Prospective Teachers' Perceptions
of the Value of an Early Field Experience
in a Laboratory Setting

Leah Wasburn-Moses, Tom Kopp, & Jill E. Hettersimer
Miami University

Introduction

For decades, researchers in the field of education have agreed that field experience is the most powerful learning experience for future teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). To see the "big picture" of teaching and learning, teacher candidates need hands-on experience with children and to be allowed to interpret that experience with guidance from an expert (Wilson et al., 2001). Typically, today's field experiences are expected to:

> be integrated as soon as possible in the preservice program; be an integral part of the whole curriculum; be carefully planned and linked to course work; be sequential and developmental; and provide opportunities for students to experience a wide range of settings and learners who represent a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. (Ribich, 1995, p. 37)

This statement implies that a range of field experiences that increase in intensity and responsibility is needed.

The history of field experiences in teacher education is extensive. Although student teaching was and is still considered to be the most important field experience in teacher education, additional types of field

Leah Wasburn-Moses is an associate professor, Tom Kopp is an assistant professor, and Jill E. Hettersimer is a graduate student, all at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. Their email addresses are wasburlh@muohio. edu, kopptw@muohio,edu, and hetterje@muohio.edu

experience began to grow in popularity during the 1980s. One type is now referred to as "early field experience." The "early field experience" is defined as field experience that occurs within the first two years of traditional preparation programs. This early experience was added to the teacher education curriculum as a response to the increasing diversity in the schools and the need to strengthen partnerships between K-12 and higher education (Huling, 1998).

Between 1970 and 1985, field-based components of teacher education programs grew by nearly 50%, and, by 1985, pre-student teaching field experiences were mandated in 35 states (Metcalf & Kahlich, 1996; Morris, Pannell, & Houston, 1985). This pattern of growth was encouraged by accreditation requirements that institutionalized, by the 1990s, the early field experience as a foundation of most teacher preparation programs (Huling, 1998; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). Many of these early field experiences not only provided a broader "social learning experience" but also included tutoring to develop specific skill sets (Fresko & Wertheim, 2006, p. 150).

Another type of early field placement is the "laboratory experience." This laboratory experience, which is for students enrolled in a school located on a college or university campus, was designed as a type of alternative experience for teacher education. It was intended to bridge the gap between traditional coursework and more extensive field experiences (Metcalf & Kahlich, 2006). Aspects of the laboratory field experience include microteaching, video technology, case studies, and simulation (McIntyre et al., 1996). This type of field placement grew out of several common concerns with traditional field experiences. One of these concerns was the possibility of negative outcomes if teacher candidates were assigned to poor teachers or to teachers whose views or practices deviated significantly from those espoused by the teacher preparation institution. Other salient issues included difficulty with locating, maintaining, and supervising placements with local schools (McIntyre et al., 1996).

A meta-analysis of these types of experiences revealed "strong evidence that on-campus laboratory experiences produce consistent and positive results in terms of teacher affect, knowledge and behavior" (Metcalf & Kahlich, 2006, p. 98). The authors concluded that these experiences show the potential to provide an exceptionally effective alternative to the traditional early field experience. In their comprehensive review of field experiences, McIntyre et al. (1996) concluded that "not only does it appear that additional research is required regarding the effectiveness of laboratory experiences, but also . . . the role of laboratory experiences in teacher education" (p. 183).

Although at one time laboratory placements were quite common, they

fell out of favor in the 1960s and 1970s as the need for more "authentic" experience led supervisors to assign teacher candidates to local classrooms instead (McIntyre et al., 1996). Typically, the schools used for laboratory placements were quite costly to maintain, and budgetary issues forced them to begin charging tuition or cut other services such as transportation. Ironically, these changes caused the student population to be skewed to the wealthy, when laboratory experiences had been intended to increase teacher candidate exposure to at-risk learners from varied backgrounds (Hausfather, 2000). Although some research is still conducted on laboratory experiences, the majority of these experiences disappeared from teacher education curricula about 40 years ago (McIntyre et al., 1996).

The last several years have seen an increasing emphasis on the field experience (or "clinical practice," which implies a stronger bond between higher education and K-12 partners) as a way to improve teacher preparation, from both inside and outside higher education. For example, the much-touted Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning (2010) focuses almost exclusively on the development of clinically based teacher preparation programs. Their report called on policymakers to support this effort (Rabe, 2012; Wiseman, 2012). A policy brief by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (2010) also made a strong case for increased clinical practices by relating them to student achievement, teacher retention, and teachers' perceptions of preparedness. Certain groups and movements have added to the pressure to reform teacher education, including Value-Added Modeling and Race to the Top, which attempt to tie teacher preparation to K-12 student achievement; the Fordham Foundation, which has concentrated on the gap between traditional teacher preparation and reform efforts in U.S. schools; the National Council on Teacher Quality, which ranked the 1,400 teacher education schools, based on self-developed quality indicators; and two accrediting teacher education agencies, which have unified and which concentrate on monitoring teacher candidate time spent in clinical experiences (Imig, Wiseman, & Imig, 2011; Rabe, 2012; Wiseman, 2012). In sum, several national groups have become interested in reform in teacher preparation, and field/clinical experience is an important component of this reform (Imig et al., 2011).

Based on this interest, the entire gamut of clinical placements, from early field experience to student teaching, represents a critical area for research. Much previous research on early field experiences has reported positive perceptions among preservice teachers (Gomez, Strage, Knutson-Miller, & Garcia-Nevarez, 2009). Others have found that early field experiences can serve as a "reality check," testing prospective teachers' commitment to teaching (Malone, Jones, & Stalling, 2002). Neverthe-

less, "little systematic research is available to guide decisions about ideal characteristics of the placements themselves" (Gomez et al., 2009, p. 120). One of the complexities involved in research in early field placement is the diversity of the variables that need to be measured, including number of contact hours, types of students, resources, and supervision.

Despite the lack of research, one constant in the literature on teacher preparation, generally, as well as through early field experience, is the need for candidates to interact with diverse learners (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). In this context, we rely on Hollins and Guzman's definition of diverse learners, which includes "students of color, low-income students, English-language learners, and students in rural and urban settings" (p. 477). Because researchers appear to agree that "teacher candidates do not enter teacher education program with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to work successfully with a diverse population of students" (McIntyre et al., 1996, p. 183), providing relevant experience is crucial to the success of teachers in an increasingly diverse world.

McIntyre et al. (1996) believe that attention should be paid to how to best prepare teacher candidates for increasing diversity in the face of a longstanding, stable population of predominantly white, female, middle-class teachers but that "surprisingly limited amounts of research have been completed on [this] important topic" (p. 183). Prater, Sileo, and Black (2000) discussed the importance of preparing teacher candidates for "one of the largest growing populations of students in the U.S." (p. 51), those deemed at-risk for school failure. This diverse population can be characterized in this context as those who have experienced academic failure "for a significant portion of their school histories" (Larose & Tarabulsy, 2005, p. 440).

Because there is limited research on effective early field experiences and, particularly, on the potential of laboratory experiences to expose teacher candidates to a diverse student population, this study evaluates one such placement. As part of the placement, the teacher candidate provided tutoring at an on-campus model alternative program for at-risk youth. The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of this field placement on first- and second-year teacher candidates. Based on the need to (a) understand what prospective teachers learn from an early field experience designed to provide exposure teaching diverse learners, and (b) examine the impact of laboratory experiences on prospective teachers, the study was guided by two research questions:

1. Did the field experience change participants' views of becoming a teacher?

2. What dimensions of learning did participants identify as an outcome of the experience?

Methods

Participants

Participants were 75 college freshmen and sophomores (45 males and 30 females) at a mid-size, public university located in the rural Midwest. All were secondary education majors in various subject areas who were enrolled in a course titled "Introduction to Secondary Education." This course is required for all secondary education majors and is intended to assist prospective teachers in determining whether teaching is a good fit for them. It is described in the university's bulletin as: "Introductory course combining classroom activities, technology experiences and school visits to assist students in deciding whether or not to pursue a teacher licensure program and to begin the professional preparation process."

One of the primary requirements of the course is to complete and reflect upon ten hours of "professional educational service." The course is typical of other introductory education courses in that it includes "lecture/discussion (sessions) aimed at introducing students to the structures and functions of education at various levels" (Slick, 1995, p. 17). This early field experience component is also typical for an introductory course in the field of education (Slick, 1995). The course supports service in two ways: by integrating discussion of professional educational service into relevant course topics (e.g., motivation, differentiation, diverse learners), and through a reflection assignment, as described below.

In the two semesters during which this study was conducted, the total enrollment in this course was 233. Of the students, 110 (47.2%) elected to complete the field requirement by serving as tutors at an on-campus alternative school that serves at-risk ninth and tenth graders from the local community. The other students selected other options, most of which involved tutoring in school or community-based settings. Of these 110 students, 75 (68.2 %) agreed to participate in this study by submitting their final projects for analysis.

Setting

The alternative school program, "Campus Mentors," served as a unique field placement in several ways. First, it was located on campus, making it an attractive field placement, as the other placements were located off campus. Second, the placement was a small-group setting that consisted of only 15 high school students. This group had been selected by the school district's leadership team as the most at-risk for dropping out of school. The at-risk designation was determined on the basis of multiple factors: failing courses, poor grades overall, low attendance, failing state-mandated standardized testing, and behavioral referrals,

including suspensions. Approximately three-quarters qualified for a free or reduced-cost lunch. Teacher referral was also taken into consideration. Campus Mentors is considered a "diverse" placement because it targets low-income students in a rural setting (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Third, this was a half-day program. Students took half of their classes online (when at the university) and the other half at their local high school in traditional classes. Fourth, each student in the Campus Mentors program was assigned a one-on-one mentor, in addition to the tutor provided through the program. Typically, one to four tutors were in the classroom during the four days per week that classes were conducted. Therefore, the placement provided multiple supports for participating high school students and can offer about 100 field placements each semester.

University students who utilized this setting as their field placement signed up for one 45-minute tutoring session each week. The duration of the tutoring was 12 weeks. Upon arriving at the classroom, the teacher would assign the tutor either an individual student or a small group of students to assist. The teacher would attempt to match the university tutor with a student or students who needed assistance in the tutor's subject area(s) of expertise (e.g., a math education major would be assigned to a student needing assistance in math). Sometimes tutors were assigned to assist students with online coursework, and other times they assisted students with traditional homework or makeup work from their regular high school courses.

During their field placement, the university students observed the teacher's assisting individual high school students in completing coursework, both online and traditional. This one-to-one teaching is a hallmark of alternative schooling (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The practices observed by the university students during this field placement can be described using the framework outlined by Tobin and Sprague (2000) as best practices for students with behavioral issues and replicated later by Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) for use in alternative educational settings. The framework involves the use of several evidence based practices, which include using a low student-to-teacher ratio to increase individualized instruction, positive methods to increase appropriate behavior, and what the authors term "high quality instruction" (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Below we present each of the practices included in Tobin and Sprague's framework and how each guided the alternative placement utilized in this study.

Because this setting has a 1:15 teacher-to-student ratio, it involves more individualized instruction than students would receive in a typical high school setting. University students observed the teacher's teaching one student at a time. The teacher engaged in both academic and behav-

ioral instruction with the students. Tutors observed the teacher's using positive reinforcement rather than punishment, even with students who displayed difficult behaviors (e.g., inappropriate language, out-of-seat behavior, refusal to stay on task). The teacher used praise and verbal redirection with individual students to reinforce both academic and behavioral performance. The teacher also reinforced classroom rules verbally. The teacher demonstrated strategies that encompassed Tobin and Sprague's (2000) "high-quality academic instruction" (p. 179). He used direct instruction with individual students, accompanied by questioning and reinforcement/teaching of learning strategies. For example, while the teacher assisted students in working through lessons, he questioned them in regard to comprehension of content and encouraged their use of learning strategies (e.g., outlining, reviewing previous content, using background knowledge). He also broke down content and assignments into more manageable chunks so that students could experience success.

The university students also observed the teacher's serving as a mentor to the students in his class (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Each week, participating high school students recorded their grades in each course, and the teacher discussed these grades, along with their attendance and behavior, with them individually. He reinforced good behavior (e.g., on-task behavior, task completion, receipt of improved grades) throughout the week and encouraged students to improve, using specific positive incidents and referring to individual abilities. He asked students about their lives outside class and encouraged them to participate in extracurricular activities and to pursue positive relationships, both in their home lives and in their social lives. He communicated with the home school on a regular basis to be informed of academic and behavioral performance and to intervene as necessary with individual teachers and/or the administration in regard to that performance and to the consequences of negative actions.

Instrumentation

As recommended by researchers, the field experience in this introductory course was accompanied by a reflective component (McIntyre et al., 1996; Wilson et al., 2001). Teacher candidates were required to write a reflection of their service experience, due after the students had completed approximately 10 of 12 required tutoring sessions. The reflection was comprised of (a) dates and times that they spent in the field and a description of (b) the learners, (c) their service experience with reflective comments, and (d) how the experience affected their desire to become a teacher.

Both the field placement itself and the written reflection align with the recommendations in McIntyre's (1983) review of the benefits of early

field experiences. Although they are quite broad, the guidelines include allowing the prospective teachers to determine whether teaching is a good fit as a career, exposing them to the complexities of classroom life, allowing them to practice instructional skills, and increasing communication between K-12 schools and universities. The field placement highlighted in this article aligns with the recommendations because it is a collaboration between schools and universities and provides a sheltered experience of the complexity of teaching at-risk students. The placement also allows teacher candidates to practice instructional skills through one-on-one tutoring. The reflection aligns with the recommendations listed above because it requires students to describe the impact of the experience in terms of whether teaching appears to be a good fit for them as well as to begin to consider some of the nuances (or "complexities of classroom life") involved in describing and addressing youth deemed to be at-risk.

Procedures

For each of two semesters, one of the researchers visited the course and invited students who had selected Campus Mentors as their field placement to participate in a study that evaluated the tutoring experience. After the end of the course, the instructor provided the researcher with a copy of the reflection assignment of each student who had agreed to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, which concerned whether the field experience affected prospective teachers' views of becoming a teacher, the responses to the writing prompt that asked for a description of how the experience affected their desire to become a teacher were coded separately by the three researchers. The researchers coded a response as positive (+) when the participant indicated that the experience increased his or her desire to become a teacher; neutral (o) when the participant indicated that the experience had no effect on his or her desire, had both positive and negative effects, or the participant did not respond directly to the question; or negative (-) when the participant indicated a decreased desire to become a teacher. The initial calculation of interrater reliability among the three researchers yielded 69%. This calculation was made by counting the number of times that all three researchers agreed on each code, divided by the number of total responses. Discrepancies were reconciled with a simple majority vote; if two researchers selected one code, that code was selected. This procedure resulted in interrater reliability of 99%.

To answer the second research question, which concerned the per-

ceptions of prospective teachers in regard to what they learned from the field experience, the researcher examined qualitative data through inductive analysis (Janesick, 2000). Responses to questions 2, 3, and 4, which asked students to describe and reflect upon the learners, their experiences, and how the tutoring experience affected their desire to become a teacher, were analyzed for what prospective teachers indicated that they learned from the experience. These comments were identified through phrases such as "I learned," "has given me a new perspective," "made me think about," "has helped me realize," "I found that," and "the experience taught me." These phrases were key to the data analysis.

This part of the data analysis was completed in four steps. The first step involved identifying what students learned from the experience; this was done by highlighting written comments that appeared directly after the key phrases identified above. For example, for the response, "It also made me realize that there will be students in my classes that need help with their homework or focusing" (see Table 1), the researchers highlighted the comment, "there will be students in my classes that

Table 1
Sample Coding

Original Response	Code	Theme
"It gave me a great look at some of the students that I will be dealing with."	Student diversity	Student diversity
"It also made me realize that there will be students in my classes that need help with their homework or focusing."	Student diversity	Student diversity
"I was able to see the progress made and how my help affected the students."	Making a difference	Making a difference
"I learned that I could help make a difference in a student's study habits, grades, confidence, and test-taking ability."	Making a difference	Making a difference
"I got a taste of what it's like to help them learn biology."	Myself as a teacher	Trying on the teacher role
"I think this was a positive experience to find out what teaching real high school students is really like."	Real life classroom	Trying on the teacher role
"It has made me more aware of what it means to care for students and be an effective, competent teacher."	Characteristics of a good teacher	Characteristics of a good teacher/ good teaching
"The process has shed light on the multitude of characteristics teachers need to have and (the) ability to endure any situation."	Complexities of teaching	Characteristics of a good teacher/ good teaching

need help with their homework or focusing," because that comment followed directly the key phrase "made me realize." By considering the highlighted comments, the researchers were able to develop codes, or brief summaries, to account for most of the responses.

Second, as the coding progressed, these codes were compared to subsequent responses and then revised to continue to encompass individual responses. For example, the illustrative comment presented above fell under the code "diversity" because it referred to the diversity of students that participants would find in their future classes. Finally, broader categories were created from the codes, and a list of themes was developed as the categories were refined (Charmaz, 2000).

Results

Change in Career Aspirations

After the reconciliation, raters agreed that 69% of responses indicated that the field experience increased participants' desire to become a teacher. Some indicated either that their desire did not change or that their experience had both a positive and negative impact, and some (28%) did not respond directly to the question. Finally, a few stated that the experience had a negative impact on their desire to become a teacher (3%). Representative comments for each category are presented in Table 2.

Outcome Perceptions

As shown in Table 3, four primary themes emerged from participants' writings in regard to what they learned in this field experience. The most common theme, seen in 34% of responses, is that prospective

Table 2
Change in Career Aspirations

Rating	Sample %	Sample Comments
Positive (+)	69%	"This was a very rewarding session and erased any doubts I had about becoming a teacher."
		"After this experience I am even more certain that I want to be a high school math teacher."
Neutral (o)	28%	"This . . . experience had its ups and downs."
		"Helping tutor . . . was a very interesting process."
Negative (-)	3%	"This experience . . . has had a significant impact on my decision to not pursue a degree in teaching."
		"I realized that I would much rather be a counselor than a teacher."

teachers learned about the characteristics of a good teacher or the characteristics of good teaching. For example, participants mentioned the characteristics of being a good motivator, being caring, needing to be "on" 100% of the time, creating an effective learning environment, balancing student understanding with the need to cover material, and managing classroom behavior. Illustrative comments included, "It taught me the role that rewards can play in the classroom and the ways in which they can be used to keep students on task and motivated"; "If you get to know your students on a personal level and make them feel comfortable, they will work that much harder for you and try to be successful"; and, "I witnessed the type of classroom management you should have in order to be an effective teacher." All of these responses show an understanding of teacher-student interaction.

Additionally, 30% of the responses indicated that participants learned about student diversity. In particular, participants indicated that the field experience had exposed them to some of the diversity that they may experience in their own classes in the future. Examples of what they learned included the characteristics of at-risk learners and the wide range of abilities that exists in one classroom as well as the need to understand students who are struggling and to anticipate that they will have students who are unmotivated and who have many issues at school and at home. Representative comments included, "Seeing how different each student's learning style and behavior in school has been eye-opening"; "I learned that, in every classroom, you will have a variety of students, including some who are considered "at-risk" . . . I learned the importance of teaching students as individuals and not just as a group"; and, "In a classroom you are going to have students from all different backgrounds, and you are going to have to know how to work with them in a way that is best for them." These comments illustrate students' acknowledgement of the diversity that they encountered.

Further, 22% of respondents mentioned making a difference. "Making a difference" was seen in responses that indicated either that the individual experienced the teacher's making a difference with his or

Table 3
Themes

Theme	Response %
Characteristics of a good teacher or good teaching	34%
Student diversity	30%
Making a difference	22%
Trying on teacher role	14%

her students or that the participant him or herself felt that he or she had made difference with individual students through the tutoring process. Some of the responses referred to scenarios in which participants helped a student learn, particularly a student who originally appeared to be unmotivated, negative, or confused about the content that was being presented. Additional representative comments included, "I have strengths that other people don't have and hopefully some of my students will benefit from it in some way"; "I learned that I have things to offer an employer in the future. I was able to help in changing a high school boy's outlook on school"; and, "That will be the greatest lesson I will take away from this program . . . there was more to me as a tutor and as a teacher than I thought had been at the program. I *could* reach these students, and I *could* make a difference." Thus, participants appeared to learn about themselves as well as about good teaching in general.

Finally, 14% of respondents mentioned trying on the role of a teacher as what they gained from their field experience. Examples of what they mentioned included learning through teaching in their subject area, how "being a teacher" changed their viewpoint in regard to teaching and learning, and learning more about themselves as a teacher from the experience (e.g., strengths/weaknesses in teaching certain content, behavior management skills). Responses included, "This experience gave me the opportunity to . . . (use) newly acquired teaching skills"; "I was overjoyed to see evidence that I might yet become a good teacher"; and "This experience has really given me a good view of what will be needed of me when I am a teacher . . . the biggest thing I have taken away from it is that I have so much more to learn." These responses indicated that participants learned about themselves by adopting a "teacher" role.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study add to the professional literature on the use of a laboratory setting, particularly a self-contained setting with at-risk learners, as an early field experience. Although the experience involved working solely with an at-risk population, most of the participants indicated that the experience increased their desire to become a teacher. They also appeared to learn about the characteristics of a good teacher and good teaching. Additionally, they indicated that they gained valuable lessons in regard to diversity and, in particular, how they might apply this learning experience to their future classrooms. In sum, the placement appears to have achieved some of the major goals for early field experience, as presented in the literature. Additional research should be conducted on this unique type of field experience.

Despite the complexity of the student population in this setting, most prospective teachers who participated in the study claimed that the field experience increased their desire to become a teacher. It is also important to note that the prospective teachers appeared to understand the diversity of the group itself but were able to take away lessons on diversity as well as lessons on the characteristics of good teachers and good teaching. This finding aligns well with the major impetus behind the implementation of "authentic" early field experiences, which is to "enable (new teachers) to cope with the increasing complexity, challenges, and diversity of current schools and classrooms" (Huling, 1998, p. 1).

Research has shown that these take-away lessons from early field experiences in regard to good teachers and good teaching can have an impact on how well teacher candidates do in future coursework. As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) stated, "Novices who have some experience with teaching when they encounter coursework are more prepared to make sense of the ideas, theories, and concepts that are addressed in their academic work" (p. 401). They believe that powerful learning can be derived from early field experience, particularly in terms of having the opportunity to teach in one's content area and to study the relationship between theory and practice. It appears that this early field experience allowed for both.

One common caveat in regard to educating teachers for diverse classrooms is the propensity of individuals from majority cultures to emphasize the successes of a few and to lower the standards for the remainder of the population. When prospective teachers are exposed to low-achieving students, or to students with behavioral issues, they may misinterpret behaviors, misrepresent students' potential, or fail to understand that mitigating factors such as good teaching can contribute to these students' success (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, 2005). Teacher educators advocate an approach to diversity that is derived from a strength-based perspective rather than from a perspective of deficit (Dieker, Voltz, & Epanchin, 2002).

However, the results of this study did not indicate that these teacher candidates held lower standards for low-achieving students. Instead, prospective teachers noticed and commented on learning about student diversity and that they would need to respond to student diversity in their own classes. For these teachers, "diversity" included students who were not motivated, who struggled with the material, and who had emotional/behavioral issues. The teachers also conveyed that they learned about the characteristics of good teachers and good teaching. The understanding that individuals can make a difference with diverse learners was another theme. Some noted observing the teacher's "making

a difference" through his actions; others mentioned that they made a difference as a tutor and conveyed positive emotions in regard to their experience with diverse learners.

Trying on the role of the teacher before student teaching is another important component of early field experience. Duhon-Sells (1996) described the twin purposes of early field experience as allowing prospective teachers to "assess their ability, stamina and endurance in relating to children, their families, and school personnel" (p. ix) and to decide early in their careers whether they wish to pursue teaching as a career. The results of this study indicate that this laboratory experience provided both to prospective teachers. Most of the participants indicated that the experience did have an impact on whether they planned to pursue a career in teaching, and, although it was the smallest category, 14% mentioned that they learned from trying on the teacher role.

Even within one type of field experience (in this case, the "laboratory experience"), there can be different types of students, different assignments for prospective teachers, and different ways of teaching and learning that can be modeled. Future research in this area should continue to focus on the characteristics of a variety of successful early field experiences as a means to develop a set of standards for such experiences.

Limitations and Conclusion

Several factors limit the generalizability of the results in this study. First, the relatively small number of participants limits the ability to generalize the results to all prospective teachers who chose to participate in this type of field experience. Further, that an opportunity sample of self-selected students was used limits the generalizability of the results. It is possible that those who did not wish to participate in the study had experiences that were dissimilar to those who did participate or that those who selected this particular field experience were different in certain ways from those who did not. Second, the uniqueness of the individual program limits the ability to generalize to other laboratory settings. Third, the data collected were the written perceptions of the participants. Although participants may have learned more from the experience than they chose to write, the impact of the field experience was not measured in other ways, qualitative or quantitative. Similarly, it is impossible to discern whether participants recorded their actual perceptions or whether they wrote what they felt would appeal to their professor.

In conclusion, participation in this laboratory field experience appeared to reinforce most of the participants' plans to pursue a teaching career. Participants indicated that they learned about the characteristics

of a good teacher and good teaching as well as about student diversity. They also noted learning about their ability or teachers' ability in general to make a difference and that they learned more about themselves from trying on the role of the teacher. The experience appeared to be successful in that it exposed students to diverse learners in a manner that allowed them to remain positive about students and their potential as teachers to make a difference.

References

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. (2010). *The clinical preparation of teachers: A policy brief.* Washington, DC: Author.

Banks, J., Cochran-Smith, M., Moll, L., Richert, A., & Zeichner, K. (2005). Teaching diverse learners In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 232-275). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning. (2010). *Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers.* Washington, DC: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-336). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dieker, L., Voltz. D., & Epanchin, B. (2002). Report of the Wingspread Conference: Preparing teachers to work with diverse learners. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 25*, 1-10.

Duhon-Sells, R. (1996). Forward. In D. J. McIntyre & D. M. Byrd (Eds.), *Preparing tomorrow's teachers: The field experience* (pp. ix-xi). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Flower, A., McDaniel, S. C., & Jolivette, K. (2011). A literature review of research quality and effective practices in alternative education settings. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*(4), 489-510.

Fresko, B., & Wertheim, C. (2006). Learning by mentoring: prospective Teachers as mentors to children at-risk, *Mentoring & Tutoring, 4*(2), 149-161.

Gomez, S., Strage, A., Knutson Miller, K., & Garcia-Nevarez, A. (2009). Meeting the need for K-8 teachers for classrooms with culturally and linguistically diverse students: The promise and challenge of early field experiences. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 36*(4), 119-140.

Hausfather, S. J. (2000). Laboratory schools to professional development schools: The fall and rise of field experiences in teacher education. *The Educational Forum, 65*(1), 31-39.

Hollins, E. R., & Guzman, J. T. (2005). Research on preparing teachers for diverse populations. In M. Cochran-Smith & K. M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education. The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 477-548). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Huling, L. (1998). *Early field experiences in teacher education*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429054)

Imig, D., Wiseman, D., & Imig, S. (2011). Teacher education in the United States of America, 2011. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 37*(4), 399-408.

Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: Minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In Y. S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 379-400). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lange, C. M., & Sletten, S. J. (2002). *Alternative education: A brief history and research synthesis*. Alexandria, VA: Project FORUM, National Association of State Directors of Education.

Larose, S. & Tarabulsy, G. M. (2005). Academically at-risk students. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karcher (Eds.), *Handbook of youth mentoring* (pp. 44-453). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Malone, D., Jones, B. D., & Stallings, D. T. (2002). Perspective transformation: Effects of a service-learning tutoring experience on prospective teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 29*(1), 61-81.

McIntyre, D. J. (1983). *Field experiences in teacher education: From student to teacher*. Washington, DC: Foundations for Excellence in Teacher Education and ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.

McIntyre, J., Byrd, D., & Foxx, S. (1996). Field and laboratory experiences. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 171-193). New York: Macmillan.

Metcalf, K. K., & Kahlich, P. A. (1996). Laboratory experiences as transition from campus to field. In D. J. McIntyre & D. M. Byrd, *Preparing tomorrow's teachers: The field experience* (pp. 97-114). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Morris, J. E., Pannell, S. K., & Houston, W. R. (1985). Certification of supervising teachers: A process for improving teacher effectiveness. *The Teacher Educator, 20*(3), 7-15.

Prater, M. A., Sileo, T. W., & Black, R. S. (2000). Preparing educators and related school personnel to work with at-risk students. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 23*(1), 51-64.

Rabe, B. L. (2012). Supporting the development of effective teachers: A case for the formation of collaborative partnerships in the development of a clinical model. *Journal of Education and Practice, 3*(7), 169-175.

Ribich, F. M. (1995). Providing meaningful field experiences. In G. A. Slick (Ed.)., *The field experience: Creating successful programs for new teachers* (pp. 36-43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Slick, G. A. (1995). *Preparing new teachers: Operating successful field experience programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Tobin, T., & Sprague, J. (2000). Alternative education strategies: Reducing violence in school and the community. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8*(3), 177-186.

Wilson, S. M., Floden, R. E., & Ferrini-Mundy, J. (2001). *Teacher preparation research: Current knowledge, gaps, and recommendations* (No. R-01-3). East Lansing, MI: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy in collaboration with Michigan State University.

Wiseman, D. L. (2012). The intersection of policy, reform, and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 63*(2), 87-91.