Mississippi Valley Technology Teacher Education Conference
108th Conference, Nashville, Tennessee

The Value of Early Field Experiences in Teacher Preparation: A Proposal

Session VI: Virtual, Hybrid, and Online: Lessons Learned, November 18, 2022

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Abstract: This proposal describes a study which examines the relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and ratings given by their cooperating teachers during student teaching. Educator preparation programs have long been tasked with providing quality education to future teachers as they prepare them for a career in the P-12 classroom. Part of this preparation happens in P-12 classroom settings, where preservice teachers observe and interact with students and professional teachers. These early field experiences, which help prepare them for student teaching and the P-12 classroom, are required for teacher preparation program accreditation. This research investigates how changes in the educational environment related to the Covid-19 pandemic closure of schools have created opportunities to assess the effectiveness of early field experiences. The study seeks to address a need for evidence of the early field experiences' impact on preparation for student teaching and eventual success as a practicing teacher. Evidence of this impact is vital for teacher preparation programs as they evaluate how effective their current requirements are in the program of study for future teachers. Data collected and analyzed by multiple linear regression will provide empirical evidence addressing the relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their professional indicator ratings given by their cooperating teacher during student teaching in order to guide teacher preparation program decisions.

Introduction

Field experiences have become an integral part of undergraduate teacher preparation offering preservice teachers opportunities to observe and engage with students and teachers outside of the collegiate classroom. While the inclusion of field experiences has become the norm, they have not always had a place in teacher preparation as, prior to the early 20th century, most teachers' first true experience in front of a classroom was after they had been hired as a teacher (Schneider, 2011). As teacher preparation changed its practice and added the student teaching field experience for most preservice teachers, continued research supported the success of student teaching and it was expanded to allow additional time in the elementary and secondary classroom as early field experiences (Bieda et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). In the current model of teacher preparation programs, field experiences provide occasions to practice methods and concepts and apply theories learned in college coursework in a setting similar to where the preservice teacher will, eventually, teach in the future.

This study will examine the relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and professional assessments of their success during student teaching. This research will investigate how changes in the educational environment related to the Covid-19 pandemic

closure of schools have created opportunities to assess the effectiveness of early field experiences.

Background of Study

Students across the United States are pursuing teacher education degrees in varied, but similar, formats, with the goal to one day teach in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (P-12) classrooms. For the 2018-19 academic year, before the Covid-19 pandemic, over 560,000 preservice teachers (PTs) were enrolled in over 2,300 teacher education programs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2022). Of these PTs, 83,946 bachelor degrees were conferred, down from the all-time high of 176,307 in 1970-71 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Also known as teacher candidates or preprofessional teachers, PTs are postsecondary students working to complete the requirements set forth by state and national entities for teacher licensure (IGI Global, 2021).

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is the main evaluator of teacher preparation programs (TPPs) as they work to meet national accreditation requirements. Accredited TPPs are charged with providing quality educator preparation through continuous improvement, quality assurance, credibility, equity, strong foundation, and innovation (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2020a). As part of this charge, CAEP Standard II, requires participating programs to form partnerships with P-12 schools in order to provide field, or clinical, experiences for PTs (CAEP, 2020a). Field experiences are required hours a PT spends in the P-12 classroom, either as a student teacher in the professional semester or prior to student teaching in early field experiences (EFEs). However, while CAEP requires field experiences, it does not specify the format or number of hours PTs must complete in order to fulfill the requirements.

For TPPs, EFEs are an integral element in teacher preparation (Bieda et al., 2017), and should be "grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. ii). Time in a P-12 classroom for future teachers has been considered a valuable staple of traditional education programs for decades (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Goodman, 1985; Mtika et al., 2014). However, Zeichner (2010) stated those most involved in the supervision of preservice educators are not as involved in the university components and vice versa, creating a "disconnect between the campus and school-based components of programs" (p. 89). Questions of quality, quantity, delivery and reasoning for field experiences embedded in teacher preparation programs are still being answered.

At Pittsburg State University (PSU), the specific requirements for all university TPPs is set by the University's Education Curriculum Council comprised of faculty from all education-related programs under the leadership of the Office of Teacher Education (OTE). While individual programs have some autonomy in choosing field experience requirements for their PTs, all have two required EFEs supervised and tracked by the OTE: 33 hours during Explorations in Education and 10 hours during Overview of Special Education. Other optional common experiences include 30 hours during clinicals and 20-200 hours in internships. As this Council regularly re-evaluates the field experience portion of the curriculum, a continuing conversation is the number of required hours PTs spend in the P-12 classroom. Proponents of increasing the number of hours argue that more hours will better prepare PTs for teaching as a

professional, while those who want no changes, or possibly even less hours, contend content courses are more valuable and there is not enough room in the 120 credit-hour program of study for another required course with an attached EFE. No consensus for a change in required EFE hours has been found yet as there is little quantitative evidence to support one.

The Covid-19 pandemic, starting in the spring semester of 2020, caused the closure, almost worldwide, of classrooms, both P-12 and postsecondary (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021). During this semester, many schools were no longer open to visitors, PTs, and, even, students and staff. Learning, for many schools, was moved to a virtual environment for a period of time until individual schools started reopening. These closures created a unique experience for many PTs with the suspension of their required EFEs. At PSU, over the course of the next few semesters after the pandemic closure, up until spring 2022, P-12 classrooms were slowly opened for preservice teachers to continue field experiences. First, student teachers were allowed to return to schools in fall semester 2020. Upper division internship course EFEs were allowed next, starting in spring semester 2021, and other upper division course EFEs were continued over the next few semesters. As of spring semester 2022, required EFEs for some courses, such as Explorations in Education and Overview of Special Education, were still not open. Starting in the fall semester of 2020 and continuing until fall semester 2024, possibly longer, student teachers in these semesters have a high likelihood of completing coursework without completing all EFE requirements. These missing foundational experiences may provide researchers opportunities to examine whether EFEs foster stronger professional teaching traits for PTs during the professional semester. For this research, the problem has been identified as the degree to which there is limited clear empirical data linking the impact of early field experiences with effective preparation of preservice teachers for student teaching.

Need and Purpose

This study seeks to address a need for evidence of the impact EFEs have on preparation for student teaching and eventual success as a practicing teacher. Evidence of this impact is important for TPPs as they evaluate how effective their current requirements are in the program of study for future teachers. Accrediting bodies, such as CAEP, require programs to demonstrate how field experiences support this preparation. Many TPPs use rating forms, such as PSU's Field Experience Inventory (FEI), completed by both P-12 cooperating teachers and university supervisors, to assess the students in various categories such as Learner and Learning, Content, Instructional Practice, and Professional Responsibility (See Appendix A). Universities are allowed autonomy in how they address CAEP Standard II, but Zeichner (2010) and Ronfeldt (2012) have stated that programs must examine how and where field experiences happen, in order to provide PTs with the most effective path of becoming a teacher. The suspension of EFEs due to the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown has now created a group of student teachers who have missed typically required EFEs. Preservice teachers need to know whether the education they are receiving is best preparing them for their future classrooms. The Covid-19 pandemic closures are timely for allowing the gathering of data to examine the impact of EFEs as an effective method for preparing to students to teach effectively.

The information in this study will be useful to directors and coordinators of TPPs when assessing the requirements for their programs of study. Details of how many EFE hours PTs should accrue, when EFEs should occur, how they should be embedded, and related questions are dependent upon whether EFEs are effective. With the exception of the temporary suspension

or transition to online formats due to Covid-19 for a few semesters, EFEs are a current requirement of most TPPs. Using multiple regression to examine the relationship of student teacher ratings and EFE hours, this study gathered and presented data examining student teachers in the range of pre-Covid 19 semesters—having all EFE hours—and Covid 19 semesters—missing EFE hours. Later studies may be able to examine student teachers in post-Covid 19 semesters who again have the full complement of EFE hours and compare them to participants in this study.

While the conversation was already happening before Covid-19 affected education, school closures have only increased the need to know if the current EFE model accredited TPPs are using to prepare future teachers is effective. The purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence examining the relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their professional indicator ratings given by their cooperating teacher during student teaching in order to guide teacher preparation program decisions.

Research Problem

To address the gap in the research examining the effectiveness of early field experiences in preparing preservice teachers, the following questions will be examined:

Q1: Is there a relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their initial teaching performance rating during the student teaching experience?

Q2: Is there a relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their growth in teaching performance ratings during the student teaching experience?

Scope and Limitations

This study will examine data on all preservice teacher candidates who participated in student teaching between fall semester 2017 and spring semester 2022 through the Office of Teacher Education at PSU. The study also examines the number of hours spent in required EFEs for their programs in relationship to their professional indicator ratings provided by their cooperating teacher during the student teaching experience.

There are several possible limiting factors identified for this study. One limitation is the presence of experiences in the field outside of official OTE field experiences. Student teachers who have worked as para-educators, substitute teachers, coaches, and school volunteers may benefit from these experiences which are not controlled for in this study. Second, while some EFEs have moved to a virtual environment instead of being cancelled altogether, the effectiveness of virtual experiences has not been determined, therefore virtual experiences will be considered the same as missing field experiences. A third limitation includes the differences in cooperating teacher or supervisor rating methods. Even using the same rubric, discrepancies between human raters may exist and there is no guarantee of continuity. Additionally, Covid-19 may have also changed the methods through which cooperating teachers evaluate PTs. New demands upon their time may cause teachers to spend less time considering the evaluations or, knowing the limited experience a PT has due to canceled EFEs, they may give the preservice teacher a "free" pass and not evaluate as rigorously as they may have in the past. The quality of placement in both the cooperating teacher and the school itself will inherently vary and may be another limiting factor for this study. While all placements have been vetted by the OTE at PSU, these inconsistencies may affect their ratings during the professional semester.

Summary

Education is a critical part of societies' culture and schools need effective teachers in classroom with students who will be the future workforce and leadership of the world (Chen et al., 2014; Dede 2010). Current research illustrates that the most effective programs are ones which partner with P-12 schools in order to place preservice teachers in field experiences with experienced teachers and classroom students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Wenger et al., 2012). Currently, field experiences are a traditional requirement of teacher preparation programs, however there is a need to assess the effectiveness of these experiences.

Formal education has seen many changes during its existence. Whether it was making attendance mandatory, the enactment of new laws, or new security measures to keep students safe, not many changes were as abrupt as the school closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. These closures caused many preservice teachers to not have some of the early field experiences which have been found to have a strong impact on prospective teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). While it may be hard to separate the impact Covid-19 has had on education and society in general from results, missing EFE hours may help researchers compare success and readiness between groups of student teachers with different number of hours.

This study will use empirical data to look for a relationship between early field experiences and professional indicator ratings reported for pre-service teachers during the student teaching experiences. Findings from this study may help direct teacher education programs as they design coursework and program requirements for future teachers.

Literature Review

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) had this to say about teaching in their report to the National Academy of Education Committee on Teacher Education:

> To a music lover watching a concert from the audience, it would be easy to believe that a conductor has one of the easiest jobs in the world. There he stands, waving his arms in time with the music, and the orchestra produces glorious sounds, to all appearances quite spontaneously. Hidden from the audience—especially from the musical novice—are the conductor's abilities to read and interpret all of the parts at once, to play several instruments and understand the capacities of many more, to organize and coordinate the disparate parts, to motivate and communicate with all of the orchestra members. In the same way that conducting looks like hand-waving to the uninitiated, teaching looks simple from the perspective of students who see a person talking and listening, handing out papers, and giving assignments. Invisible in both of these performances are the many kinds of knowledge, unseen plans, and backstage moves—the skunkworks, if you will, that allow a teacher to purposefully move a group of students from one set of understandings and skills to quite another over the space of many months. (p. 2)

This passage portrays a fitting description of what a teacher must do on a daily basis, even multiple times a day. However, developing the talents to do this requires extensive preparation and that may best start with a progressive, equitable education system focused on teacher quality (Fahrer, 2019).

Teacher Education and Preparation

At the turn of the 21st century, Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) laid out their timeline of three time periods that teaching as a profession and education had traversed. They also discussed the future phase teaching and education is preparing to enter. Pre-1960 was the pre-professional age, characterized by teachers mass produced in a "factory-like system" (p. 50) who taught as they had been taught, lecture being the dominate feature. Individualism in teaching started showing up in the autonomous professional age of the 1960s as teachers began to be better prepared to own their own classroom; however, extra training—i.e. professional development—to come up with new ideas was considered a burden only needed by weak teachers. The mid-1980s brought about the age of the collegial professional where a "culture of collaboration" (p. 51) began and teachers came out of the isolation of their own classrooms to work and learn new ways of teaching together. During this age, student teaching as a requirement for teacher licensure became the norm, while prior to this period, some teachers may have had a student teaching field experience as part of their education, many had not (Schneider, 2011). Finally, beginning in 2000, Hargreaves and Fullan predicted the professional age would be a time characterized by learning diversity, networking, and using science to bring reforms. They hoped for partnerships between schools and institutions, leading to deeper learning through mentorship from experienced teachers and a rejuvenation of the profession.

This hope was a timely one as educators and researchers alike have criticized the teacher education programs of the 1980s and 1990s as being too focused on theory and not enough practical experience (Darling Hammond et al, 2005). This criticism called for change and publication's like *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) and *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996) were just a few of the catalysts for reform and a new focus on the quality of new teachers (Danielson, 2001; Fahrer, 2019). New groups were forming, such as the Carnegie Task force on Teaching as a Profession, the Holmes Group, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, all looking at how teaching policy could bring teaching to the next level with skilled, knowledgeable professionals completing their education and entering the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fahrer, 2019). The needs of society and the workforce were changing, and education needed to adjust how it prepared teachers to educate students (Edwards, 2009; Dede, 2010).

Not everyone agreed teacher education needed to change. Walsh (2001), argued the requirements of TTPs were unnecessary and did not correlate substantially with progress in teacher performance. Similarly, Ballou and Podgursky (1996), believed new barriers were created in schools as programs required more professional standards from their graduates. The removal of teacher certifications was even discussed to make it easier to get teachers into schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These dissenters were in the minority as other research kept pointing to the need for increased teacher quality, practices, effectiveness, and education (Chen et al., 2014).

Other research from the late 1990s and early 2000s continues to reinforce the need for change. A study by McBer (2001) found the most effective skills a teacher needs to develop in their TPP are teaching skills, professional characteristics, and the ability to set up a classroom climate. Extensive clinical experiences are critical for developing professional teaching skills (Ball & Cohen, 1999) and course content is important in this development but integration between course content and field experiences is more so (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This trend continued into the 2010's as researchers examine how teacher preparation programs should

prepare teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Yilmaz (2011) said preservice teachers needed problem-based learning in authentic situations and Wenger et al. (2012) called for a consideration of strategies focused on the community for the advancement of higher education. Fahrer (2019) indicated that there was a link between teacher education and effectiveness which requires reflection on practice, alignment with standards, and practice in the field to assimilate theory in and from practice (Danielson, 2001; Koerner et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

This call for change culminated in "clinical curriculum" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 40) where TPPs join in partnerships with P-12 schools so PTs can be observed and evaluated in the P-12 setting (Lofthouse & Wright, 2012) prior to student teaching. This call and need led to the implementation of EFEs and a way for effective programs to engage with the community of educators and better prepare the future with quality graduates (Wenger, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010). As these changes were implemented, accreditation agencies began to focus on a method to determine their effectiveness.

Program Evaluation and Accreditation

An emphasis on producing quality teachers requires a way to evaluate how programs are doing on this task. Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that, "unlike many other professions" teacher education programs do not have a "strong mandatory accreditation and licensing process" (p. 38). However, soon after that study was published, accrediting bodies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) joined forces and professional standards were developed to oversee this production (Fahrer, 2019). In the beginning, these councils did make some quick progress, but eventually changes were needed and new models for evaluation, using programs known for producing effective teachers, were used to allow accrediting bodies a better way to critically look at teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In 2010, NCATE and TEAC merged to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the current era of program evaluation processes and standards had begun (CAEP, 2020b; Lang et al., 2018).

Lang et al. (2018) addressed the various ways to assess pre-service dispositions, which includes the standards set by accrediting bodies. The Council of Chief State School Officers (2013) developed the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching Standards (InTASC Standards) in 2013 as a resource policymakers and shareholders can use to make decisions about what "effective teaching looks like" (Fahrer, 2019, p. 25). CAEP requires accredited TPPs to demonstrate alignment with these InTASC Standards (CAEP, 2021b). InTASC Standards (see Appendix B) is made up of ten standards in four categories—Learner and Learning, Content Knowledge, Instructional Practices, Professional Responsibility—described by professional indicators of performance, knowledge, and dispositions (Fahrer, 2019). These categories outline the need of PTs to, not only, learn the skills and knowledge required to manage a classroom, but also gain the ability to reflect and improve on their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Current TPP development is centered around category indicators and delineates course content, test scores, and practice in the field—both EFEs and student teaching—all critical for PTs to understand and apply theory (Koerner et al., 2002). This has motivated TPPs to add and/or increase the types and expectations of EFEs in their programs.

Early Field Experiences

Early field experiences can be defined as a "field-based learning environment" (Retallick & Miller, 2010, p. 62) for preservice teachers prior to their capstone experience of the student teaching or professional semester (Huling, 1998). Participating in EFEs allow PTs to observe experienced teachers (Ober, 2013) and practice skills and techniques they have learned about in theory (Retallick & Miller, 2010). These practical experiences come in different forms and are known by various names such as observations, practicals, microteaching, practicums, internships, experiences, partnerships, and placements, and have become an integral piece of a preservice education. As described in chapter one, there are two typical designations of EFE type: observation EFEs where students mainly observe the P-12 classroom but may have limited interactions, and engaged EFEs where PTs work with P-12 students individually or in small or large group settings. They are usually short-term, unpaid (Brannon, 2014), and typically require reflective essays or work samples which can be used to assess the PT (Cruickshank & Metcalf, 1993). Preservice teachers who take coursework paired with field experiences, a practice of discovery learning, are better able to apply theory to practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2010; Yilmaz, 2011). Effective teachers come from all backgrounds, regardless of demographics or experience (McBer, 2001), so providing PTs the opportunity to experience multiple classrooms and multiple teachers increases their chances to observe quality professional teachers in the field.

Over the last forty years, institutions have shifted the way they prepare future teachers. Prior to the 1980s, classroom experience for a PT was limited to the capstone student teaching semester (Huling, 1998). Many writers point to the theories and teachings of John Dewey when speaking about the importance of field experiences for PTs, as Dewey believed they should have the opportunity for more experience before "plunging the student teacher into the complexities of responsibility for classroom control and management" (Shulman, 1998, p. 514) and that the best way to learn practical lessons about teaching was to observe what other, more experienced teachers do in the classroom (Rury, 1986). The beginning of this trend in teacher education happened in laboratory schools under the "premise that PTs should have opportunities to work in the K-12 classroom… to ground their understanding of pedagogical theory with practice" (Bieda et al., 2017, p. 853). This led to earlier opportunities for PTs to spend more time in the field, gaining experience in multiple ways to observe and engage with classroom teachers and K-12 students (Ober, 2013). By the start of the 21st century, 77% of elementary programs and 70% of secondary programs require their PTs to have at least one EFE in their first two years (Huling, 1998). Currently, CAEP, as part of accreditation process, requires TPPs to document evidence they form partnerships with P-12 schools to provide EFEs (CAEP, 2022).

Research in the field relating to the benefits and value of EFEs has varied results. A study by Bieda et al., (2017) found that these experiences in classrooms prior to student teaching, coupled with support, improved the quality of their teaching in the classroom. Ögeyik (2016) wrote that "student teachers strongly acknowledged the usefulness and resourcefulness of microteaching for boosting creativity and for gaining practical experience" (p. 1520). However, not all field experiences were created equal as differences in classrooms, cooperating teachers, and student composition can change the perception of preparation in PTs (Goldhaber et al., 2021; Goodman, 1985). Many novice teachers were concerned that their experiences were not enough to prepare them (Rife Oman, 2019), and Smalley (2011) listed concerns that included forced conformity and large differences in coursework versus experience for PTs.

Different forms of EFEs can be found in almost every accredited program across the United States, and most would agree they are an important facet of TPPs (Ball & Cohen, 1999;

Darling-Hammond, 2006; Koerner et al., 2002). Issues still exist, however, in how EFEs are conducted, how long and how often they occur, and how to connect the theoretical classroom to the practical classroom (Mtika et al., 2014). Studies conducted on assessing teacher preparation and determining readiness for the classroom have provided insight to teacher educators as they continue to improve the preparation of PTs.

Preservice Teacher Preparation, Assessment, and Readiness

Preservice teachers go through a variety of exercises during their TPP that are aimed at preparing them to be ready for the student teaching semester and, later, teaching in the P-12 classroom. Through this preparation, PTs should develop knowledge—content, pedagogy, and content pedagogy—and be able to "exercise a variety of learning activities" (Stripling et al., 2014, p. 151). To be considered as ready, PTs should be prepared to "engage in, or enact teaching of content" (McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2014, p. 121) using a "repertoire of teaching skills" (Richards, 2011, p. 4). Yüksel and Saglam, (2018) quote the European Commission, (2013) that readiness "encompasses the knowledge and abilities to find, evaluate and deploy learning materials," and have "critical, evidence-based attitudes, enabling them to respond to students' outcomes, new evidence…., and professional dialogue" (p. 208).

Measuring the abilities and readiness of PTs to student teach is an ongoing process. The profession needs instruments "identifying various levels of quality teaching" and "what desired quality teaching looks like" (Chen et al, 2014, p. 60). Shearron (1976) focused on how to define and create instruments to measure these traits or competencies. This included "observable behavior... manipulation of ideas, and the making of judgements and decisions" (p. 3). Ayers and Thompson (1990) used an instrument designed to assess student teacher perceptions of their own readiness to teach and discussed how it could be used for formal evaluation. The need for empirical evidence of this readiness increased in the 1990s with the introduction of alternative licensure or certification to teach, where industry experts stepped into the classroom without going through a TPP. As schools began hiring new teachers with no formal educational training, increased evidence of the benefit of such training, including field experiences was essential to prove the effectiveness of the preservice model (Ronfeldt et al., 2018). Many types of TPPs currently exist, but preservice programs, especially those with at least 30 weeks of field experiences, show the best outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2010).

In 1954, NCATE, renamed CAEP in 2010, was formed as a governmental body to ensure the quality and readiness of new teachers (CAEP, 2020b). Many teacher preparation programs now have their own instruments measuring readiness as CAEP requires evidence for accreditation. The Office of Teacher Education at PSU uses the Field Experience Inventory (FEI), an evaluation tool with 55 indicators aligned with InTASC Standards as previously mentioned, as evidence for CAEP requirements (OTE, 2021). This tool, and those like it, are used by programs to evaluate teaching quality and readiness by observation (Chen et al., 2014).

Schools want to hire effective teachers, and the American education system continues to look for ways to determine beforehand if a teacher will be a quality teacher. Using factors, such as PT admission profile and GPA, to predict readiness and success in teachers were found to be insignificant (Casey & Childs, 2011). Effective teachers come from all backgrounds, regardless of age and experience, so other predictors need to be used in assessing and predicting success in PTs (McBer, 2001). Throughout their tenure in the education program, PT's preparation and readiness is usually assessed and quantified by reports and surveys done by either the student

teacher, student's faculty advisor, OTE personnel, cooperating teacher, supervising teacher or a combination of. Researchers may use data from TPP and ratings of their PTs to determine if the ratings predict success as a novice teacher (Fahrer, 2019). These ratings are used to track PT progress and are reported to CAEP to justify program effectiveness. Fahrer's (2019) study on teacher and PT evaluation tools resulted in the creation of an inventory based on data-driven predictive factors of teacher success, readiness, and effectiveness that he hopes will be adopted by TPPs in the future. Casey and Childs (2011) examined the ratings of PTs by both the cooperating teacher and the supervising teacher on the same student and found they were both significantly positive even though the supervisor did not spend as much time in the classroom with the PT as the cooperating teacher did. In a study by Ronfeldt et al. (2018), cooperating teachers' ratings of the PTs during student teaching were significant predictors of their evaluations their first year in the classroom. In this same study, conversely, the self-ratings of the PTs were not able to predict their first-year evaluations. However, Aybek and Aslan (2019) linked readiness to self-efficacy and found that there is a positive relationship between them for the PT.

Preparation for student teaching, and later professional teaching, is an integral part of a PT's education. Developing knowledge and skill sets, both theoretical and practical, are highly accepted as imperative by researchers and evaluators alike (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Being ready to student teach may correlate with being ready to teach (Casey & Childs, 2011). Hiring new graduates who are ready to teach is an important focus of school and of education in general (Dede, 2010). While there is not consensus on the details of measuring preparation or readiness in PTs, there are few arguments that TPPs need to know how to determine their success in preparing future educators (Chen et al., 2014). Research shows TPPs need to look outside their own walls, to the community of professional teachers, to provide a setting for PTs to learn, grow, and even make mistakes (Danielson, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Wenger et al., 2012; Yilmaz, 2011).

Early Field Experiences' Effect on Readiness and Preparation

The presence of EFEs has been found to be correlated with high ratings during PT evaluations. Huling (1998) found teachers from field-based TPPs were reported as better prepared by school principals. This same study found that beliefs from all participants—student teachers, TPPs, and P-12 schools—were that more field experiences led to better preparation. Goodman (1985) examined when the experiences happen. He found that while experiences are good, having a longer experience in one classroom right before the professional semester produced better readiness results and that this experience needed to be an engaged one involving design and implementation of curriculum. The location of the field experience played a part in readiness and retention for Ronfeldt (2012). This study found student teaching in a school with a larger underserved population led to lower test scores as a first-year teacher and a higher likelihood of leaving their first teaching job as compared to those who taught with a lower underserved population, regardless of the population at their first-year school. When evaluating a program, including where, when, and how to have field experiences, Ronfeldt et al. (2018) suggested that cooperating teachers rating of PT readiness might be a more effective insight than PT self-rating in program design and planning.

Darling-Hammond (2005) outlined a series of studies in the 1980s and early 1990s where researchers compared various outcomes of groups with different amounts of practical experience

in the classroom. All studies presented found that graduates with a greater number of field experience hours tended to have better outcomes and success as a new teacher. The differences between field experience hours, however, were because of differences in the required length of student teaching or other EFEs requirements in different programs or institutions. In other words, if Institution A PTs had an average of 50 EFE hours and Institution B PTs had an average of 75 EFE hours, Institution B PTs would have better average outcomes. Because these studies compared different program outcomes, not different student outcomes within the same program, these outcomes may not be because of EFE hours, but because of other program differences.

Conclusions

Over the last century, TPPs have experienced a great amount of change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). The current trend, a call for strong partnerships in P-12 schools, started around the turn of the 21st century and soon became a requirement for program accreditation (CAEP, 2020b) as PTs are placed more often in schools. Occurring prior to student teaching, EFEs have become an integral part of most TPPs (Mtika et al., 2014), where PTs practice theory by application (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These experiences can take the form of observations or hands-on practica and are usually organized as a collaboration between TPPs and P-12 schools, all while being observed by experienced teachers (Lofthouse & Wright, 2012). One goal of these EFEs is to provide PTs with the opportunity to observe professional teachers and to practice skills with these teachers in a low-stakes, supervised environment prior to the student teaching semester in order to increase competencies or readiness for student teaching. The competencies of the PT are usually measured by an inventory during, but not limited to, the beginning and end of the professional semester and typically include content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Fahrer, 2019).

There is empirical evidence from previous studies linking field experiences to success in teaching. Perceptions of preparedness among PTs, as well as ratings from cooperating teachers in during student teaching are also found to indicate success for a novice teacher. These perceptions and ratings are important as they are also correlated with longevity and effectiveness in the P-12 classroom. While there is evidence for the continuation of EFEs, there are still gaps in the research regarding how many, what type, when, and how many hours are the most effective in preparing PTs for student teaching and success in the P-12 classroom. Learning by experience, coupled with reflection on the experience and repeat practice, in the P-12 classroom may some reasons EFEs are valuable.

Theoretical Framework

"Detailed feedback, with opportunities to retry and continue to improve… followed by systematic reflection" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 40) should be core criteria and components in a TPPs. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Kolb (1984) describes this theory as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). In ELT, learners go through four stages: Concrete Experience, Abstract Conceptualization, Reflective Observation, and Active Experimentation. Concrete experiences are found in observation and lead to reflection. Reflecting forms concepts from which action can be taken. Decisions leading to actions create circumstances so new decisions can be made (Kolb, 2005). One focus of ELT is an emphasis on learning styles and how they use these four stages differently based on a learner's preferences and strengths (Kolb,

1999). In alignment with ELT, students in EFEs have the opportunity to learn, do, reflect and grow, then, they can repeat the process for larger growth, all way navigating the experience utilizing their own unique strengths.

As Darling-Hammond (2010) emphasized, proper preparation can increase experience, leading to increased effectiveness. This study is examining how participating in—and, presumedly, reflecting on—EFEs play an integral part in preparing a PT for teaching. Similarly, ELT emphasizes how experience and reflection are essential in the learning process. Throughout their program of study, PTs are required to participate in field experiences and then actively reflect on what they saw, heard, did, and the results of these actions. Through this repeated pattern of experience and structured reflection, and by utilizing multiple forms of educational experiences, TPPs transform PTs (Danielson, 2001).

The Covid-19 pandemic, especially the school closures and cancellations of EFEs of spring 2020 through spring 2022, caused many PTs to miss out on foundational experiences in the development and preparation for student teaching. While student teaching has never been cancelled at Pittsburg State University, it was moved to a virtual environment during spring 2020. Other required EFEs have slowly been reopened to PTs, but, as of spring 2022, some are still not placing PTs in P-12 classrooms. These EFEs have been canceled, not postponed, and the hours are likely not to be made up by the PT. These missing experiences may lead to deficits in their abilities as measured by the FEI. While this study will not specifically examine the difference between pre- and post-Covid graduates, rather it will examine the EFE hours of the whole group, the effects of Covid may certainly affect the results. Limited experiences means less time to go through the stages of ELT, where reflection, growth, and new action help turn PT into professional teacher.

Hypotheses

This study is driven by two questions, both focusing on the relationship between early field experiences and ratings given by the cooperating teacher during student teaching. The first research question examines the initial rating, while the second research question examines the growth between the initial and the final rating. Similarly, the hypotheses of each question are congruent. Hypotheses 1a and 1b examine how time in early field experiences is related to ratings, Hypotheses 2a and 2b examine if type of EFE makes a difference, and Hypotheses 3a and 3b examine if an increase in the different types is a factor in student teacher ratings.

Research Question 1

> Is there a relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their initial teaching performance rating given by the cooperating teacher during student teaching?

Hypothesis 1a

> As total hours in early field experiences increase, initial ratings on the Field Experience Inventory will also increase.

Rationale. Increasing hours of EFEs give PTs more practical experience and reflective practice, which leads to a higher expected FEI rating. By nature and design, EFEs offer different experiences and multiple viewpoints of education than can found in classes based on theory. By

spending time in different classrooms with different students and different teachers, PTs are able to have experiences in the field allowing them to have more experience in all stages of learning from ELT—concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. By addressing all ELT stages of learning, PTs are more likely to synthesize the information, putting into practice their learning from the classroom.

Hypothesis 1b

There are differences in teaching performance ratings between groups with different types of early field experiences.

Specifically, the group of student teachers with both types of EFEs will rate higher on the FEI than other groups. Student teachers with only Engaged EFEs will have the next highest ratings. Student teachers with only Observation EFEs will rate third, followed by student teachers with no EFEs.

Rationale. The presence of both types of EFEs give PTs more practical experience and reflective practice as well as a more diverse set of learning opportunities, addressing all four stages of ELT, leading to a higher expected FEI rating. The absence of Engaged FEs will have a greater negative impact than the absence of Observed FEs.

Hypothesis 1c

An increase in Engaged EFE hours will increase the rating on the FEI more than an increase in the number of Observed EFE hours will.

Rationale. Engaged EFEs have more practical and reflective opportunities. An increase of hours in this type should have more of an impact on FEI ratings than an increase in Observation EFEs hours does.

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their growth in teaching performance ratings during student teaching?

Hypothesis 2a

As hours in Early Field Experiences increase, there will be greater increase in ratings on the Field Experience Inventory, from initial to final, during the student teaching semester.

Rationale. Increasing hours of EFEs give PTs more practical experience and reflective practice. Because they have more practice at experiential learning, they will have bigger growth during student teaching.

The changes in a PT over the holistic experience of a TPP, including all field experiences, could be compared to the changes made during the student teaching semester although over a much shorter time period. By having practice in this process, especially the reflective piece as identified by ELT, the PT will be better prepared to apply lessons learned during student teaching, resulting in increased growth.

Hypothesis 2b

There are differences in teaching performance rating growth between groups with different types of early field experiences.

Specifically, the group of student teachers with both types of EFEs will show a greater increase on the FEI than other groups. Student teachers with only Engaged EFEs will show the next greatest increase. Student teachers with only Observation EFEs will show third greatest growth, followed by student teachers with no EFEs.

Rationale. The presence of both types of EFEs give preservice students more practical experience and reflective practice. Having the opportunity to practice experiential learning will lead to a greater increase in FEI rating. The absence of Engaged EFEs will have a greater negative impact than the absence of Observation EFEs.

Hypothesis 2c

An increase in Engaged EFE hours will increase the rating on the Field Experience Inventory more than an increase in Observation EFE hours will.

Rationale. Engaged EFE have more practical and reflective opportunities. An increase of hours in this type should have more of an impact on FEI ratings than an increase in Observation EFEs does.

Summary

Teacher preparation may affect the quality of teacher effectiveness in the P-12 classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Stakeholders in education and researchers alike continue to look for the most effective models for TPPs. This search for effective practice has led to the creation of accrediting bodies such as CAEP, the development of PT rating inventories such as the FEI, and the implementation of EFEs. These practices continue to evolve over time and the instruments we use to evaluate what effective means are not always valid (Fahrer, 2019). With Covid-19 affecting education, opportunities for different studies examining these practices are available.

A review of the literature showed there is a gap in the literature regarding the relationship EFEs have with PTs are they prepare to student teach. Former studies suggest that EFEs will increase readiness, but what combination of type of EFEs and hours still needs to be studied. Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as a framework, six hypotheses were drawn regarding this relationship. Findings from this study may inform TPP design in regards to partnerships with P-12 schools for practical experience as part of PT education.

Methodology

The intent of this study is to explore the relationship between a preservice teacher's early field experiences and their professional indicator ratings given by their cooperating teachers during student teaching. Empirical evidence is needed to help give direction in decision-making about the number of hours in and type of early field experiences (EFEs) to teacher preparation programs. Six hypotheses were developed to answer two research questions and they suggest early field experiences do make a difference in how well a preservice teacher is rated during student teaching.

This study takes place in Pittsburg Kansas, a place considered to be in the rural Midwest Region of the United States. To better allow for replication of this study in other demographics, a

description of the research design, study setting, participant details, and data collected is provided. Existing data, including demographics and inventory rating scores collected by the university teacher preparation department, was used and no instrument was developed specifically for this study. Validity and reliability have previously been established for the inventory scale used by this department.

Study Design

For this quantitative study, multiple regression analysis will be used to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between multiple dependent and independent variables. Cross-sectional regression is used to examine participants at a specific moment in time, their student teaching semester, to determine if there is a relationship between their previous early field experiences and FEI ratings. This is an observational study, with no manipulation of variables or participants. Archival data collected by the Office of Teacher Education (OTE) at Pittsburg State University (PSU) is the data source for the study. A multiple regression study is appropriate as it focuses on forecasting how the time spent by the PTs in different types of EFE relates to their ratings during student teaching as scored by the FEI (Glover, 2011). The amount of data available from the OTE is adequate enough to perform the multiple regression modeling.

Study Setting

This study takes place at PSU located in Southeast Kansas. The OTE requires all preservice teacher candidates to complete specific EFE hours during coursework, while individual programs can add on other EFE requirements. Courses with EFEs are listed in the table below, along with the type of EFE they are considered to be, the number of required hours, and whether they are required by the elementary or secondary programs.

Early Field Experience Hour Requirements by Course (2022-2023)

Course Name	EFE Type	Number of Hours	Elementary Required	Secondary Required
Explorations in Education	Observational	33	Yes	Yes
Clinical Experience	Observational	33	Yes	Some Programs
Overview of Special Ed	Engaged	10	Yes	Yes
Internship	Engaged	60	Yes	No

Additionally, in order to obtain teacher licensure, all majors must complete the professional semester as a student teacher. Student teaching occurs in the P-12 classroom under the supervision of a licensed teacher, nominally vetted by the OTE, who has at least three years of experience. The conditions and requirements of the preservice teacher and cooperating teacher during student teaching are explained to all parties. This includes attendance, dress code, conduct, and how the FEI is used, among other details.

Participants and Placement

Participants for this study were students at PSU accepted to the Teacher Education Program and have participated in student teaching through the OTE from Fall 2017 through Spring 2022, a total of 10 semesters. This population was approximately 450 individuals. Participants were excluded if there are incomplete records of their EFE hours or a missing initial or final student teaching FEI.

The data needed for this study was already collected by the PSU Office of Teacher Education. Therefore, the entire preservice teacher population will be used to avoid the possibility of collecting a nonrepresentative sample. In the event something prevent the entire population to be studied, stratified convenience sampling will be used to randomly choose the same number of students from each semester. As Covid-19 cancelations of field experiences may have affected certain semesters, students from all semesters need to be equally represented. A power analysis using GPower 3.1.9.7 was conducted. For an a priori, linear regression fixed model F test, R^2 deviation from zero for a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80) with nine predictors indicates a sample size of 114 is needed. Equally dividing this number into the 10 semesters means 12 student teachers per semester are suggested. However, having less than 20 in a group may cause issues in violations of normality for multiple regression. So, if the entire population is unable to be used, 20 students per semester would be randomly selected for this study.

Materials

This study will use the results obtained from the PSU OTE Field Evaluation Instrument (FEI) (OTE, 2021). This instrument was developed in-house using previous evaluation instruments and state recommended guidelines in order to meet Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) requirements for Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. It was vetted through four PSU Education Coordinating Councils—Elementary, Secondary, College of Education, and Advance Programs—and piloted for two semesters with teacher candidates.

After piloting the FEI, the OTE established validity through a panel of 20 expert volunteers using Lawshe's (Ayre, 2014) Content Validity Ratio to determine agreement between experts using the instrument. Interrater reliability was tested during the first pilot year by comparing faculty ratings of 153 student teachers using a one-way, random, consistency, average measures Interclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC). All four categories had an ICC between 0.58 and 0.67, three good ratings (ICC between 0.60 and 0.74 = Good) and one high fair (ICC between 0.40 and 0.59 = Fair). This indicates raters had a moderate degree of agreement and only a small degree of measurement error. The OTC has continued to evaluate validity and reliability of the instrument using these tests with similar and sometimes better results.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Rating on FEI (Y1). The FEI is an assessment tool of the preservice teachers (PTs) professional qualities and readiness for teaching. The FEI has 53 indicators divided into four overall categories: Learner and Learning, Content, Instructional Practice, Professional Responsibility. Student teacher supervisors and cooperating teachers use a 1-4 scale to rate the

student teacher, with 1 = Novice, 2 = Developing, 3 = Effective, 4 = Advanced. Supervisors and cooperating teachers are given a rubric describing what qualifies each level for each indicator.

Final FEI score (Y2). Student teachers are rated by the FEI three times during the Professional Semester (initial, midterm, final). The final FEI score will represent the change in FEI score from initial to final and will include the initial FEI score as a control.

Independent Variables

Total Time Spent in Early Field Experiences (X1). This is a continuous variable describing the number of hours spent in the P-12 classroom required by coursework taken by the preservice teacher. These courses may be required or optional for their program or study. By examining a student's transcript, the number of hours a student would have been required to spend in field experiences can be determined. During the Covid-19 pandemic, selected field experiences were canceled for all students in a given course. The OTE tracks what semester each student takes coursework with required hours in the P-12 classroom and what semesters field experiences were canceled. For any PT taking a course that had field experiences canceled, even if they were moved to a virtual environment, those hours will be removed from their expected total number of EFE hours.

Total time can be split into time spent in the two types of EFE, observation and engaged. After determining whether total time spent is significant, hierarchical modeling will be used to examine if splitting total time into time spent in different types of field experiences will produce a better fit for the model.

Time Spent in Observation Early Field Experience (X2). Observation early field experiences are EFE specifically allowing PTs to observe successful teachers (Ober, 2013). In observations, PTs may have limited opportunities to interact with students, but are not expected to practice teaching or management skills. This is a continuous variable measured as hours in the K-12 classroom as required to pass a specific Teacher Education course.

Time Spent in Engaged Early Field Experience (X3). Engaged early field experiences are EFE which provide PTs the opportunity to practice skills and techniques they have learned about in theory (Retallick & Miller, 2010). When participating in engaged EFE, PTs may have times of observation, but the expectation is that they will work with students, both individually and as large or small groups. This is a continuous variable measured as hours in the P-12 classroom as required to pass a specific Teacher Education course.

Presence of Early Field Experiences (X4). Normally, all PTs will have both types of field experiences. However, due to unusual circumstances, usually, but not limited to Covid-19 restrictions, a student may not have been required to complete all field experiences in the P-12 classroom. This variable will be dummy coded into three variables (Observation EFE only, Engaged EFE only, and Both EFE Types) with "No Early Field Experience" as reference:

Observation EFE Only (X_{4a}) The PT has met course hour requirements for at least one Observation EFE, but no Engaged EFE.

Engaged EFE Only (X_{4b}) The PT has met course hour requirements for at least one Engaged-type EFE, but no Observation EFE.

Both EFE Types (X_{4c}) The PT has met course hour requirements for at least one Observation EFE and at least one Engaged EFE.

Control Variables

Age (X5). Age is included because the older a PT, the more opportunities they may have had to interact and work with P-12 students.

Gender (X6). PSU currently labels individuals as either male, female or undefined by the student's self-identification upon university application. Gender will be dummy coded into two variables (Male, Female) with participant identification of "Undefined" as the reference.

Male (X6a) The participant self-identified as male on OTE application.

Female (X6b) The participant self-identified as female on OTE application.

Program Type (X7). Pittsburg State University groups undergraduate education majors into two categories, Elementary and Secondary. Elementary includes all K-6 majors as well as K-12 majors such as PE and Art Education. Elementary Education majors follow a very strict pathway toward completion of their degree, while Secondary Education programs vary greatly based on content (i.e., math, English, technology) degree requirements. Program type will be dummy coded with "Secondary" being the reference.

Data Collection

All data from PSU preservice teachers required by this study will be collected and compiled by the Office of Teacher Education. The OTE keeps track of all individuals' application data as well as EFE hours and evaluation scores throughout their progress toward program completion. Historical data will be used by the OTE to enumerate EFE hours based on the presence or absence of in-person EFEs during the semester a student completed a course with a required EFE. Only EFE hours required for coursework are counted for this study. Pittsburg State University's OTE is an active supporter of this project as they may use results as a self-study for accreditation purposes.

The OTE also issues and collects the Field Experience Inventory (FEI) for all its PTs. The FEI is utilized multiple times during the course of a PT's education preparation program, including three instances during student teaching, but this study only focuses on the initial and final FEI collected during student teaching by the cooperating teacher. The collected EFE numerical data will be summarized into total hours a student spent in both types of EFE respectively. All FEI scores will be reported as an average score from all indicators for each instance it is used.

Data Analysis

Multiple Regression

Multiple regression will be used to examine the strength and direction of multiple independent variables and controls as they relate to a dependent variable as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: The relationship between initial FEI score and hours spent in early field experiences, after controlling for age, gender, and program.

Hypothesis 1b: The relationship between initial FEI score and types of early field experiences, after controlling for age, gender, and program.

Hypothesis 1c: The relationship between initial FEI score and hours spent in the different types of early field experiences after controlling for age, gender, and program.

Hypothesis 2a: The relationship between the change in FEI score from initial to final and hours spent in early field experiences, after controlling for age, gender, program, and initial FEI score.

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between the change in FEI score from initial to final and types of early field experiences, after controlling for age, gender, program, and initial FEI score.

Hypothesis 2c: The relationship between the change in FEI score from initial to final and hours spent in the different types of early field experiences after controlling for age, gender, program, and initial FEI score.

Hierarchical Modeling

Hierarchical modeling will be used in Hypotheses 2a and 2b to determine if adding early field experience type predictors create a significantly better model. An F change scores of $p < .05$ will be needed to be considered significant.

ANOVA and Planned Contrast

Hypotheses 2a and 2b state that there is an order to the differences in the four groups of variable X_4 "Presence of Early Field Experiences". Planned contrast is used in this situation, comparing one group to the rest and then removing that group and repeating until there is only one group. There are three planned contrasts for each hypothesis. Contrast 1 for each hypothesis compares the reference group "No Early Field Experiences" against the other three groups, X_{4a}, X_{4b}, and X_{4c}, ("Only Observation EFE", "Only Engaged EFE", "Both EFE Types" respectively). Contrast 2 compares X_{4a} against X_{4b} and X_{4c}. Finally, Contrast 3 compares X_{4b} and X_{4c}. After contrasts were completed, beta coefficients were compared and a t-statistic given. T-statistics with a probability of $p < .05$ were considered a significant difference between groups.

Internal and External Validity

For this study, one major confounding internal threat was the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic, subsequent P-12 closures, and cancelation of early field experiences for preservice teachers may adversely affect its findings, even though they helped create the situation this study examined. Everyone involved in the educator preparation process is being affected, university faculty and P-12 teachers, as well as the PTs themselves, are under added stress due to pandemic changes and restrictions. Knowing this may affect how supervisors and cooperating teachers rate PTs on the FEI. A PT with less EFEs is expected to have lower ratings, but experts rating them may be more lenient due to circumstances such as stress or not enough time to address low performance. Lower EFE hours may not show a significant relationship with FEI scored due to these changes in ratings.

Other changes, such as lowered enrollment, oversight regulations, and teacher shortages may also decrease the amount of low FEI scores given to PTs at this period in time as teacher

preparation programs attempt to push out more teachers and meet all required metrics. This study will not adjust for these but use the data and ratings as is. Other internal threats may yet be identified.

This study will take place in the Midwest United States where most professional semesters for PTs take place in largely rural, conservative, low-SES schools. These factors may affect external validity and cause readers to be hesitant in applying this study to other groups outside of this context. Replication studies in these other contexts are needed to validate findings.

Conclusion

Educator preparation programs have long been tasked with providing a quality education to future teachers as they prepare them for the P-12 classroom. Part of this preparation happens in the field, in P-12 classrooms, where preservice teachers observe and interact with student and professional teachers in a setting similar to, hopefully, their future classroom. These early field experiences, which help prepare them to first student teach, then to teach as a profession, are a required part of educator preparation program accreditation. However, direction on how this required element must be met is not concretely established and is debated among the Education Curriculum Council at Pittsburg State University. This study helps give this council, and other like it, direction as they work to prepare preservice teachers for the field.

The Office of Teacher Education at PSU, in conjunction with its Education Curriculum Council, works to provide a "transformative" (PSU, 2022) educational experience for the students who pursue an education major. Whether elementary or secondary focused, all programs at PSU and their respective majors must consider the program of study a student will follow through their postsecondary education. This includes all requirements for licensure, including field experiences. As these programs look for direction on setting these requirements, they must justify their choices and demonstrate their effectiveness. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation is the accrediting body PSU has chosen to examine its choices and requirements for its future teachers.

This examination will be used to determine what factors, if any, may predict a preservice teacher's ratings during student teaching. While the Covid-19 pandemic has created systemic anomalies, which allowed for this study, they have also created a new dynamic in preservice teacher evaluation which may be a threat to the study. Further research concerning the effect of the pandemic on teacher preparation programs may be justified and could provide clarity into how findings from this study are interpreted. However, despite the economic, political, and pandemic environment many programs find themselves in, teachers are still an integral part of our future, and TPPs must prepare them for it.