

Examining Attrition in English Education: A Qualitative Study of the Impact of Preparation, Persistence, and Dispositions in Teacher Education

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Abstract : Over the past three years, the researchers have been tracking a rise in the number of teacher education candidates leaving the field before completing their university's educator preparation program. At their institution, this rise is most pronounced in English Education. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand English Education teacher candidates' expectations in becoming prepared educators at each phase of their four phase teacher education program at one institution of higher education in the United States. Research questions include: To what extent do we find differences in teacher candidates' expectations of their teacher training program and student teaching experiences based upon undergraduate and graduate programs? Why do (or do not) teacher candidates persist in their teacher training program and student teaching experiences? How do dispositions develop through the course of the teacher training program? What supports do teacher candidates self-identify as needing at each phase of the teacher training program? Based upon participant interviews at each phase of the teacher education program, the researchers, all teacher educators, examine the extent to which English Education students feel prepared to student teach, focusing on preparation, persistence, and dispositions. The Colorado State University Center for Educator Preparation (CEP) provides students with information about teaching dispositions, or desired professional behaviors, throughout their education program. CEP focuses these dispositions around nine categories: Professional Behaviors, Initiative and Dependability, Tact and Judgment, Ethical Behavior and Integrity, Collegiality and Responsiveness, Effective Communicator, Desire to Improve Own Performance, Culturally Responsive, and Commitment to the Profession. Currently, in the first phase of a four phase study, initial results indicate participants expect their greatest joys will be working with and learning from students. They anticipate their greatest challenges will involve discipline and confidence. They predict they will persist in their program because they believe the country needs well-prepared teachers and they have a commitment to their professional growth. None of the participants thus far could imagine why they would leave the program. With regard to strongest and weakest dispositions, results are mixed. Some participants see Tact and Judgment as their strongest disposition; others see it as their weakest. All participants stated mentoring is a necessary support at every phase of the teacher preparation process. This study informs the way teacher educators train and evaluate teacher candidates, and has implications for the frequency and types of feedback students receive from mentors and supervisors. This research contributes to existing work on teacher retention, candidate persistence, and dispositional development.

Keywords : English education, dispositions, persistence, teacher preparation

Conference Title : ICES 2017 : International Conference on Education Studies

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : August 28-29, 2017