An Examination of Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Field Experiences: Shaping the Understanding of Teaching and Its Challenges before Student Teaching

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AN EXAMINATION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FIELD EXPERIENCES: SHAPING THE UNDERSTANDING OF TEACHING AND ITS CHALLENGES BEFORE STUDENT TEACHING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The School of Education

by

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May 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every big accomplishment in my life happened because there were always people who helped, supported, and believed in me. This work is no exception, and I would like to thank sincerely all those who were with me in this challenging expedition. I am going to begin with my family – people who are so often taken for granted and dismissed when their presence and needs are not fitting with my busy schedule.

My first endless thank you goes to my parents – Zore and Abdzhemil Useinov. You brought me into this world, Mom and Dad, and you were always with me, selflessly supporting and encouraging my every beginning. Unfortunately, you did not make it to this day, but I am so grateful for all your love and care. I miss you so much.

The next on my list are my daughters, Dilyara and Jana Emiraliyeva. Dilyara, you are my only and very special oldest child, and lately we switch roles. It is so great to see you acting all mother-like and saying, “Stop whining, Mom! I’ve just finished my thesis, and I survived!” And Jana, you are my only and exceptional baby-girl; we shared a year together at LSU – your last year of BA in business management and my first in a Ph.D. program. You understand me perfectly, and when I complain about missing a deadline, you calmly assure, “You have two more days, Mom! You can do it!” Can there be any better encouragement?

Now, to my husband, Lee Roy Pitre. It is you who gave me this opportunity to pursue my dream, you who made me feel safe and stable while I am taking time off to reach one more finish line. Your love, care, support, and infinite belief in my abilities kept me going. My intense schedule almost forced you “to make appointments,” so we could spend time together. I sincerely appreciate all you have done for me. Thank you, buddy!

From now on, I turn to my extended, academic family. Here, for me, you are the head of the family, Dr. Steven Bickmore. I feel as a rightful colleague next to you and sometimes, just
sometimes, if not to say often, as a lost student, but in this case, I just need to talk to you to
dissolve my doubts and uncertainties. I thank you for being a great teacher, for carefully guiding
me through this adventurous path full of unexpected curves. Thank you for making this
experience less stressful than it could have been. Finally, thank you, Dr. Bickmore, for helping
me make it happen.

Dr. Denise Egéa, I am genuinely grateful to you. Somehow, you have been a mother
figure here, far away from my home land. You remind me of my own Mom – strict, demanding,
expecting the best from me, and, at the same time, unconditionally loving and caring. Thank
you, Dr. Denise for your constructive and meaningful suggestions, for generous sharing, and for
knowing that I can always get such a needed hug.

Jackie, or I should probably say Dr. Jacqueline Bach, I always felt a little confused about
addressing you. I thank you for being easily reachable and for knowing when and how to help.
You catch on and bring attention to important details that others may dis/miss. Many times I
came to you with a question or concern, and you landed a compassionate ear and helping hand
offering an idea or initial step. Thank you for being a friend and a colleague.

A very special thank you goes to my students, the participants of this study. Thank you,
all of you, for being generous and sharing your stories with me. Among other people I would
like to thank are Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell, Destiny Cooper, Erica Poarch, and Laura
Delrose for reading parts of my dissertation and providing constructive feedback. Thank you,
Doctors Neal Mathews, Roland Mitchell, Petra Hendry, Kim MacGregor for teaching me, being
happy to see me on campus, and asking about my progress.

Thank you, all! I am sincerely grateful for everything you have done for me.
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ABSTRACT

In response to the growing demands and pressures on teacher preparation and quality, as well as the call for further research distinguishing the role and impact of early field experiences (FEs), this qualitative study explored the perceptions of the secondary English pre-service teachers at a large southern State University. The study was guided by four research questions that aimed to: (1) examine the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the value of their early FEs; (2) explore how early FEs shaped the pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching; (3) identify concerns about teaching that the pre-service teachers have as they undergo FEs; and (4) understand whether the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shifted from the beginning to the end of their FEs, and, if they did, how they shifted and what factors caused the shift.

Deweyan pragmatic concepts of experience, continuity, and interaction together with narrative inquiry theory, Vygotskian sociocultural theory of development, and Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogue and heteroglossia composed a theoretical framework allowing narrative inquiry as leading method to examine the pre-service teachers’ stories. The four main participants of the study provided the majority of data presented by field site reports, field experience logs, autobiographical essays, conceptual teaching units, and individual and focus group interviews. The data analysis applied a three-dimensional narrative methodology and thematic narrative analysis. The findings indicated that the pre-service teachers valued FEs as foundational to their professional growth and understanding of teaching despite some organizational issues. The study results allowed for implications concerning policy and practice and further research in the area of FEs. While the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of pre-service teachers, they add to the body of research and to understanding the early FEs and their impact on professional establishment and growth.
PROLOGUE

Once upon a time, there was a little girl in Crimea, a peninsular area of the Ukraine, located on the north coast of the Black Sea, who dreamed that one day she would be a teacher. She loved to spend time with a bunch of younger kids in the neighborhood; everyone in that close community knew where they could find their children in the evening – under the huge, old mulberry tree at the end of the street, playing school. The girl’s parents thought the dream was something that would change many times before she even went to middle school, not to mention through high school years. They believed her dream to teach was because in the first grade she had loved her very first teacher. They also hoped she would outgrow that desire and choose the profession that could secure her living, bring stability, and more recognition from the community around her. Time passed by, the girl grew up, but she never changed her mind about becoming a teacher. After the last school bell went off for the high school graduates, she entered college and five years later graduated to be able to go “back to school.” She finally was a real teacher.

A young woman, a wife, and a new mother at the same time, she began her teaching in a small rural school in the town of Bratskoye, Crimea. The job was more than a profession; it became a significant part of her life, bringing sadness and happiness, joyous and upsetting moments, rewards and failures—everything a favorite job can bring. For over twenty years, she met her students by the classroom door, sharing life experiences and knowledge, love and care, and exploring the secrets of the universe, escaping the classroom walls with her students.

One day she realized that she wanted to grow up and be a better teacher, so she can help the future and beginning teachers become better teachers too; she just needed to learn more first. That girl has undertaken yet another challenging expedition; she is writing this paper.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

After completing her second and in the middle of her third field experience cycle, Amy (all names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms) generously shared,

I think that my first two experiences were really valuable. I kind of feel now, during this last one that I just want to be teaching. I’d rather be doing my student teaching. I am kind of over doing the field experiences, but every day that I actually go, I am so glad I came because I’ve learned so much! I think the field experiences are as valuable as you want them to be. And for me, again, I had great teachers who really shepherded me into their classrooms. So for me, they have been pretty valuable. To me, the field experiences are as good as the teachers I was assigned to.

Amy’s reflective comments convey the value she places on field experiences and that her field placements were beneficial preparation. Amy’s peer, Casey, then joined the conversation, sharing a very different perspective of field experiences:

Speaking about the teachers, my teacher kind of ignored me; I felt as a useless piece of furniture sitting in the back of the room while the boredom set in, and she drilled the students on test-taking. So my field experience was mostly waste of time, but I kind of enjoyed my college classes that went along with field observations.

Casey wanted to be engaged; but her primary field experiences were as a student, not as a teacher. Danielle jumped in at that moment, revealing yet another side of the field experience cycle, “When my teacher told me I was going to teach a lesson, I was so excited… She insisted though on following her methods of teaching and using her exact lesson plans leaving me no room for any creativity.”

That conversation happened about two years ago when I was conducting a case study for one of my graduate research classes. It made me think about pre-service teachers’ field experiences and what could be done to improve the quality of those experiences. Why did Amy, Casey, and Danielle have such different experiences in similar field settings undergoing the same teacher preparation program? All three pre-service teachers, enrolled in a teacher preparation program for English majors, mainly attribute their different experiences to the style and method
of host teachers to whom these pre-service teachers were assigned for the duration of field experiences at the school of placement. The host teachers play one of the most significant roles when a pre-service teacher steps into the classroom for the first time, but they are not the only ones to determine the pre-service teachers’ perceptions throughout field experiences. As Amy emphasizes in the introductory vignette, personal attitude and expectations are an important aspect of a field experience’s success. An initiative to teach a lesson might turn out to be a great experience, even if a few things “go wrong.” Another answer to the question may lie in the fact that future teachers often report dissonance, even discord between what they learned in their college courses and what they see in the real world of a public classroom (Clift & Brady, 2005, Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Although English majors enter their field experiences accompanied by required pedagogical courses on methods and content of English Language Arts (ELA) teaching (See Appendix B), they still experience challenges with connecting the theory of teaching to the practice of teaching.

For many pre-service teachers, the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher is often confusing. While there are broadly stated expectations of pre-service teachers during their field experiences (Appendix A), some aspects of the field experiences have to be more specific, and the others require negotiation between a pre-service teacher and his or her host teacher at the school of placement. Frequently pre-service teachers are either hesitant or not in the position to negotiate their participation in the field experiences. In this case, the college supervisor, who is directly responsible for field experiences, and the field placement office may have either to guide pre-service teachers through negotiations or initially confer the conditions and expectations for field experiences with hosting teachers and school administration. All the factors mentioned above have an impact on pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the field
experiences, their value, understanding teaching and its challenges, and personal and professional growth through these experiences.

In the following sections, I will establish my history, introduce the teacher preparation program at one of the large southern universities under investigation, set up the goals, share my theoretical beliefs guiding this research study, and present the operational definitions for this dissertation.

From Teaching to Researching: Sharing My Story

After twenty-two years of public teaching in the secondary English classroom, I decided to enter the graduate program pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with specialization in English Education. As I often jokingly mentioned in conversations with professors or fellow-students, “I just wanted to grow up.” What I meant by “growing up” was the desire to learn how to become a better teacher myself and how to help the beginning teachers smoothly transition from being students to becoming teachers.

My short story as an English teacher begins years earlier than the writing of this dissertation. After graduating high school in 1984 with a perfect GPA, I was admitted to Zaporizhya State University, which had one of the best Departments of Roman and German Philology at that time in Ukraine. My teacher training lasted for five years. The first three years were officially called “incomplete higher education,” which was what is commonly understood in the U.S. as “undergraduate” or Bachelor’s Degree, and the following two years brought me to “a specialist with a higher education” degree, which is most frequently understood universally as a Master’s Degree. While in cohort, we had four groups of approximately 120 students, half of them majoring in English as a Foreign Language, and the other half who chose French as their major. During the first three years, after each spring semester we had a field
practice, but it was not in the content area, just in the field of education. For example, one summer I worked as a teacher, or more precisely, a babysitter for a summer camp where I, along with my college mate, had 38 six- and seven-year-old children under our responsibility for 26 days. We played, taught them dancing, singing, and participated with them in various camp activities. Yes, I could apply some learned pedagogical strategies working with those children, but not anything from the content knowledge, and they definitely did not have to pass any tests.

My real classroom experience first occurred during the fourth year in college, i.e., in graduate school. We had a one-month practicum in February, called pedagogical practice, away from college coursework. During this period, I was supposed to observe the English classes at the school where I was assigned for at least four hours a day, keep a daily observation log, and teach about a dozen lessons with or without the assistance from my host teacher. At least two lessons had to be observed: one of them in the presence of my teacher and school principal, and the other included my college supervisor and one of my English professors, in addition to the first two observers. I also had the responsibility to organize and implement one extracurricular event at school and submit a report to the college supervisor about the practicum along with evaluations from my host teacher and school administration. I had to learn how to plan lessons with up to 30 seconds of time management accuracy, from the beginning phrases, “Good morning! I am glad to see you!” till the last ones “The lesson is over. I will see you tomorrow.” For the first time in my life, I was in charge of a classroom and about 30 students. I had to manage behavior, pace lessons, and keep in compliance with curriculum, scope, and sequence of instruction. It was a valuable experience for me because it just dropped me into the school environment where I had to deal with lessons, planning, negotiating my position with established teachers, students, and administration. Another value of the experience was in the feedback I
received after my practicum. Each of the lessons I taught was discussed with me in detail with all three observers. My college supervisor provided some additional feedback at the end of the practicum about my entire field experience and the lesson he observed. I received positive comments and was pointed to lesson elements and strategies I had to improve.

The second round of field practice was scheduled during the fifth concluding year in the program and was supposed to last for two and a half months. There was no coursework at that time; it was a period of complete immersion into the classroom, teaching, and extracurricular activities. That is close to what U.S. universities commonly term “student teaching.” A lot of assignments for teacher candidates during the second practicum were similar to the first experience, but this experience was longer and deeper in scope, including a quarterly planning (about nine weeks) and about a month of teaching the same group of secondary school students. In addition, just like actual teachers, we were assigned a homeroom group of students and were responsible for all class and school-wide events in which our assigned group had to participate, which ranged from meetings of group’s newspaper editors to participating in the school competitions in sports, Science Olympics, or talent show “A School’s Star.”

To my luck or not, I did not undergo that second practicum period because one day a principal from one of the small rural schools dropped by the department and asked for a student who could replace his English teacher till the end of the school year. The current teacher had to retire due to age and health issues. This is how my teaching career began. Minus the benefit of a scaffolded second field experience practicum, young and inexperienced, at the age of 20, I first walked into the classroom as a teacher, no longer a student, and faced my own students. My youngest students were nine- and ten-year-old fourth-graders beginning middle school, and the oldest were seventeen- and eighteen-year-old tenth-graders – the seniors. I literally learned
teaching “by doing” (Dewey, 1938/1963), and at that moment, I felt how my college courses were often disconnected from real teaching practice. I truly believe I received a great education in content, pedagogy, methods, and learning theory. Yes, I knew the content of the subject and all the rest as separate entities, but it was not enough for being successful in the classroom—I had no idea about teaching. My methods courses seemed to be too theorized, or maybe I just missed the part of practical application? Maybe I just did not have enough field experiences before teaching (Kingsley, 2007; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Moore, 2003)?

I began teaching by relying on what Lortie (1975) calls “apprenticeship of observation.” I was often thinking about my teachers in secondary school and how they would act or react in a certain classroom situation. In his seminal book Schoolteacher (1975), Lortie coined the term, “apprenticeship of observation,” and defined the concept as teaching by imitation, not by making individual decisions. He also cautioned that this approach could be helpful or hindering for beginning teachers. When Alsup (2006) conducted her study of beginning teachers, her findings revealed that the participants, those who depended on “apprenticeship of observation,” demonstrated delay in professional identity development and “were less open to experiences of cognitive and ideological dissonance, intellectual doubt, or ideological identity” (p. 190). I believe this was not my case because when I relied on the previous experiences of my teachers during my first months in the profession, in essence, I “borrowed” what I thought to be “time-tested best practices.” If I had a dilemma with presenting new material, I would mentally seek advice of my own English teacher because, in my memory, she was always clear, accessible, and engaging at the same time. When I encountered a discipline problem, I would turn to my Math and homeroom teacher, who had demonstrated great skills in class management; and if during the discussion of literature my students and I came across some sensitive issue, I would “consult”
my Russian literature teacher, who had displayed a special gift for dealing with delicate situations. Learning about my students and better understanding the context, I also developed my own skills and made my own decisions. So for me, “apprenticeship of observation” became a foundational starting point from where I could grow as a professional.

As a young teacher, I was fortunate not to worry too much about classroom management. The discipline system was strong throughout the school, and the administration was always supportive; moreover, I could always count on the parents’ support. My struggles were with the lack of teaching resources, even textbooks. The twice-a-year professional development conferences became something I looked forward to attending because this was a place for teachers to share their ideas and teaching strategies, activities, and if we were lucky, obtain some copies of handouts.

Because all that happened many years ago, I was younger, more optimistic, and did not know any other way to learn except for trial and error and constant research, and as a result, I never blamed my education or college professors for my struggles but relied on my own innovation and resourcefulness. As I wrote in one of my journals at that time, they could not possibly teach me everything, but they taught me to think, and they taught me how and where to search for answers.

As years passed, I became more experienced, built up my own resource bank, and felt comfortable teaching in any secondary classroom context or setting. After moving to the U.S., my first year in public middle school was not more complicated in terms of teaching or class management as it was in the Ukraine. My biggest challenge was cultural adjustment – learning who my students were and their “ways with words” (Heath, 1983), and my lack of historical background.
It is only here, in the United States, during my first year as a doctoral student that I learned about the field experiences pre-service teachers undergo during their formal teacher training program. After several conversations with my academic advisor about the topic, I agreed to examine the field experiences more closely and read some literature. The more I read, the more interested and invested I became in the topic. And subsequently, more questions formed that needed to be answered. By that time, I also knew how great the turnover of the faculty is in an average public school in this country, especially in urban environments among beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gordon, 1991). The question kept haunting me: Why after such a focused teacher preparation program, including three consecutive field experiences and student teaching, do young teachers leave the field within the first three years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010)? That made me think about the quality and value of field experiences, their impact on the pre-service teachers, and how these pre-service teachers perceive their early field experiences. Researching the literature, which I present and discuss in more detail in the second chapter, I have also noticed that there is some abundant research related to the issues of student teaching and ushering novice teachers into the teaching profession (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Wang & Odell, 2002) and formal programs of teacher induction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) with additional attention being placed on professional development as an element of induction (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). What was lacking from this picture is a body of research specifically focused on early field experiences that build a foundational basis for student teaching and first years of teaching. It is not that researchers and educators completely ignored the issue; they often explored, examined, and analyzed all clinical experiences, extending their research into the first years of teaching (Alsup, 2006; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Britzman, 2003; Clift
and Brady, 2005; Larson, 2006; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). So, it is difficult to extract reasons from the findings that are clearly related to the early field experiences. What can teacher preparation programs do better to introduce pre-service teachers to the field less painfully and more effectively before huge investments are made to student teaching and induction programs? Should we learn what these pre-service teachers think and feel about their field experiences? How can I, as an educator, identify their struggles and challenges and help facing them? My experiences as an educator, my graduate studies, and the many questions I raise as a result is how I came to identify the research topic for my dissertation study.

I return to the question of situating myself as a researcher in Chapter Three where I discuss the methodology of this study. For now, I would like to present the demands and pressures that are challenging the newcomers to the teaching profession.

**What Are the Pressures during Teacher Training?**

In the U.S., for over three decades educational reform has been dominating in educational and policy-making circles. Teacher education reformers have called for stronger associations between university programs and schools in order to help pre-service teachers achieve a deeper understanding of the theoretical bases of teaching and their practical applications (Freeman, 1993). Many of these groups, including the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996), have advocated the extension of teacher preparation programs beyond the traditional four-year undergraduate degree. Several years later, President George W. Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* law (2002) placed a strong emphasis on school accountability and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to be taught by a highly qualified teacher (See http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.html).
More recently, President Barack Obama’s *Reform and Invest in K-12 Education* (2009) platform resulted in the *Race to the Top* (2009) initiative placing a strong emphasis on teacher quality through evaluations that utilize student achievement data as one of its criteria (See http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education). The demands on teachers and their professional training are constantly increasing. Teachers are required not only “to be able to keep order and provide useful information to students but also to be increasingly effective in enabling a diverse group of students to learn ever more complex material” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 1). Furthermore, the National Council for the Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) has established a framework of standards to promote best practice in the area of teacher preparation (NCATE, 2010). Finally, recently adopted by most of the states (45 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity, as of this writing), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS Initiative, 2010) coupled with high stakes testing demands (Johnson & Johnson, 2006) add to the pressures experienced by teachers, from the “seasoned” ones to the ones who are just preparing to join the profession. Adding to these abovementioned reforms, the recent initiatives of the (blind) state department of education, fueled by government politics about teacher evaluations and accountability based on students’ achievement intensify the scrutiny and pressure on teachers’ shoulders that seem almost insurmountable and lead to an increase in the attrition rates, especially among the beginning teachers.


In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. (p.3)
Fifteen years past the publication of Palmer’s book, the situation in education has not changed much. It seems that teachers are the ones who are always rushing to catch up with the changes and demands dictated by time and political decisions. While change can be a great, positive motivator and might stimulate progress, it does not have to be on the polar ends of a continuum. In other words, for many teachers who are new to the profession, the situation in education in the U.S. can hardly be changed for the better if we dash from one extreme to another. As of today, teachers feel the elevated demands more and more persistently while receiving less support from school, district, and state administration and departments of education (Alsup, 2006).

Research suggests that over 50% of the new teachers in low-income schools will leave the profession in their first five years of teaching (Babinski, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gordon, 1991). To justify the situation, teacher education programs are accused of graduating candidates that fall into the category of failing teachers or teachers who flee the profession when their career is only beginning (Haberman, 2005). As a result of this criticism, most teacher education programs have increased clinical experiences, offered guarantees and warranties that their new teachers are prepared to meet the needs of diverse students when they graduate, and established more rigorous admission processes to the teacher education program (Haberman, 2005; Weiner, 2000; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

**Statement of the Problem**

One of the most important aspects of initial teacher preparation programs is the field experiences in which pre-service teachers participate as they progress towards becoming in-service teachers. The primary goal of field experiences is to extend and connect the concepts, skills, and dispositions acquired in a student’s university classroom portion of their program of study providing the opportunities for the pre-service teachers to observe and practice in the field.
In a review of research published in *The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*, Clift and Brady (2005) concluded that it is difficult to deduct from the research what impact a specific field experience may have on pre-service teachers, and the impact may be different from what instructors or supervisors wish it to be. For example, Aiken and Day (1999) found that pre-service teachers may interpret field experiences as an off-campus activity, not as a type of on-the-job training; they may not be ready cognitively to benefit from the experiences; and they may find the experiences misleading, as fieldwork does not allow the opportunity to experience all aspects of teaching. Furthermore, pre-service teachers often focus on procedural tasks such as lesson planning and classroom management in field experiences rather than on instructional decision making, self-evaluation, and reflective thinking (Moore, 2003).

The report prepared for the Task Force on Field Experience, which was initiated by the Association of Teacher Educators and completed by McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996), informed that despite the fact that most research identified a positive impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers and their professional growth, “there does not exist enough data to determine that extending field experiences, whether at the early field experience or student teaching stage, will develop more effective, thoughtful teachers than those prepared in shorter field experience programs” (p.176). Further, McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx claimed that “there remains a great need for additional research in this area” (1996, p. 178) because what happens during the field experience might be more important than the length of the experience.

Teacher educators constantly struggle to connect knowledge gained by pre-service teachers in their college coursework to their experiences in the field (Blanchard, & Sulentic Dowell, 2010; Kingsley, 2007; Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012). Many teacher candidates
confess that they know the content of teaching, methods, and strategies, but have difficulties to use this knowledge in a specific classroom situation (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Moore, 2003). Schools of education are still determining what the “best practices” are in utilizing field experiences to maximize pre-service teacher learning (Sulentic Dowell, 2011, 2009, 2008).

This deficit in research studies creates a necessity to explore field experiences prior to student teaching more in depth. Therefore, to increase understanding of the impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers, this study specifically explores the English pre-service teachers’ perceptions of field experience events that affected their professional thinking and understanding of teaching.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

As it is seen from the statement of the problem and literature review, which is presented in detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation, there is a need to investigate early field experiences of pre-service teachers and make a clear distinction of these experiences and their value as the ones that form a foundational theoretical and practical basis of a successful English teacher in K-12 classroom. Thus, advancing the research in teacher preparation, filling in the existing gap surrounding early field experiences of the English majors, and understanding how these ELA pre-service teachers shape their perceptions of teaching are the main goals I intend to accomplish by this research project.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore select pre-service secondary English teachers’ early field experiences before student teaching. Using narrative inquiry as a method, the overarching question that guides this study is: How does an understanding of life experiences considering time, place, interaction, and context coupled with structured field experiences shape pre-service secondary English teachers’ perceptions of these experiences?
The following specific research questions lead this project:

1. What kinds of perceptions do pre-service teachers form about the value of their field experiences?
2. How do early field experiences shape pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching?
3. What concerns about teaching do pre-service teachers have as they undergo field experiences?
4. Do pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shift from the beginning to the end of their field experiences? If yes, how do they shift and what are some factors causing change?

**The Significance of the Study**

The importance of the study lies in the participants who are potentially future teachers and may be affected by the shortcomings of their teacher preparation programs and the high demands placed on teacher evaluation and accountability, and who leave the profession within the first several years of teaching. The research begins as an investigation where pre-service teachers become the voiced agents of their own learning. The novel and unique characteristics of the proposed study is in the data collection, research design, and narrative form of data representation.

As I discuss in Chapter Three, narrative inquiry (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Chase, 2005; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008) is the research method chosen for this study. The data for the analysis were collected through various instruments, including initial comments of the teacher candidates with retrospect on their first two field experience cycles, the researcher’s multiple field observations, the pre-service teachers’ observation logs while in the
field and the think pieces they wrote as a part of the methods course requirement, but most importantly, individual interviews that provided the participants with an opportunity to “tell their story.” The rich narrative data allowed for analysis and interpretations of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their field experiences providing meaningful insights into the issues of growth through these experiences.

It is my expectation that the study itself, its findings, and design in particular, will help future researchers to advance narrative inquiry research method as a way of understanding life experiences, including the experiences concerned with professional growth. It can be used as a model for further research, or become a pilot study for a larger project involving pre-service teachers from several flagship universities across the country. The study adds to the body of knowledge and research related to teacher preparation programs and leads to identifying more effective ways to prepare pre-service teachers in order to smooth their transitions into their classrooms.

The participants of the study articulated satisfaction with the interview process and were grateful for the opportunity to discuss their experiences with college mates in the same cohort and with a researcher. They emphasized that telling their stories of field experiences helped them understand teaching and their own position regarding educational reforms, policies, assessments, issues of accountability, relationships with host teachers, meeting needs of the diverse student population, and many other important components of a complex and multifaceted term “teaching.” Moreover, the research and interview process provided them with a chance to reflect on their experiences and make sense of how these experiences are serving them to ensure smooth transition to student teaching and the first year of teaching.
Methods and Theories: Understanding Life Experiences through Stories

Methodological Approach

The methodological approach used in this study is narrative inquiry. It attracted my attention from the early engagement with the topic. Talking to my major professor about my personal teaching experiences, I was telling him stories about the beginning of my teaching career, and he also shared some stories from his own teaching and educational experience. Through stories, we tried to make sense of what happened in our lives and how it affected our future. Thinking about pre-service teachers and their first introductions to the real classrooms during their field experiences, I wanted to hear their stories and gain insights into how those stories helped them understand future profession, its challenges, and their readiness to face those challenges.

As a method of research, narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience because teachers and educators tell stories that may be developed into narratives that help make sense of experiences and behaviors (Zellermayer, 1997). Along with prominent narrative researchers (Chase, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Andrews et al., 2008, and others), I believe that people understand their lives through experiences. Early field experiences that pre-service teachers have as part of their teacher preparation program is a form of experience, and narrative is one of the most appropriate approaches to represent and understand this complex experience. Thus, narrative inquiry allows me the exploration of teacher education including the field experience component and how it influences pre-service teachers’ practice.

More detailed justification of the method is presented in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Here, my intention was to outline a methodological background for the study and
point to the approach that provides me with tools to investigate the topic of the research. Next, I am turning to theories that help understand the world around me and phenomena happening in this world.

**Theoretical Foundations of the Research**

The theoretical foundations of this research are a combination of theories and concepts that help me explore and understand the problem under investigation. First and foremost is a narrative inquiry theory which allows getting insights and shedding light on lived experiences through narratives, i.e., stories of the study participants shared with a researcher. Narrative inquiry theory is rooted in Deweyan concepts of experience and continuity. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue serve as meaningful supplements to make meaning of experience and human development. Below, I introduce these theories. Narrative inquiry theory will be more detailed in Chapter Three to build a logical bridge from a narrative inquiry theory to a narrative inquiry methodological approach.

**Pragmatism and Its Philosophical Assumptions.** Every time I face a new situation in teaching, I mentally evaluate my previous experiences and look for the right strategy, activity, or approach in order to respond appropriately. I reflect on similar situations and try to remember what has been successful, and what has not brought the expected results. In other words, I am looking for the right tool, what can “work” in this particular situation and in this particular context. This approach to treat any new task is called practical, and people who choose it are pragmatists. Ever since I remember myself, I have always been a pragmatist, even when I had no idea what it was and how it came to be. That is why I chose pragmatism as an overarching theoretical framework to ground my narrative inquiry research project.
While the majority of the progressive philosophical theories were developed in Europe, pragmatism is the distinctive contribution of American thought to philosophy. Pragmatism is a method of philosophy developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), popularized by William James (1842-1910), and associated with three other major contributors, Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935), John Dewey (1859-1952), and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Born out of frustration with Cartesian dualism (Menand, 2001), it substitutes for the subject/object and realist/idealist divides an experimental conception of truth. For pragmatists, those things are true which are verified through transaction with nature; that is, through experience. The combination of humans’ actions and their reflections creates the experience, and knowledge is a product of such experience. Verification, in turn, is defined in terms of usefulness: a proposition may be said to be verified if it serves as a useful guide to future conduct. Thus, pragmatism aims to overcome the old philosophical puzzle of how we come to have knowledge about the world (Cherryholmes, 1999). Furthermore, pragmatists state that methods are the tools that help us achieve our goals, and it is important to choose the right tools for the right purposes.

The ontological premise of pragmatism lies in the fact that there is no absolute truth “out there.” Truth and reality are constructed based upon what is useful, practical, and what works in a given time, place, and context. What was true or reality some time ago may not be the same at present, so it is not true anymore. That is truth is contextual, related to action, and temporal. The world around us is always evolving, changing, and transforming (James, 1995; Menand, 2001).

Epistemological beliefs of pragmatists explain how they come to knowledge. For Dewey and his followers, reality and world are known through using many tools of research. These tools are practical and useful, that is why pragmatists are not tied up to a particular methodology: each and every time, they are looking for what fits the purpose best. Both quantitative and
qualitative approaches may be used, i.e., pragmatism allows for deductive (objective) and inductive (subjective) ways of inquiry, and in some cases both (mixed methods) prove to be useful. Knowing becomes a result of actions and consequences. All knowledge holds some degree of subjectivity because the knower cannot separate himself or herself from the world. There are multiple knowledges, and the hierarchy between different knowledges is eliminated. Different knowledges are simply a product of different ways in which people engage with the world.

All researchers bring values – personal beliefs about moral and ethical issues that become basis for their actions – to a study, but values are especially important for qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2012). This is the axiological assumption that characterizes the qualitative, and, in this case, narrative inquiry research agenda. That is why I have brought up my history and positioned myself in the introduction to the study and will situate myself as a researcher later on in this chapter. My goal is to report my values and biases as well as the information gathered from my participants and the field to construct and reflect both the researcher’s and participants’ views. The outcome of the research is a combined value that takes into account multiple viewpoints and approaches.

Methodological underpinnings of pragmatism allow researchers to collaborate using various inquiry approaches and serve to connect theory and practice. Qualitative methodology is characterized as inductive, evolving, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing data. As a narrative researcher, I am building “from the ground up” (Creswell, 2012). This approach allowed me to revise and refine my research questions throughout the research to reflect the emerging data. As a result, the research questions posited for this study have undergone several transformations before they were finalized and formulated.
Dewey’s Concept of Experience. Dewey’s concept of experience is essential to my understanding of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their field experiences. The view of experience that serves as the keystone of the present narrative analysis has its roots in Dewey’s (1933, 1938/1963) pragmatic philosophy. Experience is the vital term for Dewey. It is a combination of action and consequences/reactions. Through this combination, people learn from their experiences, reflecting back on a certain experience and then analyzing and evaluating its outcome. Thus for Dewey, people learn about life from their experiences. This concept helps me think about my past experiences and connect them to events in my present situations. It also allows me think about pre-service teachers, the participants in my study, and their ways of learning and experiencing, i.e., I can understand about my participants’ learning from their experiences and their perceptions of these experiences.

Dewey views experience both as personal and social. The personal and social are always present and interacting (Dewey, 1938/1963). People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but, in this context, they cannot be separated from other people. They are always in relationships and in social context. Each of my participants is an individual with his or her own life experiences. They are in constant relationships with their family, friends, and neighbors. Besides, while they are in their teacher preparation program, they are united in a cohort, a community of learners where they interact with one another, their college instructors, field experience coordinators, mentor teachers, and other people. They talk, exchange ideas, share experiences, and learn from one another and, as a result, they are immersed in an experience of action and continuity.

Furthermore, Dewey believes that education, experience, and life are inseparably intertwined and influence one another in significant ways. He calls it “the organic connection
between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 9). Although learning can result from any experience, whether it is a right (educative) or wrong (miseducative) kind of experience, Dewey cautions us to recognize both and turn them all into educative by asking questions attempting to evaluate and reflect on the value of these experiences. To distinguish a good experience from a bad one is critical for people as it lets them choose the ones they would like to have “the effect on the growth of further experience” (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 9). Because nothing is born in a vacuum, our life experiences are connected to some past experiences in certain ways. These sometimes invisible links between previous and future experiences bring us to the criterion of experience that Dewey calls *continuity*.

**Continuity as a Criterion of Experience.** Dewey (1938/1963) ascribes *continuity* to experience as a crucial criterion meaning that experiences grow from other, past experiences, and present experiences lead to further experiences. Therefore, wherever I may imagine myself on that continuum, my imagined “now” is always between some imagined past and imagined future. Each point of my present has its past experience and points to an experiential future. This idea of continuity helps me think about teacher preparation programs and how teacher candidates in these programs connect their own, past experiences as students with their future experiences as teachers, and their present, liminal spaces. Deweyan concept of experience’s continuity aids the narrative researchers “to move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3).

**Sociocultural Theory of Development.** In addition to pragmatism, I have always been drawn to Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory as it permits an understanding of how people, in this case pre-service teachers, develop as social human beings in a specific cultural context.
According to Vygotsky (1978), people learn and develop in certain socially and culturally shaped contexts. Consequently, how people become what they are depends on what they have experienced in the social contexts in which they have participated. The social contexts individuals encounter are defined by where they are at any particular point in time. As historical conditions are constantly changing, this also results in changed contexts and opportunities for learning and development. Taking into consideration sociocultural theory, I make an attempt to explore pre-service teachers’ campus social context, the ways they learn and interact within their cohort at the university, and their field experience context, the ways they learn from interactions and relations with school students, host teachers, and school administration at the site of their placement. How these two contexts intersect and how this intersection it influences the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their experiences is one of the approaches to study field experiences.

A number of researchers (Dysthe, 2001; Moen, Gudmundsdottir, & Flem, 2003; Wertsch, 1985) have increasingly promoted Bakhtin’s (1986) theories as a useful supplement to Vygotsky’s ideas on a developmental approach to the study of human beings. In particular, they focus on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue. Bakhtin (1986) firmly believed that all human action is dialogic in nature. In its widest sense, even existence itself might be considered to be dialogic. Not only do we conduct dialogues with the surrounding world when we, for example, interact with other people, we also conduct dialogues with ourselves in our consciousness. The dialogue concept means that none of the things we say or do, whether we speak, listen, write, read, or think, occur in a vacuum. For me, as a narrative researcher, this concept of dialogic interaction is particularly important since I have to develop relationships, negotiate access, and communicate with my participants, listen, record, analyze, and interpret their narratives.
When using the ideas of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bakhtin as a theoretical framework, the challenge is to explore and understand how human actions are related to the social context in which they occur and to consider how and where they occur throughout a continuum. The task for the analysis is therefore to avoid the downsides of individualistic and societal reductionism (Moen, 2006, p. 4), and to take advantage of the possibilities created by the narrative approach and explore the studied phenomenon in all its richness and complexity.

**Context of the Research**

The context of research for this study is determined by the participants who are enrolled in the Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) at the State University. Thus context of the research includes TPP itself and the sites where the participants are engaged in preparation for teaching. Among these sites the main ones are on the university campus, specifically the classrooms, which the English majors attend to complete the required coursework, and the field sites – the schools where these English majors are placed for the duration of the field experience practicums. Below, I introduce the TPP at the university and field experiences as a major component of the preparation program.

**State University’s Teacher Preparation Program for English Majors**

The Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) at the large, research one, flagship institution in the southern tier of the U.S., called State University (SU) for the purposes of this study, is an innovative program for teacher candidates who major in their disciplinary area (English Language Arts) with a concentration in secondary education. As the program developers and coordinators claim, this program provides in-depth training in both pedagogy and subject content, follows current trends in teacher education, and prepares highly qualified candidates for teaching positions after graduation (State University Handbook, 2007, p. 3).
The secondary education concentration has been designed to ground pre-service teachers in the three central elements. These include inquiring pedagogy, effective professionalism, and reflective practice:

- Inquiring pedagogy means preparing educators who draw from knowledge content, use various strategies to meet the needs of all learners, respect the needs of diverse learners, and demonstrates openness to change, creativity, and innovation.

- Effective professionals collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and community. They utilize appropriate technology and constantly add new strategies, tools, and multimedia resources to their professional arsenal. Effective teachers believe that all students can learn, create democratic communities, and view themselves as learners (State University Handbook, 2007).

- Like many teacher education programs, TPP has the goal of preparing reflective teachers and promotes field experiences which create opportunities for analysis of and reflection on teaching (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982). Reflective practitioners draw on the past to understand the present and continuously interconnect research and practice, content and pedagogy, and action and reflection (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Lee, 2005; Posner, 1996).

The SU Handbook (2007) emphasizes that at the core of the program is the pairing of education and content courses with carefully selected field experiences centered on observing, participating, and teaching while being mentored by a middle or high school teacher (p. 4). These courses are designed to facilitate field experiences and prepare pre-service teachers for student teaching. The education and content courses accompanying field experiences are presented in Appendix B.
All SU undergraduate students who seek careers in secondary school education may choose a major in a primary content area (Biological Sciences, Chemistry, English, French, History/Social Studies, Mathematics, Physics, French, or Spanish) with a concentration in secondary education. Students must have a 2.5 GPA to be eligible for the program. Additionally, students must maintain a 2.5 GPA in all of their LSU courses and must earn a "C" or higher in the courses required of the concentration. In this program, students choose a wide variety of courses to complete their content major requirements and, in addition, take a series of Curriculum and Instruction (Education) courses that are paired with content-specific pedagogy courses (Appendix B).

Field Experiences and Expectations for TPP Candidates

Field experiences are a critical component of the TPP and are provided with the cooperation of area public schools. The secondary English majors are required to complete field experiences in local public schools. These practicums are meant to provide the time and place for pre-service teachers to experience a variety of classroom settings. As recommended by the state, all teacher candidates have to complete 120 hours of field experience prior to student teaching. Participants in this program are assigned to obtain a minimum of 40 hours of field experience per semester for the three semesters prior to student teaching. At the end of each semester, students turn in the log of hours spent in the field approved by the host teacher or school supervisor and submitted to the program coordinator (Appendix C).

As previously mentioned, there are certain expectations from pre-service teachers that are stated in the SU Handbook (2007). These expectations include five broad categories to ensure that pre-service teachers:

- have strong content knowledge;
- understand professionalism in the field environment;
- are able to communicate effectively with their host teacher;
- develop attention to details through observations;
- reflect daily on their observation and/or participation in the classroom (Appendix A).

It is necessary to note that there are no distinct expectations concerning the range of activities in which pre-service teachers are to be involved during the field practicums. Moreover, amount of observation, participation, and teaching is not specified as well.

**Schools of Placement**

According to the TPP requirements, the English majors are assigned to three different schools throughout their teacher training. Pre-service teachers are placed in middle or high school classrooms in K-12 area schools. Each teacher candidate is assigned either to a single classroom teacher or to a team of teachers at the same school. Teacher candidates do not stay in the same school during all three semesters of field experiences; instead, they are assigned to a different school each semester to provide a diverse set of field experiences, ideally in different school and district configurations.

During their final, third field experience practicum, the participants of the study, who were interviewed, were placed in public high schools of the local parish school system. An average high school in the parish has an enrollment of students ranging from 900 to 1400. These schools represent the population of the city with about 85-92 % of minority enrollment and receive Title I funding because of the low income of the students’ families. Each of the schools has an academic tracking system, and students are placed in classes according to their performance scores: regular, great scholars, gifted, honors, and advanced placement (AP) classes. For the purpose of this research, I provide the detailed description of the schools where
the participants of the study were placed during their final field experiences in Chapter Three to create a vivid picture of participants and their settings during the field experiences.

Definitions of the Key Terms

A number of terms employed throughout this work are frequently used among educators and educational researchers. They add context and explain how these terms are used and function in this study. For the purpose of the study, I use the following operational definitions.

Clinical experiences: Clinical experiences are all practicum-based experiences pre-service teachers undergo during the teacher preparation including early field experiences and student teaching.

Host teacher: A host teacher is a teacher to whom a pre-service teacher is assigned for the duration of the field experience practicum. This teacher is from the school where a pre-service teacher has been placed. The term “host teacher” has not been previously used in educational research literature, but I would like to suggest it instead of two terms that have been widely used, but often confused or synonymized. These terms are “cooperating teacher” (Capraro, M., Capraro R., & Helfeldt, 2010; Grieco, 2011; Posner, 1985; Ramanathan & Wilkins-Canter, 2000; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) and “mentor teacher” (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Zeichner, 2010). Defining field experiences and addressing their requirements, NCATE (2010) does not use any of the terms and refers to teachers working with the pre-service teachers as “school-based faculty.” Because research literature does not have uniformed definitions and a clear distinction between “cooperating” and “mentor” teachers and to avoid confusion and ambiguity, I will use the term “host teacher” throughout this dissertation study, except for the review of research.
literature where the authors use one the above mentioned terms. The students’ Log Form for Field Experiences (Appendix C) uses a term “cooperating mentor,” which is for a purpose of this study is synonymous with “host teacher.”

Field experience: Field experience is an early experience in the public school classrooms the pre-service teachers have during their junior and senior years in Teacher Preparation Program before student teaching. The participants of this study have three consecutive field experience cycles during their teacher preparation program.

Field experience cycle: A field experience cycle is a period of time pre-service teachers spend in the field. The first field experience cycle begins in the fall semester of junior year; second field experience cycle is in the spring semester of junior year, and the third one is in the fall of the senior year. Each cycle is comprised of 40 hours of classroom observation and participation. Each field experience cycle takes place in a different location and with the assurance that teacher candidates experience both middle and high school settings.

Observation: Observation, as defined by England (1990), is “watching a teaching-learning situation” (p.12). Pre-service teachers’ observations have a mandatory reflection component in the form of field experience logs. English majors enrolled in English methods course are required to turn in their weekly field logs on the assigned date and time. The course instructor provides pre-service teachers with guidelines for writing field observation logs.

Participation: England (1990) defines participation as “any phase of a teacher duty except direct teaching” (p.15). Some examples of participation are: interacting with the middle or high school students before, during, and after class; answering students’ questions while they
are working independently or in small groups; assisting teacher to run an activity or grade students’ work, to prepare teaching materials, handouts.

Pre-service teachers: Pre-service teachers are undergraduate secondary English majors enrolled in a Teacher Preparation Program. They are the participants of this study, and, at the point of data collection, they are in their senior year in college.

School supervisor: A school supervisor is a school principal or assistant-principal, who allows a pre-service teacher access to the placement site and, at the same time, is a supervisor to a host teacher.

Student teaching: Student teaching is a culminating experience that occurs during the last semester of the pre-service teachers’ senior year in the Teacher Preparation Program after the three cycles of field experiences.

Students: Students are K-12 school student population.

Teaching: Teaching is defined as “assuming the responsibilities of instruction” (England, 1990, p.15), i.e. instructing or facilitating an activity, lesson, center, group, or individual assuming planning the lesson, managing the class, small group, or individual while instructing, and evaluating learning. Due to the nature of field experiences, pre-service teachers may not complete all of these elements of teaching (planning, instruction, management, and evaluation) within the taught lesson; this may depend on a host teacher and the amount of involvement this teacher permits to pre-service teachers in his or her classroom.

University supervisor: A university supervisor is a university professor who teaches one of the courses that accompany field experiences and is responsible for pre-service teachers’
progress throughout their field experiences. Pre-service teachers report their field hours and turn in field experience logs to a university supervisor.

These aforementioned terms are germane to the proposed study. Other terms are explained in subsequent chapters where they are first mentioned to ease the understanding of the term or concept within a specific context.

**Organization of Chapters**

The present dissertation consists of a Prologue, six chapters, and an Epilogue. The Prologue serves as a brief introduction to the dissertation. Chapter One provides the background and establishes my historical journey from becoming a teacher to transitioning into a researcher. This chapter also explores the pressures and demands on teacher preparation by societal, educational, and political entities. The main purpose of the chapter is to state the problem and set up the goals for the proposed research study. The chapter offers the information on methodology used in the research, explains theoretical beliefs of the researcher, and introduces the context of research.

Chapter Two is devoted to the literature review. As I researched the literature, I created a literature map that assisted me in understanding the past and present research in the field of teacher preparation and field experiences in particular. In this chapter, I examine how field experiences are defined in the literature and research and how they are separated or not from student teaching. Next, I focus on the expectations for the pre-service teachers during their field experiences and how this issue is reflected in the literature. Following the expectations for the pre-service teachers, I provide a brief overview of literature on teacher preparation. The subsequent section is centered around the impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers.
Concluding the literature review are the most researched topics in the field of teacher preparation, such as teacher identity construction and preparing a reflective/reflexive teacher.

Chapter Three is a detailed description of methodology for the present research study. Here I explain the theoretical framework guiding my study and introduce readers to pragmatism and one of its forefathers, John Dewey. Another theory I employ in my understanding of field experiences and teacher candidates perceptions is a sociocultural theory associated with Lev Vygotsky and supplemented by Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue. Further, this chapter explores the research design chosen for the dissertation study. This section introduces narrative inquiry as a way of understanding life experiences and the concept of time, place, interaction, and context, developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2002). After revising the purpose for this study, I describe the research design and procedures for collecting and analyzing data as well as approaches to the narrative analysis of participants’ stories. The chapter also provides the context of the research, outlining the general characterization of the research participants and settings. After situating myself as a researcher, I discuss the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations and possibilities of the present study.

In Chapter Four, I narrate the in-depth profiles of my participants. These profiles are a result of participants’ autobiographical essays that they have written per my request, their written think-pieces, field experience logs, and individual and focus group interviews, along with my observations in SU and their school placement environments. The chapter consists of four distinct narratives; each of them is devoted to one participant and his or her detailed story of field experiences and perceptions of these experiences.
Chapter Five brings all the participants and findings together in a discussion of the main themes evolved throughout the research study. This chapter also offers the answers to the research questions and discusses the findings.

Chapter Six is titled Conclusions and Implications. It briefly reviews the purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology. As the title suggests, it draws conclusions from the research project, situates findings in regards to previous research. Further, the chapter outlines the implications, and offers topics and questions to further the research on field experiences.

Finally, an Epilogue takes readers back to the beginning of this dissertation. It serves as a connection to the past lived experiences and hints to the future experiences.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH ON TEACHER PREPARATION AND FIELD EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature and research on teacher preparation and field experiences. I begin by explaining how field experiences are defined in the research literature and why there is a need to differentiate field experiences and student teaching for this study. Next, I present expectations for the pre-service teachers while they are in the field. The following section focuses on teacher preparation programs through the research in general. Here, I highlight some reviews of the previous research. I examine the existing research focused on the impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers’ preparation and the dominant research topics in the field. This chapter concludes with situating my study in the field, taking into consideration the gaps in literature.

Before I begin this exploration of the research and literature on field experiences, I must clarify that because of the lack of research specifically on pre-service English teacher candidates, I have used the literature concerning pre-service teachers in various subject-matter areas, i.e., elementary education, literacy, reading, mathematics, art, health, technology integration, music, foreign languages, and some others. I believe that no matter for which content area the candidates are trained, their field experiences are expected to prepare them to work in diverse classrooms, to develop professional and personal identities, as well as practical skills, methods, and pedagogical approaches, even before their student teaching.

Defining Field Experiences

The two major components of a teacher preparation program are coursework and clinical experiences, which ideally should create a balanced combination of theory and practice. College coursework is aimed to build a strong theoretical base for future teachers, including subject
content knowledge, leading methods, strategies, pedagogical theories and approaches, and such (Compton & Davis, 2010). Clinical experiences, in turn, should provide practical knowledge and building skills associated with the field: planning teaching activities, lessons, and units, implementing planning activities, applying literacy strategies in the classroom, managing class discussion, group work, and so on. Clinical experiences include field experience practicum for pre-service teachers and student teaching (Compton & Davis, 2010).

According to Posner (1993), field experience is “[t]he one indispensable part of any teacher preparation program” (p.3) with four common features for any given teaching situation: a teacher, a learner, a subject matter, and a context. Research literature defines field experiences as practices in the field, and often does not make a clear differentiation between the early field experiences and the student teaching practicum. Let me introduce some of the definitions developed by educational researchers.

A field experience is defined as a placement of pre-service teachers in actual classrooms in order to observe and practice the craft of teaching as stated by Grable, Hunt, & Kiekel (2009). Many educational researchers believe that traditional school field experiences are a key part and a necessary component of teacher preparation programs (Bricker & Widerstrom, 1996; Miller, Ostrosky et al., 2003; Rosenkoetter & Stayton, 1997; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005; Winton, McCollum, & Catlett, 2007). Generally speaking, field experiences are defined as “a variety of early and systematic P-12 classroom-based opportunities in which teacher candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, and/or conduct research” (Capraro, M., Capraro R., & Helfeldt, 2010). As it is evident, none of these definitions specifies the period, length, or other characteristics of field experiences that would divide them into field experiences and student teaching, unlike the definition I provided in the first chapter.
The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Standard 3 deals with the conceptual framework and target behaviors related to field experiences as part of the teacher preparation process (NCATE, 2010). NCATE clarifies the existence of field experience and clinical practice as integral parts of teacher preparation programs in the explanatory note to the standards:

Field experiences represent a variety of early and ongoing school-based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, participate in service learning projects, or conduct applied research. Clinical practice includes student teaching and internships that provide candidates with experiences that allow for full immersion in the learning community so that candidates are able to demonstrate proficiencies in the professional roles for which they are preparing. (NCATE, 2010)

However, the clarification provided in the definitions above is lost, combined, or becomes unclear in the Standards’ targeted expectations concerning: (1) collaboration of the college and school partners; (2) design, implementation, and evaluation of the field experiences; and (3) candidates’ demonstration of mastery of content areas and pedagogical and professional knowledge (NCATE, 2010).

It is imperative to differentiate field experiences from student teaching in order to understand the impact of these experiences and concerns of the pre-service teachers about teaching from their earliest exposition to the field. In addition to the expectations established by teacher preparation programs at universities, pre-service teachers also have their own expectations from the field experiences, thus there should be created a possibility for both sets of expectations to merge while there is still time to make changes to the structure and maximize the effectiveness of future teachers in the field. Failure to draw a line between student teaching and field experiences creates a gap in the research on teacher preparation and undercuts the importance of early field experiences.
Expectations for Pre-service Teachers during Field Experiences

The importance of field experiences is not disputed among educators and researchers (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). How field experiences are conducted and how many hours the pre-service teachers spend in the field varies greatly from teacher education program to teacher education program (NCATE, 2010). It is the narrow focus of most practicums and the lack of attention to school and community contexts that often cause students to be unprepared for the full scope of the teaching role (Zeichner, 1996). Although there is a clear tendency of increased research on field experiences in the last decade, there is less in secondary schools, and hardly any that is specifically in English Education. Discussions and debates about the best format in which to deliver these experiences as well as some peculiarly nuanced expectations set by certain teacher preparation programs continue to remain significant concerns among teacher educators and educational researchers (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996).

Some educational researchers believe that carefully constructed field experiences allow teachers to reinforce, apply and synthesize concepts they have learned in class (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). What is important about clinical and field experiences is that they allow pre-service teachers to learn about the practice while in practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Moreover, early field experiences have a significant impact on pre-service teachers, suggesting the need for carefully designed and authentic classroom experiences (Aiken & Day, 1999).

Over 17 years ago, Cruickshank (1996) pointed to a need for identifying outcomes for field experiences, determining the validity of experience as related to the outcome, defining the roles and relationships of all participants involved in those experiences. He also repeatedly stressed the importance of developing methods for preparing each group for their role, establishing the structure and the means for offering a variety of experiences, establishing the
assessment of each experience, and enhancing the experience through identifying and verifying new knowledge. In addition, Knowles and Cole (1996) argued that field experiences should be considered integrally connected and a symbiotic component of the teacher education program. These issues remain crucial for teacher preparation programs in this country today.

The focus of effective field experiences should be centered on collaborative interactions and productive communication between the “triad” of participants, the pre-service teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the college professor (NCATE, 2010; Grieco, 2011). Since pre-service teachers need the guidance of cooperating teachers, and the cooperating teacher has an influence on the pre-service teacher, it is important that effective field experiences figure out a way to train cooperating teachers in the field. It has been found that cooperating teachers who receive training in feedback techniques and communication skills have been found to provide more feedback to pre-service teachers (Capraro, M., Capraro R., & Helfeldt, 2010). Ramanathan & Wilkins-Canter (2000) write, at minimum, cooperating teachers should receive some training to help them understand the connection between the college’s expectations and the field experience.

Another component of successful field experience is brought up by Posner in the following formulaic expression: “Experience + Reflection = Growth” (Posner, 1993, p. 20). The two factors in this expression are mutually dependent on each other. The experience without reflection is not leading to the growth; reflection without experience is empty – there is nothing to reflect on. Therefore, emphasizing the importance of reflective practice, Posner (1993) writes “reflective thinking will allow you to act in deliberate and intentional ways, devise new ways of teaching rather than being a slave to tradition, and interpret new experiences from a fresh perspective” (p. 21). Reflective thinking circles back to Dewey (1938/1963) who posited that people do not actually learn from experience as much as they learn from reflecting on that
experience. Since then, reflective practice has become a mandatory component in the majority of teacher preparation programs.

A pressing concern for educators working in teacher preparation programs is to prepare teachers who can approach teaching within multiple competing traditions in education where one tradition may be focused on skills, another may be centered on knowledge of a cultural heritage, and yet another may be dedicated to the personal growth of students (Applebee, 1974). Those are not the only conflicting traditions within education: some favor a new criticism approach, others are teacher-text-centered, and still others trail one of the following: “transmission (conveying knowledge from teachers and texts to students), constructivist (enabling learners to construct their own knowledge), liberatory (focusing on equality and social justice), post-liberatory (using inquiry methods to critique power relationships) traditions” (Bickmore, Smagorinsky, Ladd, & O’Donnell-Allen, 2005). The conflicting nature of various approaches creates pressures for the beginners in the field; as a result, pre-service teachers have to build a strong foundation in a theory of pedagogy. This has to be done before pre-service teachers are first introduced to the field. It becomes a matter of importance “to illuminate these issues for teacher educators who aim to provide their students with a consistent set of principles and practices to guide their teaching in the often-contradictory settings of public schools” (Bickmore et al., 2005, p. 26).

The main document outlining the expectations for pre-service teachers’ field experiences is NCATE’s Unit Standards, effective since 2008 (NCATE, 2010). Standards expect that teacher candidates in the field will “develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn” (NCATE, 2010).
Outlined above are only a few major components of field experiences that researchers suggest to take into consideration. As one may notice, teacher preparation programs, federal, state, and even local organizations possess an exact knowledge of what they want from the teacher candidates and formulate their expectations for field experiences. But the voice of pre-service teachers is absent in the documents, literature, and research. Recognizing this deficit, the present research investigates what the pre-service teachers themselves expect from their field experiences. These expectations are addressed in Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation.

**Research on Teacher Preparation**

As of today, the amount of research on teacher education is enormous and difficult to categorize or thematize. However, the development of a sustained line of scholarship that examines the content, character, and impact of teacher education programs only began in the 1960s and gained momentum in the 1980s (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In fact, with the exception of a brief period of time when the federal government supported teacher preparation research in the 1970s, there has been very little federal or state funding for such research (Darling-Hammond, 2000). A related problem concerns the lack of sufficiently rich databases to support high-quality research on teacher preparation, at least with large quantitative driven samples (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

Studies related to pre-service teachers’ preparation have significantly increased in recent years. Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) note that research about pre-service teacher education represented less than one percent of total research in the reading community from 1970-2000. They issued a call for more research that focuses on studying literacy teacher education. In another review of research, Hoffman and Pearson (2000), argued for teaching teachers of reading vs. training them in order to best prepare them for the challenges of the next
millennium. A focus on teaching teachers naturally connects to the research on teacher preparation, and field experiences in particular, as it aims to assist educators in preparing future teachers and, at the same time, to help future teachers understand themselves and their upcoming professional commitment rather than equipping them with a predetermined toolbox set, including content knowledge, teaching strategies, and pedagogical techniques.

In 2000, the *Journal of Literacy Research* delivered a special edition on literacy teacher preparation that demonstrates increased attention of the literacy research community to pre-service teacher education. The issue includes articles focused on teacher identity and diversity of the student population affirming the notion that “becoming a teacher involves more than learning theory, methods, and skills” (Barr, Watts-Taffe, Yokota, Ventura, & Caputi, 2000, p. 467).

The most widely spread research in the sphere of preparing future teachers stemmed from The National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction, a group organized by the International Reading Association (IRA, 2003). This commission published a report titled *Prepared to Make a Difference* (IRA, 2003) that summarizes the research that examined eight Sites of Excellence in Reading Teacher Education (SERTE). The Commission’s work was followed by a review of literature (Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Block, Anders, & Flood, 2008) by IRA’s Teacher Education Task Force (TETF). The same group of researchers produced another important document, *Teaching Reading Well* (IRA, 2007), which is similar to *Prepared to Make a Difference* in identifying essential features for reading teacher preparation programs.

The *Teaching Reading Well* (IRA, 2007) report relied on the framework established in the *Prepared to Make a Difference* document and synthesized other previous educational research from Risko, Roskos, and Vukelich (2002). That document, *Teaching Reading Well*, led
to the identification of “six essential features for creating and sustaining preparation programs that produce teachers who teach reading well” (IRA, 2007, p. 1). The six critical features were: (a) content; (b) faculty and teaching; (c) apprenticeships, field experiences and practica (i.e., student teaching); (d) diversity; (e) candidate and program assessment; and (f) governance, resources, and vision. A combination of those features in the SERTE programs helped successfully educate reading teachers. Particular significance was attributed to apprenticeships, field experiences, and practica that are the essential features for educating reading teachers.

*Teaching Reading Well* (IRA, 2007) validated the importance of studying pre-service teachers while in the field and the importance of field experiences on the education of pre-service teachers.

Several research undertakings in the field of reading teacher preparation emerged from the work of The National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction (e.g., Hoffman & Roller, 2001; Hoffman et al., 2005; Maloch et al., 2003; Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2003). Many of the studies focused on the transition from being a pre-service teacher into an actual teacher, considering the first years of teaching. The work of the Commission served to bolster research in the area of literacy teacher preparation by examining quality teacher education programs and publishing the results so that other teacher education programs could learn from successful programs.

The aforementioned comprehensive review of literature by Risko et al. (2008) meta-analyzed a set of 82 studies related to teacher education. In the findings, Risko et al. grouped the studies and provides findings and commentary in four separate subsections: (a) prospective teachers’ beliefs; (b) knowledge and reflection; (c) pedagogy; and (d) research on teacher education programs. Several of the findings in this review attracted my interest. Initially, I
expected the first subcategory to summarize the valuable findings concerning prospective teachers’ beliefs. Despite my expectations, this part mainly presented the beliefs of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge of content and beliefs about their future students’ learning abilities. Although these were critical beliefs for an emerging teacher, at the moment, they are not a part of the focus of my research agenda on field experiences. I am more interested in the issue of how pre-service teachers come to understand teaching and its challenges and how their understanding changes throughout the field experiences. Though this research partially includes my interests, Risko et al.’s study does not completely satisfy this research project.

However, there are definitely important and necessary conclusions in Risko et al.’s (2008) research review. First, their findings in the knowledge/reflection subsection focusing on knowledge indicate that researchers generally have a narrow view of knowledge and assess what teachers know based on “a one-time testing of topical knowledge” (Risko et al., 2008, p. 264). This test is developed on the material that the researchers think to be important to know about teaching reading. The researchers do not typically include other measures that would give a broader picture of teacher knowledge, such as observations or interviews. Furthermore, most studies do not report validity and reliability of the researcher-developed instruments and the studies generally outline the areas of teacher knowledge deficit. Findings specify that pre-service teachers struggle with: (a) defining literary terms and performing comprehension tasks related to short stories and poems; (b) defining metalinguistic terminology; (c) understanding family-school partnerships for supporting literacy development; and (d) telling stories. Pointing out these deficits does little to advance how to work with these pre-service teachers while they are still taking college courses and participating in early field experiences. Second, findings in the knowledge/reflection subsection focusing on reflection indicate the need for explicit
guidance and support in order to deepen reflection. Third, research in the pedagogy subsection differs from research in the knowledge section because researchers attend to the complex factors that may influence knowledge development. This finding is critical due to the complex factors contributing to the development of identity, as knowledge is one of the vital components of teacher identity. A large body of research mentions that the missing paradigm in the study of teacher education is the investigation of teachers’ understanding and uses of content knowledge (Risko et al., 2008).

Over the past two decades, a number of scholars have suggested that what is missing now is research that connects teacher knowledge and beliefs of pupil’s learning to their professional and identity development as teachers. Risko et al. (2008) concluded that while much has been learned about reading teacher education, the research agenda must be deepened by not only studying pre-service teachers’ construction of knowledge, but also by including the complex environments associated with teacher education.

Teaching in today’s schools, especially in urban environments, is complex work. “For teacher education, this is perhaps the best of times and the worst of times,” accentuates Darling-Hammond (2010). Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) legislation under George W. Bush’s administration, teacher quality has been under scrutiny. With President Obama’s administration, the commitment to the continuous improvement of teacher quality remains at the forefront of redesigning and improving education. The Obama administration has proposed a six-billion-dollar annual investment in improving public education; focus areas include improved teacher education, performance based assessments for teachers, mentoring for new teachers, and professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In addition, part of the Federal Stimulus package of 2009 focuses on developing teacher quality through residency
programs and strengthened clinical experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As I have previously mentioned, the educational system in general, including teacher education, is facing a new reality – the Common Core State Standards – a shift to a national curriculum, which further emphasizes teachers’ responsibility and increased accountability for student achievement. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) following the spirit and need for true change, formulates the 2013’s NCTE Convention as *Re(Inventing) the Future of English* and includes the topics of teacher preparation and its directions in the future. Ernest Morrell, the current NCTE President, inviting teacher educators to submit proposals for the 2013 Convention proposals, proclaims: “Our generation of English teachers, as others before us, must reevaluate what we do, how we do it, and why it is all still necessary” (Morrell, 2013), underlining that this equally concerns our teacher preparation programs.

**Research on Field Experiences**

While the field experience research base is not extensive, the amount available calls for teacher preparation programs to become more systematically structured and have more intensive experiences that involve reflection and inquiry (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010). The existing research base regarding field experience appears to be somewhat equivocal as the learning that occurs during field experiences is highly contextualized and uneven (Ritter, Powell, & Hawley, 2007; Tellez, 2008). Empirical data on the effects of differing types of field experiences has been characterized as sparse and inconclusive (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). A synthesis of research conducted by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) establishes that “experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences as a powerful – sometimes the single most powerful – component of teacher preparation” (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). The issue remains that schools of
education have still been unable to agree on the ‘best practice’ in utilizing field experiences to maximize pre-service teacher learning. Teacher educators and pre-service teachers are constantly struggling to link knowledge gained by these pre-service teachers in their coursework to their experiences in the classroom (Grieco, 2011; Kingsley, 2007; Moore 2003).

Recent research on pre-service teacher education has shifted its focus. Historically, the research related to field experiences focused on discrete, observable, and measurable teaching behaviors that can impact student achievement or attitudes (Clift & Brady, 2005). More recent research related to the field experience component of pre-service teacher education programs investigates the interactions among thought, intention, belief, behavior, and content knowledge of pre-service teachers (Clift & Brady, 2005). Teacher educators examine pre-service teachers’ field experiences for more effective ways to develop a reciprocal relationship between learning theory and teaching practice (Moore, 2003).

The literature confirms that pre-service teachers learn a number of instructional methods for teaching, but they do not recognize the specific situations in which to use these methods (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Linda Darling-Hammond (2009) writes, “Often, the clinical side of teacher education has been fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to university work (p. 11). To align what pre-service teachers are taught through teacher preparation coursework with how they behave in the field and to make university instruction worthwhile, there must be collaboration among pre-service teachers, university instructors, and mentor teachers (Harlin, 1999; Kingsley, 2007; Moore 2003).

Effectively constructed field experiences should specify clear expectations and guarantee consistent communication between the college faculty and the host teacher. In an effort to
address these deficiencies in many field experiences, colleges and universities examine the ways of bridging this gap. Unfortunately, the research on the effectiveness of field experiences is mixed (Kragler & Nierenberg, 1998). The number one reason that researchers quote as blame for their ineffectiveness is the lack of connectedness between course work and field placements (Kragler & Nierenberg, 1998). One of the latest research projects by a recently emerged scholar, Anthony Grieco (2011), aims to explore the links between all those who are involved in a field experience practicum – college professors and supervisors, pre-service teachers, and the teachers at the schools of placement. The results of his research show that every time, when these main triads work closely together, the field experience of the pre-service teacher is richer, more effective, and highly appreciated from the participants’ point of view. On the contrary, when one of the links fails to connect, the pre-service teachers report field experiences as wasted time, boring, ineffective, and mundane (Grieco, 2011).

The most researched topics on field experiences include studies focusing on teacher identity development, preparing a reflective teacher, impact of field experiences, and pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching or student achievement. The following sections provide a review of the major studies on these topics.

Studies Focused on Teacher Identity

The literature related to pre-service teachers’ identity development is abundant (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Britzman, 2003; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Danielewicz, 2001; Gee, 2001; Larson, 2005; Marsh, 2001; Olsen, 2008a; Olsen, 2008b; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The identity of pre-service teachers in this literature is considered from a variety of angles.
Several reviews (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008) organize the information about the identity of teachers and pre-service teachers considering themes that are found in the research literature. For example, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) discuss the challenges of establishing a definition of identity due to the different disciplines and various issues that are contained within studying identity. They point out that identity explores issues such as self, emotion, story, context, reflection, agency, and teacher education responsibility and that this variety of concepts makes defining the construct of identity challenging. Identity is a wide concept that must be narrowed to more specific ideas in order to obtain rich descriptive findings to specific research questions.

In another review, Rodgers and Scott (2008) consider how the literature represented identity development through a constructive-developmental lens. They explain that researchers explore identity development as transpiring through a series of stages such as retreat, growth, stasis, and confirmation. The authors review four different historic models of teacher education programs to show that good teacher education programs share expectations that call on teachers to think about their own identity. Although the model programs may not use language containing the word “identity” specifically, they speak about goals such as being self-aware of personality, taking a critical look at the self, reflecting on educational experiences, etc. Teacher education programs have historically included concepts related to identity formation, although they might not specifically label them as such. Because of this history, the continued study of the role of identity and in particular more of the nuances of identity is important.

Although Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop’s (2004) review does not focus specifically on pre-service teacher identity like Rodgers & Scott’s (2008) review, I am including their research here because one of the categories focuses on teachers’ identity formation and examines studies
with pre-service teachers. Beijaard et al. (2004) review literature related to teachers’ professional identity and found four features that were essential for teachers’ professional identity. They emphasize that (a) professional identity is an ongoing process; (b) person and context are both important to identity; (c) sub-identities work across different contexts and relationships in order to characterize a teacher; and (d) agency is important to identity because teachers need to be active in the process of their own development. These findings are important as a basis for understanding definitional aspects of identity that are relevant to numerous studies focused on identity development. Specifically, the ongoing process of identity development occurs while the participants journey through their field experience contexts. The contexts become important aspects of what the participants experience in the field that lead to their identity growths. Whereas Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop’s (2004) review focuses on the general characteristic of identity formation, others study more particular nuances of identity formation.

For example, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) consider identity in a broad sense focusing on identity as a place of narrative story where identity exists and is shaped in stories. Their research opens the room for further narrative based research. Two years later, Marsh (2001) focuses on social context and its effects on teacher identity development. Furthermore, Britzman (2003) considers the relationship of discourses and identity in an ethnographic study of learning to teach in a high school. In part of her study, she examines discourses related to the tensions that are a part of becoming a teacher. Tension is sometimes an important variable in the identity development of a teacher which points to the complexities of professional identity formation.

Pre-service teachers can develop a strong sense of identity through a process of creative identity learning as suggested by Geijsel and Meijers (2005). These researchers understand identity as “the ever-changing configuration of interpretations that individuals attach to
themselves, as related to the activities they participate in” (p.423). Geijsel and Meijers (2005) argue that learning for teachers is a process both of social construction and of individual sense-making and suggest that identity learning starts when individuals have a boundary experience where they reach a limit of their self-concept. Because identity construction is a cyclical learning process, new experiences can cause individuals to restructure their identities in order to avoid previous mistakes. Geijsel and Meijers (2005) extend their suggestions to those who are already positioned in school organizations because they are capable of making changes. College instructors in partnership with school administration and teachers who are working with pre-service teachers during the field experiences can initiate these conversations of identity restructuring throughout the process of its development. That may become a germinal step to teacher identity development during pre-service stage that can blossom if continued as they become student- and first-year teachers.

In her study of pre-service teachers, Alsup (2006) explores the nature of how the personal and professional intersect in teachers’ identities. Establishing the importance of “borderland discourse,” Alsup’s work facilitates better understanding of the holistic teaching self. According to her, forming (or failing to form) a professional identity is central in becoming an effective teacher. She also provides a list of activities to include in college courses that will facilitate teacher identity construction.

Another critical variable of identity development, suggests Olsen (2008a), is context. Based on a study of eight beginning English teachers in four different university teacher preparation programs, Olsen (2008a) considers the epistemological, social, and political underpinnings of becoming a teacher focusing on the unique, context-dependent variables that shape and reshape teacher knowledge. He defines teacher learning as a continuous, situated,
identity progression in which prior experiences determine the embedded ways of viewing the world in order to make meaning of current and future experiences. Since experience shapes learning, and everyone gains different sets of experience, no individual teacher’s knowledge is exactly similar to another’s. Yet, Olsen also indicates that the process by which teachers construct professional knowledge is common: the what of teacher knowledge varies, but the how remains the same.

In a qualitative study, Larson (2006) examines what matters to pre-service teachers as they develop a literacy teaching identity; her findings explore the nuances of various discourses as they are relevant to identity development. She begins with 30 participants and then follows seven elementary and middle school graduate pre-service teachers during their student teaching. Data collection comes from a variety of sources: course documents, group conversations, interviews, emails, and classroom observations. Larson (2006) establishes literacy biography, literacy courses, and student teaching as three authoritative discourse sites that emerge from the data. These discourses influence the pre-service literacy teachers’ subjectivity. Larson labels these deconstructive discourses because they are places where pre-service teachers look back on their life and take apart what they are learning about literacy in order to understand certain events and experiences. Larson’s study (2006) also detects reconstructive discourses, or places where participants “imagined, explained wondered, and shared who they wanted to become as teachers of literacy” (p. 62). Finally, the third theme resulting from this study is agency, which deals with the strategies and discourses pre-service teachers use to negotiate and act in their student teaching placements. This work is helpful in understanding the relevant concerns for pre-service teachers in the specific discourses of their identity development.
Larson and Phillips (2009), on the other hand, narrow their study to a university course and only explore the literacy biographical discourses of two pre-service teachers. The descriptive findings indicate how different people make sense of the material in the course in different ways. The findings disclose that teacher educators often present teaching literacy in a way that assumes things about the backgrounds of their students. Teacher educators often consider teaching reading in terms of the connectedness of reading and writing, in comparison with current theories of literacy. The participants in Larson and Phillips’s (2009) study differ in the ways they make sense of the material presented in the course and envision themselves as future teachers. Larson and Phillips (2009) recommend designing courses that differentiate assignments based on the needs of students that emerge from their identities. This work highlights that pre-service teachers have their own identity that influences how they receive and interpret what they are learning as they become teachers.

Kelly (2010) considers the transition to teaching by examining the knowledge, beliefs, and identities of reading teachers. In this study Kelly focuses on two pre-service teachers, two first year teachers, and two third and fourth-year teachers. Kelly (2010) discovers that teachers indeed learn and grow in terms of their identity as teachers from their teacher education programs and practicum placements; and often this knowledge is attached to their practice. She notes that the participants feel confident in their identity as teachers during their first years of teaching but would benefit from mentors to support their learning. The contexts of teaching cause the participants to feel constrained; however, some teachers are able to adjust the contexts to better align with their own beliefs and identities as teachers. This study presents a cross-section of teachers in different places in their careers, considering a common focus on knowledge, beliefs, and identities at these different key times.
This group of studies displays several significant claims including the importance of the field of literacy education in the identity development of pre-service teachers of literacy. Moreover, the researchers identify specific discourses that influence professional identity development. In addition, teacher educators gain specific ideas of how to incorporate identity development into coursework from the aforementioned research. All these researchers explore slightly different angles on the study of teacher identity development, thus adding to the body of knowledge and making the field richer with different approaches. What is not present in most of these studies is the examination of how field experiences contribute to this professional identity development or shape pre-service teachers’ understanding of the profession prior to student teaching. Does their identity development begin with the first field experience practicum, when they are mostly observers in the classroom, or does it start at a later stage of student teaching, when they are actually expected to assume the role and responsibilities of a teacher? These are some of the questions that feed my interest throughout the research project.

Preparing Reflective Teachers

One of the first U.S. educational theorists to view teachers as reflective practitioners is John Dewey. School, and schooling, he believes, should be more like life itself rather than a representation of it (1933). That is, the confrontation of dilemmas lies at the heart of Dewey’s analysis of thinking and learning. Reflective teaching begins when teachers experience a difficulty that cannot be readily resolved, what he terms a “puzzle of practice” (Dewey, 1933). As long as classroom activities glide smoothly, there is no call for learning and reflection; however, difficulty in achieving an objective stimulates learning. As pre-service teachers experience and explore these dilemmas of practice, they are more likely to construct deeper
understandings of the problems embedded in them, their possible causes, resolutions, and the constraints that must be factored into their decisions.

According to Dewey, reflective thinking makes it possible to turn “a subject over in the mind and giv[e] it serious and consecutive consideration” (cited in Posner, 1993, p. 20). This kind of reflective thinking should be a key component of early field experience courses (Posner, 1993; Lee, 2005). Bullock and Muschamp's (2004) model of teachers' reflection mirrors “the practice of thinking analytically about an experience or an activity” (p. 32). This model is shaped by feelings and understandings that may be tacit. Davis (2005) concurs by specifying that reflection is not “merely recognizing the linear step” that presents itself but a conscious practice to open teachers' “thinking to all possibilities” (p. 9) and to move teachers so that they “step outside of their own definitions of the world and see new perspectives” (p. 18).

Reflective practitioners engage in the process of reflection by observing, analyzing, considering alternatives, and experimenting (Steffy et al., 2000). Reflection can occur at different levels (Van Manen, 1997) or within different domains (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991) identified as technical, practical, critical (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991), and personal (Zimpher & Howey, 1987) or interpretive (Bullough & Gitlin, 1991). For the less experienced candidates, learning to teach and becoming a teacher are incumbent upon “critical analysis of teaching practices, the context of those practices, and the complex roles of teachers” (Knowles & Cole, 1996, p. 4). Reflection on practice and reflective teaching have been proposed as necessary undertakings for teacher development, improved student learning, and educational relevancy and reform (Dewey, 1938; Schon, 1987, Barr et al., 2000).

In a study investigating student teachers’ reflective thinking, Coleman (1999) discovers that none of the interventions he uses to stimulate deeper levels of analysis or reflective
thinking—coaching, guided journal reflection, re-teaching, and adopt-a-class—are effective. Coleman notes, however, that the classroom teacher, who exerts the most influence on the pre-service teachers, does not explicitly model reflection for them nor engages them in reflective dialogue. There are some other potentially useful studies in assisting teachers across experiential levels in developing and refining their reflective practice. These include studies focused on reflective judgment (Bright, 1996) and on the content, processes, and outcomes of reflection by practicing music teachers and by student teachers (Stegman, 1996).

Despite diverse meanings, tumultuous debates, and implementation challenges, promoting teacher reflection remains a cornerstone of teacher education (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004). Reflective activity aligns with a metacognitive approach to learning and ideally involves prospective teachers linking theory to practice, analyzing their own practice and learning from their experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In practice, efforts to promote teacher reflection often fall short for a variety of reasons (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004). These reasons include, but are not limited to, prospective teachers merely focusing on the logistical issues associated with teaching, ignoring the contextual factors in school-based environments, displaying “shallow thought unaccompanied by action” (Zeichner, 1996), and failing to reflect in systematic and intentional ways (Dana & Silva, 2003).

As literature indicates, there is a significant increase of research on pre-service teachers’ reflections during their field experiences. This research is centered mostly on the reactions of the pre-service teachers to their observations in the field and to the strategies and activities their mentor teachers use in the classroom. At the same time, there is little to no research examining reflections that describe how teacher candidates are exploring themselves as pre-service teachers and how they should act in a particular situation. In addition to a noticeable deficit of studies
where the researchers investigate pre-service teachers’ perceptions of themselves as future teachers, many researchers focus on pre-service teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, without clearly defining or identifying these.

**Impact of Field Experiences on Pre-service Teachers**

Research illustrates that field experiences positively affect the knowledge and skills of pre-service teachers in multiple ways. That is, field experiences allow the knowledge learned in academic course work to take on greater meaning, help pre-service teachers develop more sophisticated understandings of the teaching and learning process (Egéa-Kuehne, 1992; McLoughlin & Maslak, 2003; O’Brien, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007), and enhance learning of skills needed to individualize instruction (Sears, Cavallaro, & Hall, 2004). Although it is clear that field experiences have a profound effect on teacher development, it is not clear that extending field experience practicums have a positive impact on pre-service teachers (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996).

A nationwide study of teacher education programs discloses that often little connection is made between courses and field experiences and that faculty and school-based personnel do not always connect field experiences to particular goals (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) report that there is a trend towards more thematic programs, but research does not support that field experience activities are well connected to themes, particularly those of reflection and inquiry (Howey & Zimpher, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1982). Some evidence indicates that the school context of field experiences is not always a positive influence on student teacher development (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Adequate attention is not always paid to the impact of the choices made in
selecting student teaching placements (Zeichner, 1996), although there is a trend toward more
careful selection and more intense involvement of school-based personnel.

From an extensive review of the literature on field experiences, McIntyre, Byrd, and
Foxx (1996) make important conclusions for the field of teacher preparation and organization of
field experiences. These conclusions disclose that: (a) increased practice without reflection and
analysis does not lead to professional growth; (b) the context of field placements is very
influential on professional development; and (c) evaluation of field experiences should reflect the
complex world of teaching.

In a descriptive qualitative study that includes a substantial field experience component,
Harlin (1999) follows the changes of 18 pre-service teachers enrolled in a reading and language
arts course through their completions of a semantic mapping and narrative development activity.
Analysis explores changes in the maps over three iterations as the students progressed through
the course. Four factors emerge as influential to future literacy teachers: influences beyond the
classroom, influences from children, influences from other professionals, and influences from
teacher’s personal and professional development. These factors converge, along with the
influence of the opportunity to assume the role of literacy teachers during fieldwork, in order to
help define who these teachers become.

Practicing new teachers are not the only ones to appreciate the importance of field
Preparation for Reading Instruction and the report by Harmon et al. (2001) based on this work
highlights field experiences as one of the features of excellent reading teacher preparation
programs. The *Teaching Reading Well* report also underlines the significance of fieldwork,
“Excellent teacher education programs engage beginning teachers in a variety of field
experiences in which they have opportunities to use their coursework and interact with excellent models and mentors” (IRA, 2007, p. 10).

Sailors, Keehn, Martinez, & Harmon, (2005) similarly demonstrate how participation in field experiences related to literacy, particularly early field experiences, is beneficial to new teachers. Sailors et al. (2005) bring together the work of the IRA commission’s features of the eight Sites of Excellence in Reading Teacher Education (SERTE) programs with the values of first year teachers. Sailors et al. (2005) choose participants who are a part of the SERTE programs and then interview them during their first year of teaching. Seventy-three participants are phone interviewed in the middle and at the end of their first year of teaching. The questions center on classroom reading instruction, student progress, and what they value about their teacher education programs; unfortunately, no specific questions are asked about field experiences. Without being previously probed, 90% of the participants identify early field experiences as something they value. There are many reasons for this ranging from the opportunity to build professional relationships to learning classroom management skills. This confirms that field experiences are valued by beginning teachers as an important part of their teacher education. My only concern with these results is that the participants are already in their first year of teaching and therefore past the field-experience and student-teaching phases. Their reflections on the past perceptions from the new professional standpoint may be adjusted by a new experience. Immediate reflections and those separated by a period of time are not similar — time, context, and new experiences and interactions are all factors of meaning making. While interesting, unlike immediate reflections, the ones described by Sailors et al. (2005) may bring up the perceptions shaded or influenced by the student teaching and first year of actual classroom teaching.
In an instrumental research study (IRS) by Capraro et al. (2010), the researchers directly compare the effectiveness of different models of field-based learning experiences based on standards for exemplary field experiences. This study utilizes Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards as a benchmark (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2002). The participants, 135 pre-service teachers are all undergraduate students’ enrolled in an intensely field-based teacher education program (Capraro et al., 2010). This study is conducted in the semester immediately prior to student teaching. The study examines field-based experiences within three settings including a more traditional school-based (Control) model, a professional development school (PDS) model, and an inquiry-focused, PDS based (Inquiry) model. All pre-service teachers undertake many of the same experiences and complete many of the same assignments. One of the main differences among the field-based treatments is the time spent in the field. The researchers do not believe that time spent in the field without a treatment is beneficial to any of the treatment groups versus the control group (Capraro et al., 2010).

These results highlight the importance of aligning field-based experiences to the theoretical framework from the university classroom. Another interesting finding from the results of this study indicates that it is more important to effectively spend time in the field participating, teaching, and reflecting than just logging time in the field by passively observing. Lastly, the researchers assert that the inquiry group is best equipped to bridge the gap between classroom theory and practice in the field and that these inquiry experiences create a more effective field experience than a Professional Development School (PDS) or traditional model (Capraro et al., 2010).
Summary

The second chapter has explored several topics in connection with research literature on teacher preparation and field experiences. I began this chapter with the definition of field experiences and how research makes a distinction of clinical experiences between field experiences and student teaching. Considering field experiences as one of the first steps to becoming a successful and effective teacher, it is important to distinguish this first step from student teaching and from the beginning years in the profession. Most of the studies I reviewed do not provide a clear distinction of the practices prospective teachers go through, so it is challenging to conclude what the most problematic areas of experiences are and at what point they start.

Research on teacher preparation has considerably increased in the last decade. It is dictated by educational reform movements and has amplified demands to teacher quality and accountability. Educators agree that TPP and field experiences are key components of these programs and should be designed and implemented to create an effective bridge between the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching.

Exploring literature on field experiences, I have included studies on teacher identity construction. This is one of the most studied topics in present educational research because professional identity is a constantly changing, multi-layered phenomenon and has a great impact on teacher success and effectiveness in the classroom. Though identity formation is not at the heart of my research project, I do not exclude that issues of identity development play a significant role in future teachers’ perceptions about teaching. In my final chapter, I return to Danielewicz (2001), Britzman (2003), and Alsup (2006) and compare their interpretations and findings with mine.
Another group of studies that deserve attention are those devoted to preparing reflective practitioners. We understand our lives through experiences, but experiences are empty without reflection (Dewey, 1933). Similarly, pre-service teachers have to learn how to reflect beginning with their first classroom experiences and continue to remain reflective throughout their profession. Literature suggests specific activities to help future teachers reflect and connect their past and present experiences, looking into the future, and creating a recursive cycle of self-understanding.

The final section overviews research that emphasizes the importance of field experiences and points out deficiencies resulting from disconnect between college courses and real classroom practices. I also provide a more detailed glimpse into two studies that confirm the benefits of well-structured field experiences and those that consist of a thematic element stimulating professional growth. The results highlight the significance of aligning field based experiences to the theoretical framework from the university classroom. The researchers stress that the inquiry group is best equipped to bridge the gap between classroom theory and practice in the field.

As it is evident from reviewed literature and research, there is an increasing tendency to study field experiences of teacher candidates. Various angles of teacher preparation and field experiences are investigated and many practical recommendations are issued to assist educators in preparing the future generation of teachers. Nevertheless, even more research is needed to understand the complexities of the profession itself and teachers as carriers of this profession. There is a deficit in research of the narrative nature which allows for rich descriptions, insightful stories, and deep understanding of the value of the experiences and the perceptions of pre-service teachers about their experiences.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Field experiences have been cited by the American Education Research Association as a priority area of research in teacher education for the reason that they are seen as an opportunity to create learning experiences that can bring about change (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Demers, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000). These experiences are intended to create room for pre-service teachers to practice instructional and classroom decision making. As evident from the literature review, the research indicates that many field experience relationships fail to provide pre-service teachers with an opportunity to practice effectively due to a disconnect of beliefs and ideals between the theories and practices of the university faculty and those of the host teachers in schools of placement (Alsup, 2006; Grieco, 2011; Kingsley, 2007; Kragler & Nierenberg, 1998, and others). There is still uncertainty about how to offer pre-service teachers the best organized field experiences that will extend support and provide feedback from the teacher educator(s) that are in congruence with the ideals and beliefs of the university and in agreement with the classroom practices of school teachers working with pre-service teachers during their field practice. While present research cannot guarantee a complete and satisfactory solution for this problem, it attempts to investigate how pre-service teachers view their field experiences, which major factors they perceive as shaping their perceptions, and how these early experiences, their structure and content might be improved.

This chapter is one of the most important parts of the research project as it links all the other parts together – research questions, theoretical framework, methods, context, results, analysis, and interpretation of findings. In order for the results to be credible, the methods of data collection, reduction, and analysis have to be highly explicit (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln &
Guba, 1985; Smagorinsky, 2008a). Thus it is critical, not only to list the methods of data collection, for example, but also to explain in detail how, when, where, and by whom the data has been collected through each of the listed methods. Further, the methods need to be clearly aligned with the framing theory and the rendering of the results. Taking all of this into account, the *Methodology* chapter becomes “a conceptual epicenter” of the research that is “the vehicle through which alignment can be if not assured, at least systematically attempted” (Smagorinsky, 2008a, p. 405). This approach reiterates the concept of *methodological congruence* developed by Morse and Richards (2002) who assert that purposes, questions, and methods are interrelated and interconnected creating a cohesive holistic research report rather than fragmented and isolated parts.

Considering this chapter as central to the research project, I briefly return to the theoretical framework that guides this study and connects it with the methodological approach of narrative inquiry. Next, I revisit the purpose of the study conceptualizing it through the theory and methods chosen to investigate and understand pre-service teachers’ perceptions of field experiences. Following that, I describe the procedures for this research project. This chapter provides only a general description of the research participants. The detailed profiles of the selected participants are narrated in Chapter Four along with the findings.

This chapter continues with a discussion of my role as a researcher, possible bias, and the explanation of how I attempt to ensure trustworthiness of the collected data, analysis, and interpretations. The subsequent section is devoted to ethical issues. The chapter concludes with presenting limitations and possibilities of the study.
Theoretical Framework

The foundation of any research rests on an overarching methodological framework consisting of questions, designs, data structures and decisions about analysis and interpretation of the obtained data. Furthermore, the framework is rooted in a particular worldview, or a particular way in which truth is perceived and understood (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). This framework is often referred to as a paradigm, a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p.17). Within paradigmatic framework researchers choose interpretive theories to frame their theoretical lens in studies to make sense of things. Based on the chosen theory, they make philosophical claims, or assumptions, about what knowledge is (ontology), how one knows (epistemology), what values are attached (axiology), and the way in which they study and report about phenomena (methodology) (Creswell, 2012).

The theoretical foundations of this research are rooted in Dewey’s pragmatism, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory in combination with Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue and narrative inquiry theory. Although I explained these theories in Chapter One, I am revisiting their major theoretical points in this chapter and introducing narrative inquiry as a theory. This allows me to build a bridge between my theoretical framework and narrative inquiry as the leading method in this dissertation project.

Dewey’s Pragmatism

People use different tools to understand the world around them and particular situations. They also use different tools to solve everyday problems or understand certain events. My tool is pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that “works” and helps me understand life experiences. I call it “Dewey’s pragmatism” to distinguish his pragmatism from the three other three major philosophers, Pierce, James, and Holmes, who developed this American thought (see Chapter
One), as all of them had certain, yet varying beliefs about pragmatism. My views are closely associated with Dewey’s (1859–1952), whose pragmatism if often called instrumentalism, as it was particularly important for Dewey to find the right tools – instruments – for the right job (Dewey, 1933).

As a pragmatist, I believe that knowledge is created through experience, i.e. through combination of humans’ actions and their reflections. Moreover, all knowledge holds some degree of subjectivity because the knower cannot separate himself or herself from the world. Knowledge becomes as individual and unique as people who are engaged with the world and use various ways to make sense of what is happening in this world.

Vital to my understanding of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their field experiences is Dewey’s concept of experience. For Dewey (1933, 1938/1963), experience is a product of action and its consequences, or reactions. Through reflecting on events and situations that happened and analyzing a particular outcome, people learn from their experiences. This is how I have learned from my experiences and how I intend to learn about the participants of my study. Pre-service teachers’ stories of their experiences in the classroom shed light on how they perceive these field experiences in the English classrooms and what they are learning through these experiences.

Another important concept that helps me understand experiences is continuity, which is also rooted in Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy. Dewey (1938/1963) believes that any new experience grows from the other past experiences and that present experiences lead to further experiences. Simply put, nothing happens in a vacuum—there was always before, and there will always be after. So, any imagined present lies between the past and the future; hence, each of my experiences is caused by past experience and leads to future experience.
Sociocultural Theory and a Concept of Dialogue

To advance Dewey’s thought that experience is both personal and social with these attributes being always present and interacting (1938/1963), I would like to engage Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory as it allows an understanding of how people, in this case pre-service teachers, develop as social human beings in a specific cultural context defined by where they are at any particular point in time. Sociocultural theory permits exploring pre-service teachers’ social context, the ways they learn and interact within their cohort at the university and with their field experience context, and how they learn from interactions and relations with school students, host teachers, and school administration at the site of their placement context.

A valuable supplement to these Vygotskian ideas is Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogue and heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1986) considered all human action as dialogic in nature. We conduct dialogues interacting with other people, and we also conduct dialogues with ourselves while thinking. That means that whatever we say, write, or think always happens as a result of interaction with someone else or self. For me, as a narrative researcher, this concept of dialogic interaction carries a special value as I develop relationships, communicate with my participants, and together with them create and interpret their narratives. Heteroglossia is another important concept I am going to use in this work. Bakhtin (1981) defined heteroglossia as a blending of world views through language that creates complex unity from a hybrid of utterances. Narrating participants’ profiles in Chapter Four, I will let the participants demonstrate individual and distinct voices conveying beliefs and perceptions of teaching while undergoing their field experiences. It will become possible to see how these voices create heteroglossia – multiplicity of views: even when the participants talk about similar events happening in similar contexts and have agreeable views, their voices differ in style, tone, and nuanced meaning.
Narrative Inquiry Theory

To introduce a narrative inquiry theory, I make an attempt to explain what a narrative is. The term “narrative” is complex and multilayered, and it is not easy to define in a way that encompasses all its complexity. Narratives are linguistic structures involving syntax and semantics, plot and characters, sequences and places. They can be phrases or fragments, colloquialisms, and jargons. No matter what they are and how they are constructed, they are loaded with meaning. Narratives are simultaneously products of individual and society, and individual and society are their products. Narratives are social: they are local, national, and global; they are feminine, masculine, and other. Moreover, this list of narrative characteristics can be expanded and complicated “with research based on spoken, written, and visual materials” (Riessman, 2008). To emphasize the universality of the narrative form, Barthes (1993) lists sites where it can be found:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting … stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. . . it is simply there, like life itself. (pp. 251-252)

This list can be continued by adding memoir, auto/biography, diary, archival documents, health records, or stories told by people about their experiences, and even photographs, and other art work. When people share their life experiences, for example, they tell stories. And when they tell stories, they talk about these stories. “These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35). This statement conveys the essence of narrative inquiry theory that is rooted in the pragmatic concept of experience I discussed earlier. While formalists begin their inquiry of the world in theory,
narrative inquirers “tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40).

Every time a researcher begins a new inquiry, she or he tells a new story. Typically for narrative inquiry, this story begins with the researcher’s autobiographic narrative associated with the research questions, or “research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). That is why this dissertation has begun with my story in the Prologue, and later, in the Introduction, I have also situated myself in the context of the study thus connecting my personal experience with the research problem and weaving my narrative into the bigger narrative created from the stories of the research participants.

When a researcher invites a participant to share something asking, “Tell me about…,” the active subject constructs a narrative that is particular, personal, and contextualized in time and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The speaker describes the important events that “are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Thinking narratively, the participants of the study are looked at as embodiments of lived stories. They are “seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Hence, one of the most appropriate ways to explore these people’s lives and their stories is by using a narrative inquiry methodological approach.

**Methodological Framework**

I have already mentioned that the current study is a narrative inquiry research study of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about their field experiences before student teaching. Narrative in its nature, this project encompasses case study strategies for analyzing and interpreting data which I describe in detail later in this chapter. As discussed earlier, pragmatism allows me to
choose the most helpful instruments for the purpose of my study. First, I discuss narrative inquiry as an approach to study life experiences.

**Narrative Inquiry as a Way to Understand Life Experiences**

Our days are filled with continuous experiences and interactions with the world and ourselves. All these events are woven together in a seamless, yet complex web we call life. To make sense of these experiences and interactions, people tell stories, or narratives. For most people, storytelling is a natural way of recounting experiences, a practical solution to a crucial life problem, creating some reasonable order out of experiences. We create narrative descriptions about our experiences for ourselves and also develop narratives to understand the behavior of others (Zellermayer, 1997). According to Polkinghorne (1988), life itself might be considered a narrative inside which we find a number of other stories, and people’s very existence creates narratives. Hence, it is logical to study narratives as a way of understanding the multilayered complexities of life experiences and behaviors.

Narrative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, primarily because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative research is thus the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers gather these stories and compose narratives of experience (Gudmundsdottir, 2001).

Choosing narrative inquiry as my research methodology, I rely on the arguments developed by the prominent narrative researchers who come together in the common belief that narrative inquiry creates endless possibilities for researchers:

- to make meaning through shaping, sequencing, and ordering the experiences;
- to create a narrative through the interaction between the researcher and the participant(s);
- to understand one’s own or others’ actions;
- to organize events and actions into a meaningful whole;
- to connect and see the consequences of actions and events over time;
- to learn about any phenomena by maintaining a focus on narrated lives;
- to reveal truth(s) about human experience through studying multiple data collection forms, including interviews, personal interactions with the participants, field notes, observations, participants written and oral reflections, and visual materials (pictures, photos, posters, collages, etc.) (Chase, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslette, 2008; Moen, 2006; Riessman, 2008).

These possibilities of narrative research methodology attract my attention as the ones that help in reaching the goals of this research project. Along with Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Riessman (2008), Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008), and many other narrative researchers, I believe that people understand their lives through experiences; i.e., experience is a strategic component to comprehend the meaning of any life phenomenon. Early field experiences that pre-service teachers have as part of their teacher preparation program is a form of experience, and narrative is one of the most appropriate approaches to represent and understand this complex and multidimensional experience.

In the field of education, narrative inquiry is a method that allows the exploration of teacher preparation including the field experience component and how it influences their practice. Teacher educators want pre-service teachers to become more reflective practitioners (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004; Dana & Silva, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001); thus, narrative
research provides these teachers with their own voice and stories from the field in order to develop their ability to reflect. Through this form of research, the researcher’s goal is to gain insight into how pre-service teachers make sense and learn from their field experiences by reflecting on their own perspectives and understandings of past, present, and future experiences in order to strengthen the support future pre-service teachers receive. Narrative inquiry can also offer an important tool for educational change, according to Larson (1997):

…narrative inquiry in education examines growing problems in schools from multiple perspectives.... When we understand circumstances, events, or conflicts from other people’s perspectives, we can identify and implement better strategies for addressing these problems. (p. 455)

Using narrative inquiry as a methodology for my research project allows collecting the stories as a means of thinking and knowing. These stories compose valuable sources of insight and practical information in various forms, from observations, to students’ field experience logs, to focus groups and individual interviews and our collaborative interactions while creating narratives of experience with my participants. Finally, the narrative approach enables me to think, collect, analyze, and write narratively about a narrative phenomenon – pre-service teachers’ perceptions of field experiences and how they shape their understanding of teaching.

All researchers enter inquiry with their views, beliefs, and ways of thinking, and I am not an exception. I do realize my narratives may coincide with or oppose to the actual research agenda of this inquiry. Being aware of these tensions between my narrative history and narrative research is important; that is why I may need a certain degree of reconstruction of my personal narratives. To follow the research agenda, I return to situating myself as a researcher further in this chapter.
The Concept of Three-Dimensional Narrative Space

Narrative inquiry engages plotlines, character, setting, and action (Bal & Bal, 1998) and provides ways of holding meaning together in more complex, relational, and nuanced ways than flowcharts or number tables. Thinking about pre-service teachers’ field experiences and the research goals, I depend on Dewey’s theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction. In my work as a researcher, I constantly remind myself of a reason why I use narrative inquiry: narrative inquiry allows me to study people’s experiences which are part of their lives.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a set of terms for narrative inquiry based on Deweyan foundational principles where personal and social represent interaction; past, present, and future are associated with continuity; interaction and continuity are combined with the notion of place forming context and situation. These terms create “a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along the third” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Using this set of terms enables researchers to both present and interrogate findings and permits the narrative inquirer to epitomize the contingent, nuanced, and symbolic aspects of the findings.

I use a three-dimensional narrative space to study field experiences of the pre-service teachers during their fall semester of the senior year in the teacher preparation program which defines the temporal character of the study as well as experiences themselves. The pre-service teachers in this study are in a cohort of English majors enrolled in the same two college courses that accompany their third field experience cycle at the school of placement which creates a specific context for these experiences (Appendix B). During these experiences, my participants interact with one another, college professors, university field experiences office, host teachers,
administration at the schools of placement, and a researcher, not mentioning their family members and friends. Thus, as outlined by the three-dimensional narrative space, this study operates in terms of temporality, context, and interaction during the entire research process.

**Revisiting the Purpose of the Study**

In recent years, the major emphasis of teacher preparation has moved away from students’ scores on tests to teacher preparation programs (TPP) and how students’ achievements reflect successful TPP (Grant, 1994; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). True to this purpose, TPPs have increased field experiences to ensure that future teachers are prepared to meet the needs of diverse students (Haberman, 2005; Weiner, 2000). Increasing field experiences does not automatically improve their quality or create a positive impact on pre-service teachers. Educational researchers believe that carefully constructed field experiences allow teachers to reinforce, apply and synthesize concepts teacher candidates have learned in class (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). The importance of field experiences is not disputed among educators, but in a review of research published in *The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*, Clift and Brady (2005) concluded that it is difficult to deduct from the research what impact a specific field experience may have on pre-service teachers, and the impact may be different from what instructors or supervisors expect or wish it to be.

Although there is a clear tendency of increased research on field experiences in the last decade, there are still unanswered questions for teacher educators and pre-service teachers themselves. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the early field experiences of pre-service English teachers before student teaching at a southern research university through the lens of a three-dimensional narrative space as delineated above.
These are the main questions that have led the investigation:

1. What kinds of perceptions do pre-service teachers’ form about the value of their field experiences?

2. How do early field experiences shape pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching?

3. What concerns about teaching do pre-service teachers have as they undergo field experiences?

4. Do pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shift from the beginning to the end of their field experiences? If yes, how do they shift and what are some factors causing change?

Consequently, the focus of this research is to understand the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about their field experiences and to think about them in terms “of continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Experience is a focus of the study, and I explore it narratively because “narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

**Research Design and Procedures**

As with any research, this study was derived by researching the topic of interest, teacher preparation and early field experiences, through studying the research and literature to determine what has been studied by educational researchers in connection with the topic and identifying the deficit in research and literature. After articulating the problem, I stated my research questions and designed the study. Due to a narrative nature of the data, the research questions have undergone some modifications, and their final, refined form is presented in the previous section. In conformance with the research procedures, I collected, coded, and analyzed data, and together
with the research participants constructed their narratives of experience. Interpretation of those narratives provided the answers to the inquiry questions and led to conclusions about the research problem and implications for further research.

**Research Context and Settings**

**The Participants.** The participants of the research were the English majoring students currently enrolled in their fourth year of secondary English Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) at a large research southern State University (SU). As outlined by TPP, during the fall semester, pre-service teachers participated in their third cycle of early field experiences before student teaching. This group of 16 students was a smaller group of English majors than TPP had during the last few years. For example, last year in the fall semester, the enrollment counted 31 pre-service teachers, and the year before there were 24 secondary English majors in the program.

For the first time, I visited the cohort of English majors participating in my study over a year ago, when they were juniors. At that time, I was conducting a case study for one of my qualitative courses. I asked permission of their English methods course instructor, came in for a few minutes, and briefly explained my research project for the case study. All of the cohort members responded to my invitation to participate in the study providing their email addresses in the sign-in sheet I ran around the classroom. It was impressive and, at the same time, I knew I could not complete a case study for a coursework with 18 people in such a limited timeframe. My worries were groundless because, when I sent them emails with more details about the study and requested to complete a questionnaire, only one (of 18 pre-service teachers at that time) had completed the questionnaire and wanted to be interviewed. That was a relief; besides, I already had another participant from a previous cohort for the case study.
In the fall of their senior year, when the same cohort came into my classroom where I taught their Education methods course, it seemed like I had just met them for the first time. Just like the last time, I talked to them about the study and invited them to participate, only this time it was for my dissertation research. By that time, I had developed the research design and had a clearer picture of what I was investigating and how my agenda could be implemented. There had been 16 English majors in the cohort by that time, and all of them agreed to allow me to use their writing work for both English and Education methods courses to conduct the study. All of them also consented to focus group interviews. I stressed several times that they did not have to agree; the study was on a voluntary base, and their decision would not affect the course and their progress in the course. After I mentioned it again, several students announced that they wanted to participate and share their experiences because it helped them think about their chosen profession and their place in it from the very beginning. They also hoped that the research and its results might initiate some improvements in TPP that could serve future generations of pre-service teachers. The following information about the participants came from the questionnaire they completed for the study.

With the exception of two men, the majority of the cohort (14) was represented by young women. All 16 of them were White, which is a typical racial representation at this university for TPP. Some years, there were one or two percent of African-American representation in a cohort, but no other racial diversity. Although all participants identified themselves as belonging to middle class working families, only one of them did not hold a part-time job while pursuing an undergraduate degree. The other 15 were working – some at the university student services; others as waiters/ waitresses at local restaurants. Eight of them earned TOPs (Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, a program of scholarships for state residents who attend
either one of the state public colleges and universities), other scholarships, and had parents’ financial support to cover additional expenses and fees, including textbooks. The rest of the cohort members had student loans, used their own earnings or savings from part-time jobs, and occasional parents’ help.

At the moment of data collection, the participants’ ages ranged from 20 to 26 years old, with an average age of about 22 years old. Nine out of 16 pre-service teachers reported their intent to teach after graduation; four others planned to pursue a master’s degree, and the remaining three participants were undecided as of the end of the fall semester.

Out of the 16 cohort members, four volunteered to participate in individual open-ended interviews. This met my goal to recruit at least four pre-service teachers. Although I only included four pre-service teachers’ detailed profiles and analyses in the report, the rest of the group participated in the study in direct and indirect ways. I collected and analyzed think pieces, field experience reflections, and conceptual teaching units from all 16 pre-service teachers. All of them also joined in focus group interviews. In addition, I observed them several times in their English methods class with Dr. Slade and closely worked with all of them throughout the Education course I taught.

The results of the analyses and findings of the data received from all study participants are presented in Chapter Five. Because I employ Dewey’s concepts of experience, continuity and interaction and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of development, it is imperative to explore the relationships of the participants as individuals with the other cohort members representing social dimension of interaction. Furthermore, Clandinin and Connelly’s methodological concept of a three-dimensional space requires taking into consideration the participants during a certain period of time interacting with others in a particular context.
As I mentioned, the detailed profiles of my participants—Kathleen, Scout, Harry, and Katniss—are included in Chapter Four. That chapter will present four narratives in which the distinct voices of the participants reflect their perceptions of field experiences and create heteroglossia – multiplicity of the voices within the same cohort of pre-service English teachers.

The Courses. The secondary English majors in the Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) have 120 hours of mandatory field experiences required by the state before student teaching. These hours are evenly distributed into three consecutive semesters, 40 hours each. The first field experience cycle was assigned during the fall of their junior year in the program; the second fell onto the spring semester of their junior year, and the third one took place in the fall of their senior year in the program. All three field experience cycles were accompanied by college coursework that aimed to facilitate field experiences and provide content, methodological, and pedagogical support to the pre-service teachers in the field. (See Appendix B for English Education courses scope and sequence with description of these courses).

During the fall semester the students enrolled in the undergraduate TPP at the university were enrolled in English methods and Education methods courses that accompany the third cycle of field experiences. According to the description (Appendix B), the English methods course, Curricula, Pedagogy, & Assessment in the English Classroom (1 hr.), was the third in a three-course sequence of one-credit-hour courses required by the secondary English concentration. Together, the courses led to the final semester which includes student teaching, the next level of Education methods course, and the capstone course. The English methods course had two major purposes. First, it was designed to facilitate the last 40 hours of field experience in local schools before the student teaching experience. The second goal was to prepare future teachers for the PRAXIS II tests that English majors are required to take before graduation.
The English majors in TPP were simultaneously enrolled in the English Language Arts section of the Education methods course, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Secondary Disciplines. According to the university catalog description, it was a course in applying instructional approaches in particular subject areas (in this case English) for middle and high school students. The main goal of the course as outlined in the syllabus was to encourage pre-service teachers “to adopt an inquiry stance to the teaching of English” (Appendix D). Adopting an inquiry stance meant to be able to ask hard questions and search for the answers through research, practice, experience, and using the variety of resources and tools at hand. Throughout the course, pre-service teachers together with their instructor created, shared, and experienced activities and strategies that would become tools that future teachers could adapt and modify as they began to teach.

The purpose of the two courses was to reinforce and extend the learning pre-service teachers had completed in preceding semesters. In addition, those courses were intended to facilitate their final, third cycle of field experiences, and, finally, they were the major point of preparing pre-service teachers for student teaching.

**Research Settings.** Place, or space, is an important characteristic of any research design, and is particularly vital to this narrative research design, because context of place in this research influences two other dimensions of this research—temporality and interaction. There were several settings for this research project. As a researcher, I strove to provide settings where my participants feel comfortable, relaxed, and safe to interact and tell their stories. However, there were some settings to which I did not have access or could not change. These were the classrooms at the hosting schools of placements.
Secondary School and Classroom Settings. The information describing schools and classrooms came from pre-service teachers’ field site reports completed as a part of their English course and my observations of the pre-service teachers in the field. The school sites are important for this research investigation as place is one of the dimensions of the methodological approach and shapes an environmental context of the study. Two out of four research participants had their placements at the same school, which I call School A in this dissertation. One of the participants was assigned to a different school, which I call School B. The fourth participant was placed in yet another high school, which I call School C. All three participating schools were public high school in the same city and district school system and had many things in common. Below are descriptions of these schools.

School A is a city public high school with a student enrollment of 1346 students in grades 9-12. This is an old school, but the buildings are new. It looks nice and pleasant from the outside and inside. The hallways are freshly painted and light colors make it seem bigger and brighter.

The school’s faculty includes 112 educators, and 93 of them are full-time teachers. Educational background of the faculty is represented by approximately 55% of teachers with bachelor’s degree and 45% of teachers with master’s degree or higher. Experience wise, 29% of teachers worked in public schools less than 5 years, while 71% of faculty has more than five years of teaching experience. School A offers regular (94%) courses, which also include students with special needs, honors, and advanced placement (AP) courses. The class sizes fall under three main categories: (1) classes that have 1-20 students make 29% of student population; (2) classes that have 21-26 students make 26% of student population; and (3) classes that have 27-33 students make 42% of student population.
The school has an on-time graduation percentage of 72% exceeding both the district and state averages of 66.4% and 64.8% respectively. Gender wise, 52% of students are male, and 48% of them are female. Students eligible for free and reduced lunch comprise 59% of the student population. The racial diversity of the students’ body includes:

- 64% are minorities, among them 3% are Asian Americans, less than 0.1% are Native Americans, and 61% are African Americans;
- 36% are White.

*School B* is a city public high school with a student enrollment of 1228 students in grades 9-12. It is one of the oldest schools in the district, and the buildings carry the burden of time. The ceilings and the walls in hallways have some cracks, and the paint could be refreshed. The school appears to be clean though, and there are signs of good caring from the janitorial stuff, faculty, and students.

The school has 77 teachers, contributing to a student to teacher ratio of about 17:1, a little more than in School A’s 14:1 ratio. Most of the teachers have a master’s degree and higher (71%), and the remaining 29 % hold bachelor’s degree. About 20% of teachers have one to five years of experience, while the majority of the faculty taught for over five years. Along with regular classes, this school has gifted and talented program. It also offers AP courses. *School B* has a 78% graduation rate, even higher than School A, and is considered one of the highest performing high schools in the state. The average class size is about 23-30 students.

Students eligible for reduced and free lunch make 65% of the student population. There are 54% of male students as opposed to 46 % of female students in the school. Racial demographics of the school are represented by 84% of African Americans, 13.2% of Whites, about 3% of Asian Americans, and less than 1% of American Indians.
School C is the third city public high school where one of the study participants was placed during the Fall 2013 semester. It is not an old school, but it seems like it has not been maintained very well, and it appears to be disorganized. The walls need some uplifting to cover the cracks and remove stains and students’ writings. The white boards could use some cleaning, and paper trash on the floors in the classrooms does not create much comfort either. As a whole, the school environment felt unsettling to me, like some temporary arrangement where everyone is “sitting on suitcases.”

The school enrolls about 1040 students in grades 8-12 with 64 full-time teachers making a student to teacher ratio of about 16:1. Unlike Schools A and B, School C has more teachers with bachelor’s degree (59%) and less with master’s degree or higher (41%). The school’s faculty teaching for over five years represents 69% of all teachers, the rest have been teaching less than five years. The graduation rate is considerably lower than in two other schools at approximately 55%. The school offers an array of traditional and honors level courses, including several AP courses and college dual enrollment opportunities with local community college and university, like the two other schools participating in field experiences.

More than 72% of students are eligible for reduced or free lunch at School C. Unlike Schools A and B, this school has a slightly prevalent female student population (about 52%) with 48% male students. The school is ethnically and racially diverse with 79% African American students, 12% Whites, about 6% Asians, 3% Hispanic, and less than 1% Native Americans.

All three schools actively participate in athletic activities and are equipped with a gym, stadium, track field, library, school theater, and computer labs. They compete in football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, soccer, track, swimming, bowling, and golf. In addition, these schools have many clubs and extra-curricular activities, some of which meet as
regular classes: art club, band, Beta club, choir, Flag Corps, Math club, yearbook, drama club, and some others.

My personal observations confirmed a seemingly friendly and safe school environment in all three schools settings. Students were respectful and helped me find the school office and the classrooms where the pre-service teachers were. The school personnel was also very hospitable, except for the School B where I had to wait for about five minutes until the office coordinator even noticed me standing in front of the counter. The host teachers, in all three schools on the days I visited, were hospitable, friendly, and eager to answer my questions.

Classrooms. The classrooms looked similar in all three schools. They were average size with three large windows providing enough light. The rooms were able to accommodate up to 30 students without cramming. Each classroom had a teacher technology station with a computer and printer. In Schools A and B, the classrooms had eight additional computers for students to conduct research or work on drafting, revising, and publishing of their class assignments. The classroom in School C had only four more computers for students to work.

The desks in the Schools A and C were arranged in five rows with about 5 desks per row, so that all students faced the front of the class. On the days I visited the desks did not move to form circles or clusters for the students to work in groups. The students were working as a class or individually responding to the questions in the worksheets. It appeared to be a bit overcrowded and was not very convenient for the circulation that I observed when one of pre-service teachers tried to move around the classroom. In School B the desks in the classroom were assembled in two sections or two rows facing each other. So that row one faced row two, and row three faced row four. During class, when a teacher completed a whole class instruction
activity, she asked students to form clusters of four students to work in groups. Since the desks were already facing each other, it was a very efficient way of creating groups.

In Schools A and B, the host teachers posted objectives and lesson agendas on the boards in front of the students, while in the third classroom in School C, I could not locate that information. I also noticed that in the first two classrooms, students were really responsive to classroom procedures, so any transition from one activity to another went fast and smoothly, while in the third classroom students took more time regrouping and asked a lot of procedural questions.

The positive attribute of all three classrooms was a wealth of students’ work generously displayed all over the walls. There were shelves with books and dictionaries in all the classrooms as well as number of posters serving as reminders of grammar rules or steps of the writing process. The classrooms were relatively clean, but teacher’s desks in all three classrooms were overflowing with papers, handouts, writing supplies, and therefore, seemed to be lack of organization to me.

**Campus Settings.** Three other settings include two classrooms on campus and my office. Both classrooms were on the first floor of Building A on SU’s campus. These were typical campus classrooms for groups of up to 36 students intended for a lecture or seminar. The rooms were not very spacious because they were crowded with up to seven rows of desks. There were six desks in each row lined up to face the front of the room with a board and an instructor’s corner with computer and other technological devices.

Both instructors teaching English and Education methods courses rearranged the desks to form a circle or semi-circle to create an atmosphere for open discussions and interactions among the undergraduate students and instructor. Often that arrangement got disrupted during class
when pre-service teachers were working in groups discussing questions or teaching strategies, creating a learning activity, or analyzing a novel. In this case, one could observe four or five clusters with four or five desks in each cluster, and the instructor walking from one group to another and participating in various activities the groups were working on at the moment. Although it seemed like a traditional classroom setting, the class participants felt comfortable to express their opinions and share their experiences because of the ability to move around, interact, and be a part of a smaller group.

Finally, there was my office. It was a small room on the third floor in Building B, and I shared it with two other graduate students. There was not much furniture or decorative elements in this room: three desks, three chairs, and three floor-to-ceiling bookcases filled with textbooks and fiction that graduate students used for their doctoral studies. Each desk was neatly organized and did not expose much presence of its owner. My college mates and I did not work much in the office unless we had more than an hour break in between classes or meetings. Each of us had a favorite place to work; mine is at my home office where I was surrounded with all the resources and comfort I needed.

I do not remember a single time when all three of us were in the office at the same time. Nevertheless, that place attracted me as a perfect private area, where I sometimes brought small groups of three to four team members to work on a course project. My team members who did not have offices on campus usually enjoyed the privacy and simple room arrangement that was not distracting and stimulated group work. Last year, when I was conducting a case study for one of my graduate courses and a pilot study for a dissertation project, I invited my participants for individual interviews to the office. In the fall semester, my writing group met in that room at least once a week. My fellow graduate students thought it was a nice and quiet space with no
distractions, allowing for productive writing and constructive feedback while revising and editing each other’s work.

When I was scheduling the first round of interviews with my participants, I asked them where they preferred to meet and talk, and mentioned my office. Because I planned to interview each of my participants at least three times during their experiences, I wanted each of them to make a decision about the interview site. They said it had to be a quiet and private territory, and that my office seemed to be just the right place for the purpose. Thus, all the individual interviews were conducted in my office. I made sure each of my participants felt comfortable and was able to open up safely about the field experiences, positive or upsetting moments, concerns, questions, or other issues that emerged during the interview.

Summing up this section, I would like to emphasize once again that the settings in which the participants engaged in experiences of learning, interacting, sharing, and creating narratives were important for the study. Now that I have described the research setting, I will outline data collection procedures and instruments, explain coding and reduction of data, and introduce approaches to analyze the gathered data.

**Data Collection and Methods**

The narrative research methodology enables researcher to use various methods of data collection in order to create “narratives of lived experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To avoid overloading the study participants with extra writing assignments, I used some of the information and assignments pre-service teachers completed as part of their field experiences in connection with the college courses they took during the fall semester. Those included pre-service teachers’ field site reports, field experience logs, think pieces, and conceptual teaching units. The field site reports, field experience logs, and think pieces were required by syllabus in
their English methods course taught by Dr. Slade, who developed the syllabus and assignments. I asked him to use two themes I designed for two of the five think pieces students wrote for that class. The conceptual teaching units were final projects for the Methods course I taught in the fall semester and designed on the pattern described by Smagorinsky (2008b) in *Teaching English by Design*. I used Dr. Slade’s syllabus from a previous year with slight modifications of the resources, assignments, and weekly classes’ agendas. All 16 students had to complete those assignments as part of their regular coursework, so they all informed the research study and influenced my selected participants’ work as well.

The other data collection methods consisted of autobiographical essays, researcher field notes, individual and focus group interviews, and a questionnaire. The data collection timeline is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Data Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Date Collected</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Site Report</td>
<td>By November 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Experience Logs</td>
<td>By December 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Pieces</td>
<td>By December 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical Essay</td>
<td>By October 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Teaching Units</td>
<td>By December 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>September 17-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>October 21-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>December 2-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>September 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>December 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>October 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Field Site Report.** The purpose of a field site report was to demonstrate the importance of educating pre-service teachers about the specific context of their field experience. In this study, that context was mainly shaped by schools where prospective teachers were placed for the
duration of their field experiences. The information pre-service teachers included in the report reflected:

- School data: location, size, performance, faculty;
- Student data: SES (socio-economic status), race/ethnicity;
- Community data: history of the neighborhood, SES and ethno-racial makeup, local commerce and recreation.

Pre-service teachers gathered information for the report from online resources available through the parish school system website, newspapers, TV news, and alike. Other sources of information were conversations and interviews with school faculty, community, and neighborhood members. Pre-service teachers were encouraged to talk to a school principal, teachers, and students to learn about the school, its history, and traditions. The report had a flexible format and length, meaning that the author could choose and present information using descriptions, anecdotes, visuals (photos, drawings, and maps).

For purposes of the research, I used field site reports to supply the description of the school settings to detail the research context. The reports’ content added to my knowledge of study participants and helped understand what and how they think about school as a place for teaching and learning.

Field Experience Logs. Pre-service teachers enrolled in English methods course were required to turn in their weekly field logs on the assigned date and time. The course instructor provided pre-service teachers with guidelines for the writing of field logs. Taken together, these logs reflected all 40 hours spent by each pre-service teacher in the field. The model for keeping field logs included (1) a heading, where teacher candidates indicated date, time, subject, and teacher observed; (2) a numbered sequence of observed events in the classroom or any other
school setting; and (3) an elaboration on and detailed analysis of one of the described events (Appendix J). The selected events could be in relation to the curriculum, the teacher, the students, or any other experience with the schools. Field experience logs reflect pre-service teachers’ observations and analytical skills and help course instructors to understand the issues of concern. Some instructors choose to discuss critical issues raised from the field experience logs to facilitate field experiences and to help pre-service teachers evaluate situations and identify ways to find solutions. These field logs provided me with invaluable data source that elucidated pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching and the challenges they might face in real classrooms as well as their thinking about the profession. Because of the huge amount of field experience logs (40 hours from each student in a cohort), I only used two sets of field experience logs – one from their first week in the field, and the other one from the last week in the field. Choosing these two sets from opposite ends of the time continuum allowed me to observe how pre-service teachers’ perceptions of classroom events and the language to describe those events changed from the beginning to the end of the field experience practicum.

**Think Pieces.** One of the course assignments for English methods course was writing think pieces. A think piece was a written reflection intended to be shared with and commented on by the other members of a cohort. Hudson-Ross and Graham (1999) designed the think piece “as an extended free-write on a topic that concerned [the pre-service teachers]” (Graham, Hudson-Ross, Adkins, McWhorter, & Stewart, p. 113) to get direct feedback or advice about a teaching situation. Secondary pre-service teachers at SU wrote five think pieces throughout the semester. The pieces could be thoughtful extensions of one episode pre-service teachers that observed in the classroom, or it could be a philosophical analysis of an education issue suggested by some situation or incident in one of their observations. The written account was limited to a
page and half, or about 500 to 650 words. In agreement with the college instructor for the course, I suggested two topics for think pieces. The first one solicited how pre-service teachers understand teaching. In a direction to this piece, I offered “Teaching is…” as an opening phrase, and asked class participants to write their thoughts, understandings, and concerns about teaching; what metaphors may come to mind in connection with teaching; or reflections on their personal experience as students or their future professionals. I also requested that they write this think piece sometime at the beginning of the semester aiming to get pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching before they went out for their third field experience practicum.

For the second think piece, I proposed the following prompt: “Please, think about professional and personal qualities that define a successful teacher. After considering these qualities, choose the qualities that you observed during the field experiences or discuss your own qualities that in your opinion will assist you in becoming a successful teacher.” My goal with this prompt was to get some insight of how pre-service teachers perceive a successful teacher. I wanted them to think about the qualities they consider important for a teacher as a professional. The participants wrote this think piece closer to the end of the semester, sometime in the first week of December in the fall semester.

Although I carefully examined all five think pieces produced by the participants, the two I suggested played a major role for the purpose of this research. They provided me with some information that helped in finding some answers to the research questions for this study. In addition, they revealed the pre-service teachers’ growth from the first think piece to the last, which I demonstrate in Chapter Five.

**Conceptual Teaching Units.** Education methods course participants had to develop a conceptual teaching unit as a final, culminating project. For the purposes of that course,
Smagorinsky’s *Teaching English by Design* (2008b) was the foundational textbook that provided pre-service teachers with the guidelines and components of a conceptual teaching unit. Pre-service teachers planned to cover four to six weeks of teaching and defined their units under any of the conceptual categories that were outlined by Smagorinsky: theme, period, movement, region, genre, works by a single author, or learning a key strategy. Pre-service teachers worked on their units throughout the semester while participating in field experiences. Creating conceptual units provided opportunities for each future teacher to connect theory about teaching with actual teaching practice while constructing a personal interpretation or perspective of a chosen category. As a course instructor (I talk about my instructor role later in this chapter), I evaluated not only my students’ ability to apply what was learned in the course into practice, but my own ability to teach the course and provide pre-service teachers with necessary support and guidance throughout the process.

The process of creating a teaching unit in my course was similar to the writing process pre-service teachers learned about in their content courses. I made an effort to guide them through each step of the process similar to the way they would be guiding their future students by beginning with a “seed” paper (brainstorming for the topic of interest), developing a detailed outline (planning phase), creating a rough draft, and revising followed by editing with peer review and feedback, and finally publishing (final draft stage). It was interesting to observe that the “teachers-to-be” had the similar struggles with a project as their prospective students would have. Some of the participants felt overwhelmed at first, until they realized that they had to do just one step at a time. This is a critical concept to learn for pre-service teachers and an important one to teach to their future students. As a researcher, I am interested in the ways pre-
service teachers envisioned their teaching, and were able to apply teaching methods, strategies, and activities learned, shared, and experienced during the course.

**Autobiographical Essay.** At first, I anticipated asking only the four main participants, who volunteered for individual interviews, to write an autobiographical essay. After giving it a second thought, I reconsidered that initial intent and replaced one of the assignments for the portfolios pre-service teachers had to assemble for the Education course with autobiographical essay. I wanted all 16 cohort members to write an autobiographical essay with the long-term goal that these initial autobiographical accounts will be a starting point for further reflective practices, and pre-service teachers may want to continue adding stories of events and experiences that affected their lives in some ways. In the directions to the essay prompt, I asked pre-service teachers to reflect on their background and experiences. Their autobiography should focus on how they came to teaching. I encouraged them to write about events or situations that served as reasons to enter the teaching profession, about their favorite teacher, or teacher qualities they valued the most. They could also share any previous experience, from the first two field experiences, working with children, their understanding of challenges teachers face in the 21st century, etc. As initially projected, those essays supplied information for detailing the participants’ profiles and helped learning about them as pre-service teachers. Furthermore, they provided me with valuable data for understanding how their personal life histories influenced their decision to become a teacher. According to a narrative inquiry theory, those stories were lived experiences that would shed light on the future experiences and connect the past with the future through the present moment. Another hidden goal was to make all pre-service teachers to think about their childhood, their own educational experiences, and connect those to the life decisions they made and to their chosen profession. Lastly, there was another result, hidden even
from me at first or maybe not anticipated beforehand—I did not look at my students the same way anymore; I had a respect for each and every one of them for the personal stories they chose to share with me through their autobiographical writing. It was like a misplaced piece of the puzzle that was finally found and added meaning to the picture as a whole.

**Researcher Field Notes.** Throughout the entire research process, I kept a journal of my field notes and other observations. I placed great importance on all kinds of notes—reflections on the interviews, thoughts about visiting a school and a classroom, notes while coding the data, etc.—anything that aided me to notice small things and forgettable details. Those field notes included observation notes from the field (schools and classrooms) with a focus on a pre-service teacher in the classroom. The notes from the field also offered some specifics for the school and classroom settings descriptions.

I recorded my observations while visiting an English methods course in which my participants were enrolled along with the Education course. During that course, pre-service teachers were discussing their field experiences, sharing what they had accomplished in the classroom, reflecting on teacher practices. That course offered an opportunity to talk about their concerns about their future profession. All those issues were closely tied to my research agenda and could offer some responses to my questions.

There were field notes reflecting my observation of participants during the one-on-one and focus group interviews. In addition to learning how to conduct interviews, those notes helped me identify the questions that provided richer accounts of the participants and eliminate the questions that were not effective for supplying data for my research questions. Observing participants, I modified the interview strategies to make pre-service teachers feel more comfortable and adjusted my input in the interview.
Sometimes writing the notes was challenging because I wanted to listen without missing anything that was going on in the field experience classrooms where my participants observed or in the SU classroom where the English methods course instructor or I taught. Often, I would just jot down a word or a short phrase and then write it out after the classes. I did not particularly mention what came from my observations and notes in this dissertation, except occasional instances. Mostly, I weaved those observational details in the analyses and interpretations to create a holistic picture of my participants and their context.

**Interviews.** Interviews were one of the major sources of data for this study. All the interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. When I first began work on developing interview protocols, I had over 39 questions for the first individual interview. I consequently added nine questions to the second and third interviews allowing for possible further questions. The questions for the first focus group interview totaled 20, and I added nine possible follow-up questions during the second focus group interview. After carefully revising the interview questions and considering advice of my committee members, I eliminated all the questions that provided demographic information and short responses. Those questions were included in a questionnaire. Some of the questions I rephrased for clarity and some of the repeating questions were replaced by one question which could elicit a better quality response from the participants. After the revisions, the final version of individual interview protocol had 17 questions for the first interview with six follow-up questions. The focus group interview protocol was finalized to include 10 questions for the first interview and five follow-up questions. The focus group (Appendix E) and individual interview (Appendix F) protocols are included in Appendices.
Two focus group interviews were conducted in a classroom setting with cohort members. The first interview took place at the beginning of the third field experience cycle on September 18, 2013. That interview was focused on the two previous field experience cycles and the pre-service teachers’ expectations about their final, third experience practicum. During that interview, focus group participants also discussed their understanding of teaching and their concerns about teaching profession. The second focus group interview was held during the last week of the fall semester on December 11. The final interview was centered on the third cycle of field experiences and aimed to identify whether the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about teaching have changed, and if so, how these perceptions shifted and for what reasons or factors they changed. The focus group interviews were helpful and informative as they yielded the necessary information because the participants were the pre-service teachers in the same cohort, in similar situations, and cooperated with one another (Creswell, 2012).

There were three individual interviews with each of the participants at three distinct points during the study. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the fall semester, right before pre-service teachers went into the field for their third cycle? Similar to a focus group interview, the first interview intended to elicit participants’ stories about their first two experiences in the field and their expectations about the upcoming field experience practicum. I also asked questions about their understanding of teaching. The second interview took place in the middle of the semester, when pre-service teachers were half-way through with their field experiences. To conclude the interview cycle, the third interview was during the last week of the semester. The second and third interviews were focused on the final field experience cycle. I was interested in how their perceptions about teaching and its challenges were shaped, whether they changed or not throughout the experience practicum, and what the reasons for change
were—the coursework, the influence of the field and of the host teacher, or all of the above.

During the last interview, I also asked them to look back on all their field experiences and reflect on the significant moments that somehow caused them to make some discoveries about themselves, teaching, their future students, etc.

When scheduling the interviews, I tried to eliminate stress and avoid dates when the participants had midterm or final exams, so I asked for the days and times that suited them the best. I conducted all the interviews, and after each I reflected on the interview process and made adjustments for the following interviews. It was not an easy job at times. I tried to keep interviews dialogic and interactive, while simultaneously allowing my participants to be the leading voices in these interactive dialogues. Sometimes I found myself sharing my personal teaching experiences with them or responding to their concerns and worries about teaching, managing a classroom, or following the school, district, or state education policies. In the end, I always asked if I had missed something that the participants would like to talk about, whether they had anything else to add to their thoughts, or if they wanted to revisit and revise something from our interview.

All the interviews were audio recorded with two recording devices, Sony MP3 recorder with two built-in microphones and Android smartphone. Both provided high quality recordings that were easily transferred to my computer. All the interviews were transcribed word for word and quotes are used in Chapters Four and Five to present the study participants and to support the analysis and interpretation of the findings. After transcribing the interviews, I emailed them to the study participants for revision and approval. I wanted to make sure what they said during the interview was what they meant to say and there were no recording mishaps or major shifts in
their thoughts and views since the interview process. All four participants positively responded
to the transcriptions without making any changes in their accounts.

**Questionnaire.** As I mentioned earlier, I developed a questionnaire that my study
participants could complete within ten minutes. It was comprised of the six questions that
provided demographic data and short responses that supplied information for describing the 16
participants who were in the cohort (Appendix G). The questionnaire also had four open-ended
questions that could add to the main participants’ responses and allow me to see whether the rest
of the cohort had similar concerns, parallel themes, or suggestions. The questionnaire was
completed on November 13 in the fall semester after our class meeting for Education methods
course.

**Data Coding and Reduction**

Initially, I planned to begin the coding process as soon as I collected the first data set. I
had to stop myself and wait until all the narrative data had been collected because I did not want
my second and third interviews with participants to be prompted and influenced by the
preliminary coding and analysis. I did not want to compromise the results by looking at
incomplete sets of data and consciously ask questions that would fill in the gaps in my
investigation or provide the information I expected to be there. I knew waiting for all the data to
be collected was going to be more intense and put the time constraints on me, but the quality of
the research was more crucial, and I chose quality.

As I collected all the written pieces from my participants, completed the interview
process and transcribed the interviews, I turned to coding. Surprisingly, it did not take as much
time as I anticipated, and the main reason for that was my familiarity with ATLAS.ti, a
qualitative research software, and coding process in general. My major professor introduced me
to both the software and coding process during my first year in graduate studies. Together we coded data for one project, and I partially helped coding the second project. During one of my qualitative research courses, our professor also shared some tips about the software and ways of coding, and I completed a case study coding interviews on my own. So, my previous experiences prepared me to code for my dissertation project.

I like to think about coding as a kaleidoscope with bits of colored glass. First, I have all the raw data, which is like bits and odd pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope with no particular pattern or sense of connection. After I turn the kaleidoscope, various bits and pieces cluster together, as though they are searching for “what looks alike and feels alike” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Just like the kaleidoscope does every time one turns it, I quest for relationships and connections among my bits of data, slowly organizing them in certain patterns.

Keeping in mind the kaleidoscope metaphor, I started with an open coding without having any prior codes or thematic labels. First, there were no known published systematic studies of pre-service teachers in the field experience setting that I could consult for codes and categories. Next, I wanted to ensure all the data were carefully read and coded. Because of the narrative nature of this study, my major concern was to avoid any chance of neglecting even the smallest detail that may contribute to creating the meaning of these narratives.

I coded the first interview with Katniss on my own. Because I did not want to omit anything, I coded almost every phrase. Some codes I named and some coded “in vivo”, just highlighting the word or phrase that I found important. When I was finished with the first interview I had 86 codes, many of these codes were wordy and had a descriptive nature. For example, there were codes like, “being able to adapt to another group of students,” “making reading relevant to students,” or “establishing a dialogue zone in the classroom.” That did not
raise my concerns as I knew after coding the first interview of all four participants I would carefully revise my codes. So, even 305 codes, after the first set of interviews was completed, did not overwhelm me. I had some codes that were repetitive and those were easily merged within the software. I also realized that I had coded some specific details that would go under the same thematic category. For example, a thematic category Successful Teacher had 57 codes providing teacher qualities and skills that pre-service teachers considered crucial for a successful teacher in the classroom. The pre-service teachers divided teacher qualities on professional and personal characteristics which a successful teacher should possess, in their opinion.

After initial coding of the first interviews, I asked my peers, graduate students in the School of Education, Laura, Destiny, and Erika to help with further coding. Laura and Erika have experience with the ATLAS.ti coding software, so they were able to look at my data with “fresh” eyes and provide their feedback to my initial coding. Furthermore, all three of us coded the second set of individual interviews, and then negotiated our codes and came to an agreement about the final codes. Destiny was new to ATLAS.ti, so I explained her how to work with the program, and showed her the coding of individual interviews. We reviewed the existing codes and coded together the first focus group interview. Then we coded the second focus group interview independently. After we finished coding, Destiny and I compared our coding, negotiated differences, and established a set of common codes. Such a collaborative coding provided me with necessary help and strengthened trustworthiness of the research by using peer review and debriefing.

As a result of careful review and revision of the codes, there emerged three overarching thematic family categories, which I named Field Experiences and Their Organization, Understanding Teaching, and Becoming a Teacher. Each family category consisted of several
codes associated with themes evolved from the data. The first family category Field Experiences and Their Organization included nine themes; the second – Understanding Teaching was comprised of four themes, and, finally, Becoming a Teacher family category contained three themes. Table 2 provides these overarching thematic family categories and themes resulted from coding.

Table 2. Overarching Thematic Family Categories and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Experiences and Their Organization</th>
<th>Understanding Teaching</th>
<th>Becoming a Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for FEs*</td>
<td>Defining Teaching</td>
<td>Learning about Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a Cohort</td>
<td>An Image of a Successful Teacher</td>
<td>Thinking about Teaching and Own Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations for FEs</td>
<td>Building Relationships with Students</td>
<td>Growth through Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in the Classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing While in Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges during FEs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to the FEs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of FEs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* FEs – Field Experiences

Furthermore, each theme category contained a number of codes reflecting perceptions of the participants pertaining to that specific theme. An example of a theme category Value of Field Experiences, which consisted of 51 codes (Table 3), is presented on the next page.

Numbers in parentheses next to each code represents how many times this particular code was used.

When I moved to coding pre-service teachers’ written data sources, I began with the same body of codes that were used for coding the interviews. I invited Erika to assist me with coding of the think pieces and field experience logs. We briefly reviewed the codes and the work that had been done previously. We anticipated that the number of codes might grow as we examined and analyzed written work as opposed to the interviews, but they did not. In fact, we
used fewer codes for each think piece because instruction for writing think pieces already determined the theme of each think piece. For example, the first think piece was about how pre-service teachers understand teaching. For that think piece, we used the codes that were under overarching theme of *Understanding Teaching*, including the codes for the themes within this family category.

Table 3. Theme Category *Value of Field Experiences* Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a good rapport (4)</td>
<td>learning about students (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodating students with needs (5)</td>
<td>learning about yourself (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assisting students in group/indiv. work (7)</td>
<td>learning about lesson structure (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adapting to another group of students (6)</td>
<td>observing inclusion classroom (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being more confident (7)</td>
<td>observing other teachers (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being organized (6)</td>
<td>observing scaffolding (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being prepared (15)</td>
<td>organizing time (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build trust with students (5)</td>
<td>planning lessons (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building on experience (7)</td>
<td>preparing a lesson to teach (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenges of teaching (13)</td>
<td>reading activities (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in understanding teaching (7)</td>
<td>reflection on observations (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in yourself (7)</td>
<td>relationships with students (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comfortable in the classroom (6)</td>
<td>roles in the classroom (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication with hosting teacher (13)</td>
<td>seeing individuals in the classroom (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creativity in teaching (9)</td>
<td>seeing what you learned (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing identity (8)</td>
<td>teacher qualities (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effort makes FE better (3)</td>
<td>teacher qualities (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entering the setting that is different (3)</td>
<td>teacher strategies (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite activity from a host teacher (6)</td>
<td>teacher/students relationships (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>host teacher's style (12)</td>
<td>teaching a lesson (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction with students (21)</td>
<td>teaching procedures (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involvement in the classroom (12)</td>
<td>thinking about future teaching (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowing what FEs are about (4)</td>
<td>thinking about own classroom (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning about kids living in poverty (2)</td>
<td>understanding adolescents (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning more grade levels throughout FEs (4)</td>
<td>understanding various learning styles (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the entire process of coding, it was obvious that there are no definite borders between the thematic categories; therefore, there were numerous overlapping codes belonging to more than one theme. For example, while discussing teaching, pre-service teachers consistently
included teacher qualities and skills that strengthen teaching, and while sharing their experiences in the classroom in writing, discussion, or interview, they were reflecting on the value of field experiences at the same time.

**Data Analysis**

During the coding process and after it was finished, I continued working with the data in order to analyze and search for answers to my research questions. Having collected data that are narrative in nature, I used narrative approaches to analyze the collected sources. As Riessman (2008) commented, “Narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (p. 11). Because most of my data consisted of stories told by pre-service teachers about their experiences in the field, the narrative approach to analysis seemed to be the most appropriate.

According to Abbot (1992), narrative analysis brings attention to sequences of action because the investigator focuses on “particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times” (p. 428). This quote echoes the three-dimensional space approach developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which serves as the methodological framework for this research study. Based on Dewey’s concepts of experience, continuity, and interaction in close connection with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, the three-dimensional approach to data analysis includes the inquiry into three elements: temporality, context, and interaction, based on personal and social relationships.

Analyzing the data sources, I searched first for interconnectedness among pre-service teachers in the cohort, their interactions with college instructors, host teachers, the students at schools of placement, and such. The second focused search was centered on continuity, reflecting on the past experiences through the present, and foreseeing the future. Finally, I
considered the places, the settings where these interactions occurred at certain periods of time, and how the places affected the pre-service teachers’ perception of their experiences. Presenting participants’ profiles through narratives and sharing their perceptions of field experiences, I identified times, places, settings, and the order in which particular events occurred along with what kind of interactions among pre-service teachers, host teachers, and middle or high school students were developed in a specific temporal and space arrangement.

Narrative analysis is unique in the sense that it can employ a variety of analysis techniques and approaches. That is why, in addition to looking for three-dimensional elements in the collected data, I engaged in thematic analysis as suggested and detailed by Riessman (2008). Together, these two approaches beneficially complemented each other allowing me to explore the variety of themes and elements and, at the same time, keep the story “intact.” Thematic analysis was aimed primarily at what was spoken (Riessman, 2008). While analyzing stories of my participants and constantly asking who, what, when and how, I followed Dewey’s (1938/1963) notion of interaction. It focuses on four directions: inward (feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions of pre-service teachers), outward (environment), backward, and forward (past, present, and future) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

Because narrative research is case-centered (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Riessman, 2008), I looked at and analyzed each of my participant as a “case” and then presented the findings pertaining to each individual case in Chapter Four, beginning with personal stories of the pre-service teachers participating in the research study. The pre-service teachers provide the main voices in Chapter Four. Further, in Chapter Five, I brought all the participants together and discussed the findings looking for commonalities and differences among the cases to answer the research questions.
As noted earlier, the three overarching thematic family categories that emerged through coding were *Field Experiences and Their Organization*, *Understanding Teaching*, and *Becoming a Teacher* (Table 2). It is important to note that none of these categories can be isolated from each other. These main categories and themes within the groupings have close interactions, interrelations, and cohesion between and among them. While the first thematic family group *Field Experiences and Their Organization* directly responds to only one research question about the value of field experiences, it is the most essential category for gaining deep insights into the pre-service teachers’ meaning-making process. Through this category, I was able to determine how the participants understand teaching, what they learn, and what their concerns about teaching are. And it is this category that allowed me to follow the pre-service teachers’ growth through field experiences and marked the turning points in shaping their teaching philosophies. In a similar way, the first and second thematic categories are connected and related to the third category *Becoming a Teacher*. Going through field experiences, observing host teachers, trying on different roles in the classroom, and forming the ideas of “teaching” and “successful teacher,” the participants move to becoming teachers—learning about themselves, developing their teacher identities, and thinking about their teaching and own classrooms.

I also explored and experimented with Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia. Introducing my participants in Chapter Four, I have included their stories that led them to choose teaching as profession from the first person point of view. My goal was to reveal their distinct voices within the cohort. Even when they were talking about similar experiences and sharing similar ideas, each voice clearly represented an individual participant’s style and meaning-making process. Together their accounts created heteroglossia – a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints
developed in similar contexts, during the same period of time and undergoing similar experiences.

In addition to the multiplicity of voices within a cohort, I searched for multiple voices within one participant’s voice. Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogue supports heteroglossia as a phenomenon present within each individual. When a person thinks, she or he conducts a dialogue with self. Often the inner voices create multiple viewpoints and opinions within one such dialogue. When the dialogue involves two or more participants, the multiplicity of voices within one person can be noticeable as well. To demonstrate that I chose one episode from stories told by two participants and created an “I” poem, using phrases and sentences beginning with “I” + action verb, or “I” + linking verb and a noun or adjective. Analyzing such a poem allowed for “hearing” multiple voices within one individual. Those voices elicited some unexpected, sometimes controversial thoughts within that person helping me understand various views of events, actions, and/or interactions (Yin, 2009). I have included two “I” poems and interpretations at the end of Chapter Five.

**Exploring Subjectivity: My Role as a Researcher**

My role as a researcher for this project was complicated. First, I was both an investigator and an active participant in this narrative inquiry research study. As I entered the project and collected stories, I constantly negotiated my relationships with the participants, the purposes of the study, the transitions from one phase to another, and the ways to be useful to my participants. As a participant, I interacted with pre-service teachers, created stories, learned, shared, and changed with my participants through our interactions. In the process, I also negotiated the meaning of the stories, sharing with my participants the copies of their transcribed interviews and discussing interpretations. I realized that the success of this research significantly depended
on how well I was able to navigate that space and come to agreeable terms with my participants in various settings.

The second complication was my former experience as a secondary English teacher. I had my own perceptions and beliefs about teaching, teacher preparation, and what constitutes an effective teacher, none of which might be the same for my research participants. However, I was aware of that, and I made every effort to prevent my personal views from interfering with the research process by attentively listening and properly recording the stories told by the pre-service teachers. Moreover, as a teacher educator, I recognized the changes in the society and new demands to teacher preparation that resulted in creating an updated image of the teacher for the 21st century.

Lastly, the third complication to my role was teaching the cohort of English majors who were the participants in my research investigation. I taught the Education methods course located in the Education department that accompanied the third cycle of field experiences. That was the first time I was an instructor for the course on my own. I had assisted my major professor, Dr. Slade, with that course before, but my responsibilities and participation were limited to occasional presentations and assistance in grading conceptual teaching units created by former pre-service teachers.

Recognizing the complications of my position during the research process as the instructor for this course, it was imperative for me to maintain professionalism and the expectations for the Education course while complying with the NCATE standards for teacher preparation, the Code of Governmental Ethics for this university’s employees, academic achievement, diversity, discipline, and service policies. Therefore, designing and implementing the research project required a balance between my professional specifications as the instructor.
and my research agenda. The pre-service teachers in this course could choose to participate in the study or not, and it was the first thing I explained to them clearly. They had to understand that all the assignments and activities of the course as outlined in the syllabus (see Appendix D for a copy of syllabus) had to be completed on time, including the development of the conceptual teaching unit which was the final project for this course. The unit and autobiographical essay were the only two assignments I added to the course that would serve directly as a data source. All other interactions with the participants were outside the classroom setting and had no influence on the students’ progress in the course.

Such a position of being a researcher, participant, and course instructor at the same time created limitations many educational researchers recognized (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Smyth & Holian, 2008). On the other hand, some researchers highlighted advantages in that “multi-role” of position. For example, Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) identified three key advantages of being an insider researcher, and labeled a researcher who was specifically a course instructor at the same time: (a) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied; (b) not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and (c) having an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. Further, insider-researchers generally knew how to best approach people. In general, they had more knowledge, which took an outsider a long time to acquire (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I agree with this statement; by the time of our first interviews, I knew my participants for three or four weeks. We had interacted in a classroom setting, and I had observed these pre-service teachers discussing issues of education and teacher preparation while visiting an English methods course taught by Dr. Slade.

Although there were various advantages of being an insider-researcher, there were also problems associated with being an instructor. For example, my greater familiarity with the
participants could lead to a loss of objectivity. Unconsciously, I might be making wrong assumptions about the research process based on my prior knowledge which could be considered a bias (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). However, educational research was always concerned with human beings and their behavior, involving a great number of players, where each could bring to the research process a wide range of perspectives, including the researcher’s own perspective. As a result, the situation might produce a more balanced and, in this sense, a more “objective” account of the participants’ gradual development.

To conduct credible research, I recognized the possible effects of a perceived bias on data collection and analysis and respected the ethical issues related to the confidentiality and anonymity of the organization and individual participants. In addition, at each and every stage of the research, I considered and addressed the issues about access to privileged information that might influence the researcher’s role and decisions, (Smyth & Holian, 2008). In order to minimize researcher’s bias, I closely worked with my participants while maintaining the continuity of the process, guaranteeing validity, or conducting member checks. The next two sections deal with issues of trustworthiness of the results and ethical considerations.

**Trustworthiness of the Results**

As all storytellers do, narrative researchers face audiences when presenting their analytic stories in the form of research reports. Bosk (cited in Riessman, 2008) poses one of the central questions concerning the results of qualitative research: “all field work done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?” (p. 184). This is a legitimate question, and a narrative researcher must have an answer to it. When applied to narrative research, two levels of validity are of utmost importance – “the story told by a participant and the validity of the analysis, or the story told by the researcher” (Riessman, 2008, p. 184).
Qualitative researchers have various perspectives regarding the importance of validation in research studies; they use different definitions, terms, and procedures for establishing it (Creswell, 2012, p. 244). Writing their first major article on narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stressed:

Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. The language and criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry are under development in the research community. (p.7)

This was in 1990, over 20 years ago, but the situation has not changed much – the language and criteria for narrative research are still in the stage of development. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I will use the term “trustworthiness,” recognized in writings of Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), Riessman (2008), Stake (2000), and others. To ensure trustworthiness of my research study I employed several strategies described below.

**Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation**

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation requires a researcher to observe and be engaged with research participants for a reasonably long time, at least several months (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From the moment I met the cohort of English majors participating in this study in August, I was engaged with them for over seven months through the end of March. During that time, I was able to build trustworthy relationships with them as my students through interactions, discussions, and activities in the classroom and as my participants in the research through observations and interviews. I learned about them and their educational culture, heard stories about their childhoods and school learning experiences, their favorite teachers and not so favorite. At the same time, they were learning about me, my educational background, and experiences as a teacher and researcher. We exchanged jokes and laughed; we thought about better ways to teach and collaboratively created activities we considered as effective and
engaging because of their relevance to students’ life experiences. We shared books we read. That was also a period of collecting data from my participants and my constant reflections from observing them in various settings.

**Peer Review or Debriefing**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer review and debriefing is another effective strategy strengthening trustworthiness of the research findings. This strategy allowed me to bring peer graduate students from the School of Education to review the data analysis throughout the study. As I mentioned before, three graduate students, Erika, Laura, and Destiny helped me throughout the research. They participated in coding of the individual and focus group interviews to build credibility. In addition, they read parts of the dissertation and questioned my methods, meanings, and interpretations and provided me with an opportunity for catharsis, listening to my feelings and struggles throughout the research process.

**Member, or Validation, Check**

Member checks occur when the researcher asks participants to review both the data collected by the interviewer and the researcher’s interpretation of that interview data. This technique is considered to be “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). After transcribing individual interviews, I provided my participants with textual copies of the recorded interviews for their approval. All of them positively responded to the transcripts adjusting the phrasing of their thoughts. The next member check happened after I coded, analyzed data, and wrote the Chapter Four with participants’ profiles. I shared the portion devoted to each participant with that person. She or he read it, and together we revised certain parts to create a true narrative presenting that participant. Again, those revisions were not major; a few sentences here and there, rephrasing, but the content and meaning did not change. The
participants were given an opportunity to verify the accuracy and credibility of my account. It seemed to be a healthy collaborative process that was helpful and beneficial to all of us. I included quotes from the participants’ to the second member check at the end of Chapter Five.

**Triangulation**

This is another strategy qualitative researchers actively employ in their studies. In this study, triangulation was accomplished by:

- asking different study participants the same research questions;
- collecting data using multiple methods—field site reports, field experience logs, think pieces, conceptual teaching units, autobiographical essay, researcher field notes, individual and focus group interviews, questionnaire;

Though I was the only investigator in the research study, member checks, peer review, and assistance from fellow graduate students with coding the data allowed for multiple viewpoints.

In addition to those measures, I positioned myself as a researcher, participant, and instructor to uncover possible disadvantages and biases. Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008) together with Riessman (2008) believe that such positioning along with the researcher’s reflexivity could be crucial to the data analysis and interpretation. Reflexivity addresses my subjectivity as researcher related to people and events as I encountered them in the field (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). It also confirms the interpretive nature of the research account as a narrative constructed by me (Wolcott, 2001). Based on the understanding that I was the primary data-gathering instrument in the proposed research study and that the “self” was the “key fieldwork tool” (Van Maanen, Manning, & Miller, 1989), reflexivity required me to be aware of my presence at all stages of the research process.
Transferability

Qualitative researchers define transferability as “parallel to external validity or generalizability” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 241). This includes ensuring a precise description of the following:

- **Researcher role**, which I described earlier in this chapter. There does not exist a technique to neutralize or completely eliminate the effects of my presence in the research and the effects of my personal perceptions added to the reactions of research participants to my presence. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize existing problems in order to minimize them. This does not mean that the collected data is invalid or not reliable. I addressed this issue above discussing the measures to ensure trustworthiness.

- **Participants**. I provided general characteristics of the research participants in this study earlier in this chapter. Chapter Four will narrate detailed descriptions of the participants. This is a critical part because they are the main sources of the data collected for the study.

- **Settings**. Data and their collection are influenced by the settings in which the study takes place. The description of the settings should be provided to allow replication of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I described campus settings, schools, and classrooms where pre-service teachers were placed during their field experiences based on participants’ field site reports and my observations from school visits.

- **Assumptions and theories**. The philosophical assumptions, theoretical, and methodological frameworks guiding this research study were explained in Chapter Two along with procedures at every stage of the research process beginning with the
literature review, research design, data collection timeline and methods, coding, reduction, and analysis.

To add to the above, I also included interview protocols, the syllabus for the course I taught, a sample of the field experience log, an episode from each participant used for an “I” poem, and other documents reflecting the requirements and expectations of secondary English majors at the university in the Appendices. Together, all these measures strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and their interpretations.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are important throughout the entire narrative inquiry process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). They cannot be limited to obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and filled out consent forms from the participants. Ethical matters shift and change as narrative inquirers move with participants through the research study.

As it is required by most of the universities and other institutional organizations, before designing and conducting a research project, I applied for, and was granted, the approval of the university’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix H). When I completed the proposal for the dissertation research, I refined the title of the study and made some changes to the interview protocols. I submitted the updates to the IRB office again, and on August 26, 2013 received an approval for modifications which the IRB office confirmed by stamping the Consent Form for study participants (Appendix I). After that I introduced the study to the cohort, explained the purpose of the study, the procedures and the use of data, and obtained their written consent for participation. The main purpose of those two steps was to guarantee the participants that they were not taking any harm or risks in connection with the research study, that they had a right to
withdraw from the study at any time, and that they were entitled to the benefits in the form of
knowledge, understanding, and opportunity to reflect on their experiences throughout the
investigation.

While analyzing and interpreting data, I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the
collected data and research participants. Confidentiality and anonymity are related but distinct
concepts, and often researchers confuse them and use the terms interchangeably. The Concise
Oxford Dictionary defines confidentiality as: “spoken or written in confidence; charged
with secrets” while anonymity is defined as: “of unknown name, of unknown authorship”
(2011). In other words, confidentiality deals with safeguarding the information, and anonymity
ensures protection of the name and identity of the participants. Because I knew the participants
and their personal information, that information was held in confidence with me and in
anonymity for the others.

Maintaining confidentiality of all information collected from research participants, I
ensured that only the investigator, i.e. myself, or individuals of the research team can identify the
responses of individual subjects. The graduate students assisting me with peer review and
debriefing did not know actual names or any demographic information about the participants.
Their interviews were transcribed and coded under pseudonyms. I made every effort to prevent
anyone outside of the project access to the collected data and information connecting individual
subjects with their responses. Providing anonymity of all information collected from research
participants, I guaranteed that the data did not link individual responses with participants’ names
and identities.

In analyzing and reporting the findings, I was consistent with stating accurate quotes
from participants and providing multiple perspectives. Furthermore, I shared with the
participants the copies of transcribed interviews and parts of the report that included analysis and interpretations of the findings based on a particular pre-service teacher’s input. Moreover, researcher-participants close collaboration and cooperation built on trust with each other assisted in solving ethical issues emerging during every step of the research process.

**Limitations and Possibilities of the Study**

The present study has limitations due to its small participant sample and narrative nature of the investigation. Only 16 pre-service teachers were in the cohort of secondary English majors and four of these were the major sources of data. The findings might not be generalizable because of the locally contextualized character of the research based on the participants from one university and the unique data set produced in collaboration between the participants and the researcher. Despite this, the study findings can provide learning and deeper understanding of the problem under investigation which can inform similar situations and contexts of the research.

Because narrative research presents a case-centered approach to analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Riessman, 2008), there are still possibilities for producing generalizable results:

- Case studies produce context-dependent knowledge – this knowledge is essential to the development of a field, in this case, teacher preparation of secondary English majors.

- Carefully chosen cases, coupled with critical researcher’s reflexivity may influence development of scientific knowledge.

- Narrative case-centered studies can “close-in” on everyday situations and test how something occurs in social life. The focus here is on the depth of the issue, rather than breadth.
Most important, these studies focus attention on narrative detail, the “little things.” Important insights can unfold from “the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories” (Bell, 2006, p. 37).

Another considerable limitation of the study is the subjectivity of the researcher, who is a former secondary English teacher and instructor for the university course pre-service teachers took along with their field experiences in the fall semester. The advantages and disadvantages of the researcher’s position have already been discussed in this chapter. Conversely, subjectivity may add to the strength of the data in narrative research as subjectivity supplements data with another viewpoint perspective created at a certain time through close and prolonged interaction with participants in a specific context (Atkinson, 1997; Egéa-Kuehne, 1992; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995).

**Summary**

This narrative study aimed to explore secondary pre-service English teachers’ perceptions of field experiences before student teaching. The theoretical foundation of the proposed study was grounded in John Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy and sociocultural theory of development associated with the name of Lev Vygotsky. Concepts of experience, continuity, and interaction of individual and social are at the heart of narrative inquiry theory; therefore, I employed narrative inquiry as a methodology, specifically the three-dimensional space methodology developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Using that methodology permitted me to explore my participants and their interactions with the surrounding environment at a particular time and place.

The narrative research design and procedures for this study were described in details and included data collection methods, coding and reducing of the data, as well as approaches to the
data analysis and interpretation. I began the project by introducing it to a cohort of the secondary English majors enrolled in Education methods course and recruiting volunteers to participate in the research study. Throughout the fall semester, I collected data employing a number of methods: field site reports, field experience logs, think pieces, conceptual teaching units, autobiographical essay, researcher field notes, individual and focus group interviews, and a questionnaire. The data was audio recorded and filed using electronic storage spaces on my personal computer. The coding was completed with the assistance of fellow graduate students using ATLAS.ti computer software. Analyzing the data, I turned to a three-dimensional space methodology looking for time, place and context of the interactions and experiences through the stories narrated by my participants. Additionally, I employed Riessman’s thematic approach to narrative analysis.

Because the sole investigator was also a participant in this qualitative research project, the issues of trustworthiness and ethical matters in connection with the narrative nature of the research were necessary to consider. As a researcher, I undertook various steps to strengthen the validity of the research project and demonstrate professional ethics towards my participants and other people in several settings with which we were involved throughout the process. The probable limitations and possibilities of the present research were outlined at the end of the chapter. The next chapter introduces the main participants of the study—Kathleen, Scout, Harry, and Katniss.
CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS’ VOICES

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the main participants of the study, those who shared their stories with me. There were four English majors out of 16 who volunteered to participate in three individual interviews to discuss their field experiences. Our interactions and relationships were developed through my visitations to the schools where they were placed. In addition, we met, worked, and interacted for 15 weeks in the Education course I taught. Finally, I observed the main participants along with the rest of the cohort several times in their English methods course with Dr. Slade.

The narrative that introduces each participant is based on my observations and her or his autobiographical essay. The first part of each participant’s profile is in the first person perspective; it is a personal voice sharing a story from a childhood or an event that brought this individual to choose teaching as a future profession. Each participant’s profile and her or his perceptions of teaching and its challenges are presented in light of a three-dimensional narrative space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with temporality (time and continuity), the personal and social (interactions within the context), and place (spaces where interactions and learning occur). Although I do not specifically identify where which one of these dimensions is used in this chapter, “hearing” participants’ voices and learning how they view the future profession, one may notice the connections and interrelatedness of the times, places, people, environments, and interactions pre-service teachers encountered throughout their life experiences, including teacher training and field experiences. The way I employ language devices also reflects the three dimensions: prepositions of time and place (before, after, during, while, throughout, in, at, near, etc.). Tense shifts from present to past and future are intentional as well. When a participant
shares an experience, it is in the past tense; when it is a reflection, thinking, or commenting revealing the process of coming to understand, it is in the present tense, and when the participant thinks about her or his own teaching or plans for it, it is in the future tense. Moreover, one can find the identifiers of places and contexts where the events or situations happened. The participants’ voices are dominant throughout the themes that evolved as a result of the study. Their quotes come from individual and focus group interviews, field experience logs, think pieces, and conceptual unit plans. When I quote participants, I intentionally leave their quotes “intact” and do not change the first person pronouns inside the quotes (I, me, my) to the third person pronouns as it is usually done in this cases. My goal is to provide as much insight into each participant’s personality as possible, and the first person pronouns help create these unique images and perceptions of participants as individuals.

Because the participants of the study are future English Language Arts teachers and are fond of literature, I suggested to them to choose their own pseudonyms, and maybe base them on their favorite book or movie character, who might remind them of themselves. They liked the idea and came up with a short, creative character introduction, which begins the personal story of each participant and smoothly integrates with their personal stories. This chapter is a special collaborative effort of my participants and me. Please, meet the main characters.

Kathleen: I Have a Voice. How Will I Use It?

A Child with a Speech Disorder

Hello, my name is Kathleen Kelly. My friends call me Kat, and you may too. I am from the 90s hit movie You've Got Mail. While I am not a character within a book, I have a love affair with books of all shapes and sizes. I have become a part of the technology age, the shift from typewriters to AOL dial up. I am a strong, independent woman, with a touch of idealism and
romanticism, which spouts from my mother and her legacy. Often the books I read leave a lasting impression and show how one book can reach past time and space and exist in an infinite universe outside of people and their agendas. It is because I believe that, when you read a book as a child, it becomes a part of your identity in a way that no other reading in your whole life does. Most of all, I believe in making a difference, even in the smallest way possible.

Now, let me tell you about myself. I was born in a White, middle class family, about 25 minutes away from the capital city. I was a small girl with great ambitions to be an actress, a singer, or even an astronaut. Alright, I wasn’t completely sure what I would be, but I knew that I had to make a change in the world. You know that grand romantic idea of having a legacy? I had one too. I thought the only way this would work was to be famous and take a stand for all of those small people, but that is not where I have ended up today. It seemed I would have a lot of hurdles to jump over to get what I wanted, but I refused to be counted out of the game for lack of trying.

In my grand plan of being famous, my first hurdle was my speech impediment. I had that annoying habit that people tried to ignore—stuttering. The hard thing was that I was an extremely outgoing little girl, but when no one wants to hear you or talk to you, then you slowly become silenced. My stutter was an impenetrable wall. I refused to talk, to read aloud, or answer questions whether I knew the answer or not. I can look back on that time of my life now and see that my stutter wasn’t a disease or curse like I thought it was. It was just a hurdle. But at the time, this hurdle looked like a mountain, where one small mess up caused an avalanche of s-s-s-ss, t-t-t-ts, and p-p-p-ps. Sounds were hiccupping out of my mouth when all I was trying to say was hi. My self-esteem was low and my courage even lower. I stopped trying to speak unless specifically called on and would not volunteer for any of the school plays that I had
wanted to do so badly. Finally, in third grade, we were all required to be in the play, and, since I knew all of the speaking parts were not on the table, I decided to sing. I was as nervous as a third grader with a stutter could get, but something miraculous happened. The stutter disappeared when I sang. This was not some miracle that suddenly cured my ailment, but it gave me an outlet to express myself.

Then came Ms. C. She is honestly the most influential person in my whole life. It’s strange how such a small interaction can change the way you view the world and yourself. Ms. C. was my third grade teacher. Because I lived very close to my school, I often stayed late before walking home. Ms. C. was always there, and she always encouraged me. Her encouragement and support are really the reasons of why I am here today. The four words she said to me changed my life forever. “I believe in you,” she said, and the way she did it made me believe her and made me feel like the most important and powerful person in the world. At the age of nine, I decided what I was meant to be. I was going to be a teacher.

I feel like when I speak to people now, I find out how rare it is to find your life’s purpose at the age of nine. I was just a little kid, but I had such big dreams. My dreams had changed from wanting to be famous and changing the world to a more humble one – to be a teacher and change the world of one child at a time. I wanted to be a Ms. C. to another kid that struggled like I did. Not everyone in this world is as fortunate as I was when I grew up, but that is what makes me work harder every day to help children and become a part of the support system every child deserves.

Field Experiences and Their Organization

Preparation for Field Experiences. Kat feels like she “was slightly unprepared for the first field experiences.” She doesn’t consider this to be a big issue since she “didn’t do much in
the first field experience practicum, it was okay.” All she needed to do, confesses Kat, “to show up, sit there, and take notes.”

The only prerequisite for enrolling in the teacher preparation program was “the first education 2000 level class, which I took in my freshmen year, being a little ahead of my cohort at that time,” shares Kat. After that course, she continues, “there was nothing till the junior year,” and “I feel like there needs to be something in between because during my second year it was just content: Poetry, American Literature, British Literature, and other classes.” When Kat became a junior, she had to take the English and Education methods courses that began “like two weeks, where we barely started talking about anything, before we were thrown into the classroom.” Luckily for Kat, it was right before her first field experiences, where the teacher “didn’t expect much of me,” she remarks.

Kat admits that her college coursework helped her in the field, “I take a lot of bits and pieces that I learned in class and bring it into the classroom.” She thinks that her host teachers were often impressed by that because “they don’t have to invite me to a conversation. If I know something, I will share my knowledge with my teacher and the students.” Kat tells a story of how she was able “to take things from Dr. Slade’s American Literature class last semester about the racism in that time and interracial marriage” and include it in one of the lessons she taught with her second host teacher. The students, notices Kat, were very interested in that issue, and many of them “went home and interviewed their grandparents and older relatives, who confirmed what I was saying in class.”

Not everything she learned in the coursework is “applicable or happens in the field,” complains Kat because “in our classes everything is idealized, and we have lots of discussions, and we hope to do the same in the classrooms where we teach.” In reality, she observed some
teachers, who “just keep giving students the worksheets.” “Worksheets, all the time! No discussion, no critical thinking, and even I am bored to death,” voices Kay her frustration. “The more I think about this, the more I want to have my own class and turn things around,” she smiles.

**Being in a Cohort.** Kat acknowledges the importance and value of having “friends, associates, and colleagues already kind of “built into the program.” This “built-in support system” has become a “small community of learners,” within the program, announces Kat, “where we already know each other, and are open to discussions even when our views are different.” She sees the cohort as the beginning of a professional network and extension of friendly relationships beyond the teacher preparation program, “I can imagine some of us getting together during summer and share our ideas, successes, and problems, asking for advice and suggestions.” She is thrilled when she thinks about these future meetings, “We would just talk and throw out the stuff at each other. I would really love that!”

**Expectations for Field Experiences.** To the question asking whether Kat was instructed in college about what to do during the field experiences, she hesitantly responds, “I feel like they [course instructors and Office of Field Placements] did tell us what to do,” but because of delay in placement and “trying to figure out all of these things and not really knowing what to do, I feel like some of those instructions or expectations fell through the holes.” She agrees that they knew that they were going “to observe and to write reports,” and, because she wanted to do this, she “was going to just jump into the classroom, and do whatever I can.”

Kat also confesses that she did not have particular expectations before she went into the field for the first time, “just because I didn’t know what to expect.” She continues, “I knew I wanted to learn as much as possible and to participate a lot.” Only that didn’t happen, and “for
the first several weeks, I was just sitting there in the back, taking notes,” adds Kat with a heavy sigh. So when she went into her second field experience practicum, she hoped “to get a lucky ticket—a host teacher who would let me be involved in the classroom and teach,” and it “was my best experience ever,” glows Kat with pride “because I taught over 25 hours out of 40.”

Kat admits that she approached her last, third field experience cycle with “idealistic expectations to start teaching from get go,” being constantly involved with students, and helping her teacher in any way possible. It seemed so natural after “the last semester that was so great,” if only all her expectations “could come true.” She confesses, “I wish I could participate a little bit more, but now there is actually nothing I can do because of the way the class is set up.” Although this is a lot lower than Kat’s expectations for this semester, she still feels like she is “learning certain things.” The only thing that bothers her at the moment is the question, “Did I already use my lucky card for a good teacher?” This is what concerns her before she goes into student teaching.

**Host Teachers.** From her field experiences, Kat understands that whether she “will have a great experience or a mediocre one depends on a host teacher I am placed with.” She seems a little reserved reflecting on her first host teacher, Ms. B., “who was very nice and helpful.” Kat also comments on her first teacher having “a great rapport with her students” that helped her “to learn about classroom management.” “I just wish I was in a more active classroom,” continuing she adds that she understands how “hard it is to pair teachers with someone they will like, and vice versa.” As Kat explains further, her first teacher’s style was “basically to give out the worksheet packets at the beginning of the class period and to collect them at the end.” This kind of experience “isn’t for me; I would rather have someone like I am—active, enthusiastic, and
always moving,” concludes Kat. Instead, she often felt “like falling asleep in the back of the classroom.” She often thought, “This can’t be interesting for the students.”

The situation radically changed in Kat’s second experience when she “saw more of what I hoped to see in the classroom.” “My last semester was phenomenal!” brags she with a wide smile, “My teacher, Ms. W., was amazing; she was great with her students; she was great with me!” For the first time, Kat felt like she was appreciated in the classroom because her host teacher “would turn around and ask me for a feedback on the lesson that she just taught.” She viewed Kat “as a colleague and was interested in my advice about the lessons and activities she taught.” Kat is sure it is Ms. W. who has taught her to be reflective. “We always talked about this in our education courses—reflexivity and critical thinking—and here I could actually connect that and see how it really works.” It made Kat happy that Ms. W. cared enough to include her in the classroom and let her “not only participate in occasional activities, but teach almost every other day.”

The conversation about Kat’s third field experience is not nearly as enthusiastic as the previous one. She comments though that her “third host teacher has a really good rapport with his students, so the classroom culture is really cool.” Kat explains that it is likely because “he taught the ninth grade last year, and now he teaches the tenth graders, and he has a lot of the same students.” Kat still thinks that “it is not necessarily good for him because he kind of lets them get away with more than he should if he hadn’t taught them before.” The issue that upsets Kat about her last host teacher is the fact that “he was not actually present in the classroom.” This is how she explains her strong opinion:

Well, he was there, but he was not a teacher in this classroom for most of the time; he was a law student. He was not there to teach; he was there to get a paycheck, so he can pay for his law school. And I understand how hard it must be to go to a law school after
a day’s work every night, but it’s still… it didn’t make for the best learning environment for his students and for the greatest experience for me.

While Kat does not see him “as an ideal teacher,” she still acknowledges “learning some good procedures from him, like giving out and collecting the classroom set of textbooks.”

Before that, she admits, “I didn’t think the procedures were so important because in my high school we always had a book to take home.” Kat realizes that when working in a public school system she has to “learn how to deal with lack of resources.”

Comparing all of her host teachers throughout three consecutive field experience cycles, Kat summarizes,

My first teacher was at school for about 14 or 15 years, and the one during my second semester had about seven years of experience, and the last one just came to school a couple years ago. So I don’t know whether it was years of experience, you know. One felt that she has already done everything, and she didn’t need to do anything extra, and the other one was still making efforts to reach her best. Then, I just don’t know how to explain my third teacher’s approach. He seems to be confused in his priorities.”

Despite Kat’s dissatisfaction with some things about her host teachers, she appreciates the “opportunity to observe different teachers and their teaching styles.” She considers even negative experiences “educational moments,” but prefers to learn from the best.

**Diversity in the Classrooms.** All schools where Kat was placed for field experiences “represented a pretty wide variety of students.” She notices that schools “use a lot of tracking in terms of students’ levels and performance.” As a result, she observed “regular classes and great scholars, and there were also honors and AP classes.” Kat thinks that tracking systems “do not quite work in favor of all students,” but she understands that it is “a reality we have to deal with in our schools.” She knows that “successful teachers adapt to various levels of students they teach and look for the ways to meet their needs.” Kat hopes to be that kind of teacher in the classroom.
What surprised her more when she first walked into the classroom as a pre-service teacher was that “in the regular ELA, it was about 90% of African-American kids, maybe 5% of Asians, and 5% of others, like Latino and White students.” The picture was more balanced in “the great scholars class, like about 25% of White students, 25% of Asians or Native Americans, 25% of African Americans, and 25% of the rest.” Kat confesses that she “was really uncomfortable in the first couple of weeks, definitely because of my background.” She knew it was going to happen and was prepared for it, but “I was not necessarily prepared to go into the classroom that had 95% of African-American students. And I am there with my ginger-self, sticking out like a sore thumb in the back of the room…”

Kat appreciates that she “only had African-American host teachers, which I am very grateful for at this point.” But when she first started she wasn’t too happy, “I realized I could learn things from her, but, at the same time, I would feel more comfortable with someone more like me.” So, for Kat, it was “a very stark reality” when she immersed into her first experience. She knew she “had to get comfortable with it, and I did get comfortable.” Thanks to field experiences, she feels that this kind of diversity where she “might be the only one in the classroom, who is actually different from everyone else in that classroom,” does not frighten her anymore.

**Practicing while in Practice.** Kat discloses that during her first field experience practicum she “couldn’t do anything in this class because my teacher [Ms. B.] just stuck me in the back corner, and she gave out worksheets to her students every day.” She tries to justify the situation by adding that “it might be because of the place I was in with a specific teacher.” So, while the students were busy with worksheets and the host teacher was catching up on grading, Kat pondered, “Is it really supposed to be like that?” She was looking forward to something
different, something that her professors talked a lot about – “engagement, excitement, or joy of discussions.” Still holding on to her frustration, Kat states, “Well, that semester was supposed to be just observing, so I did the correct thing, but I like being involved.”

“While Ms. B. was amazing at classroom management and had a great rapport with her students,” continues Kat, “I feel like I never saw her teaching anything. I saw her giving mini-lessons and then worksheets, and worksheets.” She asserts that her teacher’s style “made it kind of hard to get involved in the class.” Although, admits Kat, she did participate “a little with great scholars groups and learned most of the students’ names while interacting with them.” “It was more like a mini-lesson,” she recollects, “and I taught them how to use ethos, pathos, and logos when writing a persuasive essay.” She remembers how proud she felt reading and grading their essays afterwards.

When Kat entered her second field experience practicum and asked her teacher, Ms. W., if she could teach something, the response was immediate, “Sure, you can teach!” It was the best thing she could hope for, says Kat, “So I was going to teach as much as I could, while I could!” She sure did. Kat shares that she taught more than half of the 40 hours she was with Ms. W. “This is where I learned what team teaching is,” she assures, “Ms. W. and I had such a great chemistry in the classroom.” She thinks Ms. W.’s support and trust made her more confident in the classroom, “she would stop at one point, and I could easily pick it up from there with students.” While constantly observing and making mental notes, which she wrote down after her school visits, Kat more actively participated in all kinds of teaching activities, from planning to preparing resources, to delivering the lessons, and grading papers. “This was my best experience ever!” fondly recollects Kat.
After such “amazing second field experience” Kat “was a little more apprehensive” to come into the third one. She disappointedly notices, that “this semester the kids have heard me talk once or twice so far in the classroom.” She complains that she wanted “to participate a little bit more,” but there is not much she can do “when they [students] are just listening to the novel recording and write down the answers to the questions in their reading guides.” That is why most of the time Kat was “standing at the end of classroom, helping to monitor students, and waking up those who fell asleep.” Because she only “was able to have small, insignificant conversation with kids this semester,” Kat feels like if she tries to be involved more “it might seem like intruding into the class and pushing some boundaries that were already set.” That puts Kat in an awkward position, as she considers, that she really wanted to do more, “but I don’t want to step on people’s toes. I don’t want to take over his classroom. It is still his classroom, not mine.”

**Challenges during the Field Experiences.** The most challenging thing for Kat during her field experiences was “the fact that it isn’t my classroom.” As she mentions before, it places her in awkward position:

To the students, we are not the teacher, we cannot punish them, we aren't held responsible for their learning. The teacher often sees the pre-service teacher as another student in the class or an observer, instead of someone who can help or aid them in classes. This is the most problematic thing, because I can see how many other responsibilities I will have when teaching, but I am not able to try on those responsibilities during my practice.

Kat wishes she could do “more grading, and planning, and other hands-on activities sooner, before I get to a real job.” Otherwise, it might be overwhelming “with all of the responsibilities thrown on my shoulders to really understand what I am getting myself into.”

**Changes to the Field Experiences.** Based on the three field experience practicums and how they were organized, Kat proposes several changes. She believes these changes will
accomplish several tasks: “improve the quality of the teacher preparation program; raise the value of field experiences, and prepare better teachers for the classrooms.”

Kat begins her propositions talking about the amount of field experience hours, “40 hours of field experiences sounded so much, when I first started. But it is not about the amount now; it is about the quality of these 40 hours.” She feels like pre-service teachers should be expected to be involved more in our field experiences, “If the program required more from us, then we will all be better prepared for the classroom.” And then she offers some specific requirements:

During the first semester, it is good to be mostly observing, but during the second semester, we need to have a credible amount of hours involved with the students, and at least one mini-lesson. Then in our final semester before student teaching, we should be required to teach at least up to three days of one or two class periods per day. We need this progression to feel more comfortable in the classroom.

Another of Kat’s suggestions deals with an issue of paring pre-service teachers with host teachers at the schools of placement. She wants every pre-service teacher to experience “some sort of progression with the teachers we are assigned to work throughout our FEs.” She understands that they are placed with “the qualified teachers,” and comments on her own experiences when she “went from being somewhat confident to very confident, and then losing some of confidence during my last field experience.” Thus, her personal movement through field experiences she identifies as “mediocre, great, and then below average,” while her preference would be to “begin with the worst and move towards the best.”

Kat also proposes progression in educational courses that pre-service teachers take as part of their teacher preparation program, stressing that she “would prefer everything being done sooner.” She recollects that they only planned “one lesson during the first semester,” and most of the cohort members were “not able to teach that lesson.” Then, they planned another lesson during the second semester in the field, “and then this semester we had to develop the whole teaching unit. So it went like an enormous progression: 1:1:30.” Kat declares that it would “cost
us less stress to work on lesson planning gradually. Maybe change the ratio of planned lessons to something like 5:10:30.” Kat is certain, “These are just some little things that I think will help greatly, and they can be done.”

**Value of Field Experiences.** Despite some disappointing experiences in the field, Kat truly considers her field experiences beneficial as they “have really prepared me for my profession.” She is grateful for the opportunities in the classrooms that gave her “more confidence in my content knowledge and ability to manage a group of students.”

She believes when people say that “their field experiences weren't valuable, then they do not have what it takes to be a teacher.” Kat also proclaims that one has to “have a specific work ethic and mentality to be a good teacher,” and through her field experiences she “gained this fervent mentality and work ethic that helps a teacher be great.” A pre-service teacher’s effort to make the best of given opportunities, considers Kat, is crucial, “You have to make any and every experience you have a valuable one and make it work.” Supporting the previous statement, she clarifies, that “even if I didn't enjoy particular parts of the experiences, I value them for the knowledge I gained from the experience.” Concluding her thoughts on the topic, Kat sincerely declares, “I just really want you to know that the program here provides us with everything that we could need to be great teachers, but it is us –pre-service teachers who determine whether we take advantage of the opportunity and the program or not.”

**Understanding Teaching**

**Defining Teaching.** Like Kat shared in her autobiography, she was very young when she decided to become a teacher. She claims knowing what she wanted to be and what kind of teacher she would become “ever since I was nine.” As a teacher to be, Kat believes that teaching is “the most courageous profession.” She understands that “teachers face day to day challenges
of poverty, hunger, and conflict in their classrooms” and at the same time, make every possible effort “to teach, support, and to believe in every child and raise the next generation of American citizens.”

Kat also realizes that teaching is not considered to be a reputable profession in the contemporary society. She acknowledges, “In the eyes of the public, because of the media, this profession is rarely seen as honorable and admirable.” Teachers are often blamed for downfalls and failures in the society as they are “seen as the scapegoats for society’s problems, instead of society’s solution.” The public opinion about teaching does not scare or intimidate Kat’s intentions. For her, “teaching is a profession of dedicated, passionate, caring individuals that strive for a better world for each of their kids.” She explains that teachers become so connected with the lives of their students that they call them “our own kids because they are invested in the lives of every single one of them as if they were our own flesh and blood.”

From her field experiences, Kat learned that teaching is “about flexibility and reflection.” Remembering her second field experience practicum, she says, “We both, my host teacher and I, were constantly giving each other a feedback or reflection.” Talking in between the classes, Kat and her host teacher would discuss the lesson they just had with a previous group of students and think “about the adjustments that needed to take place in order for the next lesson to be more effective.” Flexibility, according to Kat, is one of the keys of successful teaching:

Each class is different. You can’t teach each of the classes the same! So when you teach the first class, you analyze what didn’t work for it, and then take it to the next class and rearrange it or fix it, also taking into account what those kids are. In our first class, for example, most of them were fast paced, but there was a big group that liked to talk a lot, so things went slower, but they all got their stuff done. And the second group was a very small group, and they were slower workers, but they were all really creative, so we came up with different ways to get them to finish everything.

Another example of teacher’s flexibility, explains Kat, is an ability to move away from a lesson plan the teacher created if “the school principal comes in and says that she [teacher] has to
go and administer a test to another group of students and that there will be a substitute teacher in
her own classes for the day.” Fortunately, for that teacher, Kat was in her classroom that day,
and she took charge and taught the students all day long adjusting the teacher’s lesson plan:

As I taught an intro to *Odyssey*, we were going through my teacher’s PowerPoint. During the first class, I used almost the entire PowerPoint, but noticed that some students were bored. So, when the next class came in, I began my introduction with discussion about Batman and Superman, and it went very well.

Reflecting on that day’s lessons, Kat added, “Instead of looking at each slide of the PowerPoint, we went more in depth into those two characters and their analysis. So being able to be flexible and quick on my feet helped me with the lesson.”

Teaching is much more than transmitting knowledge, believes Kat, “It is being a constant in the classroom as a support for the kids, but also pushing them beyond their comfort zone to think critically about the world around.” Teaching is “giving students the tools they need to be successful.” Teaching is about connecting students’ lives “to what they learn, read, or think about in the classroom.”

In the end, Kathleen says that, “The more I think about teaching, the more complex it becomes to me, and the more complicated task I see ahead of me.” Nevertheless, she is optimistic, “This job means the world to me, beyond any monetary amount. I want to make a difference in the children I serve to let them know that life is a battle worth fighting.”

**An Image of a Successful Teacher.** Teaching and teachers are inseparable for Kat, and that is why her image of a successful teacher is closely associated with characteristics that distinguish effective teaching. She believes that “the most successful teacher has a balanced mixture of being kind, loving, and supportive, but also tough and demanding.” She does not see it as a negative attribute if students call her “mean and strict because they will learn something with me.” Being demanding also means “believing in students and caring about them,”
emphasizes Kat. It is also a great motivator for students “when someone outside of your family that takes interest in you, when they show that they really believe in you and support you, and see these qualities in you, that makes a complete difference in a child’s life.” Kat had such a teacher in her life who made her believe in herself again and enabled to overcome stuttering when her third-grade teacher’s and Kat’s lives crossed their paths in the same classroom. It is that difference in attitude that made nine-year-old Kat think about teaching and a growing desire “to be able to do that for kids because I was fortunate enough to have someone to do that for me.”

A good teacher, for Kat, is first of all “knowledgeable in the content,” and, if there is something a teacher “feels insecure about in the content,” he or she should “go back and learn more about it.” She believes that we are past the time when the teacher was considered an absolute expert in the classroom, “it is okay to admit that you don’t know something, but it is not okay to remain ignorant about things your students and you come across in the process of learning.” Her solution is an easy fix because today “we have Internet and all the technology at hand to find out the answers.” Furthermore, a successful teacher creates unit plans and daily lesson plans that “will not only teach students what they need to learn, but teach it in the way they will enjoy it and respond to that lesson better.”

To make learning more enjoyable, Kat knows that good teachers choose “topics and books that are relevant to students and their lives”, and this way “the universal themes of society, culture, and inequality will make more sense to them.” She thinks it is important for students, and for everyone for that matter, to understand “where they came from and how they change throughout the life because this is how people become better.” This is how Kat comes to terms with growing in the White upper-class community and then “seeing that other people don’t have
the opportunities or resources that I had.” She decides that she wants to work in a public school “where students don’t have much, unlike at school where I went they already had good teachers and all the resources.”

Another quality of a successful teacher, according to Kat, is being humble in order “to do something good.” She believes that if teachers want to “to have a big impact on someone’s life, they have to be humble enough to listen to that person and place his or her interests above own.” Some teachers Kat knows forget that they were students in the past, and “they also had troubles with writing, for example. Now they want their students to write well without giving them a chance for an error. But most of people have to learn and practice a lot to write well.”

Kat confesses that her image of a successful teacher is based on the “four teachers I have learned from or worked with in my past.” First, there is her favorite third-grade teacher, Ms. C., who made “me believe in myself and showed me what it is like to have someone care about your future.” The second is Ms. D., her tenth-grade teacher, who “made me fall in love with the English language and think more critically about how I use my language to convey my thoughts.” The third is Ms. Y., her junior and senior AP English teacher, who “taught me to be critical of life around me, to make my own decisions and opinions, and that knowing your content can mean worlds to a kid. Lastly, there is Ms. W., Kat’s host teacher during her second field experience practicum. She is grateful to her for teaching “how to become more than a teacher in the students’ environment, but to become a safe place for them to exist in. She created a home for students.” Kat says that these four women “all taught me something that will stay with me and inspire me for the rest of my life.” Because of these great teachers in her life, Kat holds a firm belief:

A teacher is more than just someone who teaches you about English, Math, History, or Science. A successful teacher teaches you about life, makes you aware of the world
around you, and provokes you to be more than you ever thought you could be. A successful teacher’s reach extends way past the classroom, beyond all traditional boundaries, and into the future of a child.

This belief drives Kat’s desire to become a teacher and someone who is able “to create a safe home” for students within the school’s walls.

**Building Relationships with Students.** A key to successful teaching for Kat is in healthy relationships with students in the classroom and creating that “safe home,” she mentions before. It starts with building trust and letting students know “they can come to a teacher with anything, and they will not be punished for what they say or think.” This doesn’t happen overnight, thinks Kat, and can begin with a small step, like learning students’ names and addressing them personally. From her field experiences, she notices that students “are so surprised if you know their name,” and they feel more respect for teachers, who care and “show an interest in them and show that they care, just to take time to learn their names by the second day…” So, having a “good rapport” with students “was one of the most important things I thought before my field experiences,” admits Kat assuming that “learning will come afterwards.”

Having observed three different teachers throughout field experiences, a little over a year later, Kat comes to another critical conclusion, “It is good to have good relationships with your kids, but if the relationship prevents students from learning, then I feel like that is a problem.” She shares that her third host teacher “has a great relationship with his students, but there is not much learning going on in the classroom.” Kat feels like “students need boundaries” because “when they get too close to a teacher on a personal level, they feel like they don’t have those boundaries anymore and that they can just do whatever.” This kind of situation “makes the teacher dependent on his students,” explains Kat, and there are certain things “a teacher has to clearly articulate and make students understand the requirements, rules, and procedures for the class.”
“Another key of great classroom climate is knowing the students,” thinks Kat, adding that “you have to be very aware what’s going on with them in their lives because that’s going to determine how relevant something is for them, and how well they are going to do in your class.”

She shares the following story to support her statement:

Last semester in Ms. W.’s class, there was that one kid with an IEP (Individual Education Plan). A literacy specialist would come in and help him during class. On the days when there wasn’t a specialist, that student would just sleep in the back of the class. He really liked the teacher, and he would talk to us in the morning and explain that he worked 40 hours over the weekend. And then he would fall asleep. There seemed nothing we could do to keep him awake and interested. One of the days my teacher was absent, and I had to teach. That student was awake, and he wanted to hear what we were discussing, just because we were discussing Batman and Superman when I introduced the class to the *Odyssey*. I realized that the student actually had a lot to say about the characters we analyzed, so he knows what the archetypal hero is. And it could lead him to be more interested in the further lessons, advancing that one. So I think it is really important to know your students and what they are going through and find some things.

Kat is sure that the teacher can also “harm or embarrass a student if he or she doesn’t know that the child has some health problem or learning disability.” She brings an example with her having a stutter as an elementary school student, and how challenging and humiliating was her experience in class when she was called to read out loud.

Kat believes the ultimate success of a teacher in the classroom comes from caring about the students because then “they [teachers] see the response from these students.” When students know their teacher believes in them, “they want to give it a shot.” The caring teacher, according to Kat, must address the disturbing behavior in the classroom, so the students “can learn to distinguish right from wrong.” Unfortunately, she admits, one of her host teachers never addresses negative students’ behavior, and as a result “his third hour students have probably the lowest average of all of his classes…because of the amount of disruptions in this class and his refusal to deal with them.” This is not acceptable for “building trust and creating healthy relationships in the classroom,” concludes Kat.
Concerns about Teaching. Kat recognizes that “there are things that are challenging,” but these concerns are not “inside the classroom” for her. They are “not about interacting with kids and teaching them,” she explains further as “it comes very naturally to me, possibly because I’ve done so many different things with kids.” She tells that she has been tutoring kids for a while now. Instead, she may “get nervous standing in front of my peers when presenting something, but in front of kids I am not worried about what they think or say about me.” When she is not prepared, she may feel some discomfort, says Kat, “but this is an easy fix – I just need to learn more about the subject or to read the book I haven’t read.” She also knows that she can seek the help from the other, more experienced teachers in school.

Kat’s main concern about teaching is not within the classroom:

It is within the school, the district, the state, and the country. I am more concerned about mandated curriculum, like my [host] teacher has right now. I don’t understand how that can be! I mean I understand curriculum and unit plans, and I can do it. I just don’t understand how someone can tell me what I can do in my classroom. If I am getting everything done, and I can do it in these great ways that kids understand, and it makes it great for them, then why do I need to abide by specific mandates?

So her major concern going into the profession is about being able to become a kind of teacher she dreamed about all these years. “I have all these great ideas, but I won’t be able to use them because I feel like I’ll be watched at all times to make sure that I follow the mandates.” She also comprehends that at some point she will have make a decision between “either following the state mandates or standing up and fighting for what I think is better for our children.”

Kat shares that she has “been taught not to fret about the Common Core standards and to strive to understand them instead.” However, observing her third host teacher, she has witnessed how “these thematic units are being passed down from the state as samples, and pushed onto the schools by the district as mandatory units.” She sees how “the teachers’ understanding of the Common Core sprouts from the school district’s understanding and interpretation of these
standards.” And this is what bothers Kat. She emphasizes that she is more worried about how the district interprets it and adopts the mandates, “They may decide to make unit plans for teachers and make us follow these plans. So I might just be a dancing monkey that stands there and says, “Look at me! Look at Me! Yea!”

Nevertheless, Kat is optimistic as she considers that some of these things “you are not going to learn until you are there. So there is no sense in worrying about it right now.” There will be a day for that, she remarks. For now, she reasons, it is best just to take “a step at a time” because she was able to help “several students last week, so I know if I were teaching this week, it would be fine with me because I just helped them to address specific questions from our reading.” Practice will teach her how to make better choices in favor of her students. “I want to teach what I value to the kids, and what is relevant to them, and I hope to learn how to find the right way to do it,” adds Kat enthusiastically.

**Becoming a Teacher**

*Learning about Self.* The main thing Kat learned about herself throughout field experiences is that she is “really reflective.” She says, “I am constantly thinking about what I just did and what I am about to do before I even do it, which sometimes can make the lesson go slower.” Because of the heightened reflexivity, she thinks that she “need[s] to work on time management, to know that reflection should come after class, not as interruption to the lesson.”

Another self-discovery Kat made has to do with a having a support at school, “I realized that wherever I go as a first year teacher is a place that provides a mentor teacher in my area or at least someone I can go check in with, or an assistant principal that doesn’t mind to just come in and give me a feedback that’s not an evaluation in this school.” She reminds how great it was for her to have that kind of support during the second field experience cycle with Ms. W. She
confesses how greatly she enjoyed Mr. W.’s feedback, support, and reassurance “that are so needed for beginning teachers.” Kat has also learned to “respect someone else’s territory,” and “as much as I wanted to be involved in my teacher’s class, I didn’t want to intrude or be a pushover.”

Although Kat recognizes that she is “very good on my feet” that comes from “years of being an actor and doing improvisations,” she really likes “to be prepared.” That is why she considers planning to be an important part of a teacher’s life. Still sometimes Kat realizes that she has “these moments of insecurity” when she is thinking whether she is “really good at this or not.” “It is a great job, and I think I am meant to be a teacher. I just need to hear it from someone from time to time,” acknowledges Kat.

**Thinking about Teaching and Her Own Classroom.** Kat says that she thinks about teaching “all the time.” When she was developing a conceptual unit plan for the Methods course, she thought “a lot about the book choice, what she wanted to do with it, and how she could make it work in the classroom.” She proudly admits to be happy with her unit plan “and the things I came up with,” but cautions that she probably couldn’t “take that risk while actually teaching because it took so much time.”

Kat declares that she is “trying to experiment with the idea of how to read a text in class.” She observed teachers making students to read out loud, “but then, you know, I grew up with stutter, and that was just a torture to me.” Then she also witnessed teachers just playing the recording, while students followed the text in the book, “and it was so boring, I was about to fall asleep.” Reading silently “is not an option because many students don’t read, and there is no an opportunity for discussion while reading,” continues to deliberate Kat. Finally she comes to the thought that she could try a combination of different approaches, “For example, every Monday,
we are going to listen to the recording, and every Tuesday we are going to take turns reading aloud.” She is certain that “having a variety of options to present the anchor text will help to involve various types of learners, “One class may really love Readers’ Theater, while the other class would rather listen to it.”

Thinking about teaching helps Kat “to realize my stance and my immense gratitude for having an opportunity to follow my dreams.” She tells that “negativities about the profession come from people who doesn’t care about education and our children”, and she is more determined today to use her “teacher voice to fight for every child.”

Having her own classroom is Kat’s dream. She says that last summer she “did actually go through the phase of planning out my classroom.” She laughs, providing the details of the classroom description:

Somehow it ended up looking like a Victorian library with books from wall to wall. I know that’s not very realistic because I don’t have that many books. I want it to be homey, when you are just comfortable when you go in. It’s just some quirky things around because I am very quirky. Like, I want owls all over the place and some foxes. She further explains, “The two animals that I feel represent teaching and learning are an owl and a fox. Owls are wise and knowledgeable, and foxes are very smart and sly, and I really like that.” So when students are having fun during the lessons, “it doesn’t mean that they are not learning at the same time,” cunningly adds Kat. There is one thing that is a must in Kat’s classroom:

One thing that I want is an Inspiration Wall where on the back wall, behind my desk, we will just have big, cut out letters saying “INSPIRE ME,” and throughout the whole year (each class would have a set of sticky notes), students will be able to write their favorite quotes or something they heard. All these notes will go up onto the wall, so by the end of the semester, it will be full of sticky notes. It will also show their learning because it will come from the things we read, discuss, and share. So this wall will have everything to help them to get through the day, if they need to. If someone is having a bad day, or something bad happens in the classroom, I will be able to pull something off that wall that will help us to get through it together.
Kat also shared what she has already bought for her classroom when she went to one of the stores for Thanksgiving, “I saw an Academy Award for the World’s Greatest Teacher, and I bought it for myself because that’s how weird I am.” While it may seem narcissistic to someone, for Kat it is partly just a joke and partly has a hidden agenda, “You know the kid in my classroom maybe distracted by this when seeing it on my desk, and think, “She really is the World’s Greatest Teacher! I need to pay attention!” Imagine how cool that would be!”

Kat wants to use a lot of random little things that will make her class special, “I want some current stuff and things that kids may find funny because I am a funny person.” She considers it to be a great learning experience “to have in the class and to create a space where everyone can laugh not at someone or something mean, but together, having fun while learning.” Another idea about her classroom is having funny posters with “hidden meaning.” For example, “one poster says, “If you moustache a question, raise your hand!” and another poster is a picture of a Batman reading a book, comparing a bat cave to a library.”

Finalizing her vision of a classroom, Kat clarifies that she wants “everything to look kind of like a mess, but it all works and all makes sense.” She admits how important it is for “kids to learn to be organized and arrange things that work together, but it doesn’t all have to be neat and tidy because not everything in life is just neat and tidy.”

**Growth through Experience.** Kat sincerely believes that her understanding of teaching and her idea of a teacher “have not changed throughout field experiences.” She reasons it by declaring she “came into this with that clear and idealistic picture of what I think the teacher was.” That ideal of a teacher reminds Kat “was based on the previous teachers and my previous observations.” Through her experiences and observations, she has “also realized that not all the teachers are my idealistic type of teacher.” Kat discloses that seeing “bad teachers did not
change the kind of teacher I want to be.” After some thinking, she admits though, “I think my ideas of how to present things have changed because I was presented with more options, saw different strategies and activities.” She also “learned a lot through my experiences and my college courses during these past two years.” Kat assures she will use all her “skills and knowledge to provide the learning opportunities for the kids.”

**Scout: Beyond the Doll House and Convenient/Conventional Students**

**Education Is not about Making Uniform Learners**

Hi, there! I'm Scout Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel by Harper Lee (1960). Yes, I'm a girl. But NO, I'm not girly. I live with my older brother and father. I have a wild imagination and mouth; both land me in trouble quite often. I love to read and find school quite boring, but Daddy makes me go anyways. He’s always making me do stuff I don’t wanna do, and he is always trying to make up my mind. But I do love him even though the rest of our small town doesn’t seem to like him that much nowadays. Well, I have to run and spy on Boo Radley, the scary old man across the street. Don’t tell Dad... When I am back, I will tell you a story.

Hi, it’s me again. So, this is how I chose to do what I liked the most.

A dramatic five-year-old girl, instructing my class full of well-dressed dolls on an overhead with laminated worksheets, I aspired to teach prim little boys and girls for as far back as my memory takes me. My idealistic view of such a perfect, plastic classroom was shaped by my hometown’s flagship elementary, middle, and high schools. I grew up with kids just like myself, middle-class children who essentially had everything they ever needed. My parents provided my sister, my brother, and me with every opportunity to be our best selves: reading *Go Dog Go* before bed each night, carting us to countless baseball practices and basketball games
throughout the week, helping with homework. They wanted to make sure we could one day go to college (that they of course would pay for), turning my doll dreams into realities.

After exposure to impoverished students in the Dream Program, it did not take long for my dream classroom to take on a new look. Zack, Leah, Benny and many other students earning an inner-city education five miles from my house did not have the same opportunities as I had by attending the public school right up the road simply because they did not always have the means to buy a clean school shirt, much less *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The more I was exposed to lower income schools, the more I saw the importance of equality and education beyond fancy clothes and teaching gadgets. Volunteering weekly with thirty-five Black children who ate reduced-price lunches and who did not dread homework because a completed homework for them was an opportunity to be noticed and encouraged, there was no doubt in my mind, and especially in my heart, that I had found my dream career.

Fifteen years after playing with properly dressed dolls and four years past tutoring poorly clothed children, the harsh reality of education inequities guides my studies at the State University. With statistics showing that by the end of third grade only 58% of students in low-income communities can solve simple multiplication and division problems compared to 84% in higher-income communities, my college years have been shaped by my interest in and the promise of education reform. The university provides me, as an English major, the means to study literature, to learn rhetorical strategies, to think and to write critically, as well as to teach the next generation of students that language and literacy have the potential to shrink socioeconomic gaps.

By exposing me to his world, Zack showed me more about my passions in those nine short months than twelve years of grade schooling ever began to teach. Much like the little boy
who needed as much love as edification, Leah, the six-year-old daughter of a heroin addict I tutored my first year at college, drives my compassion for poverty in education. With chocolate stuck in her teeth, she looked up at me one day, as I put away Monopoly Junior and reached for another *Pup and Pop* book, and said, “Bring me home with you.” These five trusting words could breathe life into every doll I wished to teach, every class in which I enrolled, and every barrier I sought to break. I was not a phenomenal mentor; I never taught Leah how to count without her fingers before she moved to yet another elementary school. Even today Benny, one of my Reading Friends I visit each week, still cannot sound out the simplest of words even though he is in the 1st grade for the second year in a row. But as Leah and I painted pumpkins then and as my boys and I play hide-and-seek on the playground now, the imaginations of these under-resourced children expand a little, giving them hope for both today and tomorrow. Taking the time to show up week after week and reading the exact same books for the seventh time simply because it is their favorite, Zack, Leah, and Benny begin to believe that someone actually cares about their education and their life. That makes them care too.

Realizing my heart belongs with children who never before used a graphing calculator or passed a level-appropriate AR test, I long to help solve poverty-propelled education inequities in the classroom. I believe in the potential of Zacks and Leahs who have never before considered college as an option or, better yet, their education past middle school. Such students do not need to *pass* through in order to be handed a diploma, but rather a mentor who patiently teaches them that education can be bigger than the neighborhood in which one is born. I also believe in the power of literacy. Through my studies of English and concentration on education, I seek to make sense of the discourses people are involved in, push students to think critically about
themselves and the world, as well as find meaningful literature and effective classroom pedagogy in order to make education relevant and useful for every student of every race.

So as I end my final courses at the university and look forward to student teaching next semester, I think about achieving the dreams of my naïve five-year-old self. But instead of instructing a bedroom full of dolls, bears, and rabbits, this time I will look out into my classroom full of Zacks, Leahs, and Bennys and remember that education is not about making uniform learners who all behave and think in the same manner. My teaching must empower each of my students to embrace where they have come from, make sense of the current world in which they live, and seek to challenge society in such a way that creates future societies.

Field Experiences and Their Organization

Preparation for Field Experiences. Scout began her college career majoring in Math. She praises the Math program for its structure that required her to “do more in my first semester of freshman year than we do in our senior fall semester in the English program.” While being a freshman, she was “in the classroom, planning and implementing my lesson plans.” Later, when she switched to English, she also took a “6-hour elementary Reading course that had a field experience component built-in.” Scout shares that, while she was in the classroom for eight weeks of the semester, she “created and taught eight lessons along with other projects and assignments.” That is why when she had to enter her first field experience practicum as an English major, she felt adequately prepared. It seemed also easy because her first field experience “was strictly observation.” She knew “how to observe,” and she had “a great first host teacher that allowed enjoying time in the classroom.”

As for the coursework, Scout wishes it to be more rigorous and directly connected to teacher preparation earlier in the program. She believes that the education course, she took
during her second year in college “was bogus and kind of pointless” and stresses out that “English Teacher Preparation Program should offer something more meaningful and applicable during the sophomore year.” However, Scout really appreciated a course on diversity in the classroom that she took during her junior year where she, along with her classmates and a professor, talked “about individual students from different backgrounds and how to address issues of race and ethnicity.” When she went into her first field experience practicum, she observed “a White female teacher and her ways of using some of the strategies we learned in our course.” It was interesting for Scout to see how skillfully “Ms. A., my first host teacher integrated diversity in her classroom. Her essays and assignments were culturally relevant to those students, which was a huge thing we were learning in class at that time.” Scout was impressed by how well Ms. A. knew her students and responded to their needs noticing, “The teacher did a fantastic job taking the curriculum standards but making them meet her students where they were.”

Scout points out to a “seemingly recurring problem with field experience placements.” She says that all three of her placements were delayed for some reason, and if during the first and second placements “most of the English cohort had placement after two or three weeks into the semester,” the third time, she felt a little overwhelmed when by the end of the third week she “was somewhere on the bottom of the list, and everyone had already been placed.” So she had to “agree driving to the remote school” hoping that her longer drives “would be worth it if I get a good teacher and I can learn a lot.”

**Being in a Cohort.** Scout appreciates being a part of a cohort where they all “know each other so well.” She is glad that “there is no need to take time to get to know each other,” and there is “an advantage of just get deep down into meaningful conversations about education.
because we’ve been together for a complete year now, and we’ve been wrestling with the same ideas.” Scout made new friends in the cohort and is certain that they will continue “talking and sharing way beyond the program.”

The only thing Scout dislikes about the cohort is its rigid structure, course availability, and graduation time. “When I switched my major from Math to English, I realized I couldn’t graduate in December - it’s not possible. I had to complete student teaching in spring.” Even if she “had all coursework completed by summer before the senior year, the only time student teaching is offered is in the spring semester,” explains Scout. So those who “come late, they are automatically a year behind.” That is the only drawback of the program and cohorts, but Scout understands that might be because the number of students enrolled in the program is not “high enough to offer the same courses each semester.”

**Expectations for Field Experiences.** Scout discloses that she does not “remember any specific expectations outlined in the program or by the college instructors until she got to the senior year.” She articulates, “I knew they expected me to observe and write down notes as detailed as to what the kids were saying to one another. And that’s about it.” In regards to expectations, she feels being unprepared and wishes that “expectations were communicated more clearly, so that we know what we are supposed to get out of it.” Furthermore, notes Scout, although they discussed their field experiences in all education and content classes during their junior year, “as a class, we were never digging deep enough or theorizing enough about what was going on in the field.” It is only when “we got to Dr. Slade’s class” during the Fall, 2013 Scout admits:

He told us that our first field experience should be about focusing on the individual student. Our second field experience was supposed to be about a small group of students, and the third experience is about a whole group, teaching a unit, the teacher, and decisions the teacher makes. I felt like it was the first time we ever heard that.
Scout does not complain that not knowing clear expectations affected her grades and academic progress, but if she “had to pinpoint one student and watch his or her growth, I had to know that!”

Regarding her personal expectations, Scout wanted “to walk away from those 40 hours during my first semester with new knowledge about what a teacher is and how a classroom works.” She also expected the host teacher “to acknowledge that I was there without making a big deal out of it – to continue teaching like she normally would and kind of invite me into that space.” Finally, she expected “a professional who respected his or her students, earning respect back.” To summarize, Scout “expected a good teacher – someone who was making a difference in the classroom and facilitating learning.”

The most disappointing reality for Scout is “the quality of host teachers we worked with.” In that sense, she feels like her “expectations were not met at all.” She complains that she couldn’t “observe many of the great things we learned in our coursework” because she didn’t “really see the teachers employing these strategies and approaches, except for my first host teacher.” When it comes to learning “what not to do in the classroom,” Scout considers being “just a hard way to learn.” “What is the point of the field experience?” she questions, if “within one day I learned what not to do, and for the rest 39 hours I was just sitting there.”

Scout thinks that there “might be a lack of communication between the university and host teachers” as it seemed to her that some of the teachers “do not know what we are supposed to do in their classroom.” For her third experience, she decided “to ask for more communication with the host teacher outside the classroom,” although she is a little concerned that this could be “bothersome because teachers have a full-time job.”
Host Teachers. Scout was anxious to “get into the classroom,” so right after she received her first placement, she “immediately emailed my host teacher.” The response followed pretty fast, and a few days later, she was heading to school to meet with Ms. A., her first host teacher. Because Ms. A. worked with the university’s pre-service teachers for several years, “the first meeting was pretty brief, but informative.” “Ms. A. talked about the make-up of her classes and inclusion teacher who was coming to assist students with special needs,” recollects Scout.

Scout considers her first host teacher the best she had throughout all three field experience cycles. “She was happy to share some teaching secrets with me, and we talked before and in between the classes,” tells Scout. Her first teacher demonstrated how to make accommodations to the diverse students in her classes:

With students being diverse in learning abilities and achievements, with IEPs and regular students, she had several accommodations. So, if they were doing an activity on an article, she would create questions that were on the second, fifth, seventh, and eighth grade levels, so all students could participate. She varied her assignments according to her students without them noticing these differences.

Explaining her teacher’s decisions and choices, Ms. A. would tell Scout that, “the second hour students are more advanced; therefore, for them I can go into more detail, whereas my sixth hour students would not be able to handle this. I have to scaffold them more.” She also finds her first host teacher to be “innovative in her lesson plans.” Ms. A. often explained to Scout her thought process, like “Last night I was watching the news and President Obama’s speech made me think that we should write about it, so I pulled out a YouTube video, watched it, and typed up the prompt that I would use.” Scout noticed that students positively responded to that prompt.

Scout admires Ms. A’s determination to “meet each child’s needs.” She liked that her “teacher would focus on the positive, so she wouldn’t call out a low performing students for things they couldn’t do; she would call them out instead to answer easier questions. She would work towards building students’ confidence.” Scout names two major lessons she learned from
her first host teacher and wants to bring them into her own teaching: “One, I want to vary my lessons according to my students in a class, and two, I want to be able to encourage each student as I meet them on their different levels and gradually move them up to higher levels and standards.” Through meeting with and learning from her first host teacher, Scout realized that she might “actually like to teach in middle school,” unlike many of her cohort college mates.

Scout’s second experience was significantly different. She was placed “in a high school with a sophomore English teacher, who didn’t really care about the students.” She didn’t like “neither his teaching style, nor the way he treated me as a pre-service teacher.” To clarify, Scout adds:

I felt like from the very first day, I was there to do his dirty work. So I graded all of his papers, I put them in the computer system, which I don’t mind doing at all. That’s all reality of teaching. But instead of incorporating me in the classroom to help him do these chores in addition to assisting with instruction or assisting students, I was more as a secretary. He viewed me as someone who simply could do his tedious work.

Scout admits that Mr. F.’s attitude towards her “as secretarial aid” did not coincide with her expectations for field experiences. She confesses that sometimes she “would spend the entire instructional time just grading his papers.” After such experience, she took the liberty “to observe other teachers in his school because he was not giving a good reflection of what a teacher should be.” Most of Scout’s field observation notes “were about what I wouldn’t do as a teacher.” Moreover, “seeing his teaching style, and then grading the students’ work,” Scout saw that “the highest grade on quizzes and other works would be a C that signaled about a clear disconnect between his teaching and assessment results.” She understood that “the students truly weren’t learning because they didn’t care, and he gave them a ton of busy work. He had his own agenda, and it didn’t include the students’ engagement or his care about students.” For Scout, Mr. F. wasn’t “a good teacher, nor was he a good host.”
Because her first experience was good, and the second one wasn’t, Scout “was hoping to have another good one.” Although, when she showed up to meet her third host teacher, “that was not the case.” Scout admits that Ms. H. “is very friendly, laid back and relaxed.” Recognizing that “it is easy working with Ms. H, and communication is good,” Scout was discontented with her teaching style:

She is just not a wonderful teacher. She sits, and I mean it, she sits in her desk, literally all the time. She sits there, and half of the class would go on tangent about some random things that aren’t applicable. And that’s all day long. The students would come in and have housekeeping things that are going on. Then someone would get off topic, and it would turn into like a 15-minute pointless discussion. These are only 55 minutes classes, so what’s left for learning?

Scout shares that while she was in Ms. H’s classroom of the 12th-grade AP students, they read a translated, condensed version of Beowulf. Even from that version, her host teacher “cut out a bunch of stuff.” These were the only times when “Ms. H. would get up in front of the class, read parts of Beowulf, and tell students to annotate the text.” The teacher would stop every several lines and say, “In the margins, you should write …” and provide students with actual annotation, which according to Scout, “just diminishes the whole point of assignment.” Other than that, Scout did not notice “much instruction going on in class, nor discussion.” It seemed she points out, “it was always teacher’s interpretations of what they read, and it was never open to students’ views and opinions.”

Trying to find at least some positive moments from her third field experience, Scout acknowledges that she liked how “Ms. H. was meeting her students at the front door in the beginning of class.” Her teacher also introduced Scout to Thug Notes, a YouTube series. These notes are “a bit controversial with some use of foul language,” Scout explains, “but before the test, the kids can go online and complete a five-minute overview of the play or novel they read in
class.” Scout did not observe her teacher using Thug Notes, but it sounded “like a really cool way to review the entire thing they read in everyday terms.”

Reflecting on all three field experience cycles, Scout expresses regrets that she “didn’t have great teachers all the way throughout her experiences.” She started with a great first host teacher and then went to a tedious practice of “secretarial aid” during the second one, moving onto a “mundane” third field experience that she does not view as valuable or beneficial to her. While Scout clearly articulates disappointment with her second and third host teachers ranking them “pretty typical and not great,” she assures that she “didn’t start hating teaching” and still wants to make a difference in her own classroom.

**Diversity in the Classrooms.** Scout understands diversity in the classrooms as a characteristic of students and teachers that make them “unique and different from the others.” Thus, diversity for her is “not only about the ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds of students, but also about their economic status, learning styles, and achievement progress.”

When Scout first walked into the classrooms, she saw “pretty usual for our local schools ethnic make-up of students, where about 85-90% of the students are Black, about 2% of them are White, and the rest – Asian Americans, Latinos, and others.” This was neither surprising, nor overwhelming for her because she tutored “students in the Dream Program who were predominantly Black kids.” She had also previous field experiences through her Math program as a freshman and through her elementary Reading course, so she was “comfortable in the classroom where she was the different one.”

She also appreciates her “first semester Education course that went along with field experiences that about diversity in the classroom.” Talking about various issues that may happen in the classroom and “learning more about different ethnic, race, and cultural students helped me
a lot,” recognizes Scout. In addition, she had her “first host teacher who skillfully “integrated diversity in her classroom.”

Scout is more concerned with diverse levels of students in the classroom, like “high performing students, regular students, students with IEPs, ESL students, and those who need special accommodations.” Those diverse kinds of learners she “met in every school I was during the field experiences.” Her first host teacher had “low performing students, lower than regular students.” She shares that “it wasn’t like an English class, more like the second language English class with an inclusion teacher.” She acknowledges how much work her teacher put into planning lessons and activities, sometimes “developing five different levels of the same reading activity.” Scout witnessed the change in the attitude of her teacher towards different groups of students, “it wasn’t necessary because she didn’t like those kids who were low performing, but she didn’t expect as much from them.” She explains that her first teacher “wouldn’t do certain things with them, she wouldn’t ask certain questions because of knowing or assuming that they couldn’t do that.” Scout still thinks that she would try “to push those students further and expect a bit more from them because kids need challenges too.” She hopes that she will “be able to be that kind of teacher who meets the needs of her students and still reaches the standards.”

**Practicing while in Practice.** During the first field experience cycle, Scout was placed with the eighth-grade middle school teacher. She felt like she was “a kind of a helper in that classroom.” She was observing the teacher and “pass[ed] out the papers as needed.” While the students were working in groups, Scout would “walk around and help them.” She knew most of the students by name because she would come for two and a half hours every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and the students “were comfortable to ask questions.” So, Scout wasn’t
“just silent in the back and strictly observing;” she was “interacting with students beginning with greeting them in the morning.”

Although, she complains, “I never was in charge of a lesson,” her first experience was still considerably better than the second one because she “knew a lot of students by name and could follow their progress or whatever they were doing.” Unlike it, during her second field experience with a high school host teacher, she “wasn’t even given that opportunity.” She began knowing the students’ names “by their test-papers I graded.” But the most disappointing for Scout was the fact that her second host teacher didn’t even introduce her to the class, “My teacher put no value in me, so neither did his students,” concludes Scout with sadness. As she mentioned before, she “would spend the entire instructional time just grading his papers.”

While Scout doesn’t express much gratification with her third host teacher, she had some “good practical experience in her classrooms.” From the beginning, she decided to invest herself “more than in any previous field experiences.” On the very first day, Scout asked her host teacher for seating charts and tried to memorize students’ names as fast as she could. Although she “had no real choice of teaching a lesson of my own,” she helped with daily grammar that students completed as bell ringers. “My teacher hated grammar,” admits Scout, “so she would make me copies of ACT prep sheets, and I would work with class after they complete the assignment.” She views those grammar activities “as an opportunity to interact and connect with students at least in some ways.” Only once, when her teacher planned “a review of Beowulf,” she pulled up Jeopardy PPP, so I led instruction all day.” Scouts recollects it as a fun experience regardless that she didn’t use something she “had created and then implemented,” she was just happy “to take whatever was given to me.”
Besides those daily grammar activities, Scout “would walk around more than her teacher and help students format their papers and answer their questions on the days they went to the library and worked on research.” She was also happy when her host teacher let her read and respond to students’ rough drafts. Scout believes that “despite the teaching, you know, I felt like I had a role in their room and a kind of ownership” because students knew her name and the reason for being in the classroom. She considered herself “a part of the room,” and if she spoke in class, “it was accepted normal, not like, I was some strange visitor.”

**Challenges during the Field Experiences.** The challenging aspect for Scout during her field experiences, as she puts it, “was seeing the relevance.” She explains, “I know many of my peers in the cohort and I experienced at least one bad teacher, if not two. And it is just frustrating. Why do I have to spend 40 hours with this teacher if I don’t learn anything?” If after her first 40 hours, Scout “wanted to go back and experience more,” she was ready to get her second experience “over as soon as possible.”

She thinks that “any teacher preparation program should dig for meaningful, good teachers to work with pre-service teachers, if they want us to learn something.” For Scout, it is hard to “wrap my head around the idea that there are not 20 good English teachers in this parish to place us with.” If host teachers “know what to expect from us, and we know what is expected from us, then the other issues, like participating more in activities, teaching a mini-lesson, or interacting with students “would not be either challenging or concerning because everyone is on the same page,” concludes Scout.

Another challenge for Scout is “the limit of a range of various classes at various times of day and week.” Because field experiences are a part of the teacher preparation program, and pre-service teachers take two mandatory courses that accompany field experiences, in addition to
other coursework and part-time job, she clarifies, “we can only devote certain time to our field experiences.” For example, during her first experience, she would visit school “on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from the first hour till the middle of the third hour.” So every time, she “observed the same classes at the same times,” while she would also like “to see how the afternoon classes work, or how lunch affects students’ productivity and behavior.”

The main challenge though is “being in someone else’s classroom and not being able to do anything,” confesses Scout. She understands that she doesn’t “want to be bothersome for the host teacher,” but wishes “them to be required to let us teach or lead an activity.” She thinks that would make the experiences “so much more beneficial.”

**Changes to the Field Experiences.** Scout understands that in order to be comfortable in the classroom and “to revamp the program and teach earlier, we should be taught how to plan lessons and units earlier.” She thinks that learning about unit plans and how to develop them during “the senior year in the program is a bit late in the game.” Scout discloses that her Fall, 2013 semester was “very heavy on the unit and getting a big picture of the curriculum, and if that is what has to be instilled in teacher’s mindset, this should be introduced at the very beginning.” Of course, she agrees, if the program stays “as it is now and doesn’t require us to do much, except for observing, then what kind of preparation do you need for that?”

Furthermore, Scout voices hope to have “better progression of education and content classes in the program, if not for us, then for the next cohorts.” She mentions that “a lot of our education classes were spent talking about our field work and observations,” and, “although it’s helpful some,” continues Scout, “for three semesters having a class that is weighing heavily on observations is kind of pointless to me.” In her opinion, “observing these instances is helpful, but sometimes they are so specific to content and context that talking about them for the duration
of a class period is not helpful because that situation will never happen again.” Any new situation, according to Scout, is unique and needs a solution “depending on concrete circumstances: time, place, participants, etc.” She believes that “if we observed our first semester, and that first class would be focused on observations, then the second class would be more about teaching and application, not observing. Forcing us to teach and participate more would require different courses to accommodate the requirements.”

Scout considers host teachers to be the key to successful field experiences. If she could make any changes to the organization of field experiences, she would make sure “pre-service teachers have better quality host teachers.” Talking to her classmates and sharing experiences in the classroom, she heard her peers to admit that “there are a few lucky girls and boys who had good teachers, but that’s rare.” Scout agrees with her cohort friends and summarizes her thoughts about the quality of host teachers:

I think this is a shame if we are learning to become good teachers. Sure, one can learn what not to do, but if two out of three, or all three of field experiences are with bad teachers, who don’t like their jobs, who don’t enjoy teaching, who only want us in the room to do work for them, it diminishes the value of field experiences. So first of all, I wish there was a way that university could recruit better teachers to work with us.

Another important issue for Scout is the quality of “field work,” particularly clear requirements to expect more rigorous involvement of pre-service teachers with “less observation, but more participation and teaching.” Again, she emphasizes that the more “we plan, teach, and be observed,” the more it will lead to valuable experiences. In connection with active participation, Scout also reminds about close communication between the university and schools of placement, so “we are all on the same page.” She expresses regrets that often “host teachers either don’t know what to do with us, or they don’t allow us to do anything in their classroom.” As much as Scout understands that pre-service teachers are “temporary visitors in the classroom, we need to learn and experience the classroom first hand.” That is why she wants “to have an opportunity to
teach and to interact more with students,” and “it should be clear to host teachers: your university student has to teach a lesson, and you have to allow him or her to do that.” Scout firmly believes that field experiences should be extended towards more participation and teaching:

Forty hours of strict observation is bogus, and to say, well, you could teach one lesson… well, it’s one lesson out of 120 hours! How helpful is that? And if on top of that, our teachers don’t let us, and then we can’t! Then some of us experienced ZERO lessons. She does not “complain about 40 hours each semester,” but she has “a problem with it because they are with the same exact teacher.” Scout suggests a simple solution. Often, she knows, two or more pre-service teachers are placed at the same school with two or more different host teachers. “Why can’t we rotate in the middle of the semester?” she asks, and explains, that she thinks that “20 hours is plenty to get to know the teacher, her teaching style, and learn from her.” If pre-service teachers could switch the host teachers half way, they would “benefit in several ways,” because they will “see at least six teachers, instead of three; double number of classes and maybe grade levels.” Scout believes that would lead to learning more; besides, “it’s more likely to have three bad teachers than six bad teachers.” These small changes would improve field experiences “by exposing us to more – seeing more teaching, more classrooms, and more grade levels.”

**Value of Field Experiences.** As Scout mentioned before she attributes the success and value of field experiences with the host teachers she had because “both valuable and invaluable experiences boil down to the teachers I was observing.” She was “paired with an excellent mentor teacher who has been teaching for 12 years, and by far she impressed me with her professionalism and expertise.” That made Scout “to enjoy every hour spent in the classroom.” Because her first teacher “taught high school, and now she is teaching middle school, she knows the grade level differences,” and it helped Scout see those differences and possible ways to deal
with them. Having an opportunity “to peek into middle school was the most valued experience during the first placement,” acknowledges Scout.

She considers her second experience to be “very invaluable, kind of a waste of time.” She “did it because I had an obligation to complete those 40 hours,” not because she expected to “learn something from him [second host teacher].” He initially saw Scout “as a secretary doing the work he was supposed to be doing.”

The two most valuable moments during Scout’s third field experience cycle were “a glimpse into 55-minute classes and the value of interacting with the students.” As she noticed earlier, “what I learned from my teacher is mostly what not to do,” however, “sitting at the desk among the students, being a part of the class during activities, and helping students with their research and writing has been more valuable this time than ever before.” Scout also realized that the more initiative she took during her field experiences, “the more enjoyable the experience was.” Overall, although Scout did not consider all her experiences valuable and effective, she “enjoyed going to three different schools and seeing three different teachers.”

**Understanding Teaching**

**Defining Teaching.** For Scout, teaching is “much like making art.” She develops a metaphor of teaching as art-making turning students into the artists, and teachers into the paints: “In order to create art, students must take the tools given to them and apply it to their canvas. The point of teaching is not to end up with a homogenized group of paintings.”

As fun as the art metaphor sounds, teaching can be daunting, admits Scout. She saw teachers “who provide their students with color-by-the-number kits, leaving no room for choice or individuality.” Those teachers who Scout had during her own schooling or who she observed as a pre-service teacher “assign text, worksheets, and tests that expect all students to think and
perform exactly the same.” On the contrary, she also had and observed teachers, who “realize each student is different; therefore, they provide an array of mediums and tools that promote comprehension, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation.”

Based on Scout’s life experiences, including those in the field, she defines teaching as “providing tools that allow students to value knowledge and understand concepts, to construct their own ideas about the world they live in, and to realize their role in society.” Thus, she accentuates the idea that “teaching is not the transferring of ideas from a teacher to student; nor is it checking for fact memorization.” Instead, according to Scout, “teaching occurs when students begin to grasp ideas and concepts as well as questions of how and why things work the way they do.”

“What is the best way to ensure that good, genuine teaching occurs?” questions Scout, and her attempt to answer is a sincere belief that teaching “is not a paint-by-numbers game, but instead, it is an opportunity to interact with many different artists who all bring something unique to the table.” She is certain that “with hard work and the right tools, any and all students can create their own masterpieces.”

Giving students “the tools to get somewhere, to achieve something” is necessary, assures Scout, but teachers should not forget “to let them grow and learn on their own” without providing the answers to questions and imposing which “tools they have to use for their purposes.” She declares that choice should belong to students, as “knowledge has to be their discovery.”

Scout further considers teaching “a two-way street,” where “teaching and learning are happening side by side.” She believes, “Teaching is learning from your students and challenging them, making them to think about what they believe in and why they believe in that, and why it
matters.” The biggest lesson she learned from her rather short relationships and interactions with students was that “teachers get out what they get in, and students will do the same.” Scout feels absolutely certain that “the more care and genuine interest in their students teachers invest, the more respectful, understanding, and motivated to succeed their students are.” She assures that she will remember this important lesson as she begins teaching.

Talking about teaching “is impossible without talking about teacher qualities,” believes Scout. She proclaims, “Good teaching happens if there is a caring, compassionate, knowledgeable teacher who know students, understands their background, recognizes their differences, strives to meet them where they are, and bring them to achieve set goals.”

**An Image of a Successful Teacher.** Scout confesses that she doesn’t “have like one person that I could call the best teacher ever.” She thinks that a successful teacher has “a lot of characteristics which mix up.” Furthermore, she points out that teachers’ success “maybe defined by the school they are in, a classroom, or a group of students they are teaching.” Nevertheless, Scout has an established set of teacher qualities she considers “a must” if one wants to succeed in the classroom and “win the hearts of students.”

First, “a successful teacher does not just transmit ideas to the students but allows the students, probes the students to come up with their own ideas in growing and learning,” discloses Scout. She admits that “it would be easier to stand in front of the classroom and just pass knowledge onto the students, but I think it’s harder to let students become engaged and lead conversations.” Moreover, a teacher should be able to “assess students in a formal or informal way to see where they are and where they need to be, so he or she can help them to get there.”

Scout defines teacher’s primary roles in the classroom as “a facilitator and a guide, who is not an absolute expert and transmitter of knowledge.” She asserts that “[g]ood teachers
encourage students how to ask and how to find answers to their own questions.” These teachers develop activities and assessments that “make students think for themselves, providing tools as needed,” reasons Scout.

Another crucial teacher quality, “which is more like a great skill,” states Scout is “understanding differences in students’ learning styles and their levels of learning abilities.” Being able then to adapt to “different levels in the room from super advanced or maybe low performing” becomes a challenge that effective teachers “can face and overcome and, at the same time, push their students for more, better, and the best.” For Scout that means:

A good teacher to me is not the one who gives only As or Fs, but the one who can take a group of students at the beginning of the year and kind of move them up the ladder, so to speak, to higher level thinking and wrestle through with ideas about the world and novels they read, and maybe take themes from a book and apply them to a real life.

When talking to friends about their best teacher in all of schooling, shares Scout, “one quality came up over and over again—compassion.” This is how she summarizes her conversation:

Not one person said their favorite teacher was the best teacher they ever had because he or she was brilliant in their content area. Instead, the consensus was the most loving and nurturing teachers who actually took time to invest in all students’ lives (regardless of if the student was brilliant or disabled) were the teachers who were most remembered.

“My favorite teacher,” one lady explained, “would look at me whether I walked into her class for the day or was on the playground later in the afternoon and ask where my hands were; she always wanted a hug.”

In Scout’s opinion, successful teachers “are not those who have Ph. D.’s in English (although they certainly could have one and be the best teacher ever) or know all the teacher theories in education.” They are “those who genuinely care about their students, not only care about their learning, but they also care about students’ wellbeing.”

Being a pre-service teacher and learning about teaching and teachers from her coursework and life-long personal observations, Scout recognizes that teachers “who invest time, energy, instruction time, and care for every student – Black, White, dyslexic, gifted, or simply
different” are those who “make differences in students’ lives.” Concluding her thoughts about an image of a successful teacher, she writes:

For me, an image of a successful teacher is a snapshot of a person who evaluates where each student is, understands where each student needs to be, and uses every tool he/she has to get students there. It is a teacher who is not color blind, but color conscious. It is a teacher who understands the power she or he has in the classroom and does not abuse this power but instead uses it to empower students and equip them with knowledge and education. Successful teachers teach students, not subjects.

When Scout thinks about an effective teacher in the classroom, she feels that “it is kind of nerve wrecking.” She realizes “how much work, patience, and perseverance” has to be invested and “it’s not gonna be easy.”

**Building Relationships with Students.** Scout sincerely believes that “students can ‘read teachers’ a lot better than teachers think,” and students are good at it “whether they are in middle or high school.” Thus, it is essential to be aware of this without misleading hopes that “teachers may say one thing, but act differently, and get away with it.” If teachers “really believe that what they are teaching is important and significant, students will believe in that too,” understands Scout.

The relationships with students are “pretty straightforward,” acknowledges Scout, “they see respect, care, or generosity, and they pay back with respect, care, or generosity.” As she mentioned earlier, “teachers get out what they get in, and students will do the same.” Seeing a teacher, who is like Scout’s first host teacher “enthusiastic and creative, with lessons connected to current events and students’ lives, thinking about individuals in the classroom, and changing teaching approach according to a group of particular students brings exponential payoffs.” Students will “buy into this kind of teaching and begin to learn,” asserts Scout. On the contrary, teachers “who don’t really care and just give busy work,” will raise “students who don’t care
either and accept failure.” Scout observed that kind of relationships during her second field experience cycle.

Reflecting on the relationships of her third hosting teacher with the students, Scout shares the following observation:

One time she [third host teacher] got me to be a leader of the game, so I got to sit behind her desk, which is where she was most of the time. Quite frankly, she only got out of her desk when she would go upfront to read Beowulf, and then she would go and sit back down. So, when I sat at her desk, I couldn’t see any of the students. Half of them were in blind spots for me. How could she build relationships with students she didn’t even see most of the time? This must be so frustrating for her students.

Furthermore, in the rare cases Scout’s teacher interacted with her students, “she tried to be their friend and talk about the gossips and what’s going on in the school,” adds she, noticing that “this is not even ethical or appropriate for teachers to do.” In addition, Scout was appalled by that teacher “playing favorites a lot and talking to the same students, completely ignoring the rest.” Being friendly without recognizing “each individual student in the classroom didn’t work well for her,” concludes Scout. She thinks it would be better for her “to be up and around assisting students when they work in groups or individually and addressing their personal learning needs.”

Observing students in the classrooms for three semesters, Scout learned that they “have a lot to bring to the table,” but to make them put an effort, teachers have to realize that “teaching is more about students. Teachers are not teaching just English, Math, or Science; they are teaching students, individuals with unique personalities.”

The past two years, confesses Scout, taught her a lot about students. She learned to respect them and their roles in the classroom. Before entering the field, she understood “students just as an arbitrary term, meaning a group of students, like students in a class, a group of people.” Through these semesters, she “put faces to students, and they became persons and individuals,
not so much a whole group anymore.” Scout realized “how different they can be and how they need different things.” Her experiences revealed:

Students are not equal – their home life isn’t equal, their learning abilities aren’t equal, their learning styles aren’t equal. There are also socio-economic status, their race, and many other things. Before these last three semesters, students were for me like one-size-fit-all term. Now my definition of students and understanding students has become more complicated. This is a good feeling but a little daunting.

Learning these new things made Scout look “back into my high school and how I learn and how I don’t learn.” The most important discovery for her is that “students all have a voice, and they want to be heard, but they are not always heard in the classroom, so they tend to not like school because of that.” It is Scout’s firm belief that “every single student is capable of something if they are given the chance, but they are not always given that chance.” Thinking about future teaching and her students, she expresses hope to “always remember these priceless lessons,” and follow her dream of creating learning opportunities for all students.

**Concerns about Teaching.** Scout feels prepared for student teaching and does not have too many concerns about “actually teaching” because she “started in Math program, and in this elementary course, I’ve been planning and teaching every week.” Admittedly, her field experiences also taught her “a lot whether they were valuable or not.” However, in conversations with her college mates, she senses “a lot of worries,” and recognizes that “these worries could be alleviated earlier if we were forced to teach earlier.” She also thinks that some of these worries are “false fears that could be pushed away” just because pre-service teachers don’t always have an opportunity to learn “while training.”

The biggest challenge for Scout is “meeting the needs of all students.” She has learned that teachers have to keep in mind “so many little things within the classroom – learning abilities of students, personal life conditions, availability of recourses, differentiated assessments, and other things.” Scout is afraid that beginning teachers may “let some students just fall under radar
and be dismissed.” Another concern for her “is making my classroom not hip and cool and easy, but relevant to kids’ lives, so they can connect with the things they read and learn in class.” There seems to be yet another dare, as Scout questions, “How to make students who hate English understand why it is important to learn and how to break that wall of hatred?” These and some other concerns worry Scout as she approaches her student teaching, but she is certain that the more she is in the field, “the better the chances are that I will face the challenges as they arise and will learn as I experience more.”

**Becoming a Teacher**

**Learning about Self.** Throughout field experiences, Scout learned that “a middle school is a possibility” for her. She is happy to know that because many of her cohort peers dislike middle school. Because of “the great teacher I had,” says Scout, she liked being in the classroom with seventh or eighth graders “who called me Ms. Finch.” She happily notices that “they saw me as a teacher,” which she considers to be very important for the beginners in the profession. Scout also learned that she doesn’t “want to be a ‘busy-work’ teacher, and just give students some work, so I can put grades in the gradebook.” She wants to be a teacher “who makes learning meaningful when every activity and every assignment are thought through and have an end goal.” She has “a deep desire to teach all students and …see a potential in all students, even those who’d been pushed through and don’t believe in themselves.” Scout feels “a deep compassion for those who don’t have all the resources that other students have,” and she “wants to help these students realize that, even if we live in a materialistic world, education is more important and empowering than a new pair of sketchers, fashionable dress, or the latest iPhone.” Scout wants her students “to leave classroom being better thinkers and having better
understanding of who they are and what their place in the world is.” Thinking about teaching helps her to “learn more about my philosophy of teaching.”

When Scout observed her host teachers, she admits being very critical of them, “but this also spills on me,” she says. “I want to be the best, and I want my students to be the best. That is a lot of pressure,” acknowledges Scout. These three semesters in the field in addition to the coursework have taught her more than she expected:

I’ve learned a lot! I’ve learned what kind of teacher I want to be. I don’t know, but it is interesting that you ask all these questions. I didn’t think much of my experiences before, but now that you are asking, and I look back, I realize how I have changed and my beliefs have changed too. So I was learning a lot even without realizing it!

Preparing for student teaching, Scout admits that she feels content knowing that as a teacher she never is, but will always be “striving and becoming her best self.”

**Thinking about Teaching and Her Own Classroom.** When Scout thinks about teaching, she knows “exactly what kind of teacher I want to be.” After developing her first conceptual teaching unit, she confesses that “it is something extremely time consuming, but also extremely worth it.” She believes that “everyone can pick up a book and read it to a group of students,” and only “an excellent teacher will think a little more outside the box.” Scout wants to be that teacher “who creates effective lessons thinking about her students.”

She also understands significance of “knowing students and their needs, and treating each one of them as an individual.” She hopes to become a teacher with “passion and patience to see every child in my classroom as a success story.” To provide students with the best learning experiences, Scout plans “to collaborate with other departments in school and look for ways to make my class cover more bases than just English Language Arts.”

Her classroom “would be a work zone,” she declares. It will also be “a place where students are always working together to get somewhere as a class and to grow and change as
individuals.” Scout considers challenges to be motivating in any classroom, but to succeed in overcoming these challenges, students need “a safe place where they are allowed to try new things, fall, and try again; a safe place to communicate thoughts and ideas, knowing that it’s okay to have these thoughts and wrestle with these ideas.” Scout’s classroom will be a dialogue where students are conversing, debating, writing, and figuring out things on their own.”

She is ready “to share power with students” because she wants her classroom “to be student led” where she is “not a dictator and the all-knower, but a team player, explorer, and facilitator.” So the classroom, the resources, and teacher are “a tool box, where my students can take what they need and the skills they have and create their own thing,” explains Scout. She sees her “classroom as a construction zone with students and a teacher building together and learning from each other.”

Scout’s idea of a teacher she wants to be is briefly summarized in the following statement:

I want to be a love teacher, but also a tough teacher, like, “Ms. Finch makes us always do something. She doesn’t let us just sit and watch TV all day.” I want learning to be constant and kind of chaotic. I feel like I can deal with chaos with lots of learning, lots of openness and a right for mistakes.

Creating a classroom where students “are not afraid to question stereotypes and shortcomings of the world they live in” is Scout’s goal. She intends to promote thinking beyond students’ “track labels, socioeconomic status, or cultural backgrounds.”

**Growth through Experience.** Scout confesses that the more she thinks about teaching “the scarier it becomes.” She explains:

So at first, it was all cheerful, “I am gonna be a teacher! I will go and teach.” And now the more I learn about what it takes to be a good teacher, the more I learn how much time and effort it will take to plan these things and be effective. I can see all these other factors that you don’t initially think about, like differentiation and meeting all your students’ needs, teaching to a range of various levels of children at a time.
On the other hand, admits Scout “it also makes me more confident as a teacher today because I know about all these nuances and issues.” She recognizes that “just this fall semester has taught me so much about practices of a teacher,” and she has “so much knowledge about who I want to be as a teacher and how I can execute that, but also I have my fears.” She ponders, “How do I become my best self as a teacher?”

Through her experiences in the field, Scout came to understanding “how off the cuff it is, how involved a teacher is, and how much pressure teaching encompasses.” Her classroom observations proved that “it is impossible to teach three different groups of students, even if they are the same grade level, according to the same lesson plan because of the dynamics of students and understanding each individual student’s needs.” Scout wants to be the teacher “who differentiates for her students knowing that the students are not the same.” She learned some “reality things that I didn’t think before being in the classroom.” “Coming out of field experiences, I see teaching as more complicated with multiple aspects for a teacher to consider,” concludes Scout.

Harry: I Want to Be a Teacher Who Makes Change Possible

A Teacher in the Making

Hello, I am Harry, Harry Potter from J. K. Rowling’s (1997) book series. If you don’t know me yet, ask your children. They probably have seen movies about me, at least once. Although I grew up a loner, I made friends and greatly cherish friendship. I'm extremely loyal, caring, and a little hard-headed, but I believe in kindness. I try to be always fair and will go out of my way to make sure that others have their fair share of the pie. When someone needs help, I'm ready with a helping hand or even a sacrifice to save those I love.
I grew up in a small town in the south of my home state where I now attend the university. I was blessed to be in one of the top school systems in the state, being that it has very few of those. After I finished middle school and had the two most wonderful English teachers, Ms. B. and Mrs. S., I decided that English was my favorite subject. From then on, I was all uphill towards my dream, if not counting some distractions.

I remember the first books I ever picked up, mainly because I enjoyed the illustration style. The *Sweet Pickles* books (Perle, Reinach, & Hefter, 1977-1995) were the books that piqued my interest the most. I could sit for hours in Ms. M.’s first-grade classroom, reading for hours. After first grade, I took an interest in short novels; my favorites were *The Magic Tree House* series (Osborne, 1992-present). Into middle school in my eighth-grade year, I had two teachers who made English Language Arts a truly enjoyable subject. I remember writing my own novella and presenting it in class. Learning how to RASS (restate, answer all parts, support, summarize) on test questions made me appreciate writing more. My final year of high school was when it really hit me that literature and writing was something that interested me the most. I loved to look up new words and research topics that I was fascinated with at that time, for example, Chinese food or world records. Then turning the research topic into some kind of project always brought so much fun, while I learned a lot along the way. It may seem weird for a boy, but I actually enjoyed writing research papers, studying for vocabulary tests, reading AP books, and learning how to present information. Ms. S., my AP English teacher, really knew how to teach. She could keep a class engaged and engrossed for an entire lesson, and I knew I wanted to be just like her.

My first year of college was at a small university in the northern part of the state. At that college, I changed majors like socks. I liked a lot of things, but couldn’t decide where my place
was. I was an English major for a week, then a nursing major for a month. After that I decided to major in culinary. Though that lasted almost a year, I eventually changed to history for the rest of my last semester there. After I transferred to the State University, I realized that history was not my true calling, but English was, more specifically, English education. I enjoyed telling people about the things I knew and loved sharing information. So I decided to go into teaching. First, I thought teaching was the only thing I could do well. I also knew it was real to get a job because of teachers’ shortage.

Later, when I started to take more education classes, I realized that this is something I really enjoy doing. I love learning about new methods of pedagogy and how to manage a classroom. I love interacting with my observation teacher and my peers about the problems in education today. How can we change education? How can we make it more accessible to people who otherwise wouldn’t have a good education? Those are some questions for which I try to find answers. I want to be like some teachers I had, and at the same time, I don’t want to be like some of the teachers I had. So I kind of want to be a person in charge, or maybe like a third parent, or even one parent to some kids who do not have parents or parental figures in their lives. I mean that is one of the goals of education for me is to make education fun.

Going into the field of English education was the best thing I could have ever done. I believe that education is my true calling. Often I think about my future classroom and students and what kind of teacher I would like to become. I would love to be a teacher who can make learning meaningful, important, and at the same time enjoyable. I want to engage young people in learning English; I want to introduce them to hundreds of great books; I want them to understand how important education is for developing critical thinkers, a trait all employers look for in the potential candidates.
Field Experiences and Their Organization

Preparation for Field Experiences. Before going into the field experiences, Harry thought that the Teacher Preparation program in which he was enrolled prepared him for field experiences. He liked that most of his professors at the State University “have a lot of experience, and that’s a key to teaching future teachers.” However, when he actually went into the field, Harry realized that he was “not quite prepared for these kinds of field experiences.” He explains that he might have been prepared “for the first field experience in middle school, but was not prepared “to face the boredom of the Magnet high school.” What he means by that is “there was some teaching going on that I could observe in middle school.” Unlike that he did not “expect it would be as boring experience as it was” in high school. Harry complains that he never “actually saw any teaching; students were always doing some work on their own.” He expected more active field experiences that involved lots of learning in practice:

You know, I expected to see all these great strategies we learned in classes. Honestly, I didn’t see any of that, nor was I able to apply any of these things. I just sat in the back and took notes. That is why I feel I was not prepared. I was not prepared to do nothing and to observe so little during my first two field experiences.

As Harry went through field experiences, he took some mandatory education and content courses like the rest of his cohort. He interviewed his first host teacher as a requirement of one of the courses and was not pleased because “what she said about teaching and what I saw in her class did not match. It was like she was saying all the right things, but didn’t apply her philosophy in practice.”

Harry considers that his coursework accompanying field experiences to be “focused on one thing – race, for example.” He understands how important the discourse about race and diversity is, especially in our region because teachers “will encounter it one day,” but he feels like it is time “to move on and talk less about it” as they talked about diversity, race, and poverty.
in the first education course, then almost the same discussions took place “during our second year, and then more and more every year.” Harry is ready to learn more “about classroom management and how to deal with parents,” since these are “the things I am going to deal with soon.” He emphasizes that he is not “trying to dismiss those other issues as unimportant; they are crucial, but they are not the only one to be focused on.”

Harry appreciates the course on reading strategies he took with Dr. T. in the fall of his junior year because he “learned so much in that class, a lot of strategies. It was one of the most helpful classes along with Methods course this semester.” The Education methods course in the senior fall semester, admits Harry, taught him how to think about a bigger picture of curriculum:

I have never created a unit plan before; I’ve really never mapped out anything before as for planning. It makes me to think diligently about what I want to do, what I want to use to get the students to learn. I am glad that I am finally at the point where I can put what I’ve learned into practice.

Harry also complimented both courses that went with his last field experience practicum noticing that he could “definitely see a flow between Dr. Slade’s class and Education methods course; it was like these two courses were closely interrelated and feeding off each other,” which he couldn’t observe in previous courses. These courses attracted him as he “enjoyed discussing and then applying what was learned—like exchanging ideas and a practice on top.” In addition, Harry adds that he was able to talk about what he was learning with his third host teacher and get her professional opinion.

**Being in a Cohort.** Harry likes to be in a cohort. Although he confesses that “it was a bit weird at first because I was an only boy in it,” he appreciates a cohort for “creating some sort of unity among my classmates.” He is certain that “in the future if any of us needed one another, like to exchange ideas or lesson plans,” they will be able to reconnect. Harry believes that “having people with whom to share ideas is really helpful.” Besides, he adds, “every class we
had a chance to talk about our experiences.” If Harry had some doubts or questions or needed to get some resources, he knew that he “had peers in class, and they would help.” He admits that he “enjoys getting feedback from his classmates,” but most importantly he “met new friends here.”

**Expectations for Field Experiences.** Harry acknowledges that he did not have “clear expectations before I went into the field for the first time.” He knew he expected “to go to school, to sit in the classroom, and watch for a little bit.” He also does not remember the expectations to be thoroughly explained in any course or at the meeting with the Office of Field Placements. Harry thought that he might be able “to be more interactive with teachers and students.” After the first field experience cycle, he recollects:

I remember some students, my peers, would come and say, “I got to teach a lesson” or “I got to help students” or something else. And I thought I was the one sitting in the back of the classroom and just writing things I saw. My expectations were definitely that we were going to do a little more than just observe.

So, after Harry completed his first observation practicum, he “couldn’t really say I learned more.” He wanted to learn more and to see more, “not the same things over and over.”

Before going into the second cycle of field experiences, Harry decided that he “would like to interact more with students. Maybe even try to teach a lesson, talk more with the teacher about the daily procedures, lesson plans, and choices.” Unfortunately, he notices, the second experience “was boring and dreadful.” He shares that he would come and sit in the back, trying to take notes, but “even taking notes was hard because there was no teaching in this class and not much interaction.” What he saw were students who would “come in, pick up a package that they had to complete, and worked on it entire class period.” His expectations were not met again.

When his third placement was announced, Harry got anxious. “Maybe this time,” he thought, “I can be more interactive with the students and teach one or two lessons.” He wanted to connect with students, to be “more than some stranger in the back watching them as they do
their work.” He also wanted “them to ask me for help,” and he sought teacher’s support. Most of all, he wished “to be someone in this class, not just a stranger in the back,” like he was during the first two experiences. He recognizes that setting expectations and goals means that he understands his future profession and knows what the possibilities are:

Yes! I had more expectations, so my mind was set differently. And because a lot of things about teaching are starting to make sense, I wanted to get more experience that I know I can get right now. This will prepare for student teaching and the actual teaching next year. This is my last chance before that.

Harry expresses endless gratitude to his third host teacher for helping meet his expectations, providing opportunities to grow his confidence in the classroom, and allowing him to be an active participant in class.

**Host Teachers.** Without knowing what exactly to expect from field experiences, Harry eagerly began his first practicum in one of the city’s middle schools with an eighth-grade ELA teacher, Ms. D. He recollects that he “arrived at school, met with the host teacher, and briefly talked about the classes she taught.” He viewed the first meeting as promising, but then the students began to come in, and “he didn’t really know what to do,” so he “stood upfront greeting students.” Nothing happened in the following few minutes; Ms. D. “didn’t introduce me to class, nor she explained students why I was there.” Feeling discomfort and awkwardness of the situation, Harry “moved to the back of class, where I pretty much spent the rest of my observation hours.”

Despite his unsettling position in the classroom, Harry “kept his eyes and ears open,” trying to notice, “what she does, how she does it, and how students respond to that.” He still thinks that he learned a lot from being in Ms. D.’s classroom. He remembers “talking to her about teaching field in between of her classes, and she would tell me about the troubles they are having with teacher evaluations, Common Core, and other district and state mandates.” For him,
just a beginner in the profession, it seemed puzzling that “an experienced teacher as she was, she worried about all those things.” That made Harry to think that soon he would have “to deal with these issues too.”

Not having too many opportunities to participate and interact with students, Harry enjoyed “the communication part of experiences.” Sometimes, when students were working, Ms. D. “would give me a handout they were working on and explain what they are doing and why,” shares Harry. “She also clarified how activities would help students to develop certain skills, showed her lesson plans, and students’ work,” to help him “understand the dynamics of the classroom and some strategies.” Harry “was happy to get what I could from our daily communication mainly during her classes and sometimes in between her classes.”

Furthermore, Harry saw how Ms. D. employed “scaffolding strategies a lot.” He paid attention to the procedures she used in class and noticed that students knew “what to do and when, how to work with bell ringers, and overall classroom structure.” She also “used lots of technology, and they had a Smart board and other equipment,” acknowledges Harry. His favorite activity was the one that “reminded him about his own school experience.” It was “listening to the song and treating it like a story,” and they did that lesson so students could “understand parts of the story, like rising action, climax, and falling action.” From personal experiences, Harry remembers this kind of activity “to be fun” and plans “to incorporate music and technology in his own classes.”

After passive observations during his first field experience cycle, Harry was anticipating to “see more and do more” in his second practicum. He was placed “in one of the best high schools in the city, called Magnet.” He confesses that he never “expected that experience to be so boring.” Again, he “was just dismissed in there—not introduced, not recognized—a stranger
in the back.” He points out that “the teacher maybe fussed at her students once or twice for the whole time.” He did not observe many interactions between the teacher and the students: “They [students] were constantly on their feet doing work, and nothing ever would go wrong, so I couldn’t really observe anything.” He comes to conclusion that “the teacher was there as a guide; she never really taught.” While the students were always on task, admits Harry, “It must have not been too successful because at one point she told me that their essays were kind of bad.” He considers that second experience “a hard observation,” because he did not “notice anything worthy to reflect on and write in my field experience logs.”

Hoping to have better experiences, Harry delved into his third field experience cycle raising his expectations and deciding “to be more involved in the classroom, interact with students, and teach at least one or two lessons.” This time it was at an average public high school in the city. His host teacher was Ms. R. who “teaches 11th grade great scholar students, which is kind of like honors, and AP classes.” The first time Harry went to school, Ms. R. “let me into her classroom, and we talked a lot because it was her break.” They talked “about the things I wanted to do during this field experience,” and he confessed about “never being able to teach a lesson before and that I really want to do it.” Ms. R. assured him of having “plenty of opportunities to do that in her class.”

Harry declares his “last experience to be the best one” because he “enjoyed observing, participating in class discussions, and talking to Ms. R. about things I learned in my classes.” He liked everything about Ms. R’s classroom, even the “way it was set up with the students’ desks forming an open half-square and a board upfront.” Harry described his host teacher as “active and enthusiastic” as she “walked around and engaged students in activities, constantly asking questions.” He felt that he was “learning new things because the teacher is more involved, I am
getting more ideas from her.” He would make notes about activities he liked, “I can use this thing in my class. I can use that activity.” Beside, notices Harry, “she was excellent at classroom management and always kept the class in order.” However, “the best part was to be able to teach at last.” The happiest moment of his experience, Harry considers, “was being able to capture students’ interest showing them connection between a modern person and transcendentalists.” He finally could apply knowledge to practice and register “students’ positive response to his teaching.”

**Diversity in the Classrooms.** All three schools Harry observed during field experiences were “city public schools with diverse student population.” “When I say diverse,” he clarifies, “I mean the students come from different home backgrounds and have different family income: some are well dressed and have expensive backpacks and school supplies, while others don’t have any of that.”

Most of the classes he observed during his first field experience practicum had “about 90% of the African-American students with about 10% of the rest, including Whites, Latinos, or Asian.” Approximately the same ethnic make-up was in Magnet school which he visited throughout the second cycle of field experiences. Harry’s last field experiences were with the honors and AP students, “they were probably half and half (African Americans and Whites), and then there was one Asian girl.” He still considers this diverse.

Harry noticed that “most of the students in middle school would mingle together during breaks,” so he did not observe students isolated because “of their race or ethnicity.” What he found more interesting was to see “how students in high school would form small groups; they wouldn’t talk to everyone in their class, and they interact less.”
Harry recalls his school’s practice to “track students as tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3, and then honors, and AP students.” Unlike his schools, the schools he visited had “regular, great scholars, gifted, honors, and AP classes,” but it seemed to him that “tracking was pretty much the same,” and he was aware that “students easily figure out these labels and what is what.”

One of the lessons Harry learned throughout his field experiences is what he calls “three-level divide between students.” This is how he explains his discovery:

There is a definite divide between honors students and students in regular education. Regular education students are not always motivated, while the honors or great scholars seem not to struggle with incomplete assignments. When I was in middle school with regular students, teacher had to push every one of them to do work. Instead, in Magnet school, the students would just do their work, and the teacher didn’t even teach. And then, here [the third placement] it is kind of in the middle. The students don’t undertake many initiatives, but they are not constantly pushed to do their work. It is easy flowing with the active teacher’s involvement.

These different “kinds of dynamics between students” Harry recognizes as the ones that characterize schools and tracking systems.

**Practicing while in Practice.** Harry’s first impression of the middle school where he was assigned for the first field experience cycle was positive. He described it as “very nice and big,” bigger than a school he attended as a middle school student. He notes that he “always compared the schools I observed to the schools I went to for some reason.” So, from what he saw, Harry concluded “that it was going to be a good experience because of a good school, just by the way it looks” and added, “It was stupid of me because what really matters is what’s on the inside, not the façade view.” When he met his first host teacher, he tells, “we talked a little bit, and I was not really sure what she wanted me to do.” From his education classes, Harry remembered that “it is always good for teachers to greet their students at the door.” So he went to the front and met students at the door. “I did not know any students’ names, so I was just saying hi, hello, how it is going,” explains he.
Mostly his first experiences were observations. Harry describes his time in class:

And I would just sit in there, take notes, made note of how the teacher was using technology, how the students were reacting to what their teacher was saying, and how the teacher would discipline the class. I paid attention to things like that.

He recollects that there “were one or two days out of all my 40 observation hours when I really interacted with the students.” Because it was such a short interaction, Harry “didn’t really learn students’ names,” but he was “able to help some students when they were working on the career projects.” So he helped “one girl to find a book she needed and locate the information from the book.” Another girl had trouble spelling, and Harry wasn’t sure whether he had handled the situation correctly “when he pulled out the dictionary and asked her to look up the word.” What was odd about that short and seemingly insignificant incident, explains Harry, “it made him think about my future students. That girl was in the eighth grade and couldn’t spell a simple word. I realized that there will be some students I will teach who don’t know how to spell or read.”

Another “heart-warming episode” for Harry was when he helped a boy to choose a book for home reading. He shares the following story:

There was also a student who seemed to always be having a bad day. He would come to school angry, and teacher would fuss at him. He seemed to be upset for no reason, (but, of course, there had to be a reason behind such behavior). One day we went to the library, and I helped him to pick out a book. I chose the book that I really liked when I was his age, and it made me really happy to help a student with choosing a book. Later, he would update me on his reading.

Those small interactions “didn’t happen often, but they brightened my days,” and provided “motivation” to go on with observations, admits Harry. He even had a chance to try out a discipline technique one day:

The teacher left the classroom, and they were doing an assignment, so I stayed in there to watch them for about two minutes. The students would call me Mr. P. So, one student said, “Mr. P., so and so aggravates me.” I looked at him and responded, “If you were doing your work, you wouldn’t even notice what the other student was doing.” I saw that
student was not completely in his work the whole time. I thought whether it was too mean to say that or what…

During his first cycle of field experiences, the host teacher let Harry to observe another teacher “who was a man. “ “She wanted me to see how different teachers operate in the classroom,” he explains. Observing a Science teacher was different, “in fact, a lot different from what I observed in her classes,” notices Harry. He attributes that to the teacher “being a male, instead of a female,” and it seemed to him students had “more respect to that teacher, although he did not fuss much and made little comments about students’ behavior.”

Harry’s second cycle of field experiences can be briefly summarized in a few sentences:

It was just observations. I never once interacted with a student in educational way. I would stay in the back. The only way I would interact with them was to an extent of “hey” or “excuse me.” The teacher did not interact much with them either. They were just completing packages of worksheets.

After that one, the third placements appeared to be like “finally I was at the right place with the right teacher.” Ms. R. generously invited him to participate in lessons and “provided several teaching opportunities,” brags Harry. He eventually had “to teach a lesson that she planned.” It was “an introduction to nonfiction where they learned about the famous speeches of the Presidents.” Harry studied a PowerPoint prepared by the host teacher for a few minutes and then presented it to class.

His presence in this classroom was noticeable, comments Harry, “I feel like I am more involved, and my presence is more known or recognized. I actually have a purpose here.” It was important for him that Ms. R. introduced him “to all her classes from the very first day, and students definitely know I am there, and they know why I am there.”

Harry says that he did not walk around a lot because he “was not sure how Ms. R. feels about that.” Once, when students worked on a McCarthyism project, “the teacher had a fun activity and I walked around and talked to the groups.” Nevertheless, “the best moment was
probably when I taught transcendentalism to the students.” Because they were interested in it, Harry thought he “was able to make connections.” He made “a PPP about Chris McCandless, who was considered like a modern day transcendentalist.” Ms. R. also liked the film clips he showed her the day before “planning to use them in my lesson and asking for her approval.” “I was very happy she liked the film; she even said she’ll use it again,” excitedly announced Harry.

The various experiences in different classrooms make Harry “think a lot about what kind of teacher I want to be and what things I will never do.” He acknowledges “learning a lot because I saw real classrooms with real students.”

**Challenges during the Field Experiences.** One significant challenge for Harry was that he did not know what to do in the classroom: “I am not sure if I had clear expectations before I went into the field. I know I expected sit and watch for a little bit.” Moreover, he did not feel comfortable to ask his first two host teachers “if I could participate in lessons because they even didn’t introduce me.” “It was their classroom, and I was some stranger in the back,” he states with regret.

Another challenge for Harry was the “application part.” He discloses:

I can be honest. During my first two observations, I applied none of my knowledge from my English or British literature classes. As far as my education classes are concerned, I haven’t been able to apply much of those yet because the teacher didn’t really give me any opportunity to do anything.

At the beginning of field experiences, Harry did not know “how to negotiate my position with a teacher.” Fortunately, by the third field experience, Harry found the way to let his teacher know “what he wanted to do.” He insists that “professors have to instruct us earlier and better how to communicate with host teachers.”

**Changes to the Field Experiences.** Harry “really liked that in first field experience, my teacher let me to observe another teacher to get an idea of different perspectives of how different
teachers work.” He expresses the wish all his “observations were set up in a way where we could observe at least two teachers during one field experience practicum.” He understands that it “might not be always possible, but it really got me thinking how different teachers are operating.”

Harry is not sure “if this is already in the program or not, but I would mandate that the host teacher involve pre-service teachers more, to require to teach at least one lesson every semester.” He sincerely craves teaching experience:

Maybe we could teach something not difficult during the first semester, like an activity or mini-lesson, then something harder during the second observation semester, and during the last semester to teach something that is really challenging. I think we should be required to teach.

The requirements should be stricter for the host teachers as well, asserts Harry and clarifies, “I want them to have some guidelines, like you have to do this, this, and this.” He recognizes that host teachers choose to volunteer when they work with pre-service teachers, still he thinks, “if teachers volunteer to do it, they may as well do it better.” “I want my host teacher to know what we are supposed to do and encourage us to participate more,” stresses Harry. To summarize, he requests “field experiences to be organized in a way where we really get more practical experience before we are thrown into our actual student teaching.”

As for the coursework, notices Harry, “we have a lot of classes that are just discussions where we talk and exchange our ideas about education, and we talk a lot about our field experiences and situations we observe in the classrooms.” For him, it feels “like it’s the same things over and over.” Harry suggests making education classes “more like Methods or Reading Strategies course in which we can apply what we learn in developing lessons and activities.” “I don’t think there should be a change in a coursework; it’s just the content of the courses should reflect more progression,” he concludes.
Value of Field Experiences. Harry views his field experiences very valuable as he was “able to see the field of my future profession.” He believes that “it is something that every career preparation program should provide for its graduates.” In his opinion, “having the first-hand experience, seeing how it is going to be like, understanding how different professionals do their job is vital,” and it taught him “about students’ ways of learning and how to be teachers.”

While Harry “really didn’t get much out of two first field experiences” because he “was just observing all the time,” he appreciated “seeing different schools and compare them.” He says that he never “was at a Magnet school before, so it was weird to me just to see how things work there.” His experiences in school “made me think what kind of teacher I want to be and what kind of classes I want to have.” So for Harry, “every single day is learning something; learning never ends.”

Harry believes that the value of field experiences directly depends on host teachers. He asserts that “the better host teachers we have, the better our experiences turn out to be.” Harry deliberates:

I guess, a part of the reason is when you see a class where students don’t want to be and don’t want to try is the teacher. If she feels kind of useless and can’t really control her class, students will not pay respect and they won’t try to do something. But when you get to a class with Ms. R., where the students are motivated because they enjoy being in there and participating in activities, it makes all the difference.

In addition to teachers, Harry certainly puts himself “as someone responsible for success of field experiences.” Reflecting on the first two experiences, he reminds, “When I didn’t know how to approach my first two teachers, I ended up sitting in the back.” It took Harry some time and 80 hours of previous experiences to negotiate his place and role in the classroom: “Learning how to talk to a teacher and ask questions is important, and it helped me to turn my negative experiences to the best last experience.”
Understanding Teaching

Defining Teaching. When Harry thinks of teaching, he always remembers his senior English classroom:

There was nothing special about it. There are a few posters on the wall, a bookshelf or two, and the front board it always filled with the day’s procedures. But, I do know why I think of this classroom. It is the classroom of a teacher who influenced my decision to become a teacher. It seemed like she knew the secret to reaching all her students and keeping them… holding them in a trance and not letting them out until the bell rings.

For Harry it “was almost magical.” He has a firm belief that “it takes a special person to teach,” like his teacher was.

In Harry’s opinion, teaching is learning: “Through the occupation itself, teachers are always growing and learning new concepts, learning how to better interact with people, and learning how to be better in what they do.” He is assured that “teaching means being open to change and a dynamic environment every day.” Teaching is definitely a process for Harry, “Every teacher I’ve talked to tells that they are always learning, learning from co-workers and from students.”

Harry narrates a metaphor of teaching as follows:

Teaching is climbing the mountain on that cancelled Nickelodeon show, Guts (1992-1995). There are falling rocks, endless fogs, and scary sounds. However, if you get to the top and win, the feeling is like no other. Succeeding at being an educator, to get through to a student, must be the best feeling in the world, like climbing up to the peak of an intimidating mountain called the Aggro Crag.

He understands how much effort it takes, remarking that “teaching takes a lot of planning, which I already knew before, but I didn’t know exactly how much time it takes.” He shares his progress on developing the teaching unit for Methods course: “Right now I am just gathering ideas for my unit plan and thinking about questions I will ask and activities I will use. It seems meticulous to plan everything out, but it is necessary.” Harry realizes that he “may not
follow exactly these plans, but I need them to guide the teaching/learning process, to know what
the final goals are.”

According to Harry, teaching is also following the school, district and state mandates on
education, and “sometimes it means teaching with a scripted curriculum or using a unit plan
developed by the district school system.” He is determined to “learn about all mandates and
standards” and use this knowledge “to avoid some restrictions and enrich lessons with book
choices and other resources” he finds “more relevant to students’ lives.” Teaching is more than
“lessons on reading and grammar; it is about life lessons.” Harry associates effective teaching
with qualities of a teacher, “who is well-prepared, knowledgeable, strict, but at the same time,
well-liked.”

An Image of a Successful Teacher. Harry’s “collective image of a successful teacher”
is based on his favorite high school teachers, Ms. B. and Mrs. S. He talks about them warmly
and with a smile:

Ms. B. was actually a first-year teacher at the time, but she was in the classroom like
she’d been teaching for years. Being a student, I would never know she was a first-year
teacher. Mrs. S. was very strict, but she was a good teacher. She knew how to pull the
class to attention. Both teachers were always well-prepared, very knowledgeable on the
subject, and knowing what it is they are doing in the classroom at all times.

Harry hopes to be “a teacher like that, a teacher who seems to be teaching for ten years at least
during the first days of teaching.” He also realized that he is “not becoming a teacher for the
money,” and continues, “I don't know who would, but being a teacher and reaping the awards of
a student garnering newfound knowledge is worth more than anything.” Saying this, Harry also
regrets that “not enough people become teachers with the thought that what they are doing
should benefit the students.” He thinks that results in a fact “why many teachers stop being
teachers… simply because they go into the profession with all the wrong ideas.”
Harry defines a successful teacher “as someone who believes that every student has the capacity to learn, think, and grow.” Education is not limited to a few selected students, he acknowledges, “everyone deserves the best education.” Like many of his cohort classmates, Harry agrees that a successful teacher should be creative: “A creative lesson always keeps students engaged and engrossed in a lesson.” He hopes that as he “grow[s] as a teacher and learner, so will my creativity.”

In Harry’s opinion, “good teachers understand that they will not always have the answers to every question a student asks, and are prepared to accept the fact that they do not know everything.” They constantly learn with students and “must be open to change and diversity of views.” Such teachers are “well liked and respected for honesty” as they “set examples not only for their students, but for their colleagues.”

Among other vital teacher qualities, Harry considers dedication to students. “Students, their education, and well-being should be a priority for teachers,” he assumes, understanding “how difficult it is to feed that dedication with low salaries and disrespect from public.” He knows “good teachers have to be willing to put in a lot of work, and not expect the world to be material.” The rewards in teaching are not immediate, recognizes Harry, “The only reward maybe just knowing that the student you pushed and who didn’t think he’ll make it finally makes it, and you feel that it was worthy.”

**Building Relationships with Students.** When Harry observed two teachers during his first semester in the field, he noticed that “there was a different dynamic in relationships between a teacher and the students.” He attributes this to two individual teacher personalities and the fact that “one teacher was a female and the other was a male.” “I feel as if (and I don’t want to sound
rude or anything) the students respected a male teacher more than they respected a female teacher,” concludes Harry from his observations. He further explains:

I don’t know if it was because they saw him as a more authoritative person. At least I didn’t think about it at that time. To me, it seemed more like his attitude versus her attitude. He was funnier, more laid-back person, but still kept the classroom in control. Unlike him, she would momentarily react to any distraction, like, “Stop doing this! Stop doing that!” Her class seemed to be totally out of control comparing with the man’s class.

Though Harry had seen teachers struggle with class management and relationship-building when he was a middle- and high-school student, he first paid attention to “what was going in class and tried to understand why it worked the way it did” during this first field experience. Harry clearly perceived how his “first host teacher was really enthusiastic about one of her classes, and then, for her other class, she would constantly fuss.” Those “other students,” he notes, “did the same kind of things her favorite students would do, and she wouldn’t fuss at them.” “Does that mean she didn’t like those kids and played favorites? Or was it her way to bring the other class to the same performance level?” puzzles Harry. For him, it was just “annoying to sit in class and watch her relentlessly telling students to do this or that.” He believes if she “changed her attitude, maybe students would respect her more and try harder.”

After completing the first field experience, Harry found out that “students seemed to be pretty much the same as when I was in middle school.” He felt “a bit old because their humor was different, and I didn’t understand some of the things they saw as being funny.” It made him desire “to get closer to them when I start teaching; I want to understand them better.”

The biggest lesson for Harry was his realization of how different students are:

I’ve learned that some students will do anything to do well in school. For some of the students school is a breeze, it’s easy. For some of the students, it’s unbearable – they want to be anywhere except for the classroom. They would rather be at home or outside. So there is a range of students from the students who don’t want to be anywhere near school to the students who consider school the only right place to be at the time.
When he came to a Magnet high school for the second field experience practicum, Harry observed the “relationships that were close to an adult world.” It seemed “almost unnatural” to him that all students would work and complete their assignments “without any push from their teacher.” “They were treated like adults,” he remarks, “and maybe that’s a key of building healthy relationships.” Still it didn’t “appear quite right to me,” comments Harry, “There was something about it that felt business-like, you know.”

Harry enjoyed his last practicum most of all because of “an easy going atmosphere in the classroom.” He saw students trusting their teacher, Ms. R., and she “would always treat them with respect.” “They may get chatty at times, but it is nothing; it is not disruptive at all. She just tells them to stop talking, and they stop,” describes Harry.

Once, during one of their regular conversations between the lessons, Harry asked Ms. R. “about the first day of being a teacher.” He shared an advice some teachers gave him: “You shouldn’t smile and should appear mean during your first days in school.” Ms. R. said, “it was nonsense because, if you are not a mean person at heart, you can’t really do it.” Instead, she suggested, “Don’t disrespect, belittle, or raise your voice at the kids, but show your sincere concern.” Harry witnessed himself how “Ms. R. lived up to her advice.” When she approached a kid falling asleep in her class, “she wouldn’t jump at him screaming to wake up, but she would ask whether he got enough sleep last night.” Her concern, care, and kindness “made that student to pick up his head.” “Oh, maybe I’ll start doing that,” thoughtfully adds Harry.

Harry considers Ms. R. as quite “an opposite to the teacher whom he experienced in his own high school days:

I had a teacher who walked in on the first day of my English class wearing black, slammed the door, and said, “Get to work!” We were all shocked, just like, “Wow!” She was okay in the end. She kind of instilled some fear in us during our junior year to get
ready for our senior year. I don’t think I can pull out something like this because I can’t even pretend being mean.

Caring teachers succeed “even with most troublesome kids,” believes Harry. Through his personal experiences and field observations, he learned that students “want you to care about them; they want you to be interested in the things they have to say.” He is certain that if a teacher “goes out of the way to help maybe one student, that student will probably try to achieve better.” Dismissing individualities of students and “looking at them only as a class of students” do not help “building trust and respect,” declares Harry. When recollecting brief interactions with a boy who he helped choose a book for home reading, Harry points out that “genuine interest can do much,” specifying, “that boy would approach me every day in class and update me on his progress with the book.”

Harry acknowledges that “it’s not that easy to deal with students every single day,” and teachers have “ton of responsibilities that are outside the particular classroom,” but “it is okay to show interest (or even pretend) sometimes about a movie this boy is very excitedly talking, if it helps that student to get through the day.” Most importantly, thinks Harry, as teachers we have to remember that students are “still children,” and they will “misbehave or make mistakes, and it is okay to let some of this slide sometimes.”

**Concerns about Teaching.** Harry confesses having “many concerns about education and teaching.” First, he is upset with “regulations and mandates currently taking place in the state” because “they take away from a teacher’s ability to freely teach in his or her classroom.” He is asking questions with which he wrestles while preparing to enter the profession:

How is a teacher supposed to be creative and innovative if he or she has to be concerned about meeting Common Core standards and then to be evaluated based on the students’ performance? I feel like teaching to do well on a test is sort of an insult to my education as a trained professional. What are students gleaning from taking standardized tests? Nothing, except test-taking skills, in my opinion. Is this what colleges are looking for? A nation of test takers?
To him, these are the issues in which “teachers do not have much control or say so.” Harry views money as “another concern for education and teachers.” While he understands that “throwing money at education does not always solve the issues associated with it,” he feels that “careful and considerate investment in education could help all schools reach a level that fosters and cares for all students.” He questions inadequate opportunities of the students in schools that have unequal resource base: “Why can’t Tykedrik get the same education in his regular class in a public school as Brandon at his Magnet school? Why does Sally get to be a cheerleader while there isn’t even a football team for George to join?” Harry defines “monetary issues as a big factor in public education; moreover, resource distribution and allotment is treated poorly.”

Descending from those “big concerns” about education to his future teaching, Harry admits: “There are so many little things I am constantly thinking and worried about.” For example, watching documentaries about teachers on Netflix, he noticed how “those teachers had lots of trouble balancing their personal life and school life.” The job “takes a huge toll on a teacher,” he is assured. Teaching is a work that doesn’t have “limited work hours,” and long after students are gone home, “teachers grade papers, plan lessons, and prepare handouts and projects.” Harry is afraid that he “won’t have time for his personal life, for family, and things he used to enjoy doing with friends.” He asserts: “Obviously my job is very important – being an educator is important, but having a personal life and social life is also very important to me.” Learning how “to juggle work and personal life” is what he hopes to manage in the future.

Harry is also concerned about his future students:

How will I be able to manage being a teacher who is fun and joking around with being strict and firm, when we have to be serious? How to make students to stop laughing and get to the task? What if I get a student or a group of students who just don’t want to do anything?
Then, there are some worries about the content knowledge and grammar, “which has never been my strong suit,” adds Harry to his list of challenges.

Questions like that “pop in my head over and over,” discloses Harry, but he knows that the only way he can face all these challenges is “to go in, complete my student teaching,” which he considers to be “a kind of rehearsal before the actual teaching.” Harry summarizes that other helpful “things are talking to my peers, sharing my ideas and challenges with them, getting advice from experienced teachers, and continuously reflecting on my own teaching.”

Becoming a Teacher

Learning about Self. It was upsetting for Harry that he spent most of his first two field experiences “sitting in the back of the room.” Even more discouraging was the fact that “none of two host teachers introduced him to their students.” That made him feel “as a stranger in the classroom,” confesses Harry: “I just wanted to be acknowledged, at least little explanation why I was in the classroom after all.” This position when he “was not a teacher yet,” but not “a school student anymore,” bothered Harry “and it didn’t add confidence.”

He remembers how nervous he was the first time he helped a student in the classroom “I didn’t want to say the wrong thing. I didn’t know the student, and even because I was older, I wasn’t a power figure for them.” Harry says it was not easy “to get over my anxiety about doing the wrong thing,” but he realizes that he “will make a mistake every now and then, and it’s okay; it’s a part of life.”

Harry learned that he needs “to be prepared,” because he is not very good at “last-minute arrangements.” If he doesn’t “practice and plan in details,” he accepts, “I will get nervous and say something dumb. When I say the wrong thing, I get really nervous, and then I am like, “Oh, My Gosh!” and jumble something.” Harry shares: “As I was teaching more and more, the other
classes, I felt more and more comfortable. I felt like I could connect with the students, and that made me more comfortable. I was able to move around and talk more.” These first lessons taught him to trust himself:

I learned that as long as I am comfortable with the material I am teaching, I won’t be nervous, and I can let more of my personality to students. You know, students will not like me just because I am ‘an awesome person’, but because I am a good teacher, and I know what I am doing. I hope one day I will be awesome though.

Harry also admits that he has “to be more organized” as sometimes he lets “things to get hold of me.” His “poor organizational skills,” have caused him to “get so jammed with all the assignments by the end of the semester.” He accepts that “learning to prioritize tasks is essential for a teacher who has so much to do on a daily basis.”

**Thinking about Teaching and His Own Classroom.** Harry “knew from the beginning that teaching was not an easy occupation.” To enhance his worries, teachers, and even college instructors, “scared me for becoming a teacher.” They revealed insights, explains Harry, “that make this profession difficult.” They also told him, “how little respect and prestige teaching gets in our society.” One of his friends, “well, not really a friend,” remarks Harry, “told me that teaching is an easy way out for a man.” That young man made Harry “really upset at that time because not everyone can be a teacher obviously.” His is convinced, “It takes a special person” Later, when he began taking Education courses, he “realized that despite all negativity, this is something I really enjoy doing and really love learning about.”

He wanted to be like Ms. B. and Mrs. S., his “favorite teachers in high school,” and, at the same time, he “didn’t want to be like some of the teachers I had.” When Harry thinks about teaching and his relationships with students, he confesses, “I kind of want to be a person in charge, or maybe like a third parent, or even one parent to some kids.” He explicates:

There are students who go home and don’t have a role model or don’t have a mother or father figure, but to find someone at school who really cares about them is really
precious. I want to be that teacher for someone. I want to be a teacher students can talk to, who can make education fun. I want to engage my students in learning and not just training them for tests.

Harry wants to be “the teacher who not only knows what he is doing every day, but the teacher who cares about what he is doing every day.” When he observed his first host teacher, “she seemed not to care about her job.” He elaborates:

Sure, she would greet all the students at the door with a smile and she was an ok teacher, but in between classes, she always seemed defeated and like she did not want to take on the next block. While I know I won’t always be ready to go in at certain moments, I want to be able to look forward to the next moment.

Harry asserts that his “field experiences have taught me that there are some teachers who would want to be anywhere else than in their classrooms. This upsets me and I hope to one day be the opposite of that.” He wants more passionate teachers in schools, and he is determined to bring some positive changes: “I don’t want to be a teacher who revolutionizes teaching and is portrayed in documentaries, but I want to be a teacher who makes changes possible, who is different.”

Harry mentions that he has “that image in my head of what I want to be, how to behave, how my classroom will look like, what I want to do,” and it frightens him sometimes that he will not be able “to live it in reality.” He dreams of classroom with “posters all over and students’ art work that they are proud of.” He sees it as an organized space, and students “know where to go if they need something, like if you need a pencil, you need to go to the shelf with boxes.” In Harry’s imagination, it is “a free space, and students feel peace and comfort in there.” For him, as a teacher, “a desk is a ‘no-no’ place to be when you are teaching.” He sees himself “always up and walking around, just being there for the students who need me.”

Thinking about the teacher he would like to be, Harry often recalls teachers who taught him and always compares them to the teachers he observed through field experiences. He is
interested to see the differences, “how the things were there, and how they are now.” It helps him determine “what really works, and how I would like to do it.”

Harry even projects how his school days would proceed and outlines the lesson structure:

On a regular day, I would welcome students at the door. They would walk in and know what to do right away. It will probably be a bell ringer kind of work, but it will be related to that day’s lesson or a test prep question. After 5 or 6 minutes, we would go over it together. Then I would introduce a lesson, incorporating something that is fun or something they can relate to. Then I will teach the lesson, trying to get all the students involved in any way I can – get them build on their own ideas. I might have a little assessment at the end or an exit ticket.

Harry considers that “students need to know that there are some boundaries between a teacher and the students.” He plans “not to give them much power,” but, at the same time, he will “let them make some decisions, like if I assign a project, I would welcome their ideas. I would have open forums, like discussions of the things we read.” This is how Harry sees “classroom dynamics” and believes it would work for him and his future students.

**Growth through Experience.** On the one hand, Harry admits, “It doesn’t seem like I changed a lot,” but, on the other hand, he realizes “that teaching is much more than I anticipated before.” Before field experiences and the last education method course, he did not think “about how much time and effort teachers are putting in something, like planning, for example; it always appeared not that significant.” Now, “when I had to plan my entire teaching unit,” discloses Harry, “I must admit that I spent so much time just thinking about the length of each activity or assignment I give to students.”

Another thing that Harry learned throughout his coursework and field experiences is that he “will never be ready to answer every question students may ask me.” “I am not all-knowing, and I have to be open and strive to learn and accept change,” he confirms.

Harry also realizes that he “will not look at the group of students like he used before” because “there are so many individualities in the classroom.” In addition to that, “even each
group of students is different,” he acknowledges. “I may teach gifted, hyper gifted, average, and below average students.” Field experiences helped him to see “how different teachers handled different groups of students.” Observing “the real classrooms” he noticed that “not every teacher is the same, not every teacher will do everything, and not every teacher is teaching the way you were taught.”

The main message that “came out of field experiences and coursework, especially during this last semester,” accentuates Harry, “is the thought that I will never be ready to face everything in teaching, but I am ready to face the challenge itself. I have to be ready that it’s going to happen—unpredictable situations and challenges.” “I endlessly appreciate my last field experiences and education courses for making me think about teaching and what kind of teacher I want to be,” gratefully concludes Harry.

**Katniss: When a Shy Girl Is on Fire**

**A Little Girl with a Big Goal in Mind**

My name is Katniss Everdeen, the main character from Suzanne Collins's (2008) *Hunger Games* trilogy. I keep mostly to myself, confiding only in my close friend and younger sister, but I will tell you a little about myself. I've been told that being myself is all people really want to see anyway. I am introverted and self-sufficient but wildly passionate about making my world a better place for the future citizens of my country. I have been forced to fight the government powers which make the laws to keep our people down, but I am determined to succeed and fix the wrongs that my family has been forced to face. One day, everyone will have equal opportunities to better themselves.

I grew up in a very small town in the south of the state. My town, to me, had the best of both worlds in it. It’s close enough to a big city to enjoy its opportunities, but is still small
enough making our community pretty close knit. My high school had about 900 students and was the only one in our district. There are only three high schools in the parish, but the other two are too far “down the road,” as we say, meaning further in the southern end of the parish, for people from my town to attend.

My family consists of my parents, my younger sister, and my twin brother and me. My Dad is an engineer and is the quiet rule maker of the house. When we do something wrong, we get a Dad lecture. My Mom works as a high school secretary, and is the people person of the pair. Everybody loves my Mom. My brother and sister are a mix of my parents. My brother can be quiet like my Dad, but he has a sense of humor. My sister is my mother incarnate, and they either get along great or are at each other’s throats. I am both of my parents. I am quiet and studious like my Dad, but strive to be outgoing and loud like my Mom. She calls me Kay, and we get along the best. My Mom is my rock and biggest supporter.

I have always been fiercely independent and self-motivating. When I was younger, I kept very much to myself and used poetry as a way of expressing myself to my parents since words didn’t always suffice. As I got older and more confident in my abilities to express my thoughts and opinions, I turned to reading as my escape instead. I can still get lost in books and other worlds. I was the kid in school who participated in complaining about reading assignments but secretly loved them and always finished the readings.

School has always come easy to me, that I get from my father. I wasn’t a science kid or an English kid like you tend to see with honors or gifted students. I was, and still can be, good at both. Because I was so good with science, and enjoyed it to some extent, I always thought that meant I should use that ability in a future profession. As a result, my goal was to become a doctor, and I began college as a biology major.
The turning point for me came when I signed up for a teacher prep class during my first semester in college. I took the class because it sounded interesting, and I needed another class to fit into my schedule. I had never wanted to teach. In fact, it was the one profession I had easily ruled out, so it surprised me when I actually enjoyed teaching the assigned to me class. I also loved interacting with students and answering their questions. With the combination this with of feeling over-stressed and not enjoying my science classes at all, I easily made the decision to change my major to English and focus my studies on becoming an English teacher.

My love for English and for the profession was truly sparked during my senior year of high school in AP English class. I had always loved reading and writing and felt I was strong in both, but I had never approached the subject in the way that my teacher did. Ms. C. taught us to analyze texts and make meanings on our own. We did the same with writing by choosing the topics that we wanted to explore further. She was the one that inspired me to become a teacher; she is the teacher that I want to be, one that can enthuse my students, if not with love for English, than at least with an appreciation for what the subject can bring to their lives.

Since changing my major, I have never looked back and have discovered that not only do I have a passion for English, but a passion for education as well. My passion mostly lies in my ideas about education and how it should service our students. In the short term, I want to try to improve English education in my classrooms and give my students the best possible experience that they can have under current conditions. I want to make sure that they are prepared for whatever their future holds for them, but I don’t think that is always possible with the way the education system is currently set up. With that in mind, my long term goal is to do something about that. After teaching for a few years, I want to go back to school and pursue either a master’s degree or Ph.D. in educational policy, so that I can work either with a government
agency or with a consultation agency on efforts to improve some of the policies that law makers
are imposing on our schools and students. My goal is to advance our education system, and
though I will start on a small scale with my own students, hopefully one day those small changes
will turn into bigger ones that are able to impact the education system as a whole.

Field Experiences and Their Organization

Preparation for Field Experiences. Kay was very excited to go into the field and “to
see a real classroom” for the first time since she graduated high school. Adding to the
excitement was the idea that this time she would be on the other side, not as a student and “kind
of close to a teacher.” She worried a little bit about “being small, which made me look more like
a student,” she confessed. However, those concerns moved to background when after a few
weeks into the fall semester of her junior year, Kay “did not meet a host teacher.” “Because of
the August storm, our placements were delayed,” recollects she, “so that took about two or three
weeks.” Furthermore, after she emailed her assigned teacher right away, she “didn’t get any
response.” It took three emails with copies sent to the university’s Office of Field Placements
and about three weeks “just to get in touch.”

Kay considers her “first semester in the program definitely interesting.” Out of two
courses that she had to take with her first field experience practicum, she saw more relevance in
the English course: “It was a course on diversity and adolescents, and it was really helpful to
learn about different cultures and the ways adolescents think and act.” Later she appreciated it
even more when she walked into the classroom that was mostly comprised of African-American
students. Kay assures, “that English course prepared me, a White, middle class girl to walk into
the environment that was very different from my community.” Unlike the English component,
the Education class during the same semester left Kay thinking that she “didn’t learn a lot in
there.” As other cohort members, she had to complete some assignments for that course, “like creating a lesson plan, developing own teaching philosophy, and interviewing a host teacher,” but “our professor didn’t give us a lot of direction of how to do these things,” complains Kay. “Showing us a template of a lesson plan doesn’t mean teaching us how to plan a lesson,” she reflects.

Because Kay “didn’t have a lot of hands-on practice” during her first experience, she felt that she “was learning all the strategies, but couldn’t really apply any of them.” However, she “did see some connections to her coursework, like dealing with adolescents” and could observe behaviors which they discussed in class.

During the second field experience cycle, the education course “was all about reading strategies, and was extremely relevant for English teachers because we need so many of reading strategies.” This course was a great help for Kay, but she wishes “to take it a little earlier, maybe a semester earlier, so when we go in the field, we already know how to use all these strategies.”

To summarize the question about being prepared for field experiences, Kay comes to this conclusion: “My first field experience prepared me for the second one.” She admits: “I did not really feel prepared for the first one. I went in there not really knowing what to expect and what to do.” While Kay’s instructors and Office of Field Placements coordinator informed pre-service teachers that they “can do all these things, no one actually clarified what things we were to do.” So it was her first time in the field, and it “became obvious soon enough that my host teacher was doing it for the first time too,” that is why “we both kind of went in blind not knowing what to do and what to expect.” Kay also recognizes that because she “mostly just observed during the first semester,” she did not sharply feel a lack of preparation.
**Being in a Cohort.** Kay likes her teacher preparation program, especially because “it creates this community of teachers that I think is really helpful.” She considers being in a cohort and “seeing the same people in classes are very helpful.” Throughout the coursework, she was “able to share my experiences with my cohort and to hear my peers’ concerns; we discussed various classroom situations and wrestled with solutions together.”

Going through this “really foreign experience where we are the teachers and students at the same time is hard enough,” Kay emphasizes, “but going through it together lessens that burden.” “There is always somebody who has an advice that is really helpful and really pertinent to someone’s particular situation,” she points out. Kay declares “the cohort itself as one of the most valuable parts of the program.”

**Expectations for Field Experiences.** As Kay noticed earlier, she did not have clear expectations for her first cycle of field experiences, nor was she provided with such from the Office of Field Placements: “I guess I expected to be more involved in class activities and not just sit there and take notes like I did.” Without having an idea what to expect in the field, she “just went with the flow.” Since her first host teacher never worked with pre-service teachers before, “that first experience was rough for me,” admits Kay. The challenges of the first experiences prepared her for the second round:

After that I knew that I wanted the next semester to be different. I knew things I wanted to accomplish, things I wanted to do in class, and things I wanted to ask my teacher about. So I was more prepared in that way.

Kay hoped her second experience would be better, and that she “will work with a teacher who loves what she does.” She also adjusted her own attitude towards field experiences and decided “to go in with a right mindset knowing what I want out of this experience.” She knew that she “had to teach at least one lesson, so I could see how it felt to be a teacher in the classroom.” Kay also expected “to get more comfortable with students,” and despite the comfort
level, she planned “to interact with students as much as possible to get a feel for it.” Her next determination was “to accept a teacher and classes I was assigned to because I can’t really change that, but I could make the best of it.”

Before her third semester in the TPP, Kay notes, “No one actually told us that our first experience was supposed to be a focus on an individual student, the second – on a group of students, or small group, and the third one on the entire class.” She would not get this information until the fall semester of her senior year when she took an English course with Dr. Slade during which he explained to them the main focusing points of their three field experience cycles. Going into the field for the third time, Kay knew “exactly what I have to pay attention to in the classroom.” During her first meeting with a host teacher, she asked if she could “teach more lessons and be more involved in activities and interactions with students.” She also asked her English and Education methods courses instructors whether they “could visit her in school when she is teaching and provide feedback.” Kay was resolute to make “the most out of these last field experiences.”

Host Teachers. Kay’s first field assignment was in the middle school with Ms. G., her first host teacher, who “didn’t work with pre-service teachers before.” The teacher was “nice and friendly,” and “we talked a little bit on the first day because I had to do a teacher interview for the education course,” she shares. When Kay asked about her host teacher’s philosophy, “she said that all kids in her class can learn, but I didn’t really perceive that from her classes.” Kay comments that “her teacher was always tired, and it seemed she didn’t want to be in the classroom.” It was “a bit shocking to hear that Ms. G. didn’t like middle school, but, because there were not openings in elementary school, she got stuck in middle.”
As for her teaching, Kay noticed that Ms. G. “was doing a lot of group work.” She particularly liked an activity students completed with interest: “They had a pamphlet in which they took notes regarding its content.” Kay was surprised at how her host teacher “was very lenient to a late work, or students sometimes didn’t turn in the assignments at all.” That was not “something I would agree with,” she declares. She is certain that “teachers should expect their students to turn the work on time.” Kay insists that she doesn’t “support teachers who don’t have high expectations for all their students.”

When Kay was in Ms. G’s classroom, she “didn’t really see her teaching much.” The students mostly completed group work filling out some worksheets. “There wasn’t much for me to observe or participate in her classes,” sadly reports Kay. She was also frustrated with her first teacher when she went to school “three or four times, and the teacher wasn’t there, but she hadn’t told me she was not going to be there.” Although Kay acknowledges that she “still learned things about teaching, noticed some engaging activities, and understood students better,” those little “frustrations would add up creating an undesirable experience as a whole.”

While it took a long time to get in touch with the first host teacher, Kay’s second host, Ms. T., responded to her email right away to set up a meeting. When Kay found out that Ms. T. was working on her master’s degree and still taking classes at LSU, they met on the university campus talked “for an hour or so about her classes, the things that I wanted to do, and I kind of got a feel for her teaching style.”

Kay was happy about her communication with the host teacher. She is grateful for resources Ms. T. shared with her: “She’d send me emails with the testing websites I can go to. She showed me things to use for lesson planning and activities.” Kay explains that Ms. T. “had a planning period before her first class on A-days, so I would come in early, and she would tell me
what she was going to do that day.” She appreciated the opportunity “to go on faculty meetings with Ms. G.” That taught her “a lot about the school environment, some school policies, and gave an idea how the faculty meetings work,” reflects Kay.

Kay describes Ms. T. as “great with students and really passionate about teaching.” She could see that her second host teacher “wanted to help the kids in her district because it was a lower level district, and the kids needed a teacher like her to care about them succeeding, or they didn’t care about the school at all.” “You could tell she was one of those good teachers,” brags Kay, “and she also wanted to become an instructional coach so she can prepare more teachers like that for her district.” Kay also underlines that her second teacher “definitely expected more from her students, even the kids who needed much help. She would work with them.”

Whereas Kay mostly enjoyed her second host’s teaching style, she saw “some things that I would do differently,” she reflects. She draws on an example of teaching Julius Caesar (Shakespeare, 1992):

They read Julius Caesar. Ms. T. would have the students open the books as she played the movie while they were following the text in the books. I didn’t think that was the most effective way to go through the play. I think they should have spent some time reading it and then watch some of the scenes. This would be good for students to understand the text better and then discuss the play deeper after watching some important episodes.

Reflecting on the first two field experience cycles, Kay tries to accentuate that she learned from both, but the second experience was more meaningful for her. Comparing the two host teachers, Kay comments on their “essential difference,” recognizing that “personalities matter,” but attitude and desire to teach play a significant role:

My teacher this time really enjoyed teaching while my last year teacher… well, she was pregnant at the time and seemed always tired. She didn’t really like teaching middle school and the kids, so I don’t think she put her best effort into teaching. But my teacher this semester wanted to teach. I think that made all the difference.
While the first and the second teachers “were new host teachers,” Kay’s third teacher, Mrs. O. “had a bunch of pre-service teachers before, so she knew what she was supposed to do.” Kay excitedly notifies: “I was actually one of the first people who got into a school so quick this time.” Her host teacher responded quickly, and they arranged the first meeting within a couple of days.

Unlike what she witnessed during her first experience practicum, Kay notices “Mrs. O. has a lot more structure.” She describes the flow of the lesson:

After they do the bell work, the teacher tells them what they are going to do for the rest of the day. If it is literature, they talk a little bit about what they read the previous time, and then they talk about what they are doing today—reading, annotating, answering questions, and etc. Then she will give them homework for the next class. This is pretty much the order of the class. They vary the activities depending on what they are doing.

Kay liked the bell work completed by AP seniors: “They were working through a little booklet that had like diction activities, syntax, imagery, word choice, and others. After completing these various activities, the teacher then was evaluating how that improved their writing.” It would be better if “they checked the bell work daily, but she just stamps it for completion,” deliberates Kay.

Mrs. O. “had AP students, great scholars, and gifted, and they are capable of a lot, so she gave them challenging work all the time,” says Kay, noticing that this “makes her teaching style different from my other host teachers who dealt with low-performing students.” She was pleased to know that “her classes were student oriented.” Mrs. O. assigned a lot of group projects; students had lots of discussions within their small groups, and they practiced Socratic circles with students bringing their own questions to explore. In Kay’s opinion, “it created more opportunities for learning.” She liked that “working in groups each of the students had ‘a job’ she or he had to complete, everyone would get the benefit of the group work.”
Throughout all three field experiences Kay acknowledges observing “definitely different teaching styles.” These differences she attributes to “teachers’ personalities and different groups of students, whether they were age differences or various learning abilities.” She emphasizes how crucial it is to know “how to teach different groups of students.”

**Diversity in the Classrooms.** Kay, as most of her cohort friends grew up “in a small, predominantly White, middle class community with close ties within neighborhoods.” When she first visited her middle school placement, she found herself “in a completely different environment from the one I grew up.” This is when she “really appreciated a class on diversity we took our first semester in the program,” she explains, “where we talked about relating to students who are different than we are and learning about how to incorporate their culture into the classroom.” Our college instructor provided us with some strategies of “including relevant work into our lessons, so the students don’t feel like they are reading about “dead White people” that they have nothing in common with them.” Kay claims that the course and discussions prepared to face “cultural difference in public school” and changed the way she “saw students and interacted with them.”

There was something that bothered Kay during that first experience though; she describes her first impressions of the school:

When I first got there, it was really early in the morning. I saw middle school students, and they were predominantly African-American students. It was very different from my schools, not like White, middle class community… I don’t know, but we had specific rules. I remember at one time, we had lines we had to walk on, so it wasn’t chaotic. And like in this school, it was like… kids everywhere. It was so much crowded. It is like they all crammed in those little hallways, and there was not much order at all.

Kay pondered whether it was because of the cultural backgrounds of students, or because teachers and administrators “didn’t enforce any rules,” or “maybe it was just this particular school’s culture.” A semester later, in another school during her second field experiences, Kay
realized that it was “most likely that school’s culture.” She highlighted the “more welcoming atmosphere” in her second school of placement. In addition, her second host teacher taught her “how to embrace diversity.” She explains:

My teacher was a White, middle-aged lady, and her students were African-Americans in majority or belonging to minority groups. She told me that they know that you are not like them. So the best thing to do is to respect the differences. She said it like, “own your whiteness” because they see it; everyone knows it’s there. Just acknowledge it, and move on.

Kay had “a little incident” in the classroom. When one of the students said “he had to write to his Ps, I asked what that meant.” She saw “kids all kind of laughing” and saying, “Oh, you are a little White girl.” At that moment she realized that she “still had a lot to learn about them.” Her host teacher seemed “to master the skill of communicating with them,” notes Kay, as “kids respected her, and she was able to find things that appeal to their interests and their own cultures.” She witnessed it numerous times in class, and gives an example:

When they read about Julius Caesar, she talked about a conflict between Tupac and Biggie, who used to be best friends before, and that gave them the general idea of what was going on in the play. I thought that was good. They may not know who they were, but seeing their pictures and explaining more recent events they could relate to was better than understand two old vermin guys.

Being in the field, Kay learned that “not all kids learn the same way, so I think some of them probably need more direct instruction than others.” She noticed that all her host teachers acknowledged that and tried “to vary their lessons and expectations depending on students learning styles, their performance level, or behavioral patterns.” Her first host teacher, she states, “had one honors class with a well-behaved kids who would stay on task and two other regular classes that were more rambunctious.” Kay recollects that “she would talk to her first class and let them chat a bit, but to the other classes she didn’t let them to chat at all, saying they would not turn in their work.” It also appeared to Kay as “if my teacher didn’t expect much from the regular kids. This is sad because I think these kids also need to strive for higher standards.”
Kay’s second field experience practice demonstrated how it was possible “to motivate all students to reach their best.” Her teacher had one honors class and the rest were regular classes:

The honors students always picked up things quicker, so she would always have something else to challenge them a little more. She definitely expected more out of them because she knew they could do more. And then, the next year these classes would go to AP courses, so they had to be prepared and get used to. With her regular classes she used the same strategies, but she would give them more time to think, and she’d explain and scaffold them a little more. It seemed like she helped them build their answers rather than just give them the answers.

Kay also noticed that “even in their honors class there are still kids who are on a lower level,” and she saw how teachers “adjust assignments for them, giving them a bit simpler things, and they still get the benefit of the class work.” Understanding how important individual students and their needs are, Kay hopes “to practice differentiated instruction during her student teaching and later in actual teaching.”

Practicing while in Practice. Kay considers her first field experience practicum as the one “where she was mostly an observer.” She mentions that her “very first day was probably when I had the most interaction with students throughout the whole experience.” The students, she recollects, were writing an essay, and their teacher instructed that they “could ask me for help if they needed.” “Two of them shot their hands up right at that moment. So I went and helped them to figure out what was the topic about, basically what they were expected to write about.”

Because of her college courses schedule and work, Kay only visited school on Thursdays, “and they did group work on Thursdays, I wish I could go on other days, but my schedule didn’t allow for this.” Besides walking “a little bit around,” Kay “couldn’t do much while they worked.” During this experience, she “didn’t even learn the names of the students as I didn’t have opportunity to work with them closely to remember their names.” She knew a few names because “my teacher would call on some of the students often.”
Kay wanted to do more in the classroom, but she “wasn’t really sure how to tell my teacher about it.” Ms. G. often told her, “If you want to teach, just let me know and feel free to do it.” Nevertheless, when Kay developed a lesson plan and emailed her teacher “thinking she would jump right on that because I planned a writing assignment,” she never responded, and Kay didn’t feel comfortable “to ask her about it.”

There was “one day when my teacher was having a trouble explaining grammar,” she recalls. “She was trying to explain a simple subject and simple predicate, and students couldn’t understand it,” reflects Kay, “so I got up and drew it on the board for them.” She was surprised how well “students responded to that as opposed to just saying it.” That was the only day Kay interacted with a whole class, and it “was a rewarding experience.”

When Kay entered her second field experience practicum, she decided to change “it for the better, so I kind of introduced myself a little more.” That made her feel more comfortable because “students knew who I was and why I was in the classroom.” Kay also felt more comfortable with the teacher and could tell her “what I wanted to do.” As a result, she interacted more with students. She “was able to learn more of their names this semester than the last semester.” “There were more interactions and discussions in classes that my second teacher taught, unlike during the first field experiences,” reports she.

The most exciting experience for Kay was when she taught two lessons to the classes. She “was a little anxious…but my teacher said they did and behaved better for me because I was a new person.” Kay recounts this about her first attempts to teach:

My first lesson was not super good. We were going over comma rules, and I talked too much. Like I was trying to present them all the information I had, but I also planned an activity. I didn’t give them enough time to work on the activity. So, yes, it wasn’t great! But I noticed my flaws and did change it. I had two lessons that day. The second lesson went much better than the first one.
This taught Kay how to “adjust lessons if you see something is off or doesn’t work well.” Now she “really understand[s] why teachers have to be flexible,” she admits.

During the second lesson on formal and informal writing styles, Kay used the strategy her host teachers calls “trimming the fat,” or FAT (format, audience, and topic), as she learned it in one of the education courses. Applying that strategy, students had to write the same text but to two different audiences, “one in a casual language and the one in a formal way.” Reflecting on that lesson, Kay thinks that if she could teach it again, she “would let students choose the style, and then discuss with them their choice: why they chose to write it in a casual or formal way, and what kind of audience was the recipient of their writing.”

“Dr. Slade told us that we had to look at a whole class during our third experience cycle and see how the teacher makes decisions based on her class,” reminds Kay. She “looked at it this way now,” trying to “capture the process as a whole.” She also notices that “whenever I observe, I always think if I agree with it, what I would do differently, and if I did, how differently I would do it.”

Enjoying her last field experience, Kay shares that she was “much more comfortable to approach the teacher and ask what she was teaching that day and how it fits in her unit plan, where she got the materials, and stuff like that.” She was pleased to receive answers and explanations. Moreover, she compliments her teacher, Mrs. O., for “going into details about how she used to teach a particular topic, and how she changed it since then, and why she made that decision.”

Mrs. O. “lets me grade students’ work, so I can see what kind of work they are doing and how.” It is not always “easy to grade their work because I may like what they write about, but don’t like the sentence structure or something—grading is too subjective to me,” asserts Kay.
On the days when students were reading out loud, she mostly observed in Mrs. O’s classes.

When they worked in groups, “I would walk around, see what they were doing, and help them with some things they needed help with, or answer their questions.”

Kay also planned and taught a lesson during that last, third field experience practicum. Again, she had to adjust her plan to that day’s circumstances:

It would have been better if I could do my whole lesson. I had it planned for two days, but when I came into the class, we had to readjust some things because the computer wasn’t working, and I couldn’t use my Power Points; I had to talk out loud. I didn’t know how much I was going to get finished, and the class is only 52 minutes. So I ended up splitting the story for two days.

Kay thinks the lesson would be “better if I knew how much students already knew about the Romantic authors. I think I said more than they needed to hear.” She calls that lesson “a good study of adjustment,” and emphasizes how vital it is for a teacher “to know her students, their knowledge background, and learning capabilities because obviously I could not know all that during short period of observing.”

Although Kay started her field experiences “as a passive observer,” she progressed to taking “more active part in the second and third field experiences.” Deciding “to kind of make the best out of my experiences, I learned how to talk to my teachers and let them know what I wanted to do,” she remarks. In the end, Kay was “happy with the way I felt and acted in the classroom.”

**Challenges during the Field Experiences.** The biggest challenge for Kay “was not being prepared for my first field experiences.” She clarifies: “I didn’t feel like I can speak in the classroom or interact with the kids that much. I was pretty much an observer in that class. And this is not what I wanted it to be. I wanted to be a participant.” Kay “was not even prepared how to let my teacher know what I wanted to do,” she adds. Because of that, “I probably missed on a lot of opportunities during my first semester in the field,” concludes Kay.
To be “better prepared to face challenges,” Kay asserts, she accomplished some things:

I participated in continuous discussions with my peers in the cohort; the courses I took during the second and third semesters in the program were also helpful, and, honestly, the interviews with you were valuable and helped me think about my experiences and understand what I wanted to learn and take away from my experiences.

Planning to go into student teaching next semester, Kay shared her plan “to meet with my mentor teacher before the spring semester starts, discuss with her the goals and expectations for student teaching, and, if possible, meet with students and survey them about their interests and needs.” Kay believes this would help her immensely “be prepared and avoid some awkward moments later.”

**Changes to the Field Experiences.** Kay is certain that some changes “to coursework, or not actually coursework, but what is in the content of each particular course, may help us to be better prepared for field experiences.” This is how she reasons her opinion:

We get assignments, like to create a lesson plan or activity, for example, but no one actually taught us how to make a good lesson plan. In our first semester in the program, we had to create one lesson plan, but all instructor did was to give us a template that we had to fill out. What are the things that go in the lesson? How to make a good lesson plan? We had similar situation during the second semester. Our professor assigned us to create a lesson, but she didn’t really tell us what she wanted in it, like how she wanted us to do it. So I feel like we could have been better prepared for that.

Another point Kay wants to bring to attention is about instructions for field experiences and expectations:

We did not have a lot of directions, especially for our first one about what we should do or expect. It was kind of like “you do what you feel you should.” I would be glad if someone just told me that this semester it should be mostly observation, and if you want to do some interaction and participation, that’s cool. And then the next semester, you want to focus on whatever else we were supposed to focus on. And the last semester is a whole-class focus.

Kay also thinks that they “have to start teaching lessons sooner” because “the sooner we get to it, the more confidently we deal with it.” She suggests:
Maybe assign us during the first semester of FE like a mini-lesson that we have to teach for about 20 minutes while focusing all the 40 hours on observation. The second semester everyone should teach at least one entire lesson. The third semester – teach two or three lessons. This way we are not going to the 180 hours of student teaching without any practice, but because some host teachers wouldn’t let, some of my peers will teach for the first time only during student teaching.

Another concern is that “the host teachers don’t always know what to do with pre-service teachers in their classroom, or they don’t let us much participation and interaction with students,” shares Kay. She expresses the wish that all of her peers support:

I feel like our host teachers should have clear understanding what we are expected to do. They have to have some kind of guidelines communicated to them by our program coordinators. Something like: These are the students you are getting; this is what we need them to do; they need to be able to do it during their field practice, and you have to provide that opportunity for them.

Kay understands that it is “hard for the placement office to find good teachers,” and she also realizes that “teachers need to meet so many standards and do so much,” but, as pre-service teachers, “we have to learn somewhere and somehow, so field experience practicums should be designed to help us with that training.”

Value of Field Experiences. Kay places the value of field experiences on “host teachers who make all the difference.” She doesn’t think that “school placement or students have anything to do with the quality of field experiences.” To prove her opinion, she explains that “during my first field experiences, I was in a brand new school, but the students’ demographics and achievement levels were approximately the same as in my second placement, so the teachers made the difference.” She continues: “If you have a good teacher who is passionate about what she is doing and wants you to do well, then I think you will have a good experience.”

If during the first semester in the field Kay “learned more about what not to do, than actually the things I could probably use in my classroom,” then her second field practicum
provided her “with opportunities to teach and resources for future teaching.” She appreciates “the value of either kind of experience,” but prefers more positive experiences.

The most valuable experience during her first field experience was an opportunity to “attend teachers’ meetings during their in-service day.” For Kay, it was interesting to see teachers “interacting with each other, discussing problematic issues.” One particular meeting especially resonated with Kay’s desire to “help students in need.” The teachers were talking about “how they could make small differences in one student’s life if they took more interest in his or her specific needs.” Another helpful workshop, in which Kay participated that day, was about “how to use rubrics, so students in class may benefit from them.” Kay also found “an opportunity to observe an inclusion classroom very interesting and helpful.” She noted how “the main teacher would include all the kids, but the inclusion students had their own teacher to assist them with assignments, and the entire class was working on the same assignment.”

From her second and third field experience cycles, Kay “definitely learned a lot that I can take into my own classroom and I will keep in mind some things as I will prepare for teaching.” She saw some “valuable classroom management skills and how to set up procedures and routines at the beginning of the school year.” The host teachers generously shared with Kay where they find resources for their lessons and how to use various resources.

Kay is convinced that “field experiences are definitely important.” She voices her strong opinion about the value of her field experiences emphasizing that “we get to see another teacher’s classroom, and, watching this other classroom, lets us learn about what we want in your own classroom. That’s the whole point is that we see as much as we can and try some things first hand.”
Understanding Teaching

Defining Teaching. Since enrolling in the program, Kay “learned so much about teaching, and still learning,” depending on what she is going through, what classes she is taking or who she is talking too. She considers “teaching as a non-stop activity.” It is not just a job, or regular profession, “it is a way of life.”

Kay knows that teaching “doesn’t stop when teachers go home” because there are still “papers to grade, plans to develop, and materials to prepare for next days.” “There is no break in teaching,” she smiles, “but I still want to do it.” She is upset because “teaching, and teaching English as a subject in particular, is much underrated.” “Who else is going to do it if no one thinks it is important?” she questions. Despite negativities towards profession and its carriers, Kay has a great passion for teaching and is “willing to give it a best shot.”

Kay believes that “teaching has surpassed its basic definition: passing knowledge from one source to another.” As times change and people learn more, “teaching needs to be more than just imparting knowledge on a subject to our students.” She is certain that “students need a deeper understanding of any subject in order to be successful in it and in their futures in general.”

That kind of understanding may be jeopardized by “the push for testing and assessments as it requires rote memorization of what certain literary texts mean so that students can reproduce it on a standardized test.”

Teaching, to Kay, can be defined as follows:

Equipping students with critical thinking skills applicable to any situation, providing tools to becoming effective communicators, and exposing students to worlds and characters some will probably never encounter; thereby, broadening their experiences and helping them learn to empathize with people different from them.

To enhance her definition, Kay offers additional specifics, such as “teaching is believing in students and expecting success from them.” She learned from her observations that “students
could be challenged more.” She always felt that way, and her “field experiences have cemented that belief in me.” Witnessing how her second and third host teachers “had high expectations for all of their classes regardless of their classification, i.e. honors, regular ed., or special ed.,” she saw “students rising to the occasion.”

Kay is convinced that “teaching is a very humane occupation,” and “talking about teaching is impossible without mentioning qualities of good teachers, such as love, caring, kindness, generosity, and, at the same time, fairness, decisiveness, determination, and consistency.” She elaborates more about these qualities in the following section.

**An Image of a Successful Teacher.** Among numerous qualities that make a teacher effective in the classroom, there is one that should be “just understood and accepted without reservations”—teachers need to know their subject: “If you are going to teach sixth grade, you should at least have a thorough understanding of sixth-grade English. Or if you are to teach AP English, more than decent understanding of English language and literature is expected.” This doesn’t mean that “you need to be an absolute expert in your field, but you should know your way around grammar and literature and know how to learn more.” Without a doubt for Kay, “English teachers need to be well-read, especially true for high school teachers who will have to expose their students to both canon novels and more contemporary texts.” Kay plans “to play catch up in reading widely before I start teaching.” Content knowledge is a must, announces Kay, but there are other things teachers are expected to know.

Next on Kay’s list is knowledge associated with standards, assessments, and students’ needs: “I think you have to know how to test your students, determine where they are and where they need to be, and have a general idea about how to get them there.” That means “a successful teacher needs to know his or her students: what their background is like, whether they have
resources, what their learning styles, abilities, and their challenges are.” This knowledge will beneficially affect students because “teachers will be acting in the best interest of each student.”

Humility and modesty are other vital teacher qualities in Kay’s opinion: “You have to be humble enough to respect your students and treat them on a level that they deserve to be treated.” She is assured: “You can’t treat your 11th-graders like they are sixth-graders. They understand what you are doing.” Fairness is yet another quality that distinguishes good teachers, according to Kay. She reasons: “The students are not equal; they don’t have equal resources, backgrounds, they come from different cultures. So, it is better to treat them fairly, not equally.”

Kay proclaims “being confident in own teaching style” as the next characteristic of a successful teacher. She deliberates, “Many teachers teach the same texts, but not in the same way. That doesn’t mean that some of them are good teachers or some of them are bad. It simply means they are different.” During her observations, Kay “found several activities that I like, but I catch myself tweaking them in my head to better reflect my own style or how I think I could best implement them in my own classroom.” Moreover, she acknowledges, “Since teaching is borrowing, I think a good teacher can easily borrow activities and ideas from others but can also easily adapt them to fit his or her own classroom and teaching style.”

At the same time, a successful teacher “is also creative enough to come up with engaging activities at least part of the time based on the students and learning materials at the time.” Furthering this point, Kay suggests, “Successful teachers work well with others and can easily collaborate with their colleagues and team members to share ideas, offer and accept constructive criticism.”

Kay believes “good teachers enjoy teaching.” They love what they do, and “that is why they most likely succeed.” She learned this through her own school experiences and
observations of different teachers during her field experiences. Teachers, “who love about what they do, change the way students act and perform in their classrooms.” Along with love of their job, teachers should have “a genuine care about their students. “ The best thing teachers can do, reveals Kay, “is to expect a lot from our students, believe in them and their capacity to meet our expectations.” As “a student with many years of personal experience,” Kay asserts that “students know when teachers don’t care and don’t expect much from them.” She further declares that she is “a firm believer that if we set high expectations, then students can rise to the challenge.” Kay is not thinking about being labeled “a successful teacher yet,” but she wants her “students to succeed, and as a result, I will be willing to put in the extra time and effort that goes along with having a thriving classroom environment and thriving students.”

**Building Relationships with Students.** Kay is firmly convinced that a healthy classroom environment should be the teacher’s priority, “as it will affect their [students and a teacher] work in class, their attitude, and progress.” In all three field experiences, she had host teachers “who were skilled in managing classrooms and dealing with various kinds of students.”

Despite some difficulties and disappointment with her first field experience practicum, she gives her teacher a credit for “having decent relationships with students.” She reports that “students in her first, honors class, were free to come in and tell about how their day was, but when it was time to get down to work, they understood that.” Those students “were also allowed to talk while they worked.” However, “when the other classes would come in, she did not give them much freedom to do that, so they were much quieter.” The teacher explained that “if they were given freedom to talk, they would just talk and not do their work.” So it was her way to “manage classes, so they can complete their work.”
Kay also understands that classroom environment “is also created by a physical space,” and her first host was a “floating teacher, so she didn’t have her own classroom and couldn’t create her environment.” “There is only so much she could bring with her to whatever classroom she was assigned for the day,” admits Kay. Nevertheless, Kay asserts, “caring about her other classes, even with rambunctious students, would help her build trust and earn more respect.”

Kay also paid attention to students’ interactions during that first experience practicum and noticed that “the first class, because it was an honors class, and these kids stayed together probably since their fifth or sixth grade, they were a close group of kids and knew each other well.” So, there was a lot of interaction and talking among the students, points out Kay, but “it was not overly distracting or keeping them from working on their tasks.” On the contrary, the students in the other two classes she observed “were very subdued, like they didn’t talk to each other or in class, and teacher had to do a lot of prompting to get them to speak.” Reflecting on the relationships in the classrooms during her first time in the field, Kay pronounces them “as a teacher/student kind of relationships, where the students know the boundaries, while they are friendly, and students are free to talk to her and to each other.”

From her first experience in the field, Kay came to a conclusion that she “really do[es]n’t want to work with middle school students.” To her, she doesn’t “have enough patience to deal with their changing moods, attitudes, and adolescent matters.” She is honest, confessing: “I just don’t think I can do it!” Kay does acknowledge that further experiences and more practice may change her present beliefs, but as of now, she prefers “maturity and intellectual levels of high school students,” highlighting that “from the middle school to high school, there is definitely a difference in students’ maturity level.”
Kay believes that “students understand so much more than we give them credit for.” When they see teachers who do not acknowledge that, it “hurt trust and relationships.” Students need “someone to have faith in them, to challenge them, and to expect them to succeed.” She elaborates:

Too many students are told that they can’t or won’t succeed early on because of where they come from or the label that they are given in elementary or middle school. It only takes one teacher to believe in them or challenge them to show students that they can accomplish something, a phenomenon we’ve all either experienced or heard about in our program: the-teacher-who-changed-my-life story.

Kay’s second host teacher explained how “she starts building her relationships with each group of students from the first day of school each year.” The teacher clearly “outlines her expectations and lets kids know that they can’t get away with stuff; it won’t work in her class.” Students learn that “they cannot walk all over the place once class starts; they can’t sharpen their pencils any time they feel like doing it; or they can’t throw paper trash.” However, she also lets them know what they can do, continues Kay, “they can discuss their work with peers, help each other with assignments providing criticism and feedback, and ask teacher questions to help them move on; they can share their ideas and display their work in the classroom.” Kay finds this to be a good strategy that doesn’t only require “can’t, but includes lots of cans”

During the last field experiences with senior and juniors, Kay noticed “a very different dynamic in the classroom.” Those “were adult relationships where teacher challenged her students and raised expectations, and they would respond to those challenges with respect,” she describes.

To summarize, Kay asserts that “building healthy relationships with students is hard work.” She understands that this is “not a separate process,” and it takes time and effort. “Every teacher’s decision, every activity students complete in class, and everything that includes
teaching or learning is about building trust, caring and believing in students, and earning respect by paying respect,” concludes Kay.

**Concerns about Teaching.** Kay shares that she still has lots of concerns about teaching. Because “there is so much to teaching, and there is so much you have to be aware of and to keep in mind,” she still feels anxious. However, confesses Kay, “some of my worries dissolved as I went through field experiences, and we talked a lot in our classes and with my host teachers.”

For example, when she first went into the classroom, “the students I was placed with were predominantly African-American, and the teacher was White, so I was worried about that.” She further explains, “I didn’t grow up in such environment, and I didn’t know how to deal with that.” Thanks to Kay’s second host teacher, “this concern has lessened as I was advised to embrace the whiteness, and use it to my advantage when I can.” That teacher also constantly emphasized that “it is not the race that matters to those kids; it is the way you treat them.” Kay intends to keep this “important lesson with me as I go into teaching.”

Kay is still intimidated by the amount of work teachers do daily. She comments on the lessons she prepared to teach during her last field experience cycle: “It took me hours to prepare my two lessons and six hours to prepare all the papers that I wanted to include and bring with me, not counting all the thinking.”

Kay is also concerned with “reaching those students who have given up on learning or just don’t want to do anything.” She has observed many times, especially during her first semester in the field that “students would not turn in work that was assigned to them unless they did it in class.” She notes that it “wasn’t as big of a problem for high school students, but there are always a few that just don’t turn in assignments.” She questions:

How do you motivate students who don’t want to be motivated? Explaining to them exactly why and what they are working towards will only go so far. In addition, as much
as I dislike the testing movement, the students who don’t care will still have their scores counted against us as teachers and against the school.

In addition, Kay has some specific concerns about teaching, for instance, “how to tell kids what I think doesn’t matter, I am not there to provide answers the questions for them… they are supposed to analyze the story and make meaning.” She is also worried whether she “can teach them how to analyze instead of summarize.” She saw many strategies teachers used, “but mostly they didn’t succeed.”

Concerns about “the creative aspect of teaching bug me constantly because I am not a creative person,” she discloses. “What if I can’t come up with activities to engage all of my students?” Kay ponders. Sometimes, she also struggles with technology. “You know it is a big part of teacher evaluation now, and I am not big on technology,” admits Kay. Certainly, she can create PowerPoint presentation or Prezi; “it’s finding the videos, hooking things up in the classroom—these sorts of things I am worried about,” she adds.

As Kay comes across another struggling issue, worry, or concern, she “writes it down in my little notebook,” and, when she finds a reasonable solution, she records “it in there, and it makes me feel better.”

**Becoming a Teacher**

**Learning about Self.** Kay was glad to be placed in middle school during her first field experiences. She was only 20, and realized that in high school she “could be only two years older than some of the students.” In the middle school, she was “several years older than their even oldest students,” Kay reasons, “so I didn’t feel like a student, but I did not feel like a teacher yet.” She comments:

The students didn’t seem to view me as a student. I feel like they viewed me more like an adult because of what I was doing in there. And the teachers and staff… they didn’t treat me like a student, but they didn’t treat me like a colleague either; they saw me as someone who is observing and becoming a teacher.
Kay herself doesn’t think she is “old enough to be a teacher yet…I guess because I am so small, I still feel like …whenever I’d be walking around the school, I just feel like I am so miniscule compared to all these people hovering over me.” She also mentions that “it might be better if I would be upfront teaching them something, but, when I am in the back, I still think like I am a student.”

Even during her third semester in the field, she still feels “like I am in between.” For the high school students, “I am close to their age, and they don’t see me as someone older, but I don’t actually feel as a kid as much as thought I was going to anymore.” A few lessons and more interactions with students made Kay feel more comfortable in the classroom, and while students don’t see her as a teacher, “they respect my opinion and accept my advice.” She notices these changes:

I am more confident to lead a classroom than I was before. I am a very shy person, and I was shy when I was in school, but I feel more like speaking in front of people now and leading, or holding, discussions. Even in college, I would never offer something on my own because this is not what I was used to do. Now I can feel freely if I have something to say.

Field experiences convinced her once again that she doesn’t “have patience to teach middle school.” She remembers not liking middle school when she was a teenager, “so maybe it’s just personal, she remarks, ‘and I just don’t want to go back.”

Kay is grateful to the program and field experiences for “the idea of what kind of teacher I want to be and what kind of class I would have, which is shaping firmly in my head.” She developed “a clear picture of the things I want my students to be able to do and people I want them to become.” She thinks that her “teaching style begins to have certain distinctions.” Although she didn’t teach much, she highlights: “I was able to analyze what my teachers were doing, and how I would like to do those things myself. I would change some things to work better for students.”
Thinking about Teaching and Her Own Classroom. When Kay thinks about her future teaching or ideal lesson, memory takes her back to her “senior year English AP class and my favorite teacher.” She wants to “be that teacher one day.” She recollects that “they had formal lessons sometimes, because they had to get some form of instruction,” but Kay’s most enjoyable moments were class discussions. She sees her future classroom “filled with discussions rather than just answering comprehension questions.” Kay also always enjoyed “the writing aspect of her English class and choosing their own topics.” She hopes to “raise this love for writing in my students.” She doesn’t “want students to be worried about tests because if they work in class and think, they will be able to pass any test.”

Kay claims that she learned “a lot from her host teachers, and not only things I would like to do, but also some things that I don’t want to.” “Teaching and assessments should go hand in hand,” she comments, “however, sometimes I saw that students after certain teaching did not succeed on assessments.” Before asking students to complete a task, “I will make sure I taught them how to do it and provided the necessary tools.” She noticed, for example, that high school students during her last placement didn’t have note taking skills, as a result while doing the analysis portion on the unit test, they “scored low because there was nothing for them to review what they discussed in class and what new things they learned—no study guide and no notes.”

Kay proclaims setting high standards for her students as one of the main lessons: “I have learned from my observations to expect success from the students, and it is a lesson I will keep with me.” She always felt that students could be challenged more, “and my field experiences have cemented that belief in me.” That is the teacher she wants to be: “I want my students to know that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to.”
Visualizing her future classroom, Kay confesses that she doesn’t “like desks in rows; it seems militarized.” She is convinced that “it puts the kids in a different mindset, like, my desk is in a row, I have to sit straight and behave!” She plans to use the set up similar to the one she observed in her last field experience classroom – “two sections of desks facing each other” – this way “it is easy to pair them up, to put them in groups, and there is plenty room where I can walk up and down because I move when I teach.” Sometimes, she “will rearrange the desks to form a circle, so we can have a class discussion.”

Kay wants to place her desk “in the back of the room because I don’t like to sit.” She “would like to have a little podium upfront where I can put my stuff, but I wouldn’t stay behind it,” explains Kay. She further elaborates her classroom plans by “adding a table somewhere by the wall and next to the door where students can pick up handouts and things they need for the lesson with two or three trays to turn their work in.”

She anticipates “having just a few rules and lots of procedures.” She is convinced that students need to know the classroom routines from the beginning of the school year, so “they don’t waste time on simple procedures just turning in work or completing a bell ringer.” “While we will have all these procedures, I want us to have an open classroom environment,” Kay emphasizes. She believes that a classroom has to be a place where “they are not afraid to talk and ask questions.” She also expects her students “to generate lessons.” She shares her experience at one of the NCTE sessions “when a teacher presented an entire unit that was completely student generated.” She was impressed with “students who came up with their own guiding question; they developed specific narrow questions, their own activities, and everything they were doing in class.” Kay does not think she “will go that far, but I want them to know how
to ask questions and when to ask questions.” “I want students to have a little bit of say in what they are doing,” hopes Kay.

**Growth through Experience.** Kay admits that her “idea of a teacher and teaching will probably change daily.” Moreover, she is certain, “it is going to change drastically when I actually start teaching and get involved with students because teaching one or two days will not do much.” With getting more experience in the classroom, she asserts, “it’ll probably change from year to year as I teach on my own.” Thoughts, like “this works, and I should do this more,” or “gotta add this to my plan next time,” visit her constantly.

She remembers when she planned her first lesson during her second field experience:

I was talking with my teacher about the lesson I planned. She looked at me and said, “So how long are you planning to spend on this? It will take them about two days. To write a story, students need at least a week to complete it.” I was like, “Oh, I didn’t know that!”

From that time on, when some of Kay’s classmates were presenting their lessons in class, she thought that “it would take so much longer to do what they planned.” She smiles, “we have to realize that whatever we plan, we plan for students, not ourselves.”

Kay remarks that she begins “seeing teaching as a more complex process where students are playing a significant role in constructing knowledge.” Whenever she observed her teachers “doing various activities with students, I think how I can get students to be more involved in what they are doing, and how I can make them to find the definition on their own.” Kay realizes now that “students learn better when they find the answer rather than you tell it to them.” “If they discover it on their own, they will remember it, and they will be motivated to find out more.” So Kay’s verdict is definite: “The students have to be a part of constructing learning, and their voice should be heard.”
Summary

This chapter represented detailed profiles of four main participants of the study—Kathleen, Scout, Harry, and Katniss. Together with these pre-service teachers, we created rich narratives based on their stories about early field experiences before they entered student teaching. A unique characteristic of these narrative accounts was an employment of the first-person introductory stories of the participants, who chose their own pseudonyms and a partial autobiography of either childhood or educational experiences that led them to teaching.

The narratives were organized around three overarching themes and 16 subtopics that evolved as a result of analysis. For the purpose of this chapter, the themes and subtopics served only as structural components to organize perceptions of the participants and provided neither analysis nor discussion of these perceptions.

Throughout this chapter, I attempted to make my presence as minimal as possible and did not make any remarks that could even slightly hint to analysis or evaluation. However, I actively employed Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of dialogue. Every time the participant’s voice was accompanied by verbs, such as “shares,” “comments,” “reflects,” “questions,” “asserts,” and countless others, it was obvious that her or his utterances had an addressee who received these utterances, thus creating a dialogic interaction.

Furthermore, this chapter also demonstrated Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia in practice. Translated from Russian, heteroglossia means “multiplicity of voices.” By presenting participants’ perceptions about their three field experiences completed as a part of teacher training, my participants’ voices dominated throughout the chapter. Those voices revealed a multiplicity of viewpoints and ideas within the same cohort of pre-service teachers. Though the themes they developed in their stories and the experiences they went through were often similar,
each voice was distinct and identifiable with the only one person. Generously quoting my participants, I tried to keep their personalities and their ways with words as authentic as possible leaving personal pronouns within the quotes, thus avoiding interruption within the original voice.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-service secondary English teachers’ early field experiences before student teaching in order to gain insight into the role of early field experiences and how they shaped pre-service secondary English teachers’ understanding of teaching and its challenges. The research aimed to explore the following issues:

1) the perceptions that pre-service teachers form about the value of their field experiences;
2) pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching shaped by the field experiences;
3) pre-service teachers’ concerns about teaching;
4) whether pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shifted throughout their field experiences, and if they did, how and what affected the shift.

Consequently, the focus of the research was to understand the pre-service teachers’ perceptions by employing a three-dimensional narrative methodology outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in terms of time, place, and interaction.

The findings related to each participant of the study were revealed in the previous chapter, where participants’ perceptions were presented in the form of case narratives. Analyzing the findings across the cases, I employed the thematic narrative analysis approach detailed by Riessman (2008), who recommends finding themes that are parallel among the participants across the cases, trying to keep each case “intact.” I also included in the discussion some of the findings that do not represent a unanimous concern of all four participants called “outliers” that are clearly present in the stories of a particular participant and appear to be vital for this person. The data analysis revealed definite consistent themes between and among
participants’ perceptions. The main goal of this chapter is to consolidate analysis and findings from all participants and organize them according to the research questions.

Organizing findings around research questions, I used thematic categories that emerged through coding and analysis to report the data analysis. Just like participants’ perceptions cannot be isolated and used as fragmented pieces, the categories cannot be secluded from each other. Thus, it is necessary to remind the reader that thematic categories are not definite or static in this study; they do not have distinct borders. They are interrelated, always in interaction, and each category informs others, and vice versa. Below I present the research questions, findings, and discussion of each question in the light of thematic categories. As discussed previously, the pre-service teachers’ field experience logs, think pieces, conceptual teaching units, individual interviews, and focus group interviews served as data sources to elicit the responses to the research questions.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question was formulated as follows: What kinds of perceptions do pre-service teachers form about the value of their field experiences? The analysis of data collected from the participants of the study revealed a thematic family category *Field Experiences and Their Organization* that provides responses to this question. There were nine themes under that category (Table 2, p. 99, this dissertation), and although only one was directly named *Value of FEs* (Field Experiences), all the themes informed and provided evidence to support the findings. The findings and discussion to the first research question are organized around the following themes: preparation for FEs, being in a cohort, expectations for FEs, host teachers, diversity in the classrooms, practicing while in practice, challenges during FEs, changes to FEs, and value of FEs.
Preparation for Field Experiences

All four participants reported that the only prerequisite for enrolling into the TPP was an education course during their sophomore year in college. In Kat’s case, she took this class earlier, during her freshman year, so she did not have any education courses until her junior year. She felt that “there needs to be something in between.” Agreeing with her, Scout claims that the first education course “was bogus and kind of pointless” and suggests that TPP at the university “should offer something more meaningful and applicable during the sophomore year.” Harry and Kay only commented that their first Education course was introductory, and they accepted it as it was.

Kat, Scout, Harry, and Kay appreciated the courses on diversity and adolescent development that were offered along with their first field experience cycle. Kat and Kay recognized immensely benefiting from those courses, as Kay assures, “that English course prepared me, a White, middle class girl to walk into the environment that was very different from my community.” Although Scout had been previously exposed to the diverse populations while tutoring for the Dream Program, she was grateful to have a course that helped her see its direct relevance to the field of teaching, especially in the southern states of the country. At the same time, Harry felt that “while the issues of diversity are extremely important,” he experienced that most of his courses were “focused on one thing – race, for example,” and was eager “to move on and talk less about it.” He emphasizes that he is not “trying to dismiss those other issues as unimportant; they are crucial, but they are not the only one to be focused on.”

Another strong pattern across participants’ perceptions was about the disconnect they observed between their coursework and their first field experiences cycle in particular. As Kat put it, not everything she learned in her coursework was “applicable or happened in the field.”
Echoing Kat, Harry confirmed that he did not see any of the great strategies he learned in class, “nor was I able to apply any of these things,” he stated disappointedly.

One of the problems reported by the pre-service teachers that affected their field experiences was “a seemingly recurring problem with field experience placements,” as Scout defines it. All four of the participants explained that the first two placements were delayed by the Office of Field Placements. While the reason for the first delay was justifiable by the August storm, reminded Kay, the second placement came two weeks later than scheduled with no apparent justifications. While Harry and Kay received their final placement in time and established an immediate contact with their host teachers after the first email message, Kat and Scout had additional delay because of scheduling conflicts at their schools of placement.

As a result of coursework and placement issues, Kat, Harry, and Kay conveyed that were not adequately prepared for field experiences. They also did not consider it to be a significant issue since they “didn’t do much in the first field experience practicum,” admitted Kat. She was prepared “to show up, sit in class, and take notes.” Reflecting on her first experience in the field, Kat knew what she wanted “to get out of her second.” Likewise, Kay came to the same conclusion after she went into the field for the first time, reporting that she had feelings of “not really knowing what to expect and what to do.” Because she “mostly just observed during the first semester,” Kay did not feel a lack of preparation and claimed that her “first field experience prepared me for the second one.”

Expecting to see things he learned in coursework and observe them in the “real classroom,” Harry stated that he was not prepared “to face the boredom.” He was craving an opportunity for active teaching in the classroom, but his first two experiences exposed him to
watching “kids complete the worksheets.” That is why before his third field experience, he decided to take more initiative and change his final experience for the better.

Out of the four participants, Scout was the only one who felt prepared for her first field experience practicum. She began college majoring in Math, and the Math program required her to “do more in my first semester as a freshman than we do in our fall senior semester of English program.” In addition, she took a “six-hour elementary reading course that had a field experience component built-in.” Thanks to the previous experiences, she was not intimidated by shortcomings of her preparation for the field experiences in the English program.

To sum up, value of field experiences began for the pre-service teachers with preparation for those experiences. The participants recognized the value of the courses where they learned strategies and teaching approaches, and they especially appreciated course on diversity and adolescent development. Nevertheless, the participants reported a certain level of unpreparedness because of lack of rigor and progression in the coursework; some disconnect between the coursework and what they saw in the field; and considerable delay in field placements. Despite those problematic areas, Kat, Scout, Harry, and Kay did not consider those issues essential as they were not actively involved in the classroom activities and were mostly observing during their first semester in the field. From the participants’ perceptions, it was clear that every preceding field practicum prepared them for the following field experience.

**Being in a Cohort**

The theme of being in a cohort within the teacher Preparation Program was brought up by each of the pre-service teachers under investigation. They all highlighted the importance and value of growing together as they underwent field experiences. Kat called the cohort “a built-in support system with friends, associates, and colleagues” that created “a community of learners.”
She saw the cohort as a beginning of the professional network and extension of friendly relationships beyond the teacher preparation program, when long after graduation, the pre-service teachers might meet to exchange their experiences and share ideas about teaching.

Kay joined Kat, furthering “a community of learners” to “a community of teachers” and emphasizing its supportive nature, bringing attention to the fact that pre-service teachers go through a painful and “really foreign experience where we are the teachers and students at the same time.” She stressed that being in a cohort was very helpful because there was always somebody “who has an advice that is really helpful and really pertinent to someone’s particular situation.” Kay declared “the cohort itself as one of the most valuable parts of the program.”

Just like Kat and Kay, Scout appreciated being a part of a cohort where they all “know each other so well.” She pointed to “an advantage of just getting deep down into meaningful conversations about education because we’ve been together for a complete year now, and we’ve been wrestling with the same ideas.”

As the only man in the cohort until their senior year in the program, Harry confessed being in “a bit weird” situation among the girls. He got used to it and cherished his cohort for “creating some sort of unity among my classmates.” Harry asserted that “having people with whom to share ideas is really helpful,” and he was grateful for the opportunity to talk about field experiences and learn from his classmates.

In summary, the four pre-service teachers place a strong value on being a part of the cohort. For them, is the cohort creates an opportunity to grow together into profession, to wrestle with questions that concern them, and to get needed support. They made friends within the cohort and were convinced that their relationships would extend beyond the program.
Expectations for Field Experiences

Scout, Harry, and Kay did not recollect that the expectations for field experiences were clearly articulated by their instructors or Office of Field Placements coordinator before they went into the field for the first time. Scout disclosed that she did not “remember any specific expectations outlined in the program or by the college instructors until she got to the senior year.” Unlike the other three, Kat hesitantly responded, “I feel like they [course instructors and Office of Field Placements] did tell us what to do,” and she was partly blaming herself because “trying to figure out all of these things and not really knowing what to do, I feel like some of those instructions or expectations fell through the holes.”

Because expectations for field experiences were not clearly communicated to the pre-service teachers before their first field experience cycle, all four participants had a general, but vague idea of what they were going to do in the field. They couldn’t provide any specifics about their own expectations. For example, Kat stated that she knew that she was going “to observe and to write reports,” and Harry expected “to go to school, to sit in the classroom, and watch for a little bit.” In her turn, Scout shared her knowledge of expectations: “I knew they expected me to observe and write down notes as detailed as to what the kids were saying to one another. And that’s about it.” Finally, Kay guessed, “I expected to be more involved in class activities and not just sit there and take notes like I did.”

Kat also confessed that she did not have particular expectations, “just because I didn’t know what to expect,” and continued, “I knew I wanted to learn as much as possible and to participate a lot.” Her strongest desires through all her field experiences were participating in the classroom, being constantly involved with students, and helping her teacher in any way possible.
Having more experience than her peers, Scout was the only one who had a concrete expectation; she wanted “to walk away from those 40 hours during my first semester with new knowledge about what a teacher is and how a classroom works.” She also expected the host teacher “to acknowledge that I was there.” Finally, she expected to meet “a professional who respected his or her students” and “made a difference in the classroom.”

Without having any idea what to expect in the field, Kay “just went with the flow.” Learning from her first “horrible experience,” she felt prepared for the second round, outlining her expectations, “I knew that I wanted the next semester to be different. I knew things I wanted to accomplish, things I wanted to do in class, and things I wanted to ask my teacher about.” She expected “to teach at least one lesson, so I could see how it felt to be a teacher in the classroom” and “to get more comfortable with students.”

Harry, along with Kay and Kat, admitted that he did not have “clear expectations before I went into the field for the first time.” He thought that he might be able “to be more interactive with teachers and students.” After the failure of those general expectations, he was more determined “to interact more with students” and “maybe even try to teach a lesson, talk more with the teacher about the daily procedures, lesson plans, and choices.”

The pre-service teachers finally received clear instructions once they met with Dr. Slade for their first English course in the fall semester of their senior year. Kay recapped those instructions, “[O]ur first experience was supposed to be focused on an individual student, the second – on a group of students, or small group, and the third one on the entire class.” After that, they knew what to look for in their final field experience cycle and adjusted their expectations towards noting “a whole group, teaching a unit, the teacher, and decisions the teacher makes.”
In conclusion, the pre-service teachers did not receive explicit communication on the expectations and goals for each field experience practicum to until they reached their senior year and final field experience cycle. As a result, they did not have their own clear expectations, and their ideas about what to do or what was expected from them in the field were vague. As Kat, Harry, Kay, and Scout moved from one experience to another, they were able to reflect on the previous experience, evaluate it, and formulate their expectations for the next field experience cycle based on what they had experienced in the previous one.

Host Teachers

All four participants held the unanimous opinion that the success of field experiences mainly depends on a host teacher with whom they worked for the duration of field experience cycle. After three consecutive field experience cycles each of the participants was exposed to three different host teachers in three different classroom settings. Reflecting on the work of host teachers in the classrooms, pre-service teachers noted their teaching styles, relationships with students, attitude towards teaching, and many other aspects of being a teacher. They also pointed out their strengths and weaknesses.

First Field Experience Cycle. Throughout her experiences, Kat evaluated her host teachers as “one average, one great, and one below average.” While her first host teacher was “very nice and helpful,” she didn’t seem to care much about her students, and her teaching style was “basically to give out the worksheet packets at the beginning of the class period and to collect them at the end.” That did not attract Kat since it “isn’t for me; I would rather have someone like I am—active, enthusiastic, and always moving,” but instead, she often felt “like falling asleep in the back of the classroom.” She ended up being “stuck in the back and taking notes.”
Similar to Kat’s, Harry’s and Kay’s first host teachers were not very inviting. Harry and Kay were not even introduced to the students and spent most of the time “like strangers in the back of the classroom,” as Harry remarks. Kay “didn’t really see her teaching much,” she explained about her first host. The students mostly completed group work filling out some worksheets. As a result, there was not much for Kay “to observe or participate in her classes.” While Harry was also a passive observer, he credited his first host for educative communication. His teacher explained to him the handouts she was using, the goals for lessons, and how each activity supported those goals. She also shared her lesson plans. Harry was pleased to learn what he could from his daily communication with the host teacher.

Unlike her peers, Scout considered her first host teacher the best she had throughout all three field experience cycles. She “enjoyed every hour in that class” learning a variety of “teaching secrets.” Her first teacher demonstrated how to make accommodations to the diverse students in her classes and explained her teacher decisions and choices. Scout observed her host’s positive attitude and determination to meet goals of her struggling students in class.

**Second Field Experience Cycle.** During the second field experience cycle, Harry and Scout both had teachers who taught them primarily “what not to do in class,” rather than educating them about what to do when teaching. It was frustrating for Scout particularly because she had a “great teacher before” and felt that observing her second host “who didn’t really care about the students,” was a step back. Seeing his teaching style and then grading the students’ work, Scout noticed disconnect between his teaching and students’ progress. For her, “Mr. F. wasn’t a good teacher, nor was he a good host.” Like Scout, Harry was disappointed with his second host, who made his experience “so boring.” While the students “were constantly … doing work, and nothing ever would go wrong, so I couldn’t really observe anything.” He
concluded that “the teacher was there as a guide; she never really taught.” Again, Harry “was just dismissed in there—not introduced, not recognized—a stranger in the back.”

Kat and Kay considered themselves fortunate with their second host teachers since they both had a great experience. Kat declared her “semester was phenomenal” because her teacher, “Ms. W. was amazing; she was great with her students; she was great with me!” Kat credited her host for teaching her how to be reflective, provide constructive feedback, how to approach each group of students differently, and how to be able to adjust lesson plans depending on the class response to teaching. Similar to Kat, Kay was also happy about her second host teacher, Ms. T., who was quick to respond to any question, generously shared teaching resources and web links for planning lessons, and took Kay to faculty meetings. But most importantly for Kay, her host teacher was “great with students and really passionate about teaching.”

**Third Cycle of Field Experiences.** The last round of field experiences was more successful for Harry and Kay and less beneficial for Kat and Scout. Kat reported that her third host teacher had a great rapport with his students; however, the students were not his priority at that time. Besides, trying to have good relationships with students, he “let them get away with more,” and it affected their learning in class. While Kat didn’t see him “as an ideal teacher,” she still acknowledged “learning some good procedures from him.” Just like Kat, Scout was disappointed with her third host noting that she was “very friendly, laid back and relaxed,” but too relaxed to be “a wonderful teacher.” Most of the class time, she would spend sitting at her desk, and her students “would go on tangent about some random things that aren’t applicable.” Scout was frustrated that her host teacher would allow “a 15-minute pointless discussion” within a 55-minute class period.” Providing ready answers to her students was another characteristic of Scout’s third host, and it “just diminish[ed] the whole point of assignment.”
Kay and Harry were in a more fortuitous position during their third field experiences. They both worked with experienced teachers who “knew what they were doing in class,” as Kay acknowledged. Kay’s teacher was working with AP students, great scholars, and gifted students. It provided Kay with an opportunity to observe how to work with students who were “capable of a lot,” and that made “her teaching style different from my other host teachers who dealt with low-performing students.” She saw that “her classes were student oriented,” witnessed lots of discussions in small groups, and students practicing Socratic circles with student exploring their own questions. Along with Kay, Harry had “a great teacher” during his last field experience cycle. He complimented his host teacher for being “active and enthusiastic” as she “walked around and engaged students in activities, constantly asking questions.” He felt that he was “learning new things because the teacher is more involved.”

Despite the fact that all four participants worked with “good and bad teachers,” as they usually labeled them, they recognized that they learned a lot from their host teachers. Kat expressed it in the following statement, “Although I prefer to learn from the best in the profession, I appreciate the opportunity to observe different teachers and their teaching styles.” Reflecting on all three field experience cycles, Scout voiced regrets that she “didn’t have great teachers all the way throughout her experiences,” but “learned a lot through observations and participations.” For Harry, “every day in the field was learning,” he summarized, and even when he did not have an opportunity to be actively involved in the classroom, he “kept his eyes and ears open,” noticing and reflecting on teachers’ decisions and choices. Finally, Kay acknowledged that throughout all three field experiences she observed “definitely different teaching styles,” and learned from host teachers “things about teaching, noticed some engaging activities, and understood students better.”
In summary, the pre-service teachers attributed success of their field experiences mainly to their assigned teacher. They had different experiences with each of their host teachers throughout three cycles of field experiences and observed various teaching styles. The participants reported that some of the teachers, according to them, were successful in the classroom, while others did not demonstrate effective teaching style, strategies, or attitudes. All four participants identified the need for quality host teachers to work with pre-service teachers. Despite frustrations and disappointment with some of the host teachers, Kay, Scout, Kat and Harry admitted advantages of observing different teachers and learning from them.

**Diversity in the Classrooms**

The theme of diversity in the classrooms was present in all participants’ individual and focus group interviews. It was also reflected on in the written think pieces and field experience logs. The pre-service teachers considered diversity of students a crucial reality in the classrooms they observed. Throughout their field experiences, they learned and were able to distinguish various kinds of diversity that characterized students as “unique and different from each other.” Thus, diversity for them is “not only about the ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds of students, but also about their economic status, learning styles, and achievement progress,” as Scout defined.

While all participants testified that the classrooms they observed were racially and ethnically different from the White, middle class communities in which they grew up, only Kay and Kat expressed discomfort entering the classrooms where about 90 to 95% of students were predominantly African Americans. They had a course on diversity and were prepared to see mostly African-American students in classes with very little representation of Asian, Latino, Indian, and White students; however, they did not expect to find themselves as “the others” in
those classrooms. They both “got comfortable,” as their interactions with host teachers and students progressed throughout the experiences. For Harry and Scout, ethnic and racial make-up of the classes did not appear overwhelming. They took the same class on diversity. Harry accepted the situation “as typical” in local schools, and Scout already had previous experiences working with children from African-American neighborhoods. All of them appreciated what they learned through both coursework and field experiences and believed both would help them to understand their students better.

The pre-service teachers acknowledged diversity in terms of students’ performance and progress as critical one for any teacher to recognize. Every classroom they were in was categorized as regular, gifted, great scholars, honors, or AP, reflecting the school’s tracking system. Each class had a specific dynamic surrounding teaching and learning activities depending on the class tracking label. Scout, Kay, Kat, and Harry witnessed how their host teachers adapted lessons for each group of students and noticed difference in assignments and teaching techniques. Furthermore, even within each of those classes, students had “various levels.” The participants understood that effective teachers should know their students, their learning levels, and be prepared to meet the needs of each student.

In summary, throughout the field experiences, the pre-service teachers were exposed to various kinds of diversity. They recognized racial and ethnic diversity, socio-economic diversity, and diversity of students according to their learning styles and capabilities, along with the tracking system implemented in each school. All participants valued their field experiences for providing opportunities to observe diversity in the classrooms and witness host teachers’ approaches to teaching in diverse classrooms. They learned that “not all kids learn the same
way” and voiced hope to become teachers who embrace differences and meet needs of every child in the classroom.

**Practicing while in Practice**

Field experiences allowed the pre-service teachers in this study “practice while being in practice.” All participants had opportunities to be involved in the classroom to some extent, depending on their host teachers. Observation was the major focus of the field experiences, and the pre-service teachers reported continuous observations of their host teachers in the field. However, their participation and teaching were limited. They wished that observation would not have been the focal point of the field experience.

Kat was the only one among the four pre-service teachers who taught more lessons than Kay, Scout, and Harry taught together throughout the three field experience cycles. While she did not teach much in her first and third placement, she participated “a little with great scholars groups” and taught them a mini-lesson on writing a persuasive essay using ethos, pathos, and logos. She also graded their essays and “was proud with the results.” The second field experience practicum was the most rewarding for Kat; she taught about “25 hours out of 40” and more actively participated in all kinds of teaching activities, including planning, preparing resources, delivering lessons, interacting with students, and grading papers. She learned about team teaching, reflection, and professional feedback from “first-hand experience.” Unfortunately for her, the last field experience was disappointing because she only “was able to have small, insignificant conversations with kids.” Kat wanted to be involved more, but she did not want “to step on people’s toes,” realizing that it was “still his classroom, not mine.” That is why her roles in that classroom were limited “standing at the end of classroom, helping to monitor students, and waking up those who fell asleep.”
Unlike Kat, Scout was mostly an observer in the classroom throughout the entire field experience practice. During the first field experience cycle, she was “interacting with students beginning with greeting them in the morning,” assisting her teacher with distributing handouts and monitoring individual and group work of students. Although she “never was in charge of a lesson,” she felt free to “walk around and help,” and the students “were comfortable to ask questions.” The second field experience practicum taught Scout mainly how to grade students’ work; there were days when she “would spend the entire instructional time just grading his papers.” While Scout was not greatly impressed by her third host teacher, she had some “good practical experience in her classrooms.” She decided to invest herself “more than in any previous field experiences” and asked the teacher for a seating chart so she could learn students’ names and interact with them. Scout “had no real choice of teaching a lesson of my own,” but she helped with daily grammar that students completed as bell ringers. Once, she was fortunate “to lead instruction all day” when her teacher planned a Jeopardy game to review *Beowulf*. For Scout, it was a fun experience even though she did not use a lesson plan or activity she “had created and then implemented.” She was just happy “to take whatever was given to me.”

Describing his first day in the field, Harry confessed that he wasn’t sure what his teacher wanted him to do. He remembered that “it is always good for teachers to greet their students at the door,” so that was how he began his interactions with students without knowing their names. His primary role in that classroom was an observer, and he “would just sit there, take notes,” paying attention to “whatever his host teacher was doing.” He reported that there were only “one or two days out of all my 40 observation hours when I really interacted with the students.” He helped two students while they were working on career projects and later assisted another with choosing a book in the library. Harry even tried out his classroom management skills while
disciplining a student. His first host teacher allowed him to observe another teacher, and he was grateful for the opportunity to “see how different teachers operate in the classroom.” The second field experience practicum was even worse in Harry’s opinion, as it “was hard to observe.” He admitted that at that time, he “never once interacted with a student in educational way.” The teacher did not interact much with them either. The students were just completing packages of worksheets. Unlike the first two field experiences, Harry’s presence in the third placement classroom was noticeable. His teacher generously invited him to participate in lessons and “provided several teaching opportunities.” Finally, he felt like he “actually ha[d] a purpose here.”

Similar to the three of her peers, Kay’s role in the first field experiences was an observer. She recollected the first day in the field as the one when she “had the most interaction with students throughout the whole experience.” The students were writing an essay, and she helped two of them by explaining the purpose for writing. Because she observed her teacher on days when students were working in groups, Kay “couldn’t do much” besides “walking a little bit around.” Once she had an opportunity to demonstrate grammar on the board for the whole class and was surprised by how well “students responded to that” as opposed to the host teacher’s oral explanation. To improve the quality of her field experiences quality, Kay approached her second field experience cycle differently, and “kind of introduced myself a little more.” She taught two lessons and learned how to adjust from one lesson to another by reflecting on her own mistakes. Entering the third field experience cycle, Kay was “much more comfortable to approach the teacher and ask, what she was teaching that day and how it fits in her unit plan, where she got the materials, and stuff like that.” This was the semester when Kay experienced variety of participation activities in the classroom, graded students’ work, and taught a two-day lesson that she developed on her own.
To summarize, all four participants experienced various roles in the classroom throughout their practice in the field ranging from passively observing the teacher and the classroom to taking a more active role by interacting and helping students, grading students’ work, participating in activities, assisting with preparing lesson resources, and teaching a segment of the lesson or the entire class period. They were convinced that the more they practiced, the more comfortable they felt with students and more confident in their abilities to assume responsibilities of a teacher. Not all of them had equal opportunities to participate and teach, but all pre-service teachers had significant amounts of observations. Again, the participants were unanimous in their belief that their practices in the field depended on their host teachers and the amount of opportunities those teachers provided for various kinds of experiences in the classrooms.

**Challenges during Field Experiences**

There were several challenges that pre-service teachers faced as they entered the field. One of them, expressed clearly by Kat and Scout, was that they were in “someone else’s classroom.” Thus, they found themselves in an awkward position because neither the host teacher nor the students in the classrooms saw them as teachers. They realized that their presence was temporary in those classrooms and did not want to “step on people’s toes,” as commented Kat, or “to be bothersome for the host teacher,” as Scout disclosed. They both wanted to participate and actively engage in classroom activities, but that indefinite position in someone else’s classroom often held them back.

Another challenge stemmed directly from the first one and was clearly articulated by Harry and Kay, who at first did not know how to approach their host teachers to ask if they could be more involved in working with the students and the host teacher. They were not taught how
to negotiate their spaces during their field experiences, and that is why felt unprepared to deal with their presence in the classroom in the new identity role. As a result, when they began the first field experience cycle, Kay and Harry not only didn’t know what to do in class, they also did not know how to ask their host teachers what they could do or how to be more involved.

In addition to those challenges, Scout and Harry pointed to one more problematic issue, which Scout defined as “seeing the relevance,” and Harry called “an application part.” Neither saw much connection between what they learned in their coursework and what they saw in the classrooms. They questioned why they should observe a teacher who did not use any of the reading strategies or pedagogical approaches that they learned in coursework. Additionally, they questioned why they had to observe the same things, like working with packages of handouts for 40 hours, if they could see it within an hour and move on to something more valuable.

Moreover, some of the host teachers did not let pre-service teachers participate actively in learning and teaching activities. For Scout, “a quality of host teachers,” was repeatedly an issue as she expressed throughout her perceptions.

To summarize, most of the challenges pre-service teachers came across during their field experiences were caused by their undetermined position in the classroom and the host teachers’ attitude to them as visitors or observers. In addition, the participants voiced concerns about disconnect between college coursework and their classroom experiences. The role of the host teachers was still identified as crucial in determining the success and value of field experiences.

Changes to the Field Experiences

The pre-service teachers in the study suggested some concrete steps that in their opinion will accomplish several tasks: “improve the quality of the teacher preparation program; raise the value of field experiences, and prepare better teachers for the classrooms,” as voiced Kat.
The four participants clearly outlined several major areas “to revamp the program.” The first of them dealt with the coursework. Though the pre-service teachers consider their English and Education methods courses that provided them with understanding of students’ diversity, adolescent development, and reading strategies as relevant and beneficial, they would like to see a better progression of courses even before they begin their practice in the field. The first Education course they took as sophomores was not rigorous or effective as Kat and Scout proclaimed. Both courses that went along with the first set of field experiences dealt with issues of diversity and development of adolescents, and the courses that went with the second set of field experiences were heavily based on discussions of field experiences. The participants also registered the lack of practical application in those courses. They proposed that instructors could collaborate better in developing their courses to avoid excessive overlapping so that the content of each following course would build upon the previous and move them further ahead. They also suggested devoting more time to planning lessons, teaching lesson segments, learning classroom management techniques and becoming informed about the state’s educational policies, regulations, and mandates.

Other small steps that could improve pre-service teachers’ field experiences include changes in the organization of those experiences. First and foremost, all of them expressed a firm belief that the expectations for field experiences should be clearly communicated to them before each field experience cycle. These expectations should set the number of observation, participation, and teaching hours required for the pre-service teachers along with the observation focus of each field experience practicum, e.g., individual student and his or her progress, a small group of students, and entire class with a teacher, or decision making process. They wanted to be aware of expectations and know exactly what was expected from them in the field. Returning
back to the issue of providing host teachers with guidelines, the participants suggested including the expectations in those guidelines, so “everyone is on the same page” – the TPP coordinators, host teachers, and pre-service teachers.

In the individual interviews, all participants emphasized how much they preferred more active involvement in field experiences to passive observations “in the back of the room.” They accentuated the need to make necessary adjustments built into the expectations or requirements for field experiences so they can progressively minimize the passive observation and move towards more active participation and teaching. Kat expressed the desire of all participants, stating:

During the first semester, it is good to be mostly observing, but during the second semester, we need to have a credible amount of hours involved with the students, and at least one mini-lesson. Then in our final semester before student teaching, we should be required to teach at least up to three days of one or two class periods per day. We need this progression to feel more comfortable in the classroom.

Participants also suggested that another important area for improvement is communication between the university and schools of placement. More precisely, they identified the issue with the host teachers who did not know what was expected from the pre-service teachers during their practice in the classroom. Furthering this topic, Kat, Scout, Harry, and Kay insisted that the host teachers should be provided with certain guidelines and allow pre-service teachers to be involved more actively in their classrooms. All four participants understood that host teachers choose to volunteer to work with pre-service teachers; nevertheless, they were convinced that, “if teachers volunteer to do it, they may as well do it better,” as Harry articulated.

That final remark echoed the “need for quality host teachers,” an issue raised by the participants multiple times, especially by Scout. If she could make any changes to the organization of field experiences, she would make sure “pre-service teachers have better quality host teachers.” Kat more tactfully verbalized the same, wishing that pre-service teachers would
have “some sort of progression with the teachers we are assigned to work throughout our field experiences.”

As Kat noted in one of the interviews, and the rest of the participants agreed, 40 hours of field experiences within one semester is not much. The rest of the participants agreed with her statement; however, they all conceded that it was not “about the amount; it is about the quality of these 40 hours.” If they had effective host teachers who allowed them to be involved and participate in teaching, then those 40 hours would have been sufficient in preparing them to be better teachers. On the contrary, if they spent 40 hours in the classroom where the main activity was filling in the blanks in the worksheets and answering comprehension questions, then it was a waste of their time. Scout and Harry suggested letting pre-service teachers observe more than one teacher during every field practicum. Often there were at least two pre-service teachers placed at the same school with different teachers. If they could rotate in the middle of the semester, proposed Scout, each of them could see two teachers and possibly two different grade levels, and that would expose them to more learning opportunities. By the end of field experiences, they would see six teachers instead of only three and that could be more teaching strategies, more classrooms, and more valuable lessons.

In conclusion, Kay, Scout, Harry, and Kat believe that the value and quality of field experiences could be improved if the program coordinators and course instructors closely collaborated with host teachers at the schools of placement. A first step toward revamping the TPP would involve developing coursework that progressively moves from observational learning and discussions to practical applications while avoiding overlap in course content. The participants also saw the need for specific expectations for field experiences to be communicated to all the field experience participants, including host and pre-service teachers. The quality of
field experiences heavily relied on host teachers; thus, study participants suggested “to recruit better teachers” and to organize placements that could allow pre-service teachers to observe “more teachers, more classrooms, and more grade levels.”

**Value of Field Experiences**

As the previous eight themes suggested, the value of field experiences was determined by participants’ preparation, being a part of the cohort, their expectations for FEs, host teachers, observing diverse students in the classrooms, “practicing while in practice,” challenges they faced while in the field as pre-service teachers, and thinking about the ways to improve these experiences. In this section, I review other aspects of field experiences the participants valued, in addition to the themes they previously discussed.

Despite some disappointing moments each of the participants experienced in the field, they assigned great value to their experiences. The main value for them was to be placed in the classrooms observing daily teaching practices. Harry cherished his field experiences for being “able to see the field of my future profession,” and believing that “it is something that every career preparation program should provide for its graduates.” At the same time, Kat proclaimed that field experiences “have really prepared me for my profession,” and Scout “enjoyed going to three different schools and seeing three different teachers.” Joining the others, Kay voiced her opinion, emphasizing the opportunity “to see another teacher’s classroom and, watching this other classroom, lets us learn about what we want in our own classroom.”

Advancing the idea of being exposed to the field, Scout was grateful for the opportunity “to peek into middle school… during the first placement,” and “a glimpse into 55-minute classes and the value of interacting with the students.” Thanks to the field experiences, she came to the conclusion that middle school “attracted her and could be a possibility for teaching.” Harry, in
his turn, appreciated “seeing different schools and compare them.” His experiences in school “made me think what kind of teacher I want to be and what kind of classes I want to have.” So for Harry, “every single day [was] learning something.” Moving on, Kat explained that opportunities to participate and teach during field practice gave her “more confidence in my content knowledge and ability to manage a group of students.” Finally, Kay “definitely learned a lot that I can take into my own classroom and … keep in mind … as I will prepare for teaching.” She observed some “valuable classroom management skills and how to set up procedures and routines at the beginning of the school year.” Kay also was happy to “attend teachers’ meetings during their in-service day” and see teachers “interacting with each other, discussing problematic issues.”

Kay, Scout, Kat, and Harry were in agreement that the success and value of field experiences were greatly affected by the host teachers. While they all supported the idea that even negative experiences can be educative, and they learned “from the bad teachers what not to do in class,” they preferred to learn from the best in the field, and once again confirmed the need for quality host teachers. At the same time, Harry, Kay, and Kat did not free themselves from being responsible for their field experiences. As Kay commented after her first field experiences cycle, she “learned from her first experience and entered the second one with the right mindset to make the best of it.” In Kat’s opinion, those who did not appreciate the value of field experiences either did not have “what it takes to be a teacher” or did not “gain this fervent mentality and work ethic that helps a teacher be great.” Harry saw himself a part of the problem, when he “didn’t know how to approach my first two teachers, I ended up sitting in the back.” Learning how to negotiate his space and taking responsibility for his own experiences helped him “to turn my negative experiences to the best last experience.”
In summarizing the data applicable to the first research question, it is necessary to note that the pre-service teachers valued their field experiences regardless of negative moments they encountered in the field. Among the major gains of being in the TPP and participating in the field experiences, Harry, Kay, Kat, and Scout outlined the following:

1. They appreciated the coursework that prepared them for field practice, despite some inconsistencies and overlapping in the content of the courses. Learning about their future field and being equipped with knowledge about curriculum, pedagogy, methods, and strategies helped them identify and recognize those elements in the classrooms. Discussing their experiences and analyzing particular situations from classrooms led them to understanding teaching and helped make meaning of what they saw in the field.

2. Being a part of a “community of learners” in a cohort was an additional aspect that created a support system for each and every one of them within the program. As a cohort, they knew one another for two years and generously shared their ideas, successes, and frustrations. They expressed hope to extend their relationships beyond TPP to be able to exchange their practices in the future.

3. While all of them experienced at least one field experience when host teachers did not provide many opportunities to participate and teach, they still learned a lot from each teacher they observed. From some teachers, they learned helpful strategies, class management skills, establishment of routines and procedures, and ways of interacting with students, while they learned “what not to do” from the other teachers. Sometimes the negative moments were more valuable because those moments made pre-service teachers think about their own teaching and how they would act in a certain situation.
4. Having an opportunity to observe diverse students in the classroom was one of their valuable gains throughout their experiences. The participants could see the relevance of their course discussions to the field. They were able to recognize not only racial and ethnic diversity in the classrooms, but also their diversity according to socio-economic status, tracking systems used in schools, various learning capabilities, special needs, and needs of second language learners.

5. Being able to “practice while in practice” was the most valuable benefit of field experiences. The pre-service teachers were able to participate in classroom activities, interact with students, and teach mini-lessons or class-length lessons. They graded students’ work, assisted teachers with planning, and helped students locate resources and information.

6. Throughout all three cycles of field experiences, they observed and reflected on their observations and their own practices in the classroom. They were able to evaluate teachers’ strategies as well as their own practices and offered some constructive changes that could improve the quality of field experiences, and the TPP at the university in general.

These and many other smaller lessons added to the value of field experiences. Kay, Harry, Scout and Kat were ready to face the challenges of student teaching and fight with fears and concerns “one step at a time.”

**Research Question 2**

The second research question was as follows: How do early field experiences shape pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching? The coding and analysis of the data sources resulted in a thematic family category *Understanding Teaching*. There were four major themes in this category: (1) defining teaching; (2) an image of a successful teacher; (3) building relationships with students, and (4) concerns about teaching (Table 2, p. 99, this dissertation).
Responding to this research question, I tried to gain insight into how pre-service teachers understand their profession and what teaching means to them. Although the four themes mentioned earlier provide the answers to the second research question, the thematic family category *Field Experiences and Their Organization* and its themes, discussed in the first research question, are also closely related to the second question. This family category demonstrates how the pre-service teachers’ field experiences, observations of host teachers, interactions with students, classroom participation, and peer discussions regarding their practice in the field during college courses shaped their understanding of teaching. Again, as was explained earlier, the categories and themes do not have clear boundaries; they are closely interrelated, interactive, and constantly influence one another.

The findings and discussion of the second research question are presented below. Although the forth theme – concerns about teaching – was included in the *Understanding Teaching* thematic category and cannot be isolated from the pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching, it will be discussed later since it provides some answers to the third research question.

**Defining Teaching**

Each of the participants shared a story of coming to teaching as a profession. Their stories were different, but behind each story there were people who influenced their decision. For Kat, it was an elementary teacher, Ms. C, who believed in her and helped her build confidence. Unlike Kat, Scout had her childhood dream of playing school refined when she started kindergarten, fell in love with her first teacher, and then later revisited it again working with disadvantage kids in the Dream Program. Harry and Kay had their influences as well. Remembering how he enjoyed his high school English teachers, Harry seemed to be lost when he
first entered college. He began his college career as an English major and then “tried on” a couple of other hats until he came back to English realizing that his passion belonged to teaching and education. Kay, similarly to Harry, relished her high school AP teachers and loved English, but she began college as a biology major thinking her love for science was prevailing. After her first Education course, she found where her heart fit the best and never regretted her decision.

Whereas the participants’ paths to the teaching profession were different, their understanding of teaching appeared to find more intersections than disjunctions. They see teaching as a word with at least two meanings “a profession and a process,” and both are complicated.

**Teaching as a Profession.** First, all four participants saw teaching as a profession. Kat calls it “the most courageous profession,” since teachers simultaneously face realities of everyday life, “poverty, hunger, and conflict in their classrooms” and make every possible effort “to teach, support, and to believe in every child and raise the next generation of American citizens.” Kay declares it “the most important profession.” In turn, Harry defines it as “not an easy occupation,” while Scout is convinced that teaching is “equally necessary for teachers and students for mutual growth.” Moreover, suggests Kay, teaching is not just a job, or regular profession, “it is a way of life.”

They realize that it is not considered to be a prestigious profession in the contemporary society. The pre-service teachers are aware that, as Kat phrases it, “In the eyes of the public, because of the media, this profession is rarely seen as honorable and admirable.” All four participants understand that teachers are often held responsible for disgraces and failures in society as they are “seen as the scapegoats for society’s problems, instead of society’s solution.” “Who else is going to do it if no one thinks it is important?” questions Kat, and the answer is
obvious for all of them: Kat, Harry, Scout, and Kay are determined to commit to teaching, like
many others from their cohort, and hope they may bring some positive changes into its
perception by society. Expressing the thought echoed by all four participants, Kat defines
teaching as “a profession of dedicated, passionate, caring individuals that strive for a better world
for each of their kids.”

Teaching as a Process. The pre-service teachers also think about teaching as a complex
process with multiple aspects to be taken into consideration. First, the study participants believe
that “teaching has surpassed its basic definition: passing knowledge from one source to another,”
proclaims Kay. The more contemporary definition, according to Scout, should include
“providing tools that allow students to value knowledge and understand concepts, to construct
their own ideas about the world they live in, and to realize their role in society.” Agreeing with
her, Kay supplements the definition highlighting that students also “need these tools to be
successful” in the society. All four participants are confident that teaching today seeks from
students “a deeper understanding of any subject in order to be successful in it and in their futures
in general.” Kay fears that kind of understanding may be in danger because of “the push for
testing and assessments” as it requires routine memorization of certain content knowledge so that
students can “reproduce it on a standardized test.” Instead, asserts Scout, “teaching occurs when
students begin to grasp ideas and concepts as well as questions of how and why things work the
way they do.”

Furthering this thought, Scout identifies teaching as “a two-way street,” where “teaching
and learning are happening side by side.” Similar to Harry, who is assured that “teaching is
learning new concepts, learning how to better interact with people, and learning how to be better
in what they do” and “being open to change and a dynamic environment every day,” Scout

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believes that teaching “is learning from your students and challenging them, making them think about what they believe in and why they believe in that, and why it matters.”

All four participants understand that effective teaching requires much time and effort from teachers. As Kay labels it, “teaching is a non-stop activity.” They know that teaching is not over after the last bell for the day rings at school because there are still “papers to grade, plans to develop, and materials to prepare for the next day.” Furthermore, “teaching takes a lot of planning,” adds Harry, sharing his progress with developing of the teaching unit for Education course and pointing out how much time it takes.

Kay develops her definition of teaching that encompasses Scout and Kat’s thoughts and ideas:

Equipping students with critical thinking skills applicable to any situation, providing tools to becoming effective communicators, and exposing students to worlds and characters some will probably never encounter; thereby, broadening their experiences and helping them learn to empathize with people different from them.

To extend this definition, Kay offers an additional aspect of teaching – it is “believing in students and expecting success from them.” She learned from her observations that “students could be challenged more.” Advancing this angle of teaching, Kat assures that being “a constant in the classroom and a support for the kids” is important, but it is not enough because teachers should be “pushing them beyond their comfort zone to think critically about the world.” Observing teachers who had “high expectations for all of their classes regardless of their classification, i.e. honors, regular ed., or special ed.,” the pre-service teachers saw “students rising to the occasion.”

Among other imperative sides of teaching is connecting to students’ lives, “to what they learn, read, or think about in the classroom,” highlights Kat, and the other three participants join her as they realize the significance of two main partakers in teaching—students and teachers. In
addition to the discussed aspects of teaching, Kat’s field experiences taught her that teaching is “about flexibility and reflection.” Teaching with her second host teacher, Kat was able to experience both, as she and her host reflected on the lessons they taught providing each other with feedback and suggestions, which caused flexibility “in action,” when they adjusted their teaching for the next group of students and had “to move away from the lesson plan.” Although Kay, Harry, and Scout did not particularly talk about flexibility and reflection while discussing teaching, they addressed it when discussing diversity in the classrooms and their host teachers.

Metaphors of Teaching. Scout and Harry introduce metaphors that help them understand teaching. Scout, for example, develops a metaphor of teaching as an art-making process in which students are artists, and teachers are providers of paints and brushes that are tools for painting: “In order to create art, students must take the tools given to them and apply it to their canvas. The point of teaching is not to end up with a homogenized group of paintings.” Unfortunately, regrets Scout, she saw teachers “who provide their students with color-by-the-number kits, leaving no room for choice or individuality” and expect “all students to think and perform exactly the same.” Conversely to this practice, she also detected teachers who “realize each student is different; therefore, they provide an array of mediums and tools that promote comprehension, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation.”

Scout’s metaphor of teaching has turned into a sincere belief that teaching “is not a paint-by-numbers game, but instead, it is an opportunity to interact with many different artists who all bring something unique to the table.” She is certain that “with hard work and the right tools, any and all students can create their own masterpieces.”

Though Harry’s two metaphoric visions of teaching draw different images from Scout’s, his metaphors share commonalities with her painting metaphor about challenges in teaching.
The first one is “kind of magical,” as he explains. He associates good teaching with a teacher who is holding the students in a trance and not letting them out until the bell rings.” For Harry, a teacher is “a special person,” like one of his favorite teachers in high school.

Harry’s second metaphor compares teaching to climbing a mountain with “falling rocks, endless fogs, and scary sounds” on the way up. It is easy to get scared and give in, he continues; “however, if you get to the top and win, the feeling is like no other.” All the pain, fears, and downfalls are worth it. Harry comes to a conclusion that a successful teacher can “get through to a student must be the best feeling in the world, like climbing up to the peak of an intimidating mountain.”

In summary, the participants understand teaching as both a profession and a process. They notice that as a profession, teaching is neither prestigious, nor respectable in the society; nevertheless, they consider it the most important profession because it is responsible for raising “the next generations of the American citizens.” Despite negative public opinion, Kay, Kat, Harry, and Scout made their commitment to teaching and hope to bring a change to its status by making a difference in students’ lives through daily small steps. The pre-service teachers believe that teaching is a complicated process with multiplicity of sides and angles that surpasses its definition as transmitting knowledge. Teaching in a contemporary world is discovering knowledge together with students, who are not passive recipients but active constructors.

Furthermore, teaching is equipping students with tools and skills necessary for explorations and discoveries, learning with students, being able to put time and effort into planning, developing lessons that are relevant to students’ lives, and being reflective and ready to adjust teaching to a particular group of students. The metaphors developed by Harry and Scout confirm that teaching is not easy, but if they can provide students with the “right set of tools” and
perseverance, it is rewarding. Since “teaching is a very humane occupation,” the pre-service teachers agree that talking about teaching “is impossible without talking about teacher qualities.” That is why in the following section, they discuss the qualities of successful teachers.

An Image of a Successful Teacher

Teaching and teachers are integral terms for the participants of the study; therefore, they speak about the qualities that make teachers successful in the classrooms when discussing effective teaching. While characterizing teachers, the participants highlight their professional and personal qualities. To the participants, a teacher’s professional qualities “just have to be present” without a doubt; these are non-negotiable qualities. At the same time, teacher’s personal characteristics are exceedingly accentuated in discussions.

Professional Qualities. All four participants agree that being knowledgeable is a quality of a successful teacher. Kay considers that “English teachers need to be well-read, especially true for high school teachers who will have to expose their students to both canon novels and more contemporary texts.” Joining Kay, Kat suggests that if a teacher “feels insecure about something in the content,” then that teacher should “go back and learn more about it.” Realizing that “knowledgeable” does not mean someone who is an absolute expert in the subject or “all-knowing,” the pre-service teachers admit that being open to learning with students is a way for teachers to grow professionally. Kat adds, “It is okay to admit that you don’t know something, but it is not okay to remain ignorant about things your students and you come across in the process of learning.” In Harry’s opinion, “good teachers understand that they will not always have the answers to every question a student asks.” Along with Kay, he believes that teachers “constantly learn with students and must be open to change and diversity of views.”
Next on Kay’s and Harry’s list is knowledge associated with standards and educational policies of the school, district, and state. They both think understanding these issues will permit them to effectively create a curriculum and justify their choices for teaching English. Harry is convinced that learning “about all mandates and standards” and using this knowledge is a way “to avoid some restrictions and enrich my lessons with book choices and other resources.”

According to the pre-service teachers, knowing the students they teach is among the most important qualities of successful teachers. That means “a successful teacher needs to know … what their background is like, whether they have resources, what their learning styles, abilities, and their challenges are,” explains Kay. Harry, Scout, and Kat agree, emphasizing that this knowledge will beneficially affect students because “teachers will be acting in the best interest of each student.” Scout considers “understanding differences in students’ learning styles and their levels of learning abilities” to be “a great skill,” every teacher should possess.

The participants believe that the ability to “assess students in a formal or informal way” is closely connected to the previous quality. The right kind of assessment helps in identifying “where they are and where they need to be,” points out Scout, and Kay enhances, “and teachers should have a general idea about how to get them there.” Knowing students, their differing learning capabilities, and assessing their present level, successful teachers develop teaching units and lesson plans, create activities and assessments that can “take a group of students… move them up the ladder … to higher level thinking,” formulates Scout.

Advancing these ideas, Kat and Scout highlight the essential role of a teacher in today’s society announcing that successful teachers do not “just transmit ideas to the students,” instead they allow the students “to come up with their own ideas” while growing and learning. The same thought echoes in Kay’s testimonial that teachers and students should construct knowledge
together. Thus, the “teacher is not a transmitter of knowledge,” the participants believe, “but a facilitator and a guide.” Moreover, Scout asserted, “good teachers encourage students how to ask and how to find answers to their own questions.”

Harry and Kay introduce another quality of an effective teacher. In their opinion, it is “being confident in own teaching style.” Harry tells a story of his high school teacher who just began her teacher career, but it seemed that she had been teaching for years. He hopes to be “a teacher like that, a teacher who seems to be teaching for ten years at least during the first days of teaching.” Kay has a slightly different view on confidence, arguing that many teachers teach the same texts, “but not in the same way.” For her, it doesn’t mean “that some of them are good teachers or some of them are bad. It simply means they are different.” She further explains that each of them has own style, own way of teaching that “works for them,” and they are confident in knowing “what they are doing.”

Furthermore, a successful teacher creates unit plans and daily lesson plans that not only teach students what they need to learn, but also, as Kat adds to discussion, “teach it in the way they will enjoy learning and respond to that lesson better.” All pre-service teachers in this study agree that teaching and learning does not have to be boring; it can be enjoyable if teachers choose “topics and books that are relevant to students and their lives.” Harry, Kay, and Kat experienced how making teaching relevant to students enhances students’ positive response. Kay observed how her host teacher explained the conflict between Julius Caesar and Brutus comparing it to the conflict between Tupac and Biggie to whom students could relate. Teaching an archetypal hero, Kat decided to build a discussion around Batman and Superman, while Harry introduced a complex concept of transcendentalism connecting it to a contemporary film.
Creativity and innovation are two qualities that are in between professional and personal qualities, in the pre-service teachers’ opinion. In order to be effective in the classroom, teachers need to search for new strategies and approaches, to try new things, to engage technology, and develop activities that will “spark students’ interest” and “keep them engrossed” in the lesson. Promoting this point, Kay suggests, “Successful teachers work well with others.” Scout and Kat explain that “they collaborate with their colleagues and team members” in order to share ideas and learn from one another.

**Personal Qualities.** The preservice teachers believe that a successful teacher has multiple characteristics that reveal his or her personality. An image of a successful teacher for them is a combination of characteristics they observed during their own schooling and host teachers at schools of placement. For Kat, for example, a successful teacher “has a balanced mixture of being kind, loving, and supportive, but also tough and demanding.” Similar to her, Scout and Kay define this balance as “tough love.”

All four participants believe that the most vital teacher’s personal quality is caring about students. They understand how important it is for students to know that someone outside of family has “a genuine care about their students,” as Kay claims. Taking it further, Scout clarifies, “not only care about their learning, but they also care about students’ wellbeing.” It is care that, in Kat’s opinion, is “beyond any monetary compensation” and does not bring immediate rewards, according to Harry, except for rare occasions “when a student makes it to where no one else, including this student, believed he would.” Kat summarizes the thoughts of her college mates declaring that it is care “that makes a complete difference in a child’s life.”

Along with care, successful teachers believe that “every student has the capacity to learn, think, and grow,” asserts Harry, and Kat is certain that believing creates “a great motivator and
support” for students. Furthermore, Kay ties believing in students to having high expectations for all students and suggests that teachers should “expect a lot from our students, believe in them and their capacity to meet our expectations.” Believing helped Kat “face her own hurdles in life” and enabled Scout “to see potential in every child” who she tutored through the Dream Program.

Humility and modesty are two more qualities that distinguish successful teachers according to the participants. Kat highlights that being humble allows a teacher place a student at the same level and “listen to that person and place his or her interests above own.” In Kay’s opinion teachers have to be “humble enough to respect your students and treat them on a level that they deserve to be treated.” Kat assures that teachers have to remember they were students at some point too, and they had some difficulties learning different skills. She points out that “they also had troubles with writing, for example.” It is there job to teach students and to “bring them up the ladder,” suggests Scout.

There are many other personal characteristics that pre-service teachers attribute to a successful teacher, such as: honesty, compassion, dedication, being fair, sensitive, and understanding, loving, nurturing, and able “to create a safe home for students within the school’s walls.”

In summary, the collective image of a successful teacher can be depicted as a combination of several definitions provided by the preservice teachers:

An image of a successful teacher is a snapshot of a person who evaluates where each student is, understands where each student needs to be, and uses every tool he/she has to get students there. It is a teacher who is not color blind, but color conscious. It is a teacher who understands the power she or he has in the classroom and does not abuse this power but instead uses it to empower students and equip them with knowledge and education. Successful teachers teach students, not subjects. (Scout)

A teacher is more than just someone who teaches you about English, Math, History, or Science. A successful teacher teaches you about life, makes you aware of the world around you, and provokes you to be more than you ever thought you could be. A
successful teacher’s reach extends way past the classroom, beyond all traditional boundaries, and into the future of a child. (Kat)

Good teachers enjoy teaching. They love what they do, and that is why they are most likely to succeed. They are loving, caring, generous, and, at the same time, fair, decisive, determined, and consistent. They believe in students and set high expectations for all of their students. They put in the extra time and effort that goes along with having a thriving classroom environment and thriving students. (Kay)

A successful teacher believes that every student has the capacity to learn, think, and grow. Good teachers think everyone deserves an equal education and will go beyond his or her means to make sure they reach their students. They put in a lot of work and don’t expect the world to be materially rewarding. The only reward may be just knowing that the student a teacher pushed and who didn’t think he’ll make it finally makes it, and it is worthy to do over and over again. (Harry)

The participants have a firm belief that teachers who invest personal time, energy, belief, and care for every student are those who make differences in students’ lives. As Scout enunciates, “teachers get out what they get in, and students will do the same.”

Building Relationships with Students

In their understanding of teaching, the pre-service teachers come to an agreement in the belief that students “should be priority number one for teachers.” That is why Kat and Kay are firmly convinced that teachers should create “a healthy classroom environment” since it will “affect their [students’ and a teacher’s] work in class, their attitude, and progress.” Further, Kat and Harry are concerned with providing a “safe home,” as Kat names it, and Harry adds that teachers should realize that “some students may not have it safe even in their own homes.” Scout and Kay, in their turn, assert that a healthy classroom “starts with building trust” and has to be a place where “they can come to a teacher with anything, and they will not be punished for what they say or think.” Extending the thoughts about a safe home, Kay raises the question of a physical space, a classroom itself, as a vital attribute of the healthy environment and is certain that teachers should think carefully how they want to set up their class spaces to make students feel welcomed and comfortable.
Building relationships founded on trust in the classroom “is a hard work,” understands Kay, adding that building trust is not “a separate process” from teaching. The rest of the participants support that it is a part of teaching and learning complex processes which take time and effort. It may begin with a tiny step of learning students’ name, regard Kat and Scout. Even this small teacher’s move to recognize individuals among the group of students “is greatly appreciated by students.”

For Kay, building relationships with each group of students should begin from the first day of school each year when the teacher clearly “outlines expectations and lets kids know that they can’t get away with stuff; it won’t work in her class.” Kat calls this “setting boundaries” for students. They need to know what is appropriate and “understand the requirements, rules, and procedures for the class.” Setting up the rules and procedures can be daunting, but Scout accepts that this is necessary “for creating a work zone” in the classroom. Kay notes the importance of establishing “not only the things the students required to do,” but also the things they may and are encouraged to do.

Having “a good rapport” with students is essential according to Kat, but if these good relationships “prevent from their learning, then … it is a problem.” She observed a teacher who had friendly relationships with his students, “but there was not much learning going on,” she reports. When students “get too close to a teacher on a personal level, they feel like they … can just do whatever.” Scout joins her peer, remembering that one of her host teachers was eager to be friendly and “talk about the gossips and what’s going on in the school,” she adds, noticing that “this is not even ethical or appropriate for teachers to do.” Besides, being friendly without recognizing “each individual student in the classroom didn’t work well for her,” concludes Scout.
All participants think that knowing the students is another great key to a thriving classroom. Without knowing students’ unique qualities and what “each can bring to a table,” the teacher’s efforts may not succeed. Observing students in the classrooms for three semesters, Scout learned that “teaching is more about students,” and teachers are not “teaching just English, Math, or Science; they are teaching students, individuals with unique personalities.” Advancing this theme, Harry shares his valuable lesson of how different students within one group create “a certain dynamic within this group.” He realizes that tracking systems and labels according students’ performance also “affect students’ interactions and relationships.” He suggests teachers should recognize these factors when building relationships with the students and respect all the students without a regard to a label. According to Scout, reflecting on the past two years taught her a lot about students too. She learned to respect them and their roles in the classroom. She also learned to see them as “persons and individuals, not so much a whole group anymore.” All four participants appreciate “how different they [students] can be” and recognize that “they need different things.” The most important discovery for Scout is that “students all have a voice, and they want to be heard,” and Kay is determined in her future teaching to “let her students to have their “say so” in the classroom.”

One more thought that Kay and Scout share is about giving students the credit they deserve. Scout sincerely believes that “students can read teachers a lot better than teachers think.” Kay articulates the same saying, “Students understand so much more than we give them credit for.” Thus, they both are convinced that if “teachers … say one thing, but act differently,” they will not “get away with it.” In the end, it will “hurt trust and relationships,” assures Kay.

The ultimate triumph of a teacher in the classroom comes from caring about students – this idea is present throughout all the writings and interviews of the pre-service teachers.
According to Harry, caring teachers reach out to “even … most troublesome kids,” and “they [teachers] see the response from these students,” comments Kat. The students want “someone to care about them,” and Harry develops this theme by saying, “they want you to be interested in the things they have to say.” When students know their teacher believes in them, “they want to give it a shot,” notices Kat. To prove the point that caring and believing in student is crucial for them, Kay reminds her peers about “a phenomenon we’ve all either experienced or heard… the-teacher-who-changed-my-life story.” And Kat reminds us that this is her life story.

In summary, throughout three field experience cycles, the pre-service teachers learned a great deal about students and consider them a priority in the teaching and learning processes. They realize that building a healthy classroom environment is one of the teacher’s primary responsibilities. Successful teachers build relationships on trust and accept students’ individualities, consider the participants. As Scout accentuates, and Harry, Kay and Kat approve, the relationships with students are straightforward, “they see respect, care, or generosity, and they pay back with respect, care, or generosity.”

Research Question 3

The third research question was as follows: What concerns about teaching do pre-service teachers have as they undergo field experiences? Throughout individual and focus group interviews, written think pieces, field experience logs, and discussions in the English and Education courses, the pre-service teachers voiced their concerns about teaching. As noted in the response to the previous question, the analysis of data collected from the participants of the study revealed a thematic family category Understanding Teaching with four themes: (1) defining teaching; (2) an image of a successful teacher; (3) building relationships with students, and (4) concerns about teaching (Table 2, p. 99, this dissertation).
Whereas only the last theme in this category directly provides response to the third research question, the concerns of the participants about teaching are noticeably present throughout other themes in the *Understanding Teaching* thematic family grouping as well as throughout the two other thematic family categories *Field Experiences and Their Organization* and *Becoming a Teacher*. The findings and discussion to the third research question are based on the theme *Concerns about Teaching* and are supported by the evidence from other themes and categories. The data analysis showed that the pre-service teachers divide their concerns into two groups. The first group contains concerns about teaching that pre-service teachers observe outside the classroom, and the second group deals with concerns inside the classroom.

**Concerns about Teaching outside the Classroom**

Among the four participants of the study, Kat and Harry voiced concerns about teaching that do not belong “inside the classroom.” These are the concerns that “are not about interacting with kids and teaching them.” Harry perceives them on a higher level of distress “about education.” Harry is saddened about “regulations and mandates currently taking place in the state,” and Kat is troubled with the effects of these mandates on districts and schools. Her third field experience cycle was at the school where the teacher had “to follow district’s mandated curriculum,” and the students had to take four substantial assessments within a month period. Kat explains her alarm, “First, there is no time to teach because of all the testing that’s going on,” but most importantly, “I can’t be the teacher I always wanted to be.” She dreamed of using all the ideas she is been nursing in her head for years, and now, when she is so close to becoming a teacher, she is afraid that she “will be watched at all times to make sure that I follow the mandates.” She sees how “the teachers’ understanding of the Common Core sprouts from the
school district’s understanding and interpretation of these standards.” And this is what bothers Kat because as a teacher she will have to comply with the district’s decisions and choices.

Harry’s worries are also about taking “away from a teacher’s ability to freely teach in his or her classroom.” He is particularly disturbed by the turn to a national curriculum and standardized testing. He ponders, “What are students gleaning from taking standardized tests?” and whether the teachers’ task now is to prepare “a nation of test takers.” Agreeing with Kat, Harry realizes that teaching practices under these conditions are not in favor of creativity and innovation since every teacher is “evaluated based on the students’ performance.” To him, the issues of testing, mandates, and regulations are those in which “teachers do not have much control or say so.”

Although Scout and Kay did not directly address the same concerns, they too shared stories about the effect of the Common Core in the classrooms. For example, Kay’s third host had to interrupt her teaching unit to administer the district test to her junior class, and Scout also reports that her teacher had to stop what she was teaching at the moment and move to another teaching unit that was developed and mandated by the district school system.

Harry raises another concern that deals with financial provisions to public schools, especially within the local parish system. He believes that “careful and considerate investment in education” could “level the playing field” and help all schools “reach a level that fosters and cares for all students.” Even within the same district school system, he notices, there are some disadvantages to students in the regular classes. Their resources and learning opportunities are inadequate and unequal compared to the students in a Magnet school or students in gifted and AP classes. Harry considers “monetary issues as a big factor in public education,” and insists that the state has to work on improving “resource distribution and allotment.”
Concerns about Teaching within the Classroom

Whereas Scout and Kat are not too anxious about “actually teaching in the classroom,” Kay and Harry still seem to have fears about their first experiences as teachers. Both Kat and Scout previously worked with children, mostly tutoring, and consequently are not worried about interacting with children and teaching. Besides, claims Kat, “it comes very naturally to me,” and “I am good on my feet,” meaning she can improvise if necessary. Similarly, Scout had lots of practice working with children in addition to her field work in Math program and throughout the elementary reading course where she has “been planning and teaching every week.”

Appreciating their previous teaching opportunities, Kat and Scout sense “a lot of worries” from their peers in the cohort who had fewer opportunities to practice, and recognize that “these worries could be alleviated earlier if we were forced to teach earlier.” Moreover, thinks Kat, some of these fears come from not knowing “what exactly it will be like in the classroom, when we are in charge.” She is optimistic and relies on old wisdom – taking “a step at a time,” and learning as she enters the field and faces certain challenges.

Kay and Harry share a common fear of being able to handle the teacher’s workload. They both understand how much work and effort teachers invest daily if they want to bring a change into the students’ attitude and be the effective teachers like they envision themselves. They both know that teaching is a profession that doesn’t have “limited work hours,” and long after students have gone home, “teachers grade papers, plan lessons, and prepare handouts and projects.” While Harry considers his future job very important, he is concerned about being able to find a healthy balance and how “to juggle work and personal life.” Kay does not even think about her personal life yet; daily planning and preparations bother her the most. When she was planning her lesson to teach during her field experience, she comments, she spent days thinking...
the lesson through, planning it, and preparing the handouts and materials. Doing this on a daily basis seems overwhelming for her.

For Scout, the biggest dare is “meeting the needs of all students.” Through field experiences, she has learned that teachers retain in mind “so many little things within the classroom – learning abilities of students, personal life conditions, availability of recourses, differentiated assessments, and other things.” She also witnessed some teachers who either ignored or seemed not to care about these issues. Scout is anxious that being a newcomer in the profession she may “let some students just fall under radar and be dismissed.” Although all participants understand the diversity of student populations within a school and any group of students, they did not express the similar concern as how to teach them. Perhaps they just do not think about this aspect until they experience a variety of learners as the teachers.

One of the other worries the participants have is making teaching English “relevant to kids’ lives, so they can connect with the things they read and learn in class.” Harry, Kay, and Kat also realize that successful teaching depends on what and how they teach in the classroom, and “if teachers don’t connect with the students,” learning may not happen or they struggle with reluctant learners. Along with relevancy, the participants single out the fear of “reaching those students who have given up on learning or just don’t want to do anything,” as Kay expresses it, and Scout questions, “How to make students who hate English understand why it is important to learn and how to break that wall of hatred?” Harry joins his peers with a similar query, “What if I get a student or a group of students who just don’t want to do anything? Most pre-service teachers wrestle with questions like this. Scout and Kat suggest that worries similar to that will start dissolving as they begin teaching and gain more experience. Practice will teach them how to make better choices in favor of students, believes Kat.
Experience shows that practice will help, agrees Kay. When she first went into the field, she was placed in the classroom with predominantly African-American students and a White teacher. Kay’s background was different from those students’, so she “didn’t know how to deal with that.” Fortunately for Kay, her second host teacher provided valuable advice to “embrace the whiteness, and use it to my advantage when I can.” Now, she feels comfortable in the classroom where she might be the only one who is different.

Unlike most of her peers, Kat is not anxious about teaching and interacting with kids. She only becomes a little nervous if she is not prepared, but considers it “an easy fix – I just need to learn more about the subject or to read the book I haven’t read.” Harry also experienced some anxieties about being unprepared for the lesson his teacher offered him to teach. He was so nervous and made some errors that were rolling up like a snowball. That situation taught him a lesson he will keep in mind and plan ahead, “Even if a lesson plan is only a script, I have to have it and know what I am doing.”

Harry and Kay also have some specific concerns about teaching skills and content. As Harry confesses that he is worried about teaching grammar because it “has never been my strong suit,” Kay wonders how to explain to her students that “what I think doesn’t matter; I am not there to provide answers to the questions for them…” She wants her students to understand they are the ones who have to discover those answers. Another question for Kay is how to teach her students to analyze instead of summarize. Throughout the practice she saw her host teachers struggling with the same issue, and she is thinking how she can find “a working strategy” for that. Harry shares Kay’s concern about being creative and “come up with activities to engage all of my students.” They both claim to have fun ideas sometimes, but do not think of themselves as creative.
In summary, the pre-service teachers have a number of alarming distresses about teaching. Some of these worries have to do with educational policies and reforms, and particularly with the mandates and regulations imposed on teachers by the state, school district, and school administration. The other group of concerns is rooted in the classroom practices dealing with various issues including concerns about presenting content, teaching strategies to motivate students, choosing texts that matter, and meeting needs of various learners within one group of students. Throughout their field experiences, Kay, Kat, Scout, and Harry have learned from their host teachers and experienced some situations in the classroom first hand. They have developed strategies to deal with worries and fears. For example, Kat records hers in a “little notebook,” and when she hears an advice or learns how to overcome a certain fear, she writes down “the solution” too, and that “makes me feel better,” she admits. As the participants approach student teaching, they are convinced that the more they practice in the field, the more prepared they will become “to face the challenges as they arise.” The pre-service teachers suggest that talking to peers, sharing ideas and challenges with them, getting advice from experienced teachers, and reflecting on teaching practices will help minimize anxieties and concerns about teaching.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question was: Do pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shift from the beginning to the end of their field experiences? If yes, how do they shift and what are some factors causing change? By posing this question, I was interested in finding whether the pre-service teachers alter their understanding of teaching from the beginning of their first field experience to the end of the third field experience cycle. I was also seeking to discover the reasons for the alterations. The coding and analysis of the data sources have resulted in a
thematic family category *Becoming a Teacher*. There are three themes in this category: (1) learning about self; (2) thinking about teaching and own classroom; and (3) changes in understanding teaching (Table 2, p. 99, this dissertation).

The findings and discussion of this research question are presented below and organized around the three themes outlined earlier. As previously emphasized, the two other family groupings *Field Experiences and Their Organization* and *Understanding Teaching* provided information and evidence to support the findings. While undergoing field experiences, observing host teachers, interacting with students, and participating in teaching activities, the pre-service teachers were moving from being observers to becoming teachers. As they experienced concrete teaching and learning situations in the classrooms, their ideas and perceptions of teaching were transforming too.

**Learning about Self**

Undergoing field experiences during the three consecutive semesters, the pre-service teachers’ first obstacle was their undetermined position in the classroom. As Kay phrases the situation with the others’ support, “I didn’t feel like a student, but I did not feel like a teacher yet.” Moreover, neither Kay, nor Kat were introduced to the students whose classes they observed during their first field experience. Harry was not acknowledged by his first and second host teachers, and Scout faced the same situation during her second field experience cycle. This position of “being a stranger in the back” complicated their identity development. As Kat reflects on her first field experience, she notices that “for students we are not teachers, so we can’t really do anything,” and the host teachers “look at us as at students most of the time.” Being ignored or not acknowledged in the classroom was painful for Harry and Scout because they did not feel like they “had a role in the classroom.” Scout comments that “simply being a
helper meant that I had a purpose in the classroom,” and without the purpose or role, “it was hard just to sit and observe,” Harry explains.

This liminal position affected Kay and Harry the most since they are a little shy by nature. They also had trouble to negotiate their space in the classroom with their first host teachers pointing out that they did not “really know how to ask the teacher.” Kay still thinks that she is “not old enough to be a teacher yet,” she remarks adding that even during her third semester in the field, she still felt “like I am in between.” She appears to be slightly intimidated by the high school students’ age and their physical appearance because she has a small physical stature although during our last conversation she claimed that she didn’t “actually feel as a kid as much as thought I was going to anymore.” Kay, Scout, and Harry felt their third field experience compensated for the previous ones as they became more comfortable in the classroom and took some actions towards advancing their role in the classroom. Scout invested more of her energy and interest when interacting with students, and Kay introduced herself to students, assisted them in group work, and taught lessons, while Harry participated in class discussions and taught a lesson too. The study participants claim that the more engaged they were in the classroom practices, the less they felt the awkwardness of their position.

Among other self-discoveries, Kat and Kay highlight that they both learned how to be reflective and adjust to the classroom situation. They both experienced teaching moments requiring them to teach the same lesson back to back to two different groups of students. The ability to reflect on the lesson taught and quickly adjust by considering their own shortcomings helped see both the rewards of “a better lesson and better students’ response.” Kay defines her teaching lesson on Romanticism to the 11th graders as “a good study of adjustment.” Not only did she have to think about how to explain the Romanticism movement and its main concepts
better, but she also had to deal with technology problems – the school network was down. Kay could not project her PowerPoint presentation and, as a result, she had to rely only on the handout she printed at home.

Since Kat found out that she is “really reflective,” she came to a conclusion that she needs to work on time management to set aside the time for reflection “to know that reflection should come after class, not as interruption to the lesson.” Harry and Kay also learned that they need to be more organized in order to be prepared for lessons. Besides, Harry realized that he is not very good at “last-minute arrangements,” so preparation is essential for him. Kay’s problem, she discloses, is her desire to do so much within a class period that may take students “up to a week to complete.” Despite being “very good on my feet” and ready to improvise, Kat discovered that “really likes to be prepared,” and that is why she considers planning an important part of teacher’s life.

Scout acknowledges learning several important lessons about herself throughout the field experiences. One of them is her fondness with middle school students. While many cohort members do not want to teach middle school, Scout sees it as a possibility thanks “to my excellent first host teacher,” she notes. While observing teachers and planning her first conceptual teaching unit, Scout realized that she doesn’t want to be “a busy-work teacher;” instead, she wants to be a teacher “who makes learning meaningful’ and thinks through every activity and every assignment with an end goal in mind. Furthermore, she discovered having “a deep desire to teach all students and …see a potential in all students, even those who’d been pushed through and don’t believe in themselves.” Finally, Scout claims to be very critical of teachers she observed, “but this also spills on me,” she says. “I want to be the best, and I want my students to be the best. And that’s a lot of pressure,” she admits.
Unlike Scout, Kay states that field experiences convinced her once again that she doesn’t “have patience to teach middle school.” She remembers resenting middle school when she was a teenager, “so maybe it’s just personal.” Kay says this as though teaching in the middle school could resurface all her bad memories.

Kat was the only one that openly acknowledged that through the field experiences she realized how much she likes having a support system at school. She decided that whenever she will go for a job interview she will find out whether it “is a place that provides a mentor teacher in my area or at least someone I can go check in with...” She confesses how greatly she enjoyed her second host teacher’s feedback, support, and reassurance “that are so needed for beginning teachers.”

One more lesson all participants learned through experiences in the field is to “respect someone else’s territory.” They understood that their presence in the classroom was temporary and tried to avoid imposing on the teachers so as “not to step on people’s toes,” as Kat puts it, and “not to be too bothersome for a teacher,” asserts Scout.

In conclusion, the field experiences taught the pre-service teachers many lessons about themselves. One of the painful lessons was associated with identity struggles as they realized their “awkward position in between” when they are “not the students anymore, but not the teachers yet” in the classrooms. Other lessons include being reflective and able to adjust teaching to a concrete group of students, being prepared and think through activities and assessments, and working on time management and organization skills. In addition, the importance of having a support system at school and respecting the others’ territory are yet other discoveries participants made during their field experiences. The participants also admitted that they did not think about learning so much about themselves until they were asked about it. Scout is perhaps the one who
clearly articulates this phenomenon, while the others join in agreement: “I realize how I have changed, and my beliefs have changed too. So I was learning a lot even without realizing it!”

**Thinking about Teaching and Their Own Classrooms**

**Thoughts about Teaching.** Observing the host teachers and classroom practices, the pre-service teachers were thinking about their own teaching “all the time,” admits Kat. The three different school settings in addition to the English and Education methods courses, remarks Scout, refined her understanding of “exactly what kind of teacher I want to be.” Along with Kat and Scout, Kay appreciates the TPP and field experiences for “the idea of what kind of teacher I want to be … which is shaping firmly in my head.” Harry feels the same way, confessing that “despite all negativity about the profession,” teaching is something he “really enjoy[s] doing,” and he has “that image in my head of what I want to be, how to behave…”

Kat supports Harry’s deep respect for the profession and comments, “[N]egativities about the profession come from people who don’t care about education and our children.” She is resolute in her desire to use her “teacher voice to fight for every child” and “be a teacher each child deserves.” Joining Kat’s idea to fight for each child, Scout is determined to become a teacher with “passion and patience to see every child in my classroom as a success story.” She has learned and understands the significance of “knowing students and their needs, and treating each one of them as an individual.” In his turn, observing some teachers “who don’t really care” about students and their needs, Harry strives to be a person in the classroom “who cares about what he is doing every day.” While in the field, he learned that not every student has a nice home or both parents: “I kind of want to be …like a third parent, or even one parent to some kids.” For Kay, caring is believing in students and their capabilities: “I have learned from my
observations to expect success from the students, and it is a lesson I will keep with me.” She wants her “students to know that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to.”

From these uplifting ideas about what kind of teachers they want to be, the participants turn to some concrete teaching responsibilities. Developing their first teaching unit, for example, they all learned “how extremely time consuming” it was, and Scout emphasizes, “but also extremely worth it.” Harry, Kay, and Scout thought carefully about how they would organize reading activities, and what kind of assessments they will develop, and Kat was “trying to experiment with the idea of how to read a text in class.” They all observed different approaches to reading texts in classrooms, and came to the conclusion that they could try a variety of different approaches, “For example, every Monday, we are going to listen to the recording, and every Tuesday we are going to take turns reading aloud,” suggests Kat. Furthering the thoughts about reading, the participants want their classes to be “filled with discussions rather than just answering comprehension questions,” pondering the question of “how to organize this kind of discussion in which every student is involved?” They have seen their host teachers try; however, in most of the cases, it “would end up as a teacher-led discussion where after a couple of hesitant students’ responses, the teacher would just elaborate on her own thoughts.”

Another significant issue for the pre-service teachers is developing assessments. Kay claims that she learned “a lot from my host teachers,” including the things she “was not supposed to do.” Her understanding of assessment as “a random check” has changed after the Education methods course and field experiences where she observed inconsistencies between teaching and tests. “Teaching and assessments should go hand in hand,” she is now convinced, but “sometimes I saw that students after certain teaching did not succeed on assessments.” The same disconnect between teaching and test results was witnessed by Scout when grading for her
second host teacher, as well as Kat and Harry when observing teachers “who just give out worksheets every day.”

Talking about the atmosphere and rules in the classroom, the participants shared differing opinions. Scout and Kat are ready “to share power with students” as they want their classrooms “to be student led,” where they are exploring and “having fun while learning.” Kat stands somewhere in the middle with “having just a few rules and lots of procedures” to make learning time more efficient. Harry’s view of the classroom dynamic is slightly different. Though he plans “not to give them much power,” he also plans to “let them make some decisions.” He will let students to bring in ideas and have “open forums, like discussions of the things we read.”

**Visions of Their Own Classrooms.** Having their own classroom is a dream of the pre-service teachers. They all have their personal visions of a classroom as a space for learning. They share some attributes of the classrooms, and have a different image regarding it as a physical space.

Scout sees her future classroom, as “a free work zone” where the students always work together towards a common goal and at the same time they “grow and change as individuals.” Kat refers to hers as “a safe home,” and Kay and Harry consider theirs “a free place.” They all mean the same, the classroom is “a safe place where they [students] are allowed to try new things, fall, and try again,” describes Scout. Kay continues announcing her classroom to be a place where “they [students] are not afraid to talk and ask questions.”

While for Harry and Kay, a classroom is a more “organized space,” Kat and Scout envision theirs as a mixture of order and chaos, “a kind of like a mess, but it all works and all makes sense,” clarifies Kat. Scout explains her position, “I want learning to be constant and kind of chaotic. I feel like I can deal with chaos with lots of learning…,” and then a little “mess won’t
hurt anyone,” she smiles. Unlike Scout and Kat, Harry plans his classroom to be well organized, and for students to “know where to go if they need something, like if you need a pencil, you need to go to the shelf with boxes.”

Kay’s design goes further and provides more specifics about the desk set-up. Observing host teachers and from her own schooling, she does not “like desks in rows; it seems militarized;” instead, she will have “two sections of desks facing each other” for easy regrouping as needed, she explains. She also plans to place her desk in the back of the room agreeing with Harry, “a desk is a ‘no-no’ place to be at when you are teaching.” They both see themselves “always up and walking around, just being there for the students who need me.”

If Scout doesn’t provide the details of her classroom physical set-up, except that she will have a zone with working stations all over, Kat has spent a lot of time planning out her classroom. From her description, a classroom looks “like a Victorian library with books from wall to wall.” She also, like Kay and Harry, wants lots of posters all over and students’ work displayed. However, she adds a few “quirky things around” to make it more homelike and funny. For example, she wants “owls all over the place and some foxes” because for her these animals represent teaching. One thing that is a must in her classroom is an Inspiration Wall. It will be filled with sticky notes containing some inspirational quotes or phrases, and when any of the students has a bad day, they will find a note that can “help us get through it together,” explains Kat. She thinks having many random little things will make her class special.

To sum up, the pre-service teachers continue to shape their understanding of what kind of teachers they want to be in the classroom in order to be effective. This understanding alters as they move from one field experience cycle to another as well as from one methods course to the next one. Despite negativities about the teaching profession, they intend to be teachers who care...
about and believe in their students. They learn and experiment new approaches to teaching, trying to figure out the best strategies and activities understanding their direct connection to assessments and students’ progress. Furthermore, they realize the significance of a classroom as a space for learning and develop their visions of this space considering it a safe zone for learning, sharing, exploring, and making mistakes.

**Growth through Experience**

Two out of four participants – Kat and Harry – report that their understanding of teaching and the idea of a teacher “have not changed throughout field experiences.” Kat’s major argument to support this statement is the claim that she came to teaching “with that clear and idealistic picture of what I think the teacher was.” Her ideal of an effective teacher was grounded “on the previous teachers and my previous observations.” Similarly to Kat, Harry had a collective image of a teacher based on his own high school English teachers, and it doesn’t seem to him that he “changed a lot.” He still wants to be like his favorite teachers.

There appears to be a little contradiction in Harry and Kat’s beliefs though. Talking about development of the conceptual unit, she remarks, “I think my ideas of how to present things have changed because I was presented with more options, saw different strategies and activities.” She was “experimenting how to read a text in the classroom.” Furthermore, she acknowledges: “I learned a lot through my experiences and my college courses during these past two years.” Discussing the second field experience, Kat shared how she learned a lot about reflexivity, feedback, and flexibility. She also experienced team teaching for the first time. All these little lessons to which Kat refers reveal that she is growing and changing. Besides, she admits that “the more I think about teaching, the more complex it becomes to me, and the more complicated task I see ahead of me.”
Analogous to Kat, due to the field experiences and coursework, Harry realizes “that teaching is much more than I anticipated before.” He looks at his profession knowing that it is more than “lessons on reading and grammar; it is about life lessons.” His growth shows in understanding of “how much time and effort teachers are putting in something, like planning, for example; it always appeared not that significant.” Planning his first teaching unit, Harry reflects, “I spent so much time just thinking about the length of each activity or assignment I give to students.” Another profound lesson Harry learned throughout his coursework and field experiences is that he “will never be ready to answer every question students may ask me.” Observing students and their interactions with teachers and among themselves, Harry comes to the conclusion that he “will not look at the group of students like he used before” because now he is aware of “so many individualities in the classroom.” Field experiences, claims Harry, provided him with opportunities to see “how different teachers handled different groups of students.” As a teacher-to-be, Harry understands the importance of readiness “to face challenges;” he knows “that it’s going to happen—unpredictable situations and challenges.”

In contrast to Kat and Harry, Scout and Kay openly admit how much they “learned … about teaching, and still learning.” Further, though they acknowledge that tracing personal change and growth was not intentional, they also acknowledge that through writing think pieces, writing field experience logs, discussing field experiences in their methods courses, and answering interview questions, they “thought more about teaching and teaching philosophy.”

Kay’s “idea of a teacher and teaching will probably change daily,” she confesses. Additionally, she is convinced, “it is going to change drastically when I actually start teaching.” Furthermore, she recognizes that with more experience in the classroom, “it’ll probably change from year to year as I teach on my own.” For Kat, change and growth are constants that are
integral with teaching. She begins “seeing teaching as a more complex process where students
are playing a significant role in constructing knowledge,” and she has to be there to assist them
in their discoveries and to hear their voices.

Scout perhaps is the only one among her peers that gave more thought and reflection
about the profession she chose. As she shared in her story Scout divulged that she always wanted
to be a teacher; she was playing school since she was five. Her first “I am gonna be a teacher!”
was cheerful. She explains that her understanding of teaching was “arbitrary and grounded in the
happy moments” she experienced as a child. However, the more she learns about “what it takes
to be a good teacher, the more I learn how much time and effort it will take.” Scout is able to
recognize at this point “nuances and issues” to be taken in consideration within the classroom,
like “differentiation and meeting all your students’ needs, teaching to a range of various levels of
children at a time.” She appreciates the last fall semester for teaching her “so much about
practices of a teacher.” Reflecting on the gains, Scout still has some fears and is determined to
“become her best self.” “Coming out of field experiences, I see teaching as more complicated
with multiple aspects for a teacher to consider,” closes Scout.

To summarize, the pre-service teachers in the study have changed and revealed the signs
of professional growth. The knowledge and experience they gained during the two years in the
TPP coupled with the three consecutive field practice cycles allowed them to recognize the
complexities of teaching as well as understand their personal teaching philosophy. Although Kat
and Harry initially could not see evident change in their understanding of teaching, their
reflections and comments clearly evinced their changes. The participants attribute their
alterations in understanding teaching and its challenges to their coursework to some extent, but
mostly to their field experiences. The experiences in the field exposed them to different school
and classroom settings and provided opportunities to observe host teachers, their teaching styles, and interactions with students. Reflecting on their observations and personal participation allowed for the change, regardless of whether the change was noticeable and considerable or seemingly invisible and slight.

**Searching for Multiplicity of Voices**

When presenting the main participants of the study in Chapter Four, I employed Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia to demonstrate multiplicity of voices within a cohort of the English majors in the TPP. Here I attempt to search for multiple voices within an individual. For this purpose, I chose one episode from Kat and another from Harry’s stories. Then I created “I” poems using all sentences from the chosen episode that have “I” plus verb and part of the following phrase for easier interpretation. Appendix K provides the story episodes from both participants.

**Kat’s “I” Poem**

I am not really sure
I observed people once
I really don’t consider as teachers
I came into this with that clear and idealistic picture
I think the teacher was,
I wanted to be …
I have also realized
I kind of struggle with this
I saw she was not teaching,
I didn’t like that
I wanted a different type of teaching
I just see her as teacher
I would [not] prefer
I don’t enjoy [a lot of grammar]
I also learned
I have to get over
I am going to be in middle school

Above is Kat’s “I” poem, created from one of her stories. Analyzing this poem, I discovered a few distinct voices.
“I Evaluate” Voice

I observed people once
I really don’t consider as teachers
I saw she was not teaching,
I just see her as teacher
I would [not] prefer
I didn’t like that

This voice signals Kat’s ability to observe and assess what she saw in the field. It also tells about her understanding of the issue she evaluates. She observed one of her host teachers and saw this person’s teaching style. As a result of observation and evaluation, she came to the conclusion that the particular teacher was not the kind she would prefer nor is the teacher she wanted to be.

“I Believe” Voice

I came into this with that clear and idealistic picture
I think the teacher was
I wanted to be
I wanted a different type of teaching

An “I Believe” voice in Kat’s poem reveals her beliefs about teaching and teachers. She came into the teacher preparation program with clear ideas about what a teacher was. That is why she knows what kind of a teacher she wants to be and what she considers good teaching. This voice serves as a support of her evaluation voice. Having understanding of teaching and effective teachers, she is then able to evaluate.
“I Doubt” Voice

I am not really sure
I kind of struggle with this

An “I Doubt” voice is not significant in Kat’s poem, but it is present. She claims that she is not sure if her idea of a teacher has changed, but later discusses things that she learned through experiences. This voice can also hint on Kat’s growth through doubts, questioning, thinking and learning. Besides, the sentence “I kind of struggled with this” also could be attributed to her “I Learned” voice.

“I Learned” Voice

I have also realized
I kind of struggle with this
I also learned

This voice represents Kat’s learning and growth. Through her experiences, she learned that some teachers do not stand up to her image of an effective teacher. She observed a teacher who had some great teaching skills, like classroom management and building relationships with students. At the same time, that teacher did not actually teach; she was merely giving out worksheets. So Kat’s image of a teacher is idealistic, and she struggles with how to bring together seemingly contradicting teacher qualities. She is learning the process of questioning.

Harry’s “I” Poem

I’m not sure
I guess you have to adapt to different groups
I imagine myself to be
I may teach gifted, hyper gifted, average, and below average students
I guess I’ve learned
I don’t think I’ve learned much about myself
I first helped a student
I was very nervous
I didn’t want to say the wrong thing
I didn’t know the student
I was older, but I wasn’t a power figure for them
I learned that I need to get over my anxiety
I will make a mistake every now and then
I guess this is something I learned about myself

Harry’s “I” poem reveals at least two divergent voices: “I Am not Confident” and “I Learned.” These voices are interwoven within the same story; moreover, they are present within one sentence despite their contradictory nature.

“I Am not Confident” Voice

I’m not sure
I guess you have to adapt to different groups
I guess I’ve learned
I don’t think I’ve learned much about myself
I didn’t want to say the wrong thing
I was older, but I wasn’t a power figure for them.
I guess this is something

Harry’s “I Am not Confident” voice is prevailing in this poem. He does not sound assured about the things he does or learns. When he helped out a student, he was not sure how to handle it. He was afraid to say something wrong because he was not sure about his position in the classroom. It appears that his lack of confidence sprouts from shortage of experience and his indefinite identity status. Harry is still in between – not a teacher yet, but not a student already; and this undetermined position reveals itself in his voice.

“I Learned” Voice

(I guess) I’ve learned
(I don’t think) I’ve learned much about myself
I learned that I need to get over my anxiety

I learned that I will make a mistake every now and then

(I guess this is something) I learned about myself

Harry’s “I Learned” voice constantly clashes with his “I Am not Confident” voice. He doubts his own growth and learning. There might be several reasons causing these doubts. Identity and lack of experience in the field may cause lack of confidence; it can also be triggered by his innately shy personality. To me, it also seems that Harry does not reflect much; he does it only when he has to answer the question or complete an assignment. That is why he appears to be so undetermined about his growth.

The provided analysis of these two poems is neither definitive, nor complete. Moreover, my analysis is subjective – it is how I interpret the poems and voices I “heard.” It is reasonable to assume that different readers may “hear” different voices interpreting the poems the way they understand. The analysis of these poems is similar to the analysis of any text where the readers make sense and offer their personal interpretations. Admitting the surface level of interpretation of Kat’s and Harry’s poems, it is still necessary to note that even on a surface level one may verify Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia. The participants of this study are not the only people exhibiting multiple voices. We all have various voices “talking in our heads,” but the voices of the pre-service teachers are important for this study as they indicate how they make sense of their field experiences, think, learn, and grow on their path to teaching.

**Summary**

Driven by the research design and questions, this chapter’s goal was to merge the analysis and findings from all participants. The findings across the four cases were analyzed through thematic analysis with addressing time, place, and interaction where possible according
to the three-dimensional narrative methodology. The discussion of these findings was organized around the research questions employing the thematic categories and themes emerged from the analysis of data sources.

The first research question explored the perceptions that pre-service teachers’ form about the value of field experiences. The findings indicate that all four participants valued their field experiences regardless of negative moments they encountered in the field. They appreciated the coursework that prepared them for field practice, despite some inconsistencies and overlapping in the content of the courses. Being a part of a “community of learners” in a cohort was seen as an additional aspect that created a support system for each and every one of them within the program. While all of them experienced at least one disappointing field experience cycle, they still reported learning a great deal from each teacher they observed. Having an opportunity to observe diverse students allowed them to recognize not only racial and ethnic diversity in the classrooms, but the differences among students depending on their socio-economic status, tracking systems used in schools, various learning capabilities, special needs, and second language needs. Being able to “practice while in practice” was the most valuable benefit of field experiences. Throughout their field experiences, they observed and reflected on practices in the classroom and offered some constructive changes that could improve the quality of field experiences, and the TPP at the university in general.

The second research question was focused on pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching. The participants view teaching as a profession and a process. They realize the complicated position of the teaching profession as neither prestigious nor respectable in our contemporary society; however, they consider teaching the most important occupation responsible for raising “the next generations of the American citizens.” The pre-service teachers
recognize the complexity of teaching with multiple sides and angles, believe that traditional teaching understood as transmitting knowledge belongs to the past, and thus open spaces for new concepts of teaching and learning that strive instead for discovering knowledge together with students. For the participants, students’ roles and needs should be prioritized in the classroom as they are the active constructors of knowledge.

The third research question examined concerns that the pre-service teachers have about their future profession. The findings reveal that the participants have a number of concerns about teaching. Some of these worries are rooted “outside of the classroom” and have to do with educational policies and reforms, and particularly with the mandates and regulations imposed on teachers by the state, school district, and school administration. The other group of fears is entrenched in the classroom practices dealing with daily teacher responsibilities, knowledge, and skills. The overarching conclusion of the pre-service teachers regarding these fears is to face the challenges of the profession and learn from experiences and own mistakes. They are convinced that the more they practice in the field, the more prepared they will become. The participants suggest that talking to peers, sharing ideas and challenges with them, getting advice from experienced teachers, and reflecting on teaching practices will ease their transition into the profession.

Finally, the fourth research question attempted to find out whether the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shifted throughout their field experiences, and if they did, how and due to what causes. The data analysis and findings demonstrate that all four participants have shown some changes in their understanding of teaching. They attribute the alterations to the teacher preparation program, the coursework specifically, and to the field experiences. In the field, the host teachers are credited for providing opportunities to observe and participate which
influenced the pre-service teachers’ previous visions of teaching and teachers. Reflecting on observations and personal engagement in classroom practices allowed for the change in views, no matter if the change was obviously identifiable or slightly recognizable by each participant. The final part of this section presented two samples of “I” poems and their brief interpretation to demonstrate multiplicity of voices within one individual.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Four of this dissertation presented the narratives of the four pre-service English teachers enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a large southern university. Further, in Chapter Five, the findings revealed through the participants’ narratives were consolidated and compared in order to identify similarities and differences across the cases. This chapter briefly reviews the research problem, purpose, methodology, and limitations of the study as well as offers conclusions about the findings and their interpretations in regards to the previous research where possible. The final part of this chapter is devoted to implications for policy and practice and suggestions for further research.

Summary of the Research Problem, Purpose, and Methodology

The field experiences in which pre-service teachers participate as they prepare to become teachers are considered to be a vital component of teacher preparation programs throughout the country. Educators believe that the principal goal of field experiences is to connect theory to practice, i.e. provide the opportunities for pre-service teachers to observe and practice in the field the concepts, skills, and pedagogical behaviors they acquired through their coursework in college (Compton & Davis, 2010; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Moore, 2003). However, teacher educators admit that pre-service teachers often struggle to connect knowledge gained in their college coursework to their experiences in the field (Blanchard, & Sulentic Dowell, 2010; Kingsley, 2007; Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012).

At the same time, the growing demands and pressures on teacher preparation and quality in this society have led to educational reforms and new policies. As a result, research suggests that over 50% of the new teachers in low-income schools will leave the profession in their first five years of teaching (Babinski, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010). While the demands to teacher
preparation are constantly rising, and the research on teacher education has significantly increased in the last two decades, the inquiry into the early field experiences before student teaching appears to remain behind. In the report prepared for the Task Force on Field Experience, McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) informed that, in spite of the fact that most research identified a positive impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers and their professional growth, “there does not exist enough data to determine that extending field experiences, whether at the early field experience or student teaching stage, will develop more effective, thoughtful teachers than those prepared in shorter field experience programs” (p.176). Further, McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) expressed “a great need for additional research in this area” (p. 178) because what happens during the field experience might be more important than the length of the experience.

Almost a decade later, Clift and Brady (2005) in a review of research on teacher education concluded that it is difficult to deduct from the research what impact a specific field experience may have on pre-service teachers. Although there are some occasional studies that examine early field experiences (Capraro et al., 2010), more of the recent research does not distinguish early field experiences from student teaching (NCATE, 2010; Kelly, 2010; Larson, 2006; Risko et al., 2008). Therefore, to increase understanding of the impact of field experiences on pre-service teachers and fill in the gap in research literature, this study explored the English pre-service teachers’ perceptions of field experience events that affected their professional thinking and understanding of teaching.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain insight into the pre-service secondary English teachers’ perceptions of early field experiences before student teaching. The study was guided by four research questions which aimed:
1) to examine the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the value of their early field experiences;

2) to explore how early field experiences shape the pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching;

3) to identify concerns about teaching that the pre-service teachers have as they undergo field experiences;

4) to understand whether the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching shift from the beginning to the end of their field experiences, and, if they shift, how and what factors cause the shift.

In order to meet the goals of the research study, I employed narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) rooted in Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy. Deweyan pragmatic concepts of experience, continuity, and interaction together with narrative inquiry theory, sociocultural theory of development (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) concepts of dialogue and heteroglossia allowed me to examine the pre-service teachers’ stories about their field experiences and gain insight into how they shape an understanding of teaching and its challenges before they move to student teaching. Experience is a center of the study, and I explored it narratively because “narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Although only four pre-service teachers’ detailed profiles and analyses were included in this report, all 16 members of the cohort enrolled in the English TPP during the Fall 2013 semester informed the study. The data collection methods consisted of the pre-service teachers’ field site reports, field experience logs, think pieces, conceptual teaching units, autobiographical essays, researcher field notes, individual and focus group interviews, and a questionnaire.
Analysis of the data was based on a three-dimensional narrative methodology with focus on time, place, and interaction and thematic narrative analysis. These methods permitted for deeper understanding of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about field experiences and allowed me to trace similarities and differences in their perceptions organizing them around the evolving categories and themes.

**Limitations of the Study**

Considering the generalizability of the research study, the following limitations should be taken into respect:

- Small participant sample. Sixteen pre-service teachers represented the cohort of the secondary English majors. Only four pre-service teachers participated in individual interviews, providing the majority of the data sources.

- The locally contextualized character of the research. The study took place at one southern state university. It was influenced by the TPP at this university and local public school settings where the pre-service teachers participated in the field experiences.

- The data collection involved audio recording of the interviews and observations of the participants that might affect their responses and behaviors despite all precautions taken to guaranty the accuracy of the collected data built-in to the research procedures and design.

- Several data sources were collected from the assignments that the participants completed as a requirement for the English methods or Education methods courses. Knowing that these written pieces would be graded by the instructors might affect the content of the writings, in spite of constant encouragements of sincere reflections.
The subjectivity of the researcher, who was a former English teacher and instructor for the university course which pre-service teachers took along with their field experiences in the fall semester, has advantages and disadvantages as discussed in Chapter Two.

Despite the existing limitations, the study produced valuable findings that allowed for a deeper understanding of early field experiences and their value in preparing English teachers for public school classrooms.

**Conclusions**

**Field Experiences: A Vital Component of Teacher Preparation**

The findings of this study obtained through analysis of all data sources revealed strong consistent tendencies in the pre-service teachers’ perceptions about their field experiences. The participants unanimously valued their field experiences regardless of some negative moments throughout the experiences. They credited field experiences for providing them with opportunities to connect knowledge gained in their college coursework with practice in the field (Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012; Kingsley, 2007). Responding to the calls of McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) about “a great need for additional research in this area” (1996, p. 178) and of Clift and Brady (2005) about identifying the impact of a specific field experience, the findings from this study might help in determining the impact and value of early field experiences before student teaching practicum by outlining the activities and experiences from which the pre-service teachers benefited the most.

The pre-service teachers valued the coursework that prepared them for field practice despite reporting some inconsistencies and overlapping in the content of the courses. Because their courses provided knowledge about their future field of employment, including
understanding pedagogical concepts, methods, curriculum, planning, teaching strategies, and subject content, the participants were able to recognize those elements in the classrooms. Furthermore, the opportunity to discuss field experiences and analyze particular situations from classrooms helped them in understanding teaching and making sense of what they saw in the field. They acknowledged that their ability to apply theoretical knowledge sometimes runs into difficulties when trying to react to a specific classroom situation (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Moore, 2003). Moreover, the pre-service teachers were aware that there will always be “a gap between university courses and reality in the classroom,” (Egée-Kuehne, 1992, p. 430) citing their professional maturity and experience level as two of the reasons. As one of the participants, Scout noted, regardless of the number of concrete situations they observed and later discussed in the methods courses, “there will never be exactly the same situation,” and that is why they will have to react to the particular context of a situation. This, in turn, will require pedagogic and decision-making skills that strengthen with professional growth and experience.

The participants viewed a cohort of English majors as “a community of learners.” Being a part of the cohort was valued as a support system for each and every one of them within the program. They realized that teaching is a profession constantly requiring team work and collaboration, and the cohort had become such a foundational team for them. They knew one another for two years and were able to initiate meaningful discussions about teaching and pedagogy, generously sharing their ideas, successes, drawbacks, and frustrations.

For the pre-service teachers in this study, host teachers were ultimately major influences during field experiences. They reported learning a great deal from their host teachers: classroom set-up, daily routines and procedures, class management skills, teaching strategies, ways to interact with students, engage them in learning, and much more. However, the participants
expressed their concerns about the quality of host teachers as it directly affected the success and value of field experiences. In connection with the quality of host teachers, the participants declared the importance of collaboration and effective communication among college instructors, field experience coordinators, host and pre-service teachers, supporting the requirements of teacher preparation programs and field experiences (NCATE, 2010) and findings from Grieco’s study (2011). Furthermore, the findings indicated that the lack of communication among all parties involved in coordinating and participating in field experiences led to a discord in the expectations for field experiences: it appeared that the pre-service teachers and their hosts were “not on the same page.” This findings support Ramanathan and Wilkins-Canter (2000) study concluding that host teachers should receive some training to help them understand the connection between the college expectations and the field practices.

According to the pre-service teachers, learning about diverse students in the classroom was one of the most valuable gains through field experiences. They had learned about and discussed the issues of diversity in their coursework, but only in the field did they realize what diversity meant. Theoretical knowledge coupled with practice enabled them to recognize not only racial and ethnic diversity in the classrooms, but the differences among students depending on their socio-economic status, tracking systems used in schools, various learning capabilities, special needs, and second language needs. For the participants, field experiences brought a meaningful connection to the concepts of differentiated instruction using a variety of pedagogic approaches to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom.

Congruent with Ball and Cohen (1999) the pre-service teachers credited field experiences for providing opportunities to learn about the “practice while in practice.” All four participants experienced a variety of teaching responsibilities in the classroom including planning, preparing
materials, assisting students in individual and group work, grading students’ work, and teaching activities or lessons. Those practices helped them think about their future profession, refine their teaching philosophies, better understand students, and learn about themselves.

To expand on the value of field experiences, it is necessary to note that the pre-service teachers’ involvement in the classrooms was not limited to observation and participation. They developed critical reflection and evaluation skills that mirrored their “practice of thinking analytically” (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004) about events they saw or experienced in the field. The “puzzles of practice” (Dewey, 1933) taught them a need for reflection in order to construct a deeper understanding of teaching and to learn from their own experience. The pre-service teachers offered certain constructive changes that can further improve the quality of field experiences. These proposals are discussed further in the Implications for Policy and Practice, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Lastly, the findings about the value of field experiences support McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx’s (1996) claim that what happens during the field experiences is more important than the length of the experience. The pre-service teachers in this study unanimously acknowledged that some of the resistance to 40 hours of field experiences during each of the three consecutive semesters was not caused by the time in the field, but by the quality of that time. That is why the issue of “loosely selected placements,” as Darling-Hammond (2009, p. 11) tactfully defines these placements, where the pre-service teachers had little to no guidance in some cases through their experiences, came up multiple times in the interviews, reflections, and think pieces.

**Understanding Teaching and Its Challenges**

For the participants, teaching is both a profession and a process. As a profession, it is closely associated with its carrier, a teacher, and, as a process, it is centered on students, the
major partakers and contributors to this process. Despite the declining respect to the profession in society, the pre-service teachers affirmed its ultimate importance in educating the future generations of the American citizens who would be able to think critically about the world in which they live. The study participants acknowledged that daily efforts of effective, caring teachers could gradually elevate the teachers’ professional status in the society.

The pre-service teachers understood teaching as a complex process having multiple sides and angles that surpass its original definition as transmitting knowledge. Teaching in a contemporary world is discovering knowledge together with students, who are not passive recipients but active explorers. The participants were convinced that the teachers’ roles as instructors and lecturers in the classrooms should be replaced with facilitators and guides who focus on equipping students with tools and skills necessary for critical thinking and learning discoveries.

Characterizing teachers, the participants pointed to their professional and personal qualities. Interestingly, professional qualities, such as subject knowledge, pedagogy and methods awareness, organizational and planning skills, were considered to be a must, while teacher’s personal characteristics were exceedingly prioritized in discussions. The pre-service teachers’ firm conviction is that caring and nourishing teachers who invest time, energy, and believe in every student’s ability to succeed make a difference in students’ lives. Moreover, because students are main partakers in learning and teaching, teachers should know students and recognize their individualities and needs.

The pre-service teachers admitted that teaching is a profession that comes with numerous challenges. Those challenges for them were divided into two groups: there were some concerns which originated outside classrooms whereas the others were rooted in classroom practices. The
participants considered worries dealing with educational policies and reforms, particularly with the state, school district, and school administration mandates and regulations imposed on teachers thereby closely affecting the teachers’ work in the classroom. The other group of concerns, in participants’ opinions, was ingrained in various classroom practices in regards to selecting content, applying teaching strategies, motivating students, choosing texts that matter, and meeting needs of various learners within one group of students. Those “inside the classroom” challenges are influenced by the ones “coming from the outside” because the state, district, and school mandates including state assessments shape the curriculum, teachers’ choices, and approaches to teaching. This is often challenging for experienced teachers, so it is more distressing for the newcomers in profession. The pre-service teachers believe that their worries and anxieties about teaching will never completely dissolve but diminish as they gain more practice proving Britzman’s (2003) claim that difficulties and tensions are inevitable during the first steps into teaching and practice makes practice.

**Becoming Teachers: Growth through Experience**

Reflecting on their field experiences, the participants admitted the benefit of learning about themselves. One of the common lessons for all of them was associated with identity struggles as they realized their liminal position in the classrooms. The findings support Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop’s (2004) study emphasizing that identity development is an ongoing process and occurs during the participants’ journey through their field experiences. In agreement with Geijsel and Meijers’s (2005) understanding of identity as constantly changing interpretations that individuals attach to themselves, the pre-service teachers in the study reported how they perceived themselves in their initial field experiences as “the strangers in the back” and gradually changed these self-perceptions as they moved from one experience to another and built their
confidence by attempting to avoid the mistakes of the first experiences, introducing themselves, and behaving more as teachers rather than students. Similarly to Alsup’s (2006) claim about the intersection of personal and professional nature of teacher identity that creates “borderland discourse,” the findings revealed that the pre-service teachers tried connecting their personalities, social life, and previous experiences to their professional views and beliefs.

Among other lessons, the pre-service teachers identified the need for being reflective practitioners and having a support system within the school to assist them during transition from students to teachers. Both reflexivity and support would lessen the anxieties and identity struggles for the beginning teachers. To continue, the participants revealed understanding of context, place, and interaction significance in teaching and learning processes as well as in their identity formation, as stressed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999) and Marsh (2001).

The signs of professional growth in the pre-service teachers were noticeable throughout the study revealing how they revisited their understanding of teaching and adjusted personal teaching philosophies. The findings confirmed that the coursework, field experiences, and reflections on what was learned and experienced allowed for the change and growth, once again proving Dewey’s (1933) concept of experience being educative.

**Beyond the Research Questions**

Throughout the interviews and written pieces, the theme of apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) came up several times. All four participants referred to personal experiences with schools and teachers mainly connecting them to the host teachers and their practices as they observed during the field experiences. Out of all participants, Harry was the only one who constantly compared schools he went to the schools he observed, and respectively the teachers who taught him to the host teachers he encountered in the field. Being less confident than Kat,
Scout, or Kay, he heavily relied on his previous experiences to assist him with making sense of the field experiences and practices he observed. That did not mean that Harry was developing slower than his peers; instead, it indicated his individual meaning making process.

Through the participants’ perceptions, the theme of apprenticeship of observation did not demonstrate the level of decision making of the pre-service teachers in this study unlike what Alsup (2006) concluded in her study. Contrary to Alsup’s participants, who began as student teachers and moved onto the first year of teaching, these pre-service teachers during early field experiences are not teachers in the classrooms yet, and they had very few opportunities to teach and make decisions. Thus, I cannot make assumptions about the influence of apprenticeship of observation as hindering or supporting their professional development. The study participants were mostly the observers, so apprenticeship of observation was definitely present throughout their field experiences, but it was on the reflection and evaluation level. They observed what their host teachers were doing, what kind of decisions they made, and compared or evaluated the particular decision by reflecting on what they had previously experienced throughout their own school experiences. As a result, the furthest their conclusions could bring them was seeing how different teachers’ decisions led to students’ progress in learning and whether they proved to be more or less effective.

Implications

The study added to the body of knowledge and research related to teacher preparation programs and may serve to help teacher educators in identifying more effective ways to prepare future teachers in order to smooth their transition into the classrooms. A number of implications emerged as a result of this study. The first group of implications concern educational policy and
practice within the teacher preparation programs, and the second suggests topics for future research. I begin with discussion of the possible implications for practice and policy.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The results of the current study inform teacher educators and administration developing teacher preparation program and curriculum by revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the current program at the State University. Consequently, the findings of this study have implications for TPP concerning both parts of teacher training including the coursework and field experiences and their organization.

In order to “improve the quality of the teacher preparation program, raise the value of field experiences, and prepare better teachers for the classrooms,” as voiced Kat, the developers of the program should closely work with the course instructors. Collaboratively, they should create the program with English and Education methods courses gradually progressing. Noting the overlapping and sometimes redundant focus of the courses, the participants suggested the steps for close aligning of the coursework with their field practices, so that the content of each following course would build up on the previous and move them further. The courses beginning with their first field experience should closer reflect the focus of the particular field experience cycle and address the issues pre-service teachers are facing in the field. The coursework should provide more opportunities for planning lessons, teaching lesson segments, and learning classroom management techniques.

Numerous times the participants voiced concerns about the lack of information and knowledge about the state educational policies, regulations, and mandates. These issues could be built into the Education course content and provide the resources to learn about the state’s policies. One of the classes in such a course could conduct a workshop to teach the pre-service
teachers how to navigate through the Department of Education website, develop student learning targets, learn about Compass, and/or understand a value-added model for teachers. The pre-service teachers could also benefit from a course (or even a part of one of the Education course) devoted to the classroom management and building relationships with students. They articulated their worries about the shortage of such knowledge and skills.

The findings revealed participants’ identity struggles through their practice in the field; therefore, it would be reasonable to initiate the conversations of identity development and restructuring to extend the conclusions of Geijssel and Meijers (2005) about the ongoing and cyclical learning process. In addition, perhaps it is the joint responsibility of course instructors and host teachers to provide guidance and support to the pre-service teachers as they negotiate their status and presence in the field. Remember, Kay and Harry had difficulties asking their host teachers whether they could participate more in the classroom activities or even if they could walk around the room to monitor and assist students when they went to their first field placements. That the results of the study also suggest that while the pre-service teachers reflected a lot, their reflection practices were not consistent. They either reflected to complete an assignment for the college course, e.g., field experience logs, or in response to the researcher’s questions. Thus, they were reflecting when prompted to do so, except for certain occasions. The reflective practices should be more encouraged throughout the coursework and made an integral part of each course to develop the need for reflection.

Other implications concern some changes in the organization of field experiences. The results of the study indicated the lack of communication among the college field experience coordinators, host teachers, and pre-service teachers as required by NCATE (2010) and supported by Grieco (2011). Improving communication will place all the participants and
coordinators of the field experiences “on the same page,” as Scout voices the opinion of the pre-service teachers. Furthering this topic, some kind of training should be organized for host teachers, or they should be provided with clear guidelines regarding the expectations for field experiences. The host teachers need to know what kind of support they should provide for pre-service teachers and what these pre-service teachers are expected to accomplish in the field. Moreover, they have to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to meet the established expectations.

Regarding the expectations for field experiences, Scout, Harry, Kay, and Kat reported that these expectations were not clearly communicated before each field experience cycle. The SU Handbook (2007) does not have specific expectations for the early field experiences outlining the focus and range of activities from observation to participation that pre-service teachers have to complete in the field. The developers of the program should make essential updates to the Handbook and included clear expectations for each field experience cycle to reflect the progression of pre-service teachers’ involvement in the classrooms.

The next implication concerns the early field experiences’ nature. It is necessary to determine what the pre-service teachers should experience in the field, i.e., how much of practice time should be devoted to observation, participation, and teaching, if the latter two are considered to be a part of early field experiences. As of now, the program does not specify the activities and roles of pre-service teachers in the field.

Lastly, the findings demonstrated the “need for quality host teachers” – an issue raised by the participants multiple times. Each of them experienced at least one host teacher who was not cooperating, mentoring, or guiding them through their field experience, and exuded a lack of care for students and little belief in their students’ abilities. The field experience coordinators
and Office of Field Placements should strive to recruit more devoted teachers who can advance the value and success of field experiences for pre-service teachers.

**Implications for Further Research**

The present study has completed its research goals in exploring the pre-service teachers’ perceptions and determined the value that these pre-service teachers place on their early field experiences before students teaching. Yet, there are still questions that remain unanswered or inquiries that could shed more light and provide deeper understanding of the role early field experience practices. Several lines of research can be suggested by the findings of this dissertation project.

First, future research could consider conducting a longitudinal study beginning the moment the pre-service teachers enroll in the teacher training program and following the same cohort of students for three consecutive field experience cycles. Such a study would allow registering the participants’ perceptions about their field experiences from the point of entrance into the field until till the exit, tracing the changes of their perceptions as they move from the first field experience to the second and third cycles. Unlike the present study that was conducted during their third field experience cycle during which the pre-service teachers were reflecting on the first two practicums post factum. In addition, this kind of research could also trace more precisely the professional growth of pre-service teachers and possible shifts in their beliefs and understanding of teaching not from memory, but on their actual experience as they undergo each field experience cycle.

Advancing the research agenda pursued throughout this dissertation study and possibly using the same set of research questions, I would suggest replicating this study in at least a dozen or more flagship universities nationwide. First, such research will foreground commonalities and
differences between the teacher preparation programs and field experiences. It would also provide for the comparison of the perceptions of the pre-service teachers across the nation throughout field experiences. Second, it might lead to a meta-analysis merging the findings from all the researched universities to create a broader picture of developing TPPs and organizing field experiences. It would also permit to make conclusions about the particular context and its impact on field experiences and pre-service teachers’ professional development.

Another possible research venue may study pre-service teachers in the early field experiences and then follow them into student teaching. The focus of this research should not be the final, consolidated interpretation of the pre-service teachers and teacher candidates’ perceptions, but a comparative study to distinguish the gains and growth during two stages – the early field practices and student teaching. This study could add to research in terms of differentiating between two kinds of clinical practice.

Some alternative teacher preparation programs lack the early field experiences component. The research project comparing the perceptions of the graduates from an alternative program and traditional program for preparing teachers could further shed light on the value and impact of field experiences. The researchers could explore how the graduates from both programs form their understanding of teaching and effective teachers.

Other future studies may closely examine the relationships and communication between the college and host teachers. The lack of such communication was revealed by the present study, and it is critical to increase the support for pre-service teachers in the field, on one hand, and to connect the coursework to the practice in the field, on the other. Such a study would provide the program developers and field experience coordinators with practical suggestions to
improve the communication among all partakers in the field experiences, creating more advantageous opportunities for the pre-service teachers in the field.

The findings of the present research left me with questions regarding the quality of host teachers and the support pre-service teachers are receiving in the classroom setting. I would suggest a workshop or a short training program for host teachers in order to provide them with information about TPP, expectations for pre-service teachers in the field, guideline, and possible tools for teaching reflection, providing feedback, and encouraging the pre-service teachers’ active involvement in the classrooms. Then, I would examine how such kind of training influences their relationships with and support of pre-service teachers as they understand the expectations for field experiences and demands of teacher preparation. Past research supports the notion that training teachers how to work with pre-service teachers helps host teachers provide more constructive feedback and guidance to pre-service teachers (Aiken & Day, 1999; Ramanathan and Wilkins-Canter, 2000).

**Concluding Thoughts and Updates from the Study Participants**

Reflecting on my first major study in teacher preparation, I have to admit my constant struggle. For the duration of the project, every new step seemed to be challenging. In the end, I am pleased with the final product – it is not perfect, but it creates an ingenuous picture of the participants of the study based on their stories and told using their voices. I am hopeful that the study itself, and design in particular, will help future researchers to advance narrative inquiry research method as a way of understanding life experiences, including the experiences concerned with professional growth.

My personal gains from this can be hardly expressed with words. I have learned a great deal about the teacher preparation program and field experiences at SU and other universities.
The most valuable experience was communicating with my participants who allowed me to be part of their lives for several months. Our relationships have developed beyond the instructor/student and participant/researcher dichotomies. We became friends and colleagues intending to continue our communication and collaboration. In fact, together with two of the four participants, we submitted a proposal to report on this research project next year at NCTE’s annual convention in Washington, D.C. Moreover, throughout the project I have learned a lot about myself and changed along with my participants.

At the beginning of the study, I was afraid that my double position of a researcher and an instructor for the pre-service teachers who were the participants in the study would impact my research in negative ways. Instead, I saw the benefits of my position. Learning about my participants’ struggles, concerns, and challenges with field experiences, teaching, lesson planning, classroom management, and other facets of the profession, I included these issues into the class discussions. This research agenda had led me closer into the inquiry-based teaching. Responding to the immediate needs of my student-participants, I was able to adjust my teaching as the semester progressed and address their concerns in preparation for student teaching and entering the profession.

All four main participants and the rest in the cohort appreciated the opportunity to discuss their experiences with college mates in the same position during focus group interviews. Kat, Scout, Harry, and Kay were grateful for individual interviews that created for them an outlet to express their feelings and reactions to what they saw and experienced in the field, to voice their concerns, worries, and frustrations. They big-heartedly shared their stories with me hoping that their experience may help improving field experiences and their organization for future pre-service teachers.
After I wrote a draft of the Chapter Five, I emailed each of four participants a part of the chapter with his or her profile. Their responses were generous and sincere as usual. I would like to conclude this work with the responses I received:

My part looks really good! Thank you. You have really outdone yourself. Student teaching is great; it's very time consuming and difficult, but so rewarding. I would love to get together soon; maybe you could use a break! Also, I want to talk about my part in the presentation that we proposed to NCTE. I actually want to thank you for letting me interview and answer these questions. I do believe talking and writing about it has helped me realize my stance on this program and my intense gratitude for giving us the opportunity to follow our dreams. Sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart,
Kat.

I love my part in your chapter. I think you represented my true beliefs and thoughts. Thank you! I do not want to make any changes; it is just right! I just wanted to update you and let you know my student teaching is going good so far! Your class helped prepare me so much for planning a unit. Hope all is well with you! Thank you for you dedication to my success as a professional!
Sincerely,
Harry.

I contacted you to check in because I wanted “a Mrs. P.’s update.” I am loving student teaching and learning a ton. Thank you for asking. I could not imagine doing anything else for a career; it comes so naturally. Wow! You have been working hard – as you always do. I am always enjoying reading back over my thoughts. The other day I read something from my senior year of high school, and it is funny to see how very different I was and how much I've changed since then. Reading my comments from last semester even shows me how much student teaching has changed my thoughts and views of teaching in two short months. Thank you for all you do,
Scout.

My portion looks great! I hope you don't mind, but I saved it to my computer. It's really cool to have all of my reflections in one place and to be able to actually look back on all of them and see how much I have changed and how much I learned in only three semesters. Student teaching this semester is amazing. I absolutely love it. My teacher is fantastic, my students are great, and it is just surpassing all of my expectations. I'm going to be starting my unit in about a week and a half, so I'm a little anxious for that, but overall the experience has been great. I can't wait to go to NCTE next year and tell people all about it! (I had to throw that in there©)
Thank you so much for sending me my section of your dissertation and for allowing me to participate in your study and with NCTE. I hope to continue to do so in the future. Thank you, Kay.
EPILOGUE

As I was reading through the printed draft of this dissertation, my five-year-old grandson Marc ran into my office.

“Grandma, can I read with you?” he asked.

I looked at him and smiled, understanding that he needed some attention right at the moment, “Sure, baby, go and bring me your book.”

“But I want to read your book!” Marc looked straight into my eyes and insistently pointed towards the printed papers on the desk, “I want to be smart, just like you!”

I looked at him and stretched my arms for a hug. Marc eagerly moved towards me. That hug lasted for a few seconds, but dozens of thoughts were erratically sprinting through my mind. It suddenly hit me: “I don’t know how to do it. I don’t know how to read this book with a five-year-old and how to explain this to him. We can’t read it together, can we?” All this time, I thought getting the highest degree was a final journey, that last step for me, and I would have everything “figured out.” I would become that great teacher I always wanted to be. It was not; it was just another step, and there will be more steps, more mistakes, and more trials. I realized I did not know answers to all the questions, and I never will. All the things I learned throughout those three long years in the program were suddenly put to trial by one simple question of a child. So, as long as life goes on, I am still becoming.

Marc quietly loosened my grip and asked again, “Can we read now?”

“Sure,” I said seating him comfortably on my laps. I turned to the first page and began, “Once upon a time, there was a little girl in Crimea…”
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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Expectations of LSU Candidates

Field Experiences
Fall 2008

Background
- Have a broad understanding of content in their fields
- Refresh content knowledge as necessary

Professionalism
- Reliable – Be punctual and prepared, inform mentor if unable to attend on a scheduled observation day
- Turn off phones/pagers etc., when observing classes.
- Dress and demeanor – dress professionally, take the role of the teacher and the students’ friend, refer to self as Ms. Mr. or Mrs., do not exchange personal information with students, and do not contact students outside of class with the teacher’s permission.

Communication
- Establish a method of communication with the teacher. Be respectful of the mentor teacher at all times. Some questions are appropriate for after class and not in front of students.
- Share your anticipation of field experiences.
- Discuss your desired level of observation/participation with the mentor teacher. What do you see as your role?
- Share any requirements of the EDCI/Content Courses that need to be addressed in your field experience.

General
- Make the most of your observations. Watch all aspects of interactions occurring in the classroom, i.e., teacher-student, student-student, small group, whole group etc.

Reflection
- Reflect daily on your observation/participation within the classroom.
- Reflect with your mentor teacher.

***Students are responsible for keeping an accurate log of their field experience time and need to keep logs up to date with mentor teacher signatures throughout the semester.
## Appendix B. English Education Courses Scope and Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 1-hr teaching labs in ENG classes:</th>
<th>EDCI Courses</th>
<th>Differences among secondary students (grades 6-12) associated with their development levels, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, genders, learning abilities and special needs.</th>
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<tr>
<td>ENG 3201 Lang. Dev. &amp; Diversity (1hr.)</td>
<td>Language development and diversity of adolescent speakers, writers and readers of English.</td>
<td>EDCI 3001(3) Student Development and Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 3202 Dynamics of Learning in the English Classroom (1hr.)</td>
<td>English 3202 is the Secondary English Education course taken in conjunction with EDCI 3002, Classroom Culture. The EDCI course explores the learning processes of middle and high school students in the social learning environment of the classroom emphasizing motivation, social interactions, technology, and classroom management. The English course focuses on reading and writing in the classroom; students will be identifying and discussing various approaches to teaching literature and writing in small and large group settings. Dynamics of learning in middle school and high school English classes, including methods of small group and whole class interaction and instruction, including integration of technology.</td>
<td>EDCI 3136 (3) Reading in the Content Areas Replaced with EDCI 3002 Classroom Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 4203 (1) Curricula, Pedagogy, &amp; Assessment in the English Classroom (1hr.)</td>
<td>English 4203 is the third in a three-course sequence of one-credit-hour STEP courses required by the secondary English concentration (SEC) that lead to student teaching, EDCI 4004, and the capstone course (ENGL 4204). Students should simultaneously be enrolled in the English Language Arts section of EDCI 4003. The purpose of these two courses is to reinforce and extend the learning you’ve done in preceding semesters, and to prepare you for student teaching. In keeping with these purposes, English 4203 will have two major emphases. One will be to facilitate your 40 hours of field experience in local schools and prepare you for your student teaching experience. The other will be to help you prepare for the PRAXIS II tests that you are required to take before graduation. Current methods of course design, pedagogy, and assessment for teaching English in middle school and high school classrooms.</td>
<td>EDCI 4003 (3) Curriculum and Pedagogy in Secondary Disciplines Applying instructional approaches in particular subject areas (in this case English) for middle and high school students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENG 4204 (3 hrs.) Capstone (The same semester as student teaching)</td>
<td>For English majors in the Secondary Education Concentration. Independent research project. Course topics will vary. Advanced seminar in which students consolidate their knowledge in English and obtain a perspective on the significance of the knowledge.</td>
<td>EDCI 4004 (3) Critical Issues in Secondary School Area Content Area Teaching Structures of the social disciplines for teaching in the secondary school. Reflection on practices of curriculum, methods, strategies, critical issues of teaching, and instructional materials related to teaching social studies and/or ELA. Critical issues in the nature of knowledge and...</td>
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<td>inquiry in specific school subjects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>All day, all semester student teaching experiences, including observation, participation, and a minimum of 180 actual clock hours of teaching (with a substantial portion of the 180 hrs. in a full day teaching) under the supervision of an assigned public school mentor teacher.</td>
<td>EDCI 4005 (9) Student Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 3223 Adolescent Literature</td>
<td>Critical analysis and survey of literatures with adolescents as main characters and written for adolescent and adult audiences.</td>
<td>EDCI 3223 Adolescent Literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. Log Form for Field Experiences

***All field experience hours must be recorded and approved by the mentor teacher or school supervisor and submitted to your program coordinator at the conclusion of each semester.

GEAUX TEACH FIELD EXPERIENCE
LOG OF HOURS - SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time In/Out</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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Total Hours This Page

TOTAL HOURS FOR ALL PAGES

Dissemination of Hours (Place total of all pages on top page only)

Observation

- Monitored Class
- Observation

Participation

- Activity/Lab - set-up
- One on One Tutoring
- Small Group Tutoring
- Whole Class Interaction

Teaching

- Activity/Lab - Admin/Lead
- One on One Instruction
- Small Group Instruction
- Taught ______ lessons

Other (Explain):
Appendix D. EDCI 4003 Fall, 2013 Syllabus

Wednesdays, 4:30-6:20; 121 Allen Hall

Leylja Emiraliyeva-Pitre
317 Peabody Hall
lemira1@lsu.edu

Office Hours: 317 Peabody Hall
Mon & Wed
by appointment

Catalog Description
Applying instructional approaches in particular subject areas (in this case English) for middle and high school students.

Course Objectives
Teaching and interacting with students in a language arts classroom can be a rewarding experience. The experience can also be fraught with frustration and anxiety. While preparing this course, even with years of experience, I don’t have all of the answers. Each class and each student presents a unique set of challenges and rewards. My primary goal is to encourage you to adopt an inquiry stance to the teaching of English. We will also keep asking the hard questions about what it means to teach English. This suggests questions such as: What specific subjects/content areas do you choose to introduce in your classroom? How do you react to and incorporate testing? How do you interact with state, district, and school curricula goals and mandates? How do you work with colleagues in and out of the building? How do you work with parents? Finally, it suggests how do you work with your students to assure that they leave your classroom with a positive and constructive educational experience with English?

These might be questions that you haven’t even considered yet. Indeed, you probably have a large list of questions of your own that might start something like: How do I _____? Fill in the gap with: teach spelling, teach literary theory, teach poetry, teach writing, inspire students, deal with misbehavior, organize a classroom, plan and teach a unit. All of these questions are important and might be answered in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances. It is important to ask questions and then work towards answering those questions by using the resources and tools at your disposal. In good conscience, I cannot ask you to take an inquiry stance without providing you with a beginning set of resources and tools. The readings and the places they take you or suggest you investigate throughout your career are resources. The activities and strategies that we create, share, and experience are tools that you can adapt and modify as you begin to teach. Chief among these tools is the development of a conceptual unit. Learning to create a unit is an essential first step that will allow you to sleep at night and approach student teaching and your first year experiences with a greater degree of confidence.

Texts Required


Supplemental Texts—Just suggestions
3. Christenbury, Leila (Editor), Bomer, Randy (Editor), Smagorinsky, Peter (Editor) (2008). *Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research*  
   ISBN 10: 1593858299


5. Weinstein, Susan (2009) Feel These Words: Writing in the Lives of Urban Youth  
   ISBN-10: 1438426525

   ISBN-10: 0814129715

Reference (No need to print) You will need to use these sources as you create your unit.

   [http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/literacy_instruction_content_areas](http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/literacy_instruction_content_areas)

8. Louisiana Department of Education, 1997, Louisiana Grade Level Expectations for English Language Arts, grades 6-12 (about 25 pages),  
   [http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1915.html](http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/saa/1915.html)

9. NCTE Standards for the English/Language Arts, [http://www.ncte.org/standards](http://www.ncte.org/standards) (2 pages)

    [http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/ENGLISH.pdf)


**Course requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Portfolio (3 components)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Chapter discussions in class and on Moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>Reading Teaching Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Midterm and Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(10%) Portfolio. As an English school teacher, I found portfolios to be invaluable ways of keeping up with student learning. Portfolios come in all forms and sizes based on your personal objectives. For this course, your portfolios will be a collection of the work you will complete this semester, a collection of resources for next semester, and copies of handouts that you provide for each other. Here is what your portfolio will contain:

1. Copies of all of the mini lessons taught by your colleagues this semester
2. 2 articles on the profession (Written in the past 2 years) and 250-500 word response to each.
3. A list of what you found out about yourself this semester and the challenges you see for your future. I will check at midterm and at the end of the semester.
4. A two page reflection about your experiences in all of the extended activities of the class. This will be a part of your final exam.
5. Autobiographical Essay. Please share with me your childhood or educational experiences that led you to choose teaching as a profession. You may also focus on telling about people (teachers, friends, parents) who influenced your choice.

(15%) Chapter discussions in class, on Moodle, or on Adobe Connect. Each of you will be responsible for leading class discussions on our readings. This is not a presentation!!! This might take a different form for each of you.

(15%) Reading teaching strategy. More details to come.

(10%) Midterm and Final
The midterm will cover all of the italicized readings on the calendar. You will be given three prompts and asked to write on one. You will be asked to synthesize the different positions put forth by each author and apply them to a “real” teaching situation.

(10%) Participation
This includes attendance, assignments on time, commenting in class, and working with others as class activities and assignments might demand.

(40%) Conceptual Teaching Units
Individually, you will be creating a conceptual unit plan. For the purposes of this class the Smagorinsky text is the guiding textbook for this assignment. You should plan to cover 4-6 weeks and can define your unit under any of the conceptual categories that he outlines. We will work on these units throughout the entire semester, adding little by little as we cover topics. Needless to say, many details will follow.

Evaluation Scale
This course adheres to the LSU Evaluation Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-92%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>74-83%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-73%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-59%</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Final remarks

Attendance Policy
Since this class only meets once a week, if you miss one class, you’re actually missing an entire week! If you know that you will be absent or late, contact me as soon as possible. Individual situations, with appropriate documentation, will be taken into account according to LSU PS-22 for excused absences and you will be allowed to make up the assignment you missed.

Any late work will be grade as if on time and then receive a 20% reduction. That policy covers all class assignments. Class presentations cannot be late. It does not cover the teaching of a lesson in your cooperating teacher’s classroom, as that schedule will depend on his or hers.

A word about cheating and plagiarism: DON’T DO IT. If I ask you to come up with original work, then that means your own work. If you use someone else’s lesson plan on which to base yours, give that person/organization credit.

Please, if you have not done so, familiarize yourself with LSU’s student handbook, which can be found at http://appl003.lsu.edu/slas/dos.nsf/$Content/Student+Handbook?OpenDocument

If you have a traumatic semester, special needs, questions, or complaints, please let me know immediately. I will try to understand your situations, but I need to know. If you prefer, you may contact me anonymously. But if you don’t say anything, how am I to accommodate your needs/wishes?

Course Schedule
This is a flexible guideline. Further readings will be added and posted on Moodle as we go.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Main topic or activity</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/28</td>
<td>Introduction and activities-Arrange Reading Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>TEBD, chap. 1-2, CCSS</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>TEBD chap. 3-7</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>TEBD chap. 8-12</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9/25</td>
<td>TEBD chap. 13-14</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<td>Mastering the Art of Effective Vocabulary Instruction (Allen)</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>The Last Book in the Universe</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pick Conceptual Unit Topic</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10/16</td>
<td>Lesson plans formats—Teaching Poetry</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/23</td>
<td>Teaching a novel. Reading Strategies</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10/30</td>
<td>Lesson plans as part of a unit—Teaching Writing Writing workshop, writing process</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11/4</td>
<td>Initial Conceptual Unit Submission: Complete Outline Group work</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>Teaching Drama. Using a film in an English classroom.</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>Second Conceptual Unit Submission: Complete Draft for</td>
<td>Assigned Reading Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>peer evaluation draft is due</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Final Unit submission and presentation</td>
<td>Final draft is due</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>5:30-7:30</td>
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We will discuss your final unit presentations in more detail as we go, but the major points that should be covered in your presentation are the following:

- A rationale
- Pre- and post-assessments
- Objectives
- Major readings
- Major writings
- Major activities
Appendix E. Focus Group Interview Protocol

An Examination of Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Field Experiences: Shaping the Understanding of Teaching and Its Challenges before Student Teaching

There will be two focus group interviews conducted during this study. The first interview will take place at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester. The second interview will be at the end of the semester, after pre-service teachers complete their third field experience practicum.

1. Who is here? Please, provide brief introductions.

2. What did you expect from your first field experience?

3. What were your first reactions to the host teacher?

4. What were your first reactions to the students?

5. How what you saw at the field site was different from your expectations?

6. How would you change the experience?

7. What was the best part of the experience so far?

8. What was the most challenging aspect of the experience so far?

9. How have you interacted with the students?

10. How have you interacted with the host teacher?

Additional questions during the second focus group interview.

1. How was this experience different or similar from your earlier experience(s)?

2. How did you approach this field experience differently from the previous ones?

3. How were your expectations met or failed during the third field experience practicum?

4. What are your concerns about teaching?

5. What do you think makes field experiences successful?

Additional follow-up questions will be based on the participants’ responses.
Appendix F. Individual Participant Interview Protocol

An Examination of Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Field Experiences: Shaping the Understanding of Teaching and Its Challenges before Student Teaching

Interview questions: The study allows for participants to be interviewed three times during the 40-hour field experience cycle. The first interview will take place during the first week of the Fall 2013 semester before pre-service teachers go in the field. The second interview will be in the middle of the semester, approximately after 20 hours of field experiences, and the last, third interview will take place during the last two weeks of the Fall 2013 semester, when pre-service teachers will complete their 40 hours in the field. The interview protocol will stay consistent, but allow for the participants to make compares across their experiences during the interviews from the beginning of the field experience practicum till the end.

These questions will guide the interview:

1. Tell me a little about yourself (Where are you from? What is your family background? Education? How did you come to become a teacher?)

2. What do you like about Teacher Preparation Program at LSU?

3. Before we start talking about your field experiences, can you describe a good, successful teacher?

4. Tell me what teaching is for you?

5. What were your expectations about the field before you ever went to school as a pre-service teacher?

6. How did you communicate with the host teacher?

7. How many different roles did you experience in the classroom?

8. How did the information from your coursework help you?

9. What was different in the field from what you learned in your coursework?

10. What did you like best about the experience?

11. What would you change about the experience?

12. What did you learn about teaching?

13. What did you learn about students?
14. What did you learn about yourself?

15. What was the most challenging during your field practice?

16. How can you be better prepared to face the challenge(s)?

17. How valuable do you think your field experiences were?

**Additional questions for the 2nd and 3rd cycle**

1. How is this experience different or similar from your earlier experience(s)?

2. How did you approach this field experience differently than you did the first two times?

3. What were your expectations for this field experience cycle?

4. How did your present field experience meet or fail your expectations?

5. Did your perceptions of teaching change from your first field experiences to the last? If yes, how did they change and what influenced that change?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about your field experiences and/or coursework during this semester?

   Additional follow-up questions will be based on the participant’s responses.
Appendix G. Questionnaire

An Examination of Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Field Experiences: Shaping the Understanding of Teaching and Its Challenges before Student Teaching

Please answer to the questions below. If you need more space to answer questions, feel free to use the back side of Questionnaire or a loose-leaf paper.

1. I am a ___ female   ___ male
2. I am ___ years old
3. Do you plan to teach in secondary school after graduation? ___________________________
4. Do you plan to enroll in graduate school after graduation?  _________________________
5. Do you have a part-time job? ________________________________
6. How do you pay for tuition?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
7. Did you feel prepared for what you experienced in the field? If not, what was lacking?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
8. What would you change about field experiences (hours; amount of observation, participation, and teaching; placement; etc.)?
   __________________________________________________________________________
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9. What would you change about the coursework that accompanies the field experiences (focus, content, the order in which you take the classes, etc.)?

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10. Do you think the field experiences are valuable and why?

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Appendix H. Institutional Review Board Approval of Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, all LSU research/projects using human subjects as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Applicant: Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at https://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePolicies/Procedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item/247321.html

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  - A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1-6)
  - Copies of all Instruments to be used.
  - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  - Consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information)
  - Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php)
  - IRB Security of Data Agreement: (https://research.lsu.edu/files/item/20774.pdf)

1) Principal Investigator: Leyla Emirliyevo-Pitre
   Rank: Graduate Student
   Dept: College of Human Sciences
   Ph: 225-456-1499
   E-mail: femirli@lsu.edu

2) Co-Investigator(s): Please include department, rank, phone, and e-mail for each.
   *If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

3) Project Title: A Study of Preservice English Teachers’ Field Experiences: Do the Tools Serve the Purpose?

4) Proposal? (yes or no) No
   If Yes, LSU Proposal Number
   Also, if YES, either
   - This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
   - More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g., Psychology students): Preservice Secondary English Students at LSU
   *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: children, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other. Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature
   Date 11/05/2012
   (No other signatures)

**I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ✓ Not Exempted Category/Paragraph

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes / No
Reviewers
Signature
Date 11/07/2012
1. **Study Title:** A Study of Preservice Teachers' Field Experience Before The Student Teaching Practicum: What Are They Doing and How Does It Help Them Prepare To Teach?

2. **Performance Site:** Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. **Investigators:** The following investigator is available for questions about this study,

   Leyla Emiraliyeva-Pitre, email address: lemira1@lsu.edu, 225-456-1499

4. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to evaluate the use of field experience as part of an initial teacher training program. In the three semesters before the teacher candidates participate in student teaching they must complete 120 hours of field experience in public schools. The hours are closely associated with the required course work in the English department and in the department of education. Each semester the teacher candidates are introduced to new concepts and then attempt to observe and participate in similar activities during field experiences. For example, they learn about the dynamics of group work and then are asked to both observe and interact with students during group activities at a local school. In addition, for each 40 hour cycle they are assigned a mentor or cooperating teacher who helps them navigate these teaching spaces. The study also seeks to understand the value of this relationship.

5. **Subject Inclusion:** Primary participants are current students enrolled in the secondary English Education program at LSU and recent graduates of the program beginning in 2011 through 2016

6. **Number of Subjects:** 250

7. **Study Procedures:** The study has four specific data collection time periods that correspond with the four final semesters of the secondary English preparation program. The researchers will conduct data collection that will include focus groups, a survey, and representative interviews among teacher candidates during and at the end of each semester.

8. **Benefits:** The benefits to the participants will be in the form of their opportunity to discuss their experiences with others in the same position. In addition, they will have the opportunity to mark their experiences with the program at specific moments in time through the interview process and focus group activities. This is aligned with the program goals of developing reflective educators. This study provides the participant with specific moments of reflection about their development as teachers.

9. **Risks:** All participants will be kept confidential by immediately assigning pseudonyms. The specifics of all data sources will be kept confidential. Original hard copies will be stored after work copies have been copied and blinded in order to maintain confidentiality. There are no known risks.
10. **Right to Refuse:** Participants can withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of any benefit.

11. **Subject:**
    The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigators obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject: Signature: __________________________ Date: ________

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair
203 U-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.8792
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb
Appendix I. Consent Form and Modification Approval

Appendix A
Consent Form for Secondary English Participant

1. **Study Title:** An Examination of Secondary English Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions of Field Experiences: Shaping the Understanding of Teaching and Its Challenges before Student Teaching

2. **Performance Site:** Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. **Investigators:** The following investigator is available for questions about this study, Leylja Emiraliyeva-Pitre, email address: lemira1@lsu.edu, 225-456-1499

4. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to evaluate the use of field experience as part of an initial teacher training program. In the three semesters before the teacher candidates participate in student teaching they must complete 120 hours of field experience in public schools. The hours are closely associated with the required course work in the English department and in the department of education. Each semester the teacher candidates are introduced to new concepts and then attempt to observe and participate in similar activities during field experiences. For example, they learn about the dynamics of group work and then are asked to both observe and interact with students during group activities at a local school. In addition, for each 40 hour cycle they are assigned a mentor or cooperating teacher who helps them navigate these teaching spaces. The study also seeks to understand the value of this relationship.

5. **Subject Inclusion:** Primary participants are current students enrolled in the secondary English Education program at LSU and recent graduates of the program beginning in 2011 through 2014

6. **Number of Subjects:** 250

7. **Study Procedures:** The study has three specific data collection time periods beginning with the Fall 2013 semester of the secondary English preparation program. The researchers will conduct data collection that will include field site report, pre-service teachers’ field notes, researcher’s observation notes, focus group interviews, and representative interviews among teacher candidates before, during, and at the end of the semester.

8. **Benefits:** The benefits to the participants will be in the form of their opportunity to discuss their experiences with others in the same position. In addition, they will have the opportunity to mark their experiences with the program at specific moments in time through the interview process and focus group activities. This is aligned with the program goals of developing reflective educators. This study provides the participant with specific moments of reflection about their development as teachers.
9. **Risks:** All participants will be kept confidential by immediately assigning pseudonyms. The specifics of all data sources will be kept confidential. Original hard copies will be stored after work copies have been copied and blinded in order to maintain confidentiality. There are no known risks.

10. **Right to Refuse:** Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit.

11. **Subject:**
   The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigators obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject: Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

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Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 11/6/2015
Appendix J. A Sample of Field Experience Log

Name: ______________
Date: _____________ Place: ______________ School Installment #: 7
Running total 21/40 Today’s time frame: 7:45-10:45

Sequence of Events:
2nd block:
22 min – AR reading
2 min – Talk to class about plans for the day (going over how to calculate AR scores, vocabulary review, constructed response, discussion of article)
5 min – Go over how to get AR scores
- Actual score of test, percentage of goal reached, and reading within ZPD (reading level) range
15 min – Vocabulary review. Teacher gives students review worksheet and they do the “brain teasers” together as a class.
1 min – Students pass up vocabulary folders and teacher passes out journal students will use to write their constructed responses.
11 min – Go over constructed response for “Why Should We Eat Bugs?”
- Teacher goes over the topic and the point for the students’ writing and asks students several times to tell her what the topic is. Topic is: You are the chef at a fancy bistro and you are trying to convince the owner to add bugs to the menu.
- Students must use at least one simile, at least five descriptive/sensory words, examples/quotes/research that were provided in the text, and must describe at least 2 bug dishes
- Teacher tells students about a contest they will be entered in using this prompt
- Teacher goes over graphic organizer from Friday’s class period that they completed with reasons and examples from the text. Teacher goes over the example constructed response she provided students with, paying special attention to the explanation portion of the constructed response.
- Teacher goes over how to structure response: topic sentence/opinion, two examples with reasons provided, explanation. Students are to be as creative as possible with this assignment.
30 min – Students work on constructed response
4 min – Students pass up folders and teacher goes over plans for following day – finish constructed responses and start the novel, The Outsiders

4 min – classes switch

27 min – AR reading
5 min – Go over how to get AR scores
- Actual score of test, percentage of goal reached, and reading within ZPD (reading level) range
13 min – Vocabulary review. Teacher gives students review worksheet and they do the “brain teasers” together as a class.
- During this time, I set up the students’ new AR logs for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} nine-weeks for all classes. I entered in their ZPD range and goal for the time period.

19 min – Go over constructed response for “Why Should We Eat Bugs?”
- Teacher goes over the topic and the point for the students’ writing and asks students several times to tell her what the topic is. Topic is: You are the chef at a fancy bistro and you are trying to convince the owner to add bugs to the menu.
- Students must use at least one simile, at least five descriptive/sensory words, examples/quotes/research that were provided in the text, and must describe at least 2 bug dishes
- Teacher tells students about a contest they will be entered in using this prompt
- Teacher goes over graphic organizer from Friday’s class period with reasons and examples from the test. Teacher goes over the example constructed response she provided students with, paying special attention to the explanation portion of the constructed response.
- Teacher goes over how to structure response: topic sentence/opinion, two examples with reasons provided, explanation. Students are to be as creative as possible with this assignment.

33 min – Students start graphic organizer/constructed response

**Episode 1:**

The brainteaser exercises that the teacher provides to the students are on a worksheet. There are several, such as fill-in-the-blank activities, analogy activities, synonym activities, and multiple-choice activities. Each activity provides the students with a word bank to choose from, and students are allowed to use their worksheet with the definitions to answer each question. The teacher goes through each one of the activities as a class. She will read out the question or sentence and call on a student to give her the appropriate word that corresponds to it. When they are finished with the worksheet, the students turn in the worksheet for a grade.

**Analysis of Episode 1:**

I like that the students have activities to reinforce the vocabulary words they are supposed to be learning for the unit. I think they are helpful and make the students think about the true meaning of the word. I think the activities themselves are great. I don’t particularly like the way the teacher handles the activities. I believe that the students should be able to complete these activities on their own, maybe not all activities but at least a few. If they have the word bank and the definitions in front of them already, they have most of the work done for them. Completing these activities with all of that extra help is not going to help the students memorize and learn the meaning of the word. They should have to do the worksheets for homework or a quiz to try and enforce the importance of actually knowing and studying the word. I think this would be more beneficial to the students. They have a big vocabulary test every two weeks and these activities and brainteasers are supposed to help prepare them for the test, but if the students aren’t actually doing the work themselves, it’s not all that helpful. If I was administering these brainteasers, I also wouldn’t pick them up right away, or I would make sure to return them quickly to the students so they could use the activities to study for the test.
Appendix K. The Participants’ Stories for “I” Poems

KAT’s Story

I am not really sure that my idea of a teacher has changed. I observed people once that I really don’t consider as teachers, but my idea of a teacher hasn’t changed. That’s probably because I came into this with that clear and idealistic picture of what I think the teacher was, and it was based on the previous teachers and my previous observations that formed that ideal, and what kind of teacher I wanted to be. Through my experiences and observations, I have also realized that not all the teachers are my idealistic type of teacher. During my first experience, I kind of struggle with this because she was great at classroom management, and she was nice and had a great rapport with her students, but all she did was worksheets every day. And it drove me crazy because I saw she was not teaching, she was just getting the worksheets. I didn’t like that and realized that I wanted a different type of teaching. I mean I just see her as teacher, but not the kind I would prefer. She’d been teaching for quite a while, and it also went with what she was teaching. She was teaching a lot of grammar, which I don’t enjoy. I also learned that I have to get over this because I am going to be in middle school.

Harry’s Story

I’m not sure. I guess you have to adapt to different groups because each group views things differently. I imagine myself to be a magnet school teacher, a low-income school teacher, and an average public school teacher. And I may teach gifted, hyper gifted, average, and below average students. It was interesting and helpful to see how different teachers handled different groups of students. I guess I’ve learned that not every teacher is the same, not every teacher will do everything, and not every teacher is teaching the way you were taught. I don’t think I’ve learned much about myself as a teacher or observer. Actually, when I first helped a student, I was very nervous. I didn’t want to say the wrong thing. I didn’t know the student, and even because I was older, I wasn’t a power figure for them. I learned that I need to get over my anxiety about doing the wrong thing, and I learned that I will make a mistake every now and then. But this is just a part of life. I guess this is something I learned about myself.
VITA

Leylja A. Emiraliyeva-Pitre, a native of Nizhnegorsk, Crimea, Ukraine, received her bachelor’s degree in 1987 and master’s degree in 1989 at the Zaporizhya State University. She taught English as a foreign language in public and private schools in Crimea, Ukraine for 17 years. After moving to the United States in November 2004, she confirmed her educational credentials and continued teaching English Language Arts in public schools in Louisiana till 2010. In summer 2011, she decided to pursue graduate education and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. She expects to receive her doctorate degree in May 2014 and plans to teach in college and actively participate in educational research upon graduation.