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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COOPERATING TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENT TEACHERS DURING THE CLINICAL YEAR

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The College of Education will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, John – You always find a way to support my crazy ideas (like getting a doctorate straight out of COVID). Your love for me has shaped me into the woman I am. You make me better. You challenge me. You push me – even when I want you to just leave me alone. Thank you for never giving up on me, and thank you for always seeing my potential, especially when I don't see it. I love you forever!

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ABSTRACT

Many aspects of a student teacher's clinical year help determine their success in the future. Understanding the lived experiences of both cooperating teachers and student teachers is essential to understanding the dynamics of that relationship and how district-university partnerships foster an environment of mentoring and support. This study aims to understand and evaluate the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and their student teachers during the clinical year. This study focuses on understanding the cooperating teacher-student-teacher relationship and how mentoring does or does not happen in that relationship. For this study, the problem is selecting cooperating teachers and the lack of mentor training offered to cooperating teachers before hosting a student teacher in their clinical year. This study's research questions include:

1. What is the expectation of cooperating teachers in clinical year?
2. What is the expectation of student teachers in clinical year?
3. What is the process for selecting and training cooperating teachers for clinical year?

The method employed for this study is phenomenology, a rigorous approach that delves into the lived experiences of the participants. Purposive selection, a method that relies on the researcher's sound judgment to choose participants based on a specific criterion, is used for this study. The participants for this study comprise nine cooperating teachers and their student teachers, each representing elementary, middle, and high school. The cooperating teachers are from over five districts in a southeast state, while the student teachers are from a small private university in a southeast state.

Key Terms: Cooperating teacher; student teacher; mentor; clinical; district-university partnership; training; phenomenology; lived experiences.

CHAPTER 1. PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Background of Problem

To create a meaningful and beneficial experience for student teachers, having cooperating teachers who value and implement mentoring is vital. A quality mentor will provide emotional and psychological support and be foundational in career development (Armesson & Albinsson, 2017; Mosley et al., 2017; Qablan et al., 2009). Other aspects of educational mentoring include modeling, classroom management, feedback, the personal attributes of the mentors, and system requirements (Bird, 2012, p. 63). There are mentoring programs for first-year teachers across the country, but very few mentoring programs for student teachers (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bird, 2012; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014; Hall et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Kell, 2020; Koç, 2012; Kratz, 2023). Developing mentoring skills in pre-clinical teachers is necessary to successfully train pre-service teacher candidates (Alexander, 2019).

To ensure a solid foundation for prospective teachers, mentoring must start in college and continue into their student-teacher experience (Bastian & Marks, 2017). There are many benefits to mentoring programs. Some researchers claim that "Mentoring and collaborative teaching are vital to learners' success in educational settings where differences exist in educators' expertise, knowledge, experience, and cultural resources and adaptability" (Tinker et al., 2011, p. 71). As student-teachers transition out of their college experience and into the classroom, adequate training and mentoring should be implemented.

Student teachers who participate in quality clinical experiences with cooperating teachers trained in a mentoring program have a more enhanced start to their career because they are given more individualized attention and support (Bird, 2012; Kagoda & Sentongo, 2015; Mosley et al., 2017). One way to help prepare future teachers is to teach them a variety of learning and

application experiences that they can "learn, practice, and refine their skills before they enter the classroom" (States et al., 2021, p. 17). Creating a mentoring program and training for cooperating teachers that student-teachers can also attend would create an expectation of how student-teachers should be trained through their clinical year (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Darling-Hammon, 2010; Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014).

Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, ran one example of a mentoring and training program. The model created a two-day, six-hour-per-day workshop for cooperating teachers to participate in, with a focus on mentoring. The participants were incentivized with a $250 stipend and a bag of teacher supplies worth $25; meals were also provided (Russell & Russell, 2011, p. 7). Aside from the interview, open-ended questions were distributed to participants: "What is a mentor? What is the role of a mentor? What skills should an effective mentor exhibit? What are some of the benefits of mentorship? What is the role of relationships in mentoring?" (p. 9). These questions helped the researchers learn about the participants' understanding of mentoring.

The findings concluded that "major educational mentoring components are role modeling, nurturing, supporting, sponsoring, and teaching" (Russell & Russell, 2011, p. 10). The cooperating teacher and student intern relationship has a "significant impact on learning how to teach" (Russell & Russell, 2011, p. 10). The most effective way to create a mentor training program would include both districts and universities collaborating. Both stakeholders have implications for working together to serve pre-teacher student candidates better (Waterman & He, 2011). This would enhance the university-district relationship and help build meaningful connections (Stapp, Prior, & Harmon, 2019).

Statement of Problem

The 21st century has seen extensive research on evaluating and understanding the training/mentoring that occurs between cooperating teachers and their student teachers (Alexander, 2019; Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bird, 2012; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Dinama et al., 2017; Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014; Gonzalvo et al., 2018; Koç, 2012; Kratz & Davis, 2023; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Rajuan et al., 2007; Russell & Russell, 2011; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). It has been studied and reported that mentoring relationships are essential in any field, particularly education. However, it is rare to find adequate mentoring programs for cooperating teachers to be trained before they work with a student-teacher all year (Waterman & He, 2011). Many gaps are prevalent in teacher preparation programs and student teachers clinical experiences (Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Scharagel, 2021; Springs & Boggs, 2016; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011; Zeichner et al., 2015). Beginning partnerships between universities and districts is imperative to future educators' continued growth and development (Russell & Russell, 2011; Springs & Boggs, 2016).

This study aims to determine if student teachers are getting adequate support before their first year in the classroom within a mentoring relationship with their cooperating teachers and how the university is providing support and training to cooperating teachers. This study has a professional background that shows developments in education continue to advance because it involves several groups of professionals currently working as cooperating teachers with student teachers in their clinical experience. This advancement allows for a better understanding of relationships and the value of mentoring. It also shows the value of district-university partnerships and the training that universities can provide to cooperating teachers. It is essential to evaluate the clinical experience of student-teachers and the mentoring and support they

receive during that time because this experience is the most prevalent for preparing them for their future positions as educators (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bird, 2012; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014; Hall et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Kell, 2020; Koç, 2012; Kratz, 2023). Evaluating the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers will allow for a deeper understanding of those relationships, impact district-university partnerships, and help change and develop future training.

Significance of Study

Student teachers must be adequately trained in various areas of their clinical experience (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, 2021). The problem is ill-equipped cooperating teachers in mentoring roles with student teachers during the clinical year (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, 2021). There is not usually a screening or application process to become a cooperating teacher, and university's should provide adequate training and support to cooperating teachers, but this is not happening at large (Springs & Boggs, 2016; Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, 2021). Because of the problem with acquiring and training cooperating teachers is ongoing across the country, school districts and universities are beginning to conduct research and collaborate to determine what would be best for pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers (Hall et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Harding & Parsons, 2011; Horwath et al., 2022; Russell & Russell, 2011).

The study will broaden the scope of existing research and enable a more targeted investigation of a mentoring program that a university can introduce in districts where its student teachers conduct their clinical work. Creating more model programs will show the need for

mentoring programs and district-university partnerships. Specifically, there is a need to have more meaningful partnerships between the local university and surrounding school districts. Furthermore, there is a need for universities to create a mentoring program and training for cooperating teachers who are hosting student teachers from the university's College of Education. The study will follow a process to ensure that all participants are heard and that plans for future implementation can be made.

This study, which aims to comprehend the lived experiences and the interpretation of those experiences by student teachers and cooperating teachers through a university-designed and taught mentoring program, highlights the necessity for mentoring programs in universities. It will be able to bridge the gap between universities and districts and ensure a quality clinical experience for student teachers. This study exemplifies real-life settings and the implementation of a program based on transformational leadership (Bellibas et al., 2021; Bryant et al., 2021; Eddles-Hirsh, 2015). When looking at transformational leadership, we must transform our leaders to transform our schools.

Universities should be more involved in selecting and training cooperating teachers to ensure that the gaps between the university and districts are addressed and cooperating teachers are prepared to effectively mentor student-teachers (Scharagel, 2022; Staff, 2002). Currently, schools select cooperating teachers based on voluntarism and a specific set of guidelines (Scharagel, 2022). The university needs to be actively involved in selecting its cooperating teachers. Schargel (2022) reports, "Currently, only 4% of traditional programs appear to take much of a role in deciding who mentors the teacher candidate" (p. 1). Universities provide background theory to prepare students for their clinical practice, but there are many gaps in their experience. Part of the gaps in the clinical year is the need for more practice learning experiences

to help equip the student teacher. Researcher, Schargel (2022) states, “The practical learning experience for my student teaching (now referred to as “clinical practice”) was greater than the theoretical learning of four years in a college classroom” (p. 1). Properly trained cooperating teachers that can create learning experiences causes a crisis in finding adequate teachers to mentor prospective teachers (Scharagel, 2022).

Organization of the Study

The research for this dissertation will focus on the student teachers' clinical year experiences and the mentoring that cooperating teachers facilitate with their student teachers. These questions focus on the impact that mentoring has on all participants, as well as how mentoring impacts university-district partnerships.

Research Questions

1. What is the expectation of cooperating teachers in clinical experience?
2. What is the expectation of student teachers in clinical experience?
3. What is the process for selecting and training cooperating teachers for clinical experience?

An Overview of the Methodology

For this study, phenomenological qualitative methodology will be used to share the experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers during the clinical year. Phenomenology’s “design is mainly used to enhance the interpretive element to elucidate assumptions and meanings in the transcribed texts of participants’ interviews where they may have difficulty expressing, hence offering a rich detailed and dense description of the phenomenon under investigation” (Annamalai et al., 2022, p. 3). Using this type of methodology

will be helpful in allowing cooperating teachers and student teachers to express their lived experiences without hindering their words.

Phenomenology is a research method that does not require many participants because of the nature of the study (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). This method requires an in-depth interview process consisting of interviewing as part of the research, which takes time to conduct, track, and report on. This must be done to ensure that an in-depth study of the human experience is researched and reported accurately (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015). The goal is to comprehend and interpret cooperating teachers' and student teachers' lived experiences in the clinical year, as well as their understanding of mentoring. The interviews will examine whether mentoring is prevalent for both cooperating teachers and student-teachers. Participants will be interviewed twice to emphasize their lived experiences. One interview will be conducted at the beginning and one at the end of the clinical experience. The interviews will be semi-structured and will happen twice throughout the school year. After the interviews, data will be managed through transcription and organized to show emerging themes. Those themes will be analyzed and reported to show the participants' perspectives and experiences throughout the clinical experience.

My overarching method's worldview consists of understanding cooperating teachers' and student teachers’ lived experiences in the clinical year, with a focus on mentoring and what types of training are offered to support both teacher groups. The research conducted for this study reveals gaps in mentoring programs and encourages school districts and universities to collaborate to create high-quality mentoring training for cooperating teachers and student teachers.

Theoretical Framework

John Mezirow coined the term "Transformational Learning" in the 1980s (Mezirow, 1997). Since then, it has been developed and changed into transformational leadership theory and works to develop transformational leaders (Mezirow, 1997; Bellibas et al., 2021; Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019)—the origins of the theory focused on adult learning. For adults to become transformational learners, there is a foundation that is set as a child. This foundation consists of recognizing cause-and-effect relationships, using informal logic to make analogies and generalizations, becoming aware of controlling emotions, becoming empathetic toward others, using the imagination to develop narratives, and thinking abstractly (Mezirow, 1997).

It is the goal that as children progress to adults, these skills strengthen, and transformational learning takes place. According to Mezirow (1997), "From the perspective of transformation theory, there are ideal conditions for the full realization of adult learning; these conditions can serve as standards for judging both the quality of adult education and the sociopolitical conditions that facilitate or impede learning" (p. 11). This further explains that adults also need an environment that facilitates learning, and that transformation happens in various working environments when that happens. When student teachers are met with transformational mentoring, they are more equipped to teach effectively and feel supported (Freeman et al., 2020; Givings, 2008).

The transformational theory has taken on many forms since John Mezirow first developed it in 1981. Each time it was modified, more questions about how transformational learning occurs were answered, creating a broader spectrum of understanding. However, there is still room for improvement in implementing transformational theory from observable transformation to repeatable transformation (DeSapio, 2017). A learner must experience many

different aspects of transformational learning to grow and develop. DeSapio (2017) states, “For two decades, Mezirow’s theory was almost exclusively explained through ‘cognitive’ terminology, with ‘critical self-care’ being the crux of transformation. It was not until 2000 that Mezirow revised his theory again to acknowledge the importance of the affective, emotional, and social factors that influence transformational learning” (p. 57). This revision focused on the personal aspects that impact transformational learning, thus shifting focus to individuals’ needs instead of just cognition. This approach focuses on the whole person and yields a holistic educational approach.

Transformational learning theory describes a phenomenon based on human experience. Mezirow (1997) defined it as the process of understanding how we become enmeshed in our past and relive it (Mezirow, 1978). “He focused on the frames of reference we use to interpret our experiences, make sense of the world, and understand who we are” (Hoggan, 2016, p. 110). Through this theory, individuals can develop a significant autonomy of thought and others’ perspectives. It enables people to understand their world and experiences critically and expansively. Over the years, the terms surrounding this theory have evolved. This evolution introduced phenomena and helped us understand individuals' lived experiences, Hoggan (2011) states:

> This evolution of terms is important because although Mezirow used all these terms to refer to his theory of learning, scholars using his theory have tended to do two things with them: 1) only use the latter term transformative learning theory, and 2) use it to refer to phenomena and explanatory principals far beyond what Mezirow had in mind when creating the term. (p. 111)

Throughout my study, I will aim to understand cooperating and student teachers’ lived experiences through interviews. The phenomenon will be determined after the interviews are completed, but it is expected to show gaps in mentor training.

Limitations of the Study

Phenomenology examines the participants' lived experiences and requires a smaller participation selection (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015). Because of this, the study aims to look at a small group of individuals between one university and four surrounding districts. Using a small participant pool creates generalizability. Phenomenology presents its own unique set of guidelines and is a methodology based on lived experience designed around experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental methods (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). A non-experimental research design will be used for this study. The interviews will be evaluated for emerging themes and discuss the phenomenon of mentoring between cooperating teachers and student teachers at the university and district levels in education. The cooperating teacher-student relationship is essential to examine so that the clinical year for student teachers can be evaluated and training can be redesigned or implemented if necessary.

Focusing on collaborative relationships helps prepare student teachers for their careers and equips them to be effective teachers. Stapp, Prior, and Hamm (2019) explain how the collaboration between mentor and student teacher leads to career success:

> The collaboration between an effective mentor and novice teacher relationship, as seen in this study, is a paramount example of social interaction leading to the highest levels of mastery, and ultimately, producing a highly qualified, confident, and skilled teacher who is prepared to lead students to success and increased academic achievement. (p. 4)

The cooperating teacher-student relationship is essential to the student-teacher's success and future career.

This study has limitations because it is focused on one university with a small number of participants and needs to provide more information to a variety of people. The participants are mostly female (17/19) and all white. The study only focuses on cooperating and student teacher

experiences and does not examine how the clinical year prepares teacher candidates for their first year in the classroom. It also neglects to learn the perspective of the clinical supervisors at the university or perspectives of university faculty and staff. Further study would need to be done on a larger scale to properly evaluate teacher preparation programs, mentoring programs, and training; cooperating teachers and the mentoring relationship with their student teachers; and district-university partnerships.

Clarification of Terms

To understand the context of this study, some terms need to be defined. A *student teacher* is a student in their clinical year of college who is completing an internship in a public school district. A *cooperating teacher* is an expert teacher who holds professional licensure and agrees to host a student teacher for their clinical year; they agree to complete the university's requirements when hosting a student teacher. A *mentor* uses their expertise to guide another individual through emotional, psychological, and professional support (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017).

A *district-university partnership* is one in which local universities collaborate with public school districts to support mentors and student teachers through initiatives and programs (Russell & Russell, 2011; Springs & Boggs, 2016). The *clinical year* is the student teacher's internship during their last year of college. A *training program* consists of a planned program that focuses on one or more topic(s) and how to learn the skills necessary to train others. These terms are used throughout the study to describe the different aspects of participants, programs, training, or partnerships that will be discussed.

Phenomenology is "describing an individual's experiences in the moment of the study" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2019). Edmunds and Kennedy (2019) explain that "the starting point for

knowledge was the self's experience of phenomena, such as one's conscious perceptions and sensations that arise from life experience" (Edmunds & Kennedy, 2019, p. 2). This aspect focuses on consciousness and the participant's ability to be in the study and give an appropriate account of their lived experience as well as how people make meaning of their experiences. It should also be noted that, "studying peoples' experiences, studying how people make meaning in their lives, studying relationships between what happened and how people have come to understand these events, exploring how people experience the essence of a particular phenomenon, and examining the commonalities across individuals" (Edmunds & Kennedy, 2019, p. 3) are all crucial aspects of phenomenology and the idea of studying people's lived experiences.

For this study, it is essential to note that mentoring and transformational leadership will be interchangeable. According to Bodilenyane and Mookestane (2019) the mentoring relationship requires much more than functions of the job:

> Mentoring involves an intense relationship whereby a senior or more experienced person (the mentor) provides two functions: one is advising or modeling about career development behaviors, and the second function is personal support, especially psycho-social support. (Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019, pp. 688-689)

According to Rankin (2020), transformational leadership is:

> A paradigm of leadership that empowers others through idealized influence (role modeling), inspirational motivation (inspiration), intellectual stimulation (creative challenging), and individualized consideration (personal concern) to strive for and achieve extraordinary outcomes while also developing followers' capacity for leadership. (Rankin, 2020, p. 8)

To be a transformational leader, more than just mentoring is needed; a whole-person aspect must be explored.

Understanding the complexity of district-university partnerships and mentor programs is beneficial to understanding the premise of this study, as well as phenomenology, lived experiences, and transformational leadership. In the next chapter, a literature review will focus on university-district partnerships and mentoring to help explain the various aspects that inspired this research and determine the methodology and theory implemented in this study.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

Throughout the process of examining different aspects of educational leadership, something that has been of constant interest is mentoring. However, researching something more meaningful and deeper than just a mentoring relationship between a student teacher and their cooperating teacher was the goal. Upon reading hundreds of articles, it became clear that partnerships between districts and universities were a topic of interest. For this study, a group of cooperating teachers and their student teachers will be examined through phenomenology and transformational leadership to determine the gaps in the selection and training of cooperating teachers. This will enable further research on these partnerships and help to develop a mentor training program to enhance both the teacher preparation program and district-university partnerships.

Content in Leadership

For this study, the content on leadership focuses on the cooperating teachers and their ability to mentor and train their student teachers. The study also emphasizes the district-university partnership and evaluates what each entity does to mentor and train individuals who step into cooperating teacher roles and host student teachers.

University-District Partnerships

Researchers in the United States have studied the creation of strong partnerships between districts and universities, supporting these partnerships for the improvement of teacher preparation programs and districts alike (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Guarino, 2016; Hall, 2017; Luczak et al, 2018; Worrell et al., 2014). A district-university

partnership aims to establish and maintain connections between a university and the local school districts that surround it. This type of relationship should foster collaboration and implementation of programs that help to train effective teachers and create strong candidates for the districts (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Horwath et al, 2022; Kell, 2020; Mcdiarmid, 2019; Melton et al, 2019).

Bastian and Marks (2017) conducted a study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This study was done after the state of North Carolina got a $7.7 million allocation toward Race to the Top to create the New Teacher Support Program (NTSP). The purpose of the study was to show how university induction models were effective in training and retaining first-year teachers in low-performing schools. Bastian and Marks (2017) explained:

> University-based induction models may entail key advantages that benefit the performance and retention of participating teachers. These include knowledge of beginning teacher strengths and challenges, connections to local schools/districts, access to research-based resources, and an ability to provide mentors who are independent from K-12 schools. (p. 361)

Creating a district-university partnership where the university trains and supports induction teachers could be a profitable way to retain teachers in the future. This type of training program should be developed in all districts-universities to ensure that student teachers are properly trained through their clinical experience.

Focusing on a district-university partnership helps to create strong connections for student-teachers and allows for districts to collaborate with university's to determine the needs of their schools and how they can adequately prepare those students for future roles as educators (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Napolitan et al, 2019; Nesbitt et al, 2022; Rajuan et al, 2007; Russell 7 Russell, 2011; Strapp et al, 2019; Waterman & He, 2011; Worrell et al., 2014).

Other studies have been conducted on teacher preparation programs focusing on content

in leadership to make changes that will help effectively train and prepare student teachers for the classroom. These studies have focused on developing teaching strengths and challenges (Bastian & Marks, 2017), building teacher confidence, and developing classroom management skills (Chesley & Jordan, 2012), and collaborating with both districts and university's to develop strong partnerships (Guarino, 2016; Horwath et al., 2022; Luczak et al., 2018; Napolitan et al., 2019). These types of partnerships will help to create stronger teacher preparation programs and help develop transformational leaders. As the field of education continues to develop, the expertise that first year teachers need to have will continue to grow (Luczak et al., 2018). Universities can help play a part in that development of partnerships and highly qualifies teachers to ensure that the teacher pipeline grows stronger (Guarino, 2016).

The partnership with the district will go far beyond schools and into the communities where the schools are established. These partnerships, while not be simple to create, are essential to creating teacher preparation programs that engage their students and create a dynamic candidate for teaching. These partnerships ensure a strong clinical year and have been shown to help first-year teachers as they begin their careers (Alexander, 2019; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Ehlers, 2019; Guarino, 2016). It is important to understand the value that creating partnerships in education has for community members, students, teachers, districts, and universities. Currently, strong partnerships are absent in much of the United States which is creating gaps in teacher preparation programs.

Gaps In Teacher Preparation Programs

It is important to understand the gaps in teacher preparation programs and begin to develop a collaborative plan between districts and universities to address those discrepancies. Because universities send their students to districts, they should be involved in the process of

choosing cooperating teachers. At the university level, hiring professors who have adequate and recent public classroom experience would benefit students with various concepts such as classroom management, lesson, and unit planning, and creating and administering assessments (Hall et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Harding & Parsons, 2011; Luczak et al., 2018; Schargel, 2021; States et al., 2021; Qablan et al., 2009; Koedel et al., 2015; Kagoda & Sentongo, 2015). Critiquing teacher preparation has been researched throughout the years to add value to this topic and help advance teacher preparation programs throughout the United States.

Gaps in teacher preparation have been discussed throughout literature. A part of teacher preparation gaps consist of societal knowledge and how well-prepared teachers are for diversity and equity, particularly in areas they have not lived in (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). Many programs are preparing students to be innovative lesson planners, but that is not translating to teaching in a classroom. Many studies exemplified the lack of professional skills first year teachers have, particularly with collaborating with peers, professional learning, participating in school initiatives, the ability to monitor and reflect on teaching practices, and displaying a growth mindset (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Harding & Parsons, 2011). One study stated that the gaps in teacher preparation have impacted students understanding of education and how to execute being a teacher. Researchers, Cochran-Smith et al (2015) said that it is a necessity to analyze programs and properly train cooperating teachers and student teachers for their clinical year experiences. This will help better prepare student teachers for their time in various districts because they will be equipped to understand the unique needs of those districts.

Understanding the needs on both a district and university level would help to create adequate partnerships between the two that focus on the well-being of the student teacher and how they can develop the skills necessary to impact the district they complete their clinicals and

could potentially work in (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Guarino, 2016; Harding & Parsons, 2011; Horwath et al., 2022; Lucazk et al., 2018; Napolitan et al., 2019; Strapp et al., 2019). All aspects of training and preparing student teachers are focused on twenty-first-century teacher education approaches.

Twenty-First Century Teacher Education

With the growing and changing demands of teaching, it is imperative to develop student teachers as twenty-first-century leaders (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2006) discusses the various aspects of teaching and all that is required of a classroom teacher today through her article on 21st-century teacher preparation:

> In the classrooms most beginning teachers will enter, at least 25% of students live in poverty and many of them lack basic food, shelter, and health care; from 10% to 20% have identified learning differences; 15% speak a different language other than English as their primary language (many more in urban settings); and about 40% are members of racial/ethnic 'minority' groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational systems and cultural traditions. (Darling-Hammond, 2006)

The article underscored the urgency of education, yet teachers are losing their ability to shape schools in a way that meets students' needs. There is a lack of teachers who believe they have any significant chance of changing a system they are so deeply involved in.

This article uses the evaluative method of research and serves as a recommendation for creating quality teacher education. One of the major suggestions was partnerships in districts and extended student teaching practicums that would suffice the whole school year (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The purpose of this article was to raise awareness of various issues in the teacher prep program and give suggestions to fix them. One issue the author discusses is the number of states that are allowing teachers to enter teaching on emergency permits or waivers. Darling-Hammond (2006) states, "Although heroic work is going on to transform teacher

education and a growing number of powerful programs are being created, more than 30 states continue to allow teachers to enter teaching on emergency permits or waivers with little or no teacher education at all" (p. 310). Because these alternatives exist, they undermine teacher preparation programs and educational integrity. There was an urgency to not water down teacher preparation programs but to focus on developing them into the training and mentoring programs that are needed to equip teacher candidates.

This concept of permits or waivers to get non-education degree holders into classrooms was an attempt to ratify a teacher shortage. However, granting a permit or waiver results in the loss of a crucial component of teacher preparation programs. There needs to be more emphasis and focus on teacher preparation programs and professional development for teachers to ensure adequate knowledge and a successful entrance into the field of education. One way to facilitate this is through mentoring and the formation of relationships between cooperating teachers and their student teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Cooperating Teachers Mentoring Student Teachers

Mentoring is a buzzword in both education and the global community. When providing a clinical experience, it is important to truly understand what mentoring is and the implications of incorrect implementation in a cooperating teacher/student teacher relationship. Research has produced some examples of what mentoring is between a cooperating teacher and their student teacher and the benefits of facilitating mentoring in teacher preparation programs (Alexander, 2019; Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bird, 2012; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Dinama et al., 2017; Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014; Gonzalvo et al., 2018; Koç, 2012; Kratz & Davis, 2023; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Rajuan et al., 2007; Russell & Russell, 2011; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). The

findings of all this research show that mentoring relationships are beneficial for students and teachers, but also for all teachers alike.

When a cooperating teacher mentors and trains a student teacher that individual needs to develop their pedagogy and practice to be effective as a teacher mentor (Alexander, 2019). Some studies have suggested that a cooperating teacher should hold a master's degree prior to mentoring student teachers (Alexander, 2019; Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Strap et al., 2019). Cooperating teachers need to focus on emotional and psychological support for the student teacher and serve as a role model (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017). When student teachers are properly mentored from quality, skilled cooperating teachers, it is shown to increase their levels of master and skill as a teacher (Strap et al., 2019). To ensure quality mentoring, training of cooperating teachers must be present so there is a clear understanding of expectations (Bird, 2012). Along with training for cooperating teachers, administration needs to be present in both cooperating teachers and student teachers experiences to offer feedback, encouragement, and support (Ehlers, 2019). The cooperating teachers age and support improved their mentoring experiences with student teachers. Gonzalyn et al (2018) suggests that cooperating teachers developing a mentoring plan, joining professional networks, participating in training, and providing follow-up studies. Arnesson and Albinsson (2017) discussed that mentoring is supporting the goals of the mentee. They state that mentoring is an all-encompassing duty that should allow for growth and development of the mentee and ensure that they are properly supported in their clinical year:

> Mentorship is based on the goals of the mentee, and the mentor has a supporting role. The mentor's role can vary but should always include at least one of the following functions: emotional and psychological support, support in career development, and the function of a role model. The mentorship is to be developed for both mentor and mentee. The relationship between mentor and mentee is

> personal. The mentor has more experience and more influence in an organization compared to the mentee. (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017, p. 203)

Cooperating teachers have a significant role in a student teachers clinical year. Through mentoring a cooperating teacher can impact a student teachers life beyond the classroom and ensure that they are prepared for their teaching career. Through positive mentoring relationships, a student teacher's disposition could be impacted.

Student Teacher's Disposition

Learning more about a student teacher's disposition throughout their teacher preparation program and clinical year helps to understand how to better serve student teachers. A student teacher has a disposition about teaching based on their college experience, but when they get into the clinical year, that disposition could change based on the experiences they have (Cummins & Asempapa, 2012; Dinama et al., 2017; Koç, 2012; Kratz, 2023; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Rajuan et al., 2007). Research has shown that student teacher's disposition relies heavily on that clinical year.

Part of student disposition is creating an environment that mimics their experience they will have in the classroom. Cummins and Asempapa (2012) suggest that programs should "address the critical importance of fostering effective dispositions by choosing learning experiences that build and refine these dispositional skills through the four years of preparation" (p. 111). The clinical year, specifically quality mentoring, should be to ensure positive clinical experience and equip student teachers with the necessary tools for success (Cummins & Asempapa, 2012). Through mentoring things emerge like pedagogical knowledge, modeling, and feedback which are all essential in developing student teacher disposition (Dinama et al., 2017). Dinama et al (2017) discuss the importance of "the perceptions of teacher trainees about the assistance they received from their mentors regarding planning and preparation of lessons during teaching practice" (p. 621). Cooperating teachers that are better prepared for their mentoring role

in clinical help contribute to better student teacher disposition (Koç, 2012). Cooperating teachers providing a variety of teaching and learning experiences were shown to help with student disposition in the areas of culturally responsive pedagogy, flexibility, and resources (Kratz, 2023). Utilizing best practices during the clinical experience also helps with student disposition and creating an attitude of positivity in the clinical experience (Nesbitt et al., 2022). Student teachers have stated that when they have a stronger relationship with their cooperating teacher they had higher disposition (Rajuan et al., 2007). The way that cooperating teachers structure the clinical experience determines how a student teacher feels about their theory and practice, modeling practice and procedures, developing student teachers academic skills, and transferring control for their own classroom (Hamilton, 2010).

A student teachers disposition relies heavily on the experiences that the cooperating teacher provides during the clinical year. It is because of this experience that a cooperating teacher should be properly trained and well equipped to mentor the student they are hosting. Student teacher disposition is an important thing to develop in the clinical year, so these individuals are ready to go into their first-year teaching with a positive outlook on the career.

Developing a Mentoring Program

Aside from mentoring relationships, there is a need to create quality programs. This is where district-university partnerships are important and needed to collaborate and develop a program that will train cooperating teachers to mentor their student teachers. Some partnerships have developed mentoring programs and training to ensure that the university's student teachers have a quality clinical year This mentorship should extend to their first-year teaching, where they have established a support system and a foundation of expert teachers who serve as resources (Evans, 2014; Hall et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2010; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Scharagel, 2021;

Springs & Boggs, 2016; Tinker et al., 2011; Waterman & He, 2011). To start a mentoring program, districts must have implemented significant professional development and have a desire to train and mentor their faculty and staff.

To help cooperating teachers and students teachers have a quality experience in their clinical year, there needs to be training of the cooperating teachers. Research states that developing a mentoring program where cooperating teachers are trained before they host a student teacher is an effective way to help create an effective clinical year. Through district-university partnerships, collaboration can help foster mentorship skills, improve teacher retention, and develop self-efficacy (Evans, 2014). This mentor program would be beneficial to both cooperating teachers and student teachers. There are various aspects of a mentoring program that should be elaborated on such as types of feedback, approaches to mentoring, personality in communication, and the different between coaching and mentoring (Evans, 2014). Other aspects of mentoring that need to be covered in a training for cooperating teachers are rubrics, strategies, guidance on meetings, observations, and feedback (Springs and Whitcomb, 2014). Mentoring helps student teachers to gain experience that leads to teacher retention as they enter their first year of teaching (Tinker-Sachs et al., 2011). Waterman and He (2011) researched components of a mentoring program that focused on the retention of teachers. They have discovered components of mentoring programs including mentor characteristic, administrative structures, support frequency, and professional development. When a mentor is helping a student teacher through profession development, the cooperating teacher "develops, empowers and sustains effective teams; develops and nurtures leadership potential in others; develops and maintains effective strategies and procedures for staff induction, early and continues professional development…" (Evans, 2014, p. 2). These aspects of mentoring help to develop

transformational leaders in cooperating teachers and in student teachers because they are going through the clinical year with these expectations from the mentoring program.

Collaboration between district and university partnerships to create quality mentoring programs for cooperating teachers is critical to a successful clinical experience. Student teachers who have mentoring cooperating teachers are more likely to stay in the field of education past their first year of teaching (Waterman & He, 2011). This phenomenon should be viewed through the lens of transformational leadership. This type of leadership focuses on change and development within a field. Transformational leadership will help to propel education forward and create teachers who are intentional, motivational, and willing to mentor the next generation of teachers.

Educational Theory

When determining what educational theory is best for mentoring and cultivating a district-university partnership, transformational leadership emerged. This type of leadership occurs when individuals work to create change within an organization (Givings, 2008; Rankin, 2020; Hogan, 2016). This type of leadership empowers and trains employees to work for change by giving them the experience to lead (Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019).

Transformation Theory

Transformation theory has become more developed over the years since its origins with John Mezirow in 1981 (Mezirow, 1997; DeSapio, 2017). Every modification resulted in the resolution of additional “how” questions, broadening comprehension's scope. However, there is still room for improvement in implementing transformational theory from observable transformation to repeatable transformation (p. 58). However, over the years Mezirow’s theory has shifted to the importance of affective, emotional, and social factors that impact

transformational learning. Understanding this theory is invaluable to the adult learning community, and it is not consistently defined because of the various evolutions of the theory (Mezirow, 1997).

Adults have a frame of reference that is needed to learn and process through their environment. Mezirow (1997) asserts that associations, concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses shape their experiences and shape who they are. A frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, consisting of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view. Adults take their experiences and filter them through lenses such as purposes, values, beliefs, and feelings to understand their world. DeSapio (2017) also found that "Adult learners themselves view learning to think as autonomous, responsible persons as an important education objective" (p. 8). The goal is for them to become autonomous thinkers, so they take their lived experiences and mix them with the learner's objectives and goals to become socially responsible thinkers (p. 8).

For adults to become transformational learners, there is a foundation that is set as a child. This foundation consists of recognizing cause-and-effect relationships, being able to create analogies and generalizations based on informal logic, being aware and able to control their emotions, knowing how to be empathetic to others, being able to construct narratives through imagination, and having the ability to think abstractly (DeSapio, 2017). It is the goal that as children progress to adults, these skills strengthen, and transformational learning takes place. Mezirow (1997) states:

> From the perspective of transformation theory, there are ideal conditions for the full realization of adult learning; these conditions can serve as standards for judging both the quality of adult education and the sociopolitical conditions that facilitate or impede learning. The position here is that there is an inherent logic, ideal, and purpose in the process of transformative learning. (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11)

As society and self-reflection have developed, transformational theory has found a place, particularly in the workplace:

> In essence, scholars understand there is a kind of leaning that transforms and this transformation is most useful, and indeed necessary, to tackle workplace issues of equality, compassion, and ethics; or social issues regarding racism, justice, and reconciliation. (DeSapio, 2017, p. 58)

As the world continues to work toward equity, inclusion, and diversity, it is important to have transformational leadership in workplaces to accomplish those goals.

Transformational learning theory describes a phenomenon based on human experience. Mezirow described it as "learning how we are caught in our history and are reliving it" (Mezirow, 1978, pp. 110-111). His focus was on the frames of reference we use to interpret our experiences, make sense of the world around us, and understand who we are (Hoggan, 2016). Through this theory, individuals can develop great autonomy of thought and others' perspectives. It enables people to understand their world and experiences critically and expansively. Throughout the years, there has been an evolution of terms surrounding this theory. Originally known as transformational theory, this theory has evolved over time to become either theory or perspective transformation before ultimately settling on the term transformative learning theory. Hoggan states, "… scholars using his theory have tended to do two things with them: 1) only use the latter term transformative learning theory; and 2) use it to refer to phenomena and explanatory principals far beyond what Mezirow had in mind when creating the term" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 111). This has shown that the theory continues to change and evolve outside of the original theorist's intention. This theory has been widely applied in education.

Because transformational learning focuses on individual experiences there are different analytic tools or typologies used to evaluate the theory and its effectiveness in various research

studies. These typologies include worldview, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity (Hoggan, 2016). A frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, consisting of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view (Mezirow, 1997).The self has several aspects to consider:

> 1) self-in-relation to others and/or the world in this sense people experience a profound shift in their sense of connectedness; 2) identity and/or view of self; 3) increased sense of empowerment and/or responsibility; 4) self-knowledge; 5) finding greater meaning or purpose in one's life, all of which are self-explanatory; 6) personal narrative; 7) a personality change. (p. 118)

Epistemology refers to "learning styles, sensory preferences, focus on holes or parts or the concrete or abstract" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 118). This typology comprises four subsets, which include individuals who are more discriminating, more autonomous, more open, and utilize extra-rational ways of knowing. Ontology is the study of being and it focuses on the effective experience of life, ways of being, and attributes. When discussing transformational learning theory, behavior comes into play because it exemplifies the changes that have occurred within a person. These different behaviors can be described as "1) actions consistent with a new perspective; 2) engaging in social action; 3) changed behavior; 4) new professional practices; and 5) new skills" (p. 120). Lastly, capacity for transformational changes refers to an individual's ability to not only acquire new perspectives but also enhance their capacity to perceive them. All these typologies and transformational learning are necessary to demonstrate the change in people's lived experiences when conducting research and looking at studies. It pertains to this study on the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers because it requires viewing parts of the clinical year and perspectives that may need to change.

Transformational Leadership

Through transformational leadership, individuals gain the most personally and organizationally (Givings, 2008). Two kinds of outcomes support individuals with transformational leadership experience: organizational outcomes and personal outcomes (Steinmann et al., 2018; Givings, 2008). The following are personal outcomes of the follower: empowerment, job satisfaction, commitment, trust, self-efficacy, and motivation" (2008). Burns, who developed transformational leadership in the late 20th century, believed that it could elevate followers from a lower level to a higher level of needs, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (2008). The goal of this transformational leadership is to take the individual and empower them to mentor and train new employees.

Organizational outcomes consisted of culture and vision. Transformational leadership leads to positive organizational outcomes. Individuals who have this type of leadership style are leaders who "better align their leadership skills with the goals and values of the organization so that their influence throughout the organization is greater and produces the highest level of results for the organization" (Givings, 2008). Transformational leadership focuses on the future and how change can positively impact an organization. When a leader demonstrates transformational leadership, they can lead employees to the organization's future, which focuses on positive change and outcomes. Many more personal outcomes stem from transformational leadership such as empowerment, job satisfaction, commitment, trust, self-efficacy beliefs, and motivation (Steinmann et al., 2018; Givings 2008).

A group of researchers determined, "Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership strategy that generates reform in the stakeholders, school culture, and educational organizations" (Quin et al., 2015, p. 74). The issue of universities and principal preparation

programs failing to adequately prepare school leaders has been brought to light (2015). Research has revealed several themes: “(a) principals in high-performing schools utilize all leadership practices more frequently than those in lower-performing schools, and (b) inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process are the two practices that significantly influence student achievement” (Quin et al., 2015 p. 71). We now recommend that principal preparation programs integrate Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership model into the current curriculum to foster the development of high-quality school leaders (2015).

Rankin (2020) presented research that has demonstrated that teachers can develop transformational leadership qualities in contexts beyond traditional administration roles and responsibilities by participating in leader-infused activities (Rankin, 2020). There were some key takeaways that help developed the idea for transformational leadership roles. Takeaway 1: Teachers of the Year – using this role to help “empower teacher leadership, serve as a voice for fellow teachers, mentor new teachers, serve as model teachers for observation, and function as leadership magnets to draw others into teacher leadership engagement” (p. 4). The next takeaway focused on the widespread variation of teachers' lived realities and experiences. Many teachers reported weak connections and access to experiences with cultural and structural conditions (p. 5). Takeaway 3 focused on organizational culture that supports teachers “voice, empowerment, collaboration, communication, appreciation, and relationships” (p. 5). The last takeaway focused on purpose and teachers finding that purpose in what they do through the why and the impact of their engagement with transformational leadership (p. 5).

Overall, transformational learning is a theory that has been evolving and changing because it has been challenged, aspects of it have been broadened, and it has expanded to include a much greater variety of perspectives and experiences. Due to its phenomenological focus, this

theory lacks a clear overarching structure for explanation and understanding. It's critical to avoid creating a rigid theoretical framework when utilizing both transformational learning and the phenomenon of transformation to guarantee a genuine and transparent understanding of the lived experiences of the study participants (Hoggan, 2016).

Mentoring Through Transformational Leadership

Leading individuals is a task; encouraging individuals to embrace change and transformation is critical to any organization's success. Transformational school leadership emerges from transformational leadership, arguably the most widely researched leadership theory among organizational researchers in the last three decades (Freeman et al., 2020). Different aspects of transformational leadership, such as increasing others' commitment to a compelling vision, motivating followers to accomplish shared values and goals, providing empathy and individual support, and developing others' intellectual capacities for higher performance, make it unique (Freeman et al., 2020). In the Transformational Education (TE) Model, there are teacher-level behavior measures and school-level climate measures. The first consists of authentic engagement, meaning-making, personalized support, and stimulating curiosity. The second is classroom support, school kindness, and aesthetic guidance. These areas translate to outcomes from mediating variables (connectedness, self-efficacy, and socioemotional well-being) and outcomes from dependent variables (academic performance, engagement, and prosocial behaviors). Using a transformational leadership model will enhance teacher self-efficacy and create better classrooms and schools that see a rise in student achievement (2020).

As more schools become aware of the need for transformational leaders, they understand that training future leaders is also important (Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019; St. Clair & Deluga, 2006; Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Treslan, 2010). According to a study by Bodilenyane &

Mookestane (2019), mentoring involves an intense relationship where a senior or more experienced person (the mentor) provides two functions: advising or modeling about career development behaviors and providing personal support, particularly psycho-social support (pp. 688-689). Mentoring and transformational leadership go together. Researchers discovered that the qualities of a transformational leader align with those of a mentor (Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019; St. Clair & Deluga, 2006; Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Treslan, 2010). These types of individuals "go beyond the call for duty" (Bodilenyane & Mookestane, 2019, p. 689), make emotional investments, and transcend organizational boundaries (2019).

Organizations must establish a mentoring program with transformational leaders who are deeply committed to the organization. Bodilenyane and Mookestane (2019) stated, "The leaders are responsible for shaping organizational culture, employee attitudes and behavior, employee development and growth" (p. 690). Furthermore, "transformational leadership has been linked to similar outcomes, job satisfaction, employee attitudes, and career satisfaction" (691). Bodilenyane & Mookestane (2019) stated, "Mentoring is about developing a whole person, it takes experience and wisdom to do such a colossal task" (p. 692). To be considered for this role. Some of these criteria are supervisory ability, intelligence, initiative, decisiveness, masculinity, maturity, a need for occupational achievement, self-actualization, and power over others. Some of these characteristics have a negative connotation and would not go well in an educational setting.

Scandura and Williams (2004) investigated transformational leadership and how mentoring approaches affect organizations. They state, "The transformational leadership and mentoring approaches contain similar concepts and affect outcomes such as career mobility, performance, commitment, and satisfaction" (Scandure & Williams, 2004, p. 3). The hypothesis

suggests that “mentoring relationships offer more personalized and intense career support compared to traditional supervisory-subordinate relationships. While transformational leadership provides performance-related coaching…” (p. 6). Mentoring not only helps employees become transformational leaders, but it also creates transformational leaders in the mentors. It creates a better work environment and helps individuals have more self-efficacy. The research concluded, “…we did find that career mentoring might add to our explanation of work attitudes over transformational leadership. The mentoring roles of supervisors should continue to be incorporated into studies of leadership” (p. 18).

Mentoring has been proven to be a successful model for transformational learning and is a great model to use in teacher preparation programs. Creating transformational leaders allows for organizations to make change that is impactful to the world. Teaching is a career field that requires individuals to embrace and enact change; creating transformational leaders in cooperating teachers will translate to transformational leaders in student teachers.

Foundations of Methodology

Researching topics of interest is a personal endeavor. I have chosen phenomenology as the data collection method for this study. This methodology focuses on the lived experiences of its participants and allows for a personal aspect of research to emerge. This type of methodology is important for my students because I want them to have a voice and authentically share their experiences.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that focuses on the participants' lived experiences (Alhazami & Kaufmann, 2022; Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2019; Farrell, 2020; Greening, 2019; Hall et al., 2016; Koopman, 2017; Najmuddeen

& Areekkuzhiyil, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017). Over the years, phenomenology has developed into the research method it is now. Husserl, who "believed that the scientific, empirical approach should not apply to human subjects in psychology, as humans attached meaning to external stimuli and therefore did not respond automatically," first developed it (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015, p. 252). He further believed that through transcendental phenomenology a researcher could delve deeply into consciousness to begin to uncover the underlying structures of phenomena. Heidegger introduced another type of phenomenology after Husserl, known as hermeneutic phenomenology. This type of phenomenology focuses on participants in a study, understanding their experience, as well as the researcher. As stated by Eddles-Hirsh (2015):

> Heidegger believed it was impossible to set aside one's presuppositions and beliefs. Indeed, he believed that intrinsic awareness was fundamental to understanding the experience. There is then a shift from the transcendental approach whereby the researcher takes on the detached observer position to the purposeful recognition of both the researcher's and participants' perceptions (p. 253).

This idea that researchers can completely detach their opinions, ideas, and biases is irrelevant. Heidegger suggests that it is impossible to disregard the value of both the research and the participant's perception.

The Structure of Phenomenology

There are different structures and strategies a researcher could employ when conducting a phenomenological study. These include descriptive attitude, bracketing, phenomenological reduction, interpretive attitude, and imaginative variation mode (Alhazmi & Kauffman, 2022). Descriptive attitude is describing what the researcher hears, reads, and perceives when entering the participants' description of their experience. Bracketing refers to the process where the researcher tries to listen to the participants' lived experiences with fresh eyes, mindfully putting

aside any prejudgments. Phenomenological reduction "is the process of re-describing and explicating meaning from the described experience" (p. 6). There are two dimensions of this type of phenomenology: texture and structure. The second strategy for approaching data is an interpretive attitude. This is part of the discovery of the essential structure of the data and is used to describe the essence of the experience. Lastly, the imaginative variation mode is part of the phenomenological method that "aims to extract themes and essential meanings that constitute the described experiences" (p. 7). This is a productive way to evaluate data and review themes and gaps in the topic being studied.

This type of method requires that the study be emergent; thus, the research purpose and questions are also emergent (Alhazmi & Kauffman, 2022). When selecting participants, it is important to remember that the goal is to give an accurate depiction of the lived experience of a specific group; within that group should be diversity. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) proposed the use of a purposeful sampling method to select participants. This is a type of nonprobability sample. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population" (p. 8). There are commonly known measures to follow when conducting a phenomenological research study that include the interviewing procedure, transcription, developing a sense of the whole, developing meaning units for each participant's experience, clustering relevant units of meaning into groups, translating the meaning units, developing a textural description for each individual, searching for essential structures that could express the entire textural description, evaluating the textural description and structural theme of each participant's experiences and synthesizing the structures from all the participants' accounts.

Phenomenology in Education Research

Recently, there has been an increase in the use of phenomenology as a research method in education (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Annamalai et al., 2022; Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Farrell, 2020 Greening, 2019). Two aspects of phenomenology need to be understood when conducting research with this method: transcendental and hermeneutic (Farrell, 2020, p. 1). There is much criticism surrounding this method because conducting research surrounding individuals' thoughts and feelings does not always prove to be reliable. Farrell (2020) states, "Learning from the experience of others is one of the greatest opportunities we have as a species, yet we sometimes mistrust human experience, reverting instead to external, rational sources of information" (p. 1).

However, a growing trend in Cartesian dualism emphasizes the importance of the mind, emotions, and personal experiences, often viewed as inferior research material. In education, learning from experiences is important because this is how educators operate in the classroom each day. Farrell (2020) states, "Educators, advertently or inadvertently, draw on the experiences of others in the form of feedback, physical or verbal cues, and examining or direct questioning, in or to develop their practice" (p. 1). Given that phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of teachers, it makes sense to employ this method in educational research (Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). practices, education naturally draws on others' experiences. Some of these include feedback, physical and verbal cues, and examination or direct questioning (Farrell, 2020). Feedback heavily drives the career of education; it is crucial to constantly receive and give feedback to develop ideas and practices, particularly when conducting research in the field of education (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Annamalai et al., 2022; Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Farrell, 2020; Greening, 2019).

Transcendental phenomenology is descriptive, meaning the researcher conducts interviews and reports on what is said (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Edmund Husserl, the founder of this theory, proposed that phenomenology could study phenomena as they manifest in human consciousness. He emphasized the importance of observing how phenomena manifest in human consciousness, rather than assuming their appearance based on an abstract theory (Farrell, 2020). This method focuses on epistemology and what we can know about the world. The mechanistic worldview, based on Cartesian principles, emphasizes the separation of mind and body. This theory posits that by listening to others' lived experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of their essence, thereby revealing a phenomenon in its natural form. It is understood that interpreter bias is bracketed out.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive, meaning the researcher conducts interviews and interprets the lived experiences of the participants (Farrell, 2020). Hermeneutic phenomenology, founded by Martin Heidegger, focuses on ontology and what it means to be in the world. This theory has a contextualist worldview that states that a being cannot be isolated from the world it lives in. There is a contextualistic worldview in this theory that states a being cannot be isolated from the world it lives in. This theory has a contextualistic worldview that states that a being cannot be isolated from the world it lives in. Understanding these types of studies is important to emphasize that all things are connected. In these types of studies, the interpreter must explain the prior knowledge of their understanding (Annamalai et al., 2022; Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Farrell, 2020).

Understanding phenomenology and the two types of research used is critical for educational research. It has received criticism in the past because it is said that with phenomenology there is no method (Farrell, 2020). However, there has been a developed

method. Farrell explains, “Heidegger described phenomenological reflection as following certain woodland paths toward a ‘clearing’ where something could be shown or revealed in its essential nature. These paths (methodos), however, cannot be determined by fixed signposts; rather, ‘they need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand’” (p. 4). There is a process that should be followed in phenomenological research to ensure information is received and interpreted correctly to show phenomena in education (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Annamalai et al., 2022; Bard, 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Farrell, 2020; Greening, 2019). First, the researcher must decide on the informed mode of data analysis, then go through the data to reduce and eliminate items of insignificance to determine what constitutes a necessity to further explore and research, and finally, from the reported information, develop core themes that will be represented as lived experiences.

Summary

This literature review serves as an overview of district-university partnerships, mentoring; the mentoring relationships between cooperating teachers and their student teachers, how to create a mentoring program; transformational leadership, and phenomenology. The research on these topics is crucial to the overall teacher preparation program, as it will explore the real-life experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers during their clinical year and how their mentors guide them, drawing from their knowledge and experience in mentoring.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Study Overview

This study focuses on the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and their student teachers during the clinical year. Evaluation of the training/mentoring that happens between cooperating teachers and their student teachers will determine if student teachers are getting adequate support before their first year in the classroom. By examining the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers in the clinical year, this study will assess their readiness for their first-year teaching, with a particular focus on mentoring and the training and professional development provided to them.

Research Questions

1. What is the expectation of cooperating teachers in clinical experience?
2. What is the expectation of student teachers in clinical experience?
3. What is the process for selecting and training cooperating teachers for clinical experience?

In this study, I used qualitative methods, working with phenomenology and conducting interviews with cooperating teachers and student teachers to understand their lived experiences during the clinical year. Following the initial interview, a final interview was conducted to capture the thoughts and feelings about the clinical year in the end.

Research Design

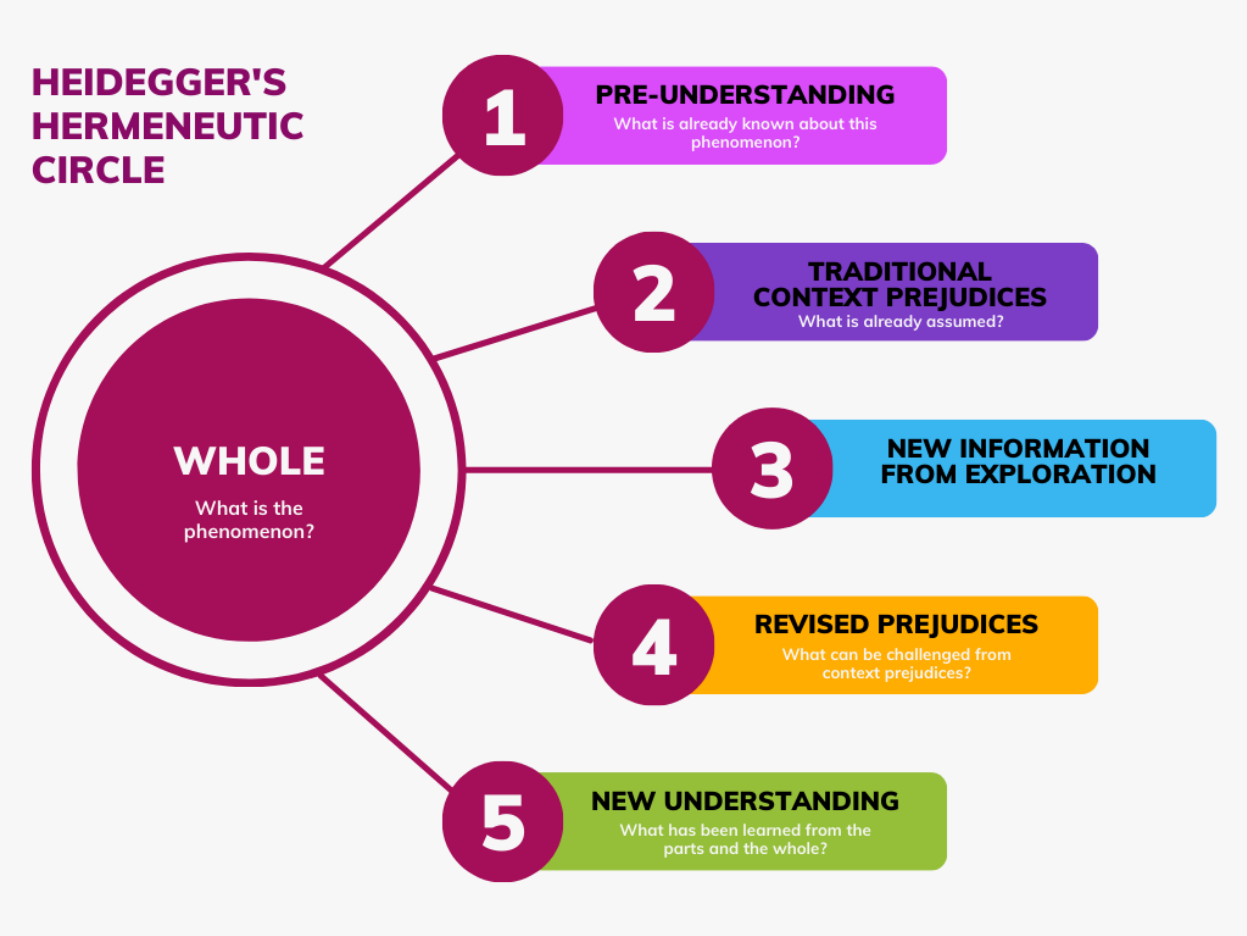
Phenomenology is important for this study because it will help to "…understand the phenomenon of learning qualitative research from the perspective of the learners" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 4). The goal is to determine if any mentoring training is given to cooperating teachers and learn how they approach their student teachers. Focusing on lived experiences will expose

weaknesses and gaps in the clinical year, allowing for future revisions. See Figure 3.1 to understand the process of data collection throughout the study.

Understanding and adhering to the structure of phenomenology is crucial for clear and articulate results. In phenomenology, there are specific techniques that can be used. For this study, Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle (Figure 3.1) will be implemented where there is interpretation as revision and a description of understanding the phenomenology is taking place. I utilized Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle which focuses on the whole, the parts, and then back to the whole of the phenomenon. There are five-steps in the Hermeneutic Circle: pre-understanding (what is already known?), traditional context prejudices (what is already assumed?), new informational from exploration, revised prejudices (wat can be challenged from context prejudices?), and new understanding (what has been learned from the parts and the whole?) This type of phenomenology focuses overall through whole analysis, parts analysis, synthesis, and then back to the whole. This type of phenomenology would fit best with the study because there is preunderstanding to the phenomenon, then an attachment theory would be applied to create new meaning, and then the Hermeneutic Circle would be applied to continue evaluating the process of discovering the phenomenon and apply interpretation as revisions.

Figure 3.1

Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle



The overarching method's worldview focuses on comprehending the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers during the clinical year, emphasizing mentoring and the types of training available to support both teacher groups, with a focus on transformational leadership. Overall, transformational learning is a theory that has been evolving and changing because it has been challenged, aspects of it have been broadened, and it has expanded to include a much greater variety of perspectives and experiences. Due to its phenomenological focus, this theory lacks a clear overarching structure for explanation and understanding. It is critical to avoid creating a rigid theoretical framework when utilizing both transformational learning and

the phenomenon of transformation to guarantee a genuine and transparent understanding of the lived experiences of the study participants (Hoggan, 2016).

The research will be conducted in public school districts and at a private university in the southeast region of the United States. The study had 9 cooperating teachers and student teachers ranging from elementary to high school. This study will represent a total of 3 cooperating teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, along with their student teachers. The study will highlight the importance of district-university partnerships, beginning with the proper training and mentoring of the cooperating teachers the university places its students with, to guarantee the students receive sufficient and significant mentoring.

Interviews will be conducted for this study. Phenomenology is the best method to use for this type of research. This study will allow for additions to the body of literature about personal stories about mentor training that begins at the university and extends to the local districts that are hiring student teachers. Unfortunately, the university does not offer a mentor training program for cooperating teachers. The goal is to demonstrate this weakness and gap, followed by further research to design and implement a mentor program, but also to examine the voices of both cooperating teachers and student teachers in one study, which has not been done before.

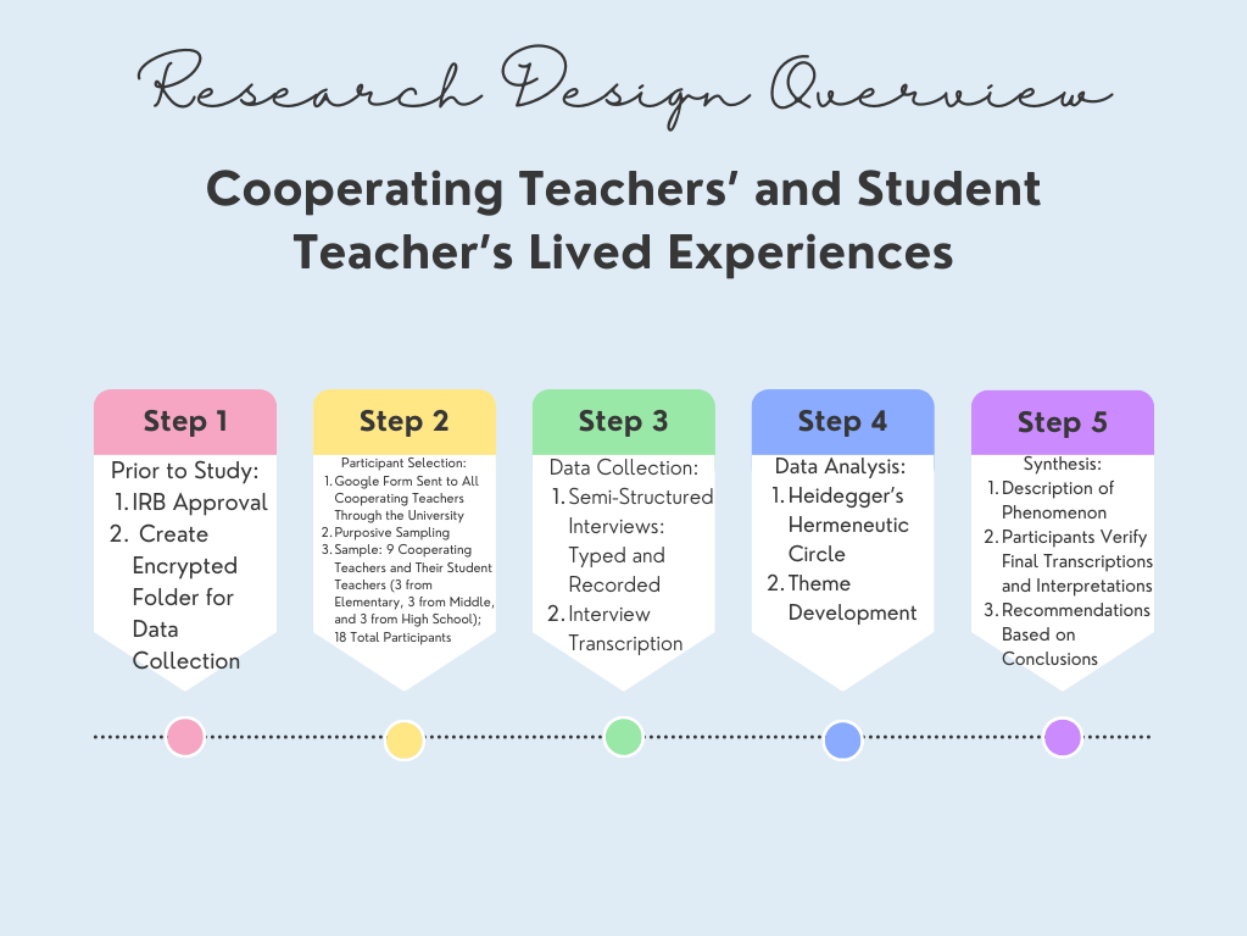
Figure 3.2 explains the research design step by step and focuses on the milestones that are required for each step of the process. Prior to my study, I obtained IRB approval and then created an encrypted folder for my data collection process and documents. I then began to select participants. I created a Google Form and an infographic that was sent to all Anderson University cooperating teachers through the university's data clerk. Purposive Sampling allows for the researcher to use sound judgement when determining participants. Because I wanted three participants from each grade level (elementary, middle, and high), I wanted to be able to choose

participants that fit those criteria and had experience with mentoring in some capacity in the past. After participants were selected, the initial semi-structured interview took place. Interviews were transcribed and recorded. Afterward, the transcription was sent back to participants in an encrypted email so they could review responses and make any changes if necessary. After first-round interviews were complete, I utilized Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle to begin analyzing the data and developing themes from this set of interviews. This process was repeated after the final interviews as well. Themes were developed from both sets of interviews. The last step was describing the phenomenon and determining appropriate recommendations based on the data.

Teacher voices are already so overshadowed with research, facts, and statistics; the focus of this study is on the cooperating teachers and student teachers' voices. The goal is to continue researching and tracking student teachers into their first year of teaching to see how beneficial mentoring is for student teachers, which would also consist of phenomenology. Districts and universities need to build partnerships; in that "…teacher training institutions should develop appropriate teaching standards and guidelines for on-campus teaching practice and give trainees more opportunity to engage with and critically interrogate their practice in the process of learning to teach" (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018, p. 1). For teacher preparation programs, ensuring quality training and support for both cooperating teachers and student teachers is critical.

Figure 3.2

Research Design Overview



Setting

Setting: Primary Information

For this study, the setting will be a private university in the southeast region of the United States. Classes on campus are attended by fewer than 20 students 46.9% of the time. 2% of classes have more than 50 students. The school currently has 3,413 students enrolled in undergrad programs. There are 912 students enrolled in graduate programs. There is a 13:1 student-faculty ratio. According to the university's demographic report, there are 63.2% female students and 36.5% male students. The breakdown of racial/ethnic groups includes 2873 white

students, 211 black or African American students, 2 students of two or more races, 183 unknown students, 99 Asian students, and 6 Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders.

The city in which the university is situated has a population of 29,771 people. The population consists of 61.1% white alone; 33.2% black or African American alone; 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 0.7% Asian alone; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders alone; 3.6% two or more races; and 3.8% Hispanic or Latino. (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.) The average household income is $37,439 with 21.2% of people living in poverty. (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.) The university does not reflect the community in which it resides. This university has a 50% acceptance rate.

Setting: Secondary Information

This study will concentrate on teacher preparation within the College of Education, specifically targeting traditional undergrad students. According to the College of Education's demographics, the university enrolls 390 students in its traditional undergrad program, with 330 females and 60 males. Among the students, 3 were American Indian or Alaskan, 6 were Asian, 9 were Black or African American, 357 were Caucasian, 1 remained blank, 2 represented two or more races, and 12 chose not to provide an answer. The students declared the following majors: 1 biology, 67 early childhood, 174 elementary, 22 PE, 29 secondary English, 22 secondary math, 49 secondary social studies, and 26 special education.

The program requires undergrad students in the last year to participate in a pre-clinical field experience that consists of 50 hours in a cooperating public-school classroom that helps lead into the last semester clinical experience of sixty-five consecutive days in a cooperating public-school classroom (Student Teacher Handbook, 2024). Throughout the program, students are required to maintain a 2.75 overall GPA with a minimum of a “C” or higher in core classes.

The program is 126 credit hours that are broken up into 41 university core requirements and 79 major core requirements (Student Teacher Handbook, 2024.).

The university supplies both cooperating teachers and student teachers with a handbook for the clinical experience. The cooperating teacher handbook provides information on important items such as cell phones, the dress code, and the student teacher's responsibilities. It outlines the breakdown of the clinical experience, how students will be graded, and a checklist for the cooperating teachers. In this handbook, cooperating teachers do not receive any in-person training or formal explanation of the university's expectations. Student handbooks provide an overview of the college of education, courses, major programs, the electronic portfolio, assessment overviews for teacher education and the college of education, information on the Praxis, details about field experiences and pre-clinical experience, an overview of the clinical experience, professionalism, communication, laws and standards of conduct, educational funding for teacher candidates, and organizations for students in the college of education (Student Teacher Handbook, 2024). Students do receive in-person training to review the university's handbook and expectations before their pre-clinical and clinical experiences. The clinical training is a full day of training from individuals at the university and from professionals in the community. A self-paced, one-day teacher training on E-ADEPT, the evaluation rubric for teachers, is available.

Participants

For this study, an email announcement was distributed through the university’s placement coordinator. The email included an attached Google Form for potential candidates to express interest in participating in the study. See Figure 3.3 for the infographic created for the email sent to participants. The candidates who want to participate in the study will be narrowed down to 9

participants based on their answers to the first question of the Google Form. The question will ask, “What are your thoughts about the training you received to be a mentor teacher?” Three representatives from each grade level will show a complete picture of a clinical experience from K–12. The sampling method for this study is purposive sampling, which refers to “intentionally selecting participants based on their characteristics, knowledge, experiences, or some other criteria” (NCSC, 2021). Purposive sampling would be most appropriate for this research design because it focuses on the researcher using sound judgment when choosing members of the study (NCSC, 2021). Because this study is so specific to one population of people, purposive sampling is the best approach because it has been researched and proven to be effective. Bisht (2024) determined that purposive sampling was an economic way to collect data and it produces reliable results. For purposive sampling, there are six types of cases. For this study “Heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling relies on the researcher’s judgment to select participants with diverse characteristics. This is done to ensure that the primary data has the most variability” (Saunders et al., 2012).

Purposive sampling offers several advantages, such as being the most cost-effective sampling method, being the only suitable method when primary data sources are limited and being a useful technique for meaning discovery (Saunders et al., 2012). There are also some disadvantages to purposive sampling including a vulnerability to errors in judgment by the researcher, a low level of reliability and a high level of bias, and the inability to generalize research findings (2012). These advantages and disadvantages also align with phenomenology. The disadvantages will need to be monitored closely so I do not fall into those risks.

Figure 3.3

Email Infographic

This study will be conducted in pairs, each consisting of a student teacher and a cooperating teacher. Cooperating teachers hold a professional license and be in their third year of teaching at a minimum. When a teacher in this state is in their third year of teaching, they have obtaining professional licensing. Professional licensing is a requirement to be a cooperating teacher for this state and university. Because the goal of this study is to show experiences between a student teacher and their cooperating teacher over the course of the clinical year, there is no target population other than cooperating teachers and student teachers. This study will ensure that those target groups are well represented. The overall goal is to show why cooperating teachers and student teachers need more training during the clinical year to ensure student teachers are receiving adequate mentoring and experience. Another goal is to encourage further research in this field, particularly with district-university partnerships that collaborate to create

mentor training programs to ensure that student teachers are being adequately trained during their clinical experiences, meeting the needs of the district, university, cooperating teacher, and student teacher.

Procedure: Data Collection and Analysis

After participant selection, interviews will commence. Data collection will be conducted through face-to-face or Zoom interviews. We will record the interviews with participants' permission and transcribe them onto an encrypted document. Throughout the study, all documents will be kept in encrypted files. After the study is complete, submitted, and approved, all documentation will be destroyed by deleting all encrypted files after three years.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Process

Key steps in data collection process	How will you carry out this step?	Where will you carry out this step?	When will you carry out this step?
Create a Google Form for participants	Email all potential participants – obtain information through the University – sent via Placement Coordinator	The University	Spring 2024
Contact 3 Cooperating Teachers from each school level and their Student Teacher	Setup initial interview with participants Interview and transcribe initial interviews	Local Districts – where cooperating teachers and student teachers are located	February – March 2024
Schedule final interviews with Cooperating Teachers and their Student Teachers	Setup final interview with participants Interview and transcribe final interviews	Local Districts – where cooperating teachers and student teachers are located	April 2024

Data Analysis Plan

For this study phenomenology will be used as the research method. Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) state, “Phenomenology is the qualitative analysis of the conscious experiences of phenomena from the first-person point of view of the participant” (p. 296). Because teachers have lived through student teaching and a clinical year, they will draw on experiences from their past to correlate with their experience as a cooperating teacher. This is referred to as a conscious experience, defined as “any experience that a person has lived through or performed and can bring to memory in such a way as to recall that experience” (p. 296). Constructing a narrative that describes or summarizes the participants' experiences is crucial for the researcher, as it serves to describe or summarize the experiences described in the interviews (p. 296).

To ensure the researcher’s trustworthiness, participants will use self-descriptions, in which they explain their background and life experiences before the interview questions. Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) state:

> In writing narratives, the author should make additional considerations that increase the trustworthiness of the research. These additional considerations should account for the context within which participants self-describe their experiences. (p. 298)

Several contexts of self-description include historical, political/governmental, societal/cultural/religious, geographic, temporal, gender, and familiarity. For this study, participants shared historical, societal/cultural/religious, geographical, and gender in their self-descriptions. These various aspects emerged throughout the interviews and questions.

When analyzing the data, several aspects of interviewing need to be examined. The verbal component concentrates on the participant's spoken words, the prosodic component examines the pitch, loudness, and duration of the words, the paralinguistic component examines

emotions like laughter or crying, and the eye dialect provides a true phonetic representation of word pronunciation (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019).

As the researcher, applying deductive analysis for this study is important because "Deductive analysis is when the researcher has preconceived ideas about what themes may be present in the narratives and seeks to find them" (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019, p. 588). Prior knowledge about this university's teacher preparation program reveals the absence of formal training for cooperating teachers, the informal discussion of mentoring with cooperating teachers, and the expectations of teachers and student teachers for the clinical year, shaped by their individual experiences. Those expectations will emerge during the interviews and be incorporated into themes as they develop.

There are three steps when processing qualitative data. The first step is to begin coding narrative data. During the analysis, a process of coding emerging themes will begin. The theme could encompass a variety of topics such as mentoring a student teacher, evaluating the benefits or harmful effects of the clinical experience, fostering collaboration between cooperating teachers, student teachers, districts, and universities, or defining the expectations of both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell (2019) discuss that "Codes are words or phrases and assign a few words or a phrase that captures the salient essence of the narrative" (p. 592). The second step involves formulating categories using the constant comparison method. This process allows the researcher to evaluate the codes and compare to support meaning of the various categories. The third step is to interpret patterns among the categories. "Patterns among categories can be based on how they are similar or different, how often they appear, sequence of the categories, how they relate to different situations, or whether a category appears to cause or influence another category" (p. 597). Tracking the subcategories by

color will allow me to see the various similarities across interviews and track how those participants have shared lived experiences. The goal of this analysis is to create several codes that turn into a few categories that eventually identify a pattern that is trackable and leads to a study conclusion.

Ethical Consideration

My participants get to choose to be a part of the study and will relay their lived experiences. All participants will be kept anonymous by their grade level (Elementary Interview 1, Middle Interview 4, High Interview 7, etc.). I Before adding it to the study, I will type all shared and observed information into a transcript and share it with the participants. After the participants review the transcript, they will determine what they want in the data and what they would like to clarify (if necessary). All documents and recordings will be in encrypted files. A potential conflict of interest would be my employment at the university. Interviewer bias is when the "demeanor, words, or expressions of a researcher influence the responses of a participant when the researcher and the participant are in direct contact" (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019, p. 145). To ensure proper reporting, I will only collect and report interview information and observations, not opinions, while constantly monitoring for bias. Participants will review all collected data before inclusion in the study to ensure accuracy and eliminate any potential conflicts of interest. Furthermore, my committee will review all work to ensure that there is no bias or conflict of interest in the study or research documentation.

Instrumentation

For this study, the implementation of an interview protocol is necessary. Interviewing will consist of asking questions directly to the participants to get their attitudes and perceptions about mentoring in the student-teacher clinical experience (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019, p.

129). Semi-structured interviews will be utilized. According to research, a semi-structured interview presents a set of questions to all participants yet allows for open-ended responses. I will interview each participant separately, record them, and, when permitted, use handwritten notes and voice-to-text features to capture a comprehensive picture of the interview. Following the interview, I will create a transcription of the conversation and provide a copy for the interviewee to read. After approval, the interview will be submitted to the study. Because the interviews are semi-structured, a few guiding questions are necessary, but the overall purpose is for the participants to talk about their lived experiences in the classroom and during the clinical experience. For the Semi-Structures Interview Protocol, see Appendix B.

Summary

This study will provide valuable insights into a local district-university partnership, the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers, and the preparedness of student teachers for their clinical experience and transition into their first-year teaching. Understanding these aspects through phenomenology is important because it reflects the participants' lived experiences.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers during the clinical year. The participants consisted of three elementary school, three middle school, and three high school cooperating teachers and student teachers. At the university's location, all participants came from four surrounding districts. They represent content area classes and related arts classes. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the participants, their gender, race, and grade/subject taught. The participants pairs consisted of three groupings from elementary, middle, and high school. The elementary level was one 1st grade, one art, and one 4th grade cooperating teacher and their student teacher. The middle level was one choir, on math, and one special education cooperating teacher and their student teacher. The high level was one art and two English cooperating teachers and their student teachers. Participants will be identified as this in Chapters 4 and 5.

Table 4.1

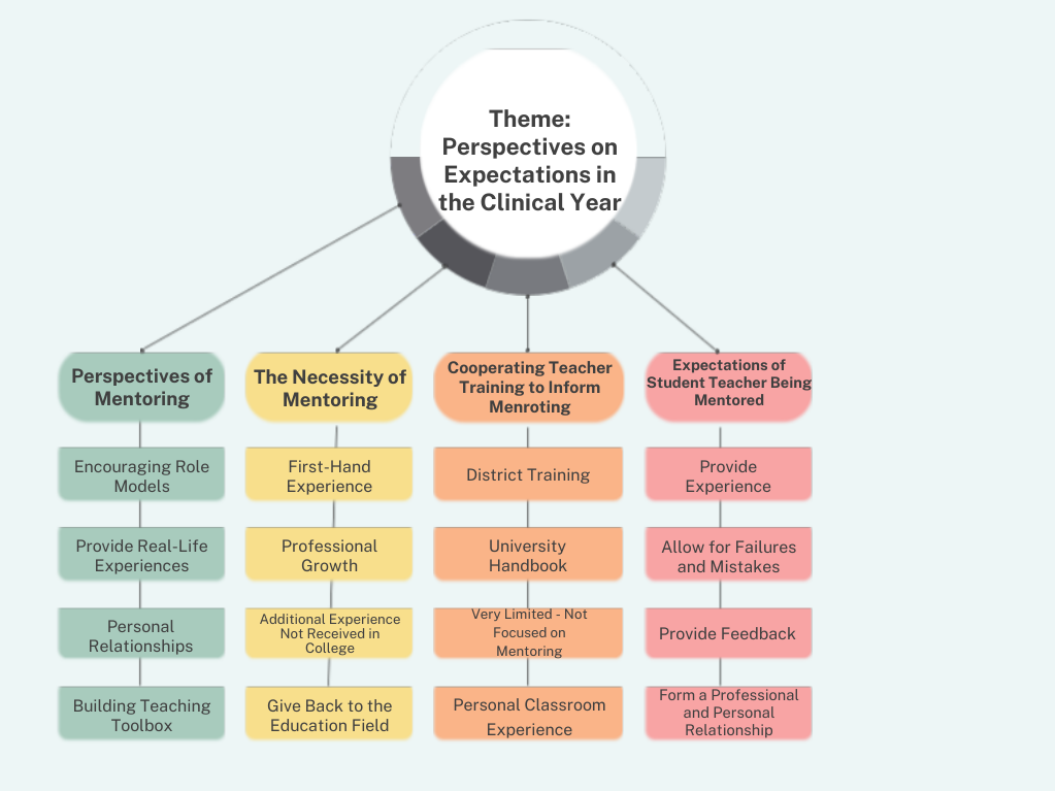
Participant Overview

Grade Level	Gender	Race	Grade/Subject Taught
Elementary Cooperating Teacher 1	F	W	1st Grade
Elementary Cooperating Teacher 2	F	W	Art
Elementary Cooperating Teacher 3	F	W	4th Grade
Middle Cooperating Teacher 4	F	W	Choir
Middle Cooperating Teacher 5	F	W	Math
Middle Cooperating Teacher 6	F	W	Special Ed
High Cooperating Teacher 7	M	W	Art
High Cooperating Teacher 8	F	W	English
High Cooperating Teacher 9	F	W	English
Elementary Student Teacher 1	F	W	1st Grade
Elementary Student Teacher 2	F	W	Art
Elementary Student Teacher 3	F	W	4th Grade
Middle Student Teacher 4	F	W	Choir
Middle Student Teacher 5	F	W	Math
Middle Student Teacher 6	F	W	Special Ed
High Student Teacher 7	M	W	Art
High Student Teacher 8	F	W	English
High Student Teacher 9	F	W	English

Throughout the interviews specific themes emerged, they were as follows: perspectives on mentoring, the necessity of mentoring, cooperating teacher training to inform mentoring, expectations on student teacher being mentored, perceptions on role readiness, perceived versus received support, and failures in cooperating teacher training (Figure 4.1). To develop these themes, I coded each interview using various colors. Each theme was developed based on similarity in words that participants used. For example, for the theme of perspectives on mentoring the sub-themes were encouraging role models, provide real-life experiences, personal relationships, and building teaching toolbox. These words and phrases occurred throughout interviews to develop that theme. This process was repeated for each theme that emerged.

Figure 4.1

Emergent Themes Part 1

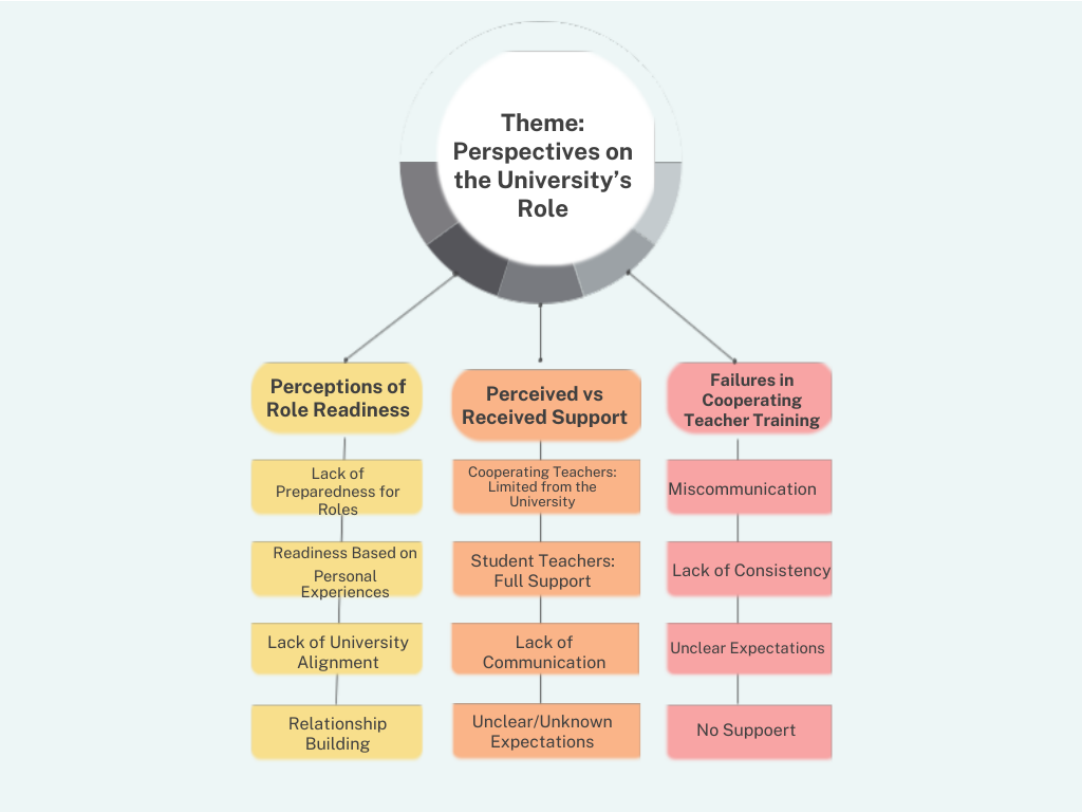


After initial interviews were conducted, the process of coding transcripts was repeated to develop the themes that emerged from the second interviews. The initial interviews revealed holes in the university's role on the clinical year and the support they give to cooperating teachers and students teachers. The initial interviews drove the development of questions for the final interview. The first interviews were utilized as a gauge to begin to hear the voices of the cooperating teachers and student teachers and to understand their experiences. The second round of interviews were conducted to ensure an understanding of the original themes and subthemes and to understand a deeper understanding of the roles, support, and training that both cooperating teachers and student teachers participate in. The themes for the second round of interviews were perceptions on

role readiness, perceived vs received support, and failures in cooperating teacher training (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Emergent Themes Part 2



For these interviews, Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle, mentioned in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.1), was utilized to develop the themes that led to the phenomena of the study. Using those two parts helped analyze both the parts of the interviews and the whole of the phenomena. This allowed for a clear understanding of evaluating the lived experiences of the cooperating teachers and the student teachers without putting personal bias into the research. It also allowed for checking pre-understanding against lived experiences to revise prejudices and clearly articulate new understanding while also preparing recommendations for the future (Figueiredo, 2023).

Initial Interviews

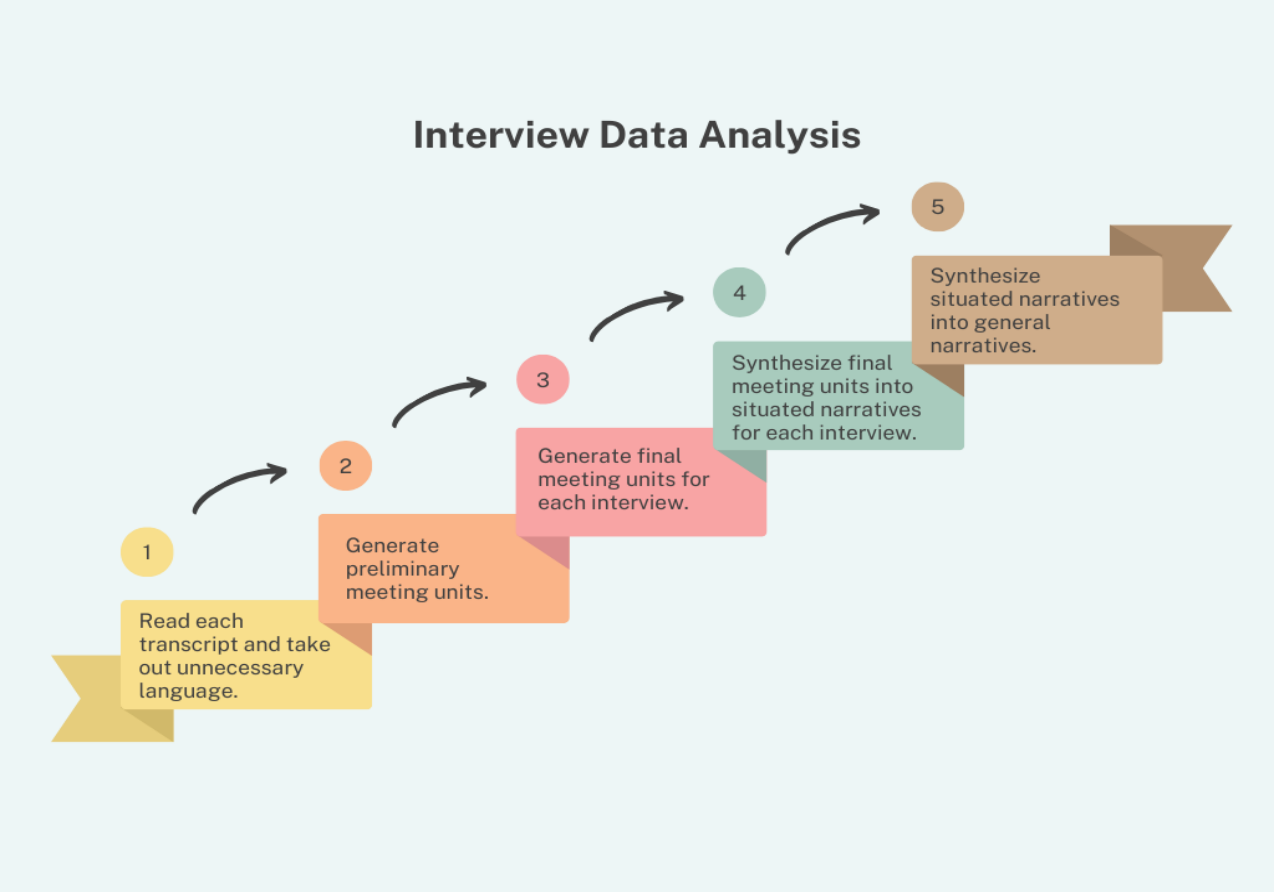
Initial interviews were conducted during the first week of February 2024 after an infographic (Figure 3.3) was created and emailed to cooperating teachers by the university. Potential participants had the opportunity to volunteer for the research study by completing a Google Form. There was not a huge initial interest in the study, so a second email was sent that explained the study in more detail. After this process, exactly enough participates signed up to fulfill the requirement of three elementary, middle, and high cooperating teachers. After the cooperating teachers were secured, a meeting with both cooperating teachers and student teachers took place to explain the study in more detail and ask student teachers if they wanted to participate in the study. All student teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

My initial interview questions focused on mentoring perspectives and what the clinical experience should look like. These interviews revealed themes of perspectives on mentoring, the necessity of mentoring, cooperating teacher training to inform mentoring, expectations on student teacher being mentored, failures in cooperating teacher training, perceived vs received support, and perceptions on role readiness (Figure 4.1 and 4.2). Each conducted face-to-face interviews with all cooperating teachers and student teachers, except for one middle school grouping due to distance. This pairings interview was conducted via Zoom. I conducted the interviews individually, giving each participant the privacy to disclose and discuss questions without fear of consequences, and the freedom to articulate their thoughts and ideas. The questions for the initial interview focused on perspectives on mentoring and how those ideas shaped the individuals for the clinical experience. Each grouping of participants, cooperating teachers, and students teachers, have their responses separately recorded. See Appendix B for Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions.

When conducting interviews and developing the data analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. From the transcription, unnecessary language was removed to help develop the themes and see similarities in language across interviews. The interviews were then evaluated for common language and themes were developed. From theme development, situated narratives were developed and then general narratives were developed. Figure 4.3 shows the data analysis process that took place for this study.

Figure 4.3

Interview Data Analysis



Perspectives on Mentoring

When discussing mentoring perspectives, all cooperating teachers and student teachers shared very similar ideas. Focusing on learning the perspectives on mentoring helped answer Research Question 1: What are the expectations of cooperating teachers in clinical experience? and Research Question 2: What are the expectations of student teachers in clinical experience? These two questions shaped much of the interviews. The interview question "What are your perceptions of a mentor?" revealed that mentors should foster an environment that enables others to learn and develop into the teachers they aspire to be. They believed that mentoring was important, not only for their student teachers but also for themselves. Sadly, four cooperating teachers expressed that they were not mentored past their first two years of teaching which is their induction year when they are paired with a district mentor in year one and are under evaluation on a formative and summative level before they can obtain their professional license. The interviews are presented in a variety of ways. For this first theme, each grade level cooperating teacher's and then each grade level student teacher's responses will be shared.

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

When asked "What are your perceptions of a mentor?" Cooperating teachers provided insightful responses that demonstrated their comprehension of the role and significance of mentoring student teachers. All the elementary cooperating teachers valued supporting their student teacher and helping them learn valuable skills to help equip them in their future classrooms. Two of the cooperating teachers believed that they should be providing experiences that support the student teacher as they prepare for their own teaching careers. The first of the two that believed that mentoring was about creating teaching experiences stated that they needed to help their student teacher fill their toolbox. One cooperating teacher said,

> It's my job to look for those teachable moments so they understand what did and didn't work well and what they need to fill their toolbox. There are so many aspects in elementary that you need to know, I think it's my job to help build up the toolbox, so they have what she needs when she is on her own. (Elementary Interview 2)

Elementary Cooperating Teacher 3 suggested that providing experiences was beneficial to equip student teachers for situation they may not be equipped for. They said that they are there to model and not judge their mentee and "should be helping to support [student teachers] in situations they may not be well equipped for (Elementary Interview 3). The last elementary cooperating teacher focused on encouraging and modeling their student teacher and stated, "[Cooperating teachers] should be encouraging to their mentee, they are not there to judge them, they are there to model the teacher experiences" (Elementary Interview 1).

Middle Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The middle school perspective on mentoring suggested that equipping the student teacher for the future was extremely important. All three middle school cooperating teachers viewed mentoring differently. The first cooperating teacher wanted to make sure they provided opportunities for their student teacher that would allow them to grow:

> I think my best definition [of a mentor] would be someone who gives support without doing it all for them. Giving them the chance to go out and do what they think is best. Being there for questions and feedback as needed. (Middle Interview 4)

Another middle school cooperating teacher perspective on mentoring explained the importance of being a model to their student teacher: "A good mentor models the expectations of what a teacher does in the classroom, from dress, attitude, planning and assessing, and providing feedback" (Middle Interview 5). The last middle school cooperating teacher perspective on mentoring discussed equipping their student teacher with resources:

> [Mentoring] is helping them build their toolbox and sharing resources, so they

> don't need to start from scratch when they are on their own. However, as a mentor, letting my student teacher fail sometimes is the best experience so she can learn how to work through hard things in the classroom with support. (Middle Interview 6)

Overall, the middle school cooperating teachers had a commonality of ensuring student teachers were receiving various experiences and helping them to fill their toolbox for teaching.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

High school cooperating teachers took a more wholistic approach to mentoring and had the understanding that mentoring went beyond the classroom and needed to include aspects of personal life. Two of the three high school cooperating teachers suggested taking risks, both good and bad, to develop decision making skills in the classroom. The first of the two focused on providing a variety of experiences for their student teacher:

> I really think I consider myself the work mom, the shoulder, the advisor, the counselor; I try to be the sage on the stage, but then I try to be the guide on the side. Giving [the student teacher] the options that are both good but stretch them as a teacher to make their own decision. [A mentor] helps them develop time management skills, how to plan lessons, and helps them to build their confidence as a teacher. (High Interview 8)

The second cooperating teacher suggested that mentoring is modeling what to do and what not to do:

> A mentor should be someone who both models what to do and what not to do. They should recommend things for the student teacher to try. They should be a confidant for their student teacher and allow them to come to them without judgement or fear. Someone who can be reliable, providing ideas, materials, support. (High Interview 9)

The last high school cooperating teacher's perspective on mentoring focused on real world experiences: "The first thing you have to give them is real world experience, it's not just the lesson plans and lessons, the minute you stand in front of the students, all those lessons can go through the wayside" (High Interview 7). The high school cooperating teachers wanted to model

what to do for their student teachers and focus on giving real life experiences that would help their student teacher to grow.

Cooperating Teachers Summary

All the cooperating teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels shared their perspectives on mentoring based on personal thoughts and beliefs, as well as their own mentoring experiences. Student teachers' perspectives on mentoring are derived from their experiences in college and their personal beliefs on mentoring.

Elementary Student Teachers Interviews

Student teachers were asked a two-part question on mentoring perspectives. The first question was, "What are your perceptions of a mentor" and the second, "What do you want to see in a mentoring relationship with your cooperating teacher?" Two of the three student teachers believed that a mentor should provide support for the mentee. The first of the two student teachers believed that a mentor is someone that guides their mentee:

> A mentor is somebody that leads by example and guides you to come to your own conclusions but also helps you make those decisions. [My cooperating teacher] does a good job of modeling in the classroom, but then guiding me when I took over in the classroom. (Elementary Interview 1)

The second student teacher believes that providing support is important for a mentor to do: "[Cooperating teachers] should be providing the support and initial trainings as you are working for the first time in the field" (Elementary Interview 3). The last student teacher's perception of a mentor focused on the mentor making them feel welcomed:

> My cooperating teacher, is my favorite that I've ever had. I feel a lot more comfortable with this cooperating teacher and they make me feel like I am familiar with all the content we are doing. This cooperating teacher makes me feel very welcomed. (Elementary Interview 2)

Elementary student teachers wanted a mentor that would provide opportunities for them while

welcome them into the classroom.

Middle Student Teachers Interviews

Middle school student teachers believed that a mentor provides the support needed in each moment to build a positive relationship. They held the belief that the clinical experience is a process of trial and error, allowing for mistakes and providing opportunities for the cooperating teacher to provide feedback. One middle school student teacher suggested that a mentor provides constructive criticism: "[A mentor] is somebody who can give you support while also giving you constructive criticism. I believe that mentoring might look different across the clinical experience, but that shouldn't change the aspects of a mentoring relationship" (Middle Interview 4). Another student teacher focused on receiving feedback from their mentor:

> Basically, [a mentor] is someone to get feedback from every aspect of running a classroom, classroom management, time management, teaching lessons – getting feedback, both positive and negative so you can grow and develop into the teacher that you are supposed to be. The goal should be to push someone to be the best teacher that they can be. (Middle Interview 5)

The last middle school student teacher interview focused on the relationship that should be built with a cooperating teacher:

> I feel like one thing that should be discussed before coming to your cooperating teacher is how to build a one-on-one relationship with that person. Both sides don't know how to foster and build a relationship with each other. Learning how to make professional and relational connections with the cooperating teacher would be great. (Middle Interview 6)

Middle student teachers wanted opportunities to make mistakes and be corrected so they could learn during their clinical experience. They also wanted someone to push them to be the best they could be while getting meaningful feedback.

High Student Teachers Interviews

At the high school level, all student teachers believed that mentoring was a natural part of their clinical experience, and all stated that they had received mentoring from the beginning. One high school student teacher explained that a mentor is someone who walks you through the process of teaching: "[A mentor] is someone that would guide you through the day-to-day activities or requirements for whatever job or position you are trying to do yourself one day. The things that might not get talked about in your formal training or classroom teachings" (High Interview 7). Another high school student teacher suggested that a mentor should allow a student teacher to have authority in the classroom: "Some who is willing to guide but also take a step back, like they will give you the feedback, but they are willing to let you have an authority in the classroom" (High Interview 8).

The final high school interview wanted someone that would meet all their needs: "[A mentor] is somebody who is there for the mentee physically, emotionally, and mentally. There needs to be support in all these areas. [Mentors] are helpful, they are patient, they are willing to share control of their classroom, materials, and tips and tricks (High Interview 9). The high school student teachers had an emphasis on wanting someone to explain the process of teaching while be honest with them about the good and bad parts of the job.

Student Teachers Summary

All student teacher interviews demonstrated a clear understanding of mentoring. They desired feedback and constructive criticism to help them grow in their role in the classroom. The student teachers expressed that they had developed a relationship with their cooperating teachers which helped with the mentoring aspect of clinical. The next theme that emerged was the value that mentoring has for both cooperating teachers and student teachers. Each group of participants placed value on mentoring and believed that mentoring was essential in their roles as cooperating

teacher and student teacher.

The Necessity of Mentoring

A student teacher's career benefits greatly from proper mentoring. The field of education places a lot of emphasis on mentoring and assisting teachers, particularly in their first year of teaching. Many districts surrounding the university demonstrate this by implementing induction teacher programs and matching a first-year teacher with a mentor teacher. It is also important to extend the value of mentoring to the clinical experience. Cooperating teachers were asked "Do you believe you should mentor a student teacher? Explain." Each cooperating teacher believed that they should mentor a student teacher because of the significant impact mentoring has on their career.

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The elementary cooperating teachers believed that this opportunity to mentor is one that is important and should be done to help develop their own skills in the classroom. All three perspectives on the value of mentoring differed. One elementary cooperating teacher believed the value of mentoring is to encourage their mentee: "Ideally, I think that [mentoring] is being that person's biggest cheerleader – not nit picking or being negative at all. Find the positive in everything – treat the student teacher how I would want my child to be treated. They are not all the way there yet, but they are working toward that" (Elementary Interview 1). Another elementary cooperating teacher focused on the impact mentoring has on developing their own skills:

> I think [mentoring] helps hone my own skills because it's easy to get complacent. It provides me an opportunity to see a different perspective – it's nice to learn new things through them and really grow professionally. I think it's important to further the profession – and what better way to do this than to mentor student teachers. (Elementary Interview 2)

The final elementary cooperating teacher interview focused on how they can add to a student teachers experience because they have gone through it themselves. This was the only cooperating teacher that discussed their own experiences with their student teaching experience and the cooperating teacher they had. This cooperating teacher shared,

> I've always wanted to be a mentor, so when I was asked I was ecstatic about it. I just want to be the person I didn't have as a student teacher. I think [mentoring] is so important because we've gone through this experience – we can give first-hand experience and knowledge to the new people and give them the same common ground. (Elementary Interview 3)

Each perspective on the value of mentoring offered differing ideas that helped shape their individual experiences.

Middle Cooperating Teachers Interviews

Middle cooperating teacher participants believed that mentoring student teachers was a need that they could meet. All cooperating teachers believed that mentoring student teachers was impactful for their career. The first of three middle school cooperating teacher believed that mentoring is something that helps them think about the teaching process:

> [Mentoring] helps me think about what I'm doing more, it requires me to step back and think about the processes of teaching. When [the student teacher] asks questions, it's helpful for me to reflect. This helps me stay relevant and grow as a professional. (Middle Interview 4)

Another cooperating teacher believed that mentoring contributes to the field of education: "In my contribution to education, mentoring is the least I could do. We need new teachers, so [mentoring] is necessary for the whole; it's a need that we need to be providing" (Middle Interview 5). The last middle cooperating teacher suggested that mentoring helped them be more self-reflective: "Sometimes I must think about the processes that I use to explain it to [my student teacher], this helps me be reflective and self-evaluative when helping someone else learn" (Middle Interview 6). This group of cooperating teachers focused on the impact that

mentoring had on their career and how that perspective shaped their value on mentoring.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

High school cooperating teachers were overall more experienced in the classroom that other groups of cooperating teachers and held the belief that only experienced, good teachers should be mentoring future teachers. They all agreed that mentoring adds value to their personal experiences and helps future educators feel supported and connected before they enter their own classroom. One high school teacher suggested that a mentor teacher should be experienced:

> I believe [mentoring] should be something that good teachers should do. You must take charge and share what good teachers do and help future teachers to care. [Mentoring] keeps me on top of things – when you've been teaching for a long time, you want to stay relevant for the students and for the student teacher to show them what education is all about. (High Interview 7)

Another high school cooperating teacher discussed the importance of being present for the student teacher and showing them different ways of doing things by saying:

> You must want to show someone how to be a better teacher. Have I shown all the correct ways – no, have I shown her ways – yes. You must be nurturing, and in my student teachers I see a spark and that reminds me why I got into student teaching. (High Interview 8)

The last high school cooperating teacher said that this mentoring opportunity allows for personal growth:

> I think that [mentoring] a good way of growing both for myself and for them. I've told other people that this situation has helped me grow a lot more and I have had to step up a lot more for my own classroom management. It has made me be reflective about what I have done in the past and how I should change things up. (High Interview 9)

These cooperating teachers have had a variety of experiences with student teachers, whether they volunteered or were asked to participate in the opportunity to mentor a student teacher. Student teachers also shared similar sentiments when interviewed.

Elementary Student Teachers Interviews

Student teachers were asked "Do you believe you should be mentored throughout the clinical experience?" All student teachers believed mentoring was a vital piece of the clinical experience. One elementary student teacher believed that mentoring was a lifelong process: "People need to be mentored for a very long time, throughout their career – we can always be better" (Elementary Interview 1). Another student teacher also believed that they should be mentored through their clinical experience because it prepares them for teaching:

> What's great for me is that my cooperating teacher sits in the back and lets me teach. After the lesson I have feedback – consistent feedback throughout the clinical experience and more experience in the classroom. (Elementary Interview 2)

The last elementary student teacher interview held the same sentiments about mentoring and believed mentoring should be a part of the clinical experience:

> If I was a first-year teacher, they would have a mentor program – I would have the extra support. The clinical supervisors and cooperating teachers are the support – I have heard negative experiences, but I have had a positive experience. (Elementary Interview 3)

Each elementary student teacher offered their perspective on the value of mentoring and believed that they needed mentoring throughout their clinical experience.

Middle Student Teacher Interviews

The middle student teachers had all discussed how their cooperating teacher had an impact on their student teaching. All the middle school student teachers suggested how much the mentoring relationship they developed with their cooperating teacher has impacted them. Each middle student teacher had a different perspective on the value of mentoring. One of the three student teachers discussed being mentored beyond the classroom:

> I feel like I am getting mentored wholly. My cooperating has been able to really mentor me because we are so close in age, and they really understand me. I have

> formed actual friendship with them. They help me with the things that I need outside of the classroom. (Middle Interview 4)

The second of three middle student teachers focused on needing guidance during the clinical experience: “I know what I have learned, but it’s nothing from what a seasoned teacher knows, so having that guidance is 100% necessary” (Middle Interview 5). The final middle student teacher discussed their experience at the university versus their experience in clinical:

> There are things that I am gaining here that I did not get in my coursework. I am getting real world experiences. We learn a lot from the textbook, but that doesn’t prepare us well. [College] doesn’t prepare us for how young we are going into middle or high school placements – we are so close to their age, and we have an extra hurdle with that as we go into teaching. (Middle Interview 6)

The student teachers’ mentoring relationship with their cooperating teacher has influenced their outlook on teaching and how to prepare to be in the classroom on their own.

High Student Teachers Interviews

The high school student teachers discussed the importance of multiple mentors throughout your training and early career. They reflected on their time at the university and how it had shaped their clinical experience. Two of the three student teachers believed that they were being mentored well throughout the clinical process. One high student teacher believed their mentoring was thorough: “Yes – I feel like I am being mentored very well throughout the process” (High Interview 7). Another student teacher believed that having a mentor throughout clinical is important to future teachers:

> I think [mentoring] would be helpful especially because everyone has different ideas – supervisor, mentor, and cooperating teacher – adding more people that you can learn with and from is valuable to future teachers. The mentoring is a critical part; having someone there to really support you and walk with you through this part of life. (High Interview 8)

The final high student teacher had a different perspective that discussed the lack of support they felt from the school they completed clinical in:

> I would like to see the schools get more involved in the clinical experience and they should know who I am and why I am here. I would just like more support from administration – it would be nice to be involved in the community and culture of the school. The admin part helps with learning the other side of teaching – the professional parts without lesson planning, teaching, and students. (High Interview 9)

The high student teachers believed that they were mentored well through the process of clinical and believed that this was a good experience to learn the teaching career.

Student Teachers Summary

At some point, all student teachers discussed the importance of having a mentor who is willing to walk through the clinical process and answer any questions that may arise. Building a strong relationship with the cooperating teacher and being willing to go above and beyond what the university program requires are key factors in feeling comfortable enough to do this. To ensure quality mentors, it is important to understand the mentor training that each cooperating teacher goes through.

Cooperating Teacher Training to Inform Mentoring

During the interview process, it was evident that there was an underlying expectation for veteran teachers to understand how to mentor with little to no training. Because of this, cooperating teachers were utilizing their own experiences as a teacher to help guide the process of mentoring their student teacher. The cooperating teachers understood the need to mentor and believed it was valuable, all the cooperating teachers viewed this perspective based on personal experiences or trainings they received from their district. All cooperating teachers showed a basic knowledge of mentoring. In this part of the interview, the goal was to gain an understanding of the experiences cooperating teachers had with mentor training.

Each cooperating teacher were asked, “What mentor training have you received?” and “What are your thoughts about the training you received to be a mentor teacher?” This question

was essential to build an understanding of what the university does to train and equip mentor teachers. Participants were encouraged to be completely honest to ensure a complete picture. All cooperating teachers expressed that they did not receive formal training from the university for their role as cooperating teachers. Some received training from their districts, and some relied on their experience in the classroom.

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The elementary cooperating teachers spent their time explaining the various training they had for mentoring, some through their district, some their schools, but all said they received little to no training to be a cooperating teacher. The ones that expressed they received training stated that they read the handbook, or they got the handbook. The first elementary cooperating teacher reflected on their experience with not receiving training: "I did not receive any training [from the university]. The Cooperating Teacher Handbook was sent in an email, which was a lot of information that I didn't have time to sit down and read" (Elementary Interview 1). Another elementary cooperating teacher shared the same experience and did not have training: "To be totally frank, I didn't really receive any training, I received a handbook. The supervisor met with me before each semester and went over the expectations. That was really it" (Elementary Interview 2). The last elementary cooperating teacher discussed their personal experiences with mentor training:

> This past summer I went through mentor training program through the district. This training focused on pre and post observations, how to encourage your mentee, and the types of teachers you might come across in training. I was supposed to be mentoring this semester and then a teacher quit which made my student teacher move into an internship role. I don't know if I would call the information we receive training. We talk to the university supervisor and go over things that are expected of us throughout the semester. (Elementary Interview 3)

These cooperating teachers stated that they received little to no training from the university,

which hindered their understanding of their role as a cooperating teacher and the expectations placed on both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher.

Middle Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The middle cooperating teachers had varying perspectives on the training they received to be a cooperating teacher. One middle cooperating teacher understood the expectations of her role because they were a recent graduate of the university. One middle cooperating teacher explained they had videos to watch that helped explain their role and provided training. They assumed that the videos were from the university, but it was discovered that this is from the state and is required of all cooperating teachers to complete these video trainings prior to being a cooperating teacher. The last middle cooperating teacher said that they received the handbook and that was their training for their role as a cooperating teacher. One of the middle school cooperating teachers had a unique experience because they were a recent graduate of the university, they shared about their experience with training:

> There was some stuff that I had to do on the university portfolio management system prior to starting. The clinical supervisor introduced herself and told me if I needed anything I could contact her. I know what is expected of me and I know what I must do, but I don't think I got a ton of training on scoring for observations. (Middle Interview 4)

Another cooperating teacher shared the same thoughts of not having any formal training: "No, when I was approved I didn't have any formal training [for cooperating teaching]. I think it was sufficient, there were videos. The videos didn't work on Chromebook devices (Middle Interview 5). The final middle school cooperating teacher said that their district provides training opportunities for mentorships with students, student teachers, and new teachers but they did not receive training from the university: "I mean the only training that we really received from the university was the handbook and that's fine – we are fully capable of reading and following

procedures. I don't feel terrible about it, but there wasn't really a training" (Middle Interview 6). All cooperating teachers mentioned district mentor training, but stated they received no training from the university.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The high school teachers were candid in their responses and overall had the same thoughts as the elementary and middle cooperating teachers. All cooperating teachers believed that the districts had more of an emphasis on mentor training than the university did. One high school cooperating teacher shared their response about training and requirements:

> The university training is efficient – I think it's fine. They are always willing to make changes also. In the years past, the booklet has changed. I do read the booklet; I look for changes each time I have a student teacher. I also try to keep up with the program and the changes that are being implemented. (High Interview 7).

Another cooperative teacher discussed the lack of training and the amount of paperwork overwhelming:

> There is not any formal training from the university. I did receive emails containing forms – I will tell you, the forms we need to fill out are cumbersome. The amount of information is overwhelming. It's overwhelming for cooperating teachers because there is just so much for us to do. Time is so valuable, and it's just frustrating. We get a handbook, but it's just they hand it to us. (High Interview 8)

The last interview shared the same thoughts about the lack of training from the university and said:

> There was no training from the university, just the district's training. Essentially I got communication from the Clinical Coordinator for taking on my student teacher and then the clinical supervisor emailed me with the materials for the handbook and all the forms that I had to complete for my student teacher for the semester. (High Interview 9)

These combined experiences influenced their beliefs about mentoring and enabled them to effectively mentor their student teachers. Understanding the experiences that cooperating

teachers had with mentor training helped shape questions for student teachers and developed the theme of student teachers expectations on being mentored.

Expectations of Student Teachers Being Mentored

The expectations for mentorship were not always clear. Most student teachers agreed that they wanted someone to be there for them and give them an opportunity to learn and grow and collectively stated that this was through classroom management techniques and feedback. Student teachers were asked "What aspects of mentoring do you think are necessary?" All student teachers believed support was the number one aspect of mentoring, but each also shared specific things they believed should be part of mentoring in the clinical experience.

Elementary Students Teacher Interviews

The elementary student teachers were looking for tangible ways to grow, especially in areas of weakness. An elementary student teacher desired a mentorship where constructive feedback was given:

> Another aspect of mentoring is having open conversations about my teaching style and having my cooperating teacher share the positive and negatives of how I deliver lessons. For example, my cooperating teacher told me I need to do a better job at monitoring the classroom when I am teaching, this is so important in elementary school, and I am so glad that she told me this to work on. (Elementary Interview 1)

Another elementary student teacher expresses concern for their lack of readiness: "I think I needed more of how to manage the class throughout the class period; given hands on experiences, [classroom management] would be necessary for mentoring" (Elementary Interview 2). The final elementary interview focused on what they expected in the day-to-day with their cooperating teacher:

> I think [mentoring] should be a going out of your way, adding extra hours in to make sure that everything is being accomplished. This is another aspect of the job. Checking up on [student teachers], reminders of what they need to do, giving

> extra support. There's always a gap between what I learn and what I needed to do – there was a huge jump, but experience was the best for me. (Elementary Interview 3)

These elementary student teachers expressed that they had expectation on being mentored to help develop their skills and readiness in the classroom.

Middle Student Teacher Interviews

The middle student teachers had perspectives on expectations of being mentored focused on the support their cooperating teachers could give them. Each middle student teacher had a different response for their expectations on being mentored. One middle school student teacher expressed the expectation that their cooperating teacher would be actively engaged throughout the day: "I guess [mentoring is] just like independence, but also not feeling like I'm alone in that independence. They let me do it because they feel like I'm ready – not because they are dumping a particular part of their job on me" (Middle Interview 4). Another middle school student teacher said they saw a need for the cooperating teacher to fill in some gaps they were missing from their college training: "My cooperating teacher should also be willing to help me understand the things that aren't taught in college like contacting parents, learning how to do grades, just the day-to-day operation of a classroom (Middle Interview 5). The last middle student teacher interview focused on preparedness and communication:

> I feel like one thing we need is preparedness – there are some aspects that are being missed out on in the real-world classroom. There needs to be more communications between the school and the district/cooperating teacher. If it wasn't for my cooperating teacher, I feel like I would have been blindsided with a lot of things I have had to do this year. (Middle Interview 6)

These student teachers entered the clinical setting with the expectation of discussing and teaching the daily requirements. They have also experienced these different requirements with their cooperating teacher.

High Student Teacher Interviews

The high school student teachers wanted to have a real-life experience in their clinical experience and expected their cooperating teacher to give them those experiences and be honest with them about education. Each high student teacher had different expectations on being mentored. One high student teacher had the expectation that their cooperating teacher be honest with the structure of the classroom:

> A necessity in mentoring is someone who would tell me the realistic side of certain things. A lot of time we get told how things should get handled or how to structure classrooms, but a real mentor will tell you about the successes and failures – even if it contradicts what you were taught – you can see both sides and decide what will be best for you. This is someone who isn't afraid to share their experiences to help make you a better teacher. (High Interview 7)

Another student teacher discussed that a mentor needs to not only tell the realistic side of things, but also give examples of successes and failures when faced with specific situations:

> A lot of time we get told how things should get handled or how to structure classrooms, but a real mentor will tell you about the successes and the failures – even if it contradicts what you were taught. They should be able to get you to see both sides and then allow you to decide what would be best for you. (High Interview 8)

The last high student teacher interview addressed the necessity for increased access to resources within the district: "I think having access to district things, especially during clinical, like the technology that they use. Knowing what goes on within the school and the district would be so beneficial" (High Interview 9). During the initial interviews, it was common for student teachers to want real-world classroom experiences because they felt that was something they lacked in their college courses.

Second Round Interviews

Final interviews were conducted during the second week of April 2024. Most of these interviews were conducted via Zoom because many student teachers had already completed their

clinical experience. As the clinical experience came to an end, both cooperating teachers and student teachers shared their time in clinical, demonstrating a greater sense of comfort with each other and the clinical environment. The objective was to exemplify the phenomenology method for this study and how this way of conducting a study can be beneficial to collect data, evaluate the data, and make recommendations for the future. This final interview process focused on the lived experiences that both cooperating teachers and student teachers had during clinical, the support they received, and their perceptions of role readiness.

The purpose of this second interview was to determine how the clinical experience ended and gather feedback for potential future practices at the university, specifically in the areas of student teacher training and cooperating teacher preparation. Maintaining connections with these cooperating teachers to ensure they felt supported as future cooperating teachers was important for this study. All student teachers were asked about their future job placements and their thoughts and feelings surrounding being a first-year teacher. For the final interview, two groups of middle school cooperating teacher/student teacher pairings declined to participate due to no communication. For the middle interview sections, only one response will be recorded because of the two pairings who did not respond to the email invitation for the second interview.

Clinical Year Overview from Both Perspectives

A clinical year is a process where student teachers are mentored and trained by cooperating teachers. The year consists of two semesters, the first is called pre-clinical where they complete 60 hours in the classroom. They are responsible for lesson plans and teaching a lesson for observation. There are other assignments that help prepare them for the clinical semester. During the clinical semester, student teachers complete 65 consecutive days in the classroom. Both semesters students are placed in the same placement with the same cooperating

teacher. Through these interviews, a complete picture of what cooperating teachers and student teachers experienced during the clinical year developed. The final interview emerged the themes perceptions on role readiness, perceived vs received support, and failures in cooperating teacher training through the following questions:

Final Interview Questions:

Cooperating Teachers:

1. What has the clinical experience been like?
2. Do you feel like you were adequately supported in your role?
3. Was there anything that you felt ill equipped for?
4. How can AU better support your role in the future?
5. If AU created a mentor training program would you be interested in participating?

Student Teachers:

1. What has the clinical experience been like?
2. Do you feel like you were adequately supported in your role?
3. Was there anything that you felt ill equipped for?
4. How can AU better support your role in the future?
6. Do you have a job lined up for next year?
7. How do you feel about going into your first-year teaching?

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

Elementary cooperating teachers expressed that clinical was an overall good experience. Each cooperating teacher had different experiences that contributed to their year. One elementary cooperating teacher had a positive experience during the year: “Well, I had a great student teacher, so it’s been awesome. I love co-teaching and mentoring. I have really enjoyed mentoring

a young teacher" (Elementary Interview 1). Another elementary cooperating teacher ran into an issue with her student teacher where she did not know who to talk to or how to handle it: "I hope it was a good experience for my mentee. There was a situation that occurred, but the university supervisor took care of that according to what needed to happen after we had to figure out who to contact" (Elementary Interview 2). The last elementary cooperating teacher explained her experience during clinical was a learning experience that stretched her as an educator:

> It's been interesting. It's been a learning experience for me in that mentoring is a lot different than teaching. I had to stretch different muscles than I do on a regular basis. I think I have grown professionally – I got to see what someone needs to know in the process of teaching. (Elementary Interview 3)

The elementary cooperating teachers expressed their positive experience in clinical and how this helped them understand processes of teaching more.

Middle Cooperating Teacher Interview

The middle school cooperating teacher experienced growth in the clinical year with their student teacher: "[The clinical experience] has been great! At the beginning of clinical my student teacher wasn't prepared. They really rose to the occasion and has done everything I've asked. I don't leave this time feeling like she is unprepared (Middle Interview 6). This cooperating teacher knew expectations from the program because they were a graduate of the university. This helped them focus on things they felt were necessary for teaching but might not have been taught in college. They also taught their student teacher in middle school and had a different type of relationship with them going into the experience. This helped both cooperating teacher and student teacher feel comfortable with each other from the beginning.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The high school cooperating teachers believed that the clinical year helped shape them as educators even more. All these educators believed that being a cooperating teacher was a way for

them to give back to a field they are passionate in and believed it helped them become better educators. One high school cooperating teacher explained that clinical was a great experience: "It's been wonderful, very agreeable, very cooperative, and very professional" (High Interview 7). Another cooperating teacher focused on the preparedness their student teacher displayed: "[The university] really prepares their students for the role in the classroom. They are good with content and hands on things" (High Interview 8). The final high cooperating teacher learned about her own teaching practices: "[Clinical] has been a good experience; I have enjoyed it overall. It helped highlight some areas that I can work on personally. It's given me new ideas to try on both instruction and classroom management. It has opened my eyes a lot" (High Interview 9). All cooperating teachers were able to reflect on their own practices and find areas that they could grow in. Student teachers also experienced positive outcomes from clinical that helped shape them into the educators they were seeking to become.

Elementary Student Teachers Interviews

It was important to capture the lived experiences of the student teacher because they are an important aspect of the clinical experience and how the university structures that experience. The student teachers all had a positive clinical experience. The elementary student teachers had cooperating teachers that poured into them and helped them grow and develop. The first elementary student teacher suggested that clinical was more beneficial to them than their college courses:

> [Clinical] has taught me more than the three and a half years in college did. Getting to experience being the lead teacher and planning for multiple weeks has changed my view on teaching and what it all entails. Until you are doing all the teacher things, it's completely different. (Elementary Interview 1)

The other two elementary student teachers focused on their personal growth throughout the clinical experience. One student teacher talked about their growth: "It's been very rewarding to

be able to see my growth as a teacher. I feel like I have come a long way since preclinical" (Elementary Interview 2). The last elementary student teacher expressed that the hands-on experiences were beneficial: "[Clinical] overall has been a good learning experience. I feel like it's been more informational than pre-clinical. There is a more hands-on experience in clinical, which has been good" (Elementary Interview 3). All student teachers believed that their clinical year provided them with more experience, opened their eyes to education, and demonstrated their growth as teachers. The elementary pairings were exceptionally good at building relationships with each other and exemplifying a true mentoring relationship.

Middle Student Teacher Interview

The middle school student teachers emphasized the importance of their clinical time. They believed it was beneficial to their development as teachers. One middle school student teacher explained the time spent in clinical was valuable: "[Clinical] is very beneficial because of the amount of time we must spend here. Going into clinical, you think it's a lot, but once you finish clinical, you really understand the process of teaching" (Middle Interview 6). This student teacher understood that it is best to learn through doing and jumped into the clinical experience. They wanted to know the ins and outs of teaching, planning, assessing, and being part of a professional learning community to be better equipped for their future teaching position.

High Student Teachers Interviews

High school student teachers shared much of the same sentiments as the two previous groups. Again, they believed it was a great experience that helped them in their future. A high school student teacher shared that clinical helped them understand the structure of the classroom:

> [Clinical] has been good! I feel like I learned what the actual day-to-day like looks like and I feel like I can go this job now. I don't know what it looked like at all and now I feel much better about that (High Interview 7)

It was also discovered that the other two high student teachers realized that the clinical experience helps you grow, but also shows you that there is no limit to growth in education. Another student teacher suggested that clinical provided ways for them to grow: "[Clinical] has been very positive. I've had great experiences in clinical – I have had tons of support from both my supervisor and cooperating teacher. I've been able to learn a lot – I was given room to grow in the ways that I needed" (High Interview 8). The last high student teacher discussed recognizing ways they could continue to grow: "[Clinical] has been great – I feel like I've grown a lot and I feel like I've been able to recognize ways that I can continue to grow" (High Interview 9). Clinical experiences were positive because of the amount of work and willingness to mentor student teachers. Each cooperating teacher had unique experiences that shaped their role as a cooperating teacher, and each group of cooperating teachers and student teachers had a unique clinical experience. The goal was to prepare future educators for the field of education. Another aspect of the final interview included the support both cooperating teachers and student teachers received from both the school and the university.

Perceptions of Role Readiness

The theme of perceptions on role readiness reflect Research Question 3: What is the process for selecting and training cooperating teachers for clinical experience? During the initial interviews, it became clear that the cooperating teachers felt more prepared for their role as cooperating teachers, whereas the student teachers felt less prepared. The cooperating teachers relied on experience to help them navigate their roles, but they received no training from the university to inform their role responsibilities. Most expressed their motivation to serve as cooperating teachers to give back to the field of education, offer services to student teachers that they themselves did not receive, or serve as mentors to a student teacher, just as they had received mentorship during their clinical experience. Each cooperating teacher was intentional in

building a relationship with their student teacher and creating a safe space to ask questions, make mistakes, and grow. They understood their role and could execute their mission well based on personal experience and their knowledge of being a cooperating teacher.

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

Elementary cooperating teachers believed that their role was to help student teacher grow as an independent classroom teacher. One elementary teacher said, "When [student teachers] takeover the classroom, it is more of a tandem teaching, but also allowing them to discover who they are as a teacher" (Elementary Interview 1). The pair taught together with the student teacher as the main teacher and the cooperating teacher as the support. The cooperating teacher also shared that they would guide their student teacher through the decision-making process, but when they taught the class on their own, they allowed them to work through that process on their own. The second elementary cooperating teacher believed their role was to allow their student teacher to experiment with their teaching. They stated, "I am the safety net for these students to experiment and really learn how to do the things that they are taught theoretically how to do" (Elementary Interview 2). Another elementary cooperating teacher held the same beliefs but also thought their role to encourage was important. This cooperating teacher did not receive positive support in their student teaching and wanted to make sure they did that for their student teacher. They shared, "We need to be very understanding mentors, but also hold them to a standard. We should be walking through the process with them and offering encouragement along the way" (Elementary Interview 3)

Middle Cooperating Teacher Interview

The middle cooperating teacher believed that their role was to teach the process to their student teacher. They shared, "This room needs to be a safe place for my student teacher to try things, ask questions, make mistakes, and learn. I want [my student teacher] to be able to think

about the processes of teaching because I have modeled that for them" (Middle Interview 6). The idea of teaching the process was found in several interviews and was something that cooperating teachers believed was part of their role as they mentored their student teacher.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The high school cooperating teachers believed that their role consisted of providing quality feedback throughout the clinical experience. One cooperating teacher said,

> I must be fair and timely with my feedback, and I must be timely with the evaluations. It's important for [my student teacher] to have instant feedback. I also believe that I should constantly explain all situations as they arrive in the classroom so that they fully understand the process of what a classroom looks like. (High Interview 7)

Another cooperating teacher shared that they wanted to physically go through the teaching process with their student teacher to help them understand the day-to-day process. They shared, "What we are doing now is sharing teaching responsibilities. I will teach the 1st block, they will teach 2nd block, and then we co-teach 4th block" (High Interview 8). This cooperating teacher went on to explain that they feel like the student teachers need much more teaching outside of the 15 days that are required and believes part of her role is to provide more opportunities for teaching. The last cooperating teacher said that they believed that providing experiences with classroom management was part of their role. They stated, "My role is to provide classroom management techniques, especially when working with students that have more behavioral problems, as well as different classroom strategies" (High Interview 9). This grouping of cooperating teachers had different perceptions on their roles and how to execute those roles during the clinical experience.

Student teachers, on the other hand, felt less equipped for their role because they said they did not understand the day-to-day operation of a classroom. They all acknowledged their knowledge of the subject matter prior to student teaching, but expressed a lack of understanding

in lesson execution, assessment planning, and classroom management. They also discussed how unclear some of the assignments and expectations for clinical were, specifically regarding observations and feedback given on those observations.

Elementary Student Teachers Interviews

Overall, the elementary student teachers believed that there were some gaps in their preparation for clinical, specifically classroom management. One student teacher said, "I felt like I could not manage the classroom. Our class was good, but when we were outside of the classroom, at lunch or recess, I felt like I did not know how to manage the behaviors" (Elementary Interview 1). This student teacher expressed the need for early childhood education majors to take a classroom management class in their course work, which is not present right now. Another student teacher shared, "I did not feel prepared to manage the classroom. I also struggled with assessments and rubrics and knowing what is appropriate for assessment" (Elementary Interview 2). This student expressed that lesson planning and teaching those lessons was also something that they struggled with in clinical. They believed there was more emphasis on theory and not practicality. Lastly, the final elementary student teacher said, "In my role I was not prepared for classroom management. I know this is not something that can be taught, but I would like more experience before getting into the classroom" (Elementary Interview 3). The student teachers believed they should be prepared to handle various classroom management issues, but determined they were not ready for this aspect of their role.

Middle Student Teacher Interview

The middle student teacher decided that the whole experience was so different from what they expected that overall, they were not prepared for their role. They shared, "The whole experience was so different from what professors told us. I knew the basics of how to do everything, but clinical is the real life that we can't experience in a college classroom" (Middle

Interview 6). This student teacher went on to explain how the process of teaching was something they needed to fully understand throughout clinical. Once they understood this, they felt much more equipped for their role as teacher.

High Student Teachers Interviews

The high student teachers discussed the rubric that is used to grade lesson plans and observations. They felt like they did not understand what was required for these two sections and that hinder their role as teacher. One student teacher said, "[Standards] did not seem to have a lot of guidance on them as far as what was expected. There's just inconsistency between pre-clinical and clinical with the requirements of the assignments. Other people have been doing very different things" (High Interview 7). Another student teacher shared,

> Some of the [rubric] targets were not addressed in classes – specifically the different types of questioning that should happen during a lesson. I don't think I was ever taught that. There was a lot of broad wording for things that I wasn't necessarily taught or hadn't been taught in a long time. (High Interview 8)

This student teacher went on to explain that there was a lot of unknown and a need to seek clarification on assignments and expectations. The last high student teacher explained that the unit work sample, which is part of the standards and rubrics, was something they were not prepared to execute in their role. They shared,

> The Unit Work Sample – I know we do the shortened version of it in pre-clinical, but besides that we have no other experience with that. We have done things similar, but not as in-depth. We need more of how to plan a unit and structuring it. We need to understand the timing. Finding the balance of choosing standards and understanding how to cover them all has been challenging as well. (High Interview 9)

These variations in understanding of assignments, lesson plans, and observations did not equip student teachers well for their role in the classroom and affected the student teachers' perception of role readiness.

At the end of the clinical experience, interviews showed tremendous growth for both

cooperating teachers and student teachers. Teaching, like many other fields, has the best results with hands-on experience. After meeting with cooperating teachers and student teachers for the final interview, it became clear that both groups had gained confidence in their roles. The observations and ratings were one of the main areas of increased confidence. Cooperating teachers were more familiar with observational expectations and understood how to teach and model what the student teachers were expected to do. Student teachers expressed increased confidence in classroom management, monitoring and adjusting, and building relationships with students. While they acknowledged the importance of the content they learned in college, they expressed a desire for more hands-on practical scenarios that would prepare them for their classroom experiences. However, they also acknowledged that nothing could fully prepare you for the clinical experience and they were grateful for the experience because it equipped them for their future role as educators.

Perceived vs Received Support

Being effective as a cooperating teacher and student teacher requires support. This support should come from the school where the cooperating teacher and student teacher are working, as well as from the university. Both groups of participants were asked "Do you feel like you were adequately supported in your role?" Participants were asked to consider the importance of their school and university in supporting their roles. However, all cooperating teachers did not mention receiving any support from their school administration in their role as a cooperating teacher.

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

This question encouraged cooperating teachers to be honest and share their opinions about their support from the university. The support that cooperating teachers felt they received varied based on their perspectives of support. Two of the three cooperating teachers felt that they

received little to no help from the university. The first elementary cooperating teacher felt supported in their role: “Yes – I do. The clinical supervisor was a former reading coach at our school, so that was helpful. I knew when things were coming up and when they were due” (Elementary Interview 1).

However, another elementary cooperating teacher had a more negative experience and did not feel supported:

> No. There is not any training other than being handed a booklet. Other than when my student teacher would share her lesson plan with me, I was not given any direct instruction with the university lesson plans. Even the clinical supervisor wasn’t fully aware [of requirements]. Her feedback wasn’t consistent throughout the semester. [The clinical supervisor] only communicated when she needed to see my student teacher, but I was never given the opportunity to really discuss any concerns with her. (Elementary Interview 2)

The final elementary cooperating teacher received support from their school, but not the university: “The only help I really got from my school, our instructional facilitator sat in while I did observation, we talked together to determine how to rate her. I knew I could contact the supervisor if I needed to” (Elementary Interview 3).. It does seem like this is an extreme case of lack of communication, but this type of response was consistent with all cooperating teachers at one point or another in the interview process. It appears that the university is not effectively communicating its expectations to the clinical supervisors, student teachers, and cooperating teachers.

Middle Cooperating Teacher Interview

This middle cooperating teacher shared many of the same experiences as the elementary teachers. A middle school cooperating teacher shared that they did not feel supported: “Luckily, I didn’t feel like I needed support, but no one has reach out to me or checked on me. So, I would have to say no, there has been no support” (Middle Interview 6). This cooperating teacher was a student at the university and expressed that not much has changed over the years from when they

were in the education program and completing clinical. Because of this, they felt well prepared, but still did not feel like there was appropriate communication.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The high school cooperating teachers shared the same thoughts as the previous cooperating teachers. One cooperating teacher felt adequately supported in their role. The other two high cooperating teachers believed that they had the support they needed because they had either been a cooperating teacher before or they were also a university student and understood the process because they had gone through that process. One high cooperating teacher felt adequately supported in their role: "Yes – absolutely, I had everything I needed and if I had a question, I could ask it and get it easily" (High Interview 7). Another cooperating teacher discussed that their previous cooperating teacher experience was sufficient: "I felt like because I have been a cooperating teacher before that was my support. I would get emails from university staff, so I felt supported, but I didn't really need it" (High Interview 8). The last high cooperating teacher suggested that the clinical supervisor was present throughout the process: "Yeah I think so – the clinical supervisor was very good about reaching out if I needed anything and checking in on progress" (High Interview 9). This group of cooperating teachers felt that they were adequately supported through the clinical experience and had access to the people they would have to ask questions to if needed. It seems that because cooperating teachers are already professionals in the field, they felt like they did not need a ton of additional support, but there were some newer cooperating teachers that did not feel supported by the university at all. The experience of the student teachers was much different than that of cooperating teachers.

Elementary Student Teachers Interviews

Student teachers expressed that they felt supported by their cooperative teacher and the university. Prior to beginning their clinical experience, student teachers participated in a one-day

training session that provides an overview of their handbook, assignments, expectations, and clinical experience structure. In addition to this one-day training, they also have a monthly meeting where they receive professional development. When student teachers were asked about the support they received in their clinical experience two elementary student teachers felt supported by both the school and university, but one elementary student teacher did not feel supported by either organization. An elementary student teacher believed that her cooperating teacher was adequately supportive: "I feel like my cooperating teacher did the most that she could do and more. She communicated with me, she figured out what her expectations were, she actively taught me by giving great feedback about what I was doing well and what I needed to work on" (Elementary Interview 1). One of the elementary student teachers was also an intern had a different perspective that discussed a lack of support:

> I think from [the university] it was a little bit difficult with communication – there was a lot of back and forth with the internship . I don't feel like communication was great for this role. My CT tries to help me in the best way that she can. It's just a lot of work to be there for me when she has so much to go on. Admin has not been supportive at all – they have not been able to be there from the beginning. They basically just come in when they need to tell me that I did something wrong. (Elementary Interview 2)

Another elementary student teacher said that her cooperating teacher was able to give her pointers and guidance to help them understand how to teach:

> I did feel supported. From my cooperating teacher I was able to get great pointers, guidance, and help with how to really teach a class. The school offered to help and collaborated with me. Because I don't have access to some things in the district, other support staff stepped in and helped me. The office has been great to supply me with materials I needed. With the university I received guidance with my observations and getting quality feedback. (Elementary Interview 3)

Overall, two elementary student teachers were well supported by their cooperating teacher who helped them understand the way the district handled things and in turn they were supported by the building faculty and staff while one elementary student teacher did not feel supported by the

school. Each perspective was varied in this response and two out of three participants had a positive experience.

Middle Student Teacher Interview

The middle student teacher felt very supported through the process. This student teacher explained how the cooperating teacher provided support and the Monday meetings were beneficial:

> I felt supported, especially from my cooperating teacher. The lectures we went to on Mondays at the university were beneficial and they got better overtime. I would say the support is there, but it's not as hands on as when we are at the university. You must do more work to get support once you start clinical. (Middle Interview 6)

This response provided valuable insight into gradually reducing university support, enabling students to advocate for themselves and seek assistance when necessary. This example exemplifies real-life teaching and the independence required, a concept that some student teachers may not yet fully grasp. However, it is evident from this interview that the university is trying to shape future educators to take initiative and work toward their own solutions when problems arise.

High Student Teachers Interviews

The high school student teachers felt they received support throughout the process, which led to significant personal growth. All high student teachers felt that their experience was adequately supported. One high school student teacher said they always felt support: "I feel like I was supported in everything" (High Interview 7). Another high student teacher expressed that questions were always answers: "My clinical supervisor and cooperating teacher were always there to answer my questions" (High Interview 8). The last high student teacher discussed the weekly emails that provided support: "I got weekly emails from my supervisor at the university – they is always checking in and offering support. My cooperating teacher is also very supportive

(High Interview 9). All the high student teachers felt adequately supported in their role and believed that their cooperating teacher and the university were there to help them throughout this experience.

Failures in Cooperating Teacher Training

When the idea developed to create a one-day training for cooperating teachers and student teachers developed, it was important to understand if current cooperating teachers could attend this training. Cooperating teachers were asked: If the university created a one-day training, would you attend this in the future?"

Elementary Cooperating Teachers Interviews

To address the gaps in the clinical experience, a one-day training for cooperating teachers and student teachers was discussed. All cooperating teachers said they would attend this training. The first elementary cooperating teacher suggested that cooperating teachers be compensated for this training: "I think if they are compensated or takes the place of being at school one day or is counted as a PD – then yes!" (Elementary Interview 1). The second elementary cooperating teacher would attend this type of training: "Probably, yes I would say so" (Elementary Interview 2). The final elementary cooperating teacher reflected that being a cooperating teacher is important: "Yes – I would be interested just because I take being a CT very seriously and want to be a support and learning opportunity for the next student teacher. I want to be equipped to do that" (Elementary Interview 3). These individuals expressed an interest in this type of training to help communicate the requirements of the clinical experience.

Middle Cooperating Teacher Interview

This middle cooperating teacher did offer many suggestions for the clinical experience throughout their interview, but when asked about the training day, they gave a simple response: "Sure, yeah" (Middle Interview 6). This cooperating teacher saw value in mentoring their student

teacher and understanding the expectations of the university during this time. This cooperating teacher was a previous university graduate and had this student teacher in class. These factors helped them understand their role and expectations.

High Cooperating Teachers Interviews

The high school cooperating teachers had the same responses as the elementary and middle cooperating teachers. Overall, they believed this would be a beneficial aspect to the clinical experiences. One high school cooperating teacher suggested that this would help cooperating teachers understand their role:

> I would be interested in participating in a training. This could make people more comfortable with being cooperating teachers, which would allow for more collaboration and allow the teacher voices to really shine. (High Interview 7)

Another high cooperating teacher stated: "Absolutely" (High Interview 8). The last high cooperating teacher discussed the importance of knowing the university's standards: "Yeah, I think that would be helpful especially with [the university's] standards and what they are looking for" (High Interview 9). All cooperating teachers believed that the training would allow an opportunity for cooperating teachers to learn the necessary expectations of the clinical experience.

Summary

After conducting interviews at the beginning and end of the clinical experience it was clear that certain themes emerged. These themes included perspectives on mentoring, the necessity of mentoring, cooperating teacher training to inform mentoring, expectations on student teacher being mentored, perceptions on role readiness, perceived vs received support, and failures in cooperating teacher training. (Figure 4.1 and 4.2) These themes correlated with student teacher and cooperating teacher experiences and information about the university. These interviews exposed some weaknesses in the university's program and gaps in literature that will

be discussed in Chapter 5 on a larger scale. The next chapter will also highlight recommendations for further research, the intentional selecting of cooperating teachers, and the creation of a one-day training for cooperating teachers and student teachers that focuses on bridging the gap between districts and university's and helping university's practice transformational leadership to build stronger partnerships, teacher preparation programs, and focus on teacher retention.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study describes and analyzes the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and clinical teachers during the clinical year. It aimed to discover what training was offered to cooperating teachers and whether there were gaps in partnerships between districts and the university. As the study progressed, the research questions were evaluated. Research Question 1 asked, “What is the expectation of cooperating teachers in clinical year?” and Research Question 2 asked, “What is the expectation of student teachers in clinical year?” Throughout the interviews these questions were addressed and answered in a variety of ways. Research Question 3 asked, “What is the process for selecting and training cooperating teachers for clinical year?” This question was answered through cooperating teacher interviews and a review of the Cooperating Teacher Handbook that is distributed to cooperating teachers at the beginnings of clinical. When cooperating teachers were explaining their perspective on mentoring, they were asked how they became a cooperating teacher. All explained that they were asked by their administration if they would like to host a student teacher for the following school year. This chapter will discuss the research questions, study's results, provide recommendations, and suggest further research.

Mentoring a student teacher is one of many aspects of being a cooperating teacher (Giles, 2021; Hamilton, 2010; Veenman & Denessen, 2001; Vikaraman et al., 2017). Districts and the university can establish a partnership by providing resources and training to cooperating teachers, which would help them understand their role and responsibility (Giles, 2021; Hamilton, 2010; Sauntson, 2020; St. Clair & Deluga, 2006; Wells et al., 2021). Throughout the study, the cooperating teacher participants returned to the idea of a lack of communication, partnership, and support from the university. Student teachers felt ill-equipped to help relay the proper

information and expectations to their cooperating teachers, relying on the handbook that very few cooperating teachers read. After the initial interviews, it was clear that cooperating teachers needed more information prior to the clinical experience. This led to the development of the idea for a one-day training for cooperating teachers.

Data Analysis

This phenomenological study emerged seven different themes (Figure 4.1 and 4.2). The themes informed the recommendations for university's at large to develop a procedure for selecting and training cooperating teachers. The interviewees share their lived experiences during the clinical year. Those interviews were recorded and transcribed to look for commonalities in language which is when themes and sub-themed developed. Those themes will be discussed below.

Theme 1: Perspectives on Mentoring

Cooperating Teachers

This theme emerged through Research Question 1 and 2 that focused on the expectations of clinical by both cooperating teachers and student teachers. The cooperating teachers believed that they had the knowledge and skills to be a cooperating teacher when they were assigned a student teacher. However, all the cooperating teachers stated that they did not know the expectations of the university and they did not receive any training to be in that role. All the cooperating teachers shared their perspectives on mentoring based on personal thoughts and beliefs and their own experiences with mentoring. It was encouraging to learn that all cooperating teachers placed value on mentoring and understood that mentoring goes far beyond the clinical experience and expectations of the university (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018; Darling-Hammon, 2010; Kell, 2020). Cooperating teachers and student teachers had formed

strong relationships (Nesbitt et al., 2022; Split et al., 2011. All these different levels of relationship created a rich mentoring experience.

Student Teachers

Student teachers' perspective on mentoring derived from their experiences in college and their personal beliefs on mentoring. Student teachers understood what they wanted from their clinical experience and how they wanted to be mentored through the clinical experience is. They expressed that they wanted to have an encouraging role model, be provided with real-life experiences, develop personal relationships, and help building their teacher toolbox (Bird, 2012; Kratz & Davis, 2023). The student teachers believed there were gaps in their education and that clinical was going to help fill those gaps and prepare them for their first-year teaching (States et al., 2021; Worrell et al., 2014). This is a significant finding because it allows schools, districts, and university leadership to evaluate the needs to first-year teachers and provide more robust training, experiences, and opportunities for student teachers to have prior to their first year of teaching.

Many of the expectations cooperating teachers and student teachers expressed about mentoring relates back to research when discussing relationships, providing support beyond the classroom, walking through real-life experiences, and explain the day-to-day process of the structure of a classroom because both the research and cooperating teachers for this study expressed that mentoring is important and necessary for a student teacher's clinical year (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018; Alexander, 2019; Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bird, 2012; Ehlers, 2019; Horwath et al., 2022; Kell, 2020; Kratz & Davis, 2023; Melton et al., 2019).

These studies exemplify the need for wholistic mentoring that focuses on the person. This idea focuses on the student teacher beyond the classroom and emphasized the need for guidance

in other areas of life such as personal, emotional, and physical. The job student teachers are required to do is vastly different from when they become a first-year teacher because of this there is a need to conduct a deep dive with student teachers to help them understand the different aspects of the job such as routines, schedules, creating lesson, assignments, tests, setting expectations, managing different learning styles, and managing a classroom full of students with various backgrounds. The overall well-being of a student teacher needs to be evaluated in the clinical experience to ensure they are fully supported in this transitional time in their life; this idea goes back to the wholistic approach of mentoring that needs to be present during the clinical year. Through this theme and subthemes, the necessity of mentoring was developed.

Theme 2: The Necessity of Mentoring

Both cooperating teachers and student teachers articulated that there was a necessity to mentor during the clinical experience. Proper mentoring has value that goes well into a student teachers career (Springs et al., 2019; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). The field of education holds much emphasis on mentoring and helping equip teachers, particularly in their first year of teaching. This is evident in many of the districts surrounding the university with their induction teacher programs and matching a first-year teacher with a mentor teacher. In this state, it is required that first-year teachers go through a two-year induction program that allows them to be paired with a mentor and go through a formative and summative year of observations and lesson planning evaluation. It is also important to extend the value of mentoring into the clinical experience (Ehlers, 2019; Hamilton, 2010; Kell, 2020; Kratz & Davis, 2023). Emphasis on taking personal experiences and making them better for the next group of teachers was exhibited throughout interviews with cooperating teachers.

Cooperating teachers mentioned the number of teachers that are not returning to the

classroom and the belief is that this is happening because there is not adequate mentoring or support for teachers as they enter this field. Cooperating teachers that were participants in the study had a desire to contribute to this work to mentor future teachers and help equip student teachers for their own classrooms. Because of the current teacher shortage crisis in the country, it is important to begin evaluating the training process for future teachers and determine areas of weakness that will help better equip them for the classroom. The idea that student teacher believe that clinical will help them fill in the gaps of their in-class education should prompt university leaders to begin discussing real-life classroom experiences and scenarios so student teachers can begin thinking about these different things.

Student teachers believed that there was such value on mentoring, and it was a necessity for their clinical experience. Student teacher placed believed that mentoring was a lifelong process that would help anyone at any part of their career. The student teachers exhibited an understanding on mentoring and the relationship they build with their cooperating teacher had the ability to impact their clinical experience and their year. The importance of having a mentor that is willing to walk through the process of clinical with and answer any questions is a necessity in the clinical experience. This group of student teachers had received support and mentorship from the university and understood that it was essential for their career.

The cooperating teachers and student teachers displayed through their words and actions that mentoring was a necessity in the clinical experience. All participants expressed that mentoring throughout ones career is also beneficial. Mentoring is an ongoing process that should be completed throughout life (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2017; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Bodilenyane & Mooketsane, 2019; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Gonzalvo et al., 2018; Springs et al., 2019;

Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). Even though research supports this mentoring model in the clinical experience, training for cooperating teachers to mentor their student teachers is largely absent.

Theme 3: Cooperating Teacher Training to Inform Mentoring

During the interview process, it was evident that there was an underlying expectation for veteran teachers to understand how to mentor with little to no training. This portion of the interview addressed Research Question 1 and helped inform expectations and perspectives that cooperating teachers had during clinical. Many of the cooperating teachers understood the need to mentor and believed it was a necessity, but many were going off personal experiences or trainings they received from their district. There is a basic knowledge of mentoring, but effective mentoring should be intentional. The idea of training cooperating teachers to mentor their student teachers was absent the university level and reflected gaps in literature where universities are not involved in the training process of their cooperating teachers (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bird, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Dinama et al., 2017; Kell, 2020; Hamilton, 2010; Luczak et al., 2018; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Russell & Russell, 2011; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). The student teachers are at a disservice in the aspect because they are given an experience with expectations throughout their college journey, however, when they approach clinical, things vastly change, and they are left to figure many things out on their own. The cooperating teachers that participated in this study were either asked to be a cooperating teacher by the student teacher or they were told they were getting a student teacher. The university will reach out to schools for the upcoming school year to inform them of student teachers they have that would like to complete clinical in their school. The administration then emails the potential cooperating teacher to see if they are interested in hosting a student teacher. In some cases, a cooperating teacher is told they are hosting a student teacher regardless of their desire to.

This lack of selecting and training for cooperating teachers does not align with university models of intentionally planning and developing a teacher preparation program and is a piece of teacher preparation that needs to be reviewed more to make necessary changes (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013). This lack of selection and training informed the recommendations explained later in the chapter. The disconnect in the clinical experience for both cooperating teachers and student teachers is contributing to hard clinical experiences that leave student teachers frustrated and burnt out before they get into their career (Darling-Hammon, 2006; Dinama et al., 2017; Evans, 2014; Hall et al., 2016; Horwath et al., 2022; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2020; Kell, 2020; Koç, 2012; Split et al., 2011). Student teachers need much more support in their clinical experiences to help equip them for their future classrooms.

Theme 4: Expectations of Student Teachers Being Mentored

Student teachers have many expectations going into their clinical experience. At the end, they hope to be ready to have their own classrooms with all the tools and knowledge. All student teachers believed support was the number one aspect of mentoring. The student teachers explained the benefit of having a cooperating teacher share the good and the bad of teaching. They believed it was important to have a full, accurate picture of teaching so they could learn and grow through the clinical experience. Having the understanding that teaching is far more than just planning and teaching lessons was important for student teachers to know (Hamilton, 2020; Luczak et al., 2018; Rankin, 2020). Student teachers wanted to understand the day-to-day requirements of being in a classroom because they felt that there were gaps in what they had learned in school (Nesbitt et al., 2022).

This idea of gaps in student teachers learning experience had come up many times in interviews. Forming a stronger connection between districts and university's would create opportunities for university's to explain their programs, requirements, and concepts taught so cooperating teachers could make informed decisions on what student teachers need to know (Mcdiarmid, 2019; Rajuan et al., 2007; Strapp et al., 2019; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). Cooperating teachers should also take the time to ask questions to their student teachers so they learn different things about them; they should understand what they know, what they learned in college, where they think they do not have enough experience or knowledge, how they lesson plan, and how they assess students. These are important aspects of teaching and topics that should be covered by a mentor. Student teachers had the expectations that these things would be taught more in clinical. Half of the student teachers reported that they were given experiences with these topics, while half stated they did not.

Student teachers had left their college career to enter clinical with the expectation that their cooperating teacher would fill in the gaps and teach them the things they were missing from their education. Many of the cooperating teachers were able to step into that role and fill in the gaps, however, there were some cooperating teachers that struggled with their role and did not feel supported by the university. Ensuring that cooperating teachers have the support they need in their role will ensure that student teachers are being mentored in their role (Luczak et al., 2018; Mcdiarmid, 2019; Napolitan et al., 2019; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Rajuan et al., 2007; Rankin, 2020; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012; Worrell et al., 2014).

Theme 5: Perceptions of Role Readiness

Cooperating Teachers

Being effective as a cooperating teacher and student teacher requires support. This support should come from the school the cooperating teacher and student teacher are working and the university. This study showed an extreme case of lack of communication, but this type of response was consistent with all cooperating teachers. The research discusses that these experiences are similar across different university's and programs (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Chelsey & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Dinama et al., 2017; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). It seems that because there are gaps in communication this is hindering the clinical experience for student teachers and is showing a lack of support for cooperating teachers (Kell, 2020; Springs & Whitcomb, 2014; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). It seems that because cooperating teachers are already professional in the field, they felt like they did not need a ton of additional support, but if a cooperating teacher newer to the field, this could be a hard situation that puts a further hinderance on cooperating teachers when they are already in a very hard career.

Student Teachers

Student teachers expressed that they felt supported by their cooperative teacher and the university. Student teachers attend a one-day training prior to the start of their clinical experience that outline their handbook, assignments, expectations, and outline of what the clinical experience should look like, but cooperating teachers are not part of this training. In addition to this one-day training, they also have a monthly meeting where they receive professional development (Bastian & Marks 2017). The student teachers felt that they had received so much support in their time at the university and when they transitioned to clinical it seemed like those supports were slowly coming off so they could learn the various things they needed to know for

their teaching career. This exemplified real-life teaching environments and what they will need to do on their own. This helps student teachers to think about their current and future roles in education. However, it is important to note that having a cooperating teacher that properly mentors through this process is important (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Hall et al., 2016; Luczak et al., 2018). The student teachers did not feel prepared for their role in the classroom regarding classroom management, lesson planning, teaching, and understanding the expectations of assignments and rubrics. This hindered their perception of role readiness in the clinical experience.

Role readiness is always a perceived idea. Throughout this study all participants had a perceived idea of their role and their readiness to partake in the clinical experience. A student teacher's experience in clinical is directly related to the cooperating teachers mentoring throughout the year. The implications for this part of teacher preparation is reliant on how a university engages with districts and the cooperating teachers that are hosting student teachers. When university leadership actively engages and builds a partnership with local districts, they will help provide support for district leaders and teachers. This will help university leaders and districts leaders understand what the other needs in terms of teacher candidates and experiences for teacher candidates. The district leadership would understand the need to participate in student teachers clinical experience to support future educators. This is essential with the teacher shortage and would aid in recruiting quality teachers for districts.

Theme 6: Perceived vs Received Support

Research Questions 1 and 2 address the expectations that cooperating teachers and student teachers had during clinical. This theme emerged through interviews focusing on the support that each group received. The subthemes that emerged focused on the limited support

cooperating teachers received from the university, the full support that student teachers received from the university, lack of communication, and unclear/unknown expectations.

Cooperating Teachers

Being effective as a cooperating teacher and student teacher requires support (Melton et al., 2019; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Rajuan et al., 2007; Russell & Russell, 2011). This support should come from the school where the cooperating teacher and student teacher are working, as well as from the university. The support that cooperating teachers felt they received varied based on their perspectives of support. The cooperating teachers discussed aspects of their support from the university that did not reflect support in their role. This shows that there are gaps in communication and expectations because the university has not put an emphasis on communication. It was also clear that each cooperating teacher had a different idea of what support should look like in this role as a cooperating teacher and what type of support they needed versus received. All cooperating teachers specifically had a lack of knowledge of expectations from the university. It appears that the university is not effectively communicating its expectations to the clinical supervisors, student teachers, and cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers perceived that they did not need much support because of their experience, but also explained that they did not fully understand their expectations.

Student Teachers

The experience of the student teachers was much different than that of cooperating teachers. Student teachers expressed that they felt supported by their cooperative teacher and the university. The university makes intentional efforts to support student teachers through the clinical experience by providing them with a training day and conducting monthly Monday meets to ensure they are understanding their roles and expectations but also giving them a variety

of resources needed as they finish their college experience. In addition to this one-day training, they also have a monthly meeting where they receive professional development. The student teachers did not feel that the training or the Monday meetings were helpful, but one student teacher did enjoy the meetings and felt that they learned the necessities from those meetings. The others saw it as an extra thing that did not provide much support. They believed they had too much to do during clinical and the meetings were a waste of time. This idea focuses on a certain perspective where student teachers believed they had too much to do during clinical and struggled with time management as they were learning all the details of becoming a teacher.

In the group of student teachers, there was an intern that did not feel supported in their role and felt that they were not prepared for the internship. This speaks to role readiness for the future by showing when a student teacher does not have a traditional clinical experience with clear expectations, they are not prepared for their first year in the classroom (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013). Support in an education role is vital to the success of the classroom teacher. Student teachers need to learn the valuable insight into gradually reducing university support, enabling students to advocate for themselves and seek assistance when necessary. This example exemplifies real-life teaching and the independence required, a concept that some student teachers may not yet fully grasp.

Both cooperating teachers and student teachers had perceptions of the support they received, but many did not receive the support they needed. They believed personal experiences would be sufficient for their roles, but that does not align with a university's role as an educational leader. Transformational leadership is important to practice in the field of education. This leadership style embraces change and helps to provide the support needed for both

cooperating teachers and student teachers. It also requires a willingness to make changes where necessary for the betterment of education, university life, and teacher preparation. Understanding the need to evaluate current practices in education and being willing to make changes is what helps build stronger teachers, educational leaders, schools, and districts. This is an important concept when training and equipping future educators, but also important for current educators to partake in. Children are everchanging, so to ensure that teachers are equipped for the 21st century classroom, the transformational leadership lens should be enacted.

Theme 7: Failures in Cooperating Teacher Training

This theme naturally emerged because there was not cooperating teacher training for the clinical experience. A Cooperating Teacher Handbook was distributed to cooperating teachers, but many did not read the contents. The expectation was that the student teacher would review the handbook with the cooperating teacher and relay any important information. However, because this was not happening as it should have, all cooperating teachers did not know the expectations of their role. This lack of training led to the development of the One-Day Training for cooperating teachers and student teachers as a recommended change in the program.

Widely, cooperating teachers are not trained for their roles. This was evident in the research (Adu-Yeboah & Kwaah, 2018; Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Darling-Hammons, 2006; Horwath et al., 2022; Kell, 2020) and in the study. It was recurring that cooperating teachers were not supported despite the support the student teachers received from the university. When the training is not present for cooperating teachers who are assuming the role of mentor and trainer for student teachers, there will be gaps in expectations, requirements, and experiences (Guarino, 2016; Hamilton, 2010). The clinical year has the capability of making or breaking a student teachers journey as they approach their first

year of teaching. To start with fixing this issue, university leadership needs to begin to make changes for successful partnerships with districts.

University Leadership Changes Needed for Successful Partnership

Both cooperating teachers and student teachers had similar perspectives on the university's role in the clinical experience. They believe the university should be a source of information that guides cooperating teachers to mentor their student teachers during the clinical year. This type of partnership leads to transformational leadership for the university, cooperating teachers, and student teachers (Rankin, 2020; Saad Alessa, 2021; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Segers & de Greef, 2021). In transformational leadership, an organization sets standards and expectations, provides training, and allows members to utilize their skills and talents to enhance the organization (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Bodilenyane & Mooketsane, 2019; Freeman et al., 2020; Givings, 2008; Scandura & Williams, 2004; St. Claire & Deluga, 2006). In this case, the university should train and equip cooperating teachers to mentor their student teachers throughout the clinical experience. That student teacher will then be prepared to enter the classroom and continue that idea of transformational leadership.

Cooperating Teachers

Right now, the perspective on the university's role is not the ideal scenario mentioned above. Cooperating teachers believe they do not have all the information they need to succeed in their position. They have expressed a lack of understanding of observation scoring, assignments, lesson plans, and what gaps student teachers have. This understanding was specific to this university and its expectations and requirements. Each cooperating teacher stated that they had received a copy of the handbook, but many admitted that they did not have the extra time to read it at the start of a busy school year, which contradicted their discussion about taking their role as

cooperating teachers seriously. The research (Alexander, 2019; Bastian & Marks, 2017; Koedel et al., 2015; Nesbitt et al., 2022; Worrell et al., 2014) and study show that there is not enough support for a cooperating teacher and needs to change to create a strong district-university partnership that fosters continued growth from cooperating teachers, student teachers, districts, and universities.

Many stated that there were too many other responsibilities to do for their classroom, students, and student teachers. I do believe that reading the handbook would alleviate many of the issues cooperating teachers faced. There was one cooperating teacher who stated that they read the handbook each year and were able to identify when the university made a change to the handbook. All but two cooperating teachers were new to hosting a student teacher from this university. The two, who had previously worked as cooperating teachers at this university, expressed confidence in their training because of their prior experience in the role. This could imply that cooperating teachers did not feel well prepared for their role or found it too difficult to manage in the school year. The cooperating teacher might have also experienced a lack of support from the university. These assumptions should be further investigated to determine the reason for cooperating teachers not continuing with the university. This research would help the university resume the role of transformational leader and enact changes where necessary. This also aligns with the states reflective practice that is required in lesson planning and classroom observations. All recommendations from this data align with the state requirements, district requires, and university requirements and allow for a more robust experience for all participants in this partnership.

Student Teachers

When they first began clinical, student teachers believed there was too much information to relay to their cooperating teachers, so they needed more time to go through the handbook with them. There was a sense of guilt that they were asking too much of the cooperating teachers with all their regular work and now cooperating teacher expectations. Throughout the clinical experience, they also expressed that they needed to understand certain clinical aspects because they were not told expectations and outlined requirements for the program. Many needed help with specific assignments, such as the unit work sample and long-range plan. Most needed to understand expectations for scoring on observations or the breakdown of domains for observations. All student teachers believed the university's role was to train them in content knowledge, which they felt equipped for (Alexander, 2019). Still, they all expressed a need for more understanding of teaching lessons to students, pace lessons, and classroom management (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Research Gaps

Some of the gaps in cooperating teacher training became apparent in research, conducting the study, and analyzing the data. These gaps included training, support, and mentorship for cooperating teachers. These gaps were also discussed in other studies (Alexander, 2019; Bastian & Marks, 2017; Bird, 2012; Chelsey & Jordan, 2012). Teacher preparation is a demanding field to perfect because so many moving parts in education always exist. There are unsurmountable expectations placed on teachers every day (Giles, 2021). This journey has prompted further exploration into ways to enhance student teachers' and cooperating teachers' training as they transition into their clinical year. These discoveries have led to a series of recommendations

starting with implementing a mentor training day for student teachers and cooperating teachers with the expectation that research will continue to create a stronger teacher preparation program that builds district-university partnerships to train future teachers to be transformational leaders.

Being in different school districts and classrooms in the surrounding area instilled a desire to connect with more educators; cooperating teachers wanted that. They had not had good experiences sharing their thoughts and opinions in the past, so this study gave them a platform to express themselves. Reflecting on this experience, some immediate issues emerged that could be implemented on a larger scale to create stronger programs that train cooperating teachers to mentor student teachers effectively. Creating district-university partnerships helps university's to practice authentic transformational leadership and set the example for cooperating teachers and student teachers in this field. This design of transformational leadership helps cooperating teachers and student teachers to develop this mindset during the clinical experience.

This study revealed a need to create change in how universities select and train cooperating teachers to mentor student teachers during the clinical year. First, universities could structure an informational meeting at the various schools within districts to explain the roles and responsibilities of being a cooperating teacher and discuss an interest meeting for teachers who are interested in participating as a cooperating teacher for the future. This interest meeting will automatically create a list of potential cooperating teachers who are aligned with a university's expectations and requirements. During this initial meeting, faculty from a university will meet with potential candidates for an interview to ensure that candidates are selected based on the needs of the university and understand the university's expectations. From this pool of candidates for cooperating teachers, a university could more intentionally match cooperating teachers with student teachers based on interest and interview information.

This idea of matching a cooperating teacher and student teacher should reflect the pairs personality and what the student teacher needs during the clinical that they may be lacking. For example, if a student teacher had received low marks on classroom management, pairing that student teacher with someone who has strong classroom management. This information could be obtained in the interview process with the cooperating teachers and from the records of the student teachers and their past observation scores. Student teachers could also be asked what they feel they need the more help in as they go into their clinical year.

Once cooperating teachers and student teachers are matched, both groups will attend a training day to further explain the details of the clinical experience. The training day will include main sessions and breakout sessions that highlight different aspects of the clinical year and help both cooperating teachers and student teachers understand the requirements and expectations. This training could be offered for professional development credits that teachers must obtain each year for continuing licensing. Both recommendations aim to foster and strengthen district-university partnerships. As much as teachers believe they can handle any challenge that comes their way, it is important to develop a support system for teachers to learn from and grow from each year. A goal of these findings would be to create mentorship between districts and university's and cooperating teachers and student teachers.

Recommendations

This study determined that communication of expectations for cooperating teachers was the primary gap in the clinical experience. The literature exemplified this gap because the cooperating teacher’s perspective, experiences, and training was largely absent. Providing cooperating teachers and student teachers with a training day would alleviate miscommunication and help outline a program's expectations, assignments, grading, and observation scoring.

Researchers (Duke, 2020; Giles 2021; Vikaraman et al., 2017; Veeman & Denessen, 2001) have explored the idea of mentoring and coaching beginning teachers. The researchers of these studies have expressed that mentoring and coaching have been embedded in professional development across many other fields and would greatly impact current practices of mentoring beginning teachers (Nesbitt et al., 2022; Vikaraman et al., 2017). All universities could modify and implement this idea to enhance support for cooperating teachers and foster a transformational leader mindset centered on adult learning theory, a subset of Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997; Vikaraman et al., 2017). This transformational leadership would allow for cooperating teachers to engage in the teacher preparation process on a deeper level while also receiving support in their role (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Bodilenyane & Mooketsane, 2019; Evans, 2014; Freeman et al., 2020; Givings, 2008; Hoggan, 2016; Hoggan & Higgins, 2023; Huang et al., 2016; Saad Alessa, 2021; Segers & de Greef, 2021; Sparks, 2021; St. Clair & Deluga, 2006). To help cooperating teacher engage in this process, the university should give them opportunities to present trainings to the student teachers, invite them to the monthly meetings so they could share their experiences and provide additional support for their student teachers, and the university could work with the state department to create opportunities for cooperating teachers to earn continuing education credits through the clinical experience. The goal is for both the cooperating teacher and student teacher to receive the support during the clinical year that will help them grow into transformational leaders and make significant changes in the field of education.

Selecting and Training Cooperating Teachers

The ideas the cooperating teachers and student teachers shared aligned with much of my research. Specifically, research studies have shown that other universities adopted training

models for cooperating teachers to ensure they were equipped to mentor student teachers because of gaps in this clinical aspect (Kell, 2020; Kratz & Davis, 2023; Rajuan et al., 2007). This type of partnership leads to transformational leadership, where cooperating teachers are empowered and equipped to mentor student teachers in preparation for their first year in the classroom. My recommendations include an additional layer of recruiting cooperating teachers by creating district-university partnerships. This recommendation requires intentional relationship building to understand the needs of cooperating teachers, student teachers, and surrounding districts.

In this instance, universities should take on the role of transformational leaders and work toward building connections with the districts and cooperating teachers. Once this partnership between the districts and universities is enacted, the university leaders in the College of Education could provide professional development and collaboration for the cooperating teachers and their schools. The cooperating teachers could also provide training for students at the university in various course classes. Furthermore, development of a conference between the university and districts could be planned for both students and local teachers to participate in. This helps develop transformational leaders that work toward conducting research and presenting findings that encourage change in classrooms, college classes, and in the field of education at large. University's should utilize transformational leadership because this type of leader works with teams or followers to identify needed change to create a vision and guide through the process (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Wells et al., 2021). Because faculty and staff at universities are viewed as leaders in education, they should evaluate the way they conduct research and present and put those efforts into creating various opportunities for the educators in the community around them.

Researchers Bellibaş Kılınç, and Polatcan (2021) created a hypothetical model that would work well with the recommended program changes. These researchers suggest that transformational leadership (the university) and instructional leadership (faculty and field experts) should work together to create teacher professional learning where cooperating teachers and student teachers are learning from field experts together. This joint learning experience would influence instructional practices (Bellibaş et al., 2021). This opportunity provides professional development to district teachers from the university and helps bridge the gap in district-university partnerships. To achieve this, the partnership must be developed and then the university faculty and staff must make intentional connections with district leadership to begin seeking opportunities to provide professional development. This would require meeting with district leadership and proposing ideas while also being willing to collaborate to make the events a success. All parts of the recommendations depend on a cyclical reliance on each other for the betterment of education. The university relies on the districts to continue training and equipping student teachers. The districts rely on the university to train quality teacher candidates that can begin their teaching careers in their districts. The students rely on both the university and districts to provide excellent training to help prepare them for a career in education.

Through this process there needs to be a focus on high-quality mentoring programs. The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (2022) states:

> High-quality mentoring programs select experienced, effective mentors and match them with mentees in the same grade and subject where possible; focus on instructional improvement; provide training, support, and compensation for the role; ensure release time for mentors and mentees to work together; offer multiyear support that aligns to expectations for teaching and learning; and create opportunities for collaborative professional learning. (p. 1)

Establishing a mentorship program between cooperating teachers and student teachers, with a focus on these areas, would facilitate the creation of meaningful clinical experiences that

prioritize growth and development for both parties. The authors discuss three strategies that would contribute to this mentorship program. Strategy 1 focuses on instructional improvement. Strategy 2 focuses on supporting mentors to be more effective by providing training, tools, and protocol. Strategy 3 aligns the mentoring program with district goals (Bellibaş et al., 2021). The first step in executing these strategies and implementing a mentor program in the clinical year is to create a training day for cooperating teachers.

Informational Meeting and Selection Process

To build a stronger district-university partnership, intentional planning of connecting with local districts needs to begin. A university should plan to plan informational meetings in each school district surround the university. At these meetings the university will explain the role of a cooperating teacher, the need for quality cooperating teachers, and give a brief electronic survey to gauge interest in faculty participating as a cooperating teacher. From this data, universities will plan a follow-up meeting with interested cooperating teachers to introduce the university, expectations, and conduct an interview with each potential cooperating teacher.

Following the two meetings, faculty and staff at a university will review the data collected and being placing cooperating teachers with student teachers. From this pairing, the clinical supervisors assigned to each student teacher will email the pair with the Cooperating Teacher Handbook, Student Teacher Handbook, and the date and information for the One-Day Training that both cooperating teachers and student teachers will participate in.

One-Day Training

Conducting a full-day training for cooperating teachers and student teachers should highlight clinical expectations by reviewing the university's College of Education handbook, Cooperating Teacher Handbook, and Student Teacher Handbook. Speakers from state teacher

associations should come to the meeting to provide information about membership in their organization and highlight the importance of these organizations. This helps both students and cooperating teachers see the various organizations that are available to provide training, support, mentorship, and resources to help them in their field.

To create a more robust day, university's should develop breakout sessions that focus on various aspects of the clinical experience that would help provide insight to both cooperating teachers and student teachers. These workshops could be led by university leaders, faculty members, and field experts. Main sessions would include handbook overview, assignment requirements, deadlines, and expectations of the university. Break Out Sessions would include mentoring and coaching, scoring observations, observation requirements, and lesson planning. This training should include an additional stipend for the cooperating teachers, and the university should provide a luncheon for both cooperating teachers and student teachers to form connections and relationships before the clinical experience. These recommendations are based on ideas from previous researchers (Ehlers, 2019; Evans, 2014) on how to build a community to provide mentoring in professional fields.

Continued Communication

The final recommendation is for continued communication between the clinical supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher. It is the expectation that the clinical supervisor will initiate communication on a weekly basis to give reminders, check-ins, and schedule observations or time in the classroom. This will help to alleviate miscommunication throughout the clinical experience and will help cooperating teachers feel supported in their role by the university. To ensure clinical supervisors are prepared for their role, they attend a training

that outlines their responsibilities. Check-ins with university faculty and staff could ensure clinical supervisors are meeting the expectations for their role.

This recommendation is part the beginning of building district-university partnerships through transformational leadership at the university level. The recommendations also serve as a catalyst to develop quality cooperating teachers through connections within the surrounding districts. It was surprising to see a lack of communication and training for cooperating teachers during the study and the results showed a gap in how this specific university conducts itself in teacher preparation. The literature at large showed a gap in university's across the United States and their lack of cooperating teacher selection and training process.

Figure 5.1 helps depict the recommendations in a five-part explanation. Each part of the recommendations has a specific purpose that aligns with the themes that had emerged in the study, the research questions that were asked, and the gap in the literature. Because each theme works together for the whole of the clinical experience, it is recommended that universities begin a process to select cooperating teachers that will host student teachers during the clinical year and that universities will train cooperating teachers for their role. The first recommendation for selecting and training cooperating teachers is to hold an informational meeting where university faculty and staff meet with surrounding districts to explain the clinical experience and role of cooperating teachers. At this meeting a survey will be given to gauge interest of potential cooperating teachers. Next, a follow-up meeting would occur where university faculty and staff would go into schools and meet with teachers who showed interest in becoming a cooperating teacher. They would interview those candidates and learn more about them. After interviews, the university clinical coordinator would pair cooperating teachers with student teachers based on survey results and interviews. Cooperating teachers and student teachers would receive the

handbook and date for their one-day training. During the one-day training, cooperating teachers and student teachers would participate in general sessions that include handbook overview, assignment requirements, deadlines, and expectations of the university. There would also be breakout sessions that include mentoring and coaching, scoring observations, observation requirements, and lesson planning. Finally, the ensure that all pieces of the clinical experience are being executed, there should be weekly communication between the cooperating teacher, student teacher, and clinical supervisor that will serve as reminders for upcoming requirements, check-ins, and scheduling observations.

Figure 5.1

Recommendations

Recommendations Reflection

A university's programs can be robust with trainings, professional development, club involvement, best practices, and experts in the field, but if the clinical experience does not align

with the university's expectations, student teachers will not receive the training necessary to be successful when on their own. This recommendation meets the expectation of a university being a transformational leader for the surrounding districts and helps to close a gap between districts and university's and cooperating teachers and student teachers (St. Clair & Deluga, 2006; Steinmann et al., 2018; Treslan, 2010; Wells et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023; Mcdiarmid, 2019; Napolitan et al., 2019; Guarino, 2016), train cooperating teachers to be transformational leaders (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Bryant et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Freeman et al., 2020), and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to make the clinical experience successful. This university is active in the community and school districts, but when the clinical year begins there is a disconnect between the districts and the university.

This recommendation follows Wetzel, Hoffman, and Maloch's (2017) research on mentoring preservice teachers through practice to ensure cooperating teachers are supported and challenged to grow in their mentoring practices. This approach to creating a better clinical experience allows educators to step into leadership roles and contribute to the need for cooperating teachers who are invested in education's future and feel equipped to walk into their role.

Implications for Clinical

When recommending change in an organization, it is critical to consider who that change affects and what implications it will have. The recommendation for this study should be to implement a small change that could potentially have significant consequences. Starting with an informational meeting that leads to interviews with potential cooperating teachers to a one-day training to resolve the immediate issues during in the clinical year would be most effective. This

change addresses Research Question 3 about the selection of cooperating teachers and how they are trained to fulfill their role as a cooperating teacher.

From that change, universities could begin to create a partnership with the state department to provide trainings, workshops, and conferences for cooperating teachers to earn professional development credits toward continuing education. These trainings would further develop the district-university partnerships that are essential to creating transformational leaders, teachers, and future teachers (Cornelius et al., 2019; Lofthouse, 2020; Selvakumaran et al., 2020; Vikaraman et al., 2017; Hennissen et al., 2008; Giles, 2021; Wetzel et al., 2017). This has significant implications for teacher preparation programs and districts because it allows for relevant training that can be used toward professional development credits and teacher licensure. This helps with the district-university partnership and the intentionality the university leadership takes with its cooperating teachers. University's that create district-university partnerships and succeed will have an easier time creating university-state department partnerships. This is the beginning of organizational change that starts on a small scale but has the implications to expand to a larger scale at the state and in the country.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study has shown that there is a need to further study how cooperating teachers are selected and trained for their role in the clinical experience. Exploration of different aspects of the teacher preparation program, district-university partnerships, and mentoring cooperating teachers and student teachers needs to be examined more. Other researchers should also evaluate universities presence in school districts and how they could provide support and training to teachers. Other researchers that want to follow this model, after implementing part one of the recommendations the next phase of the research should involve tracking the student teachers

during their first year of teaching to understand their real-world experiences during this transition. The results from this research could further improve gaps in the program and create opportunities for growth and development within a university's college of education.

After this research, it is recommended that a university focus its partnership with local districts by starting with cooperating teachers. These partnerships will develop a reputation and should allow for opportunities for university leaders and faculty to develop and deliver professional development for teachers in the surrounding districts. This exemplifies the transformational leader concept and continues to work on the district-university partnerships. Learning about the districts' perceptions of their local university would help them understand how to build a stronger partnership. This step would help teachers understand the university's presence in the community and help the university recruit cooperating teachers in the future. Right now, many universities get cooperating teachers on a volunteer basis, sometimes not volunteer, and many teachers do not understand how to become cooperating teachers. However, recruiting cooperating teachers could become easier and more natural if a university established a stronger presence in their districts and developed a partnership. This could lead to further research, which would analyze teacher retention and investigate how the clinical experience affects teachers' retention rates and overall success.

Part two of further research should involve universities to track their graduating teachers into their first year of teaching and beyond to study their lived experiences during that time. This research will show gaps in teacher preparation programs and would inform a university about potential changes that need to be made within the program because of those gaps. Understanding the gaps in teacher preparation follows the transformational leadership mindset where the leaders of an organization actively seek to find flaws within the organization and work diligently to

create change in those organization. This research could contribute to the growing teacher retention problem in the United States and inform educational leaders on issues that need to change.

Part three of further research should involve evaluating the administrations role in the clinical experience and their interactions with student teachers. Since the study revealed no positive interactions with administration, it would be beneficial to research their role, interactions, and involvement in the clinical experience. This aspect of leadership is important to understand because these are the educational leaders in the districts and schools. This aspect of research also focuses on how administration mentors their teachers. This in turn will reveal how teachers mentor their students teachers and students. Because mentoring has been shown effective throughout life, it is important to evaluate mentoring in this capacity.

Conclusion

Current literature suggests that university-district partnership are beneficial in training and equipping student teachers (Guarino, 2016; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2020; Melton et al., 2019; Rajuan et al., 2007; Tinker Sachs et al., 2011). This study has shown that a cooperating teacher needs more training and mentoring from the university. Since education is such a demanding field, it is essential to understand this critical part of the teacher preparation process and evaluate what a clinical experience is like from both cooperating teachers' and student teachers' perspectives. Essentially, there are no substantial mentoring programs in this region after a teacher’s first year of teaching. This has created isolation and burnout across the profession (Cochran-Smth & Villagas, 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013; Dinama et al., 2017; Harding & Parsons, 2011; White, 2022). Understanding the importance of partnerships, building connections, mentoring, and training student teachers

will help them begin their careers equipped and ready for challenging circumstances that will inevitably surface in the classroom.

The data collected through interviews focused on phenomenology and the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers (Annamalai et al., 2022; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Farrell, 2020). This study gave a snapshot of the clinical experiences of eighteen participants. As the researcher, I wanted to understand the clinical experience, how the university could better support cooperating teachers and student teachers, and how to create transformational leaders across districts in the area. It was clear from this research that understanding a cooperating teachers lived experience helps to see gaps in the support and training they receive. Training must be present for cooperating teachers to ensure student teachers are receiving the experience, support, and mentorship that they need as they prepare for their first year in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Participant Consent for Participation in Science Motivation Study

Principal Investigator:

Dr. T. Hunter Strickland

316 Boulevard | Anderson, SC 29621

Co-Investigator:

Ashley Nolette

316 Boulevard | Anderson, SC 29621

Institutional Review Board

Anderson University

Anderson, SC

Participants,

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of cooperating teachers and student teachers in the clinical year. Each participant will partake in an interview at the beginning of the clinical semester and at the end of the clinical semester. This interview will take place in the classroom and will take between 30 and 60 minutes. Your name will not appear in this study so that confidentiality will be protected.

The results of this study will provide information about the clinical year for both cooperating teachers and student teachers with the goal of finding gaps in the preparation for the clinical year. Since research indicates that there is a need for district-university partnerships and mentor training programs for cooperating teachers, it is important to understand the lived experiences of both groups of participants in the clinical year. Gaining this information is the most important benefit of the research. There are no known risks to the current study. If you have any concerns about the risks or benefits of participating in this study, please contact *Ashley Nolette,* or

Dr. Strickland at the numbers indicated above.

You have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. Thank you for your time and careful consideration. Please complete the portion below and return it to Ashley Nolette at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Ashley Nolette

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the preceding consent form, or it has been read to me, and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily give consent for my child to participate. All my questions concerning the research have been answered. I hereby agree to have my child participate in this research study. If I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by *Student Name*. A copy of this form will be given to me. This consent ends at the conclusion of the study.

_____ I will participate in this project.

_____ I will not participate in this project.

Name:_____

Signature:_____Date: _____

APPENDIX B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Initial Interview Questions:

Cooperating Teachers:

1. What are your thoughts about the training you received to be a mentor teacher?
2. What mentor training have you received?
3. What are your perceptions of a mentor?
4. What aspects of mentoring do you think are necessary?
5. Do you believe you should mentor a student teacher? Explain.

Student Teachers:

1. What are you perceptions of a mentor?
2. What aspects of mentoring do you think are necessary?
3. Do you believe you should be mentored throughout the clinical experience?
4. What do you want to see in a mentoring relationship with your cooperating teacher?

Final Interview Questions:

Cooperating Teachers:

8. What has the clinical experience been like?
9. Do you feel like you were adequately supported in your role?
10. Was there anything that you felt ill equipped for?
11. How can AU better support your role in the future?
12. If AU created a mentor training program would you be interested in participating?

Student Teachers:

5. What has the clinical experience been like?
6. Do you feel like you were adequately supported in your role?

7. Was there anything that you felt ill equipped for?
8. How can AU better support your role in the future?

13. Do you have a job lined up for next year?

14. How do you feel about going into your first-year teaching?

APPENDIX C. APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH (IRB)

Human Subjects Committee (HSC) Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Dear Ashley Nolette,
Proposal Title: Lived Experiences of Cooperating Teachers and Their Student Teachers

During the Clinical Year
Submission date: Thursday, January 4, 2024, 2:27 PM

The Human Subjects Committee (HSC) has received and reviewed the above-titled research proposal. I am happy to inform you that AU's IRB has voted to **APPROVE** your above-mentioned proposal. Your approval number is **AU202401IRB**. Please, whenever you contact us about this proposal, use your IRB approval number.

Also, be reminded that if at any point during the research, the risk level to any human subjects involved changes, either physical harm or loss of anonymity, or should you find it necessary to make any adjustments to the study as approved, please contact the HSC/IRB Chair in advance of implementing such changes. This may require that you submit an IRB Modification form.

We wish you well in your research.
If you need clarification regarding the committee's decision, please contact Dr. Gilbert

Eyabi, IRB Chair, at HSC@andersonuniversity.edu. Sincerely,

1/18/2024

Gilbert Eyabi, PhD Professor of Mathematics, Assistant Provost,

IRB Chair, Anderson University.

316 Boulevard | Anderson, SC 29621 | 864.231.2000 | andersonuniversity.edu