement in middle school and high school.

Four of the seven elementary schools that serve pre-service teachers were selected for this study. At school A there were approximately 620 students enrolled, with 51% of them qualifying for free or reduced meals. Of the students in school A, 14.4% were English language learners, 22% were minority students, 12.6% received special education services, and 3.6% were identified as talented and gifted.

At school B there were 645 students with 73.5% of them qualifying for free or reduced meals. Of the students in school B, 23.1% were English language learners, 35.9% were minority students, 11.5% receive special education services, and 2.4% were identified as talented and gifted.

At school C there were 615 students enrolled, with 68% of them qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Of the students at school C, 15.2% were English language learners, 27.2% were minority students, 9.8% received special education services, and 11.5% were identified as talented and gifted.

At school D there were 525 students with 54.7% of them qualifying for free or reduced meals. Of the students at school D, 4.4% percent of them were English language learners, 12.6% were minority students, 11.4% received special education services, and 2.3% percent were identified as talented and gifted.

Participants, Sampling Strategy, and Research Design

The pre-service teachers for this qualitative study were enrolled in a Master of Arts in Teaching program at the described university. During the term in which this study took place, there were 30 students enrolled in this program with six of them being selected from four different school sites to participate in this study. Their coursework was the same with the only difference in their experience being the location of the field placement, which was one of the above-mentioned school sites.

Of the six students who were participants in this study, all were working on their Early Childhood Education and Elementary credentials, meaning they had to complete a practicum experience in at least one K-2 classroom and one 3-5 classroom. They were assigned to cooperating teachers who met specific requirements as decided by the school district and the licensing agency. The cooperating teachers all held a master's degree in education, had taught for at least five years, and had not had a pre-service teacher within the last three years, per the guidelines of the two educational entities.

Within the framework of qualitative research, I utilized semi-structured interviews and participant reflective journals to collect data. Data collection took place during the pre-service teachers' three-week solo teaching experience. The pre-service teachers had a two-month window to perform their solo teaching requirement, as decided by a schedule determined by the pre-service teacher and their cooperating teacher. This allowed for some flexibility as to when the data were collected for each individual student. During their three-week experience the pre-service teachers reflected daily in a journal, responding specifically to their sense of efficacy after the day's lessons (see Appendix A) I asked them to rate their sense of efficacy on a scale of one to four, and then provide rationale as to why they gave themselves the score they did. A

score of one was to represent very low perception of teacher efficacy, while a four was to be very strong perception of teacher efficacy. Their daily reflection consisted of a one-page entry with a total of 15 entries for each participant.

At the end of the three-week solo teaching experience, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant (see Appendix B). The interviews took place as closely as possible to the completion of each individual pre-service teacher's solo teaching experience. They were all able to be completed within one week of the end of the three weeks. The participants did not have the specific questions ahead of time, although they were able to reference their journal as needed in order to remember specific events that were relevant to the interview questions. Due to the flexibility of choice in determining the dates of the three-week solo teaching experience, the interviews spanned over the spring term.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

I conducted the interviews using a digital recorder. I then had the digital recordings transcribed for each individual interview, and began with initial coding to identify what the participants reported, as described by Creswell (2009). With only six participants this was not overwhelming, although the two data sources of participant responses produced a lot of data, which became more succinct and organized as I began focused coding. The main focus of the interview was to identify themes and patterns in participant responses as they pertained to the research questions. While the intent was to have each interview question be attached to a particular research question, there were several that elicited responses that contributed to multiple questions at the same time.

To identify themes, I first separated specific responses into relevancy as they related to each research question. They were color coded by participant so I could properly identify who

contributed which comment, while also organizing and assigning responses to the research questions. Once they were separated by research question, I looked for words or short phrases that were coming up frequently and began to count repetition to identify the most prevalent themes. This assisted in answering the research questions and identifying what similarities or differences there were amongst the participants.

The daily journals produced a total of 15 journal entries per pre-service teacher, with a total of 90 entries. I used the pre-service teacher's responses to pursue patterns and themes as they related to either a positive or a negative self-efficacy rating. I considered a score of one or two to be negative, while a score of three or four was considered positive. Thematic coding allowed me to label and categorize the themes as they related to either a negative or positive response. To do this I organized the journal entries by the self-efficacy designation of the day, prior to starting the coding process. Keeping the responses color coded by participant, I counted repetition of words and phrases as they pertained to each self-efficacy rating. For each response, I identified short phrases that appeared to be the most influential to determining that day's perception of teacher efficacy. Similarly to the interview questions, color-coding by participant allowed me to identify themes while also being able to analyze each participant's individual experiences. The data gathered from the journals contributed to each research question as connections were made to self-efficacy and the specific identified factors.

After both data sources had been analyzed and individually coded, the data were combined to strengthen the connection to the research questions. I looked for associations between the ratings given, specific responses, identified themes, and perceptions of self-efficacy as defined by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) for the purpose of this study. On a daily basis, the pre-service teachers' rated themselves and reflected which not only allowed

me to better understand each individual participant's pre-service experience, but it also identified patterns and themes that were frequent amongst all participants. This assisted in the analysis of what was most commonly affecting the pre-service teachers' perceptions, both on a negative and positive level. I also compared the data gathered from the two sources to ensure that participants did not provide contradictory reflections. I did this first by looking at the combined data gathered from the interview and journal of each individual participant, and then by combining all journal responses in comparison to all interview responses. I observed both data sources to have contributed similar themes and patterns.

The timeline for data collection was spring semester, based on the participating university's timeline, and the schedule determined by the pre-service teacher and their cooperating teacher. By this time, the pre-service teachers had completed their core classes and were working in their field placement full time. They had already completed a work sample in their secondary placement, and while they had the option to complete their primary work sample during the three-week solo teaching, all of my participants had finished their second work sample just prior to starting their fulltime teaching. The three-week experience when I collected data from them was their final requirement towards completion of their degree. Analysis began right away followed by the writing of results, which I completed during summer term.

Research Ethics

As per the guidelines set forth by the George Fox University Institution Review Board (IRB), I followed all ethical standards to ensure the utmost confidentiality and anonymity possible. I completed a Human Subjects application and submitted it to the university's IRB. The study was approved on March 4, 2014 (see Appendix C). Before I began data collection, I provided each participant with an estimation of the work load that was required to participate in

this study. I then requested that they sign a letter of consent, confirming their understanding of what is being asked of them and a willingness to participate (see Appendix D). I assured participants that the highest levels of confidentiality would be employed in every step of the data collection, analysis, and presentation. Real names were not used for pre-service or cooperating teachers, the participating school site, school district, or university. I also received written permission from the participating school district, as I worked very closely with the field placement sites and faculty (see Appendix E).

All the contributing material will remain in my possession for three years following the completion of this study. This will include all journal entries, hard copies of the personal interviews, digital copies, and signed consents. I will then personally ensure they are destroyed.

Role of the Researcher

I am a doctoral student with an invested interest in the completion of this research study. I tried to follow all procedural guidelines in order to reduce my own personal influence and ensure my own biases did not influence how I interpreted and analyzed the data. However, I am passionate about quality teacher education and acknowledge that my personal bias may be present unconsciously. As a working teacher in the same district of the participating pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers, there was the possibility of interaction prior and during the study. Three of the participating pre-service teachers were placed at my current school site, although I had no impact on the location of their field placement, nor did I have consistent interaction with them prior to data collection.

I also made every effort to remain neutral throughout the process of data collection and analysis by maintaining personal and professional boundaries with the participants. My role with

the pre-service teachers was solely as a researcher, and I did not observe, provide feedback, or serve as a reference for them.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

I pursued this study to gain insight into the experience of pre-service teachers to better understand the effectiveness of their preparation. I chose to focus on perception as it is tightly related to efficacy, which is considered to be a strong determinant of effectiveness. While there are two major components of a teacher preparation program, the university classes and the practical experience, I chose to focus solely on the student teaching aspect to ensure my results were specific and more easily identifiable. This chapter will introduce the six participants and describe the participant's perceptions of self-efficacy, and how their efficacy has impacted their sense of readiness as they proceeded to the next step in joining the teaching profession.

Profile of the Participants

The six graduate students in this study all came from the same university Masters of Arts in Teaching program. They came from very different backgrounds in terms of previous educational experiences, undergraduate degrees, and what led them to pursue a career in education. They were placed at four different school sites for their student teaching with three of them being at the same site, while the remaining three were each at different sites. There were three to four pre-service teachers at each participating school site, although not all were participants in this study.

Participant one was a 39-year-old male who has two undergraduate degrees in politics and philosophy. The school in which he received his undergraduate degree did not offer a degree in education, so it was something he thought about pursuing later in life. He had always put teachers on a pedestal and did not think it would be something in which he would be successful, but changed his mind when he was inspired by a relationship he developed with a

child who had difficulties making connections with others. This participant chose elementary education because he did not have the best experiences in high school and feared he would push students too hard to prepare them for college, knowing the vast degree of difficulty he felt when he transitioned to a more challenging learning environment. He felt he could relate to elementary age students better and would enjoy being able to start their educational career off on the right foot. Participant one was born and raised in the community in which he did his pre-service teaching and is hopeful to find a job in the same school system.

Participant two was a 25-year-old female who has an undergraduate degree in anthropology and international studies which she received from a small college on the east coast. She had many international experiences during her high school and college career that raised her interest in learning about the people of the world and understanding how they live. After college she worked for an anti-hunger non-profit organization which sparked an interest in learning about food production. This led her to move back to the west coast where she worked as a farmer apprentice. This participant's most joyous experiences were when she was able to take children on farm field trips and teach them about how food is grown. She then took a job at a university extension program where she taught nutrition classes in schools, which allowed her to begin to pursue a teaching degree. She has not abandoned her other passions however, and hopes to find a job being a garden educator in some capacity.

Participant three was a 25-year-old female who has a degree in human development and family sciences from the same university in which she is pursuing her MAT. She was raised by two educators, thus was exposed to this career option very early in life. She started volunteering in classrooms as early as high school and continued to do so in a more formal setting as she completed practicum experiences at a community college and then as she went to a four year

university. This participant also worked as a research assistant where she was able to participate in data collection to look at school readiness; this allowed her to work with pre-school students and prepared her for her pre-service teaching in a kindergarten classroom. In the middle of participant three's full-time solo teaching, participant three was offered a job at a local school teaching kindergarten.

Participant four was the youngest participant as a 21-year-old female. She completed her undergraduate degree in human development and family sciences from the participating university. Similar to participant three, she was raised by two educators and spent a lot of time in classrooms growing up. She always knew she wanted to become a teacher, and chose her educational career path accordingly. This participant was first exposed to teaching when she was a teenager and volunteered in orphanages in Romania and The Dominican Republic. She had to create her own lessons and deliver instruction to students aged pre-school to 18 years old. During her undergraduate experience she had two different internships that exposed her to more formal public education. Towards the end of her three weeks of solo teaching, participant four was offered a job teaching kindergarten at the same school site in which she completed her pre-service teaching.

Participant five was a 44-year-old female from Brazil who has been living in the United States for the past 15 years. She has two undergraduate degrees, one in fine arts which she received while in Brazil, and the other in human development and family sciences which she received from the participating university. Prior to moving to the United States she taught English as a second language and Portuguese as a second language in Brazil for 12 years. She was not licensed in the United States, which is why she is pursuing this degree. Participant five

was also a mother of two boys which she believes has been very influential in preparing her to become a teacher.

Participant six was a 40-year-old female who has had a variety of experiences prior to pursuing a career in education. Her undergraduate degree is in culture and humanities, which she pursued after having a very diverse educational upbringing. She went to military school at the Defense Language Institute in Monte Rey, California where she learned Persian Farsi and became very interested in language learning. While this participant always valued education and had a desire to continue her own learning, she was employed in the business field for many years, and only left when the business she was working in closed down. She thought it was finally the perfect time to pursue her life-long dream of becoming a teacher, and began her master's degree at the participating university.

While the six participants were diverse in age, previous experience in education, and what led them to pursue a teaching career, their reflections were very similar. Even though they were teaching at different school sites, on different grade level teams, and with different cooperating teachers, there was a lot of overall consistency in responses that demonstrated the presence of shared experiences of pre-service teachers. This revealed obvious patterns developed from the data. Three main themes emerged as being the most prevalent in creating a positive and negative sense of efficacy: perceptions of classroom management, student achievement, and supervisor feedback.

Perceptions of Classroom Management

When examining the data, the most influential factor for pre-service teachers when reflecting on self-efficacy was that of classroom management. In the daily reflections, as well as the individual interview, classroom management was mentioned more times than any other

influencing factor. Classroom management appeared to have more of an influence over how the participants viewed their effectiveness, due to the shared understanding that without solid classroom management skills student learning is very difficult. Participants four and five mentioned classroom management in nearly every journal reflection, with association of negative self-efficacy, positive self-efficacy, and growth and development of teaching skills. On participant four's lowest rating of self-efficacy, she said, "In every day I have been in here, I have never once seen the students behave as poorly as they did today. I don't feel like I did anything different but I obviously did something wrong." In contrast, when her highest rating was a 4, she said, "Students responded so well to me today. It was the first time every lesson of the day was completed." When participants felt like students were well behaved and engaged in the lessons, they were more likely to give themselves a favorable rating. The opposite was true for the days where they gave themselves less favorable ratings.

Overall, participant six rated herself the lowest of the six participants with an average rating of three on a four point scale. She was also the only participant who gave herself more than one two during the three weeks, giving herself a total of four twos. For each of the four days where she gave herself a negative rating, classroom management was the identified reason. While she cited other factors such as the timing in the school year for fifth graders, particularly challenging students, and difficulties with content, they were all directly related back to her lack of confidence in the ability to manage student behavior. This participant mentioned trying strategies she learned in her classroom management class, but not always feeling like they worked with her particular group of kids. When asked to describe further the strategies she tried but did not think worked she said, "I don't know if it's me and something I am doing wrong or if ... strategies don't work with this population or age group, but I do feel like I tried a lot of variety,

even things I wasn't comfortable doing." She also had a hard time establishing herself as an authority figure with the students and felt that it took some time before they gave her a similar level of respect given to their regular classroom teacher. She shared, "He is a big strong male and I couldn't be more opposite which I think maybe made them look at me differently." More so than the other participants, participant six was also able to identify that her confidence level had an effect on how the students behaved and performed. When she was able to exude more confidence, the students responded better, which is why she felt that she had more success as time went on.

Participant two gave herself the highest overall rating, with an average of 3.57. She too attributed her self-efficacy to her ability to manage the students and keep them focused, working, and engaged. However, she mentioned she felt very fortunate that her cooperating teacher had very successful management skills and solid procedures were already in place. She shared she only had to follow and maintain them, saying, "All of the credit goes to my mentor teacher. She worked so hard at the beginning of the year to set up positive behavior and now I know why. It made it so much easier for me, even though certain days were definitely harder than others." This did not seem to make her feel any less successful, but she wanted to make it clear that much of the credit for her ability to manage the students, could be attributed to the classroom teacher who provided that foundation for her. This participant mentioned however, that she was not always in agreement with certain techniques that were used, and felt that the negative consequence approach was not always encouraging positive behavior for her primary students. Some of the most successful days during her three weeks were when she felt comfortable trying her own management strategies, and found them to be effective in helping her students achieve their goals.

Participant five demonstrated a strong level of confidence, with an overall score of 3.47, while not ever giving herself anything lower than a two. The factor she mentioned the most was her ability to connect, build relationships, and in turn effectively manage her students. Out of the 15 reflections she provided, classroom management was mentioned in 14 of them. It was evident that she placed a very high value on classroom management and how strongly it influenced her perception of success as an educator. She also appeared to be very proud in terms of how she was able to influence the learning experiences of her students. She felt that promoting a successful learning environment and fostering positive learning experiences was just as important as how students performed academically, saying "It isn't just about them doing what I am telling them to do. I want to see them smile and be excited. It's so important to get kids excited about learning."

There was only one participant who did not indicate that classroom management was as influential as the other factors. Participant one provided more negative reflections of his classroom management skills then the other participants, although he still rated himself fairly high at an average of 3.48. He definitely valued the importance of building relationships and having mutual respect with his students, as this was mentioned several times throughout his journal and his interview. However, this participant did not feel he was having the same success in behavior management as he was able to witness when the classroom teacher was in charge. On a day where he gave himself a rating of a four, he shared he was asked by a student "Do you hate me? You always seem mad at me." He went on to say this bothered him, but he knew it came from having a rough day with student behavior. "No teacher wants to hear that, but I don't blame him, it was definitely an off day with a lot of the students." Other positive factors were shared that day which led him to his rating of a four, which showed he did not let the negativity

he felt with student behavior influence his overall perception of self-efficacy. One of the reasons he felt he had the challenges he did was the restraint to teach within someone else's management system. From classroom layout to dealing with testing concerns, he did not feel like students were allowed enough interactions with each other to help alleviate some of the negative behaviors. There was a small window of time during his solo teaching that he was able to change the seating arrangement and incorporate some cooperative learning activities, which he believed to be much easier to manage in accordance to his style.

Perceptions of Student Achievement

While each participant mentioned to some degree how students performed academically, there were differences in how this perception influenced their sense of efficacy. I also observed that each participant focused on a specific type of data as being the most influential. The participants were either finishing up, or had just finished a formal work sample where they were required to conduct a pre-test and a post-test directly related to the unit they were teaching. Several participants mentioned these data because they were the easiest to isolate their own effectiveness, as the other standardized testing was believed to be more influenced by the cooperating teacher. Exit tickets were also commonly mentioned and seemed to be the most effective way to drive the day-to-day teaching of the participants, although they were only utilized by those that chose to use them.

Participant one mentioned achievement more than the other participants. Even though he acknowledged that his cooperating teacher deserved most of the credit for how students performed on the state testing, he said he was proud of what students had done and hoped he at least had some influence over how well they did. His cooperating teacher shared that it was the best his class had ever performed, with nearly 100% passing both the math and reading exams.

He also mentioned the data he collected for his work sample as being influential to his positive self-efficacy. Even though they did not meet the expected success rate based on the university standards, the growth rate on which he was focused surpassed his original goal. This participant took more pride in the growth rate, instead of the end success rate, as he felt this was a more authentic assessment of his teaching abilities, saying, "To me it isn't about a certain percent having to meet the same benchmark. I want to look at every student and make sure they are achieving their own goal, and at least improving and learning at some level." It was evident through his reflections that student data was the most influential factor in developing this pre-service teacher's self-efficacy, even though he did not believe all students should be expected to perform at the same rate as their peers.

When asked how her students performed academically, participant four also separated data from her teaching in contrast to the data she believed to be more of a reflection of her cooperating teacher. However, she identified positive feelings about how well her students did on the state tests, but more so because of the connection she had developed with her students and a desire to see them succeed. In further questioning, it appeared that she was being more humble than anything, and she eventually mentioned certain connections that she saw between the performance on state testing and the specific content she had taught the students. As she more closely analyzed the results, she noticed that the students did very well on fractions, which was the topic she had taught exclusively throughout the year. She said,

> It was definitely a good feeling to think, hey, I did that. It was always hard to accept praise for anything the students did because I always thought it was due to their yearlong teacher, but that was one time I knew it was because of me. They

> don't really do fractions until third grade so I knew that I was the main teacher that taught it.

The more we discussed the influence of data on self-efficacy, this student teacher was better able to reflect more on how she personally influenced student learning, both during the teaching of her work sample, and later when she took over during her solo teaching. However, she regularly gave her cooperating teacher more of the credit then she gave to herself. She believed it was the cooperating teacher who built the solid foundation in the beginning half of the year when she was not as involved in instruction, saying, "It was obvious everything I observed at the beginning and how hard she worked on making sure they knew the basics was for a reason. She wanted to make sure they had the knowledge they needed to learn the new concepts she was going to teach them."

Participant two mentioned several different types of student data in her reflections. Exit tickets were used most frequently to evaluate the effectiveness of specific lessons and seemed to be the most influential source of information in the development of her self-efficacy and in the guidance of her teaching. She reflected regularly about how the students performed, and although there were times that the exit tickets did not show the amount of growth and learning she would have liked to see, her sense of efficacy was not always negatively affected. She actually felt confidence in her teaching due to an increased awareness of where her students were at academically and because she knew how to adjust accordingly, stating,

> I knew that not everything they were going to learn or not learn would be because of me, there are so many other variables going on, especially with the little guys. So I had to at least know where they were at every day. That was more important than thinking about how good of a job I did at teaching them.

This pre-service teacher also mentioned observation as a data source. She noted several examples of taking anecdotal records as she walked around the room when students were working in order to better understand where they were with the content and how to support them, admitting, "I never would have known some kids just didn't get it had I not done that." In this sense, she demonstrated a perception of efficacy not only based on positive student achievement, but also on the ability to know *what* she needed to teach in order for her students to make the appropriate gains and learn the desired objectives.

Participant perceptions on the influence of student data varied based on the grade level they taught. Four of the six participants were solo teaching in grade levels required to participate in state level testing. The remaining two were completing their solo experience in primary grade levels where state testing was not administered, although standardized reading was conducted to assess early literacy skills. Participant three was doing her pre-service teaching in a kindergarten classroom and reflected on the difficulties that she faced with assessment and interpreting data. She believed observation was the best way she could assess student progress because she found it difficult to determine what student work was done without the scaffolding she provided. She noticed that math was an area where she could specifically assess student work, which made her feel an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Perceptions of Supervisor Feedback

Two people observed each student teacher during their pre-service experience: their university supervisor and their respective cooperating teacher. While each supervisor conducted three formal observations during spring term, the cooperating teachers were often engaged in daily informal observations and provided varying degrees of feedback. The participants regularly mentioned the feedback they received from both individuals in their journal entries and

throughout the personal interviews, although some described a stronger influence on self-efficacy then others.

From all six participants there were consistent comments that led to a distinction in how they perceived the feedback they received from their cooperating teacher to be different than that of the university supervisor. The feedback they received from their university supervisor was not seen to be as influential to their sense of self-efficacy as feedback from their cooperating teacher. Reasons cited were that the evaluation was not based on consistent observation, and comments and suggestions were viewed to be more generic. Four of the six participants noted that the university supervisor had too large of a case-load to be as involved as they would have liked. Participant four went so far as to say that she did not feel the university supervisor was involved enough to truly understand her teaching capabilities, making it hard to take her feedback seriously. She said, "I don't blame her for only discussing the very obvious things of each lesson because she didn't know me as a teacher, she only knew me as the instructor of those specific lessons she saw." Even though the student teacher appreciated positive comments, it was not perceived to be as meaningful as the feedback she received from her cooperating teacher, even when it was on the negative side, sharing, "It wasn't always easy to hear what my mentor teacher had to say but at least it was meaningful. Not warm and fuzzy like my university supervisor, but more helpful to improving."

Participant three appeared to be the most affected by the feedback she received from her cooperating teacher in terms of both positive and negative self-efficacy, as the feedback was mentioned more times in her daily reflections than the other participants. Similar to the other participants, she acknowledged it took her time to understand the cooperating teacher's style of providing feedback and to learn how to best interpret the guidance being provided. She noted at

first she felt her cooperating teacher was not happy with her performance, but as time went on realized that the supervisor demonstrated a true investment in her development as a teacher and wanted to ensure she was providing all the necessary comments and feedback to do so. She learned to take things less personally and instead was able to take feedback in the most constructive way possible, acknowledging she was able to do this because "...she always prefaced every debrief with she didn't want to sugar coat anything because she truly wanted to see me succeed and because I was doing so good she knew she could knit-pick me." Participant three perceived her relationship with her mentor teacher to be genuine and authentic, so when her cooperating teacher provided more positive feedback, it had a stronger impact on how effective she felt she had performed. From her university supervisor, there was less of an impact on her sense of self-efficacy because the feedback was always overwhelmly positive. She acknowledged that as a pre-service teacher she did not feel as though any observations should contain mastery and felt these formal observations were more about "...going through the motions. Not just for her but for me too. I would just nod and smile and sign at the bottom."

Participant six, who on the daily reflections scored herself the lowest, shared more negative feedback experiences than the other participants. While she spoke positively of her cooperating teacher and believed they had developed a positive relationship by the end of her experiences, she mentioned feeling that she needed and wanted to please him which was not something that any other participant shared. When participant six received negative feedback, she seemed to be more concerned with how it affected her ability to appease her cooperating teacher then she was with how it impacted student learning. She believed he was very critical of her, although she mentioned that she always appreciated the specific feedback and would try her best to fix whatever it was he had noticed. This student teacher felt that as long as she did what

her cooperating teacher asked of her, and made the changes he suggested, things would be okay. When asked if she felt comfortable teaching to her own style she said, "Not really, unless it was something he would have wanted me to do. He had things really laid out for me and didn't seem happy when I would suggest doing anything differently, so I didn't. But things always seemed to work for him so it wasn't always a bad thing." This possibly led to some level of anxiety and an extra level of pressure, as she believed she performed better and the students responded better when her cooperating teacher was not in the room. Unfortunately, due to a negative experience with a parent who was unhappy about how she believed her child was being treated by participant six, the cooperating teacher was required to be in the classroom more than originally planned. This was frustrating for her, as she noted on her highest self-efficacy rating that "...of course he wasn't in the room to see it today."

Participant five spoke highly of her cooperating teacher and her teaching abilities, but seemed to be the least influenced by her feedback. Daily reflections never mentioned feedback as being influential, and in the personal interview it was only discussed when asked a follow-up question. The feedback that seemed to be more influential to her self-efficacy and her developing teaching skills was based more on her own personal reflections. This student teacher often made specific goals for herself and reflected upon whether or not she believed she achieved them, saying, "It is really important for me to improve everything I do every day. If I think I had a great day, tomorrow I want to have an even better day. This is why I had a hard time giving myself a four because I know there is always part of my day I could do better."

Participant five had the most teaching experience prior to starting the MAT program, as she had taught for several years in Brazil before moving to the United States. She often mentioned her level of experience as being very helpful, which could possibly be why she wasn't

as influenced by feedback from others. While she mentioned the desire to grow both personally and professionally as something she is always seeking, more than the other participants, she also seemed to be completing the MAT program more for the licensure than to learn how to become a teacher. When asked if she was ready for her first classroom, she shared "I have been ready for years, I just didn't have the right credentials here to get hired."

Overall, each participant mentioned some level of influence the feedback they received from their cooperating teachers had over their sense of self-efficacy. They often mentioned the extra time and effort cooperating teachers put into the work with their pre-service teachers and the participants took this additional work very seriously. They perceived it was their responsibility to make the necessary adjustments to ensure the cooperating teachers felt their time was worth the extra effort.

Additional Influences

Another factor of influence that was never explicitly mentioned in the reflections, although was noted during the personal interviews, was the job searches that were taking place during the three-week solo experience. As the given time to teach the three-week solo was during spring term, the pre-service teachers also felt the need to pursue teaching positions at this time. While the job search was never explicitly identified as having an influence over their ability to be an effective teacher, it certainly seemed to add an extra level of stress to an already overwhelming experience. Participant one shared, "It was hard to hear of people getting interviews and getting calls when I wasn't having any luck. I tried not to think about it or let it get to me but just hard not to be nervous wondering if at the end of this you are even going to get a job." Two of the participants had accepted teaching positions, which seemed to alter their reflections, particularly when asked about readiness to enter the profession. For them, it was

easier to identify their perception of readiness because they knew exactly at what grade level and school site they would be working at. When I inquired about this with participant four who had accepted a kindergarten position, she said, "I don't know if knowing what I will be doing next year makes me more nervous or less nervous. I mean, it feels great to have a job lined up and I am excited I get to stay at the same school, but it also makes me so nervous and makes this feel so much more real." While the remaining participants also reflected positively on how they felt moving forward, all four of them mentioned the difficulties of feeling completely ready when they did not know where, or at what grade level, they would be teaching.

Participants had varying understandings of their roles as pre-service teachers. Even though they all mentioned feeling accepted and welcomed on their grade level teams, it was clear that some felt more comfortable being assertive in establishing themselves as an active participant of the school community. Those who provided examples where they had to be more pro-active in contributing to the learning community had a stronger perception of acceptance. For example, participant one mentioned certain activities he started such as a flag football league during recess, citing it as one of the most positive experiences he had during his pre-service experience. In addition, certain participants felt they were truly members of grade level teams where they were teaching; they referenced their relationship with other educators and how comfortable they felt going to any one of them for support. Those who perceived their role as a pre-service teacher to be of more importance than a classroom helper were more likely to reflect positively on their self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Throughout this qualitative research study, I used semi-structured interviews and participant journals to obtain data about pre-service teacher's perceptions of self-efficacy and readiness to enter the teaching profession. In this chapter I will respond to my research questions using the data gathered from the participants. In addition, findings will be connected to existing literature to identify and discuss potential implications for teacher preparation programs and the need for further research and inquiry. I will also share my own personal connection to the findings and explain how I will use what I have learned to influence my own teaching practice, as well as those around me.

When designing and implementing this research study, the following question and sub-questions guided my efforts:

Research Question

To what degree do pre-service teachers feel prepared to enter the teaching profession based on their pre-service educational experience?

Sub-question 1

What are the factors that pre-service teachers perceive most prepared them to enter the teaching field and raised their sense of self-efficacy?

Sub-question 2

What factors do pre-service teachers perceive to be most influential in developing a sense of teacher efficacy?

Sub-question 3

How does participation in a cohort contribute to a pre-service teacher's reported self-efficacy?

The personal interviews with pre-service teachers contained a series of questions, with room for flexibility as needed. I scheduled them at the discretion of the participant, as closely as possible to the completion of the three-week solo teaching. All took place within one week of their completion date, and lasted 45 minutes to an hour and a half, based on how in-depth the participants chose to go.

The participant journals consisted of a daily rating of self-efficacy on a one to four scale (four being the highest), and a short reflection about the day's events that led them to their rating. While the pre-service teachers were encouraged to use their daily reflection journals to recall anything specific, only one participant chose to do so for only one question. There was certainly potential for the two data sources to gather similar responses, although the journal entries were much more specific, while the personal interviews proved to be more of a summative reflection. Together, I was able to analyze a wide array of data to answer the research questions.

Research Question

To what degree do pre-service teachers feel prepared to enter the teaching profession based on their pre-service educational experience?

While the majority of the questions in the personal interviews were designed to identify the specific factors that influence a sense of efficacy, it was mainly for the purpose of inquiring into perceptions of readiness. Legette (2013) discovered that while first-year teachers believed they were ready when they began their first year of teaching, they identified specific areas that were most problematic. The majority of their 100 participants expressed the need for more hands-on experiences, more support in creating and maintaining positive classroom management, and more discussion about pedagogical practices, particularly on how to problem solve and adjust as necessary. I noticed similarities in my participant's responses. When the participants

were asked if they felt they were ready to enter the teaching profession, they overwhelmingly answered yes. Each participant shared their own specific doubts, fears, and hesitancies, but overall they all believed they were ready to be teachers. All six of the participants displayed enthusiasm and excitement when discussing the possibility of having their own classroom. Three of the participants mentioned in their interview that it was the idea of getting a teaching job that made all of the hard work and efforts of the previous year worth it.

Although each participant responded yes when asked if they were ready to enter the teaching profession, they each had their own doubts and hesitancies about making the transition from pre-service teacher to classroom teacher. What seemed to be most prevalent was not knowing the grade level they would be teaching, as well as the environment and culture of a specific school. They each described a level of comfort in their current placements, where they believed they knew and understood the demographics of the population and the culture of the students, staff, and families. While not every participant mentioned that they specifically wanted to be employed at their pre-service teaching site, it was apparent that the year-long placement had created a sense of comfort that would provide an easier transition into the work place than moving to a new school. Participant four who had accepted a job where she completed her pre-service teaching mentioned a sense of relief that she already knew and felt comfortable working with the high poverty population, administration, and staff.

Participants one and two both felt ready to be teachers, but were hesitant about the type of learning environment in which they wanted to teach. This sense of hesitancy was also reported by Turner (2004) who found proper school placement to be a key factor in the successful induction of new teachers. Both of these participants were pursuing alternative types of education models and displayed concern that they might not find the right fit for them.

Participant one expressed a desire to teach in a more exploratory learning environment where students would have more freedom and flexibility to learn based on their specific needs and wants without the restraints of the traditional model. There was one particular school in his desired district that he believed to be the best fit, although he realized there was no guarantee that he would be employed there, creating a mild sense of anxiety about what the next year would bring. Similarly, participant two was unsure about what type of teaching position she hoped to obtain. She knew she would be most content being able to incorporate her passions of teaching and nutrition, but was well aware that she would not be able to do that in a traditional classroom. This participant was hesitant to enter a traditional school now in fear that she would get "stuck" and not have an opportunity to pursue something different in the future. Both of these participants represented a doubt that was not due to lack of readiness, but was based more on uncertainty about where they would find the best fit.

Each participant expressed that while they felt ready to have their own classroom, they knew there were going to be struggles and hardships throughout the first several years of teaching. In their own way, all six participants claimed they felt as prepared as they could be, while realizing it was not possible to be entirely prepared. Throughout the course of the interview, each participant reflected to some degree on how their experience as a pre-service teacher was very different than it would be like when they have their own classroom. Participant five provided the most insight when acknowledging the lack of experiences she had as a pre-service teacher, knowing that she will still be expected to do so when she has her own classroom. Creating the solid foundation for classroom management and procedures at the beginning of the year is crucial to establishing a successful learning environment, and she realized that as a pre-service teacher, she was not able to participate in this experience, although she did feel fortunate

to observe her cooperating teacher set up these classroom procedures at the beginning of the year. Communicating with parents, participating on collaborative teams school-wide, and advocating for special education services were other examples of areas in which she was able to observe; the pre-service teacher believed these activities will require the biggest learning curve for her in the future.

While not wanting to simplify such a complex answer, the participants all believed themselves to be ready to enter the teaching profession. Particular factors were directly related to what they learned during their teacher preparation program, although it was clear they gained the majority of their experience during their pre-service teaching. It was also evident that previous life experience was influential to their sense of readiness, as this short twelve months was more about fine tuning the dispositions and skills they had been fostering prior to entering the graduate program.

Sub-question 1

What are the factors that pre-service teachers perceive most prepared them to enter the teaching field and raised their sense of self-efficacy?

Pre-service teachers work very closely with their cooperating teachers throughout their year-long placement. Even though the participants were not in their placements full time, they were there during very crucial times, the first and last trimesters of the school year. Participants acknowledged that the guidance they received from their cooperating teacher was crucial to the development of their teaching skills. Richter et al. (2013) identified the quality of the mentor to be most influential in fostering teaching enthusiasm, job satisfaction, and teacher efficacy. While I did not have data to assess the quality of the cooperating teacher or their mentoring abilities, these feelings of cooperating teacher impact were certainly described by the

participants, as the influence of their mentor teacher was mentioned more than any other factor. Even though they all shared varying levels of mentoring and guidance, it was clear they all believed their cooperating teachers were very influential in shaping their teaching skills and abilities, and in preparing them for their future careers.

When the participants were asked to reflect upon their own teaching style and philosophies, and how those characteristics compared to that of their cooperating teachers, most believed they were similar in some ways, while different in others. Five of the six participants expressed they became more like their cooperating teacher as the year went on after having denied the similarities at the beginning. In their inquiry of six science interns, Rozelle and Wilson (2012) found this to be true as well. Their teaching styles were so reflective of their cooperating teacher that the same lesson structures, anecdotes, and even jokes were easily identifiable in the instruction of the intern and their respective cooperating teacher even when they were not teaching in the same room. The researchers also found that interns who displayed the most success were those who were also able to adapt their beliefs to match that of their cooperating teacher's beliefs. This is similar to a reflection by participant six who shared that even though she did not find herself to be a perfect match for her cooperating teacher, she believed it was important to have a solid foundation going into her first year of teaching, and the best way to do that would be to model the teacher she had been able to observe for so long.

Beyond the influence the cooperating teacher had on creating a sense of readiness in their pre-service teacher was the influence of the teaching staff as a whole. The participants all spoke very highly of the teaching community they were a part of and how much support they received from different members of the school. Participant three said that she relied heavily on her grade level team and believed the relationships she formed with them taught her a different

aspect of teaching, that of collaborating with colleagues. While the relationship and interactions she had with her cooperating teacher might have been more impactful, it was hard to feel like they were on a collegial level because of the supervisory aspect. Collaborating as a member of a professional learning community has become an important aspect of the teaching profession, and is a skill this participant valued. Rigelman and Ruben (2012) found this to be true in their research as they discovered that participating in a professional learning community not only encouraged collaboration, but also enabled pre-service teachers to learn and practice how to stay student-centered in their teaching. When comparing teacher candidates who had participated in professional learning communities with those who had not, it was evident that not only were there differences in confidence and effectiveness, but in readiness to enter the profession as well.

Sub-question 2

What factors do pre-service teachers perceive to be most influential in developing a sense of teacher efficacy?

Throughout the analysis of both the interview and the journals, I noticed that each participant had a slightly different idea of what it meant to be an effective educator. Surprisingly, academic achievement was not the driving force of determining efficacy for a single participant. This is consistent with Ng, Nicolas, and Williams (2010) who found that pre-service teachers were much more likely to develop a sense of efficacy based on their own performance, and not as much on student achievement. They suggested the ability to focus less on one's self and more on students is something that comes with time and experience. This was certainly evident in the journal reflections as positive ratings of efficacy were typically based on specific examples that made the pre-service teacher feel good. Not to suggest the good feelings

were not a result of positive student achievment, but it was more often due to student engagement and excitement than it was on how they performed academically on a given task.

Another influential factor that came up in every participant's reflections, particularly through the journal entries, was the timing of their three-week solo teaching experience. While they were given the entire spring trimester to choose when they wanted to complete their three weeks, they were encouraged to do their work sample prior to solo teaching which made the window of opportunity even more narrow and closer to the end of the school year. The advantage was that it would most likely limit the workload and minimize the stress placed on the pre-service teachers, which would be supported by Turley's (1999) findings of potential factors that lead to at-risk performances. Even though it was not the most dominant indicator, he found that the workload while student teaching was one of the most reported factors that led to poor performance. This was reflected by all of my participants, as all six of them expressed a sense of relief that they had completed their work samples prior to taking on the responsibilities of full-time teaching.

Even though it made the most sense to wait until the end of the school year, the participants shared some negative experiences that resulted from the timing as well. The end of the school year has more disruptions than any other time of year; the participants shared how this led to both negative and positive perceptions of efficacy. Testing was the most mentioned school activity, although field trips, school plays and performances, and end of the year culminating events also took place during pre-service teacher's solo teaching. Those who did their pre-service teaching in grade levels where state testing was administered were affected the most as they had to be extremely flexible with planning, scheduling, and time management. Turley (1999) identified flexibility as a problem area for pre-service teachers because they had not yet

developed the necessary skills to be able to adjust as needed. Participants were more likely to assign a positive rating of efficacy when they were successful in deviating from their original plans without allowing too much disruption to occur. The opposite was also true, in that frustration occurred not only at the frequency of disruptions, but also when they perceived themselves to be less than successful in adjusting to changes.

While each participant spoke positively about their cooperating teacher and how they perceived them to be effective educators, the desire to be able to try to implement their own ideas and teaching styles was also expressed. Even though it was never explicitly mentioned that cooperating teachers prohibited them from doing so, pre-service teachers felt pressure to maintain consistency in their classrooms. It appeared to be more comfortable for the pre-service teachers to stay within the restraints of what they had watched be successful, particularly in the beginning of the three-week solo experience.

The instances where pre-service teachers were able to separate themselves from their cooperating teacher in classroom management, curriculum implementation, or engagement strategies elicited the most positive perceptions of self-efficacy. When I inquired further about this with participants during the interviews, what led them to higher levels of self-efficacy was the confidence that came from knowing that they were successful on their own, and not just because of the structures set in place for them. Moulding, Dunmeyer, and Stewart (2014) found this in their study as well, as they noted successful independence was positively correlated with increased perception of self-efficacy.

Sub-question 3

How does participation in a cohort contribute to a pre-service teacher's reported self-efficacy?

This question provided the most variety in responses and reflected the very different experiences pre-service teachers had in terms of their levels of participation in a cohort. While each participant had at least two other pre-service teachers from the same cohort at their school site, not all believed they were influential to their overall experience or sense of efficacy. Interestingly, those who did not feel they developed positive relationships with their cohort members expressed a desire to interact with them much more. The most common factors that created barriers were time and logistics. Even those that made it a priority to interact regularly with their cohort members described difficulties due to the continual sense of being too busy, and the physical space between their classrooms that made it hard to have quick check-ins.

Rigelman and Ruben (2012) described the collaborative efforts of pre-service teachers to be very influential to their practicum experience. They discovered when pre-service teachers felt they were supported by their peers they were more likely to take risks, express their individuality, and appreciate the diversity in teaching styles. This was more effective if the peers had a strong understanding of the learning environment in which they were teaching; the same was true for the clustered cohorts in this study. Participants two and five both shared comfort in knowing there were those they could rely on for support and who knew and understood the dynamics of the teaching staff and the demographics of the students. Even though they did not have the time they wanted to be able to interact at their school sites as much as they wanted, they often found themselves sharing examples and reflecting on specific experiences when they were taking university classes. Participants two and five both participated in the same classroom at

different times throughout the year which made their collaborative efforts even stronger as they were able to share and exchange ideas that were specific to the classroom.

Participant three was the most proactive in creating opportunities to interact with her cohort members. While she explained that it was often difficult due to logistical restraints, when she made an intentional effort to work with cohort members it had a lasting impact. Rigelman and Ruben (2012) saw similar responses from their participants, as interactions often had not only to be authentic, but intentional as well for positive exchanges to occur. Participant three shared a specific time when under the guidance of her cooperating teacher she set up a day of shared observation. During the same time, all three cohort members observed 10 different classrooms and then debriefed what they saw. Even though she had the opportunity to observe others on her own, it was much more effective to do so with her peers. She wished this was something they could have done more often, and that they were only able to do it when they did because they set it up themselves. She knew they were placed as a cohort intentionally, but wished the university would have done more to encourage and facilitate guided interactions.

Without speaking negatively of anyone specific, participants one and six both described a less-than-favorable experience with their cohort members. Tsay and Brady (2010) made an interesting discovery in their inquiry into the value of cooperative learning in higher education. They found a significant positive relationship between academic achievement and the participation in cooperative learning experiences, but only when those interactions were perceived to be positive for the participating members. This positive relationship was reflective in my study as well, as those who described positive relationships with their cohort members believed that participating in a cohort was influential to their experience, while those with more negative interactions did not find that the presence of other pre-service teachers made a

difference at their school site. Participant one shared that he was often the one to make the effort to interact with his cohort members and did not always feel support was reciprocated. While he did not speak of this with any negative feelings, it did not seem to make his experience any different to have cohort members at his site.

Participant six was the only pre-service teacher to suggest that it was possibly detrimental to participate in a cohort; she viewed resources to be spread too thin since there were so many pre-service teachers at her school site. She wanted her administrator to observe her but it never happened possibly due to the inability to do so for all pre-service teachers. This participant also shared that having more than one pre-service teacher at her school site possibly hurt her chances to obtain employment at that school because there was more competition from the other members. When I inquired further into what the interactions were like with the cohort members, she admitted to making an intentional effort to maintain strict boundaries for herself as she believed this was necessary to preserve her image as a professional.

While it appeared that the use of cohort learning did not directly impact self-efficacy and preparation for the pre-service teachers, it certainly could have been if more intentional direction had been provided. Knowing that other pre-service teachers were at the same site provided a sense of comfort to the pre-service teachers but for their presence to have an influence over their experience, more interactions were necessary. As pre-service teachers were to follow the schedules provided them by the university and their cooperating teacher, the intentional placement of a cohort could have been enhanced if it had been a consistent part of the field practice experience.

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

Despite similar experiences, the reflections varied due to the variety of each participant's definition and perception of self-efficacy and the impact that had on different aspects of teaching. Although I discussed the term efficacy with each participant prior to the study, I did not take into account that being an effective educator could mean something very different to each individual. While it was certainly understood they were to evaluate themselves on how effective they felt they were as an educator each day, the value they placed on what defines success as an educator had an effect on how they rated themselves. These differences are important to consider in teacher evaluation as clear expectations need to be defined. Understanding an educator's definition of efficacy in teaching will not only help to align consistent expectations, but will also assist in support them in increasing their teaching practice.

The data clearly demonstrates the most influential factor for both self-efficacy and readiness to enter the teaching profession was the role of the cooperating teacher. The mentoring and guidance pre-service teachers received was mentioned more in frequency, as well as importance, than any other component of their field placement. However, there were several inconsistencies with how the cooperating teachers chose to guide their respective pre-service teachers. While there needs to be some level of flexibility to allow the cooperating teachers to exude their own style of education and ensure authenticity in their relationship, training needs to continue to be of importance to maintain high quality instruction and consistent expectations. Universities should have high expectations of their cooperating teachers and provide the necessary tools for them to be successful. Placement should also be carefully considered to ensure positive matching takes place, as well as continual monitoring from the university supervisor to facilitate and problem solve as needed.

I found the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the pre-service teacher to be extremely fragile. The participants viewed these individuals as experts in the field and their influence over their preparation and sense of efficacy was evident. It is crucial for cooperating teachers to understand the complexities of their interactions and guidance to ensure they are having the desired impact on the pre-service teacher's learning experiences. Not only should these individuals have the desirable teaching abilities to make them effective educators, but they also need to have a strong understanding of mentoring. The pre-service teachers will take what they have learned from their cooperating teachers and the shared experiences they had throughout their year-long placement into their induction years, and likely throughout their entire careers.

It was also clear that the pre-service teachers wished there was more involvement from the university. While acknowledging the importance of being proactive in creating their own positive learning experiences, there were areas where more guidance was desired. The lack of understanding about certain requirements caused frustration for some of the participants as they felt they were often on their own to problem-solve situations where they needed more university support. The pre-service teachers did not perceive close ties between the university and their placement sites, which placed extra responsibility on them to communicate between the two.

The participants also perceived a lack of consistency in mentoring received from their cooperating teacher and their university supervisor which left them feeling confused, particularly in terms of areas for improvement. They would have liked the university supervisor to be a more active participant in their learning and to increase the frequency of visits and observations. Even though they were observed the minimum amount of three times as required by the universities throughout the spring term, it was not enough for the participants to feel their guidance was very

influential to their learning. They felt it would be most ideal if the university supervisor could be at the school site more regularly, as well as to create stronger ties between the school district and the university and ensure the maintenance of consistent standards.

This study also shows that it is also necessary for teacher preparation programs to remember the importance of listening to pre-service teachers' concerns and suggestions. The consistency in responses amongst my participants demonstrates shared experiences that are relevant across the different variables of age, gender, school sites, and cooperating teachers. While restrictions due to funding are certainly important to consider, my participants hope that universities continually seek ways to improve their programs and utilize the perceptions of their students to guide their efforts. Universities should continue to find creative ways to encourage quality educators to be willing to put in the extra time and attention that is necessary to successfully mentor a pre-service teacher. It is also important to gain insight into the experience of the cooperating teachers to ensure it is a positive experience for them as well. Listening to the concerns and possible instances that make mentoring a pre-service teacher problematic will help retain quality educators.

Need for Future Research

Overall, findings from this study were consistent with current research found in the literature, nevertheless participants experienced some unique circumstances and perceptions not identified in the literature. While this study provided insight into the perceptions of pre-service teachers, to be able to understand true implications for entering the teaching field, a longitudinal study would be beneficial. To focus on the pre-service experience is certainly helpful in terms of increasing the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, but equally important is the induction of beginning teachers. Increasing our understanding of perceptions of the self-efficacy

of pre-service teachers would be more impactful on the teaching profession if we could examine how pre-service teacher perceptions adjust as they begin their first year with a teaching position. Increasing the number of participants, as well as the length of study, would provide a deeper understanding of how perceptions of self-efficacy evolve over time. This would enable universities to fine tune their levels of mentoring and support, as well as help school districts utilize mentoring programs for beginning teachers.

Another component missing from this study but that could be incorporated in the future is inquiry into the connection between perceptions of self-efficacy and teaching performance. While pre-service teacher perception, regardless of whether it is accurate or not, is influential in the development of teaching abilities, identifying what kind of influence perceptions have on performance would aid in the ability to best support pre-service teachers as well as novice teachers. Ultimately, we hope that those who are entering the teaching field are doing so with the necessary skills to be effective educators, but this is not always the case. Perceptions of efficacy for teachers have a positive connection with performance (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) but there is little on this topic in terms of pre-service teachers. Typically, pre-service teachers are formally evaluated by a university supervisor and their cooperating teacher, but it is not common to use these evaluations for understanding the influence of self-efficacy on performance. Due to lack of calibration amongst the participating cooperating teachers and university supervisors, data from this study did not reveal insight into self-efficacy through formal evaluations.

Because this study was a discovery of perception about self-efficacy and preparation, there is also a need to widen the scope of participants to other members of the educational community who influenced the pre-service teachers' experience. It would be important to inquire

into the cooperating teacher's perception of a pre-service teacher's abilities and determine what connections can be made between the perception of others and a pre-service teacher's perception of themselves. In instances of discrepancy, it would be important to inquire into the cause and effect of these connections to better understand how to support and guide the pre-service teacher to obtain the desired qualities they lack.

Even though I had several interview questions related to the cohort experiences, insightful data were limited. As a result, the participation in a cohort model and implementation of collaborative learning is also an area to be further explored. Because the use of clustering a cohort at the same school site for a year-long placement was new for the participating university, there was little or no direction in how to best utilize this model. Using the collaborative learning framework that has been developed in other fields of study in terms of collaborative learning, activities such as guided interactions could be used to increase the understanding of how to best utilize the cohort model.

Conclusions

In the design, implementation, and completion of this study, I have always maintained my focus of wanting to contribute to improving the quality of teacher education. Just as we aim to educate our students to the best of our abilities in hopes they will be ready to enter the following year of their educational careers, I have a desire and passion to ensure quality educators are entering our teaching profession. I believe the best way to keep qualified educators from wanting to leave the profession is to continually improve the quality of programs that prepare them. Due to the literature and the data analysis of my study, I believe self-efficacy to be positively related to performance and readiness for beginning teachers. While the last two

decades have brought about steady improvement in the quality of teacher preparation programs, there is still work to be done to increase the readiness of novice teachers.

The participants in this study perceived themselves to be ready to enter the teaching profession. They were able to identify several factors that most influenced them along the way and helped develop their teaching abilities in preparation for their first classroom. Information provided from this study combined with pre-existing literature provides insight into the perceptions of pre-service teachers who have just completed their teaching program and licensure requirements. Perceptions can be as impactful as what can be proven by fact, and teacher educators would be wise to consider what pre-service teachers have to say about their experience. The more knowledge and information we can gain on pre-service teachers' experiences, the better teacher preparation programs can improve upon current programs and practice. Increasing the quality of educators who are entering the field is crucial in maintaining and improving the quality of instruction our students receive. Increasing standards of achievement for students requires we do the same for our teachers, and the best way to do this is through exceptional teacher preparation.

On a personal level, there are several things I will take away from the knowledge I have gained from this study. As a potential cooperating teacher to a pre-service teacher, I will take my role much more seriously then I had in the past. While I had always made an effort to provide the guidance I believed the pre-service teacher needed, I did not incorporate the individuality of the pre-service teacher into my instruction as much as I needed to. I viewed my role more as a facilitator to their learning who provided them with the necessary classroom and students to practice their teaching skills. I now know the role of the cooperating teacher is much more than that and believe I am more prepared to have a desirable influence on their learning

experiences. It is also my hope to work in a teacher education program where I will advocate for more time and attention devoted to fostering positive relationships between cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Participant Reflective Journal

Date _____ Lesson # _____ Self-efficacy rating _____

Reflection:

Appendix B - Pre-Service Teachers Exit Interview

Biographical Information

1. Age
2. Schooling
3. Previous experience in education

Discuss how you felt in terms of readiness as you approached your three-week solo teaching experience

1. Did you feel ready? Why or why not?
2. To what extent were you confident in your content knowledge?
3. Describe the relationship you had with your students before you began your solo experience.

Describe your current relationship with your cooperating teacher

1. Describe the level of support you feel from your cooperating teacher?
2. How are your philosophies similar or different from your cooperating teacher?
3. What is your perception of how your cooperating teacher feels about you solo teaching for three weeks?

Participating in a year long placement as a member of a cohort

1. What did you see as your role in the community of educators at your site?
2. To what extent did you feel accepted as a member of the teaching team on which you participated?
3. What could have been done at the school site to enhance your experience?
4. What are the positives about being placed with a cohort of other pre-service teachers? What where the negatives?

Levels of success, personally and professionally

1. How well do you feel you performed during your solo teaching experience?
2. How well do you feel your students performed academically during your solo teaching experience?
3. Discuss both formal and informal assessments you conducted that influence your feelings towards your student's performance.

Teacher efficacy moving forward

1. Do you feel prepared to start your first year of teaching?
2. To what degree are you confident in your abilities to teach potential students?
3. What specific components of your field experience influenced your sense of teacher efficacy?
4. What could have been done differently to enhance your sense of teacher efficacy?

Appendix C - IRB Approval Letter

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

School of Education
414 N. Meridian St., V124, Newberg, OR 97132
503.538.8383 | Fax 503.554.2868 | soe.georgefox.edu

March 4, 2014

Ms. Stephanie Montoya-Boni
Ed.D. Candidate
George Fox University

Dear Ms. Montoya-Boni:

This letter is to inform you that as a representative of the GFU Institutional Review Board I have reviewed your proposal for research investigation entitled "An Exploration of Pre-Service Teachers' Perception of Self-Efficacy." The proposed study meets all ethical requirements for research with human participants. The proposal is approved.

Best wishes as you complete your research investigation.

Sincerely,

Terry Huffman, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Human Subjects Research Committee
George Fox University
(503) 554-2856

Appendix D - Sample Participant Letter of Consent

February 1, 2013

Dear Pre-Service Teacher,

My name is Stephanie Boni and I am a doctoral student with George Fox University. I am working on my dissertation as a requirement for my doctoral degree. During the past four years I have been completing coursework in educational leadership with a focus on best practice in higher education. I understand that you have been placed at one elementary school with a small cohort of other pre-service teachers to complete your field placement requirements. I would be pleased to work with you and some of your colleagues to better understand your experiences as you complete your student teaching.

The purpose of my research is to identify potential factors that influence a pre-service teacher's perception of efficacy as they finish their student teaching experience. An increased awareness of the variables that influence positive and negative perceptions of efficacy during the pre-service years will assist in an increased effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. My research questions are: To what degree do pre-service teachers feel prepared to enter the teaching profession based on their pre-service educational experience?
What specific factors do pre-service teachers perceive to be most influential in developing a sense of teacher efficacy? How does the participation in a cohort contribute to a pre-service teachers reported self-efficacy?

To help me answer my research questions I would like to interview you at the end of your full time solo teaching experience. This interview can take place at your convenience once you have completed your teaching requirements. I will also ask that you journal throughout your full time teaching, a total of 15 times, evaluating specifically your feelings of teacher-efficacy.

All data will be confidential. To ensure anonymity, I will use pseudonyms for all participants and school sites. As a result, there is no risk to you. The data I generate will contribute to improving upon the experiences of pre-service teachers in the future. I am also more then willing to share all of my results with you at the conclusion of my research.

Please sign the permission slip below, indicating that you are willing to journal, participate in an interview, and allow me access to your evaluations as you finish your full time solo teaching. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Boni
stephmarieboni@gmail.com
541-604-0515

____ Yes, I am willing to participate in this research study by journaling and participating in an interview.

____ No, I am not willing to participate in this research study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E - District Permission Letter

Bend-Lapine Schools
520 NW Wall St.
Bend, OR 97001

February 1, 2013

Dr. Ginny Birky
Professor
George Fox University
414 N Meridian Street; V124
Newberg, OR 97132

This is to inform you that I have reviewed the research proposal designed by Stephanie Boni in completion of her doctoral dissertation. I have reviewed the intended data collection, including pre-service interview questions, journal analysis, and review of evaluations performed by cooperating teachers, which will all inform her research project. I am confident that Stephanie has given research ethics the highest regard as the process and procedures have been prepared.

I look forward to working with Stephanie on this project.

Sincerely,

Lora Nordquist
Assistant Superintendent
Bend-Lapine Schools
520 NW Wall St.
Bend, OR 97701