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SEEING THEMSELVES AS TEACHERS: PRESERVICE TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER IDENTITY AND SELF-EFFICACY WITH THE EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE

Research Article

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Abstract

This study examines forty-eight preservice teachers' teacher identity and self-efficacy during their first field experience in an elementary Professional Development School (PDS) site. They engaged in three half-day field experiences per week, observed their mentor teachers' lessons, developed and taught lessons, and reflected on their field experience during one semester. Data including pre- and post-surveys on teacher identity and self-efficacy, reflection journals, written commentaries for planning ELA lessons, and written reflection commentaries about delivery of ELA lessons, were collected to examine their development of teacher identity and self-efficacy. By the end of the field experience, they reported more confidence in engaging students in learning. They also reported that they developed instructional strategies to teach content and to manage the classroom. Field experience plays a key role in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity. Hands-on experiences in the classroom offered them opportunities to develop their self-efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Implications for teacher educators and teacher education preparation programs are included.

Keywords: Preservice teachers, teacher identity, self-efficacy, Professional Development School (PDS)

1. Introduction

Teacher education preparation programs must produce quality teachers because they play an important role in and impact student academic success in K-12 schools (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2018). They are the most impactful factor that determines quality service for children (Koca, 2016). Preparing quality teachers in the teacher education preparation programs is essential, especially during this time of teacher shortages experienced in many school districts nationally and globally. Teacher preparation can positively contribute to novice teachers' retention, especially by offering authentic, productive field experiences in classroom settings (Beck et al, 2020).

Teacher identity affects the classroom and student learning. Teachers reflecting comprehensively on their identity are more likely to interact with students using appropriate, engaging instruction, which positively impacts student learning (Hockings et al., 2009). Sachs (2015) explains that teacher self-identity offers teachers a foundation to “construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society” (p.15). Teacher educators must prepare teacher candidates to actively and professionally reflect on and develop their teacher self-identity (Izadinia, 2013).



Teachers with high self-efficacy believe in their capabilities to create positive learning environments (Pajares, 1996), to manage and organize their tasks (Allinder, 1994), and to try innovative instructional strategies (Fives & Buehl, 2009; Guskey, 1988). These efficacious teachers also positively impact student achievement (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). However, few studies focus on both teacher identity and self-efficacy using clinical and field experience among preservice teachers. Therefore, this study explores this area. A purpose of this study was to explore how preservice teachers develop their teacher identity and self-efficacy through hands-on field experience at a Professional Development School (PDS) site. Two research questions set for this study were: “How does field experience impact preservice teachers in shaping their teacher self-identity?” and “How does field experience impact preservice teachers’ self-efficacy?”

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Field Experience and Professional Development Schools (PDSs)

Preservice teachers must practice what they learned from teacher education programs in real classroom settings. Darling-Hammond (2010) states that high quality teacher preparation programs require preservice teachers to complete a significant amount of time in field settings. Field experience and student teaching provide preservice teachers opportunities to apply knowledge and strategies they learned from college courses and receive feedback from their mentor teachers. Darling-Hammond (2010) also documents out that universities must have great, sound partnerships with K-12 schools. In particular, professional development schools (PDS), partnered K-12 schools with universities, offer rich and unique experiences to preservice teachers since preservice teachers tend to receive more frequent supervision from PDS mentor teachers and since there is more collaboration between universities and PDS sites to support preservice teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2014). PDS sites serve “as authentic education preparation settings where coursework and clinical experiences are closely coupled, ensuring that educators are profession ready (National Association for Professional Development Schools [NAPDS], 2021, p.15).”

Zhang et al. (2023) studied preservice teachers’ readiness between clinically oriented and traditional teacher preparation programs. They set up two models of field experiences: the clinical experiences and practices in teaching (CEPT) model and traditional field experience model. For the CEPT models, two cohorts (twelve preservice teachers in cohort 1 at a local high school and six preservice teachers in cohort 2 in a rural high school) completed their clinical experiences. For both CEPT cohorts, mentor teachers in this model received training regarding how to support preservice teachers. The second model of field experience was the traditional field experience. Twenty-two preservice teachers completed this model of field experience over 17 different high schools. The researchers collected survey data from the participants to examine their evaluation of the effectiveness of their teacher education programs in five areas: (a) meeting 12 teaching standards, (b) frequencies of participation in developing teaching strategies, (c) benefits of Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) elements in improving teaching, (d) frequencies of participation in collaboration, networking, and mentoring, and (e) benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship. The researchers also conducted four focus group interview sessions, two sessions with two CEPT groups and two sessions with two of the traditional groups. The results showed that there was no statistical difference in the area of meeting the teaching standards between the CEPT and non-CEPT groups. However, CEPT preservice teachers reported more positive perceptions in the other four areas and developed more self-efficacy than the non-CEPT preservice teachers.

Wynn and Okie (2009) examined the impact of problem-based learning (PBL) among secondary social studies preservice teachers through field experience and student teaching. Twelve preservice teachers completed their field experience in one semester and student teaching in the following semester. While participating in the field experience at a middle school, they took a social studies methods course and learned about PBL lessons. They implemented PBL lessons in their field experience. They also completed their student teaching in high schools and continued to implement PBL lessons. The researchers collected four types of data — questionnaires and a focus group session at the end of the field experience as well as questionnaires and a focus group session at the end of student teaching — from the preservice teachers both semesters. The results indicated that preservice teachers developed confidence in planning and implementing PBL lessons at the end of their field experience. They also reported that their PBL lessons positively impacted their students' scores on exams, students' writing skills, student engagement in learning, and reduced the number of classroom management problems. The researchers found similar outcomes from the student teaching data. These results show positive effects of clinical experience where preservice teachers transfer theory into practice.

2.2. Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p.3). Personal beliefs in their abilities to be able to accomplish tasks impact how and whether they actually accomplish the tasks or not. Self-efficacy among teachers plays an important role in their profession. Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy believe in their abilities to effectively teach and interact with children and set high expectations for students; thus, they positively influence student academic achievement (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Teacher self-efficacy is an essential teacher disposition; with it, teachers can develop teaching skills, confidence, and positively impact student learning achievement (Pendergast et al., 2011).

Clark and Newberry (2019) conducted a study on 783 preservice teachers from nine teacher education programs in one state of the United States. Preservice teachers completed two sets of surveys at the end of their programs. The first one was the *Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), focusing on preservice teachers' self-efficacy. The second was the *Preservice Teacher Survey*, which examined how preservice teachers rated their experiences during the teacher education programs in the following four areas: (a) feedback from teacher educators, (b) feedback from mentor teachers, (c) preservice teachers' perceptions on teaching experiences during their program, and (d) their perceptions about student teaching experiences. The results showed that they scored relatively high on both surveys, which indicated that they ended their programs with higher levels of self-efficacy.

Jakopovic et al. (2023) explored the impact of microteaching on self-efficacy among preservice teachers. A total of 28 elementary major preservice teachers in two semesters participated in the study. They engaged in 15-minute microteaching (five times in one semester and two times in the second semester) and received feedback from peer participants and instructors. They also completed field experience in the same semesters. The researchers looked at how microteaching impacts self-efficacy in four areas: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. Overall, preservice teachers reported that microteaching positively impacted their performance in field experience and that they developed self-efficacy in all four areas.



Clark and Andreasen (2021) examined self-efficacy to teach multilingual learners among 523 preservice teachers from six teacher education programs in the U.S. Preservice teachers from six teacher education programs in one state of the Western U.S. participated in the study. During their teacher education programs, they completed the Diversity and Multicultural Beliefs Self-Efficacy Scale and a subscale of the Self-Assessment of Proficiency to Perform Reading Tasks (SPPRT) (Clark, 2015) during their teacher education programs. They also completed the same set of surveys after their first year as inservice teachers. One hundred sixty-two of them completed this set of the surveys. The results showed that, generally speaking, the participants (as preservice teachers and later as inservice teachers) felt adequately or well-prepared to teach diverse students. They also reported that their levels of self-efficacy on social tasks were high, but they rated themselves lower in self-efficacy in lesson planning and implementation.

2.3. Teacher Identity among Preservice Teachers

Researchers explored teachers' professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2008). Teachers' professional identity plays an essential role in teacher development (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Various factors, such as students' backgrounds, teacher education programs, mentor teachers, field experiences, emotion, and reflections, impact the development of teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Hargreaves, 2001).

Cuadra-Martínez et al. (2023) examined the correlations among the following four areas: (a) teacher professional identity, (b) teacher education models (technicist model, reflective-hermeneutic model, critical-intellectual model), (c) the type of teacher educators (school teachers, academic professionals, academic teacher educators teaching courses at universities, and researchers), and (d) academic progression of preservice teachers. A total of 662 preservice teachers in teacher education programs at three universities in Chile participated in the study. They completed the surveys on demographics and teacher identity. The findings indicated that the teacher education models positively and significantly correlated with preservice teachers' professional identity. They also found a positive correlation between different types of teacher educators and teacher professional identity. In particular, preservice teachers who identified themselves as school teacher reported the development of teacher identity more than others who identified themselves as other types of teacher educators. The results also showed that preservice teachers' professional identity decreased in their fourth and fifth year compared to the ones in the third year of teacher education programs.

Torres-Cladera et al. (2021) looked at the relationships between two factors, (a) preservice teachers' learning experience in the teacher education programs and practicum, and (b) the development of their teacher professional identity in Spain. Eight preservice teachers in their fourth year of the teacher education program, eight mentor teachers from the practicum, and eight university teacher educators/professors participated in the study. Data from the preservice teachers included practicum notes, individual assignments, and written observations. The researchers conducted individual interviews and hosted a discussion group with the mentor teachers. Data from the university professors included field notes and research project meeting notes. The researchers highlighted the importance of supporting preservice teachers in shaping their teacher professional identity through practicum. Mentor teachers and university professors/teacher educators play critical roles in guiding preservice teachers to construct knowledge within themselves, others, and the world.

3. Method

3.1. Context

This study took place at a Midwestern university in the United States. Preservice teachers completed their first field experience at an elementary professional development school (PDS) site. They took a literacy methods course and social studies methods course as concurrent courses while engaging in the field experience. For their field experience, they spent approximately 12 hours over three mornings (approximately 4 hours each morning) at the PDS site. They developed and taught two English Language Arts (ELA) lessons and one social studies lesson during their field experience. As part of their field experience, they also enrolled in a one-hour field experience lecture where they learned about various topics including classroom management skills each week. The researcher collected data from preservice teachers in four semesters.

3.2. Participants

In total, 48 preservice teachers participated in the study over four semesters. Their academic levels consisted of 31 juniors and 17 seniors. All but one were White preservice teachers. One preservice teacher was Latine. Among all preservice teachers, three were early childhood-elementary majors (birth – Grade 3) and 45 of them were elementary/middle school majors (Grades K-9).

3.3. Instruments

This study involved four instruments: (a) pre- and post-surveys on teacher identity and self-efficacy, (b) reflection journals, (c) written commentaries for planning ELA lessons, and (d) written reflections about preservice teachers' delivery of teaching.

3.3.1. Pre- and post-surveys on teacher identity and self-efficacy

Each pre- or post-survey consisted of three parts. Part I of the survey accessed on demographic information such as major, academic level, and previous experience working with children. Part II of the survey asked teacher identity questions. The researchers used the *Early Teacher Identity Measure* developed by Friesen and Besley (2013). Preservice teachers rated their opinions about 17 items using the 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree, 3= neutral, 5=agree). Sample items included: "I feel comfortable identifying myself as a teacher." "I can easily see myself working with children/adolescents and helping them to learn and develop." "Helping a child learn something new is very rewarding." Among 17, four statements were reversed statements. Examples were "I often doubt if I am the right person to become a teacher." and "I have no idea what it means to be a good teacher." Part II of the pre-and post-surveys included one open-ended question and asked preservice teachers to reflect on teacher identity. A reliability of the *Early Teacher Identity Measure* (alpha) was .87.

Part III of the pre- and post-surveys focused on self-efficacy questions. The researcher in this study used the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* by Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk Hoy (2001). This part included 24 self-efficacy questions, asking preservice teachers to rate their opinions using the 9-point Likert scale (1= nothing, 5 = some influence, 9 = a great deal). Sample items were: "How much can you do to help your students think critically?" "To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?" "To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?" and "How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?" There were three subscales in the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale*. Eight items (Items #1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, & 22) were statements on efficacy in Student Engagement. Eight questions (Items #7, 10,



11, 17, 18, 20, 23, & 24) were on efficacy in Instructional Strategies, and the remaining eight items (Items #3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, & 21) were on efficacy in Classroom Management. Overall reliability for the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (24 items, long form) was .94. Part III of the pre- and post-surveys concluded with three open-ended questions. They asked preservice teachers to describe their opinions on their abilities in three areas: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

3.3.2. Reflection journals

Preservice teachers wrote three journal entries reflecting on their learning and teaching during their field experience. While they could select any field-related topics, they had to write about diversity and inclusion in one of the three journal entries.

3.3.3. Written commentaries for planning ELA lessons

Preservice teachers developed two consecutive ELA lessons and taught them to students in their assigned field experience classrooms. After they developed the lesson plans, they reflected on their planning and analyzed how they planned their lessons considering the backgrounds and assets of their students as well as students' learning styles and learning goals.

3.3.4. Reflection journals

Preservice teachers video recorded their delivery of two ELA lessons in the field experience site. They watched their videos and analyzed their delivery of the lessons. For example, they reflected on how they promoted a positive learning environment and how they engaged students in learning. They also identified areas for improvement and developed modified plans/accommodations to solve the issues they identified.

3.4. Data Analysis

The researcher used a content analysis approach to analyze the qualitative data (Bengtsson, 2016). Content analysis requires researchers to analyze and interpret the meanings, patterns, and relationships in the content of the data. The researcher first organized the data and read it multiple times until she had a good sense of the data. As she examined the data, she looked for categories using the inductive approach. She then coded the data and rechecked the consistency of the coding. For the quantitative data in Part II Teacher Identity and Part III Self-Efficacy of the pre- and post-surveys, the researcher used two sample t-tests. Among 17 items on teacher identity in Part II, four items were written in reversed statements. Thus, the researcher converted their scores to be consistent with other affirmative statements.

4. Findings

4.1. Pre- and Post-Surveys

The results of Part II Teacher Identity from the pre- and post-surveys revealed that preservice teachers' scores on all 17 items increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey (see Table 1). A mean score of 17 items from the pre-survey was 4.44 (out of 5), and it increased to 4.67 in the post-survey. A range of the increased scores between pre- and post-surveys was from 0.04 to 0.50. The top three items with the most increased scores were: Item #8 "I am satisfied with the progress I am making in my teacher education." (+0.50); Item #3 "I am a natural teacher." (+0.48); and Item #9 "I have no idea what it means to be a good teacher" (reversed statement) (+0.39).

Table 1. Results of the pre- and post-surveys on teacher identity

Statements	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Increased Score
1. I see myself as a teacher.	4.65	4.85	+0.2
2. I feel comfortable identifying myself as a teacher.	4.50	4.71	+0.21
3. I am a natural teacher.	4.04	4.52	+0.48
4. I can easily see myself working with children/adolescents and helping them to learn and develop.	4.79	4.90	+0.11
5. I find it difficult to see myself in charge of teaching a group of children/adolescents. (Reversed)	3.92	4.33	+0.41
6. I often doubt if I am the right person to become a teacher. (Reversed)	3.85	4.21	+0.36
7. I have confidence in my ability to one day to a good teacher.	4.42	4.60	+0.18
8. I am satisfied with the progress I am making in my teacher education.	4.35	4.85	+0.50
9. I have no idea what it means to be a good teacher (Reversed)	4.42	4.81	+0.39
10. I am confident that I will develop the resources and strategies necessary to be a good teacher.	4.50	4.62	+0.12
11. I often doubt my ability to be a good teacher. (Reversed)	3.88	4.21	+0.33
12. I look for opportunities to work with children/adolescents in my own time.	4.40	4.52	+0.12
13. I enjoy helping out with children's activities.	4.79	4.94	+0.15
14. Family and friends often look to me when it comes to caring for or working with children/adolescents.	4.52	4.62	+0.10
15. If I had more time to volunteer my services, I would choose to work with children.	4.69	4.73	-0.04
16. I enjoy helping children discover and learn.	4.83	4.94	+0.11
17. Helping a child learn something new is very rewarding.	4.92	4.96	+0.04
Mean Score of 17 Statements	4.44	4.67	+0.23

Notes: Items were used from the *Early Teacher Identity Measure* developed by Friesen, & Besley (2013). 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree, 3= neutral, 5 agree).

The results of Part III Self-Efficacy from the pre- and post-surveys showed that preservice teachers' scores on all 24 statements, excepting Item #22, increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey (See Table 2). A mean score of 24 items from the pre-survey was 6.40 (out of 9-point Likert scale), and it increased to 7.09 in the post-survey. A range of increased scores between the pre- and post-surveys was from 0.32 to 1.12. The top three items that preservice teachers increased their scores significantly between the pre- and post-surveys were: Item #16 "How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?"; Item #24 "How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?"; and Item #17 "How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?"

Table 2. Results of the pre- and post-surveys on self-efficacy

Items	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Increased Score
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	6.83	7.15	+0.32
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	6.60	7.29	+0.69
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	6.21	6.81	+0.60
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	6.54	7.12	+0.58
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	7.23	7.71	+0.48
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	7.42	7.88	+0.46
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	5.77	6.56	+0.79
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	6.75	7.54	+0.79
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	6.98	7.33	+0.35
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	6.56	7.27	+0.71
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	6.29	7.25	+0.96
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	6.75	7.38	+0.63
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	6.40	7.17	+0.77
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	6.21	6.79	+0.58
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	6.27	7.08	+0.81
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	6.00	7.12	+1.12
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	6.08	7.12	+1.04
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	6.31	7.00	+0.69
19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?	5.67	6.77	+1.10
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	6.60	7.02	+0.42
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	5.98	6.79	+0.81
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	5.88	5.79	-0.09
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	6.00	6.79	+0.79
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	6.23	7.35	+1.12
Mean Score of 24 Items	6.40	7.09	+0.69

Notes: Questions were used from the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). 9-point Likert scale (1= nothing, 5 = some influence, 9 = a great deal).

In regard to three subscales in Part II Self-Efficacy from the pre- and post-surveys, scores in all three subscales (Student engagement, Instructional Strategies, and Classroom Management) increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey (see Table 3). In particular, there were more questions that displayed statistical significances. These questions were Items #2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 24. Categorizing these items by three subscales, Items #7, 10, 11, 17, 23, 24 (6 out of 8 items) were efficacy in Instructional Strategies and Items # 8, 13, 16, 19, and 21 (5 out of 8 items) were associated with efficacy in Classroom Management. This categorization showed that among three subscales, preservice teachers significantly developed self-efficacy in Instructional Strategies as well as in Classroom Management through the field experience.

Table 3. Results of pre-and post-surveys on self-efficacy subscales

Subscale	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Student Engagement (8 Items)	53.21	56.73
Instructional Strategies (8 Items)	49.85	56.38
Classroom Management (8 Items)	50.50	57.00

Notes: Subscales were used from the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Self-efficacy in student engagement – Items #1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22. Self-efficacy in instructional strategies – Items # 7 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24. Self-efficacy in classroom management – Items # 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21.

4.2. Teacher Identity

4.2.1. Confidence growth as teachers

Preservice teachers reflected on their teacher identity and identified that they developed confidence as teachers during the development of their teacher identity. Melissa, a preservice teacher completed her field experience in a second-grade classroom, reflected on the development of her teacher identity. She wrote: *“I see myself as more of a teacher now than I did in the beginning of the semester. I feel like my field experience has really helped shape the teacher I am going to be in the future.”* Danielle, another preservice teacher who completed her field experience in the fourth-grade classroom, shared that *“This is the first time I feel TRULY comfortable and confident being like “yep, that’s me, I’m a teacher!” instead of just being excited about it.”*

4.2.2. Connections with field experience

The second emergent theme was that preservice teachers made connections with field experience when they developed their teacher identity. In particular, they reflected on experiences they learned from their mentor teachers in the field experience placements, analyzed their delivery of teaching, and reflected on their interactions with elementary school students. Christine, a preservice teacher from her kindergarten field experience, reflected on her teacher identity related to feedback from her mentor teacher. She reported:

Reflecting on my teacher identity today I do see myself as a teacher in the near future...I feel much more confident in educating children because of gaining experience in field one. Being able to get feedback from my cooperating teacher and professor has helped me reflect on why I chose this [teacher education] field. I believe that I am able to teach and make a difference in children's lives.



Rachel completed her field experience in a fourth-grade classroom. For her teacher identity reflection, she wrote: “My CT [cooperating/mentor teacher] has given me a multitude of opportunities to take on a teacher role and I am forever grateful because it has allowed me to really view myself as a teacher.”

One example of preservice teachers’ reflections on lesson delivery comes from Alyssa, a preservice teacher from a fourth-grade field experience classroom. She shared:

I remember the first week was awkward trying to get to know the students and now conversations come naturally, and it is easy to help students with lessons. I became more confident in my ability to teach lessons to groups of students through practice. The lessons seemed to go smoothly once I got on the "stage."

Lastly, preservice teachers analyzed their experience of establishing rapport and relationships with students in their field experiences. Amy from her fifth-grade field experience reflected on the development of her teacher identity by articulating the importance of building rapport with children. She wrote:

I definitely feel as though I have grown in my teacher identity throughout the semester and have had many opportunities to truly see myself as a teacher. One major thing I have gotten to learn about this semester is the importance of connections in the classroom, and building a positive relationship with your students.

4.3. Self-Efficacy in Student Engagement

Preservice teachers developed their student engagement skills through their field experience. Two themes emerged in the area of self-efficacy in student engagement. The first theme was that they gained confidence in engaging students in learning. Thomas completed his field experience in a fifth-grade classroom. He reflected on student engagement self-efficacy as follows:

I think that my ability for student engagement has slightly increased. I feel as though I am more confident at helping students stay engaged by knowing that how I talk, and what I am talking about will determine how engaged the student is.

A second theme that emerged for preservice teachers’ student engagement self-efficacy was that they articulated specific ways to promote student engagement. They focused on increasing student motivation. Jessica from her first-grade classroom identified her growth in student engagement self-efficacy. She wrote:

I have learned ways to keep students interested and active during a lesson. For example...I had students do an activity where they were collaborating and working with their team tables to make decisions...I noticed that every student was involved in some way and engaged in what they were doing/learning. I feel more confident about my abilities now.

Jessica considered her student learning styles and selected an approach to motivate them, which helped them engage in her lesson.

Not only did preservice teachers focus on motivating their students to engage them in learning, but they also intentionally developed creative lessons for student engagement. They used various learning approaches such as group activities, pair work, videos, visualization, and game-based learning. Alyssa from the fourth-grade classroom shared that her students liked to work in small groups and they had different interests. When she taught her ELA lessons on “text features in non-fiction” to her students, she intentionally included a variety

of textbooks that would interest students (weather, animals, volcanos), a scavenger hunt activity to look for text features, and many visual images.

4.4. Self-Efficacy in Instructional Strategies

An analysis of the data highlighted two emergent themes related to self-efficacy in instructional strategies. First, preservice teachers developed instructional strategies during the field experience. Second, mentor teachers in the field experience classrooms at PDS site contributed to the development of preservice teachers' instructional skills.

4.4.1. Development of instructional strategies

Preservice teachers reported that they used a wide range of instructional strategies, including pair work, group activities, and whole class instructions, in their field classrooms. Amanda, who completed the field experience in a fifth-grade classroom, reflected on her development of instructional strategies. She noted that *"Using a variety of individual and partner activities, large group discussions, and opportunities for sharing was very effective."* Marie, another preservice teacher engaged in the field experience in the third-grade classroom, noted that when she taught reading, she *"modeled for the students, had them think-pair-share, work independently, share with a partner, and share with the class."* She continued her reflection by writing *"Using these various strategies helped me identify the importance of utilizing multiple methods of instruction."*

4.4.2. Mentor teachers' role

Preservice teachers noted the positive impact of their mentor teachers in the process of developing instructional strategy self-efficacy. Kelly, a preservice teacher from a first-grade classroom, stated that she did not have opportunities to see effective instructional strategies in real classrooms until her field experience. However, from her mentor teacher, she learned a variety of instructional strategies to effectively use technology for a diverse group of students. She reflected that *"Seeing different methods my teacher has used technology effectively in 1st graders has been very impactful."* Rachel from the fourth-grade classroom also described the benefit of getting support from her mentor teacher for her to improve instructional strategy self-efficacy. She wrote:

I have had a lot of support from my CT [cooperating/mentor teacher] in the planning process which has shown me what instructional strategies are going to be most beneficial for the content you are teaching...I have really grown to view multiple instructional strategies to consider when planning lessons and have included multimodal strategies in the lessons that I have taught.

4.5. Self-Efficacy in Classroom Management

Preservice teachers developed their self-efficacy in classroom management skills through their hands-on field experience at their PDS site. Two themes emerged related to the classroom management self-efficacy. First, they saw their improvement of classroom management skills from their field experience. Second, they connected their development of classroom management skills with their field experiences.

4.5.1. Improvement of classroom management skills

In the beginning of the field experience, preservice teachers reported classroom management skills as one of their least confidence areas. However, at the end of the semester long field experience, they reported that they improved their classroom management skills. Ashley from her first-grade classroom gained her confidence to implement classroom management skills. She reported:



I feel much more confidence in my classroom management skills, Especially, working in a younger classroom, students want to be role models and be praised for their good behavior...I feel confident asking them to stop talking and sticking to my word. I feel much better about my ability than I did before.

Mary, a preservice teacher engaged in her field experience in the fourth-grade classroom reflected on her improvement in classroom management skills. She noted:

I feel like my ability to manage a classroom has also grown...As the semester went on, I was not afraid to manage the behavior that was happening in the classroom. I learned some other ways to manage classroom behavior...by having a conversation with the students to see why they are behaving the way they are.

4.5.2. Reflections on field experience

Preservice teachers connected their improvement of classroom management skills with their hands-on field experience. They identified two specific ways to improve their classroom management skills. The first one was maintaining high expectations. The second one was getting to know students.

4.5.2.1. Maintaining high expectations

Preservice teachers described the best way to learn their classroom management skills was through their hands-on field experiences. Especially, they noted setting high expectations as important. Amelia, who completed her field experience in a second-grade classroom, wrote that her mentor teacher helped her learn ways to manage the classroom. She also learned to set her expectations before she taught lessons. She realized that setting clear expectations helped her teaching and she was very thankful to have learned that strategy. Preservice teachers also commented that being consistent with the high expectations was a key to effective classroom management.

4.5.2.2. Getting to know students

Another theme that emerged within classroom management self-efficacy was getting to know students. Preservice teachers realized the importance of understanding students not only academically, but also socially. For example, Shelly from her first-grade classroom described that she learned more about relationship building and how that affects classroom management. Mary, placed in the fourth-grade classroom, also reflected that *“I was able to get to know the students and learn what are the best tools to help classroom management.”*

5. Discussion

This study examines how preservice teachers developed their teacher identity and self-efficacy through hands-on field experience at an elementary Professional Development School (PDS) site. The researcher explored two research questions: “How does field experience impact preservice teachers in shaping their teacher self-identity?” and “How does field experience impact preservice teachers’ self-efficacy?”

In regard to the first research question, "How does field experience at an elementary PDS site impact preservice teachers in shaping their teacher identity?", the teacher identity section from pre- and post-surveys revealed that a mean score of 17 items increased from 4.44 (out of 5) to 4.67. Overall, they identified themselves as natural teachers and as very satisfied with their progress in the teacher education programs.

In addition, this study developed two discussion points regarding teacher identity among preservice teachers. First, field experiences positively impacted preservice teachers to shape their teacher identity. They reported that their educational courses on campus helped them gain knowledge on content and skills to teach; however, they could not conceptualize them until they actually interacted with students in their field experience classrooms. Their experiences directly working with students in real classroom settings greatly impacted the shapes of their teacher identity. With their field experience, they were able to think and act like "teachers," which they could not do before the field experience.

Second, preservice teachers gained more confidence and saw themselves as "teachers." They reported that they were nervous and afraid of making mistakes in front of the class and appropriately delivering content to students due to their lack of teaching experience in real classroom settings. However, throughout the semester-long field experience, they became more confident to teach and, more importantly, developed their professional teacher identity. This result aligns with other research on teacher identity (Garza et al., 2016; Pellikka et al., 2022).

In regard to the second research question, "How does field experience at an elementary PDS impact preservice teachers' self-efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management?", overall, field experience positively impacted preservice teachers' self-efficacy in all three areas of student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Especially, the pre- and post-surveys in the self-efficacy section showed statistically strong correlations in two areas of instructional strategies and classroom management.

Regarding self-efficacy in student engagement, the scores in seven out of eight items increased from the pre- and post-surveys. Preservice teachers became more comfortable in engaging students in lessons. Because of their first-hand experience in real classroom settings with mentor teachers, they were able to see various ways to engage students in learning. Therefore, at the end of the semester-long field experience, preservice teachers were able to articulate specific ways to support student engagement. Previous literature supports the result of this study. Hulings (2023) describes that a preservice teacher with an elementary education major developed her self-efficacy on science teaching from her field experience and student teaching. Especially, through her field experience along with a science methods course, she developed self-efficacy on student learning outcomes. Students engaged in productive, meaningful learning demonstrate higher learning outcomes.

The only area that did not show growth among preservice teachers in self-efficacy in student engagement in this study was family engagement (Part II of the pre- and post-surveys; Item #22: How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?). Preservice teachers in this study were limited in reaching out to and/or connecting with families and the communities. This was their first field experience, and a focus of this particular field experience was on lesson planning and delivery. Family and community engagement is very important in teacher education, and this is an area all preservice teachers must learn and develop skills regardless of their field experience stage. However, preservice teachers in this study will have more opportunities to engage in family and communities in their next field experience and during student teaching. Therefore, the result of preservice teachers' family engagement not improving over the semester reflects their actual experience in this area.

Regarding self-efficacy in instructional strategies, preservice teachers developed these strategies and, more importantly, implemented some new strategies in their teaching. They used a variety of strategies to engage students in their lessons. Mentor teachers played a critical



role in modeling for them, giving detailed tips and advice, and providing opportunities for them to practice such instructional strategies. Literature supports the positive effect of mentor teachers on preservice teachers' development of self-efficacy (Hamman et al., 2006). Four out of eight items in the "self-efficacy in instructional strategies" section from the pre- and post-surveys showed statistically significant differences (Item #7 on responding to difficult questions; Item #11 on developing challenging/good questions; Item #17 on adjusting lessons to the levels of students; and Item #24 on challenging high-performing students). Analyzing both results from the surveys and from preservice teachers' lesson plans, reflection papers, and open-ended questions, this study demonstrated that they improved their skills to offer effective instructional strategies for students. In a literacy methods class, they learned how to develop ELA lessons including differentiated instruction for all levels of diverse students as well as how to ask deeper levels of questions (such as the Question-Answer Relationship [QAR], reciprocal questioning, questioning the author strategies). This class content supported them in their effort to implement effective instructional strategies.

Finally, preservice teachers developed self-efficacy in classroom management throughout the field experience. The pre- and post-survey results showed that three out of eight items were statistically significant (Item #13 on following classroom rules; Item #16 on establishing a classroom management system; and Item #19 on minimizing student disruptions from the lessons). In addition, preservice teachers reported that they improved their classroom management skills. Setting higher expectations and remaining consistent were the keys to the effective classroom management. They also identified that it was very important for them to get to know their students so they could better understand students' life experiences and how to respond to them. Results of this study aligned with other studies that showed the effectiveness of field experience to develop classroom management skills (Thomas & Casale, 2021; Welsh & Schaffer, 2017). Sivri and Balcı (2015) also documents that the higher preservice teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management, the higher their expectations for the effectiveness of their classroom management. Therefore, preservice teachers with higher classroom management self-efficacy are likely to support students in developing effective, positive learning behaviors.

Classroom management is one of the key factors in teacher education (Kwok, 2019). However, many preservice teachers found it challenging and/or felt they lacked the skills to manage a classroom of students (Adams et al., 2022; Goh & Matthews, 2011). It takes time and requires relevant experiences for preservice and even inservice teachers to develop classroom management skills. They also must adjust their classroom management strategies depending on their students; students may respond to the same classroom management skills differently. Teacher education programs must provide preservice teachers with opportunities to learn about and practice effective and differentiated classroom management skills. Field experiences and student teaching are appropriate spaces to do so. Preservice teachers in this study were able to develop confidence in their classroom management skills, which was a huge benefit for their future teaching careers.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how 48 preservice teachers shaped teacher identity and self-efficacy through their semester-long field experience at an elementary PDS site. They engaged in observing mentor teachers' lessons, developing and delivering lessons to students, and reflected on their field experience. At the end of the field experience, they reported increased confidence while interacting with students and developed strategies to teach content and manage classroom. Field experience plays a key role in shaping preservice teachers'

professional identity. Hands-on experiences in the classrooms offered them opportunities to grow self-efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. This study included a small number of participants. Therefore, the results of this study may generate to a larger group of preservice teachers. Another limitation of this study was the data collected in this study were self-reported sources. This study recommends that future researchers look at how preservice teachers develop their teacher self-identity longitudinally throughout their teacher education program. Teacher education preparation programs must provide preservice teachers with opportunities to put theory into practice and focus on student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

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