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Transforming Field Experiences to Create Authentic Teaching Opportunities

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Abstract

For teacher candidates and the programs that prepare them, student teaching is a visible experience. For candidates, it culminates their investment of time and money and represents the completion of a significant, albeit early, career goal: becoming a certified, licensed teacher. For the university, the performance of their student teachers reflects program quality. When all goes as planned, both the candidates and program relish their successes. When all does not go as planned, where does the responsibility lie? Is it always an issue of individual candidate performance? At what point should the program assume some level of ownership? This article outlines one secondary education program's on-going journey to resolve these questions. After examination of the issue, the program identified the need to improve its pre-student teaching field experiences. Using the framework of instructional coaching, the program is redesigning its field experience addressing critical issues of supervision, duration, and connections to course content.

Key words: field experiences, supervision, instructional coaching, teacher education program improvement

Introduction

Failure is not an option. This line is often used when the investment of time and money is great and the stakes are high. Student teaching is an experience when failure should not be an option. Considering the time and money teacher candidates invest to reach the point of student teaching and the highly visible nature of the experience, even a small

number of unsuccessful student teachers could be problematic. For one Midwestern, metropolitan university, having a growing number of teacher candidates removed from student teaching was not acceptable. The purposes of this study are to describe the (a) identification of the programs with early field experiences with contributed to failures in student teaching, and (b) efforts to improve field experiences in order to reduce the number of teacher candidates failing student teaching.

The Stories

The teacher candidates sat around a table at the student teacher meeting intently listening to the description of the upcoming semester. The expectations for the student teaching experience were the same for each, (1) engage students with well-prepared lessons; (2) advance student achievement in your content area; (3) maintain a reasonably ordered classroom; (4) work collaboratively with other professionals and accept their feedback; (5) constantly reflect on ways to improve your teaching. However, when their university supervisor asked them to describe their previous experiences teaching and working with middle and high school students, it became evident that they had extremely varied experiences—even though they were enrolled in the same teacher preparation program.

Although their pedagogy courses had been similar, the field experiences they had completed as required within their program had little, if any consistency. Some teacher candidates had only observed in a classroom while others had spent time teaching in front of a class. Some had gotten feedback from the classroom teachers they work with, others had not. No matter what their past experiences had been, at this point, everyone had been assigned a school and they were all supposed to be ready to student teach.

Jenny's Story

One of the students seated at the table, "Jenny," had always been an academically successful student. Her love for history began in high school when her Advanced Placement European History teacher got her

thinking about history beyond dates and places. In college, Jenny loved her courses on medieval history the most and through friends discovered Renaissance Fairs. Jenny was hooked. In her education courses, Jenny always tried to create lessons about her favorite historical period and even dressed in costume as part of her delivery. She wanted her students to be as excited about history as she was. Jenny thought student teaching would be easy.

Student teaching did not go as expected. Jenny was assigned to two sections of American Government and two sections of American History. She had wanted to teach World History or Western Civilization—instead she had landed in her two least favorite courses. Jenny quickly became bored with her teaching and her students. She struggled to relate the content to her students and relied on lectures as her primary mode of instruction. Jenny hated going to school. She did not like what she was doing and had no motivation to do well. Students became disengaged and behavior issues started to grow. Her cooperating teacher and university supervisor gave Jenny feedback and eventually put her on an assistance plan. Having no experience receiving feedback or reflecting on her teaching, Jenny chose to ignore any attempts to help her. Eventually, Jenny was removed from student teaching because of her failure to improve. Financially drained and unable to reconcile how she could enjoy her courses and yet be so miserable during student teaching, Jenny struggled to chart a new career path.

Jack' Story

"Jack," another student teacher at the meeting, wanted to be a teacher. He came from a family of teachers, with both parents currently working as principals. While not an honors student, Jack had met the academic requirements for the teacher preparation program. Jack was excited to be assigned to two American Literature and two British Literature classes in student teaching.

Jack struggled from the start. He loved the students and was good at building relationships with them but had difficulty getting them to take him seriously. He just could not get them to stop talking. Jack was also struggling with lesson planning. He had so many ideas that he could not get everything narrowed down. No matter how long he spent on a lesson,

the students did not understand what he wanted them to do. Jack thought his learning objectives were clear, but his cooperating teacher would make him rewrite them. Jack would finish teaching a lesson only to find out the students did not understand what he had just taught them. Having limited experiences with the realities of day-to-day teaching, he found everything was taking so much more time than he ever thought it would. He was falling behind in grading, and parents were starting to complain about their children's grades. Jack's cooperating teacher and university supervisor worked with him on writing detailed lesson plans that included a variety of learning strategies and formative assessments. Jack's performance would improve for that lesson but he could not replicate this when forced to plan alone. Due to his lack of improvement, Jack was eventually removed from student teaching. The emotional sting of failure was most painful when he delivered this news to his parents.

The Problem

Jenny and Jack are hypothetical students representative of the problem that faced a large teacher preparation program. Approximately 1,100 education majors were enrolled in the program completing traditional, initial certification programs in the areas of early childhood, elementary, middle grades, and secondary education. The middle and secondary education programs included the content areas of business, science, social studies, health, language arts, mathematics, and several world languages. The secondary program also included pre-service teachers in art, music, and physical education pursuing comprehensive certification covering PK-12 grades.

The problem was significant. The program averaged 250 first-time student teachers each academic year. Of those, approximately 40 percent were secondary education majors. In a three-year period, 29 secondary student teachers needed significant remediation during student teaching and were in jeopardy of not passing. The specific concerns leading to the remediation were consistent. The students were struggling with skills related planning, teaching, and classroom management. The program remediated this situation by asking university supervisors to

increase their observations and feedback. It also asked its PK-12 partners to offer additional modeling and supervision that often involved building administrators and extended beyond the support typically offered to student teachers. The student teachers on remediation were required to complete supplemental work and attend added meetings in order to meet the expectations of their plan.

Of the 29 secondary education student teachers on remediation, 11 did not successfully complete student teaching. They were relegated to graduating without certification or completing additional remediation and repeating student teaching. If they graduated without certification, they had to redefine their future careers. Having prepared to teach in PK-12 settings, they would be unable to do so. If they elected to repeat student teaching, they incurred significant tuition costs and were delayed in their ability to generate an income. Both options made them outliers from their peers who had successfully completed student teaching. Upon closer examination, the apparent problem was the program's early field experiences. Earlier field experiences could have helped teacher candidates identify deviancies or the lack of desire to be an educator.

The program's model of the field experiences leading up to student teaching could best be described as a shotgun approach—pull the trigger and a spray of pellets came out, hopefully hitting something. The university pulled the trigger and depending on the course, the section, even from candidate to candidate, the experiences fell where they may. There was no guarantee that a teacher candidate would have a field experience in which they were able to actually teach students and receive meaningful feedback regarding their teaching. They were just as likely to have an experience in which they were relegated to sporadically visiting a classroom and doing little more than observing. Because they may not have had the chance to teach during their field experiences, they had little opportunity to reflect on their career choice and determine if teaching was the profession they wanted to pursue.

Teacher candidates, if they had a field experience, had no university supervision so the opportunity to receive and implement feedback to improve their skills was also left to chance. The well-intended PK-12 teachers who hosted the teacher candidates were reluctant to voice concerns regarding their performance. They did not want to prevent a college student from passing a class or graduating. When they had concerns, rather

than share them with the candidate or the university, they would often minimize the teacher candidate's contact with the PK-12 students, resulting in endless hours of observations that did little to develop the candidate's teaching skills.

From the program's perspective, with no framework for the field experiences, there was no intentionality and articulation of skill development, making it impossible for teacher candidates to measure their growth as they moved through the teacher preparation program. It was also difficult to create meaningful connections between pedagogical courses and field experiences because the experiences of candidates were so varied.

An unsuccessful student teaching experience has the potential to be emotionally, physically, cognitively, and financially exhausting for a teacher candidate. For the cooperating teacher, in addition to the time and energy spent supporting a student teacher and their own sense of failure when the experience has a negative outcome, they are faced with helping the PK-12 students (and perhaps parents) navigate the aftermath in terms of lost instructional time and the possibility of diminished student achievement gains. The university must deal with the expenditure of resources used to remediate a struggling student teacher, which includes increased communication with the school district when problems arise and paying for additional supervision. This is not to mention the university's need to address potential damage to the reputation of their program. If the number of struggling and failing student teachers is too high or becomes a pattern, placements for future student teachers may be jeopardized.

It is clear that whether it involves helping teacher candidates such as Jenny to critically examine her desire to become a teacher or as in the case of Jack, to more thoroughly develop his skills, preparation programs carry a great responsibility in reducing the "failure factor" at the time of student teaching. Student teaching is simply too late in the program for these deficiencies to first surface.

Although this is the story of one secondary education program's journey to improvement, teacher preparation programs across the nation are under increasing pressure to reexamine field experiences. There is a growing body of research that provides guidance for programs who wish to make innovated changes.

Literature Review

Field Experiences

Field experiences are an integral component of teacher preparation programs accredited through the major professional accreditation bodies, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council. This practice is likely to continue as these organizations merge to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). These pre-student teaching experiences are defined as early and ongoing opportunities in which teacher candidates integrate theory from pedagogical courses with the practice of PK-12 classroom teaching. Teacher candidates accomplish this through observing, assisting, tutoring, critiquing, instructing, and conducting research in off-campus or virtual settings (CAEP, 2013; NCATE, 2008).

National Recommendations for Change

Professional education organizations are calling for these experiences to be transformed and to become linchpins of broader reforms being demanded of teacher preparation. NCATE along with the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Council of Chief State School Officers, (CCSSO), and National Education Association (NEA) have criticized existing field experiences models and called for new approaches (AFT, 2012; CCSSO, 2012; NCATE, 2010; NCTQ, 2011; NEA, 2011). Teacher preparation programs must respond to these recommendations for several reasons. First, their constituents (teacher candidates, PK-12 educators, university administrators, governmental agencies, and external funders) are using the above-mentioned reports to inform their financial and policy decisions. A second reason teacher preparation programs should attend to the reports is that they provide a stimulus for programs to evaluate and improve current field experience practices.

However, in the process of program improvement, teacher preparation programs must go beyond simply responding to the calls to make "sweeping" (NCATE, 2010) and "wrenching" (Darling-Hammond, 2005)

changes. To do so, the teacher education community must contend with the broader query, "What are the best practices related to field experiences?" Reviewing best practices involves the examination of factors such as the purpose, delivery, supervision, and resource allocations that underlie field experiences.

Best Practices for Field Experiences

Guided opportunities. The purpose of field experiences is to offer opportunities, guided by university faculty, in which teacher candidates have authentic learning experiences, apply what they have learned in their programs of study, and develop the effective teaching skills most likely to impact PK-12 student learning (AFT, 2012; CCSSO, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2005; NCTQ, 2011; NEA, 2011; Singer, Catapano, & Huisman, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). The experiences provide opportunities for teacher candidates to come "face to face with their entering beliefs and assumptions" about schools, teachers, and the future students they will teach (Banks et al., 2005, p. 266). This self-confrontation provides the foundation that moves the development of teacher candidates beyond an apprenticeship of observation based on their personal experiences as PK-12 students (Lortie, 1975) to that of preparation based in professional pedagogy and real-world experiences. The "realness" of the experiences can help a candidate either affirm or re-evaluate their decision to pursue teaching as a career.

Reflection to frame learning. Additionally, most field experiences involve reflection as teacher candidates frame their learning in the context of their experiences in the PK-12 schools and "grapple" to connect the theoretical concepts introduced in university classrooms to the practices found in PK-12 schools (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Scherff & Sizer, 2012). However, when university faculty provide ongoing support to this reflective process, the connections between the campus and the PK-12 classroom become more coherent (Sherff & Sizer, 2012). In examining the purpose of field experiences two components emerge: (1) the delivery model must purposefully connect theory to teaching and (2) teacher candidates need university support and guidance during field experiences.

Purposeful course integration. In terms of delivery, optimal field experiences are purposefully integrated with university coursework (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Teacher candidates develop a greater understanding and are better able to apply the theory introduced in university coursework when they are simultaneously participating in field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Zeichner 2010).

School-university partnerships. To accomplish this, "teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies" (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p 302). Although the collaborative work to form meaningful partnerships may be complicated, school-university partnerships show promise in improving teacher candidates' ability to work in school settings and enhancing the quality of feedback regarding their performance (Dean, Lauer, & Urquhart, 2005; Sykes & Dibner, 2009). The significance of this school-university partnership is that it leads to shared decision-making and oversight regarding teacher candidate and cooperating teacher selection (National Council for Accreditation of teacher Education, 2010; Commission on Effective Teachers & Teaching, 2011). This leads to better communication between all of the involved parties, which, in turn, will "bring accountability close to the classroom, based largely on evidence of candidates' effective performance and their impact on student learning" (NACTE, 2010).

Appropriate supervision. Supervision of teacher candidates participating field experiences can strengthen the linkages between university coursework and PK-12 classrooms and may create the ideal conditions to form a third space (Zeichner, 2010). The concept of third space has been used to describe a learning space in which two perspectives or patterns of interaction intersect and create an opportunity for learning to occur (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997). The supervision of field experiences within the framework of the third space could create an environment where there are more linkages within authentic learning environments.

Teacher preparation programs can no longer rely on unsystematic experiences that may either place teacher candidates in classrooms in which they experience effective teaching or regrettably, in which they

experience ineffective teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Feldman & Kent, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). Programs must carefully consider the guidance and supervision received by the teacher candidates while they are completing field experiences and should not rely primarily on the cooperating PK-12 educators to provide this supervision and guidance (Scherff & Sizer, 2011). Effective teacher preparation programs have faculty who both teach and supervise teacher candidates, immersing themselves along with the candidates in the school site (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Preliminary evidence from several studies suggests that guidance and supervision impacts the teacher candidates' level of comfort and sense of preparedness to teach (Feldman & Kent, 2006; Schaffer, 2011; Wyss et al., 2012).

Despite the potential impact of supervision, teacher preparation programs have struggled to provide this type of guidance during field experiences. Even in student teaching, the highest profile field experience, supervision is often assigned to part-time graduate assistants or adjunct faculty (AFT, 2012; CCSSO, 2012: NCATE, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). Although part-time supervisors may serve capably, the nature of being part-time limits the integration between a program's coursework and field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Zeichner, 2010). The use of part-time supervisors also does little to foster the K-12 school-university partnerships that may improve field experiences (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Dean, Lauer, & Urquhart, 2005; Feldman & Kent, 2006; Sykes & Dibner, 2009).

Beck and Kosnick (2002) outline three reasons why few teacher preparation programs involve full-time faculty in the field experience supervision. First, the time commitment of supervision is overwhelming and creates a distraction from other responsibilities of tenured and tenure-tracked faculty. Second, the contributions of supervision may be minimized by faculty. Third, the value of supervision is marginalized by university administrative structures.

Instructional Coaching

When seeking to enhance early field experiences and address some of the historic challenges associated with supervising these experiences, the teacher education program described in this article launched significant

field experience changes on the framework of instructional coaching. Within the PK-12 environment, instructional coaching has been a widely adopted practice to improve the instruction of in-service teachers. Embedded within the PK-12 classroom and using communication and relationship building skills, instructional coaches assist in-service teachers with the implementation of effective teaching strategies. Through modeling, observations, and reflective discussions, instructional coaches become partners with teachers and administrators with the goal of improving student academic achievement (Knight, 2007).

While some view instructional coaching as remediation for struggling in-service teachers, it is argued that coaching is not only beneficial for "weaker teachers" but can "help all teachers move forward" in their professional development (Knight , 2007, p. 140).

Research Question and Methodology

The research question "How does the redesign of early field experience impact teacher candidates during student teaching?" provided the focus for this action-research. Action research provided a lens for two faculty members to examine field experiences within their program. Information was gathered and analyzed from those within the program, leading to knowledge that could be applied within the context of the program (Mills, 2011). Multiple data sources were used to insure both a rich data pool and triangulation. Data was collected from four sources: (a) teacher candidates; (b) cooperating teachers; (c) instructional coaches; (d) faculty members who were involved in the program. Data from teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and course instructors were collected from the electronic submission of the early field experience final evaluation instrument. Journals, reflections, and lesson analysis projects were key assessments of the pedagogical courses that teacher candidates submitted electronically or in hard-copy. Cooperating teachers were surveyed at the end of the field experience as part of the program evaluation and feedback. Teacher candidate focus groups were also conducted for program evaluation and feedback.

Moving From the Old to the New

Implementing instructional coaching at the university level required several prerequisite steps. First, coaches had to be hired and formally trained in instructional coaching. Yet even after adding four full-time coaches, the program faced the realities of coaching hundreds of teacher candidates. To manage this and address issues related to the previous "shot-gun" approach, partner schools were recruited into the model. By having multiple candidates in one partner school, the coaches could strengthen the relationship between the university and the schools and maximize their impact by coaching rather than driving from site to site. Finally, field experiences were embedded into the schedule of pedagogical courses. Rather than parallel delivery of the field experiences and courses, the field component now comprised approximately 30 percent of courses' scheduled contact time during which the teacher candidates reported to the partner schools rather than the university.

The structural changes were not insignificant. They required the reallocation of faculty salary lines to allow for the hiring of full-time coaches, establishment of partnerships with PK-12 schools, and redesign of courses. Once made, the operational changes set the stage for early field experiences to be supervised, tied to course work, and delivered with the increased amounts of time and opportunity.

Instructional Coaching

The teacher preparation program set out to pilot a number of changes including using instructional coaching as the guiding framework to strengthen the connections between theory and practice and provide on-site supervision of teacher candidates completing early field experience. Similar to PK-12 settings, the teacher preparation program believed the instructional coaching model could be an innovative way to provide on-site support to teacher candidates during field experiences. Instructional coaches were PK-12 teachers who were recruited and hired from surrounding school districts. They represented a variety of levels and content areas and taught in both urban and suburban school districts. They were required to have a master's degree. Once hired, they completed two

days of instructional coaching training with Jim Knight, a leading expert on instructional coaching in PK-12 settings.

Teacher candidates, like PK-12 teachers, represent various points along a spectrum of skills, and may benefit from instructional coaching regardless if they are struggling, excelling, or performing somewhere in between. By focusing on teaching practices related to (1) behavior management; (2) curriculum and content; (3) effective instructional strategies; (4) formative assessment; instructional coaching provides job-embedded support that enhances the effectiveness of all teachers, regardless of their starting point as a professional (Knight, 2007).

Prior to the field experiences, coaching procedures and expectations were explained to teacher candidates and school partners. The instructional coaches periodically attended the courses. This allowed them to build relationships with the teacher candidates and make connections between the field experience and the course content.

Supervision

The structural changes resulted in teacher candidates being placed in partner schools at the beginning, middle, and end of their programs, and at each level, the instructional coaches provided on-site support and guidance while the faculty provided periodic supervision. From the candidates' perspective and at a very basic level, the coaches were a familiar and friendly face for the candidates as they acclimated to their PK-12 partner schools. The coaches also monitored the teacher candidates' professionalism and helped with tasks such as videotaping their lessons.

At a more complex level, by being embedded in the partner schools, the coaches developed a strong understanding of the context of the teacher candidates' experiences. Coaches could use this knowledge to help the teacher candidates develop lessons that included strategies that were effective for that particular setting. The coaches also served as on-site liaisons with the PK-12 classroom teachers making certain teacher candidates had opportunities that were developmentally appropriate – not too challenging to overwhelm them or too limiting to marginalize them.

Finally, in terms of reflection, the coaches asked teacher candidates questions and listened carefully to their answers. They asked candidates to reflect on their own teaching and guided them to identify strengths and areas for improvement as well as provided their own feedback to the candidates. The coaches then monitored and helped the candidates to implement the feedback. Beyond observing and providing feedback on the teacher candidates' classroom instruction, the coaches watched for subtle signs from candidates that might indicate that the candidate was not comfortable or enjoying the experience. This prompted serious and important conversations with candidates regarding the realities of teaching. As one candidate stated," this took away the mystery of teaching" (course reflection, fall 2013).

From the program's perspective, the coaches provided consistent, day-to-day supervision in the schools freeing the faculty members to continue to meet their other university demands. The coaches shared information from the practicum experience with the instructors, which allowed the faculty to prioritize their time when they were able to be in the schools. If a candidate struggled, the coaches alerted the faculty member, who could then provide added support to the candidate.

Course instructors provided supervision to the teacher candidates by observing them in their field experience classrooms, watching recording of the candidates teaching, and reviewing the written feedback of the instructional coaches. The communication between the instructional coaches and the instructors was critical. Based on this communication, instructors could target their limited supervision time to help those teacher candidates most in need of their guidance and intervention.

Course Content

In addition to supervision, changes to the course content had to be made across the program. Theories and pedagogical expectations studied in teacher education courses had to have application in the classroom. The old system had no clear focus of skill development resulting in repetition of information, gaps of knowledge, and deficits of skills for the teacher candidates.

The first step for the instructors was to create an intentional curriculum map for the courses with the beginning, intermediate, and final field experiences generating a clear articulation of the skill development of the teacher candidate at each level. It removed the repetition, filled in the gaps, and scaffolded the appropriate skills for each level. For the candidates, it gave what they were learning on campus more purpose when they went into the classrooms for their field experiences. "What I saw in at my school really reinforces what we are learning here. It all makes a lot more sense now," explained a teacher candidate after his field experience (focus group, fall 2013).

The second step was to create assessments that tied the field experience to each course's objectives and to weight the field experience assessment the same for each section as a matter of equity for the teacher candidates. Although the details may have differed, all of the field experience assessments asked the teacher candidates to study a lesson taught and analyze how well the students met the learning objectives based on their performance on the formative assessments. The candidates also reflected on their lessons identifying what went well and what needed improvement, connecting both to their coursework.

Duration

An on-going issue with the former approach was the non-sequential nature of the field experiences. Teacher candidates were rarely in the classroom at the same time from one day to another or even one week to the next. Because candidates were given the latitude to set their own schedules, the experience seemed to be random and nonsensical.

The answer to this problem was to create an authentic teaching experience for the teaching candidates at each level of the program. This meant they would need more hours and a set time to be in the field so they could have supervision and support from the instructor and instructional coach. Working with the advisors, the instructors were able to set up a structured field experience with each pedagogical course. Each course was redesigned to allow for release time from the class for the field experience allowing instructors time to supervise their own students in the field.

This approach has transformed the field experiences for the teacher candidates. First, they have time to build positive and appropriate rapport with students. Besides learning names, the candidates are able to learn about the students as individuals. The candidates also have time to get to know their cooperating teacher better. Because the candidates were in classrooms for several weeks, they could see a unit develop. They could see different types of formative and summative assessments used by the teachers. The candidates could also observe how school works day-to-day. One candidate remarked to his instructional coach that he had never thought about late students until he had one. The student disrupted his teaching because he was not prepared for late students. However, the candidate knew not to let that happen again and was ready for the next time. Even though these are issues discussed in the education courses, sometimes it takes a real-life experience for it to hit home (coaching conversations, fall 2013).

The teacher candidates also had opportunities to practice their classroom management skills. Doing role plays in front of your peers in a college course is not the same as working with real PK-12 students, especially when one is also trying to teach a lesson. These field experiences gave the teacher candidates opportunities to practice and get feedback from their cooperating teacher, university instructor, and instructional coach. More than one teacher candidate returned to campus declaring, "I finally feel like a real teacher" (course reflections, fall 2013).

Next Steps

To discover during the final semester of college that one's chosen career path is not going to work out can be emotionally and financially devastating for the teacher candidate and a blemish on the reputation of the institution. For teacher candidates like Jenny and Jack, better field experiences could have helped before they reached student teaching. For Jenny, being required to reflect on her interactions with students in classrooms and the content she was teaching would have given her the time to think about herself as a classroom teacher. Jenny would have worked with her instructional coach to process the experience and to dis-

cuss the realities of teaching; she would have discovered early on in the program that teaching secondary social studies was not the career for her.

Jack was overwhelmed by everything his cooperating teacher and university supervisor were asking him to do in a short amount of time. A purposefully constructed field experience would have prevented Jack from failing his student teaching. Having skills intentionally scaffolded over education courses would have given Jack time to practice his skills and receive specific feedback from a coach and his instructor giving him opportunities to improve his instruction. By student teaching, Jack would have been comfortable with the realities of teaching day-to-day and would have found success in the classroom.

The initial response from the teacher candidates to the changes in the field experiences has been extremely positive. Candidates return to classes excited about teaching, talking about "their students," feeling connected to the school community, eager for student teaching, and motivated to continue on with their learning. The potential impact of coaching is not just hypothetical. However, the program is in its first year and there is still much to learn regarding the effectiveness of the changes. There are four questions to pursue: (1) How does the program evaluate the various delivery methods of supervision, course content, and duration? (2) How can field experiences be used to prepared teacher candidates for the widely accepted Stages of Concern outlined by Fuller (1969)? (3) How do the teacher candidates perceive the impact of the instructional coaches? (4) Is there a reduction in failures in student teaching? Each question forces the program to consider what impact the field experience changes are having on the teacher candidate. Teacher preparation programs must educate their candidates to be ready for the difficult challenges of today's classrooms and one way to make that happen is to change the field experience. This program has only begun to examine the changes in the field experiences and there is still much research to conduct, but hopefully, the teacher candidates will enter student teaching with a more authentic experience of what it means to be a teacher.

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