

READY TO TEACH: SPECIAL EDUCATION PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER PREPARATION

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Abstract:-

In this qualitative research project, pre-service teacher perspectives on the clinical experiences and coursework required for teacher preparation in special education were examined. The goal of this study was to provide data on specific areas where teacher educators can provide more support and better prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom. This particular study focuses on the educational experiences of pre-service teachers and their perspectives on teacher readiness. The pre-service teacher perspectives are limited to a particular special education teacher preparation educational community; however, the clinical experiences portion of the fieldwork hails from a variety of educational settings. The data collection consisted of pre-service teacher interviews during clinical experiences. The findings of this study revealed the value placed on quality mentors, practical experiences, and application in the clinical setting.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs are under a great deal of scrutiny due to rising concern surrounding educational systems nationwide. Only thirty-eight percent of twelfth-graders performed at or above the proficient level in reading in 2016. The results in mathematics were lower with only twenty-six percent of students at or above a proficient level (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Although some of the percentages have increased from last year, others have decreased from previous years. Persistent gaps still exist in achievement nationwide. Special education program models are ever-changing as a result of students with special needs struggling to meet the state requirements on standardized testing. Students with disabilities reported significantly lower scores in reading and mathematics as well as high rates of retention and mobility. Teacher effectiveness is currently one of the main subjects of research studies in relation to student achievement.

This qualitative research project examined pre-service teacher perspectives on the clinical experiences and coursework required for teacher preparation in special education. The goal of this study was to provide data on specific areas where teacher educators can provide more support and better prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom. The findings of this study revealed the value placed on quality mentors, practical experiences and application in the clinical setting. Can teacher educators compensate for the lack of quality experiences in the clinical setting? Is coursework being adapted to meet the needs of the changing special education program designs?

This particular study focuses on the educational experiences of pre-service teachers and their perspectives on teacher readiness. For the purpose of this study, pre-service teachers are defined as special education teacher certification candidates in their clinical experiences prior to senior student teaching. The pre-service teacher perspectives are limited to a particular special education teacher preparation educational community; however, the clinical experiences portion of my fieldwork hails from a variety of educational settings ranging from the far northwest suburbs to the western suburbs of a large Midwestern state. The data collection consisted of preservice teacher interviews during clinical experiences.

Literature Review

This review consists of literature in the areas of special education teacher preparation programs, pre-service teacher clinical experiences and supervision as well as effective practices in teacher preparation. These underlying themes constitute my interpretation and definition of whole program design for teacher preparation. The main ideas from the relevant literature were examined in an effort to provide evidence to support the findings of this study.

Research on Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

Currently a national movement is occurring to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. This is defined as an educational setting where a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible with success. The student should be provided with supplementary aids and services necessary to achieve educational goals if placed in a setting with non-disabled peers. The percentage of students with disabilities placed in regular education settings has risen considerably over the past decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The need for quality program design in special education and specialized training has evolved from the passage of Public Law- 94-142.

In many cases, general education teachers have very little exposure to strategies necessary to meet the needs of the special education population of learners. Special education teachers are generally prepared to educate special education students in self-contained settings. “As a result, neither general nor special education graduates are prepared to work effectively in the inclusive programs that are evolving in our nation’s schools” (Wolfberg, LePage & Cook, 2009). In response to this issue, the Combined Elementary and Special Education program at San Francisco State University is one an example of an innovative teacher preparation program (Wolfberg, LePage & Cook, 2009). This program addresses the deficiencies in current programs that segregate special education and regular education.

This particular program consists of a cross training model where the candidates graduate with credentials in special education, elementary education and English language learners. Traditional teacher preparation programs have been increasingly criticized for their poor design (Berry, Daughtry & Wieder, 2009). Research credits successful teacher preparation programs with the inclusion of at least one year of extensive clinical training (Aiken & Day, 1999; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008). A survey of pre-service teachers also revealed that clinical field experiences provided the most meaningful preparation for a special education teacher (McLoughlin & Maslak, 2003). These field experiences provide opportunities to increase confidence and gain an appreciation for student differences and diversity (Novak, Murray & Scheuermann, 2009). The University of Washington is soliciting input from recent graduates who are now working in the field to contribute to the “renewal” of the teacher preparation program (West & Hudson, 2010). The top rated themes from the data collected through focus groups related to beginning teacher quality included both coursework and field experiences during initial pre-service training. The participants felt there was a strong need for coursework related to linguistic diversity and cultural differences. The need for “more real class experience versus book training” was a reoccurring theme. The comments related to field experiences were also centered on working with diverse families and settings. The most meaningful experiences for pre-service teachers were defined as the experiences that moved them out of their comfort zone.

Research on Supervision of Special Education Teacher Candidates

The supervision of pre-service special education candidates is a focal point in the literature related to teacher preparation. The data collected from early career special educators revealed a need for quality mentors who would serve as role models

(West & Hudson, 2010). These mentors would work closing with early career teachers and provide support as well as observational feedback. The importance of supervision and providing teacher candidates with systematic and objective data on teaching skills is directly related to teacher effectiveness (Acheson & Gall, 2003). McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy & Terry (2010) identified a gap in research related to the preparation of school leaders in their ability to work with and adequately supervise and/or mentor special education teachers. A variety of supervision models are being utilized to meet the need for reflective practice among teacher candidates. There were concerns that the traditional triad model of supervision was outdated (Alger & Kopcha, 2009). Electronic modules for supervision are being researched as an option to budget constraints and reduced faculty at many institutions. Peer feedback was studied as a viable option to promote professional development during clinical experiences (Wilkins, Shin & Ainsworth, 2009). Another aspect of clinical experiences and supervision that increases teacher candidate performance, as well as a more supportive experience, is ongoing communication (Stanulis & Russell, 2000).

Research on Effective Practices in Teacher Preparation

Best practices in teaching are not surprisingly reoccurring concepts throughout the literature on teacher preparation programs. Best practices refer to research based instructional approaches and strategies for teaching and learning in today's classrooms, creating a differentiated learning environment. The importance of modeling best practices for future educators encourages inquiry and reflection. Pre-service teachers will be required to simulate what they have learned from experts in the field.

Recent theories of learning describe the process as constructive and active. These theories define learning as a social process that includes discussion, debate, and group products (NEA Professional Library, 2006). Instructors of pre-service teachers need to prepare their students to teach in diverse classrooms, to have an understanding of how people learn, to present content for different learning styles, to use various ways to assess and to utilize data (Gardner 1993).

It is also the role of teacher educators to model commitment to their students and demonstrate this through their behavior. Effective instructors in teacher preparation programs continually reconstruct theories and determine which best teaching strategies will enable preservice teachers to meet the expectations for learning and achievement in today's society (NEA Professional Library, 2006).

My study has evolved from the variety of research covering the changes over time in teacher preparation program design. "Historically, student teaching provided the sole opportunity for pre-service candidates to practice and demonstrate teaching skills" (Novak, Murray, Scheuermann, & Curran, 2009). I reviewed research on the relationships between teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness. (Berry, Daughtrey & Wiedner, 2009) Research supports the benefits and effectiveness of various opportunities for teacher candidates to apply the concepts and pedagogy in field experiences prior to student teaching (Aiken & Day, 1999; McLoughlin & Maslak, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The concepts that surround this study include, but are not limited to, reflective practice, teacher preparation within educational communities, and pre-service teacher clinical experiences and supervision. Integrated coursework, best practices and program design are at the forefront of the research lens (Wolfberg, LePage & Cook, 2009). Best practices refer to research based instructional approaches and strategies for teaching and learning in today's classrooms, creating a differentiated learning environment. In reflective practice, the pre-service teacher applies theory in classroom practice, observes and reflects on the results, and adapts the theory, as necessary. The definition of an educational community for the purposes of this study consists of university instructors, supervisors, pre-service teachers, and professionals such as cooperating/mentor teachers and administrators.

There is also focus on the concept of supervisory and peer feedback within the educational community (West & Hudson, 2010; Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth 2009). Effective teacher preparation program design combines relevant coursework and a variety of clinical opportunities prior to student teaching (Berry, Daughtrey & Wiedner, 2009). These field experiences are shaped by the mentors and supervisors in the clinical setting. Mentors are defined as the cooperating teachers working with pre-service teachers throughout the clinical experiences. A supervisor refers to university personnel providing observational data and feedback on teaching skills. This study explores the value placed upon feedback from mentors and supervisors by pre-service teachers.

The theoretical framework of this work is based on two prominent areas of educational research: experiential and social learning, (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961; Dewey, 1938; Rotter 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). The premise of these theories, all relate to individuals learning from one another to build competencies and confidence, frames this study and validates the focus on clinical experiences and mentoring relationships within teacher preparation.

Dewey (1938) concluded that "all genuine education comes about through experience; this does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). Dewey's work stressed the importance of the role of quality experiences in professional development. Dewey defined learning experiences as a circular pattern of trying, questioning, and further experimentation. The foundation of experiential learning is that experience matters and without experience there can be no true understanding (Kolb, 1984). The educational goals of institutions of higher education often align with the ideals of experiential learning and employ cooperative models for professional preparation. Cooperative education allows for the application of knowledge through experience and creates an opportunity for growth through communication, reflection, and social learning.

The *social learning theory* emphasizes the value of observing modeled behaviors and attitudes. Rotter's (1954) work on social learning included the concepts of avoiding negative outcomes and promoting positive outcomes through

observation of behaviors. Modeled behaviors are seen as crucial components to valued and desirable results. Bandura and his colleagues' (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961) work in *cognitive social learning theory* at Stanford University included an experiment with children exposed to models of aggressive behaviors and then observed if they would repeat the behaviors. The theory of self-efficacy, an individual's belief that specific behaviors would produce favorable outcomes, emerged through this research in social learning.

In summary, the author designed this work to reflect theories of experiential learning and social learning. The decades of research have provided ample evidence of the contributions of these educational theories in the professional preparation of teachers.

The problems reported in student achievement, particularly among students with exceptionalities, and special education teacher preparation programs prompted this study. The review of related literature shaped the research questions and provided an opportunity to explore the experiences and readiness level of special education pre-service teacher candidates.

Research Questions

This study sought to glean the candidates' perspectives on the following questions:

- how do pre-service teachers describe their clinical experiences?
- What coursework do pre-service teachers feel prepares them for the clinical setting?
- What types of data from supervisors' observations do pre-service teachers feel would benefit them the most in preparation for the classroom?
- What type of feedback do pre-service teachers receive from supervisors and cooperating/mentor teachers?

Methodology Site and Participants

The research was conducted within the clinical experiences courses for Special Education initial teaching certification at a public University located in a Midwestern state. The total full time and part time enrollment for the university is approximately 25,000 students.

The participant pool included 125 pre-service teachers in three clinical block schedules. The majority of participants were traditional undergraduates with a very small percentage of graduate students and non-traditional, returning second career, adult students at the junior and senior level. Participants were recruited by invitation and contacted via email, with follow up email and class visits to encourage research participation.

Data Sources and Collection

A basic qualitative approach to research was used for the purpose of this study. The study consisted of interviews and field observations, which covered the three semester span of the early clinical experiences. It includes two interviews within each of the three clinical blocks and six field observations and evaluations of the pre-service teachers in the actual clinical placement.

The interviews were conducted over several weeks during the clinical experiences portion of the semester block. The interviews were taped on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. The interview questions consisted of various topics surrounding the educational experiences of pre-service teachers, such as, courses, reasons for choosing special education, coursework utilized in the clinical setting, supervision and practical application during the clinical experiences.

The observation portion of the research was conducted during the final weeks of the clinical experiences. Pre-service teachers were observed interacting with students in the classroom and instructing a prepared lesson for approximately 20-30 minutes. The areas focused on during field observations in the classroom were related to lesson planning, teaching skills, classroom management and professional behaviors. Data were collected from evaluation artifacts associated with the clinical experience including mid-term and final evaluations submitted by cooperating teachers as well as the final reflections of the pre-service teachers.

Data Analysis

I used an open coding process for data analysis in this study. I looked for reoccurring themes throughout the data that related to all of the aspects of the teacher preparation process and program. Common themes were organized through a color coding process. Some of the predominant coding categories consist of, but are not limited to, description of the program/experience, pre-service teacher perspectives on readiness to teach, best practices in teacher preparation, coursework, supervision and feedback.

Findings Clinical Experiences

Through interviews with pre-service special education teachers, I encountered several reoccurring themes in their perspectives on the clinical experiences portion of the special education teacher preparation program. They noted both positive and negative examples of the clinical experiences, identified through interviews as well as field observations in the clinical setting. The pre-service teachers' experiences all seem to be directly related to the existence or lack of cooperation and professionalism of the cooperating/mentor teacher. The experience of a third block clinical student, Lilly, who has completed two previous clinical placements, reports the following:

In the first block I was in a self-contained 1st grade classroom. I loved working with the students but my cooperating teacher did not really seem as if she wanted me there. I mean she was a good teacher, but it was like she didn't know I was coming. I felt really uncomfortable. Last semester wasn't much better. I really didn't like my cooperating teacher and she told me that the only reason she was stuck with a clinical student was because she was not tenured so she didn't want to say no.

Lilly, as stated above, attributes the less than favorable experience to cooperating teachers who were uninformed, unprepared or felt pressure to accept a clinical student into their classroom.

She seemed quite frustrated and disappointed with this reality: "It's like we are so excited to finally get into our professional blocks and out into the schools and someone ruins it for us." She expressed regret that two out of her three clinical experiences were very unpleasant.

This particular participant felt very passionate about the process of making clinical placements and her dealings with the clinical office. At the end of the interview she asked if she could add a few things. The following comments were added to the transcript:

We need so many placements so we can't get picky or choosy but we are the ones going out there with these teachers we see them teach and we see inappropriate things that they do. I know that there are teachers at that secondary placement where I was that have clinical students again and they shouldn't. We were told straight up, "I'm not tenured so that's why you are with me". I watched and listened to my teacher talk badly and say derogatory things about another student in my class. I think it was brought up before and we were told that we are not teachers so we don't know but we know right from wrong and when I hear a teacher use derogatory terms about my peer, I know it's wrong. From what I've heard this is not the first time we have asked to evaluate our clinical advisers or our cooperating teachers. I mean it's a class and we have to attend it, even more so we are out in the community and it's a lot of work. We would feel more valued if we were allowed to evaluate. Just so we could voice our opinions and be heard. We work with them for four semesters and they should know how we feel. I wouldn't want it to go to the cooperating teachers but just for you to know. All of us would so appreciate that and maybe it would prevent someone from having a bad experience.

Again, Lilly expresses her frustration that her perspectives are not being valued in a process that directly affects her. She admitted that she does not have the experience or expertise to critique a teaching professional; however, she feels that the clinical office is assuming that these cooperating teachers always conduct themselves professionally.

She went on to explain what she perceived to be the "key" to a valuable clinical experience:

I know we can learn something from every situation, even the bad ones, but the preservice teachers that have great clinical experiences have cooperating teachers who truly want to be mentors.

Lilly reiterated her disappointment again at the closing of the interview. She explained how much experience her peers have encountered with quality mentors. Lilly cites examples from her peer's experiences such as invitations to curriculum, individualized education plan, and response to intervention problem solving meetings. She also commented on the fact that her peer's cooperating teachers gave them a variety of materials to use in their teaching portfolios.

"There are students in my block that have clinical binders full of lesson plans, behavior plans, assessment tools and other teaching material. I was never offered any materials or additional opportunities with my first two cooperating teachers. They never offered to share anything."

Harriet, a second block clinical student, described two valuable clinical experiences. Both of these positive experiences stem from cooperating teachers who mentored the clinical student. She described both of the programs as great examples of structure, collaboration and varying teaching styles:

The first block clinical experience was wonderful. I was in an alternative school, Maple Tree Therapeutic Day School, working with students in the 3rd, 4th 5th grade classroom and it was very interesting. I got to see students with a variety of special needs. I have seen more physical disabilities and these kids were emotionally disabled and working with them it was great. My cooperating teacher was amazing and really helped me understand the needs of the students. It was a very structured behavioral setting. This semester I am at North Side High School and I really like it. I love the high school setting. The special education team that they have there is fantastic. You know the questions you can ask anyone and get an answer. Very collaborative and it's neat to see the different teaching styles because two different English teachers teaching the same book and same materials two completely different ways and it's really interesting to see because the co-teacher and special education teacher work together differently. It was pretty cool.

Harriet provides evidence of positive clinical experiences that are related to the cooperating/mentor teachers. She notes examples of mentor teachers who explained the needs of students and modeled collaborative efforts. She also comments on the approachability and willingness of mentor teachers to answer questions. Current research mirrors Harriet's responses. These examples of field experiences provided the opportunities to increase confidence and gain an appreciation for student and teacher differences (Novak, Murray & Scheuermann, 2009). Nelly, a third block clinical student, shares thoughts on three very positive clinical experiences. All of these positive learning experiences reflect on the dedication and passion of the cooperating/mentor teachers:

I have had the best clinical experiences. I can honestly say that I have been blessed with all of my placements thus far. The teachers were extremely nice and cooperative. It was really wonderful to see how many people have such passion when working with students who have special needs.

She attributes her success in the teacher preparation program to quality mentors throughout her journey. Nelly stressed the importance of mentors who were cooperative and demonstrated their dedication to special education. She also provided ample evidence that the data and feedback provided by cooperating/mentor teachers and university supervisors in the clinical setting was a valued aspect of pre-service teacher preparation. Harriet shared her thoughts regarding the feedback she received from her cooperating/mentor teacher, "I received awesome feedback..., they seemed very impressed with what we are learning and what we contribute to the classroom." These results are not unlike recent studies that credit successful teacher preparation programs with high-quality field experiences (Aiken & Day, 1999; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008).

Teacher Preparation Coursework

The data collected on pre-service teacher perspectives on relative coursework in the teacher preparation program was primarily positive. Although, the results varied as to which course contents were most beneficial, the overall consensus among the participants was the same. The students in the teacher preparation program feel well prepared by the coursework associated with the clinical blocks. Several participants cited the behavior management coursework with a feeling of confidence and readiness for the classroom. Megan, who was in her second clinical block, expresses a feeling of confidence in her ability to leave the university and apply what she had learned in the area of behavior management:

I will tell you I really enjoyed the behavior management class with Dr. X That was one of my favorites. I felt I really understood a behavior management plan when I walked out the door. This semester I feel like I am learning a lot about being in the classroom and working with teachers. We are doing the co-teaching piece which I am very excited about. So, I think that right now I feel very comfortable with where I am in the block. Megan also supports the relevance of the topic of collaboration in special education. She was very enthusiastic about the knowledge she had acquired from her coursework in order to effectively work with other professionals.

Nelly, a clinical student in her final block, also reported behavior management coursework as being helpful in the clinical setting:

I used many of the disciplinary methods that I learned in my behavior management courses. I have taught past students to “self-monitor” when noise levels in the room were too high. By saying this, they understood that they were expected to sit quietly in their desks with their hands folded, until they were given the next instruction.

Nelly was satisfied with the amount of time spent in the teacher preparation coursework on classroom management. When she responded to the interview questions regarding areas she felt she needed more preparation, she shared the following: I feel there is so much information out there about assistive technology that one class is not enough to cover it all. Teachers should be aware of the amazing technology that we have in present day and should utilize it as much as possible. Sixteen weeks just does not seem like enough time for all of this great information.

Nelly continued to reflect on the course and the instructor for assistive technology and was extremely pleased with the information she received from the coursework. She stated, “I would take as many classes as were offered in assistive technology.” She felt knowledgeable about many of the current technologies being used in the schools and felt confident about her abilities to apply the things she had learned when working with students the clinical setting. The field observations conducted for the purposes of this study also provided evidence of the pre-service teacher’s confidence working with the students. It was apparent that these participants felt comfortable using many assistive devices and handling classroom management procedures.

Effective Practices in Teacher Preparation

The area of best practices in teaching again contained both positive and negative responses. These responses were again proportional to the quality of the clinical placement. Preservice teachers that were working with exemplary cooperating/mentor teachers experienced a variety of examples of best practices in teaching. Unfortunately, others expressed a lack of quality examples of best practices in the actual classroom. Maria, a first block clinical student, reflects on her first clinical experience:

There was a lot of disorganization from the very beginning. I think it was a combined block schedule and it was not organized. I felt that the students did not get a lot of instruction in the spelling piece of it they spent a lot of time on math but students were expected to learn the spelling almost on their own so if you had a two and a half hour class and two are spent on math you have 30 minutes spent on the other piece and it really was disjointed. Not an even structured class at all.

Maria appeared disappointed with this example of a block schedule. She felt the teaching and planning was disproportional and did not benefit the student’s learning. She reported the following on the lesson planning aspect of her clinical experience:

Like in the lesson plans, we do every detail down to the last “I” dotted and “t” crossed or you get two points off...but in this school it’s not like that at all. Their lesson plans are much more generic, if they have them. Some teachers don’t even believe in them. Maria expressed concern over the lack of quality experiences with best practices in teaching. She was optimistic that her next two clinical experiences would give her a better example of structure, organization, lesson planning and best practices. She offered the following suggestions to increase opportunities for learning:

Just like we did mock IEP’s in our block and I would like to experience an IEP more, like an actual meeting. I know it’s a confidentiality issue but maybe someone here in the education department can model one and we can see you guys running it because you have been in the field, instead of us trying to do one. That would help being able to see something like that and the same with best practices in teaching. We are taught about them but unless we are a good clinical placement we may never see them unless the professors model them for us. I would like to see more concrete example of the RTI process and differentiated instruction modeled here on campus.

Maria expresses great confidence in the instructors for the teacher preparation program. She continued to expand on the idea that, “It would be great to be taught the way we are being taught to teach.” This was a common theme among the pre-service teachers who felt they required more modeling of teaching strategies and methods. She described a scenario from a clinical seminar, “You know that brain research we learned about like the 90/20/8 rule in presenting, it would be nice to see examples of that in higher education.” Research supports coursework integrated with best practices and applied in clinical experiences as a successful program design for teacher preparation (Wolfberg, LePage & Cook, 2009). Overall, the themes that emerged from the research data painted a picture of pre-service teachers who were very proud to be

involved with the program and testified to the fact that they feel confident they will be ready to enter the profession with great success.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has provided some specific areas where more support to both clinical candidates and cooperating/mentor teachers can be provided. In summary, the findings from this study can be categorized into three main assertions: clinical experiences, teacher preparation coursework, and the importance of mentoring at the pre-service level.

The practical application of skills during three separate clinical experiences proved to be very beneficial to pre-service teacher candidates. These opportunities to practice in the actual classroom setting were an asset for the candidates. The coursework, designed in clinical blocks, was also credited for a feeling of readiness for the classroom. The design of the program allowed students to learn strategies and methods that could immediately be practiced in a clinical setting. The participants did not all report positive experiences in the clinical placements and there was a common theme among these students for more examples and modeling of best practices from the university instructors.

The significance of this study on a much broader level addressed the most effective strategies for training and educating special education pre-service teachers. Many studies and debates occur on the importance of teacher preparation whole program design, with strong consensus that subject content knowledge needs to be taught along with knowledge of how to teach (Education Commission of the States). Limited evidence exists that preparation in assessment, curriculum and classroom management produces highly effective teachers. Multiple field experiences prior to student teaching are also credited with quality teachers entering the profession; however, a great deal of debate remains over the delivery and duration of these experiences.

Implications from this study relate to cooperating/mentor teachers, instructors and supervisors as well as policy and curriculum. This study demonstrates strong support that cooperating/mentor teachers in the clinical experiences may need training and support in order to provide quality experiences for pre-service teachers. Some opportunities and information are available to cooperating/mentor; however, they suggest a need for more contact and communication with building principals and cooperating/mentor teachers to inform them of training opportunities as well as arrange other supports if necessary. Implications for instructors suggest exploring additional ways to deliver examples of best practices in teaching when the clinical experiences are not adequately providing those examples and to revise curriculum to meet the changing delivery models of special education in today's schools. Implications for policy changes at the university level relate to clinical placements that are not appropriate learning environments. Traditionally, placements are not changed after they are made despite reports of a less than quality clinical experience from pre-service teachers and/or supervisors observing in the field.

Through the course of this study and the review of relevant literature, the concept of special education teacher preparation needs more research. Further investigation into the extent of pedagogical coursework and high-quality field experiences on teacher effectiveness is warranted. More exploration is warranted into particular special education teacher preparation strategies that may increase the effectiveness of new special educators. Some inconclusive studies have been done surrounding teacher preparation program entrance requirements as well as the role of accreditation of these programs in relationship to quality educators. Explicit data involving the connection between special education teacher preparation and effectiveness and student achievement would prove very valuable for the field of special education.

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