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PEDAGOGY

Physical Education Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness for the Student Teaching Experience

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Abstract

The culmination of teacher education programs is the student teaching experience, an extended field experience under the guidance of a cooperating teacher (CT), as well as a university supervisor. Student teachers consider CTs to be one of the most important providers to their preparation program. The role of a CT is influential; however, there is little done to prepare these individuals for this undertaking and minimal support from the teacher preparation program. The purpose of this study was to determine physical education CTs' (PECTs) awareness of and preparedness for responsibilities during the student teaching experience and their beliefs regarding training to become a PECT. This mixed methods study involved the collection of survey data from 26 PECTs, and interviews from four PECTs related to experiences and preparedness for the role as a PECT. Survey results revealed inconsistent perceptions of their roles as PECTs, even though 85% of PECTs reported feeling cognizant and prepared for their responsibilities at the start of their PECT experience. Of the 15% of PECTs who did not feel prepared, 75% were first-time PECTs. The qualitative data revealed four major themes surrounding preparedness for their role: (a) importance of communication, (b) knowledge of student teacher preparation

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program, (c) student teachers' preparedness for the student teaching experience, (d) and professional development opportunities. Findings suggest that despite feeling prepared overall, PECTs could benefit from formal training that clarifies their roles and responsibilities within the student teaching triad.

The culmination of teacher education programs is the student teaching experience. The student teaching experience is an extended field experience under the guidance of an experienced teacher who is often referred to as a cooperating teacher (CT), as well as a university supervisor. The principal objective of student teaching is to provide the opportunity for execution and demonstration of instructional competence for beginning educators before entry into the teaching profession. The significance of the student teaching experience within teacher preparation programs is well documented. As well, the student teaching experience has been identified as "a central component of nearly every U.S. teacher education program" (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012, p. 1196). This extended field experience provides opportunities for preservice teachers to collaborate and be actively mentored by a CT. Generally, the teacher preparation program selects experienced teachers to serve as CTs based on factors such as availability and willingness to work as a CT, credentials, and prior collaboration (Russell & Russell, 2011). CTs principally focus on mentoring and supervising the preservice teacher. Typically, the CTs are eager and willing to facilitate in this supervisory role but are often ill-prepared to serve as effective mentors (He, 2010).

Literature reveals a strong justification that CTs lack specific preparation to enable high-quality and developmentally appropriate support for student teachers, as they tend to be underprepared for their work as mentors. CTs have consented "to assume one of the most responsible, influential, and exciting roles in teacher education" (Henry & Weber, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, it is imperative for teacher preparation programs to prepare them for this role. In fact, student teachers consider CTs to be one of the most important providers to their teacher preparation program (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Rodgers & Keil, 2007). Unfortunately, many CTs continue to receive negligible training from the university to prepare them for their new roles as CTs (Kent, 2001), and as a result, the quality of the student teaching experience can vary greatly.

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of preparedness for the role of a physical education CT (PECT) during the student teaching experience of a physical education teacher education (PETE) program. This study showcases the voices and opinions of PECTs to gain knowledge and insight on how to better prepare future PECTs for their role as a vital member of the student teaching experience.

Student Teaching Triad

The relationship between the student teacher, PECT, and the university supervisor is triadic. The basic role of the triad is to work as a collaborative team employing constant communication to support, enhance, and prepare the student teacher to become a reflective professional (Zeichner, 2002) and successfully enter into the teaching profession. Each member of the student teaching triad has a specific set of responsibilities usually outlined in the university's student teaching handbook. The roles and relationships of the triadic members entail complex interactions, which can greatly vary (He & Levin, 2008; Slick, 1998; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009).

Role of the Physical Education Cooperating Teacher

As a member of the student teaching triad, the PECT fulfills many roles while overseeing the student teacher. One of the most important is the role of a provider of context for the student teacher. Without a PECT, there would be no school, no K–12 students, and no student teaching experience. The student teaching experience is multifaceted and often overwhelming for most student teachers. Consequently, PECTs have an important job in managing that context and introducing student teachers to the readily apparent and often-hidden dimensions of teaching, as appropriate to and in light of a student teacher's stage of readiness. Equally, mentoring is one of the major aspects of the CT role, which is often a collaborative effort between the university supervisor, faculty, and CTs (He, 2010; Schwille, 2008).

Lack of Preparation for the Physical Education Cooperating Teacher Role

Despite the agreed acknowledgment of the importance of the student teaching experience, efforts to guarantee quality and

consistency across student teaching placement sites have been criticized for being disjointed and appearing disconnected from other components of teacher preparation programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Guyton & Byrd, 2000; Richardson, 1996; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Zeichner, 1990). Efforts to ensure that CTs are properly prepared for their work remain inadequate and fail to address some of the most basic issues associated with their supervisory work (Glickman & Bey, 1990; Knowles & Cole, 1996). The role of a CT is exceptionally influential; however, there is little done to prepare these individuals for this undertaking and minimal support from the teacher preparation program (Hoffman et al., 2015; Young & MacPhail, 2015).

While research surrounding student teaching experiences has been employed, there is a still a lack of clarity and definition of roles and responsibilities of CTs. This lack of definition explains the wide variance in the ways CTs, supervisors, and student teachers interact (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). CTs must have a clear understanding and knowledge of their role within the supervision triad, and together these roles can contribute to the development of consistent, cohesive systems for supporting progressive teachers (Freidus, 2002). When the teacher education faculty, university supervisor, CT, and student teacher hold different meanings and notions of the expectations and role of the CT, it can become problematic (Clark, 2002). Further, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2013) recommends that CTs be "trained as mentors and highly skilled in supporting the learning of adult candidates as well as that of children" (p. 5). Opportunely, CTs' understanding of their role can change with specialized training (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Lesley, Hamman, Olivarez, Button, & Griffith, 2009), and professional development may serve to widen CTs' perspective on working with student teachers (Kent, 2001).

Cooperating Teacher Training

Research over the past several decades surrounding CT training illustrates the positive effects of trainings such as changed or adopted behaviors. In university-based training programs for CTs, Coulon (1988), McIntyre and Killian (1987), O'Cansey (1988), Rikard and

Veal (1996), and Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1990) reported significant positive behavior changes of trained CTs in performing supervisory and mentor practices. Similarly, a PETE program in Ireland designed a cooperating physical education (COPET) program to maximize the learning opportunities for student teachers when on placement. The pilot program included a cohort of 26 PECTs supervising 28 student teachers. The program consisted of a 2-week teaching practice placement. Focus group interviews evaluated the effectiveness of the COPET program. Findings indicated the PECTs found the COPET program very useful in defining their role on teaching practice, and the PECTs felt that all future PECTs should have to participate in the COPET training before taking on a student teacher (Belton, Woods, Dunning, & Meegan, 2010). The benefit of university-based training programs for PECTs is apparent. Which raises the question, why is this not a common effort by all teacher education programs?

Currently, a handful of PETE programs in the United States provide training for PECTS to outline and define their roles and responsibilities. For example, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, University of Texas at Austin, Grand Canyon University, and Texas State University require PECTs to attend or complete a training to serve in the PECT role. The trainings offered by these PETE programs differ in format, which include in-person trainings, online training courses, and seminar-style training. It is unknown which training is most effective in helping PECTs become informed about their role. However, an effectively designed, implemented, and evaluated training program designed for CTs could help to better prepare them for their critical role of working with preservice teachers (He, 2010; Schwille, 2008). Little work has been done to identify or develop quality training models for teacher education programs to implement with their CTs (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002). The limited research available supports the premise that formal CT preparation increases CTs' effectiveness in their role (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Kennedy, 1991).

Developing better understandings of how PECTs perceive their preparedness for their role with student teachers is critical. It is equally important for PETE programs to understand how to effectively and efficiently inform and prepare PECTs for the significant role. The purpose of this study was to determine PECTs' awareness

of their role and perceptions of preparedness for responsibilities during the student teaching experience.

Method

This study employed a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2013), which included the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. First, quantitative data were collected and analyzed, followed by and informing the collection of qualitative data. The addition of the qualitative data provided richer and more context-specific insights into the PECTs' experiences than what might have been possible with a strictly quantitative study design. Mixed methods provide the means to "grasp and sense the lived experience" of participants on the nature of participation in teacher education (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative phase of this sequential explanatory design used a phenomenological research approach to describe the PECTs' perceptions and lived experiences of their preparedness for their role during the student teaching experience. In a phenomenological study, the researcher gains insight of the phenomenon of interest through interviewing knowledgeable participants (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, this study explored the lived experiences of PECTs to understand the nature of their preparedness for their role. This study was approved by the researchers' university institutional review boards.

Participants

The participants in this study included 26 PECTs (M_{age} = 41.7 years; 54% female, 46% male; 54% secondary level, 46% elementary level) associated with a mid-sized PETE program in the Western United States. PECTs had an average of 16.5 years of teaching experience and had supervised an average of 4.26 student teachers prior to the survey. After analysis of the survey data, four PECTs (3 female, 1 male) were interviewed based on their unique survey data and willingness to participate in the interview portion of the study. Table 1 represents demographic information for the four interviewed PECTs. Pseudonyms were used to report the PECTs interview remarks.

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Characteristics of PECT Interviewees

PECT	Age	Years of experience	Grade level taught	Number of student teachers	Felt prepared for CT role?	Received formal CT training
Laura	39	15	6–8	1	Thought was prepared; realized was not prepared	No
Jack	28	6	K–5	1	Prepared	Yes
Tamara	36	14	K–8	6	Prepared	No
Cheryl	59	33	K–5	20+	Prepared	No

Note. PECT = physical education cooperating teacher; CT = cooperating teacher.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The researchers first collected descriptive data from PECTs through an 18-item online survey. The survey included questions related to demographics, their training and background to become a PECT, their perceived preparedness for their role as a PECT, and what they believed their roles and responsibilities were as a PECT. Prior to dissemination to PECTs, the survey was reviewed by two in-service physical education teachers who have served as PECTs before, for evidence of face and content validity (DeVellis, 1991). One of the two PECTs had formal training for their role as a PECT, while the other did not have training for their role. The PECTs critiqued the readability, clarity, conciseness, and layout of each section of the survey. Based on their feedback, the survey was revised as appropriate. The revisions included changing formatting, providing definitions to words, and giving clearer instructions on some of the questions. The survey questionnaire was developed to elicit the perspective of PECTs about their preparedness for their role as a mentor for student teachers.

The second instrument used for data collection was a semistructured interview script. The interview consisted of questions related to experiences, training, and preparation for the role of the PECT. The interview questions provided a more in-depth description, although

exploratory, of the experiences of the PECTs. The interview guide included 10 open-ended questions. The interview followed a framework that allowed respondents to answer questions directly as well as to dialogue with the interviewer with minimal restriction (Kerlinger, 1986). To discover the unique perceptions of the PECTs preparedness, the interviewer asked the PECTs several questions about their experiences in this role. The interviewer asked the PECTs to discuss their experiences of their supervisory roles, questions about prior PECT training, and questions about the type of training they think would have been helpful prior to their first PECT occurrence, among others. Probes delivered a platform for respondents to expand upon remarks and clarify the meaning of their answers. Much of the time the PECTs discussed their experiences in detail, without prompting, and spoke beyond the scope of the question at hand. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analyzed via IBM SPSS 23.0. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of demographic and individual response item data. Participants were selected for the second phase of the study after analysis of the quantitative survey. The second phase included interviews with four PECTs. A purposive sample of PECTs was selected for the qualitative phase of the study based on their willingness to volunteer and their unique survey responses, specifically the responses to the questions of years of teaching experience, the number of student teachers they had supervised, whether or not they received formal training, and their reported level of preparedness.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed via two processes of analysis derived from grounded theoretical perspective: open (develop categories of concepts and themes) and axial (building connections within categories) coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative analysis began with the identification of keywords and phrases in the data. Next, the keywords and phrases were coded and grouped into like categories. Common themes were then identified and organized into common categories, resulting in the emergence of four themes. Categories remained flexible throughout the peer debriefing process. To ensure data trustworthiness, researchers independently and then collaboratively analyzed the transcriptions

to establish investigator triangulation and reduce potential bias (Patton, 2002). Member checking followed to confirm the findings. An e-mail was sent to the Phase 2 interview participants for verification that the essence of their remarks was captured. Internal validity was achieved through the provision of rich descriptions through direct quotes from the PECTs (Merriam, 1998).

Results

Quantitative Results

Table 2 shows quantitative results from the survey. Of the PECTs, 85% felt cognizant and prepared for their role and responsibilities at the start of their PECT experience. Of the 15% of PECTs who did not feel prepared, 75% were first-time PECTs and had 10.5 years of teaching experience, on average. Participants' preferred types of training to become highly effective mentors for student teachers included online modules/videos (45%), online course packet (34%), and on-campus seminars (17%). When asked if a more selective and involved process was required, 80% of the PECTs answered they would still participate.

Table 2
Summary of Demographic Characteristics for Online Survey

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	12	46
Female	14	54
Age		
20–29	6	23.1
30–39	7	27
40–49	8	30.7
50–59	5	19.2
60–65	0	0
Teaching Level		
Elementary School	11	42.3
Middle School	9	34.6
High School	6	23.1

Table 2 (cont.)

Characteristic	*n*	%
Years of Teaching Experience		
> 6 years	3	11.5
6–10 years	3	11.5
11–20 years	14	54
21–30 years	5	19.2
31–40 years	1	3.8
> 40 years	0	0
Number of Student Teachers		
1	6	23.1
2–5	15	57.8
6–10	3	11.5
11–15	1	3.8
16–20	1	3.8
> 20	0	0
Felt prepared for role as PECT		
Yes	22	85
No	4	15

Note. Valid percentage is reported for each demographic characteristic.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative results provided a better understanding of PECTs' perceptions of preparedness for their role during the student teaching experience. Four themes emerged as PECTs described their experiences in their role: (a) communication between student teacher, PECT, university supervisor, and PETE faculty; (b) knowledge of student teacher preparation program; (c) knowledge of student teachers' readiness; and (d) self-guided discovery. Each theme is accompanied with a brief discussion, subthemes, and identified quotes from the interviews to support the paradigm.

Communication between student teacher, PECT, university supervisor, and PETE Faculty. This theme explores the role of communication between the members of the student teaching triad and the PETE faculty. The four interviewees acknowledged

the significant role of communication during the student teaching experience. The four PECTs offered examples of their experiences of uncertainty in their role when a lack of communication existed between one or more of the triad members. Each interviewee also disclosed that they had requested communication in some form with the student teacher prior to the placement beginning. The communication would ideally occur face-to-face, but if that was not an option, a phone call could be an alternative solution to communicating prior to the first day. Similarly, 18 PECTs' open-ended survey responses indicated the importance of communication for them to feel prepared and confident for their role.

Communication during the student teaching placement. All four of the PECTs acknowledged the need for solid communication lines between their student teacher, university supervisor, and the PETE program faculty. For example, Tamara wished the PETE program coordinator in charge of student teaching placements would connect throughout the placement to check in on how things were going. This line of communication would offer a chance for each person to converse and for both to stay on the same page throughout the extended field experience:

> A check-in point from them [PETE faculty coordinator] saying 'Hey did you get everything that we sent you? Is your student teacher on it? How is it going?' I know the university supervisor would be or are supposed to be doing that. But sometimes I feel like there's a disconnect between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher and student teacher . . . Like all four of us need to be on the same page.

Equally, Cheryl stated that she would have appreciated some type of a check-in from the faculty or university supervisor making sure she fully understood her expectations during her first PECT experience. She mentioned that after supervising several students, she felt much more confident about what she was supposed to be doing during the field experience. However, Cheryl said if changes were ever made to her PECT expectations during the student teaching experience, she would appreciate some direct contact with someone from the university:

> Maybe it is an email from the university supervising teacher or the professor checking in and saying look for this . . . And the expectation on what the student teacher is supposed to turn in and making sure the instructions are very clear for the first time [serving as a PECT], or if things [PECT expectations] ever change.

Likewise, survey data reinforced the prominence of open and ongoing communication lines. The open-ended question of "How could you have been better prepared and aware of your role and responsibilities as a cooperating teacher?" delivered 21 responses that fall within the theme of communication. One PECT wrote on the survey, "I would have liked more communication throughout the entire process other than just sending in the evaluation forms I filled out at the end." Other PECTs stated that "continued communication with the university" and "easy ways to communicate with the supervisors on a more regular basis" would better prepare them for their role as a PECT. Additionally, another PECT responded that "working directly with the assigned university supervisor and the student teacher prior to the teaching assignment to set consistent expectations would be helpful." Overall, PECTs identified the need for quality and constant lines of communication with the university supervisor and/or PETE faculty throughout the placement to fulfill and provide the best supervisory practices for the student teacher.

Communication with student teachers prior to student teaching placement. All four of the PECTs said communication should begin before the student teaching placement begins. Each PECT made known that building a relationship with their student teacher is a useful indicator of how they can prepare to mentor and supervise their student teacher. During his interview, Jack shared that while he received "standard information" about his student teacher via e-mail from the placement coordinator, he would have liked the opportunity to get to know his student teacher on a more personal level:

> Maybe interactions before we got started would have helped or might have made it [the student teaching experience] better. Maybe a phone conference or Skype or Google Hangout or whatever prior to actually meeting him [student teacher] that first time would have been helpful.

Tamara shared her experiences of meeting her student teachers prior to placements beginning. She was able to use these meetings to determine whether she felt the student teacher would be a good match for her as a PECT:

> I was able to meet the students prior to the student teaching semester and know if we had a connection or not . . . Being able to handpick [student teachers] without having to say "Hey I'm getting a student teacher, and all I know is them on paper." We [PECTs] would rather be able to interview student teachers before just being handed one by the university. I want to know if we are going to mesh. You [PECTs] need to get students in here [your classroom] so you [PECTs] can figure out who you [PECTs] get along with. It matters; relationships are huge when you spend so much time together with your student teacher.

Differing from Tamara, Laura did not meet her student teacher prior to the placement beginning. She felt that if she had met with her student teacher beforehand, she could have been more prepared to supervise and mentor her student teacher:

> I think going through the handbook before time with him, like before he even started student teaching, would have helped. Had he come in and we had time to sit down and go through what was expected of him, what I would look for, I think that would have helped tremendously.

Survey responses aligned with this theme, as numerous PECTs (n = 9) also indicated the benefits of communicating or interacting before the placement began for both the PECT and the student teacher. Suggested lines of communication from survey responses included e-mails, phone calls, video call (Skype or FaceTime), and in-person visits.

Knowledge of student teacher preparation program. During interviews, all four PECTS said they wished they had more information and knowledge about their student teachers' education. They were curious about the PETE program curriculum, students' previous teaching experience, and students' content knowledge. Specifically, the PECTs wanted to know how many hours the student

teachers had spent observing or teaching children at the elementary and/or secondary level, if they had taken an adapted physical education course, and if the student teachers knew what an Individualized Education Program (IEP) was. The PECTs reiterated one another's remarks about their request for more information about the preparation program:

> I did not know how many hours he had actually spent teaching. I did not know if he had even taught by himself before, or if he had created lesson plans before . . . so I did not know what to expect from him. I also was not sure about any experience he had had with students with disabilities, if any. And with it being my first student teaching, I wasn't sure if he was supposed to tell me that, or if I was supposed to dig that out, or how it happens. It was a little confusing. (Laura)

The survey data parallel this disconnection between the PETE program and PECT awareness of their student teachers' educational preparation leading up to the student teaching experience. The open-ended survey question provided a platform for PECTs to express their request for becoming familiar with the PETE program courses, learning about the PETE program teaching and learning philosophy, and developing an awareness of the types of teaching experiences and opportunities the student teachers had experienced. Specifically, numerous PECTs ($n = 12$) reported on the survey that they had little to no knowledge of the courses their student teachers had taken, the student teacher's ability to write lesson plans or assess student learning, and the amount of contact/teaching hours the student teacher had had with K–12 learners. For example, one PECT wrote in a survey response, "It would be nice to know what the PE program is having the student do so I can make sure we are all aligned." Another PECT wrote, "I needed to better understand the requirements of the cumulative portfolio to be of any help" and "knowing the expectations that the college has for their student teacher would be helpful." The survey data reiterate the importance of providing PECTs with information about the PETE program prior to the student teaching experience commencing. Prior knowledge could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of their student teacher's preparation, thus allowing PECTs to better mentor and supervise.

Knowledge of student teachers' readiness for the student teaching experience. During interviews, all four PECTs expressed their feelings of preparedness were affected by their student teacher's perceived level of preparedness and understanding of the role and responsibilities for student teachers during the placement. Meaning, when the student teacher was not fully prepared and aware of the expectations for student teachers during the student teaching experience, the PECT also did not feel entirely prepared. The opposite was also true. If the PECT perceived that their student teacher was prepared and confident in understanding the expectations for student teachers during the student teaching experience, the PECT was more likely to feel prepared and competent to fulfill their role as CT. During his interview, Jack articulated an example of how his feeling prepared for his role was due in part to his student teacher's own preparedness:

> My student teacher was very prepared; I mean he was on top of it. He was very organized and was always ahead of the paperwork, which helped me. He [student teacher] was able to inform me of all the extra things, because he knew everything so well of what he had to do, and how we needed to do it and everything like that.

This statement from Jack supports several survey responses from PECTs ($n = 6$) who stated if their student teacher had a good understanding of the expectations of student teachers, it manifested for a better overall experience. One PECT wrote on the survey response, "The second student teacher assigned to me was very thorough and well prepared. She knew what we had to get done. It went very well that time." Similar responses to the survey question "How could you have been better prepared and aware of your role and responsibilities as a cooperating teacher?" emphasized this idea that if PECTs are to feel fully prepared for their role, the other triad members, specifically the student teacher, must also be prepared. Tamara shared her experience with one of her student teachers who was not cognizant of the expectations for students teachers or the PECT:

> Sometimes they [student teacher] do not disseminate that information [placement expectations] very well. . . And the

> student [teacher] doesn't know. When I ask them, they say, "I don't know, there's something online, [program coordinator] should email you. They just do not know how to communicate that information sometimes or they wait to last minute to figure it out.

In a similar scenario, Laura shared a negative experience with her first student teacher who did not provide her with relevant and vital information for her to fulfill her job as a PECT. She shared some frustrations about working with a student teacher who did not take initiative for his responsibilities during the experience:

> He didn't give me all the information up front, so all I had was the handbook in an email, but I guess he was supposed to give me other information, and I never actually got that, so it was late getting done.

This theme highlights that the student teacher's level of preparedness and competence affects their PECT's feelings of being prepared for the student teaching experience. It may be as important for the student teacher as for the PECT to understand the role of the PECT and the role of other triad members to ensure a successful student teaching experience. If student teachers enter the placement without a clear understanding of the expectations for student teachers and have poor lines of communication with the PECT, it could have a rippling effect throughout the experience. Likewise, PECTs and university supervisors need to take responsibility in doing their part to be wholly prepared for their role and awareness of the other's role. While the PECTs in this study indicated a perceived reliance on their student teachers, much of the "nuts and bolts" information outlining the responsibilities of the PECT is likely outlined in the student teacher handbook. It is possible that some PECTs do not take the time to read it fully. It is important to acknowledge that the student teacher does not shoulder the weight of reminding their PECT of the duties of the PECT when it is available in the handbook.

Self-guided discovery. This theme unpacks the implications for PECTs' self-guided discovery of the necessary knowledge and understanding for fulfilling their role. All four PECTs stated that they learned a lot about mentoring and supervising teacher candidates

by taking initiative to learn about different aspects of their supervisory role and about mentoring novice teachers into the profession. Examples from interviewees included three of the PECTs having to educate themselves on the different types of observation forms they needed to complete. Specifically, Cheryl shared that she was unaware of what some of the language meant on the Teacher Observation Form and had to do some research on her own to learn about it. In the same way, two PECTs mentioned during phone interviews that they learned different types of feedback to provide to their student teachers during their supervisory period as a PECT from the associated PETE program. Cheryl spoke to this concept, sharing that when her student teacher was struggling, she looked up how to provide appropriate feedback: "It [feedback] changes depending on their [student teachers'] level of readiness, and I was trying to give too much to him." Another example of self-guided discovery of new information was from Laura, who shared her experience of independently educating herself on her student teachers' Feedback Form to fulfill her supervisory tasks:

> I had to do some homework, look up some things and, I felt like it did help me to understand how to complete it [student teacher feedback form] because I had to do some homework for my own understanding.

One more example of self-guided discovery was from Cheryl, who mentioned doing some "homework" on her own to learn about the forms she was tasked with completing as a PECT:

> I did not have to do them when I was student teaching. I have been removed from the college setting or university setting for quite a while. Some of those [student teacher paperwork], I am looking at it going 'what the heck is that?' So I had to do some homework and look up some things on my own.

To summarize, the four PECTs provided examples of how they self-initiated learning to prepare and fulfill their PECT role. There were numerous survey responses to the survey question "How could you have been better prepared and aware of your role and responsibilities as a cooperating teacher?" that echoed this construct of PECTs having to independently seek understanding to achieve their

role and expectations as a PECT. Samples of these responses include "I did not understand requirements of the portfolio and requirements of the school. I had to send several emails to find it out" and

> I did not go there [student teachers' PETE program university] and did not have any history of the program. I had to learn what they [PETE program] wanted from their student teacher so I could better prepare my evaluations and feedback for the student teacher.

These responses illustrate the ways in which PECTs self-guide the discovery and learning of essential information and knowledge to fulfill their role throughout the student teaching experience. The data exemplify that PECTs will educate themselves, rather than remain unaware and incompetent about their responsibilities.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide further confirmation that the current level of preparedness of PECTs varies and is inadequate for this integral component of PETE preparation. While much research about the student teaching experience has ensued, this study reiterates the lack of clarity and defining roles and responsibilities of PECTs. Christenson and Barney (2011) called for more congruency and communication among CTs and teacher preparation programs for a better definition of the role and supervisory tasks of the CT, aligning with the findings from this study. The results from this study show inconsistences between PECTs' perceptions of preparedness and the veracity of their preparedness for their role. While many PECTs (n = 22) indicated feeling prepared for their role at the start of the student teaching experience, the data contradict their perceptions. The PECTs in this study were unable to identify and articulate all of their roles and responsibilities on the open-ended survey question. The responses PECTs did disclose were inconsistent with the expectations that the associated PETE program identified—thus highlighting the importance for PETE programs to inform their PECTs of the PETE program curriculum and the expectations throughout the student teaching experience.

Equally important, the university faculty teaching the campus courses often know very little about the specific practices used in the

K–12 classrooms where their students are placed (Zeichner, 2011). This suggests that PETE faculty members should work to become familiar with and aware of the teaching practices that are being employed in the K–12 schools by the PECTs. Subsequently, this could lead to a more holistic understanding of what the PECTs are already doing and what they are not doing. This understanding may help PETE programs better prepare and educate the PECTs with whom they work, before becoming participating members of the student teaching experience. Additionally, the theme surrounding the student teachers readiness was similar to the findings by Ronfeldt, Brockman, and Campbell (2018), who reported CTs' perceptions of student teachers' preparedness positively predicted the PECTs' observation ratings of the student teacher. Meaning, the less prepared the student teacher is for the field experience, the lower their observation ratings compared to that of their prepared student teaching counterparts.

Teacher educators and university faculty need to persist with current efforts or begin to make efforts to involve CTs as partners in teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2002). The triad members should work together to create experiences that support and further the development of student teachers (McEntyre, Baxter, & Richards, 2018). Without a shared understanding of expectations between all members of the triad, the potential for confusion, frustration, and negative experiences greatly increases. Improved efforts to inform PECTS of the PETE program will allow them to feel more prepared and confident for their dynamic role.

Improving congruency between PECTs and PETE programs will require consistent and effective communication. The communication could include several methods such as face-to-face meetings, phone calls, video conferencing, and e-mails. The communication should be ongoing and begin well before the student teaching experience commences, thereby generating PECTs who are better prepared before the placement begins and lasting through the conclusion of the placement. Specifically, the communication should include information on the student teachers' educational training and experience before the placement begins (Gurl, 2019). This will help PECTs to hold similar expectations and to provide comparative supervision as the PETE program. Consequently, this will better

align the student teachers' schooling with the practicalities and endeavors during their final field experience, ideally leading to an increased potential for a positive experience for all triad members. When the PECT does not reinforce practices and expectations of PETE programs, a complicated situation can arise for all members in the student teaching triad (Young & MacPhail, 2015). Therefore, it is critical for preparation programs to provide PECTs with the necessary preparation to serve as effective mentors and with the knowledge of various supervisory approaches within a university-based teacher preparation program (Bernhardt & Koester, 2015).

For all PECTs to have the knowledge and appropriate skills and training to serve as effective mentors and facilitators during the student teaching experience, training endorsed by the PETE program needs to be required. The results from this study echo Smalley, Retallick, and Paulsen (2015), who stated, "It is critical to provide training for CTs to emphasize and instill the importance of skills and activities required during the capstone student teaching experience" (p. 135). Similarly, Belton et al. (2010) found in their study of the evaluation of a PECT training program in Ireland that the participant PECTs felt that all PECTs should have to attend the training workshop before they take on a student teacher. CTs who have had adequate preparation are better able to support their student teachers with different aspects of teaching, including classroom management, problem solving, and lesson planning expertise (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). Another strategy when PECT training is not feasible is screening potential PECTs for compatibility (Kahan, 2001). The screening could look at the attitudes, beliefs, and practices toward various aspects of supervision. Results of "a simple screen strategy could be used to identify CTs who match up well with the program goals" (Coleman & Mitchell, 2000, p. 42).

A PETE program considering providing PECT training would need to pursue easily accessible and readily available types of training that would be suitable for the busy schedule of a K–12 PE teacher. Unfortunately, PETE programs may not have the time or workforce to create PECT trainings from scratch and to identify the ways to best assess PECTs' supervisory effectiveness. Implementing existing frameworks for supervision training would be the most ideal for a PETE program. However, developing and using frameworks

effectively can involve considerable time and energy, depending on (a) the complexity of the domain; (b) the maturity of existing frameworks; (c) the availability of good documentation; (d) the willingness of other users who can help (e.g., university supervisor, administration); and (e) the ability of CTs to master key concepts, patterns, features, and tools associated with frameworks (Schmidt, Gokhale, & Natarajan, 2004). It would be ideal for a PECT supervision training framework to be vetted and disseminated for ease of use and implementation in PETE programs. The framework could include trainings for PECTs in several formats such as in-person seminar training, online video module trainings, or an online training course packet. These aforementioned training styles are the types of frameworks and formats employed in previous literature surrounding CT training.

Further investigation into the preparedness of the student teacher and the university supervisors during the student teaching experience is recommended. Studies continuing to investigate the practices, characteristics, and features of the student teaching experience to fully understand what makes a quality student teaching placement could enhance the current knowledge base surrounding the student teaching experience. The opportunity to compare the effectiveness of different training formats for PECTs would provide valid and reliable frameworks that PETE programs could easily adopt and implement. As the PECTs in this study were associated with one PETE program at a university in the Western United States, future research could examine PECT preparedness nationwide.

Conclusion

The student teaching placement is one of the most anticipated and crucial teaching opportunities offered in a teacher education program (Clarke, Trigg, & Nielsen, 2012; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). This appraisal reveals a strong sense that PECTs lack specific preparation to enable high-quality and developmentally appropriate support for their student teachers. The PECTs in this study tended to have a false perception of preparedness that is inconsistent with the goals of the PETE programs. This could result in PECTs who are likely to be underprepared and improperly trained for their work as supervisors and mentors for their student teachers. Professional development and training is imperative for PECTs to fulfill their

roles and responsibilities fully during the experience. The information available to PETE programs about the prominence of training PECTs for their role is significant. Therefore, PETE programs should commit to providing bountiful opportunities to inform and prepare PECTs to best equip them for their essential role within the student teaching experience.

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