

Benefits of Supplemental Field Experiences: Reviewing Five Years of Program Data

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This study focuses on five years of data collected in a summer literacy program offering a supplemental field experience to education majors. The campus in which this study took place is in a suburban area in the southeastern United States, and children attending the summer program have been required to meet the following criteria: the children must receive free/reduced-price lunch; the children must be performing below grade level in reading, and the children must commit to attending daily for four weeks of instruction. The program is offered at a low cost (\$20 supplies fee) by utilizing the university's America Reads funding to hire Federal Work Study eligible college students to work as tutors for the children. This program has produced beneficial data for understanding the importance of summer programs on college campuses to improve the literacy of K-12 children while simultaneously (and perhaps most importantly) developing the teaching skills of undergraduate students.

Additionally, this study exemplifies replication research. While the participants change every year, the program goals, setting, and curriculum framework were replicated each year from 2015-2020. This program is an example of literacy interventions with real-world applications. The program is as important as a tool for children in grades 2-6 to improve literacy as it is for the teacher candidates using it as a supplemental field experience. This study adds to the literature in the field by looking at how literacy programs are studied through context replication (Kim, 2019).

Literacy, and what it means in school and out of school, has long been debated (Adams & Rodriguez, 2019; Adams & Rodriguez, 2020; Gee, 2000). There is often a "fixed linear logic associated with 'hard evidence'" (Burnett, 2017, p. 525) in literacy. Becoming literate is not, however, a fixed or linear process; therefore, understanding literacy attainment is "localized and nuanced" (Burnett, 2017, p. 525) is critical in understanding literacy studies. For example, there is a difference in how children learn to read outside of school and how they are taught to read in school, including the fact that learning at home and school means being taught by people with varied values and beliefs. Thus, while quantitative literacy studies help get an overall impression of literacy rates, "qualitative methodologies suited to exploring the different . . . educational context" are critical (Burnett, 2017, p. 525). This is a study of how a literacy program in the summer months impacts teacher candidates and changes teacher education for faculty working with them.

In 2002, Cochran-Smith wrote about how to better incorporate out-of-school literacies with school-based instruction and assessment. In 2016, a Global Kids Online network created a toolkit to assist with understanding how the internet impacts children's lives, including their literacies (Stoilova et al., 2016). The article focused on children in Europe and the United States. Another study linked children's mental health and digital technology use in non-dominant

cultures (Kardefelt-Winther et al., 2020). However, there are far fewer studies related to what happens when children are intentionally engaged in out-of-school literacy (Adams & Rodriguez, 2019; Adams & Rodriguez, 2020, Adams, Rodriguez, & Zimmer, 2017). What happens when children are engaged in a supplemental summer program focused on literacy? The answer may vary if there are teachers involved in the supplemental summer experiences. The researchers also interrogate how supplemental field experiences impact teacher education. We utilize data in this study from previous years of a summer program to conclude core tenets – our conclusion is that the collaboration between faculty and teacher candidates is the heart of this work.

The program has driven multiple research studies on a supplemental field experience on a college campus. This study looks across five years of data and eight publications to determine the recurring themes from the summer program. Table 1 demonstrates the participants over the previous five years.

Table 1
Participants, Modality, and Year of the Program

Year	Tutors (college students)	Children	Faculty	Modality
2016	8	12	2	F2F
2017	6	17	4	F2F
2018	7	30	3	F2F
2019	8	38	2	F2F
2020	9	23	2	Digital

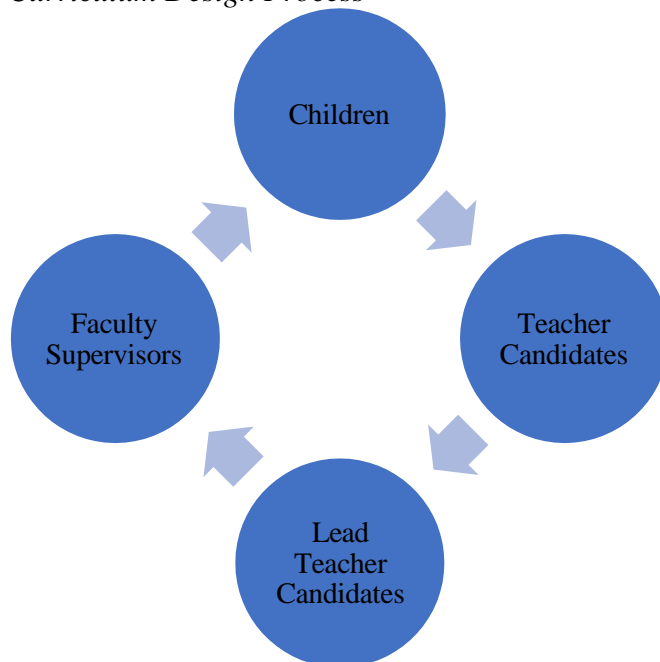
Program Overview and Context of the Study

The program is designed by both the faculty and the teacher candidates. There are two lead teachers hired each year who are involved in every step of the planning process. The methods of designing the curriculum have changed each year, however, the consistent element in planning is a collaborative effort between teacher candidates and two faculty supervisors who have remained with the program since the beginning. The cycle of instruction is altered based on pre-assessments (typically Qualitative Reading Inventory) taken by the children. The ages of the children are also consistent. Due to America Reads

restrictions, the program is offered for children in grades two through six. Growing the program has been relatively easy (except 2020 due to COVID-19); most of the participation has been through word of mouth in the Latinx communities near the university campus.

The Teaching Tolerance website (now renamed Learning for Justice) has been used to assist tutors in creating appropriate, asset-based curriculum. The focus every summer has been on identifying the needs of children through literacy. The children's social and emotional learning has also been just as important to the curriculum as their academic learning. In this way, we value the individual coming to the program as opposed to valuing a curriculum to serve individuals – each child is a valued member of the community, and instruction is tailored to each child's individuality. The teacher candidates spend the first days of the program getting to know the students, learning about their families, and using this information to build the curriculum. A visual of how we design the curriculum as a team is included here in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Curriculum Design Process



The elementary students drive the curriculum based on their reading levels, interests, and identities. The teacher candidates each work with a small group, typically 5-7 children. The lead teacher candidates partner with the faculty supervisors to finalize the themes, schedule, and daily activities, and to determine what activities and lessons should be developed by the teacher candidates. The faculty supervisors act as facilitators for all steps of the curriculum, instruction, and reflection process.

While these core values have driven this work each summer, this study provides a much-needed time to reflect on what has been consistent based on the data.

Research Questions:

1. What are the most important themes reappearing every year of the program?
2. What are the trends and issues evident despite drastic changes due to issues like COVID-19?
3. What are the most important conclusions for both K-12 participants and teacher candidates?

Literature Review

Every year, the faculty supervisors determine a focus of inquiry. There is ample data collected for the program to result in multiple publications, however, often the focus each summer is on something specific. For example, in 2019, the plan was to study the children's literacy growth from pre- to post-assessment and compare what those scores indicated to the tutors' perceptions. However, after a week we found the personalities and professionalism of the tutors were a primary focus of our time. We, therefore, conducted a narrative analysis of the critical incidents occurring that summer (Adams & Rodriguez, 2020). The literature reviewed for each year's study is based on the research questions and relevant gaps in the literature. For this current study, instead of reviewing the literature in each of those previous studies, it is more relevant to review the literature on the common elements. The replicated pieces of the context are supplemental field experience and out-of-school literacy interventions.

Supplemental Field Experiences

The supplemental field experience design allows teacher candidates to combine a field experience with service learning. Service learning positively impacts undergraduate students in multiple ways (Bell et al., 2007; Colby et al., 2009). For example, studies have shown improvements in students' cognitive and social development and stronger connections to the communities where service learning occurs (Colby et al., 2009). There are some drawbacks, particularly in terms of meeting the financial demands of institutions of higher education. "The requirements for implementing CSL [community service learning] run counter to the prevailing trend toward large class sizes and other "efficiencies" (Ellenbogen, 2017, p. 317). For service learning to be impactful, it is important for it to be participatory in nature and involve smaller numbers of participants. For this reason, it is also easily merged with undergraduate student research (Ellenbogen, 2017). Service learning, in particular as a supplemental field experience for teacher candidates, aligns with Vygotsky's (1997) emphasis on

creating structures where students can learn for themselves and react to situations occurring in real-life experiences.

Field Experiences as Sites for Collaborative Teaching

Recent research has suggested field experiences are excellent sites for collaborative teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Simons et al., 2020). Simons, Baten, & Vanhees (2020) suggest pairing student teachers with one mentor increases the opportunities for collaboration and increases the support needed to transition to practice. Previous studies also indicate team teaching provides opportunities for dialogue and innovation (King, 2006; Sorensen, 2014). Supplemental field experiences occurring in a community-based placement are one way to pair multiple teacher candidates with one or two faculty mentors. As opposed to utilizing the “application of theory” process requiring teacher candidates to gain knowledge of pedagogy and follow that learning with practice in the field, community-based field experiences allow the faculty to teach pedagogy while the teacher candidates are practicing their craft (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Zeichner, 2010). This opportunity allows for the connection between campus and field-based teacher education has often been missing in the field (Zeichner, 2010).

Out of School Literacy Interventions. A focus on out-of-school literacy is critically important for students performing below grade level in reading (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Quinn & Polikoff, 2017). Data shows that 75% of children who perform below grade level in third grade in reading will remain poor readers in high school and be more likely to drop out (Annie E. Casey, 2010). Additionally, the summer slide learning loss accumulates over time and impacts both reading and mathematics. This accumulation particularly impacts students who are considered low achieving (Quinn & Polikoff, 2017). Therefore, avoiding the summer slide (Allington and McGill-Franzen 2003) in literacy in the early grades is imperative. For Emergent Bilinguals (EB), this means trying to accomplish two major tasks. While the EB children are learning to master the English language, they must also begin learning to read in English (Babinski, Amendum, Knotek, et al., 2017). By fourth grade, children shift in the continuum from learning to read and focus more on reading to learn (Allington & Johnston, 2002); this means reading skills must be adequate to learn content. Literacy interventions offered during the summer are one way in which the summer reading loss has been mitigated (McCombs et al., 2019). In their study of the effectiveness of summer programs, McCombs, Augustine, Pane, and Schweig (2019) found the benefits of summer programs were greater for students who attended voluntary summer programs for consecutive years and for students who had high rates of attendance.

Conceptual Framework

Out-of-school activities have been steadily increasing despite decreasing funding for many years (Clarke, 2021). A recent article on utilizing federal funds for after-school programs emphasizes the need to assist students in the critical time frame for learning outside of school, which is both after school hours during the school year and the summer months (Clarke, 2021). Those who organize out-of-school experiences traditionally seek ways to support school practices, and “school-based educators . . . examine after-school programs to aid the understanding of teaching and learning in school” (Gallego, 2001, p. 315).

The introduction noted the project design, and the execution of the summer program each year, is a collaboration between the faculty and the teacher candidates. As noted by Connelly & Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry protects the voices and stories of participants involved in dialogic relationships. In each publication used as data in this longitudinal research, stories are the heart of the research. Each year, the faculty have researched some element of the program as viewed by the teacher candidates. This research paper is a look at thematically restorying the program; we want to emphasize the themes repeating time and again. This study focuses often on scene and plot as opposed to cause and effect; this is intentionally chosen following the advice of Connelly & Clandinin in writing results of narrative inquiry (1990).

Methods

As this is a review of five years of data to determine salient themes, the narrative inquiry was the most appropriate methodology. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to describe lived experiences focusing on the most important information provided in participants’ stories (Clandinin, 2007). The aim was to use an approach that would also reveal the rich and diverse ways in which data sources can inform what we have learned over the last five years. Our assumptions as we began this study were that the narratives from each year of the study would provide powerful insights about ideas that would offer new perspectives about what has been learned both by K-12 participants and teacher candidates.

Data Sources

Across the five years of data collection, the researchers’ primary methods have always been qualitative. The data from the participants used in each study included observations, interviews, surveys, and journals - all storied in some way in the articles published. We uploaded each of the data sources using Atlas.ti web version which allowed us to collaboratively code the same documents. The documents were an article published from each year of the program as well as the primary data sources for each article.

Data Analysis

Each of us read and reread the data sources. Following this reading, each of us coded each of the documents using open coding. After we each coded the data, we met to discuss the codes and determine the categories. The following themes by year were evident based on initial coding. In 2016, the overall themes were: increased literacy instruction efficacy; increased efficacy in keeping children engaged; challenging and questioning deficit beliefs; becoming more culturally relevant; a decrease in efficacy in classroom management; a decrease in efficacy in using varied instructional strategies; learning active listening and building relationships. In 2017, the overall themes were the need for a summer bridge program for children performing below grade level in reading; the need for a field experience to allow teacher candidates to fail with support; the need for teacher candidates for a lab experience to learn to teach; the need of the lab experience for teacher candidates to learn culturally relevant pedagogy. In 2018, the overall themes were: the ways teacher candidates allowed children to describe worlds; the use of culturally relevant texts to foster children's writing development; the use of storyboards to allow children to tell their own stories; and green screen as a restorying opportunity. In 2019, the overall themes were: the ways teacher candidates used feedback for children as a demonstration of culturally relevant pedagogy; a focus on literacy skills and increased efficacy in literacy instruction; children's positive identity development due to relationships with teacher candidates; children demonstrating culturally relevant pedagogy with each other. Finally, in 2020, the overall themes were: teacher candidates became more culturally relevant; teacher candidates became active listeners; teacher candidates utilized varied instructional strategies; teacher candidates navigated politics in the workplace; teacher candidates appropriately utilized mandated reporting; teacher candidates demonstrated the need for on-demand guidance and instruction.

Findings

The first research question asked about the most important themes recurring each summer the program is offered. Based on the coding - reliant upon the whole story and all data leading to the publication - we developed the following categories. We identified that the summer program contributed to learning opportunities for the teacher candidates who worked as tutors. Another finding was the focus on asset-based instruction for students. Additionally, there was a focus on meaningful literacy instruction for students. These were the themes repeated most frequently in the data.

These findings indicate the program is successful in relevant learning opportunities through the supplemental field experience, provides the space for teacher candidates to shift to asset-based thinking, and provides an opportunity for teacher candidates to develop meaningful literacy instruction techniques.

Learning Opportunities for Tutors

The data indicate the summer program provides a rich learning opportunity for teacher candidates who work with the students during summer program. The summer program allowed teacher candidates to have an intense, additional field experience during their teacher education program which allowed them to work more independently with elementary-aged children. The tutors indicated learning in multiple ways across the data. First, the tutors had increased knowledge related to cultural competence. This was illustrated in 2019 when tutors used the language of the children and mirrored children's interests through their feedback on assignments. In 2017, we saw the tutors illustrating cultural competence throughout the interview data. These included moments when the tutors questioned their own biases and assumptions and changed lessons to suit the needs of each child.

In 2020, learning was most notable in the way the tutors interacted with each other as professionals. The tutors all described challenging situations with their peers requiring thought and preparation that would not typically be part of a supplemental field experience. For example, there was a situation involving a disagreement between colleagues which had to be resolved to move forward. In a school setting, the disagreement would have been unnoticed by outside parties. By discussing it with the faculty, the tutors were able to learn how to navigate disagreements in the workplace while in a safe space. This was a learning moment for faculty on how little we prepare teachers for the politics of teaching.

Finally, and most importantly, teacher efficacy was a focus across the data. Beginning in 2016, tutors were asked about their efficacy in working with children. There were instances of decreased efficacy which led to learning - the tutors realized they needed bigger toolkits of instructional strategies; were not yet proficient in classroom management; needed to improve active listening; needed to learn to build relationships. There were also instances of increased efficacy as learning occurred - tutors learned how to keep children engaged; tutors learned to use student interest to improve instruction; tutors learned to respond to difficult questions from children.

Asset Based Thinking

The data showed over multiple years and studies, teacher candidates consistently challenged their deficit-based thinking about students. The shift to asset-based thinking in the classroom is critical as teachers work with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teacher candidates received professional development in the asset-based pedagogies. The field experience allowed students to question deficit beliefs by providing space for them to get to know children while simultaneously receiving training and feedback on their teaching practices.

Through the co-development of the curriculum to the observations with notes provided, the faculty mentors partnered with teacher candidates to assist them in growing in cultural competence. In one iteration of the program, a teacher candidate felt she had little in common with a Muslim student she was tutoring. After a few tutoring sessions, she realized she had jumped to conclusions based on her own beliefs. She shifted her beliefs during the experience to a place of openly discovering whom students are before making assumptions. This shift occurred as she developed a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with the student. She was not alone; several teacher candidates over the years have noted the importance of building meaningful relationships. From a tutor who incorporated students' favorite games to tutors who learned phrases in Spanish to better communicate with parents, teacher candidates learn through the program the importance of working on partnering with children and their families.

Teacher candidates incorporated many projects over the years of the program that emphasized the identities of the children. One year teacher candidates explored “who I am in the community, in the state, in the nation, and the world” as the themes for each week. Other iterations of the program included “I Am” poems (see Figure 2 and 3) and drawings to show who they are as part of the classroom family. Posters of “our family” and “caught being kind” (See Figure 4) are other examples of how children were valued as integral parts of a team and family in the classroom (see Figure 4).

Figure 2

Example of I am Poem planning sheet

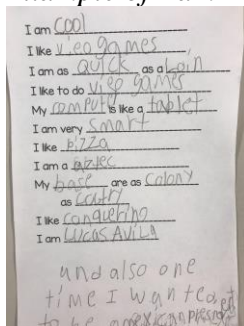


Figure 3

Example of a finished I am Poem

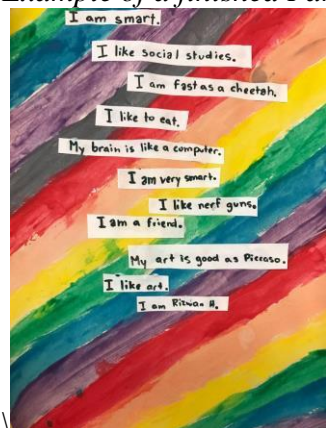
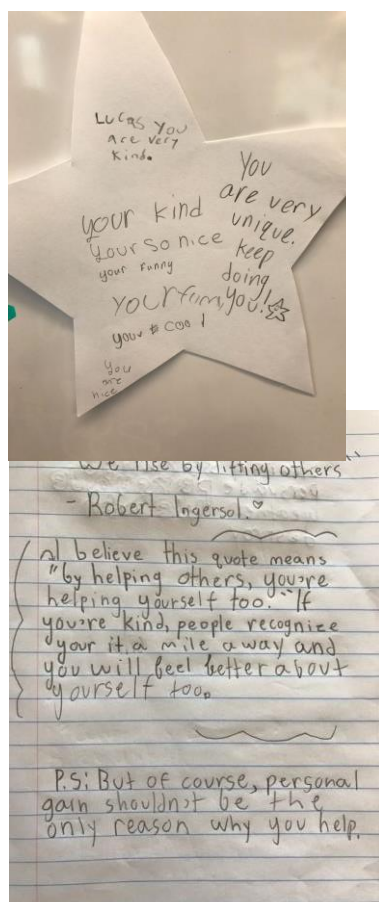


Figure 4

Example of a “Caught Being Kind” Statement and Teacher Response to Wor



In addition to daily activities, there were also projects incorporating culturally relevant literature into the program. In one iteration, students were asked to read texts such as *Ruby Bridges This is Your Time* by Ruby Bridges and *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh as part of the reading occurring each day. During their daily work, children used drawing and their writing to express themselves as cultural beings with shared histories. There was a clear tie made by the teacher candidates between the stories told by characters and the children's stories. These activities led to increased understanding for the teacher candidates on the importance of using texts as "windows and mirrors" (Bishop, 1990). Multiple teacher candidates expressed frustration they were much further in their educational journey before reading similar texts.

Meaningful Literacy Instruction

In three iterations of the program (2016, 2017, and 2018), the candidates explicitly focused on critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, Van Sluys, 2002). In 2016, the teacher candidates working through a course experience showed significant changes in efficacy in instructional strategies. They noted they began allowing the children to choose the text and shifted from locus of control on the teacher to the student in literacy practice. In 2017, the focus of the program was entirely literacy and used the (then) Teaching Tolerance social justice standards as a framework for designing instruction. The lead tutor never strayed from the planned focus of the program on critical literacy, and the results from the children showed how important leadership is to student success. In 2018, the children used texts focused on unsung heroes in history such as *Ruby Bridges This is Your Time* and focused on texts such as "windows and mirrors" (Bishop, 1990), but there were no meaningful assessments to engage the children in those texts in critical ways. While authentic literacy practices involving technology - such as creating a play using Green Screen technology - engaged children, they did not engage in meaningful discussions about the impact of literacy on our understanding of culture(s).

Discussion

The discussion is divided into sections based on the research questions. Question one is answered through the findings but situating the findings in the literature is included in the discussion. Questions two and three are answered below, and literature is included to support those findings as well.

Research Question One

The first research question was answered through the findings. Research question one is What are the most important themes reappearing every year of the program? The learning of the teacher candidates was critical. Unpacking that finding equates to explaining the specifics of what the candidates learned

in the supplemental field experience they do not - perhaps cannot - learn in a traditional course or field experience. This unique field experience allowed the tutors to oversee a class or group of students, something that rarely happens in a traditional field experience. This type of autonomy in designing and putting the curriculum into practice allowed many learning opportunities for the tutors.

As noted by Braden, Compton-Lilly, Myers, & White, (2019), teachers still primarily learn social justice and culturally relevant teaching *by teaching* (p. 237). What our research shows over the years is there are gaps in opportunities for teacher candidates to learn through teaching and providing feedback to children; for teacher, candidates to learn from mistakes in a supportive environment; for teacher candidates to learn from interactions with their peers. Learning from our mistakes, and learning from others, is a critical part of the process of becoming an expert teacher (Braden, Compton- Lilly, Myers, & White, 2019; Nieto, 2000). In undergraduate courses for many students, the content is extensive, and allowing candidates to try and fail in field experiences is not supervised directly by faculty (Darling-Hammond 2009; 2015). This finding is critical; how can we provide more learning lab school experiences to allow the teacher candidates, to fail with a safety net before entering the field? In our setting, using the university space available is the best way to make this possible. Having university faculty available for immediate feedback was key since teacher candidates were able to try strategies with students and receive feedback as they were implementing those strategies. While faculty had high expectations of the teacher candidates, we also let them know it was normal to fail.

The data also shows shifts in beliefs from deficit to asset-based occurred annually. Our university is in a suburb of a major city, and many of our candidates pursue local field experiences. This means some students are in diverse, urban settings; some students are in suburban, predominantly middle-class, white settings; some students are in rural, mountainous areas full of poverty. This creates a difficulty for program coordinators; are all teacher candidates exposed to socially, economically, and racially marginalized children? Should they be exposed - and what are the pros and cons of having all undergraduates work in all settings? Our supplemental field experience is provided for children who are receiving free or reduced-priced lunch and are performing below grade level in reading. In all iterations of the summer program, the demographics of our students are nearly all Black American and Latinx. This is a setting in which many of our teacher candidates are working with “other people’s children” (Delpit, 2006) while under direct supervision from scholars versed in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). This created a dynamic in which students were both exposed to and expected to enact an asset-based perspective when interacting with students.

The shift from deficit to asset thinking and teaching was primarily of interest to the researchers to add to the literature on social justice teaching (learningforjustice.org, 2021). However, there was also a shift from deficit to asset teaching in utilizing evidence-based literacy practices. The teacher candidates described providing meaningful literacy instruction annually. These could be listed under the category of “learning”, but these are areas where the literature indicates particular importance (Moje, 2007; Nieto, 2014; Woods, 2012).

Research Question Two

The second research question is about trends and issues which were evident across multiple years despite changes (such as moving to remote instruction in 2020 due to COVID). The trends and issues that constantly appear are the themes listed in the findings. However, there are other important issues. Each year, there is at least one candidate who shows little improvement during the summer program. This could be using a phone during instructional time, refusing to alter lesson plans after receiving feedback from faculty, being too quick-tempered with students, or failing to create boundaries with students and acting like “buddies” as opposed to teacher and student. In each instance, there are disciplinary steps followed. In several instances, teacher candidates have been fired as tutors. So, we question where the line belongs between a job - being paid as a tutor - and the permanent student record. When a teacher candidate engages in a supplemental, paid field experience, should mistakes be recorded to assist in future placements and hiring? This is something the faculty have discussed over the years. The students we work with are teacher candidates and therefore participate in field experiences during the regular semesters. The additional field experience provides an opportunity for growth, but what happens when the student is not successful? As faculty have discussed this, we have concluded it is our responsibility as faculty in the college of education to at least reach out to program coordinators when we are concerned about a student. This could mean the student receives additional support from their faculty supervisor or even just monitored more closely in their field experiences. We also understand the stress of being “in charge” of a class is difficult for students. Most of the teacher candidates we work with also come from historically marginalized groups and as faculty we also consider how to support students if they are not successful in our program and prompt us to consider what support we could have offered them.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked “what are the most important conclusions for both K- 12 participants and teacher candidates? The most important conclusions are times when the needs of both groups intersect. In the theme “learning opportunities for tutors”, we found places in the data describing moments when

the teacher candidates grew personally or professionally. Those moments nearly always coincided with realizations something was not working: tutors saw they were not getting through to the children through their lessons; tutors saw their lessons were not engaging and behavior was an issue; tutors saw they had approached children from a deficit perspective. In moments when tutors came to faculty, multiple data sources from each summer showed faculty guiding tutors in their thinking. We ask questions about why a lesson is not working as evidenced by performance, why behavior has become an issue, or why an assumption is being made about a child or group of children. By asking these questions in a non-threatening way, the tutors can think about how to change. This is sometimes due to the empathy of the tutors; it is just as often a change made out of necessity to make the day go more smoothly.

Implications

The story of our program is one of hope. While there are findings indicating areas where programs can be improved, and findings indicating each year has setbacks, the overall narrative indicates a program where teacher candidates grow as professionals. Teacher candidates develop humanizing relationships with students every single summer of our program (Mizell, 2020). They also learn a great deal in a short amount of time and develop relationships with faculty that often remain beyond graduation.

Teacher candidates are often hired immediately when utilizing materials put together during our program. Teacher candidates often illustrate a deeper understanding of literacy teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy by the end of the program. Teacher education researchers (Cochran-Smith, 2020) have argued teacher candidates need extensive time in the field to refine their beliefs about students and to also learn about the theory and practice of learning. This program offers the opportunity for teacher candidates to do this. These are all indicators supplemental field experiences (or Professional Development Schools) create stronger induction-level teachers.

The significance of this study programs such as the summer literacy program can serve two major purposes- a space where teacher candidates could work with diverse students while implementing an asset-based curriculum and a service to the community by providing students with an academically rigorous, entertaining summer camp. The summer literacy program offered a space where teacher candidates could have real-world experience while also being supported by faculty. The field of teacher education continues to call for the need for teachers to be prepared to work with diverse students (Gay, 2015; Sleeter and Owuor, 2011) and the research around the summer experiences of historically marginalized youth calls for meaningful literacy experiences for students. Our analysis of iterations of the program over the last five years indicates this program does both.

Declaration of Interest Statement

This research was not funded. The IRB approval was in place before any data collection took place across all 5 years of data.

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