

ArATE Electronic Journal
Volume 8, Number 1
March 2018

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Increasing Student Achievement and Teacher Satisfaction through the Sterling Quality Program

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Abstract

The Quality Principles program was sponsored by the Baldrige National Quality Program. It was implemented in an effort to use data-based, decision-making skills school wide. The intent was to increase student achievement and decrease the teacher dissatisfaction that often occurs in low socioeconomic low performing schools.

Preliminary Literature Review

The education version of the criteria titled Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence was created in the mid-1990s as a framework for understanding and improving school performance and student learning. Sterling Quality provides the basis for organizational assessment and the foundation for continuous improvement. It has three important purposes: (a) to help improve performance practices, capabilities, and results; (b) to facilitate communication and sharing of best practices information among organizations of all types; and (c) to serve as a tool for understanding and improving organization performance (Georgia O’Keeffe Elementary School, [GOES], 2003).

Sterling Quality is a framework for continuous improvement aimed at getting the results that are important to an organization. The framework was designed to help organizations use an aligned approach to organizational performance management. The framework is not prescriptive. It supports a systems approach to organization-wide goal alignment, and it supports a goal-based means for diagnosing the effectiveness of an organization and devising an improvement plan from that diagnosis (Baldrige in Education, 2002a).

Sterling Quality had 11 core values that are interrelated and characterized all types of high-performing organizations. They are evident in the best schools in the nation. The values are linked with an underlying need to engage students in the learning process in order to help them attain the higher standards set for today’s learners and tomorrow’s leaders.

Voke (2002) contended that, despite the challenges that the teachers face, neither the structures nor the cultures of their schools seem to be geared toward teachers' needs. If states and districts do not address the role that high teacher turnover plays and if they do not develop policies and initiatives that address the causes of high turnover in schools, they cannot effectively address the problem and not addressing the problem is tantamount to undermining efforts to provide all children with a quality education.

In schools where a quality management system has been tried, it has made an enormous difference. Teachers and administrators have reported increased student achievement and increased student and staff satisfaction (Barnes & Van Wormer, 2005c).

Introduction

The 11 core values of Sterling Quality are as follows: (a) visionary leadership; (b) learning-centered education; (c) organizational and personal learning, (d) valuing faculty, staff, and partners; (e) agility; (f) focus on the future; (g) managing for innovation; (h) management by fact; (i) public responsibility and citizenship; (j) focus on results and creating value; and (k)

systems perspective (Baldrige in Education, 2002a). Each value is to achieve certain objectives. Each core value provides educators with certain expectations. Visionary leadership will create and balance value for students and stakeholders. Learning-centered education will place the focus of education on learning and the real needs of students. Organizational and personal learning will be directed not only toward better educational programs and services but also toward being more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of students and stakeholders. Valuing faculty, staff, and partners will not be dependent upon but will be essential to the knowledge, skills, innovative creativity, and motivation of its workforce. Agility will involve an explicit focus on faster and more flexible responses to needs of students and stakeholders.

Focusing on the future will take into account short-term and long-term factors that affect an organization. Managing for innovation will improve an organization and create value for students and stakeholders. Managing by fact will use performance measurement to focus on improving student learning. Public responsibility and citizenship will go beyond mere compliance. Focus on results and creating value will be the means to improving student learning and building loyalty. Systems perspective will provide a keen understanding of alignment strategy for improving the overall organization (Baldrige in Education, 2002a).

In the Sterling Quality process, organizations must identify a set of core values, but what the employees of the organizations do with the set of values often separates the best organizations from the mediocre. By integrating these values into the everyday life of educational institutions, educators can alter the organization's learning environment as well as impact student performance results dramatically.

Core values are the basic principles that not only bind an organization together, but also define what an organization deems important. Whereas mission, vision, policies, and strategies need to be evaluated and refined over time, core values are timeless and remain intact during good and bad times. They are understood, embraced, and shared by everyone in the organization. They shape and influence the everyday decisions and actions of leaders, management, and staff.

The seven Sterling Quality categories are (a) leadership, (b) strategic planning, (c) student focus, (d) measurement and analysis and knowledge management, (e) staff focus, (f) process management, and (g) results (Baldrige in Education, 2002a). The focus of the leadership category involves certain leaders of a system setting and communicating direction, reporting results, and working continuously to improve the system.

Sterling Quality Process

Barnes and Van Wormer (2005b) noted that, when a visitor steps into a classroom where the teacher employs the Sterling Quality process, he or she discovers young people using Deming's plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle and basic quality-principle tools as self-directed learners. The visitor sees students creating mission statements, key measures of mission fulfillment, statements of classroom rules and procedures, classroom data centers, and personal data folders. The PDSA cycle is a means of integrating both theory and practice systematically to create a more effective, data-driven approach to show and sustain continuous improvement.

Sterling Quality is not a magic potion for every educational ailment. The success of implementing it as a strategy for improvement is that it has attributes that most other education improvement efforts lack. It prompts strategic alignment of the education system at all levels. It helps to forge new decision-making structures around the shared goal of raising student achievement (Baldrige in Education, 2002b).

Barnes and Van Wormer (2005a) pointed out that Sterling Quality is based on quality principles and student data to drive high student achievement. Teachers guide students in setting their own individual goals (a) in reading, math, and writing and (b) in behavior and action plans for how to achieve those goals. The goals were then reassessed using performance data. After implementation of the quality approach, if a person asked a student who was responsible for learning, he or she would answer, "I am." However, before the implementation of the quality approach, when kids were asked to draw a picture of who was responsible for their learning, they drew their parents or teacher but not themselves. Quality made the difference.

Barnes and Van Wormer (2005c) noted that teachers learn Sterling Quality in order (a) to respond more effectively to their students' needs and the requirements of the next grade the student would be entering and (b) to allow the student to make a smooth transition from school to school or eventually from school to work. The program improves overall effectiveness, use of resources, and capabilities. By the time a child graduates from high school, he or she has to be prepared to meet future demands. This means that, whether a child is in elementary, middle, or high school, he or she learns how to work in a team, think about personal and academic goals, and understand processes as a whole (systems thinking). Moreover, the individual student is able to make decisions based on facts and is continually striving to improve in order to stay on the job or in college.

Sterling Quality helps teachers and students together meet these goals (Barnes & Van Wormer, 2005c). Students are taught to look at their own progress and measure it. Meeting standards, creating and improving products, and working together are skills necessary to be successful in this century. These mandates do not change. What changes, with the use of Sterling Quality, is that children join teachers in choosing how they reach goals. Students take more responsibility for their own learning and become better prepared to be responsible citizens. A child, at any age, learns how to improve.

From the efforts of the persons involved in the Sterling Quality process, several educational principles emerge (Barnes & Van Wormer, 2005c). There is joy in learning. Everyone learns. Students take responsibility for their own learning. Students plan and monitor their learning process. Students and teachers are colleagues. Quality is achieved through systems thinking. Quality leadership is more effective than management from the top. The Sterling Quality principles that are successfully applied to other business and service organizations are successfully applied to school organizations, and success is a choice.

Barnes and Van Wormer (2005c) noted that a recent study indicated that businesses want graduates who are customer-focused, systems thinkers, are committed to improvement, can make decisions based on fact, are able to use quality processes, and are able to work in teams. By learning and implementing Sterling Quality, educators are able to produce graduates who indeed have these kinds of skills and who are prepared for the world in which they live and work.

Sterling Quality increased feelings of acceptance at school and improved student achievement. It was not a substitute for knowledge; rather, it was a way to organize learning. It changed how a child learned, not what a child learned. Students learned how to look at the facts (data) and to adapt new learning to what the data indicated. Teachers found that, if a student knew what he or she already understood and what still needed to be learned, greater leaps in achievement resulted. This principle applied to teachers as well.

Sterling Quality has been very effective in helping businesses to be responsive to their customers. Similarly, schools need to react favorably to the changes taking place in the job market and in colleges and universities everywhere. By graduating students who can survive and thrive in a changing economy, educators are attempting to meet customer needs.

According to Barnes and Van Wormer (2005c), Sterling Quality is a way to help teachers and students create a climate where continuous improvement is expected and is the norm. Users of the Sterling Quality process incorporate quality tools and practices into their classrooms to enhance the daily activities of the students. The shift that teachers make in pedagogy is from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction. Students take responsibility for most of the processes in the classroom, and the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning. Students keep data folders to track their own progress in a subject. The teacher provides opportunities for continual checking on student progress. Students and teachers partner to take responsibility for classroom processes that affect learning. Tools such as flowcharts, issue bins, and plus and delta charts enable all partners to identify solutions that enhance the learning process.

Experienced administrators know that new programs alone rarely secure and sustain academic improvement. Schools are highly complex systems, and successful educational leaders recognize that all of the key components and processes in the school system must be aligned toward improvement in order to achieve the desired results. Using a mathematical analogy, Stephens (1999) contended that (a) a system leader who believes in quality improvement processes and its tools, (b) plus a facilitator who is knowledgeable in quality improvement tools and processes, (c) plus sustained commitment to demonstrate the value of the organization's programs and services equals continuing development of an organization and sustained improvement. Mass, Hacker, and Weincek (2004) described the Sterling Quality process as follows:

Sterling Quality was a self-assessment process that focused on student achievement results. It also focused on other results that impacted student achievement such as student, teacher, and parent satisfaction, key learning processes, leadership, planning, data collection and analysis. It focused on building effective and efficient processes to support everything schools and classrooms had to do. Sterling Quality was also a terrific planning tool that enabled schools and classrooms to focus on what was important for students and how to put processes and systems in place that empowered students and teachers to accomplish school and classroom goals and action plans. (p. 1)

Mass et al. (2004) noted that, at the beginning of the school year, one of the priorities of classroom teachers is to create a trusting and accepting classroom environment. Specific strategies known as quality tools include consensograms, ground rules, affinity diagrams, brainstorming, plus and delta, force-field analysis, and the PDSA cycle are used to solve an identified problem. Mass et al. found, "These strategies assisted students in understanding what was expected of them. As a result, they met classroom goals and became more productive learners. In addition, classes developed *mission statements*" (p. 2). The authors further suggested, "Teachers and staff should continue to ask for student stakeholder input and feedback concerning their learning. Teachers, students and staff should reflect on this feedback and make necessary adjustments to instruction and classroom environment" (p. 2).

Teacher Turnover

Keller (2003) found that school characteristics, such as the number of students living in

poverty and other factors that vary by school and district, including salary and student discipline, are linked to higher teacher turnover. If educators are to counter the teacher shortage successfully, they need to examine the reasons why teachers are leaving schools. Many teachers have linked their leaving to poor working conditions, such as lack of administrator support and lack of teacher influence over decision making. Addressing the working conditions in schools and creating a professional environment with adequate resources is crucial to the success of teachers in educating children.

According to Carter (2003), high teacher turnover is a symptom of greater problems in schools that cannot be fixed simply by attracting more teachers to the profession. To ensure that every child has a quality teacher, educators have to address the professional needs of teachers by providing the resources and support that they need to succeed.

Latham (1998) contended that job satisfaction does far more than help retain teachers: It improves their teaching. Teacher satisfaction plays a critical role in mitigating job-related stress. This is important because stress is so common for teachers, and it reduces teachers' commitment and effectiveness.

The challenge is to identify factors that schools can control to help teachers achieve career satisfaction. Extrinsic rewards are the tangible benefits surrounding a job, such as salary and job security. Intrinsic rewards are the emotional and personal benefits of the job itself, such as personal growth and a sense of accomplishment. Intrinsic rewards play a greater role in teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Latham (1998) maintained that teachers' job satisfaction does not depend significantly on extrinsic factors. Clearly, teacher satisfaction is also influenced to some extent through school policy. Schools need to focus on goals such as fostering a communicative, collaborative environment for teachers as part of a strategy for promoting their job satisfaction. Intrinsic rewards play the pivotal role. A teacher who loves seeing students grow and develop is likely to be more satisfied than a teacher who does not feel that kind of love, regardless of extrinsic factors.

Each year, thousands of new teachers enter the field. According to Eisner (2006), six profound satisfactions come from the processes of teaching. The first satisfaction pertains to the opportunity to introduce students to ideas that they can think about for the rest of their lives. The second satisfaction is that teaching provides opportunities to reach out to students in ways that ensure teachers' own immortality. Living in the memories of their students is no meager accomplishment. The third satisfaction is that teaching, to use a music metaphor, makes it possible for teachers to play their own cello. Moreover, teaching is a custom job. How something is taught influences how something is learned.

The fourth satisfaction is that teaching provides ample opportunities for both artistry and memorable forms of aesthetic experience (Eisner, 2006). Artistry is not restricted to the fine arts. Teaching depends on artistry. Artistry is the ability to craft a performance, influence its pace, shape its rhythms and tone so its parts merge into a coherent whole. Artistry in teaching depends on embodied knowledge. The occasions remembered are those that are most meaningful to students. The fifth satisfaction is that teaching provides for teachers the occasions to share with others their deep affection for what they teach. Their passion for their subject is the sincerest and most powerful invitation they can extend.

Finally, teaching provides the opportunity to discover that something a teacher once has said in class has made a difference later to a former student (Eisner, 2006). Teaching is filled with many surprises that reassure teachers that their contributions sometimes exceed those that they can recall. The satisfactions of teaching extend beyond the academic. The most lasting

contributions come from saving lives, rescuing a child from despair, restoring a sense of hope, and soothing discomfort.

Teachers must remember that the student is a whole person who has an emotional and social life, not just an intellectual one. This is true for graduate students as well as students in elementary school. Teachers need to be more nurturing. Teachers need to pay attention to the whole child and address the whole child in their teaching practices. How they teach is related to achieving the deep satisfactions of teaching.

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The Classroom Management Experiences of Educators in Diverse Classrooms: Informing Teacher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomenological nature of seventy-two education professionals and to report findings to express the cognitive strategies employed regarding classroom management. The research questions sought to determine participant's perceptions of classroom management strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. The research study findings suggest that in any classroom with management strategies, students respond to caring teachers. Therefore, a culturally responsive classroom that provides differentiation of classroom strategies appears to be the best for students with diverse needs. These results can inform teacher educators as to the strategies identified by current teachers as most effective in providing classroom management for diverse classrooms.

Introduction

Commonly, teachers think of consequences when referring to classroom management tools. This phenomenon can be exacerbated with diverse learners such as English Language Learners (ELL), children with special needs, or culturally sensitive children. Ducharme & DiAdamo (2005) proposed that behavior problems are identified at an increased rate in children with special needs to include noncompliance. However, this can be an issue of disproportionality caused by a lack of adequate effective classroom management strategies necessary to meet the needs of all diverse learners. Therefore, all forms of diversity in the classroom need to be addressed to maintain effective classroom management and to support optimum learning.

Culturally Responsive Classroom

Culturally Responsive Teaching ensures that teachers “make standards-based content and curricula accessible to students and teach in a way that students can understand” (Rajagopal, 2011, para. 1). Further, culturally responsive teaching strives to honor, celebrate, and respect students' differences (LaCour, 2016).

The same concepts of culturally responsive teaching can be applied to classroom management to ensure equality while providing a classroom environment that meets the needs of all diverse learners. By establishing classroom management strategies which honor, celebrate, and respect students' differences, teachers can address behavioral concerns of all students in the classroom. Further, classroom management strategies should be accessible to all learners and be provided in a way that all learners can understand.

Barriers to Classroom Management

Addressing all the needs of a diverse classroom can be a daunting task for any education stakeholder. Many times, teachers, particularly new teachers, do not possess adequate skills or experiences to establish adequate classroom management strategies to meet the needs of all diverse learners in the classroom (Freiberg, 2002). Yet, classroom management is one of the primary responsibilities for education professionals. Often teachers develop their strategies

through their own experiences in the classroom, essentially through trial and error which can take several years (Freiberg, 2002).

Learning can be difficult in any case, but this is especially true if the classroom is a chaotic environment (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005). Thus, classroom management strategies become a daily struggle for a productive classroom where learning must take place. In a productive classroom, teachers have considerable influence over student behavior and management. Therefore, the question becomes, “Are we doing it right?”

To address this important question, this research study sought to ascertain the cognitive strategies of professionals working in today’s classrooms regarding classroom management. It is important for all education stakeholders to know what professionals think is important and what they think are the right solutions to management in a diverse classroom. Seventy-two research participants volunteered to participate in a questionnaire assessment, independent interviews, and member checking focus groups to provide a snapshot representative of their own experiences.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomenological nature of seventy-two education professionals and to report findings to express the cognitive strategies employed regarding classroom management. The research questions proposed were: (a) What classroom management strategy do you find to be the most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom; (b) What barrier do you most experience that prevents classroom management strategies from being effective with diverse learners in your classroom; and (c) How do you overcome this barrier? OR if you were unable to overcome this barrier, what would help you overcome this barrier?

Phenomenology is the qualitative research design used in this study. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to utilize the participants’ own words to describe the experiences of individuals who have lived the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological research focuses on experiences and the meaning of those experiences on the participants in their natural settings (Groenewald, 2004; Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Schram, 2003). All the participants in this research study were educators with lived experience in real classrooms and school settings (see Table 1).

Participants

A variety of education stakeholders responded to a questionnaire assessment with a response rate of 72 related to classroom management for diverse learners in today’s classrooms. Participant professionals’ opinions about the importance of classroom management on a scale of 1 to 5, ranged from a .72 response percentage for *not that important* to a 41.76 percentage for *very important*. Interestingly, the study participants reported one year of experience at 36.72 a percentage rate to .72 percentage rate at five years of classroom experience. Another interesting finding among volunteer research participants was the wide range of professions reported as educators. Some education professionals who participated in this study were behavior specialists of different specialties and others were support personnel for instruction. One participant reported to “train soldiers.” However, all research participants held degrees at the graduate level or were currently completing graduate courses in education at the time of data collection.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

	Classroom Management Scale of 1 to 5	Years of Experience	Classroom Position
1	0.72%	1	36.72 ABA Program Supervisor
2	0.00%	2	5.04 After School Teacher
3	1.44%	3	0.00 Behavior Analyst/Therapist
4	7.92%	4	7.02 Early Intervention Specialist
5	41.76%	5	.72 ESE Teacher IBT Supervisor Substitute Teacher Trains Soldiers Lead Teacher Aide Speech Pathologist

Note. Participants = 72

Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigor

Qualitative validity refers to the process the researcher undergoes to verify the accuracy of the findings from the perspective of the researchers, participants, and the readers of the study (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological researchers commonly conduct member checking to corroborate the findings with the participants as a means to ensure validity (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The process of member checking includes providing the participants specific components such as the themes or major findings to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to provide an opportunity for any inaccuracies to be corrected (Creswell, 2014; Simon & Goes, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were analyzed, and emergent themes developed as a natural phenomenon of the cyclical nature of the qualitative research process. The focus of data analysis in a phenomenological study is to understand the meaning of the phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). According to Creswell (2014), a phenomenological analysis should include horizontalization of data referring to the listing of all relevant information with equal weight, grouping information into units of meaning or themes, including the participants' descriptions where applicable, and analyzing the data for common elements repeated by the participants (Simon & Goes, 2011).

Results

The volunteer education professionals reported a plethora of strategies to employ for management in the classroom (see Table 2).

Table 2. What classroom management strategy do you find to be the most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom?

Themes

Positive Reinforcement (24) Rewards (13) Consequences (11)

Subthemes

Diversity (10)	Expectation (10)	Individual Needs (10)
Token Economy (9)	Procedures (8)	Consistency (7)
Effectiveness (6)	Rules (6)	Cultural Responsive (5)
Praise (5)	Schedule (5)	Visual (5)

Note. Consequences

Positive reinforcement was the most common strategy reported by the participants. Using rewards and consequences were also thematic. Research supports the idea of positive reinforcement. The use of positive behavior supports and the avoidance of common classroom mistakes (Alderman, 1999) contribute to the development of a psychologically supporting environment. Specific reinforcements such as tokens and praise were noted by the education professionals as effective.

Clear expectations along with clearly communicated standard procedures, predictable rules, and a consistent schedule were also reported by the study participants as the most effective classroom management strategies. Smith & Bondy (2017) support that maintaining a predictable schedule and routines will help students feel secure and decrease anxiety, frustrations, and challenging behaviors. Helping students stay aware of the schedule and informing them of any changes to the schedule will help students know the expectations.

Diversity, noted as thematic and cultural responsiveness noted as a subtheme of the question about classroom management strategies, was also reported by the researchers. Moreover, an awareness of learning styles of students and making an attempt to address these learning styles was also noted in this research study. A large variety of classroom management strategies became evident in the data analysis process. Although, some education professionals reported classroom management of low importance, the scope and experience of corrective strategies were evident in this study.

Barriers to effective classroom management strategies became evident in the data responses (see Table 3).

Table 3. What barrier do you most experience that prevents classroom management strategies from being effective with diverse learners in your classroom?

Themes

Diversity (9) Support Staff (8) Individuality (6)

Subthemes

Differentiated Strategies (5) Expectation (5)
 Motivation (5) Home (5)
 Time (5)

Note. Consistency

Education professionals appeared to have more focused thoughts regarding how effective these strategies are with diverse learners in the classroom.

Smith & Bondy (2007) report an important barrier regarding the health of the mother during prenatal care. In addition, inadequate health care of the student and maltreatment in form of negligence and/or physical and emotional injury (Zirpoli & Melloy, 2001) can play a role in the classroom behavior of children. Social factors, such as racial discrimination and poverty can cause severe stress (Barkley, 1997).

Education professionals reported the importance of support staff and the family to help with motivation and differentiated instruction for children in the classroom. The individuality of students was also thematic with the study participants. Diversity of this kind is as important to some of the education professionals as other reported types of diversity. Addressing all forms of diversity should be a top priority for all educators.

How do educators over these barriers? (see Table 4).

Table 4. How do you overcome this barrier? OR if you were unable to overcome this barrier, what would help you overcome this barrier?

Themes

Reinforcement (8) Consistency (6) Expectations (6) Motivation (6)

Communication (5) Differentiated Instruction (5) Peer Students (5) Support Staff (5)

Note: Culturally Responsive Classrooms

Again, help from support staff, peer students, or reinforcement of any kind remained a high priority for the research participants. Consistency and expectations also became major themes when answering this question. Communication is also a common theme across the research questions. Even though the education professionals that participated in this study and

the low number of years of experience they had, it became evident that the participants had knowledge of classroom management strategies.

Conclusion

The focus on experiences of phenomenological research design suits this research study's purpose of understanding classroom management strategies of diverse learners. There were several themes that emerged both within and across research questions; communication, family and staff support, motivation, consistency, and expectations. Researchers as well as education participants became aware of the importance of providing a culturally responsive classroom which included differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of the diversity of the students.

Training for education professionals working with a diverse learning population in the classroom are needed to yield substantial improvements. In addition, research on multicomponent interventions could provide important data that could prove helpful. The volunteer participants in this study were somewhat informed of classroom management strategies. They also appeared to understand the difference in behavior management and other classroom management strategies even though the participants had five or less years of teaching experiences. Also, it is important to note these educators either held graduate degrees in education or were pursuing graduate degrees in education.

As with any classroom management strategies, students respond to caring teachers. One fundamental strategy in working with defiant behavior is to establish and maintain a psychologically supportive classroom environment (Patrick, Turner, Meyer, & Midgley, 2003). Therefore, a culturally responsive classroom that provides differentiation of classroom strategies appears to be the best for students with diverse needs.

The results of this research can be used to inform teacher education programs regarding the classroom management strategies identified as most effective in meeting the needs of diverse learners in the current classroom. Through these results, teacher educators can identify those strategies which have been perceived as most positively addressing diverse learners. These strategies can be integrated into curriculum to ensure that pre-service teachers have experience with these strategies prior to entering the classroom. Further, the barriers most often experienced by these educators, as well as the means for overcoming barriers, have been identified. By understanding effective strategies and the barriers experienced by current educators in the field, teacher educators can better prepare pre-service teachers to meet the needs of all diverse learners in today's classroom setting.

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Online Standardized Testing with Young Children: Teacher's Action Research Cries Out for Help

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Abstract

Technology is becoming more and more common in today's classroom. The question is whether or not the technology is authentic and purposeful. With the implementation of the Common Core Standards (or similar standards with an emphasis in technology), states are choosing to use technology-based assessments for accountability. Teachers and Students have indicated that in order to perform well on these technology-based standardized tests, "real" technology strategies are needed. These strategies will allow students and teachers to feel less stress and more success as they attempt to show they have reached grade level indicators of mastery.

Introduction

We are in a transitional time period with an uprising in the implementation of technology in the classroom. As we shift away from the more common paper and pencil-based instruction and assessments to technology-driven lesson plans and assessments, being fluent with the most effective technology instruction in the classroom is vital to student success. Technology is now more affordable and more used than ever before. In an article from *Education Week* from February 2016 it states, "public schools in the United States now provide at least one computer for every five students" (Brantley, p.1).

Major developments with technology have occurred in the states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards or similar standards modeled after the Common Core State Standards. The adoption of these standards is a factor with the rise in technology-based assessments. The 2015-2016 school year was the first in which more states required summative assessments in the U.S. middle and elementary schools be delivered via technology rather than paper and pencil (Holt, 2016). With these shifts, it is imperative that we remain reflective on the elements involved to create "real" classroom experiences that will ease the transition into the new technology developments. We must be reflective of the struggles that have and will continue to arise with these changes and then we must give our best attempt to make changes as needed for the betterment of our future in support of teachers and students.

Listening to the teachers and students is key. Teachers and students not only need technology to be readily available, but also need guidance with technology related issues that will in turn better our classroom instruction and foster learning communities that provide continual growth.

Teachers and Students Matter

Teachers and students matter. Teachers have reported that they experience significantly more anxiety about their students' performance on the NCLB standardized assessment than on regular classroom testing (Segool, Carlson, Goforth, Von Der Embse, & Barterian, 2013). It is my prediction that this will continue with new authorized federal mandates which continue to emphasize standardized testing. Teachers are in a constant struggle to provide opportunities for students to experience technology testing strategies that promote success on these new computer-based assessments. Teachers are trying many things and some strategies are valuable. Others are

possibly attempting strategies that are not best practices. I firmly believe there is not time for this “trial and error” with little organized data collection that is much needed to support needs.

Kearns (2011) reminds us “the voices of youth are seen as integral to the discussion of educational policies directly affecting their lives, identities, and possibilities” (p. 114). Since standardized testing is a large part of the world we live in and used to assess our educational placement among other states in America and with other countries abroad, we must be prepared to address needed changes in order to compete. With a collaborative effort, there are new dynamic possibilities to what the future can look like as we move ahead with new standards and assessments.

The future of education is in a time of urgency, calling us to listen closely to the students and teachers that represent today’s new classroom. Their stories, often times hidden, are important. Teachers and students hold information that can help us pass on knowledge to the future generations in regard to best educational practices. Their perceptions of this important topic are invaluable and need to be considered. Students and teachers are our future and our hope. They need support to deal with the changes related to the standardized testing that they are required to participate in.

Teachers Want to Help Students Succeed

Students are giving their best efforts to move forward. Teachers are experiencing this shift alongside them. Teachers admit that pressure to succeed is a real issue. Despite personal philosophies and personal struggles, teachers want to be a support system for students. Bourdieu (1999) emphasizes that teachers, principals, system officials, and policymakers do not deliberately and willfully act unjustly towards children in regard to standardized testing and excessive pressures. Teachers and principals also believe that the majority of stakeholders in America have the best intentions for our current educational system in mind, even with their allowance of standardized testing to serve as a primary source for our analysis of our country’s educational placement among the states and abroad (Holt, 2016). However, if the true goals of school reform have good intentions, one can agree that Ayers (2004) maintains a legitimate argument that the attempt to reform using standardized testing to drive change has major challenges. Ayers states, “to provide every child with an experience that will nourish and challenge development, extend capacity, encourage growth, and offer the tools and dispositions necessary for full participation in the human community are simple to state but excruciatingly difficult to enact” (2004, p. 64). Having well developed technology-based professional networks will be critical to success in this area.

Teachers and parents report that the pressure of high-stakes tests is leading to higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of confidence on the part of elementary students (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). The excessive pressure and outlandish actions are a reflection of the mental pressures felt by educators and students to show growth on the standardized tests. A fear factor is growing with attempts to show gains. This pressure plays into their mental state which affects student performance. With organized support fostered inside learning networks, we can support the needs of our teachers and students.

Strategies are Changing

With the implementation of NCLB reform and now the ESSA Act, school systems and daily classroom instruction must look much different than in previous years. Pressures have indirectly reshaped the way society is viewing accountability and how society is reacting to

pressures with accountability. Smith (2003) adds that “the role that schools have in developing engaged citizens has been obscured by pressure from these high-stakes testing, tight budgets, and the challenges of teaching a diverse population of students at all levels of ability” (p. 3). One thing that seems absent from these debates is a concern for caring or nurturance that can be found with support. Collaborative grouping as it relates to technology needs will help. Another is a concern for the “shape of school communities” (Strike, 1999, pp. 173-174). Smith (2003) declares that if schools want to succeed today in light of the pressures, they need to do things differently (p.3). What are those differences? We need to support teachers and students with these issues.

What better way to discover needs and then support these issues than to be reflective thinkers who will help understand ways that learning networks in troubled areas can be identified and improved upon? Encouraging teachers to collaborate with researchers and vice versa to identify what is effective and what is ineffective must be utilized for growth. Furthermore, we must identify what is lacking to fill gaps and be innovative with new ideas. The idea of building collaborative learning communities or networks to promote learning is not new, however when we consider the new technology-based needs, I argue we are lacking with the basics of how these learning collaborations are organized. New understandings will promote stress-free testing situations for all involved, thus resulting in more accurate test data results. Teachers can [and desire] to help relieve the anxiety experienced by students by employing a variety of interventions that have proven useful (Salend, 2011). Therefore, it is valuable to use professional network strategies and interventions with the technology needs as the primary goal. Because teacher interventions are reported to build classroom rapport as well as reducing anxiety, surfacing and then helping implement these interventions are justified. Cheek, Bradley, Reynolds, & Coy (2002) state that a by-product of teacher interventions was an increased sense of school community. Investigating what perceptions can be drawn from the thoughts of teachers and students can be applied to the betterment of our world today making an exponential impactful on future generations with technology and its relationship to student learning.

Purposeful Technology-Based Instruction?

With state requirements that the newest standardized tests be given using a computer-based format, teachers naturally have had no choice but attempt to prepare the students accordingly. Teachers have been left to their own devices to make this happen in the classroom with little or no organized support. In an article from *Education Week*, the explanations of this issue lie with “a lack of how teaching and learning is expected to change with teachers and students” (Herold, 2016, p. 2). Teachers have reported that students have continued to attend a keyboarding class each week as a strategy. In addition, teachers have indicated that students are now given more time with technology inside the classroom instruction day. Some teachers use devices such as Chromebooks and iPads to allow students to manipulate technology more often than in previous times. But the question is if in fact this is the most purposeful means of preparation and what strategies are being successfully used?

With the need for new strategies, teachers believe that the hunt for computer-based testing strategies should take first priority and that they need support. Teachers have reported some success with various strategies using tools such as *Wikis* that have been introduced to practice responding to reading and writing prompts in a digital format (Holt, 2016). *Open Ed* is an online resource devoted to Common Core State Standards that allows students and teachers to practice and assess by each individual standard. Other sites teachers have noted as used as a tool

to better prepare students are the sites *Go Moodle*, *Jeopardy Brain Games*, *Khoot It!*, *Moby Max*, *Cool Math Games* and *IXL* (Holt, 2016). But are there others? I argue that perhaps utilizing learning networks to enhance professional learning in regard to technology in the classroom would open up new thoughts and ideas on a larger scale and ultimately promote success.

Methods

In an attempt to discover what strategies are used to reduce stress with standardized testing in the classroom, a qualitative case study was the most applicable. This methodology was important to answer the research questions and further allowed for additional themes to emerge. This method supported the importance that attention is needed in support and more emphasis with embodiment strategies that are needed with standardized testing in today's classrooms. The allowance of these strategies to be tested, tried, and utilized in the classroom will eliminate stress and simultaneously allow students who are testing to produce more accurate test data that reflects what they have learned. While the use of strategies in the classroom was identified, the importance of the implementation of the strategies to both the students and educators is brought to light in this article.

Additionally, it is important to consider the argument that on behalf of the teachers, we need to embrace the battle that they have begun with technology-based standardized testing stressors and support their needs. Ethical concerns are also to be considered. It is imperative that we are aware of student health issues from increased stress levels when testing is considered with each detail and is made known. The qualitative method justified the need to build a plan of support.

Results

The argument that more must be done to support teachers and their endeavors to promote success with students' academics as they transition into being college and career ready has been recognized. We must use professional learning networks with an emphasis in using "real" technology in the classroom and what best practices look like to learn what is being attempted, what is working, and where more help is needed. This will allow future research to help provide additional professional support for teachers attempting to transition their students from paper-based testing into technology-based testing.

One interview with teachers and students indicated that teachers use embodiment strategies to prepare their students for standardized testing. Revelations from the students' data verified the desires for embodiment strategies when testing to ease difficulties as they arise with the students. Teachers also indicated that all states have some form of testing occurring with educators at the forefront attempting to conform. These themes again justify the need for more support. Furthermore, we need to embrace what overall classroom instruction, including classroom management, has transformed into with this increase in technology. I firmly believe that students need daily organized instruction to prepare for a technology-based test. If students are to perform using a computer to show proficiency, but receive daily instruction using a paper and pencil only, we are doing our students a disservice. We are not providing stakeholders with accurate testing information. Perhaps students actually know how to read and write and perform math, but due to an increase in stress from being ill prepared for using technology as an output has caused students to shut down emotionally and mentally? Scores may not be accurate.

Conclusion

I encourage the field of educational researchers, administrators, teachers, and fellow community members to see the impactful information in this article as a challenge. We must continue to help students as we guide them with our daily classroom instruction in the transition from paper-based testing to technology-based testing. Using collaborative networks to do this provides an opportunity for growth.

Teachers and students matter. Teachers and students have a voice that must be acknowledged and supported. Issues can be best addressed if we collaborate with one another about the significance of the need for professional learning networks with an emphasis on the role of “real” authentic technology-based strategies with classroom instruction to promote best classroom practices, to reduce stress, and to produce more accurate standardized testing data for stakeholders.

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Personal Satisfaction and Academic Achievement: The Impact of Foundations of Reading Honors Student Coursework

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Study Origin

Teaching honors coursework at four-year institutions is a pedagogical and reflective challenge, with various content areas naturally seeking stronger teaching practice and seeking to add depth to relevant areas of inquiry. Successful exemplars of effective practice must be examined in greater detail in order to facilitate a deeper look at student growth and learning. Especially in the context of their coursework—indeed, where this study began—as Flyvberg (2006) notes, with the hope of better understanding what appeared initially to be a vivid exemplar of effective practice. With this in mind, case study methodology quickly emerged as the methodological option likely to provide that deeper look at a topic so important to student learning.

While the array of current scholarship on this topic seems certain of its importance, the precise nature of such effective practice takes very different forms, depending on the content area and the pedagogical reach of the inquiry. Despite these differences, scholarship on honors student coursework hopefully points back to a personal satisfaction and academic achievement driving candidate learning to a higher level. With this in mind, and an intriguing array of various types of data, this case study ultimately seeks to examine the following questions:

- a) How do students view the rigor and/or impact of their honors Foundations of Reading coursework?
- b) And how do they feel such work may or may not be beneficial in their future teaching practice?

Relevant Literature

Current scholarship documents various pedagogical strides across content areas to make honors coursework more directly beneficial to students' thinking and enjoyment of learning. Nelson (1994) focused on active learning, replacing lectures, and fostering student-centered discussion. Others have found that supporting student ability to locate primary literature enhanced their writing (Johnson, Anelli, Galbraith, & Green, 2011). Carpenter (2010) shifted the experience from mere theory to “the human response to illness” (p. 32) with honors level nursing. For Niedbala and Fogleman (2010) work with honors students was a great deal more situated in digital learning (e.g. Web 2.0). McDonald (2010) found an intriguing community balance between strong academic thinking and personal satisfaction at a religious institution, noting that “honors study flourishes most when rooted in a strong community of learners, (both students and faculty members) from different disciplines and levels of experience, who sustain broad and ongoing conversation with one another” (p. 84).

Hickey and Pontrello (2016) documented pedagogical strides with intermediate due dates, the importance of strong formative feedback, and a great deal of student independence. Still others have focused on strong student-centered learning and discovery (Hughes, 2014; Hancock & Saunders, 2008). Snavely and Wright (2003) found that portfolios not only made assessment much more authentic and individualized, but also a more integrated (and satisfying) match to the research process. Dundes and Francis (2016) documented an interesting look at the potential drive in honors candidates to defy expectations and surge forward independently—

interestingly enough, drawing a connection between those with tattoos and their ability to “cope with the scrutiny of their decisions, especially those that defy norms for high achievers” (p. 223).

When digging still deeper into the underlying pedagogy and aims related to growing student scholarship and deepened thinking, the literature becomes even more interesting. Rinn (2005) paid close attention to retention and attrition patterns, noting “a slight decrease in academic self-concept” and the need for additional support in order to promote retention (p. 165). Honors programs should help gifted students build intrinsic motivation through co-curricular involvement (Hébert & McBee, 2007). Stanford and Shattell (2010) found great worth in supporting the academic scholarship of honors students through faculty mentorship and encouragement. Honors coursework should also help candidates focus on “a high level of complexity, specifically at the level of thinking,” as well as build upon student-focused learning and positive reinforcement (Scager, Akkerman, Pilot, & Wubbels, 2013, p. 131).

In summary, the following four key themes emerged from the literature to inform the inquiry, and offered thematic relevance toward the upcoming analysis of case study data:

Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Feedback
Independence	Scholarship/Thinking

Figure 1. Themes from the literature. The following four themes emerged from the literature to inform this inquiry.

Participants and Study Recruitment

Four participants, former honors candidates in a Foundations of Reading course, took part in this case study. Their honors coursework consisted of a self-selected topic among the major areas of literacy (i.e. phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension), and the construction of a graduate-level literature review of approximately 10 current peer-reviewed journal articles. Students had the freedom to organize their literature review in various ways that suited them, such as but not limited to: thematic applications, categories of strategies, or a mix of topics with a logical connection. Ultimately, each participant completed both an honors paper and a 20-minute presentation to their class.

All four participants are female of traditional college age; one was a junior (Middle Level major) and three were seniors (two Middle Level majors and one Elementary major) at the time of data collection. Participants gave consent to participate on campus via a standard IRB-approved consent form, plus secondary consent to use their honors coursework in the case study data set. The initial consent given by participants included the possibility of future follow-up interviews at the upcoming completion of their future Teacher Internship.

Research Framework and Methodology

This case study is conceived around an action research framework intended for the examination of effective classroom practice. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) say this framework has “the intention to influence or change a system, and the values are those of participation, self-determination, empowerment through knowledge, and change” (p. 127). Be it development of pedagogy, or a refined understanding of it, Stringer (2008) calls action research “particularly relevant to those who engage in constructivist approaches to pedagogy” (p. 2). He further notes that it initially begins in reflection, grows into a clearer focus, and comes to fruition in a relevant classroom setting with relevant participants (p. 36-37).

This case study's methodology is guided by Yin (1994; 2012; 2018). It seeks to examine "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context," cope with a variety of variables, rely on a variety of evidence "needing to converge in a triangulating fashion," and benefit from prior theory (Yin, 1994, p. 13). While often a daunting methodological challenge, this is something Flyvbjerg (2006) calls "a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences"—and one he says "holds up well when compared to other methods" in the social sciences (p. 241). He ultimately claims that "a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars" and, thus, ineffective (p. 242). In this spirit, this case study offers a vivid exemplar of effective practice intended to bring further depth to this discipline.

Data Collection Methods

Participants completed a short semi-structured interview consisting of five open-ended questions gauging their thoughts, opinions, reflections, and experiences as they conducted their honors work. These short semi-structured interviews were conducted on campus, recorded by two digital audio devices to ensure quality and an available backup, and were immediately transcribed. Interviews followed an established protocol of questions; participants were asked matching questions but did have the freedom to expand answers as much as they felt necessary. Following the initial round of transcription, the typed responses were de-identified, checked for accuracy with minor errors corrected, and entered into the coding and analysis process. The potential remains for data from follow-up interviews to join the case study, once participants complete their future Teacher Internships.

Participants also completed an anonymous survey consisting of fifteen statements intended for a Likert-scale style response. The aim of these survey questions was to further support triangulation of case study conclusions. Participants completed survey responses after their semi-structured interviews and placed their surveys in unmarked envelopes which remained unopened until all surveys had been completed in order to ensure the anonymity of the survey responses. Following access to survey responses, mean values for responses were calculated using a basic Excel spreadsheet.

The study also included further analysis of their honors papers and presentations. While the case study was not designed initially to examine the quality of their honors papers and presentations, the overwhelmingly positive nature of their opinion of their project outcome necessitated a further look back at the nature of the work; an expanded understanding of the background context of this work further enriched the quality of this case study.

Data Analysis

Outcomes and Analysis: Honors Papers and Presentations

While not necessarily an essential element in the case study data, a look at the overall quality of the participants' honors coursework does provide additional background context on the nature of their work. Due to the nature of the references made to their work, considering the work, itself, is helpful prior to examining the semi-structured interview and survey data. As mentioned, participant honors coursework consisted of a self-selected topic among the major areas of literacy (i.e. phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension), leading to an honors paper of graduate level rigor (utilizing approximately 10 current peer-reviewed journal articles) and a short presentation to their classmates at the end of the semester. Topic selection was made via an initial conversation with the course professor, attempting to

match existing personal interest with growing curiosity about course topics, and was mentored constantly throughout the semester. Candidates met with the professor for conversational feedback and topic discussion a minimum of once per month over the course of the semester, with approximate goals of one-third completion of their papers at approximately four-week checkpoints throughout the semester. Candidates further had access to as many rounds of formative feedback via email as desired beyond those checkpoints, in support of paper completion and revision. The following basic information details the topic, scope of references, and size of participants' honors papers:

	Paper Topic	Number of Cited References	Paper Length (in Pages) *
Candidate 1	Fluency	9	9
Candidate 2	Comprehension	7	10
Candidate 3	Comprehension	9	8
Candidate 4	Fluency/Comprehension	9	7

* *Not counting the APA-style cover page and references page(s)*

Each honors paper took the form of a graduate-level literature review in APA style, with an introduction that established purpose and topic, and body paragraphs that reviewed relevant literature in a manner synthesizing an appropriate summary of the content—with relevant connections among topics. Popular approaches to the organization of content (via appropriate headings) were to divide content into areas such as theory, strategy, or classroom practice; differentiation of instruction for diverse learners was present, as well. Effective literature review narrative was evidenced by appropriate citation of sources, use of a variety of approaches the narrative in terms of direct quotation versus summarization (i.e. to avoid simply putting quotation marks around citations in order to build a paragraph). Candidates ultimately reached conclusions about the theoretical and pedagogical value of the content and made it ready for consideration in their teaching practice.

Candidate presentations to their classes represented a very interesting concluding step to their work. Using a provided PowerPoint template, candidates selected key talking points from each cited resource and section of their paper in order to walk classmates through the content (instead of simply reading the paper aloud) and produced approximate 20-minute presentations to their classmates at the end of the semester. When multiple honors candidates presented in the same section, it made a dynamic and engaging end to the semester. Candidate 4 took this process yet one step further and requested an evaluation of the produced paper and presentation via the closest available rubric for a graduate level literacy course. While not a perfect match to the task, it did facilitate the requested graduate-level feedback and was the impetus for developing a rubric specifically for this purpose in the future.

Outcomes and Analysis: Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants had the freedom to share as much as they wanted when responding to questions; the nature and pace of the responses resulted in approximately three to five minutes of discourse per question, approximately 15 minutes per semi-structured interview. Participants were each asked the following specific questions:

Please describe your decision-making process when electing to take Foundations of Reading as an Honors option—why did you do so?

What was your initial impression of the nature of the Honors option work for the course?

Describe your experience as you conducted your Honors option work for the course—for example, what were your thoughts, feelings, or opinions on the work?

How did you feel about the support and guidance you received while conducting your Honors option work for the course?

How did you feel about your final product (both paper and presentation) that you produced as a Foundations of Reading Honors Candidate, and how (if possible) do you hope to apply it to any future teaching?

Figure 2. Semi-structured interview questions. The following five questions comprised the semi-structured interviews.

Analysis of interview responses consisted of a coding system, the four emergent themes from the literature (i.e. Fig. 1), utilized at the sentence and fragment level. This is consistent with Yin's (2018) notion of *pattern matching* (or congruence) in that it “compares an empirically based pattern...with a predicted one” (p. 175) and draws additional value in the building of context (e.g. the value of the statement within the context of the discourse) as guided by the critical discourse analysis work of Gee (2014, p. 120). Of initial interest was the emergence of more than three major instances of a consistent code per interview question response, with the majority of participants displaying the same presence of a code for the same question. Of greater interest was the emerging presence of certain codes dominating the responses to questions consistently across all four of the participants.

While some responses were shorter, all responses yielded enough insight to promote a very noticeable linkage between the four key themes emerging from the literature, which were used in the coding process. It was particularly encouraging during the coding process to note how multiple themes emerged so prominently within the context of the majority of responses to a particular question (three or four of the questions), as well as one particular theme which dominated one particular question, as such (see Table 2):

Table 2	
<i>Emergence of themes under the framework of semi-structured interview questions</i>	
Question 1 (Decision-Making Process)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking
Question 2 (Initial Impression)	
Independence	Scholarship/Thinking
Question 3 (Experience)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking
Question 4 (Support)	
Feedback	
Question 5 (Final Product)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking

Semi-structured interview theme of enjoyment/satisfaction.

Enjoyment or satisfaction as a trend in the discourse data resonated clearly and consistently across participant responses to three of the five semi-structure interview questions. Multiple responses to the first question, regarding their decision-making process in taking the honors option, noted potential enjoyment or satisfaction:

“You described it and it sounded interesting and sounded like something that would help me.” (Candidate 1)

“[The course] just seemed like a good option, a good kinda class than some of the other ones.” (Candidate 2)

“[The choice was] what I was interested in.” (Candidate 4)

The third semi-structured interview question, looking more specifically at the substance of the experience as an honors candidate, further supported this trend of enjoyment/satisfaction:

“[It] was intriguing to me.” (Candidate 1)

“I really liked how we spread it out for the whole semester.” (Candidate 2)

“I wasn’t just rushing at the end...” (Candidate 2)

Candidate 4, however, had a great deal more to say in support of this trend—the most of any candidate in support of any trend in any one question:

“I really enjoyed looking through the articles and, like, annotating, highlighting...and I really enjoyed going through the articles. And the writing itself, I really enjoy writing, so I enjoyed that part...once I regained my flow [the writing] went really well and I enjoyed writing it.” (Candidate 4)

“I thought it was gonna be really boring, but, umm, I’m having a lot of fun.” (Candidate 4)

Additional enjoyment and satisfaction existed still in the fifth question about their final academic product in the course, with strong support from Candidate 2, in particular:

“...The presentation that we actually did on it was helpful...” (Candidate 1)

“I was really proud of the outcome that I had.” (Candidate 2)

“By my final paper, and then the presentation we did for our class, I felt like went really well.” (Candidate 2)

“...I really valued what I ended up making out of this. I really thought that it turned out as a success.” (Candidate 2)

“I was really proud of my paper...” (Candidate 4)

“...I was surprised at how well I was able to put my voice into my writing.” (Candidate 4)

Semi-structured interview theme of scholarship/thinking.

The trend of scholarship and thinking ran the strongest of any, spanning four of the semi-structured interview questions. In the first and second questions, participants made it clear that the academic concept and their own academic rigor were important to them. In the first question, they noted:

“...The reading process is pretty interesting to me. So, it helped me in wanting to do it.”
(Candidate 3)

“...The reason I decided to take this specific course...was because it falls under, umm, ELA, which is what I prefer to teach” and “I think it would look good on my resume and help me build my knowledge for that.” (Candidate 4)

And in the second, they noted:

“It was quite a bit more rigorous” and “[the professor] did not design it in a way that would simply allow you to check something off of a list;” further, “what would help these honors students and what would challenge them.” (Candidate 1)

“[Candidates could choose topics] we had the most knowledge about, or which one we wanted to learn more...” (Candidate 2)

“I kind of expected it to be harder...but I guess this was just more in depth, and really made me, like, think not necessarily deeper but more in like a bigger picture.”
(Candidate 3)

The third interview question appeared to reveal a greater comfort overall with the academic process that, while satisfying, appeared to trend more toward the work and thinking itself, rather than personal enjoyment:

“It made me realize that as an educator reading would be to put it, ah, I don’t know, colloquially, I guess it would be a big deal.” (Candidate 1)

“I had time to actually go through each of the articles, really read deeply about each one, and I took notes on each article and then would combine the articles together.”
(Candidate 2)

“...It kind of all just kind of clicked.” And further, “...The more I read, like I said, I realized it’s a lot of trial and error with figuring out how to get through to students...so, we have to figure out how to get these students to think in all these different ways, and it work as one machine.” (Candidate 3)

The final interview question suggested that participants were able to bring cohesion to their academic process. In light of this case study’s second research question, this is particularly encouraging in that it suggests participants saw immediate value in their work, and an applicability of the thinking to their growing pedagogical palate. Evidence from the final interview question illustrated the growth of their individual thinking and their tangible product—giving it an intellectual and professional value, as well:

“It made me, like, synthesize everything that I learned and figure out how to use it.”
(Candidate 1)

“I feel like I can use it as a teacher;” and “most of the opinions that I had about reading, umm, were kind of influenced by what I learned through this honors project;” and also “...I feel like it gave me the ability to help other people understand it better.” (Candidate 1)

“...I felt like I had a lot of pretty valuable information that I didn’t have before...” and “I will probably just carry that with me as I move into education.” (Candidate 2)

“I definitely think my paper was really interesting...” (Candidate 3)

“I realized that it was not only helpful to me, but it was helpful to my classmates to see what I have been doing.” (Candidate 4)

Semi-structured interview theme of feedback.

The theme of feedback was the sole, predominant theme present in the fourth interview question regarding the support that participants had as they completed their honors coursework:

“...You [meaning the professor] were a lot more, you were on top of things as far as setting up meetings with us...” and “...walking me through all of that...” (Candidate 1)

“I knew that I can ask questions” and “I got lots of help, and especially when I was stuck, I got help in kind of figuring out what next step to take.” (Candidate 3)

“And, so you helped me, like, kind of figure out what path to take.” (Candidate 3)

“I received a lot of support...anytime I got frustrated, had questions, I either emailed or came in here and solved them immediately.” (Candidate 4)

“I don’t think we went more than two weeks without discussing [the work].” (Candidate 4)

Candidate 2, however, had the most to say about this trend, which further emphasizes the weight of this dominant theme in the third question:

“It was really good. You were very good about providing feedback to us...you make sure we weren’t overwhelmed at the end...so I felt very on track the whole time and you would always provide quick and immediate feedback. That way we knew what to adjust, or, you know, what was good, things like that. And you always made sure to always mention positive things, as well. You know, sometimes there would be things we needed to change but there was always a positive message back about lots of things.” (Candidate 2)

Additionally, Candidate 4 had one additional comment regarding feedback (present in the response to the fifth interview question) which further emphasized the importance of feedback in the process—specifically in response to the presentation on the work given to classmates:

“And as far as the presentation, I think the feedback from the classmates, they really, they came, some of them came to me after class...so, I think the presentation, I think at first I didn’t take it seriously. I was like, oh, whatever, the main part of it was the writing. But then once I did take it seriously, I realized that it was not only helpful to me, but it was helpful to my classmates to see what I have been doing.” (Candidate 4)

In summary, the analysis of the interview responses suggests that honors candidates place a high value on what they perceive to be an enjoyable or personally satisfying experience in their work. Additionally, they appear to place their highest value on the scholarship or the growth of their thinking. And finally, they may very well consider feedback to be one of the most (if not the most) crucial forms of instructor support as they conducted their honors coursework. The survey results, to follow, added further depth to these findings than the interview analysis alone, and deepened the case study data enough to support a strong triangulation of conclusions and resulting recommendations.

Outcomes and Analysis: Survey

Participants encountered the following questions in the survey, which they rated on a Likert-style response scale (5: Strongly Agree; 4: Agree Somewhat; 3: Neutral; 2: Disagree Somewhat; 1 Strongly Disagree), as listed in Figure 3:

- 1) I am glad that I decided to take the Honors option for *Foundations of Reading*.

- 2) The concept/idea of the Honors option work for *Foundations of Reading* seemed appropriate.

- 3) I feel that I came to understand the nature of the Honors option work quickly/effectively.

- 4) As I came to know and understand the Honors option work, I found it interesting.

- 5) I was satisfied by the nature of the support that I received from the professor on the Honors option work.

- 6) As my Honors option work was underway, I continued to find it interesting.

- 7) When I encountered difficulty or questions in my Honors option work, I was able to get feedback and suggestions to continue my work.

- 8) The professor suggested an effective pace and/or timeline for the Honors option work.

- 9) As I completed my Honors option work, I continued to find it interesting.

- 10) I feel that my Honors option work was relevant to my training as a preservice teacher.

- 11) I foresee the ability to implement the thinking in my Honors option work in my immediate future teaching practice (e.g. Teacher Internship).

- 12) I foresee the ability to implement the thinking in my Honors option work in my future teaching practice (e.g. future teaching position).

- 13) The nature of my Honors option work was relevant to the course content of *Foundations of Reading*.

- 14) Reflecting back on my Honors option work, I continue to find it interesting.

- 15) I would recommend this Honors option for *Foundations of Reading* to current and future BSE (ELED/MLED) program candidates.

Figure 3. Survey questions. The following 15 questions comprised the survey.

While survey question responses were overwhelming positive in the “Strongly Agree” category, six of the questions scored unanimously at “Strongly Agree.” The occasional response of “Agree Somewhat” by only one of the four participants per question caused the value of 4.75 on eight of the questions. This suggests an overwhelmingly positive response to the overall nature of participant experience (see also “Triangulation” section, to follow). Mean values to all fifteen survey responses appear in Table 3, below:

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Mean	4.75	4.75	4	5	5
Question	6	7	8	9	10
Mean	4.75	5	4.75	4.75	5
Question	11	12	13	14	15
Mean	4.75	4.75	5	4.75	5

This stage of the case study was further reassuring in that it also suggests that participants were speaking openly and genuinely in the semi-structured interviews.

The response to the third question proved intriguing. The implication of the third question suggests that participants did not come to understand the nature of their honors work as quickly or effectively as they may have hoped. This somewhat unexpected element in the case study data proved interesting in that the resulting successful participant coursework was clearly completed; this potential difficult start to their work clearly did not hamper the eventual successful outcome. While not strong enough to earn a theme or trend in response to the first semi-structured interview question, a look back at the interview data did reveal a few clues related to this particular survey question response:

“I wasn’t sure, you know, if I really knew how to do what you were proposing...”
(Candidate 2)

“...When I started it...it was a little bit overwhelming.” (Candidate 4)

In both of these examples, the candidates very quickly indicated the above but turned in a productive direction which fed more directly into the theme of scholarship and thinking. This does, however, uncover a likely avenue of improvement for future teaching, which is noted in the recommendations, moving forward.

Outcomes and Analysis: Triangulation

Yin’s (2018) assertion that multiple sources of information will yield the proper congruence of evidence to support conclusions is a notion that drives the approach to triangulation in this case study. This further enriches the above-mentioned pattern matching and explanation building, and thus enriches the crucial internal validity necessary to preserve case study research as a worthy form of inquiry. The overall strength of each of the survey questions further supports the emergent themes in the semi-structured interview questions, when considering the highly positive nature of the interview question responses, and their role in that internal validity. Given the topical nature of the respective interview questions, they appropriately map into the themes from the semi-structured interview questions in Table 4:

Table 4 <i>Triangulation of themes under the framework of semi-structured interview questions, including the relevant interview questions</i>	
Question 1 (Decision-Making Process)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking
Interview Questions: 1, 2	
Question 2 (Initial Impression)	
Independence	Scholarship/Thinking
Interview Questions: 3, 4	
Question 3 (Experience)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking
Interview Questions: 6, 9, 13, 15	
Question 4 (Support)	
Feedback	
Interview Questions: 5, 7, 8	
Question 5 (Final Product)	
Enjoyment/Satisfaction	Scholarship/Thinking
Interview Questions: 10, 11, 12, 14	

Given the highly positive nature of both the interview responses and the survey responses, it is still necessary to closely examine their relationship in order to identify what is potentially problematic or unexpected, within that congruence—or what threatens it. While more interview questions were devoted to participants’ experience and final product than their decision-making process and initial impression (which was anticipated as more crucial when framing the case study), the highly positive nature of the survey responses still supports the emergent themes, rather than makes them problematic.

Conclusions

Most crucial in this case study’s findings is that honors candidates place a high value on what they perceive to be an enjoyable or personally satisfying experience in their coursework. This decision, one born of a desire for greater individual rigor, is also one that seems to include a desire for independently driven work. Additionally, honors candidates do indeed place a very high value on what they perceive to be the rigor of the scholarship or possible growth in their thinking. This content-driven desire may also, as in the case of these participants, play a role in what they perceive to be important academic content preparing them for their future professional practice, such as teaching.

Additionally, this case study suggests that honors candidates consider feedback to be one of the most (if not the most) crucial forms of support in their work. Access to feedback is important to them, as is the ability to seek and receive answers to questions when they feel that they have reached an impasse in their work. Further, it may very well be that candidates view feedback as much more of an extended formative dialogue. While this is consistent with the reviewed literature, it also reiterates Flyvberg’s suggestion that a case study should be a vivid exemplar of effective practice, and indeed this case study may very well be a vivid exemplar of the personal satisfaction and academic achievement of these candidates.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this case study, instructors and professors of honors coursework should very carefully consider the experiential value candidates place on their work, when planning coursework for such candidates. Instructors and professors should be prepared to construct an experience commensurate with the academic growth needs of the students in question, yet at the same time not assign them a task without some degree of input or independent topic selection. Instructors and professors should also consider carefully the academic rigor and intensity of the coursework. There may be greater value in adding layers of depth to known topics of interest within the range of the coursework—especially when considering what one might consider graduate-level rigor—and greater value in directing the academic thinking toward future professional practice, as well. Additionally, as suggested by the third survey question, clear directions and guidelines should govern the start of candidate work so as to minimize overwhelming feelings.

Instructors and professors should also not underestimate the value candidates place upon the richness of the feedback that guides and mentors their honors coursework. Feedback should be considered the cornerstone element in the growth of a candidate's topic from the initial discussion to the finished academic product. Instructors and professors should not underestimate the power of verbal feedback and conversation in aiding candidates when they struggle in their work. Given the potential in honors coursework to generate pivotal thinking, academic development, and preparation for professional practice, feedback that guides the process may be priceless, worth any investment of time to do so. Ultimately, these recommendations may prove positive in guiding the coursework and experience of honors candidates to a higher level of satisfaction and achievement.

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Strategies for Recruitment and Retention

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Abstract

According to Gleiman and Mokhtarian (2013), students are recruited and retained one at a time. This is especially true for smaller institutions competing against larger institutions in order to maintain viable programs. From undergraduate to graduate, this paper provides insight to strategies that a small Division II university implemented to recruit and retain students through graduation. The paper was presented at the 2017 SRATE/ArATE conference and connected to the strand: **Reclaiming Educator Preparation, Policy, and Practice for the Common Good.**

The teacher shortage is a real problem. Based on the research of Woods, Richards, and Ayers (2016), teacher preparation enrollments dropped 10% between 2002 and 2012, which has and will result in severe teacher shortages in the public schools. Because of this, it is the responsibility of college faculty and staff to implement strategies to attract and keep students who will commit to teaching careers. According to Gleiman and Mokhtarian (2013), students are recruited and retained one at a time. This is especially true for smaller institutions competing against larger institutions in order to maintain viable programs. This article provides effective recruiting and retention strategies that have been implemented within a small Division II university that has provided educational opportunities for over 100 years.

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 2017), many colleges and universities are experiencing the greatest loss of students in their first-year of college. Although there are several reasons why first-year college students do not succeed, many colleges and universities are focusing on evidence-based practices and success strategies in an effort to reduce drop-out rates. The overall theme that is continually brought up at conferences and webinars (e.g., opportunities for all campaign) is the fact that students need to feel a sense of belonging if they are to be successful in college (AASCU, 2017), which can be accomplished by cultivating an inclusive climate and by providing social and academic support (Perna, 2002).

Many universities and colleges in Arkansas are small but serve an important purpose. Although they provide exceptional learning opportunities, they often find it difficult to maintain high enrollment. During the years of face-to-face only courses, classes were full and program viability was not an issue. But when the Internet came into existence, online programs began to provide opportunities for students in every corner of the state and beyond. The institution began to see numbers drop, especially in graduate programs. To offset these declining numbers, faculty began brainstorming ideas and looking at relevant research, which provided insight to the direction the university should take.

According to Lechuga (2011), faculty-graduate student mentoring relationships are considered to be most important by students as it is seen as the foundation for graduate-school assimilation, professional identity, and long-term dedication to the profession. Simply put, the simplest actions on the part of the faculty member can improve the relational teacher-student

dynamic. Verbal and non-verbal actions such as providing feedback in a positive manner, addressing students by name, or simply just smiling, provide for a relaxed atmosphere that is a pathway for professional growth: growth for not only the student, but the professor as well.

For those aspiring to achieve their career goals through higher education, there are a plethora of respectable universities to consider. Acquiring credentials through face-to-face or online courses has vastly expanded school options for prospective students. With proximity no longer dominating the equation of selection, primary factors of consideration may include a university's reputation or cost of tuition.

Utilizing the relevant research and implementing common-sense strategies, our university has found an influx of new students at the undergraduate and graduate level. Program recruitment and retention numbers have tripled since implementation. Word-of-mouth from program graduates has been especially effective. Others see graduates using their credentials to find lucrative leadership positions and want in on the success. They also hear from alumni about having 24/7 access to their professors via phone, text message, email, or office visit. Students like the one-on-one atmosphere knowing they are more than just a number. For example, faculty members at this university teach classes as well as advise students in their field of study. There are advantages of personal advising due to the fact that it allows students and faculty to meet one-on-one. The old saying "First Impressions" is very relevant in higher education because a student will either choose or not choose a college/university based on these impressions. Because this university is one of the few remaining universities that are open enrollment, we have a professional obligation to help our students to succeed.

There are many strategies employed by faculty at this university to improve a student's sense of belonging inside and outside of the classroom. Although these success strategies are simple strategies, they have been effective in retaining and recruiting students. The overarching strategies include the following: 1) Establish your office/classroom as a friendly environment; 2) Upon meeting a student for the first time, shake their hand and introduce yourself, show them that they are significant and worthy of your time; 3) Ask students questions about themselves. Students appreciate that you want to know who they are- this tells the student that you are interested in them; 4) Make it your goal to remember your student's name; 5) Offer study sessions before an exam. It is a great way for students to connect and learn from the professor and from each other; 6) Keep grades up-to-date in the grade book or on the universities online grading computer grading program; 7) Answer emails within 24 hours or at least acknowledge you have received the email; 8) Start a club/organization within your field of study. This is a great way for students to get to know each other outside of the classroom; 9) Engage your students in relevant research and conferences; 10) Engage your students in the classroom by asking them challenging questions.

These student success strategies described are not "rocket science," they are simple and easy to implement. This is not an exhaustive list but is a means of treating others as anyone would wish to be treated. As students are dependent on faculty to guide them through the challenges of college, faculty are also dependent on students; for without them, there would be no need for faculty.

A former graduate stated the following:

As I began to narrow down my options of potential universities to achieve my Masters in Educational Leadership, my university was able to dissolve concern of limited guidance through its dedicated instructors. Ongoing face-to-face interactions with the director, who was also a faculty member in

the program, built a foundation of support I began to trust. Online courses no longer appeared to offer weak, distant guidance, but rather a dedicated staff of instructors eager to build my skills as a future administrator. My retention continued on the basis of its loyal beginning: high instructor support and engagement. (T. Jansen, personal communication, April 1, 2017).

This is just one story of how one small Division II university in Arkansas made some simple changes to solve a big problem; changes that can be easily replicated by any institution in higher education and elsewhere. This article is not intended to present the results of a complex research study or provide a foundation for future research but was written to describe simple strategies in an effort to retain and recruit students in higher education. It offered some effective ideas for making connections, placing students first, and forming productive relationships that cultivate success for all involved.

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