Abstract: Placing teacher candidates for student teaching is one of the most important responsibilities university teacher education programs and their school partners share. Traditionally, teacher candidates drive the placement process by requesting a district for convenience, near their home or the university. This paper will explore how one Midwest regional university faced the challenges of implementing clinical education as defined by the NAPDS Essentials and the ten design principles presented in the NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel Report. Diversifying junior year field experiences for elementary and early childhood majors, implementing peer coaching, and creating a “third space” by turning responsibility to district administrators for choosing and placing candidates that “fit” the district are responses that have led to a successful student teaching placement.

KEYWORDS: placement, student teachers, student teaching, third space, field experiences, recruitment, retention, diverse field placements

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:
2. A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community.
The student teaching experience is perceived by teacher candidates (TCs) to be the most important part of teacher preparation. Successful classroom placements are a key responsibility of university teacher education programs and their school partners (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; The Teaching Council, 2013). This article explores specific design elements of a Midwest regional university’s clinical teacher education program for early childhood and elementary education candidates. Faculty were faced with the challenge of offering a high-quality teacher education program that required heavy coaching and supervision of large numbers of candidates in the field. Specific challenges and solutions are presented along with a discussion of the evolution of a “third-space” through the implementation of district and building administrator interviews and placement of teacher candidates into their buildings.

Evolution of Teacher Education Clinical Practice

Historically, some teacher preparation programs created laboratory schools or established partnerships with local grammar schools to allow TCs to practice teaching. However, some programs did not include any practical teaching experiences. Extended clinical experiences became common in the 1950s and 1960s when professional licensure for teaching was established, yet some states still did not require any student teaching. By the 1970s most states required student teaching and had developed standards for it, but there was a lot of variance in the requirements from state to state ranging from 4 to 18 weeks (Schneider, n.d.).

Over the past decade, teacher education programs across the nation have become increasingly field-embedded in various and creative ways; the initial collective movement was inspired in great part by National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) policy statement (2008) and the Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel (NCATE, 2010). “The Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations focus on teacher education as a whole and the NAPDS Essentials concentrate on the definition of professional development schools. However, they both offer guidance related to meaningful, effective school-university partnerships focused on improving teacher education and P-12 student learning” (Van Scoy & Eldridge, 2012, p. 8). Now, eight years after the release of that seminal report, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) has followed the NAPDS and the Blue Ribbon Panel Report with a white paper that attempts to offer more structure and definition to the development, implementation, and practices of clinical teacher education (AACTE, 2018). The white paper asserts a list of proclamations related to clinical practice; the central proclamation is “clinical practice is central to high-quality teacher preparation” (AACTE, 2018, p. 13).

Clinical experiences continue to evolve and take on deeper elements of practice and partnership, redefining the intersection of teacher education and PK-12 education. The conceptualization of a professional development school (PDS) experience as described in the second of the nine required Essentials of a PDS states, “PDSs, however, are more than simply places where TCs complete their clinical experiences...PDSs create a school-wide culture that incorporates TCs as full participants of the school community” (NAPDS, 2008, p. 4). Of the ten design principles of clinical education posited by the NCATE Blue Ribbon Report, clinical preparation integrated throughout the program and occurring in an interactive professional community align with NAPDS Essential #2 (Van Scoy & Eldridge, 2012). Additionally, the Mutual Benefit Proclamation (AACTE, 2018) asserts that, “Boundary-spanning, school-based
and university-based teacher educators play necessary, vital, and synergistic roles in clinical educator preparation,” (p. 33).

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) follows NCATE in advocating collaboration between teacher education programs and preK-12 school partners to the extent that they jointly determine specific clinical placements for teacher candidates. Similarly, the tenets comprising the Mutual Benefit Proclamation include a focus on the joint responsibility of school- and university-based teacher educators to develop TCs by coaching, providing feedback to, facilitating the dispositional development of, and evaluating TCs. These responsibilities require a reconceptualization of the roles of both school-based and university-based teacher educators (SBTEs and UBTEs). To effectively redefine the roles of the different stakeholders in teacher education, including the evaluation, coaching, and placement of TCs, the setting of teacher education needs to be redefined as well.

Often, the clinical side of teacher education has been fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to university work (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 11). Simply increasing time in field placements will not result in better preparation of teachers; other factors are crucial to positive outcomes of increased field experience including quality of the clinical site, skills of the mentor teacher, quality of supervision, and preparation of the teacher candidate for the classroom (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010).

**Applying Theory to Practice**

The definition of school-university partnerships has evolved as the implementation of clinical practice has expanded. “Partnerships enable teacher education to have a space where practice and theory meet to support students’ preparation for the teaching profession, as well as to promote professional development for teachers and teacher educators” (Smith, 2016, p. 19). This quote aligns with the goals expressed in NAPDS Essential #2. TCs need classroom teachers (Site Based Teacher Educators [SBTEs]) who will serve as coaches and mentors, share their students, explain their craft, and provide critical feedback. The senior year placement must provide the TC with opportunities to solidify academic knowledge (Zeichner, 2010) with practice and develop teacher dispositions. The placement should focus on the transition from student to teacher (The Teaching Council, 2013) with expert coaching from the university supervisor and SBTE, providing opportunities to put theory into practice. Participating in the classroom as a full time teacher forms linkages between coursework and its application with diverse populations of students. Additionally, there must be time and space for the meaningful initiation of the development of teachers as reflective, inquiry-oriented, life-long learners. This development is essential to prepare teachers to continually self-evaluate, collaborate and adapt throughout their careers to reflect the changing realities of the classrooms in which they will teach (The Teaching Council, 2013).

**Third Space in Teacher Education Clinical Practice**

Third space in teacher education usually means a hybrid space which crosses the traditionally-defined boundaries for both university and school practitioners; once the boundaries are blurred, it is possible to redefine the traditionally-accepted practices and roles in teacher
education (Lewis, 2012). Zeichner (2010) defines third spaces as “hybrid spaces in pre-service teacher education programs that bring together school and university-based teacher educators and practitioner and academic knowledge in new ways to enhance the learning of prospective teachers” (p. 92). Lewis (2012) encourages a more radical definition – beyond “new ways” of learning – when she cites Bhabha’s ideas, “It is the third space which allows learning in and from practice to be processed fully, enabling reflective practice to draw upon alternative ideas and perspectives. The third space extends beyond reflection, feeding off clash to lead to new and often subversive productivities” (p. 32).

A common criticism of traditional university-school relationships is the perceived “disconnect” between the academia of the university and the practice in public schools; the university has long been the authoritative source of knowledge about teacher education and has made most of the decisions about how TCs were placed and what they will do (Zeichner, 2010). Prior to the nine required Essentials (NAPDS, 2008), school-university collaborations in teacher education were commonly inequitable partnerships with a clear hierarchy of roles and power in decision-making (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Higher education has traditionally made all decisions about whether teacher candidates moved into student teaching, where each candidate was placed, what the expectations were for the candidates, and how candidates were assessed. Districts were recipients of random placements with responsibility for providing opportunities for TCs to practice. Cooperating teachers “hosted” teacher candidates, often with no training or support for the mentorship that was expected. Additionally, cooperating teachers did not generally have any role in assessing the teacher candidate nor assigning a grade. The NAPDS Essentials describe how the work of clinical teacher education must span institutional boundaries and should lead to the creation of new roles for both SBTEs and UBTEs (Van Scoy & Eldridge, 2012.)

It is now accepted that the placement of well-prepared TCs for a year-long student teaching experience is mutually beneficial for each partner (NCATE, 2010). The university is able to support TCs in completing licensure requirements while district partners develop a pool of prospective teachers. Zeichner’s (2010) definition of third space, above, is the space where the different aspects of teacher education meet and merge; however, there are many ways the third space can be structured and integrated into a teacher education program, and myriad possible dynamics and power relations among the various stakeholders (Smith, 2016). For example, the creation of a third space in this Midwest regional university’s teacher education program allows freedom to implement new and unconventional ways for district administrators to participate in the placement of TCs for student teaching. A primary benefit of creating a third space during pre-service education is that, by definition, the lines that defined the hierarchical roles held by the district and by the educator preparation program are blurred and the realms overlap and merge. This means that more of the previously separated tasks and responsibilities are now jointly held and a different type of partnership interaction is required. As stated by Taylor, Klein, and Abrams (2014), “Teacher education must exist across multiple spaces. The challenge of teacher education is simply too large to continue to reside solely in the university, isolated from the realities of schools” (p. 17).

Challenges

In revamping traditional routes to design clinical teacher education programs, one
Midwest regional elementary and early childhood teacher education program researched best practices for clinical programs and relied heavily upon the recommendations of seminal resources: the nine required *Essentials* which define the PDS mission (NAPDS, 2008), national accreditation standards, and the Blue Ribbon Panel Report’s ten design principles (NCATE, 2010). Among those practices incorporated into the new program were extended junior year field experience (more than 100 hours), intensive supervision by UBTEs who taught the university coursework and could facilitate the implementation of theory and strategies taught in coursework, a full senior year of practice, and placements jointly determined by the districts and the teacher education program through interviews of the teacher candidates by the district leadership. Along with identifying research-based practices, faculty identified several obstacles to reforming a long established traditional program. This article presents how they addressed those obstacles to create a clinical model that prepares TCs for success.

**Challenge: Teacher Candidate to University-Based Teacher Educator Ratio**

According to the Blue Ribbon Panel Report, teacher education programs should:

Ensure that all candidates have qualified clinical educators, coaches, and mentors….candidates [should] be supervised by certified clinical educators drawn from both higher education and the P-12 sector, and mentored by effective practitioners, who are also trained to work with candidates. Coaches should be made available to support mentors in the work with candidates. Clinical educators should be accountable for the performance of the candidates they supervise, as well as that of the students they teach. (NCATE, 2010, p. 21)

The NCATE design principles state that SBTEs and UBTEs are effective practitioners who are rigorously selected and who prepare candidates who are experts in content and pedagogy including state-of-the-art technologies. These principles align with NAPDS Essentials regarding shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice with ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all, and which speak to the importance of quality coaching and supervision for candidates during every practical experience (Van Scoy & Eldridge, 2012).

Much has been written about the changes in roles and responsibilities of SBTEs and UBTEs in ensuring the student teaching experience helps to provide valuable and relevant practice for a teacher candidate; it has been noted that UBTEs need to learn the pedagogy of effective supervision and the application of mentoring practices into supervision (Streiker, Adams, Cone, Hubbard, & Lim, 2016). However, although the efforts toward more clinical practice such as year-long internships, integration of coursework and field work, and earlier field experience have been researched and documented, very little research has been conducted on efforts within teacher preparation programs to support and improve the pedagogical practices of university supervisors who coach and assess the performance of candidates enrolled in clinical programs (Streiker et al., 2016).

As described in Bozella (2008), Goodlad felt that student teaching placements are frequently flawed and fail to serve the teacher candidate well, because teacher education programs accept large numbers of students in order to create revenue, rather than being selective and limiting admission to a maximum number. Because large numbers of candidates are admitted, large numbers of cooperating teachers must be recruited and therefore it is not possible for a teacher education program to ensure that cooperating teachers are vetted and highly qualified mentors. This situation makes it even more important for intensive supervision of
candidates by UBTEs especially in the practica prior to student teaching. However, the ratio of candidates to UBTEs in most teacher education programs generally makes it very difficult for the UBTE to effectively supervise candidates in the classrooms. In large programs, candidates may be placed across several buildings or even districts in the early practicum placements, which are the placements that require more intensive supervision and coaching. Effective supervision can be very difficult when logistics of traveling from school to school and the temporal confines of the school day come into play.

Additionally, identifying placements for all TCs at different points in their programs of study (early field experience, mid-level field experience, student teaching) and offering differing levels of support can be a daunting task. Universities may establish central placement offices staffed by personnel who do not know the TCs (Zeichner, 1996) to address the overwhelming issues surrounding student teaching placements. The disconnect between the student and university personnel does not focus on options that best meet the needs of the TC, the SBTE, or the students in the class, which in addition to high candidate to supervisor ratios, compounds the inability to create consistent quality in supervision of candidates.

**Challenge: Diversifying Field Experiences**

The Blue Ribbon Report’s design principles for strategic partnerships with specific schools designated/supported as clinical practice sites align with the NAPDS Essentials for a comprehensive mission beyond the mission of any one partner with an identified structure that supports collaboration and includes dedicated resources and formal recognition (Van Scoy & Eldridge, 2012). A primary goal in teacher education is diversifying the clinical experiences for TCs. “Every effort should be made to ensure that student teachers gain teaching experience in a variety of school contexts to reflect the socio-economic and cultural mix of society” (The Teaching Council, 2013, p. 14). The Blue Ribbon Panel (NCATE, 2010) recommended giving candidates opportunities to work in hard-to-staff schools. Specifically, the report suggested that preparation programs and state departments of education work to develop specific clinical sites in hard-to-staff districts to provide mentored internship experiences for candidates who want to teach in high-needs areas (NCATE, 2010). Hard-to-staff schools differ from other schools in several respects; they have higher percentages of students who perform below grade level on end-of-grade tests, are eligible for free lunch, and are ethnic minorities. Hard-to-staff schools are often middle schools and schools located in urban areas (Glennie, Coble, & Allen, 2004) or rural areas, that serve economically depressed areas (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Rural schools are largely neglected in the literature that examines issues in hard-to-staff schools, but they are often plagued by the same issues that poverty causes in urban settings. However, fewer social support resources are available in rural areas than in urban centers. Even with more resources, many new teachers report that they feel unprepared by their teacher education program to teach in an urban school and they are reluctant to accept a job in an urban setting (Ronfeldt, Reininger, & Kwok, 2013). Most teacher education programs are criticized for lacking coursework, service learning, and field experiences specifically designed to prepare candidates for hard-to-staff schools in urban and rural areas.

Diversifying clinical experiences is complicated by the need to identify schools that support best practices and excellent teaching with qualified, willing SBTEs at the grade levels needed to place candidates. Overcoming the logistics faced by many universities and schools in remote areas and the issues inherent in the partnerships between universities and hard-to-staff
schools adds complexity. Because TCs’ job preferences may be influenced (positively or negatively) by pre-service practical experience, it is extremely important to place TCs in hard-to-staff schools and carefully structure and implement supports that will allow them to become confident and develop high teacher efficacy in these settings.

**Challenge: Traditional Process of Placing Teacher Candidates for Student Teaching**

Traditionally, student teaching placements were borne out of convenience for the TC. One study found that first teaching jobs seem to be predicted by hometown – specifically, the type of district in which the teacher attended K-12 (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). They found that the large majority of new teachers took first jobs in districts with similar demographics to their own background. The primary reason for student teaching placement was comfort and convenience for the TC – not identification of appropriate clinical settings which could provide support for the critical culmination of coursework and field work or inclusion in the school community (NAPDS, 2008). Supervising TCs in districts where university personnel may not have relationships with teachers and administrators made successful completion of student teaching challenging. These placements were “based on a tradition of goodwill” (The Teaching Council, 2013, p. 7) rather than developed partnerships (Zeichner, 2010). Although TCs had some knowledge of the district, it was often superficial. They had to learn about their students, SBTE, and school “on the job,” once student teaching began. TCs were observers for the first few weeks as they acquainted themselves with students and teachers (Heck, 2013). SBTEs gradually release responsibility to the TC allowing them to teach some disconnected lessons on their own for a few weeks. TCs then taught independently for a few weeks, often without the SBTE present, so the TC could learn how to teach the whole class, with a particular focus on managing group behaviors. Then the TC gradually released teaching responsibilities back the SBTE, assuming this fluid exchange was the best way to support the students in the class. The end result was a few weeks of actual teaching for the TC without input or coaching from the SBTE (Heck, 2013; Zeichner, 1996). This process didn’t provide the best support for TCs and did not reflect the needs of the partnership schools.

One of the NAPDS (2008) Essential goals is the development of “a comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community” (p. 2). However, if TCs have pre-service experience exclusively in easier-to-staff schools, what is teacher education doing to encourage job placement in hard-to-staff schools? Placing candidates in hard-to-staff schools for field experiences prior to student teaching – for example during junior year, when more intensive supervision, structure, and support are available – will allow experience in different settings prior to the autonomy of student teaching.

**Design Elements of the Clinical Pathway at one Midwest Regional University:**

**Responding to the Challenges**

**Challenge: Teacher Candidate to University-Based Teacher Educator Ratio**

**Response: Scaffolding Clinical Experience and Implementing Peer Coaching**

Field placements in the Midwest regional university program begin junior year and
continue into a full year of student teaching. UBTEs have built relationships with SBTEs in dozens of school districts in a 50 mile radius of the university. Partner districts range from very small rural and suburban districts to large urban and suburban districts. TC on-campus coursework during junior and senior year is held 8:30-3:00 in consecutive blocks of time to mirror a typical elementary school day. This enables full days in the field without interruption to courses outside of the clinical block. Students enrolled in the same block of courses are placed together in designated districts to ease supervision on field days.

Junior TCs spend half of the semester on campus and half in the field. Junior year field work is closely supervised by the UBTEs who teach the content courses. TCs interact with and are observed by a UBTE each day they are in the field. UBTEs serve as mentors as they ensure application of coursework, support peer coaching, classroom interactions, small group lessons, and developing professional dispositions. Increased scaffolding and support during the junior year ensures the transition into the field is successful.

Such field experiences in teacher education are considered to be essential to the development of teachers; from early observation in classrooms to actual clinical practice for teacher education students, field experiences are beneficial to professional development of teacher candidates. However, there is persistent concern that these experiences do not reach their full potential value (Bowman & McCormick, 2000). Through appropriate and timely supervision, coaching can provide essential feedback after a candidate teaches a lesson, but it can be hard to achieve this type of guidance for aspiring teachers when enrollments in teacher education programs are high (especially in some areas such as elementary education) and it may be difficult for university faculty to provide quality supervision for all candidates. In seeking a way to further support the candidates and provide observation and timely feedback for all, faculty looked to the literature on peer coaching and found that peer coaching has been successfully implemented in supporting and developing novices (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000). In fact, a considerable body of research examines the use of peer coaching in teacher education (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Wilkins & Shin, 2010; Zepeda, Parylo, & Ilgan, 2013). UBTEs implemented a peer coaching program during the junior year when intensive supervision is needed by teaching the process and skills for peer coaching into coursework and practicing it in the field.

During the first semester of the senior year, students are on campus one full day per week and work in the field two full days a week. Seniors teach whole class lessons in three five-week placements. Placements are in different grades located in one school. To continue the scaffolded design, senior content instructors supervise once every other week or every third week rather than every field day as in the junior year. Student teaching occurs second semester, when the TC co-teaches full-time for 16 weeks. The student teaching assignment is in one of the three first-semester placement classrooms, ensuring a quality match between TC, grade level, students, and SBTE. Co-teaching is enhanced by the five weeks the TC and SBTE spent together first semester. Supervision is even less intensive during the second semester, when a university supervisor observes six times over the course of the semester; the SBTE provides daily feedback as they work together co-teaching to meet the needs of all students. Co-teachers plan, organize and implement assessments and instruction sharing roles and responsibilities (Bacharach, Heck, & Dank, 2004). The increase of teaching responsibilities, time in the classroom, number of students they are teaching, co-teaching with the SBTE, and a decrease in university supervision over time allows TCs to transition from candidate to teacher with greater success.
Challenge: Diversifying Field Experiences
Response: Strategic Placements with District Partnerships

As recommended by The Teaching Council (2013), district partnerships are structured to promote the continued development of the TC and learning in the classroom. Student teaching in partnership districts ensures the candidate has knowledge of the district and the district has knowledge of the candidate. Partnership districts represent a variety of communities: urban, suburban and rural. In the original program design, placements occurred in a variety of settings based on the block of coursework: PK-K rural schools, grades 1-3 urban schools or grades 4-6 suburban schools. Due to the growing number of TCs, the PK-K block has outgrown the smaller rural districts and will be held in larger suburban districts. Beginning Spring 2018 Educational Foundation block courses (the initial observation field experience for students prior to admission to teacher education) were placed in rural schools to support diversified experiences. Placement in a variety of settings ensures TCs work and develop relationships with diverse learners. All TCs work one semester in an urban setting, placing them in high-need field placements prior to student teaching to prepare them to work as teachers in underserved communities (Ronfeldt, 2012).

All stakeholders in the community participate in securing placements for student teaching. Placements are determined by the collaborative efforts of the university faculty and school administrators rather than a central placement office (Zeichner, 1996). To provide the best “training grounds” for teacher candidates and simultaneously benefit partner schools, the university has worked to develop professional development schools that serve as training sites for preservice teachers analogous to teaching hospitals in medical education (NCATE, 2010). The philosophy of the Blue Ribbon Report suggests that school sites used for student teaching should be as carefully vetted and prepared for teacher education as teaching hospitals are prepared for medical education. However, if teacher candidates have pre-service experience exclusively in easier-to-staff schools, what is teacher education doing to encourage job placement in hard-to-staff schools? Placing candidates in hard-to-staff schools for field experiences prior to student teaching – for example during junior year, when more intensive supervision, structure, and support are available – will allow experience in different settings prior to the autonomy of student teaching.

The Teaching Council (2013) recommends a more structured approach to the identification, involvement and support of host schools should be put in place, following consultation with all stakeholders. Such a structured approach would bring greater coherence to, and address issues of imbalance and capacity in, the placement of student teachers across schools nationally” (p. 8).

Challenge: Traditional Process of Placing Teacher Candidates for Student Teaching
Response: Invested Administrators Hold Placement Interviews

Because TCs spend both semesters senior year in the same district, ensuring the district and candidate are a good fit is important. During the second semester of junior coursework, TCs are given a list of primary partner districts from which they request top choices for student teaching placement. Frequently, TCs have had clinical experience in one or more of these districts during their foundation block or junior year. The university rotates junior placements
with senior placements enabling districts to carefully select where TCs are placed. SBTEs who host juniors understand their work with novice TCs will ultimately result in a knowledgeable senior co-teacher. Due to the large number of juniors (up to 60 in each of three developmental blocks per semester) smaller districts who are unable to hold large numbers of juniors but have a relationship with the university also host seniors. TCs may apply to work with teachers with whom they have a collegial relationship or a district in which they observed, but they do not “choose” their placement. The candidate and district must choose each other.

UBTEs schedule TC interviews with administrators from one or two districts on their “preferred” list. District interview teams schedule a day they are available to host 10-15 minute interviews with prospective TCs. Some interviews occur on campus, others take place in the host district. Each candidate is then interviewed by administrators, human resources personnel, and/or teachers from their selected district(s). “In order to facilitate preparation for the complexity of teaching in today’s world, it is imperative that teacher educators look beyond the match of one student with one cooperating teacher toward a broader view of the clinical practice site” (Bozella, 2008, p. 2). TCs attend the interview in professional attire with a completed resume. School administrators identify candidates they deem a good fit using the interview data; they have the capability to deny placement of any TC whom they feel will not be a “good fit” with the district for a variety of reasons. The UBTEs match TCs to schools using administrator interview ratings and data. Once placed in a district, a specific placement school is selected through collaborative discussions among the central office administrator(s), building administrator(s), and often the SBTEs who participate in the program. UBTEs provide additional information about candidate dispositions and grade level experiences to help promote a good fit in all placements. Once a district and building are identified, the building administrator identifies three mentor teachers for each TC. Because these are short, five week placements, one SBTE may have three different TCs during the semester, resulting in hosting one TC student teaching second semester. After observing the TC in each of the three placements, the building administrator conferences with the SBTEs and UBTEs to determine which of the three first-semester placements will become the semester-long student teaching placement for each TC. Interviewing has been suggested (see Turner, 2013) as a means of district involvement in accepting and appropriately placing TCs, but there is currently no research that examines the actual process, division of responsibility, or use of district interviews for placing TCs for student teaching. Generally student teaching placement is not considered competitive (the TC takes for granted s/he will get a student teaching placement in or near their requested district) and the usual procedure for placement is an application process followed by the Clinical Services office contacting district central offices and requesting a certain number of placements.

The following is a personal account from a partnership district administrator describing how district participation in interviewing and placing TCs leads to a smoother transition into the senior year and supports longevity in the district past graduation.

From the Perspective of a Partner District

As the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, the primary purpose of my position is to interview and hire educators and support staff that will provide high quality instruction and create a safe, positive environment for our students. One of the most challenging aspects of this process is finding teachers who will not only meet these qualifications but will also fit within the school culture and stay in the position for many years. To address this concern,
my interviewing teams work to screen applicants that we believe have solid teaching skills and a strong desire to teach in our school district. We have found that screening TCs for student teaching allows us to not only train prospective teachers but also choose the candidates that we feel are the “best fit” for our school district.

Traditionally, TCs are simply placed in our schools by universities. With the student teaching interview process, principals are allowed to interview and determine which candidates have the best potential for becoming effective teachers in our school district. This process begins with the placement of 80-100 education students into our schools during their junior year. During that time, juniors provide small group instruction, but more importantly for our district, teachers and principals observe the juniors. This process allows the juniors to form their perceptions of our district and the teachers and principal to judge fit of the district for the juniors. After this process is complete, the juniors decide in which districts they would like to student teach (from a selection of primary partner schools). It is at this time that several of our principals interview the juniors who have chosen us for their student teaching placement.

During these interviews, principals often have preconceived ideas about which candidates exhibited the kinds of dispositions they want in a teacher. When a junior has displayed a positive attitude, strong work ethic, and a coachable demeanor while in our schools, they have an advantage over those who have not done so. However, the interview allows all interested candidates to demonstrate academic knowledge and express interest in their placement in our schools for student teaching. As a district that caters to a diverse population with low-socioeconomic students, this is vital. Given two equal candidates, we always prefer the one who expresses great passion for our demographic. The retention of teachers who prefer our demographic is far greater than those who would prefer to be somewhere else.

The results of this student teaching interview process have been positive. I initially thought that principals might not want to spend time on the process. However, this has not been the case. They realize that the time invested prior to student teaching often saves time when they are interviewing for teachers the following spring. All of the TCs who applied with our district for the 2017-2018 school year were hired as teachers, and all have proven to be quality teachers. While not all schools had openings, principals with TCs who student taught in their buildings recommended them to other principals. This program has greatly enhanced our odds in finding quality TCs who have a strong desire to teach in our school district. Logically, that would imply that we are not only improving recruitment but also enhancing retention.

**Challenges and Limitations**

Placing juniors in the field and implementing field based interviews has its challenges. One challenge is developing partnerships with districts that offer diverse field experiences. This requires time and opportunity for the UBTE, district administration, and principals to identify the benefits and difficulties of field placements. To date the Midwest regional university maintains relationships with approximately 17 school districts and continues to develop new partnerships for the future. Another time related challenge is scheduling interviews. The UBTEs, utilizing district leaders’ calendars and campus calendars, schedule two interviews for each TC. Interviews are typically 20 minute back-to-back conversations. Interviews are typically conducted the second month of senior one. Principals are asked for their feedback within a week of the interviews so UBTEs can match TCs to a district placement. This process may be complicated by candidates, approximately 8% each semester, who are not selected by a district.
In these instances UBTEs reach out to partnership schools and teachers who have agreed to work with any candidate; some have expressed a desire to coach candidates who are qualified but find themselves struggling during their field placements. If specific concerns have been identified about the candidate the UBTE will offer additional support, as needed, for the SBTE. Occasionally, a TC is not offered a student teaching placement after senior one. In those rare cases the UBTE reaches out to SBTEs who have successfully supported a TC in the past. To date, these secondary placements have been successful for both the TC and SBTE.

This study is limited to the experiences of one university. Its proximity to urban, suburban, and rural schools offers opportunities for student teaching placements to occur in a variety of settings. The university continues to evaluate and refine its practices to effectively support pre-service elementary and early childhood education teachers.

Conclusion

Utilizing school administrators and SBTEs to participate in placing student teachers has many implications for TC success. Developing a structured approach to student teaching placement (The Teaching Council, 2013) ensures success for TCs. Creating a third space with diverse junior year field experiences and district administrator interviews informs all stakeholders (TCs, teachers, principals, district administrators, and university faculty) how to best serve TCs and students in the field. Teachers and administrators are motivated to support candidates they previously hosted and invited through an interview process to student teach in their building. TCs are situated to succeed because they have experience working with the SBTEs and students with whom they will student teach. These experiences lead to proficient first year teachers and districts who want to employ them.

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