Teacher Candidates' Attitudes That Influence Preparation Choice: Traditional Versus Professional Development School Options

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ABSTRACT: Many teacher candidates continue to choose the traditional student teaching path in spite of research documenting the value and benefits of professional development school programs. The purpose of this study was to explore reasons why teacher candidates choose a traditional model versus a professional development school model for their culminating student teaching experience. Participants for this study were from the elementary teacher education program at a large midwestern university. Data collection for the study took place over one semester, and 203 candidates participated. The study found that teacher candidates' dispositions in regard to career mindedness, or a lack thereof, influenced their preparation choice.

The traditional student teaching semester is perhaps the most important semester of a teacher candidate's education. However, student teachers continue to report that the demands and concerns of the student teaching semester create high levels of stress, which create burnout and, thus, emotionally drained teacher candidates who want to leave the profession (Lerhardt & Clement, 1999; Swick, 1989). To alleviate teacher candidates' early feelings of stress, a current trend of teacher education reform is to alter traditional student teaching programs into partnerships between schools and universities, often referred to as professional development schools (PDSs).

PDSs can be defined in a variety of ways. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001) defines a PDS as follows:

> Varied forms of initial teacher preparation, such as (1) student teaching, field placements, and on-site undergraduate coursework; (2) multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in continuing professional development by working with university faculty members; (3) efforts to increase all students' learning; and (4) research into teaching and learning for the purpose of improving both. (p. 2)

More than 600 PDSs were implemented during the 1990s (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). The essential goals of the PDS are to improve teacher preparation, enhance the professional development of practicing teachers, and increase student academic achievement while promoting collaborative research with the partnering university (Castle, Fox, & O'Hanlan-Souder, 2006). Involvement in the PDS program is expensive for universities, time consuming for university faculty and practicing teachers, and extremely intense for teacher candidates (Castle et al., 2006). However, those involved in PDS programs continually praise the benefits: a regular exchange of information between practicing teachers and university faculty, the team-teaching between
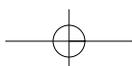
practicing teachers and university faculty, the staff development for teacher candidates and practicing teachers, and a yearlong practical internship for teacher candidates (Castle et al., 2006; Reynolds, Ross, & Rakow, 2002; Ridley, Hurwitz, Hackett, & Miller, 2005).

Qualitative studies of PDS teacher candidates' level of preparedness and confidence have found that PDS-trained teachers were better prepared for their first teaching experience (Book, 1996; Long & Morrow, 1995; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001; Soares & Soares, 2002). Other studies—especially, those with quantitative elements—found no significant differences in comparison of preparedness (Bland & Hecht, 1997; Long & Morrow, 1995; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001). However, when performance was examined by Wait and Warren (2002) using the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument, PDS-prepared teachers scored significantly higher overall—specifically in regard to discipline and classroom management, as well as instructional skills. Likewise, Castle and colleagues (2006) found that PDS participants scored higher on performance items and were more student focused.

Other issues related to PDS teacher candidates included career entrance, satisfaction, and retention. Baker (1998) found PDS-prepared teachers to be more satisfied with the profession and to have entered sooner than their traditionally prepared peers. A 2002 study found no differences in professional entrance or in retention between PDS- and non-PDS-prepared teachers (Reynolds et al., 2002). Additional studies have found increased stress levels in PDS candidates (Hopkins, Hoffman, & Moss, 1997) but also more motivation and higher tendencies toward teacher leadership activities (Kelly, Stetson, & Stetson, 1997; Snow-Gerono, Dana, & Silva, 2001).

The institution that served as the location for this study ("Midwest University") has been actively engaged in the professional reform movement and has developed a variety of PDS models across program areas. Midwest University prepares approximately 1,200 elementary education teachers each year. It began pursuing PDS partnerships in 1996, and more than 700 preservice teachers have participated. Although PDS partnerships vary according to location, all the current Midwest University PDS options offer a yearlong student teaching experience. In the PDS option, teacher candidates are in their student teaching classrooms for the full school year. During the fall semester of that year, the teacher candidate's final university course work is arranged around their classroom teaching and delivered onsite. Some of the PDS sites also participate in reciprocal professional development activities and action research with university faculty and in-service teachers in the partnership schools. The PDS option allows the opportunity to assume greater responsibility for instruction and assessment over a longer period. Approximately 25% of teacher candidates at Midwest choose the PDS option. Seventy-five percent choose the traditional option, which includes a culminating 16-week student teaching experience. Teacher candidates who choose this option complete all university course work before starting their student teaching. Teacher candidates in the traditional option also assume greater responsibility for teaching and assessment; however, this increase in responsibility occurs over a 16-week period, as opposed to a full year in the PDS option.

Teacher candidates are introduced to the possibility of participating in the PDS option in several ways—including (1) open house meetings for parents and prospective students, which take place on campus during the prospective students' senior year in high school; (2) meetings by major for incoming students, which are provided each fall and which contain information describing the PDS option and where teacher candidates can get more information to make plans for their senior year; (3) PDS showcase activities, which happen every fall and include in-service teachers and administrators from each partnership, who meet teacher candidates and answer questions; and (4) a variety of printed and electronic mailings, which are distributed each semester and which describe the option and provide application materials and admittance criteria. Today, many teacher candidates

continue to choose the traditional student teaching path in spite of research documenting the value and benefits of PDS programs. The purpose of this study was to address two research questions: First, why do teacher candidates choose a traditional model versus a PDS model for their culminating student teaching experience? Second, do any demographic factors affect the choice between the PDS option and the traditional option?

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the elementary teacher education program at Midwest University. In the semester that data were collected (fall 2005), the population of elementary education majors at Midwest University was 1,290. The course that is used to administer the survey is a required course for all elementary education majors. Researchers administered the survey in 11 sections of the course, and 203 of the 382 enrolled teacher candidates participated (53%). This course allowed researchers access to participants who are at a similar point in the program. Teacher candidates complete this course after they have made their student teaching choices but just before they begin the student teaching experience.

Of the 203 participants in this study, 152 chose a traditional student teaching place-

Table 1.   Participant Demographics (n)

Demographic	n
Student teaching option	
Traditional	152
Professional development school	51
Race/ethnicity	
White	196
Hispanic	5
African American	0
Asian	2
Gender	
Male	15
Female	188
Financial aid[a]	
Yes	95
No	106

Note. N = 203
[a]Two participants did not respond to the financial aid question.

ment and 51, a PDS placement (see Table 1). Most of the population was White ($n = 196$), with the remaining being Hispanic ($n = 5$) and Asian ($n = 2$). Fifteen participants were male, and 188 female, and the population was split in regard to financial aid eligibility, with 106 receiving no aid and 95 receiving financial aid. Two participants did not respond to the financial aid question.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study was accomplished through the use of a brief survey (see Figure 1) developed by the researchers. This anonymous survey asked participants to indicate their gender, ethnicity, eligibility to receive financial aid, and student teaching choice (PDS or traditional student teaching). The survey then asked participants to indicate, in a three- to five-sentence response, why they made the choice they made.

The researchers met on several occasions to analyze the data. The process of analysis began with open coding the participant forms. Open coding, as used in grounded theory methodology, is the process of developing categories of concepts and themes emerging from data. The process is open because one explores the data without making any prior assumptions about what might be discovered. In open coding, the relationships among the data have yet to be discovered. According to Bryman and Burgess (1994), "categories are rarely known in advance of data exploration, and the relationships between categories must always be discovered during data analysis" (p. 168).

We began the process of open coding by reading each participant's comment, discussing the nature of the comment, and designating a code that captured the comment. Each sentence in a participant's form was coded separately, and in some instances, more than one code was designated for each sentence. For example, one student provided the following reason for choosing the traditional option:

> Because I wanted to be on campus as long as possible and then I chose to go back home so I could save money on housing.

Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is completely anonymous and your lack of partic-ipation will not affect your grade in this course or your student teaching placement. If you have any questions concerning this project please feel free to contact —— or Research Ethics and Compliance at ——.

Please mark the appropriate response for each category below:

Ethnicity	Gender	Financial Aid
_____African American	_____Male	_____I receive financial aid
_____White	_____Female	_____I do not receive financial aid
_____Hispanic		
_____Asian		

For your student teaching experience, please mark which option you have chosen.

_____Professional Development School   _____Traditional

Please indicate below in 3-5 sentences why you made the student teaching choice you made.

Figure 1.   Participant survey

Therefore, this sentence received three codes: *college experience*, *living at home*, and *financial*. The open-coding process resulted in 32 codes.

Each researcher then sorted and catego-rized the codes individually. The purpose of separately categorizing the codes was to pre-vent one researcher's thinking or attitudes from influencing the perceptions of another. At a subsequent session, the researchers com-pared the results of their categorized codes as a way to reach consensus for category names. They found that they had sorted the codes quite similarly, although their category names were different. For example, the researchers had categorized codes such as *family*, *religion*, and *living at home* into one category; however, one titled it *convenience* and the other, *personal reasons*. Because the researchers had clustered the codes similarly, only a few required discus-sion for their placement into categories (e.g., *financial*); after which, consensus was reached on the category names. The 32 open codes were ultimately sorted into six categories: per-sonal reasons and PDS location; necessity; ca-reer mindedness; career hesitation; awareness; and college experience. Table 2 illustrates how

Table 2.   Category/Code Association

Category	Codes
Personal reasons/PDS location	family; undesirable location; desirable location; living at home; financial; alternative student teaching experience; religious
Necessity	remaining course work; schedule; PDS slots full; transfer
Career mindedness	readiness; opportunity; positively impacts future teaching; career commitment; employment opportunity; amount of prep time; diversity experience
Career hesitation	lack of commitment; traditional is less prep; PDS load
Awareness	lack of information; misinformation; word of mouth; inability to connect theory to practice
College experience	unwilling to leave college early; senior year on campus; campus involvement; friends

*Note.* PDS = professional development school.
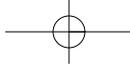
Table 3.   Financial Aid Eligibility According to Category Responses, *n* (%)

	Financial Aid[a]		Nonfinancial Aid[b]	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Personal	49 (51.6)	46 (48.4)	51 (48.1)	55 (51.9)
Necessity	8 (8.4)	87 (91.6)	11 (10.4)	95 (89.6)
Career mindedness	31 (32.6)	64 (67.4)	29 (27.4)	77 (72.6)
Career hesitation	10 (10.5)	85 (89.5)	19 (17.9)	87 (82.1)
Awareness	31 (32.6)	64 (67.4)	37 (34.9)	69 (65.1)
College experience	27 (28.4)	68 (71.6)	30 (28.3)	76 (71.7)

Note. Two participants did not report financial aid status.
[a]PDS option, n = 26; traditional option, n = 69.
[b]PDS option, n = 23; traditional option, n = 84.

the open codes were ultimately sorted into the six distinct categories.

Findings

To determine the extent to which participants' choice was based on financial need, we asked them to indicate whether they received financial aid. Of the 203 participants, 95 (47%) received financial aid and 106 (53%) did not; 2 participants did not report financial aid status. Of the participants receiving financial aid, 27% chose a PDS option and 73% chose a traditional option. Of those receiving no financial aid, 22% chose the PDS option and 78% traditional. The distribution of participants receiving financial aid or not reduces the possibility that resource issues played a major role in student teaching choice. Table 3 compares the participant responses based on their financial need.

Of the 203 participants in the study, 51 chose the PDS option and 152 chose tradi-

tional student teaching. These results are reported by category and include participant responses from the survey. Table 4 presents the frequencies (number and percentage totals) for both the PDS and the traditional options relative to the categories.

Personal Reasons and PDS Location

When participants gave a personal reason for their student teaching choice, they addressed the locations of the PDS, family responsibilities, the opportunity to live at home, and financial need. Forty-five percent of the PDS participants (*n* = 23) gave a personal reason for their choice. Of these 23 participants 87% indicated that the PDS location allowed them to live at home, which placed the PDS in a desirable location. Similarly, 51% (*n* = 78) of traditional participants gave a personal reason for their choice; 85% of them also wanted to live at home during the student teaching semester. However, because there were no PDS options

Table 4.   Participant Survey Results: Professional Development School and Traditional Options, *n* (%)

	Professional Development School		Traditional	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Personal	23 (45.1)	28 (54.9)	78 (51.3)	74 (48.7)
Necessity	0 (0.0)	51 (100.0)	19 (12.5)	133 (87.5)
Career mindedness	49 (96.1)	2 (3.9)	13 (8.6)	139 (91.4)
Career hesitation	0 (0.0)	51 (100.0)	29 (19.1)	123 (80.9)
Awareness	11 (21.6)	40 (78.4)	57 (37.5)	95 (62.5)
College experience	0 (0.0)	51 (100.0)	57 (37.5)	95 (62.5)
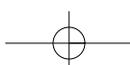
near their homes, this reason was coded as *undesirable location*.

Necessity

None of the PDS participants indicated necessity as a reason for their student teaching choice. However, 19 traditional participants (13%) provided reasons regarding remaining course work or scheduling issues that would not allow them to consider a PDS option. The issue of necessity was obviously not a major consideration in candidates' choice. This finding shows that participants are generally not bound by necessity.

Career Mindedness

Participants choosing the PDS option were more likely to give a reason that reflected career mindedness (96%) than participants in the traditional student teaching option (9%). Reasons that teacher candidates in the PDS demonstrated career mindedness varied. Some participants indicated their readiness to get out to the schools and begin their careers:

> I also want to get into a real career setting as soon as I can.

> I am ready to teach.

> I chose the PDS option because I am just dying to get into the classrooms.

Other participants demonstrated career mindedness when their reasons for choosing PDS included issues of opportunity. Some believed that the PDS option provided opportunity for self-growth:

> I am here for my education and if the PDS is going to further my education and give me a better teaching experience, I'm going to do it.

> I feel that having more experience in a classroom will help me to become a better teacher when I begin my teaching career.

Other participants stated that the PDS provided opportunity for employment:

> I love the idea that graduates from a PDS are seen as second year teachers and can get a job more easily.

> This is a great opportunity and might help me to get a job in the future.

Still other participants suggested that the PDS option would positively affect their future teaching:

> I feel that this will be better for me in the future.

> I chose the PDS because I feel that it will prepare me for my first year of teaching.

PDS participants also indicated that the additional amount of preparation was important:

> I think that it is better to be in a classroom for a whole year rather than one semester.

> I like the idea of getting a full year of experience in a school.

> I want to have the most experience I can get and feel comfortable when I begin to teach.

> I wanted to be able to get as much experience in the classroom as possible before I graduate.

Fewer participants in the traditional student teaching option provided a reason that demonstrated career mindedness ($n = 13$, 9%). Of the participants choosing the traditional student teaching option, 11 demonstrated career mindedness when they indicated that the traditional option allowed them to student teach near home, where they plan to also get a job. These participants based their decision on their desire for a particular job location.

> I plan on student teaching at home so I'm near the area I want to teach.

> I want to student teach in a school district that will be close to what I will ultimately teach in.
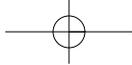
I have always wanted to student teach in my home area to begin my career.

One other participant in the traditional option indicated the benefit and experience of traditional student teaching but did not mention being near home. The final participant of the 13 did not plan on staying in teaching but did demonstrate career mindedness relative to career goals.

I did the traditional way because that is what is required of me. I also do not want to prolong ST because I really don't want to teach in a school setting; I want to get my master's right away and work in a rehabilitation center for persons with visual impairments.

Most teacher candidates in the PDS option (97%) gave a career-minded reason for their choice. In addition, PDS candidates gave varied reasons related to career mindedness and went beyond thinking about job placement to include self-growth. In contrast, few traditional candidates (9%) gave career-minded reasons related only to job location.

Career Hesitation

Whereas PDS participants were more likely to show career mindedness, traditional student teaching participants were more likely to give a reason of career hesitation (19%) than were teacher candidates in the PDS option (0%). The following examples illustrate this hesitation, as identified in participants' responses:

The traditional way just seems easier.

I don't think I would be ready.

I did not like the idea of teaching and school all week.

I'm not ready to be a "real" teacher yet.

I have the rest of my life to work and teach. So I thought rushing into it would be the wrong choice for me.

These reasons appear to be in direct contrast to the career-minded reasons in the previous section. It is worth noting again that these candidates are at the same approximate point in their teacher preparation, yet only traditional candidates gave reasons categorized as career hesitation. This seems to indicate a tendency among teacher candidates who choose the PDS option—namely, that although they recognize their fears and the unknown, they address these issues by choosing more experience and professional exposure. However, some traditional candidates indicated a desire to avoid the unknown and the fears surrounding their future career.

Awareness

In regard to the category of awareness, PDS teacher candidates reported a positive understanding of the PDS experience through word of mouth. Traditional candidates who gave an awareness reason reported a lack of information on the PDS option.

I chose the traditional method because I did not know much about the PDS program.

I am not sure what a professional development school is.

Traditional candidates also reported reasons that indicated that they were misinformed about what a PDS is or requires.

I decided to do the traditional student teaching because I want the usual/general observation. I want to teach in a regular school.

I chose this type because it is the type of school I wish to teach in; since I am an elementary education major most schools available are traditional anyway.

From these responses, one can see the misconception that the teacher candidates have of a PDS. The first response implies that PDS experiences are not conducted in "regular" schools, and the second response implies that
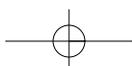
a PDS is a type of school rather than a type of experience. As mentioned earlier, teacher candidates learn about the PDS in various ways and have equal exposure to information on what a PDS is and what is required.

College Experience

Participants in the traditional option were also more likely to give reasons related to the college experience (38%) than PDS participants (0%).

> I don't want to miss out on my last semester of college.
>
> Did not want to miss living my last year in an apartment with my friends here.
>
> I wanted to be in the college life for another semester.

As in career hesitation, none of the PDS candidates gave a reason related to the college experience as influencing their choice. A notable number of traditional teacher candidates based their preparation choice, at least in part, on how important the college experience was to them and how reluctant they were for it to end early.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide an interesting lens through which to examine current research pertaining to PDS outcomes. As members of the field continue to examine the benefits and outcomes of PDS training on teacher performance, teacher attrition, and even student achievement, it is important that they understand the dispositions of teacher candidates who choose PDS options and their reasons for doing so. Some current PDS research has shown positive impacts of the PDS model on teacher performance, teacher attitudes and perceptions, and even teacher attrition (Castle et al., 2006; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2002; Ridley et al., 2005). However, this study provides an addi-

tional lens through which to examine the results of those studies. Would teacher candidates who are more career minded and less hesitant during their preparation produce these more positive outcomes regardless of training model type? Or is it a combination of attitude and the PDS training model?

According to the findings in this study, PDS candidates appear to be more career minded at the onset of their student teaching experience. Although some traditional candidates gave reasons that fell into the *career minded* category, those reasons typically related to their desire to student teach in a district in which they could be employed. PDSs were not offered in those districts. PDS candidates, however, provided career-minded reasons that had more to do with being better prepared to teach, improving effectiveness, and increasing the opportunity to interact for a longer period with classroom environments and students.

In retrospect, we believe that some of our other categories are closely related to the topic of career mindedness. Specifically, the issues of awareness and desire to stay on campus for the college experience illustrate the teacher candidates' hesitation to enter the profession. Responses from the traditional group in the category *lack of awareness* illustrated the teacher candidates' lack of initiative to learn more about the opportunity of the PDS option. Is this confessed lack of awareness an underlying result of a deeper lack of career mindedness? We should note that all candidates had the same opportunities to learn about the PDS. Or does a lack of awareness translate as a lack of career mindedness, if all candidates have the same access to information?

Another category related to career mindedness is that of college experience. In this regard, responses from the traditional group focused on a desire to stay on campus and be with friends their final semester. Teacher candidates placed a higher priority on the social aspects of the campus environment than they did on their future profession. This preference to stay on campus is noteworthy because these candidates are in their junior year and, as such, have already had 3 years of the college experience.
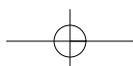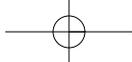
If PDS teacher candidates place a higher priority on preparedness before their culminating student teaching experience, does that mean that they would already be more effective or that they would stay in the field longer? Or is it the combination of the established attitude and the PDS preparation that produces the most effective teacher? Latham and Vogt (2007) studied more than 1,000 teachers—half prepared through traditional student teaching and half prepared in the PDS—and found that PDS preparation was the only factor studied that significantly affected teacher retention in the field during a 7-year period. However, in light of the current study, those findings could have been attributed to the established preparedness attitudes of the PDS-prepared teachers. In other words, perhaps the PDS-prepared teachers in Latham and Vogt's study would have stayed in the field regardless of their preparation. At the very least, the current study suggests that more research needs to be done to determine whether the PDS preparation or the established career mindedness in the student before student teaching has the greatest impact on teacher performance, effectiveness, and retention in the field. If the greatest impact is found in the combination of the preparation and the established career mindedness, how will this influence program changes in teacher education? SUP

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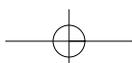
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