

Exploring the Impact of Extended and Early Practicum Experiences

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Abstract

Universities typically use one-day-a-week practicum experiences for novice preservice teachers, but in this pilot program they were placed with 20 cooperating teachers in elementary classrooms for five consecutive weeks. This article explores the impact of extended and early practicum experiences. Findings suggest the cooperating teachers had increased opportunities for their own professional development, observed growth in their preservice teachers, and witnessed direct benefits to their students, furthering the argument that there is room for improvement in traditional practicum models in teacher education programs. However, extended immersion experiences require close partnerships between schools and universities. To foster these partnerships, a collaborative mentoring model is proposed.

Keywords: teacher education, elementary schools, school partnerships

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Preparing elementary teachers who are fluent in working with an increasingly diverse student body is a complex educational endeavor. It requires partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts (Gardiner & Shipley Robinson, 2010). Teacher education programs invest considerable effort working with local schools and teachers to provide meaningful practicum experiences filled with experiential opportunities for preservice teachers. Schools are equally vested in providing a context for high quality teacher education and appreciate the extra help busy teachers receive from energetic and enthusiastic preservice teachers. However, this mutually beneficial partnership is a complex educational enterprise that must be forged intentionally so that it yields positive outcomes for preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, and their students.

Practicum experiences provide preservice teachers opportunities to observe and learn about the complexities of the teaching profession. During this time, preservice teachers develop their teaching philosophy, learn about the diversity in students, and explore the connection between theory and practice. Thus, a quality practicum experience is essential (Beck & Kosnik, 2002). Quality practicum experiences have several components including: personally empowering transformational experiences (Caires & Almeida, 2005), consistent, frequent, authentic, and formative feedback (Marks, 2007), and strong mentoring relationships that foster empathy and emotional support (Blair, 1984).

Central to a high-quality practicum experience is apprenticeship with a quality cooperating teacher (Young, O'Neill, & Mooney Simmie, 2015). Research suggests that strong cooperating teachers have: mid-range teaching experience, strong collaborations with university faculty, experience with practicum supervision, a graduate degree in teacher leadership, and a deep understanding of content knowledge (Killian & Wilkins, 2009). In addition, they are able to articulate their teaching philosophies and their beliefs about education that shape their pedagogy

(Tolbert, 2011). Cooperating teachers are key to practicum experiences because they provide structure to the daily experiences of preservice teachers, model best practices in teaching and behavior management, and offer feedback on preservice teachers' behaviors, dispositions and content delivery (Zeichner, 2010). The roles and responsibilities of cooperating teachers change as the preservice teacher progresses through the teacher education program (Allen, Perl, Goodson, & Sprouse, 2014).

Theoretical Framework for High Impact Immersion Experiences

A successful teacher is a polymath (Breit, Elzinga, & Willett, 1996; Burton, 1992). A key goal of teacher preparation programs is to nurture individuals to be knowledgeable in core content, have a deep understanding of child development and family dynamics across diverse settings, exhibit empathy, and be able to successfully differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all children (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). An educator must therefore develop the potential to view an event from multiple perspectives, integrate and synthesize a wide range of ideas, and then apply the knowledge judiciously in different situations in the interest of education and creating a more just society. Teacher preparation programs therefore focus on student engagement civically, socially, and cognitively in all aspects of a teacher candidate's education (Burton, 1992). Thus, some of the high impact best practices in preparing teachers include frequent student-faculty interaction in authentic learning environments, hands-on active learning, and consistent formative feedback from multiple sources (Kuh, 2009). The Association of American Colleges and Universities has listed 10 high-impact activities that are aligned to developing a polymath. These are experiential seminar experiences for novice college students, developing learning communities, writing intensive courses, undergraduate research, community based service-learning projects, internships, and capstone courses (Bass, 2012). These methods are impactful practices mainly because they afford the opportunity for college students to interact

with different stakeholders, experience diversity, and engage in deep reflection and synthesis of experiences. Teacher candidates are preparing for a professional future in challenging settings. Schools present a work environment that is people, labor, time, and effort intensive, as well as reflective of the demographic changes experienced nation-wide (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Vargas & Conlon, 2011). To yield the same high impact suggested by Kuh (2009), deeper immersion in schools is the pathway for developing the polymath qualities in a teacher.

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) holds Colleges of Education accountable for providing “effective and high quality clinical practice” to teacher candidates so that they can have an impact on K-12 education. CAEP envisions a collaboration between colleges of education and schools that provides the teacher candidate “clinical experiences of sufficient depth, breath, diversity, coherence, and duration” (CAEP Standard 2). There is a significant emphasis on depth, duration, and diversity. The emphasis is based on the understanding that education is a practice-based profession where content knowledge and the development of skills and dispositions are both important. Learning skills and developing dispositions of a teacher polymath are best achieved in classrooms through meaningful interactions with students, teachers, school staff and administrators, community members, and families. These interactions afford the opportunity to build trust, strengthen relationships with all stakeholders, and engage in authentic problem solving and assessment (Grossman, 2010; NCATE, 2010). This trust cannot be achieved through classroom-based traditional instruction alone. It must be strengthened by more immersive practices. Currently, teacher candidates attend practicum in schools one-day-a-week for 14 weeks each year. In addition, they have a 12-week student teaching experience in two different grade levels. This limited field experience is insufficient in meeting the CAEP standard. Immersion is not a new idea in education. Immersion-based programs to teach language arts (Nildicéia & Rosangela Sanches, 2016) and

cultural competency (Arnett & Mady, 2017; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001) have demonstrated success across grade levels and countries (Kong, Hoare, & Chi, 2011). This High Impact Immersion experience advocates replacing four to six weeks of traditional university classroom instruction with consistent and daily immersion in schools where teacher candidates experience the benefits of a High Impact Practice (HIP) by deep immersion in elementary classrooms.

Traditional Practicum Experiences

The initial placement for novice preservice teachers occurs in the first year of the teacher education program when they typically spend one-day-a-week in classrooms and mainly focus on observing students, teaching practices, and classroom management strategies used by the cooperating teachers. In addition, they work on assignments associated with their university courses. The complexity of interactions during practicum between all stakeholders increases in small increments and eventually leads to spending full days in the classroom over several continuous weeks during student teaching. This gradual progression from observations to application of content during practicum is seen as a developmentally appropriate practice for teacher education. However, this gradual progression is time intensive (Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, & Isken, 2003).

In addition, traditional one-day-a-week practicum experiences have been critiqued because novice preservice teachers have limited opportunities to build significant relationships with cooperating teachers, students, and their families. Strong relationships extend beyond information sharing and allow the preservice teacher to connect with the practicum setting (Awaya et al., 2003). The traditional one-day-a-week model also limits the time the preservice teacher spends with the cooperating teacher. Thus, during their approximately 80–90 hours together during the 16 weeks, there may be few opportunities for the cooperating teachers to

provide consistent authentic and formative feedback (Kahan, Sinclair, Saucier, & Caiozzi, 2003). In addition, there is insufficient time together to build trust and clear channels of communication, that are essential in successful practicum experiences.

Typically, the novice preservice teachers also have limited interactions with university faculty during their time in schools because they are only there one day each week. Similarly, the cooperating teacher and the university faculty members in their traditional roles may not have opportunities to interact. Thus, communication between university faculty and the cooperating teacher is mediated by the preservice teacher and the role of faculty is limited to debriefing with the preservice teachers once they return to campus from practicum experiences. This lack of interaction between the two faculties can potentially lead to a disconnect between the routines and practices within elementary schools and content emphasized in higher education (Torrez & Krebs, 2012), often resulting debriefing discussions after practicum that are not contextualized or authentic in meaningful ways.

Residency Models

In response to these limited learning opportunities in a traditional one-day-a-week practicum experience, several school districts developed a residency model for teacher education (Coffman & Patterson, 2014). This model is based on developing a mutually beneficial partnership between institutions of higher education and school divisions in high-need communities. The residency model is typically offered to graduate students who immerse themselves in schools for a full year while simultaneously taking 10–15 credits of graduate level courses that are embedded within the elementary school sites. A teaching residency typically culminates in a full-time teaching position in the school division. During residency, the preservice teachers are expected to take full charge of a classroom, which in turn gives them several opportunities to integrate theory into practice. Residency models have gained prominence

because many high-needs schools are struggling to attract qualified teachers. Thus, a residency model for teacher preparation is seen as a way to recruit, prepare, and retain effective teachers in high-needs schools. Emerging evidence suggests that residency models are successful in hiring teachers from diverse backgrounds and in achieving high teacher retention rates (Berry, Montgomery, & Snyder, 2008). However, empirical evidence that supports the efficacy of teacher education residency models is limited. Furthermore, the residency model is not widely offered across the country to preservice teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

High Impact Immersion Experiences: The Middle Ground

Four university faculty at a university in the Southeast recognized the limitations of the one-day-a-week practicum experience for novice teachers. They also acknowledged that a residency model was not developmentally appropriate or logistically possible for novice preservice teachers. Therefore, they developed a model termed High Impact Immersion Experiences (H.I.I.E.) that addressed the limitations of the traditional one-day-a-week and residency models. In the H.I.I.E. model, the novice preservice teachers spent five consecutive weeks in classrooms, starting three weeks after entering the teacher education program. While they were immersed in elementary classrooms, they met with university faculty on a weekly basis within the school setting instead of attending classes on campus.

H.I.I.E. was inspired by the High Impact Practices (HIP) developed by George Kuh (2009). Research shows that HIP benefits students and faculty in specific ways (Alemu, 2015). For example, students who engaged in HIP found lasting value in their educational experiences and faculty who incorporated HIP into their coursework experienced similar feelings of fulfillment (Kuh, 2012). H.I.I.E. supports deep immersion in authentic learning environments, one of the HIP practices, and allows novice preservice teachers to witness and grapple with real-life issues.

The faculty recognized that H.I.I.E. would change the university and school partnerships because novice preservice teachers would be spending every day in the schools for five weeks. The faculty, all former classroom teachers, recognized that H.I.I.E. would also make the role of the cooperating teacher more complex. Unfortunately, in the research on teacher education, the voices of the cooperating teachers are heard only occasionally (Clift & Brady, 2005). Thus, in order to understand the impact of extended and early practicum experiences on school partnerships, we needed to understand the cooperating teachers' perceptions and experiences related to H.I.I.E.

Methods

The methodology and data shared in this article are part of a larger study that examined the impact of extended and early practicum experiences from all of the stakeholders' perspectives. However, the focus of this article is the impact of H.I.I.E. on school partnerships and highlights the voices of cooperating teachers.

Participants

Twenty elementary cooperating teachers participated in the H.I.I.E. initiative. Each teacher worked with one preservice teacher who was enrolled at the local university. The teachers taught preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. All teachers are White and 19 are women. Their ages ranged from 26–59 years. Five teachers had an undergraduate degree in Education, and seven had earned a Master of Arts in Teaching degree. The teachers had a wide range of teaching experience ranging from 7 to more than 22 years. Their class sizes ranged from 18–20 students.

Context

The cooperating teachers worked in one of five local elementary schools, all within five miles of the university in a rural area in the South-Central Region of Appalachia. Approximately

87% of the students in the participating classrooms benefited from the free and reduced lunch program. The number of native languages in the classes ranged from two to seven. The dominant languages were English, Spanish, Russian, and Kurdish. Students’ racial or ethnic backgrounds corresponded to the city’s demographic patterns. See Table 1 for specific ethnic and demographic data.

Table 1
Demographics of Students at Participating Schools

School	Number enrolled	Limited English proficiency	Immigrant	Refugee	First year in US school	Latino/Latina	White	African-American	Other ethnicities
A	499	46%	13%	2%	5%	48%	43%	6%	<1%
B	548	48%	8%	1%	2%	59%	29%	11%	2%
C	447	61%	17%	3%	4%	52%	35%	11%	0%
D	463	42%	11%	2%	3%	36%	49%	11%	0%
E	532	49%	8%	2%	2%	54%	39%	6%	0%

Note: Totals do not include preschool students. Immigrant students are defined as those who were not born in the United States (US) and have been in the US schools for less than three years. First year in the US students are those who are new to US schools this school year and does not include Kindergarten. Refugee numbers are unofficial numbers provided by the district office and not a field reported in published reports.

Data Collection

Data were collected from the cooperating teachers using structured open-ended interviews, written reflections, and journals maintained by the researchers.

Structured open-ended interviews. Of the 20 cooperating teachers, 14 consented to participate in the interviews. Each interview was conducted in person by a trained research assistant or faculty member. Participants were provided the interview questions ahead of time to ensure complete and thoughtful responses. The interviews occurred after the H.I.I.E. implementation in the last three weeks of the semester. The interviews asked questions related

to: a) demographic data including age, ethnicity, teaching experience, and classroom structure; b) impact of H.I.I.E. on their own teaching practice; c) impact of H.I.I.E. on their students; d) impact of H.I.I.E. on preservice teachers; e) suggestions to improve the quality of the H.I.I.E. initiative. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional service.

Weekly written reflections. During the H.I.I.E. program, cooperating teachers shared written reflections with the research team. They were provided reflection prompts that solicited information on a specific aspect of the H.I.I.E. experience. In addition, the cooperating teachers were encouraged to share other thoughts and offer their perspective on their own experiences each week. Given that cooperating teachers are extremely busy, the reflections were optional. In week 1, 14 cooperating teachers submitted written reflections; in week 2, responses were received from 13 cooperating teachers, in week 3, 11 cooperating teachers responded, and in week 4, eight written reflections were received.

Field notes and journals maintained by researchers during visits to the schools.

University faculty visited the schools each week and met with the cooperating teachers during H.I.I.E. Journals and field notes were generated during this time by the faculty researchers. During weekly meetings, faculty shared their journals with other participating colleagues. The discussions were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed.

Data Analysis

Analysis of these multiple data sources followed a three-phase process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the data reduction phase, data were analyzed to identify patterns and scrutinized for emerging themes. Research assistants then shared the themes with the participants and requested feedback. In the data display phase, the coded data were organized into compressed visual displays to illustrate the outcomes of the data reduction phase. During the third phase of drawing and verifying conclusions, the coded data, as well as the visual display of

these data, were further analyzed for similarities and differences in perceptions of the cooperating teachers. Interpretations were made about the cooperating teachers' perceptions of H.I.I.E and the themes were then shared with the participants to enhance descriptive and interpretive validity of findings and reduce researcher bias.

Findings

In this section, we highlight the impact of extended and early practicum experiences on school partnerships, specifically focusing on the cooperating teachers' perceptions of the H.I.I.E. pilot program. The data revealed that the cooperating teachers believed that H.I.I.E. offered several unique opportunities for all involved, including their own development as teachers, the growth of their preservice teachers, and the learning of the students in their classrooms. Within each broad theme, several sub-themes were evident and are described in the narrative that follows.

Perceptions of H.I.I.E. and Their Own Development as Teachers

Time for metacognitive reflection. The data revealed that the preservice teachers played a role in helping the cooperating teachers reflect on their own teaching. Yvonne, a preschool teacher, talked extensively about this in an interview:

Any time, you know, you've got someone in your classroom, it makes you think about everything you do and why you do it. And like I said, it makes you go back and reevaluate yourself, and, you know, am I doing this the best way? Am I reaching every student? Because you want to present the best you can when you are being a model for somebody. So, I think anytime you have anyone in your room, you want to make sure you are doing it the right way.

Yvonne desired to provide a strong example for the preservice teacher, and to do that she had to reflect on her teaching and the decisions she was making in the classroom. Unlike other

practicum settings, where the preservice teacher is only there a few hours a week, the H.I.I.E. experience gave the cooperating teachers a reason to reflect daily as they explained their thinking to the preservice teachers in their classrooms. Katie, a first grade teacher added, “I feel like it also helped me reflect when I said to her, ‘Oh, yes, so you do have these 100 things you want to include in a lesson, but you have to pick 4 or 5. You have to include what you think is the most beneficial.’” For Katie, having the preservice teacher in her classroom every day helped her reflect and verbalize her decision-making process as she prioritized concepts to include in lessons. Katie also shared that talking to the preservice teacher daily helped her think more critically about what she was doing in the classroom.

In addition to reflecting on their current teaching practices, in the interviews, the cooperating teachers also shared how much they learned from the preservice teachers placed in their classrooms. Naomi, a kindergarten teacher, discussed how the preservice teachers had a lot to offer even if they did not have previous teaching experience. “Having someone fresh in here, they can bring ideas in that I haven’t thought about.” Another cooperating teacher shared, “I mean, it makes me think about myself as a teacher. Okay, this is what I usually do, but that is a good idea. I might try that next time.”

Reflecting on different models of practicum. Some of the cooperating teachers had both H.I.I.E. students and traditional one-day-a-week practicum students in their classroom. Sarah, a preschool teacher, saw a clear difference between the two models of practicum and shared these thoughts:

I think that the students [referring to the preservice teachers] having the experience of a whole month within the classroom setting is very valuable in learning what it is truly like being a teacher. They are able to see the students on good days and on bad, and get the feel for what it is like to teach 8am–3pm five days a week and then need to finish other

work and duties on top of this.

Several of the cooperating teachers mentioned the benefit of having this experience so early in the education program. One shared, “This experience gives them a good picture of what is ahead with student teaching. They will take what they learned here and be able to apply it even more then.” Another teacher said, “These early experiences are very valuable in preservice teachers' education. Seeing real happenings will help them make more sense of what they are studying at [the university]. Educational theories come to life at an elementary school.” A first grade teacher said, “I think it’s definitely helped her [the preservice teacher’s] education. I feel like she really got a sense of what goes on in the life of a classroom teacher.” This feeling was echoed by several other teachers, one sharing:

I think the more time they can spend in the classroom and not just one day a week, but being in here every day for five weeks allows them to see what every day is like. It allows them to see good days. It allows them to see bad days.

Erika, a preschool teacher said:

I think definitely when they are in here day to day, it gives you a better picture of everything that goes on in the classroom. You are seeing every component. You see transitions and schedule changes. Just the everyday routine and rigor that you have to go through. I think it is very eye-opening. If you are here for just a couple of hours you don’t see the whole picture.

One teacher remarked, “My favorite part of it was the five weeks that she came every day. I thought that was so awesome. I wish I had that when I went to school.” Another cooperating teacher, reflecting on her own teacher education, said “I would have LOVED an experience like this. I feel like to have so much hands-on experience so early in the teacher education process is invaluable.”

Perceptions of H.I.I.E. and Preservice Teachers' Growth

Authentic and formative feedback. A key role of cooperating teachers is to provide authentic and formative feedback that is timely, specific, and constructive on various aspects of the preservice teacher's behaviors, skills, and dispositions. In traditional models, college professors, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers have limited opportunities to observe preservice teachers in action, and therefore their feedback is often limited.

During H.I.I.E, because the preservice teacher spent significant time in the classroom engaged in a wide range of activities, it created a context for the cooperating teachers to offer immediate and ongoing feedback. In addition, the cooperating teachers had the opportunity to observe how their feedback was received and applied. For example, Layla, a kindergarten teacher, noticed within the first week of H.I.I.E. that her preservice teacher needed assistance understanding classroom boundaries in terms of what materials and supplies she could have access to in the classroom. The preservice teacher also struggled to appropriately implement the classroom discipline policy. This created dissonance in the classroom which provided Layla an opportunity to offer feedback and strategies that the preservice teacher could use to align herself with classroom priorities. Through candid conversations with the preservice teacher, Layla was able to offer concrete examples of behaviors she frequently observed and her reaction. She then invited the university professor and the preservice teacher to share their perspectives. Through a process of shared negotiation, the cooperating teacher, the preservice teacher, and the university professor arrived at acceptable boundaries and behaviors that were aligned to the preservice teacher's learning objectives, but also respected the cooperating teacher's teaching philosophy. H.I.I.E. created the context for frequent observations and extended conversations unlike typical one-day-a-week practicum experiences where misalignment could be ignored. In addition, it opened channels of communication between preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, and

university faculty.

In another instance, Patricia, a first grade teacher, shared that because of the structure of H.I.I.E, where she mentored the preservice teacher on a daily basis over an extended period of time, she was able to give feedback to the teacher candidate multiple times a day.

I debriefed with the teacher-candidate each morning about the class, what happened the day before, and what the plan is for the upcoming day. I ask her how things went for her when she is given an activity to do and ask if she has any questions.

The cooperating teachers valued having short but frequent conversations with the preservice teachers which provided them opportunities to give frequent and immediate feedback and learn how their students were progressing. Tammy, a preschool teacher said:

I like to give feedback in glows (positive) and grows (needs improvement). My practicum student and I talked every day and we discussed what I would like her to work on with a particular group and then she would share with me how they did during that lesson or activity at the end of the day.

Feedback also occurred in additional settings as described by Katie, preschool teacher, “We have team meetings each Tuesday morning where we discuss what we're doing in preschool and give any feedback on lessons or activities. This is a good, safe time to ask questions and provide feedback.”

H.I.I.E. opened opportunities for administrators to provide feedback to the preservice teachers as well. An assistant principal observed a preservice teacher interacting with a student having a temper tantrum in the hallway and used that as a teaching moment for the preservice teacher. Later she met with the preservice teacher to offer encouragement as well as critical feedback on the observed interactions.

Build and demonstrate capacity as future teachers. Novice teachers are typically expected to observe and try simple tasks with children in a traditional one-day-a-week practicum. However, preservice teachers in H.I.I.E. successfully handled complex teaching and behavior management challenges, allowing them to build and demonstrate capacity as future teachers. The cooperating teachers were able to facilitate this growth by providing opportunities and offering support immediately or later that same day. For example, the novice preservice teachers had the opportunity to work independently with students in small groups during H.I.I.E. They also intentionally planned and implemented multiple lessons in collaboration with their cooperating teachers. Robbie, a cooperating teacher, said that the preservice teacher, “planned and prepared a kindergarten craft and writing prompt for the children.” Another shared, “During the first week of H.I.I.E., I felt confident enough to allow her to work with all of the small groups for our class.”

The preservice teachers, because they participated in the classroom every day, also played an important role in supporting cooperating teachers’ instructional goals. One cooperating teacher said:

She has followed through on plans I have created for improving skills during reading and math rotations. She was able to give me feedback using a simple checklist or by telling me about any problems students had with the activities. Often, the preservice teacher was called upon to work with children with special behavioral challenges or take charge if the cooperating teacher was out of the classroom.

This level of responsibility is unusual for preservice teachers in a typical one-day-a-week practicum experience. A cooperating teacher shared, “I was out two days while she was here and she did a great job of keeping my students in their routine, working on classroom management and was a big help to the substitute teacher in my classroom.” During H.I.I.E., the preservice

teachers also had unique opportunities such as accompanying the cooperating teachers on home visits. This shared experience was beneficial for all involved as discussed by a cooperating teacher:

This [the home visit] provided an insight into this child's life outside of school. I think we both found the visit to be very eye opening. The child is performing well in school, but the mother seemed dysfunctional. We also shared the meeting with another teacher, as she has the sibling.

Another cooperating teacher said, “It is good for these future teachers to see the reality of classrooms.” This cooperating teacher realized that the H.I.I.E. experience was not only helping her logistically support her students, it was giving the teacher candidate a “sneak peek” into what it will be like in her own classroom one day.

H.I.I.E. provided, even within the first couple of days of the immersion experience, the opportunity to engage in more complex tasks and develop confidence and competency, which in turn built capacity within the preservice teachers.

Perceptions of H.I.I.E. and Impact on Students

Individualized instruction. It is a well-established fact that elementary teachers have complex jobs and are simultaneously inundated with multiple demands. The demands not only originate from the students and their families, but also from steadily increasing testing and reporting requirements. Teaching takes on additional complexities when teachers are serving children who live in poverty or are at high-risk for academic failure. The cooperating teachers found H.I.I.E. provided much needed daily support which resulted in more time for small groups, additional one-on-one instructional time, and specific support for English language learners.

Pam, a preschool teacher, shared in an interview that during H.I.I.E. she was able to use three small groups for instruction for the first time because she had support for each group. Another

cooperating teacher remarked, “It [H.I.I.E.] has allowed for me to be more intentional in my small group planning because I can have her [the preservice teacher] lead and teach small group activities.” Having the extra set of hands was especially helpful in some classrooms where the cooperating teachers had little support. “She [the preservice teacher] is able to take small groups and make learning more meaningful for all since we do not have full time assistants. The needs in my classroom are great. It is hard to manage it all by myself.”

The preservice teachers also supported the cooperating teachers with classroom management. Jackie, a kindergarten teacher said, “It just helps having two extra eyes in the room.” Another said, “It's been nice to have an extra set of hands! Especially in preschool, where the children require more one-on-one attention.”

Support for high needs students. In addition to being able to facilitate small groups and assist with classroom management, the cooperating teachers also talked about the benefit of H.I.I.E. for their students in terms of supporting the needs of particular students. One cooperating teacher said:

Each day during reading, she met with two of my new students who were also struggling learners to give them extra support or to help them learn things that the other students in my classroom had already been taught at this point in the year.

The daily presence of the preservice teachers took some of the pressure off the teachers.

Katherine explained:

Sometimes she would help the children who needed support sounding out their words when they're writing, or, for example, some days she would take my student that's gifted out in the hall and work with him on some extension things. She was just there to help the children however they needed it, and two teachers are always better than one, so of course it helped them.

As stated earlier, the population of the school district the university partnered with for H.I.I.E. is incredibly diverse. Part of this diversity is the result of the United States government designating this community as an official refugee resettlement site. While not all immigrants are officially classified as refugees, about 75 students with this status enter the local school system each year. School personnel refer to those who have come to the United States recently as newcomers. The data revealed that in addition to working with students one-on-one during H.I.I.E. to support students academically, the preservice teachers also helped students whose first language was not English. A first grade teacher shared:

I have four newcomers in my classroom. One is from the Congo; he speaks French. One is from Guatemala; he speaks Spanish. Another is from Iraq; he speaks Arabic. My fourth one is also Spanish-speaking. Just having another person to meet in small groups, to spend time with children who don't speak English has been really wonderful.

This sentiment was often repeated in the data from the cooperating teachers. Newcomers arrive at all times during the school year. A cooperating teacher discussed this during an interview.

In our school system, we are often faced with challenges when children arrive in our classroom from other countries with no English. The students usually react in two ways: scared, quiet, not a behavior problem or demanding, loud, with behavior issues. My candidate was able to help me with one of my difficult newcomer children. She often sat with him, worked with him, and gave him one-on-one attention. This helped immensely.

In another example, a kindergarten teacher said, "It can be challenging to meet the needs of children who speak multiple languages as well as the other 16 English-speaking students." The benefits of H.I.I.E. extended beyond providing academic support to include nurturing students' social-emotional needs, especially those experiencing multiple risk factors in their

home environments. The consistency of having the preservice teachers there every day mattered to some of the students. Theresa explained, “We have some kids that really come from different home environments and their adult trust level isn’t always the greatest. I think the more they [the preservice teachers] are in here, the more they begin to feel comfortable with those adults.”

Discussion and Implications

Overall, the school partners, specifically the cooperating teachers, concluded the H.I.I.E. initiative, intentionally providing preservice teachers with an intense and early field placement experience, was valuable to preservice teachers, their students, and to themselves. They saw that this experience was worthwhile because it offered preservice teachers opportunities to gain significant and authentic hands-on experience early in their teacher training, try out strategies and assess them critically, and develop dispositions that would help them be successful teachers. Furthermore, the cooperating teachers shared that they felt H.I.I.E. helps prepare teachers to work in high-needs settings by providing them with more opportunities to get to know students.

In a review of the literature, Clark, Triggs, and Nielsen (2014) outlined the role of cooperating teachers in teacher education. The roles they highlighted overlapped with many of the qualities of the H.I.I.E. cooperating teachers including: providers of feedback, gatekeepers of the profession, modelers of practice, supporters of reflection, gleaners of knowledge, purveyors of context, agents of socialization, abiders of change, and teachers of children.

Mentoring a novice teacher takes time, something cooperating teachers often lack, especially in traditional models. Immersion programs, such as H.I.I.E., offer extended opportunities for achieving long-lasting and transformational learning for novice teachers. However, the job should not be left to the cooperating teacher alone. The mentoring model for H.I.I.E. requires deeper collaboration between the cooperating teacher, college faculty, and school administrators. As the faculty analyzed the data and listened to the needs of the

stakeholders in our study, a solution emerged. We labeled this the Three-Legged Mentoring Model because strength and stability comes when all three stakeholder groups, university faculty, school administrators, and cooperating teachers all contribute to supporting preservice teachers.

Leg 1: University faculty. Deeper involvement by university faculty is needed regardless of whether preservice teachers are engaged in traditional one-day-a-week models of practicum or alternatives like H.I.I.E. Given that cooperating teachers are incredibly busy, the sole responsibility of planning and providing feedback should not rest on their shoulders. University faculty can and should be actively involved in the process which extends their roles beyond creating assignments for preservice teachers to complete in practicum. However, in order to have university faculty involved in supporting cooperating teachers, universities must allow time for deeper involvement in the schools.

Leg 2: School administrators. The role of building leaders, especially principals, may not be immediately evident, however, they play a key role in the H.I.I.E. approach. Not only do they identify cooperating teachers who have the requisite teaching experience, but they also know the teachers who have the temperament and dispositions to take on the added responsibility of working with and nurturing novice preservice teachers during this pivotal time in their professional development. Administrators can also advise teacher education programs about pre- and post-practicum experiences that would provide the wrap-around support for the experience. These experiences may include orientation and debriefing meetings for cooperating teachers and release time or compensation for time spent working with the university faculty. Furthermore, school administrators can be directly involved with the preservice teachers by providing onsite authentic feedback.

Leg 3: Cooperating teachers. Learning is a two-way street. The target beneficiary of immersion practica is the preservice teacher. However, our research shows that there is a

profound spillover effect on the cooperating teachers. There are several opportunities for in-service learning for the cooperating teacher built into the immersion experience. The H.I.I.E. initiative created a context for deep reflection for the cooperating teachers. They were also required to be more explicit about their teaching philosophy, preferred behavior management strategies, lesson planning, and implementation in order to transmit this information to the preservice teachers on a daily basis. Additionally, since the preservice teachers were new to the profession, they had many questions which often stimulated a more authentic problem-solving learning environment. In the one-day-a-week model, there is less time for reflection and feedback, so the pressure to make those days at school meaningful is greater.

Conclusion

School partnerships play a central role in teacher education, and it is imperative that faculty in colleges of education work with cooperating teachers to structure meaningful preservice practicum experiences. In this article, we have shared the findings from our study of the H.I.I.E. pilot program and the cooperating teachers' perceptions of this initiative. Through the process of asking the cooperating teachers for their feedback, we learned that more support is needed if we want this model of practicum for preservice teacher education to reach its fullest potential. Additionally, cooperating teachers need professional development opportunities and incentives to provide consistently high quality practicum experiences to future teachers. With future implementations of H.I.I.E., we plan to put into practice the Three-Legged Mentoring Model so that all stakeholders can contribute substantially to support preservice teachers.

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