



Overlooked Perspectives: Elementary Preservice Teachers' Perceptions on their Educator Preparation Program

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the experiences of 12 elementary preservice teachers (PSTs) in their educator preparation program (EPP) at a university in the southeastern United States. Through survey and interview data, we elicit PSTs' perceptions of their program holistically. Findings surface PSTs' perceptions in four key areas: program structure, course content, internships, and critical consciousness. The study suggests that EPPs can enhance PSTs' experiences by incorporating PST feedback into programmatic decisions, strengthening support for critical consciousness. The PSTs' perceptions highlighted in this study have the potential to inform EPPs' decision-making and to impact the work of teacher educators more directly in efforts to cultivate more inclusive, responsive, and community-centred teacher preparation. Our findings provide insights into how institutions may adapt reflective processes to consider their individual contexts, allowing the results of this study to inform a larger international body. We argue that listening to PSTs can be a powerful and valuable way of examining our own teacher education practices and should inform programmatic decisions and practices. Their voices can help teacher educators rethink, reshape, and reimagine teacher preparation.

Keywords: teacher education, educator preparation program, reflective practice, preservice teachers

Introduction

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) are designed to include many experiences that prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) for the teaching field (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2009). One hallmark of EPPs is the use of reflection whereby PSTs are regularly expected to reflect on their teaching and learning (Beauchamp, 2015; Gahlsdorf Terrell & Sherman, 2022). Grouping students in cohorts to complete courses, placing PSTs in internship experiences, and asking PSTs to complete course evaluations are also common practices. While these are established practices across EPPs, what is commonly overlooked is how PSTs' feedback about their experiences can collectively inform program decisions.

In this article, we focus on the perceptions of PSTs as they pertain to their program experiences. Utilizing surveys completed during the final semester of the program and interview data, we investigated how 12 preservice elementary teachers perceived their program experiences. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

- 1- What perceptions do elementary preservice teachers have about their teacher preparation program holistically?
- 2- What can educator preparation programs glean from these preservice teachers' perceptions?

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After reviewing the literature, we share our findings from the PSTs' reflections. We then examine the potential implications for teacher educators.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

We embrace sociocultural and sociopolitical approaches. We view culture as both a set of individual beliefs, dispositions, and practices and a set of group norms and practices developed in daily, social interactions (Nasir & Hand, 2006), such as teaching and learning (Vygotsky et al., 1981). Teachers' perceptions incorporate varying degrees of ethical, moral, pedagogical, theoretical beliefs. Therefore, attention should be given to the way in which PSTs reflect upon the teaching and learning environments they create (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). Gore and Zeichner (1991) advanced that teachers who engage in reflective practice gain a holistic understanding of their professional work and their role in supporting successful learning by students; therefore, EPPs should incorporate opportunities for PSTs to engage in individualized reflective processes based on lived experiences and personal/cultural perspectives.

Additionally, sociopolitical perspectives consider social variables that shape one's experiences, such as power, race, class, language, and gender. These variables are perceived and play out in educational settings (Apple, 1996; Luke, 2003). Attention to such dynamics is important in considering how PSTs experience their preparation holistically (e.g., course work in addition to internships, supervision, etc.) and how power is constructed and enacted in teacher preparation.

One way teacher educators can promote a sociopolitical perspective in teacher education is by supporting PSTs in developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). Reading the world through this lens helps identify and understand how power and privilege operate at large and in school systems, with the intent to use this recognition and awareness to promote more equitable practices. This aligns with Freire's vision of critical consciousness where we must first understand power structures that contribute to oppression and inequality before we can act in ways to transform systems through collective action. Critical consciousness building can also aid PSTs' understandings of their own positionings and perceptions of language, race, class, and gender.

In this article, we acknowledge the importance of reflective practice by not only asking our PSTs to engage in it but by modelling the process based on our cumulative experiences with PSTs. This ensures we are reflective about our EPP to make culturally responsive adjustments. Schön (1983) looked at reflective practice through two lenses: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Interviews conducted for this article allow us to reflect-on-action as we interpret, investigate, and reflect upon PSTs' perceptions of the teacher preparation experience provided by our institution.

Literature review

The use of PSTs' feedback about their program experiences collectively—such as the courses they take, being part of a cohort, their experiences with their field supervisor, their internships and student teaching—is not widely researched, nor do we tend to share how that information is used to make program changes. Related research has explored isolated components, largely PSTs' experiences during their internships (e.g., Toe et al., 2020).

In terms of looking holistically at EPPs, we found only two studies in the past 25 years. One study focused on PSTs in Malaysia and their perception of cohesion in their program, such as whether university classes were aligned with the practices in their internships and if the PSTs were able to link theory to practice (Goh et al., 2020). Another study used focus group interviews with six racially diverse PSTs to ask them about the strengths and shortcomings of their EPP (Sharp et al., 2019).

When studies examined PSTs' experiences in their program more broadly, this was typically examining the experiences of PSTs of Color as they navigated predominantly White institutions (e.g., Cheruvu et al., 2015; Jackson, 2015). For instance, previous research documented how PSTs of Color

experience unsupportive and marginalizing spaces in teacher education. This includes feeling a disconnect from their peers and faculty, a lack of representation in their programs and field experiences, and a lack of culturally affirming curriculum (Brown, 2014).

With little to report from previous research on EPPs holistically or how PSTs' feedback and perceptions of their EPPs are elicited and used to inform program decisions, we turn now to the literature that has reported on isolated areas that comprise teacher education. The individual areas of teacher preparation we present here pertain to the scope of our own study and context. Our review of the literature is therefore not exhaustive as there are many other aspects of teacher preparation.

Internships

First, we begin with the area that has been most researched—PSTs' experiences with internships. Most studies we reviewed were interested in PSTs' perceptions of their internships; however, unlike our study, the studies we examined did not suggest how those perceptions would inform the teacher education programs. These studies surfaced PSTs' accounts of their experiences, including the challenges they faced as well as what they attributed to their success (Sadler, 2006) or compared different models for how well they supported PSTs in making connections between theory and practice (Toe et al., 2020). One strategy was the use of narrative reflections to understand how these reflections informed the PSTs' own teacher awareness and professional development, including the theories they drew on in their narratives (Eksi & Güngör, 2018).

Another area examined was PSTs' relationships with their cooperating teachers (CTs), in-service teachers who serve as professional mentors and oversee PSTs during field placements. In one study, the researcher noted issues such as ineffective communication, inappropriate opportunities for teaching, and the CTs having the wrong perception about the PSTs' role (Lu, 2013). Not included in the study or analysis was how PSTs and CTs may have had diverse backgrounds (e.g., race, culture), which may have contributed to problematic relationships.

Weisman and Hansen (2008) looked specifically at bilingual Latinx PSTs to examine their experiences with schooling and their observations of their student teaching experiences. The researchers recognized the influence early schooling experiences had on PSTs and how they connected with their students with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Despite making these connections, however, the researchers found that the PSTs were not adept at recognizing social inequities or identifying ways to challenge them to bring about change. These findings have implications for supporting all PSTs in developing critical consciousness, especially as PSTs of Color have likely experienced years of schooling where mainstream culture has been presented as the norm.

While the studies we have cited here are important for understanding how the internship experience is perceived by PSTs, what is missing from the literature is the ways in which this information can be used to inform teacher education, in particular how teacher educators can use this information to revise their own programs. This study seeks to address this gap by showing how teacher educators can use PSTs' feedback to make program changes.

Readiness to enact theories and course content

The field of teacher preparation has also examined PSTs' perceptions of their coursework and readiness to enact specific theories, such as culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogies (CR/SP). CR/SP encompass preparing teachers for culturally responsive pedagogy and expands multicultural education toward transformative, inclusive, reflective, and justice-oriented approaches (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). For example, Lambeth and Smith (2016) were interested in how White PSTs perceived their readiness to work with culturally and racially diverse students whose backgrounds differed from their own after completing a field experience. Overall, the PSTs perceived their abilities to have improved and emphasized the importance of learning how to teach culturally diverse students,

yet their understanding of White privilege and power was still limited, suggesting there were limitations on their readiness to enact culturally responsive teaching.

In a similar study, Maddamsetti (2020) examined two PSTs of Color and how they implemented CR/SP in the classroom as well as the internal and external dialogues they engaged in as they worked to enact CR/SP. Findings showed that the PSTs drew on their social identity positions and identified gaps between knowing and doing CR/SP. This was often related to interpersonal relations and power relations in their schools, which highlights the importance of having a CT who also supports and values CR/SP and is skilled at navigating school constraints.

Readiness to implement theories was more common than examining PSTs' perceptions of their coursework. One study that examined PSTs' coursework was primarily interested in the classroom environment and management in their university courses rather than in the content of their courses (Yasar, 2019). The researcher concluded that the relationships teacher educators fostered with PSTs were important. Given that PSTs learned more from examples and modelling, teacher educators should be conscious of their role as models.

This body of research points to the importance of considering how PSTs understand the theories and content from their courses and preparedness to implement those theories, strategies, and practices into their teaching. Understanding their ability can have important implications for how EPPs should proceed with adjusting their courses and overall design. In our study, we did not specifically explore PSTs' readiness to enact specific theories; however, our interviews indicated which theories were influential for PSTs and the aspects of courses that stood out to them.

Teacher identity

Teacher identity was another area frequently examined in the literature. Some studies were interested in PSTs' constructed identities, such as how their coursework influenced their identities (Arvaja & Sarja, 2021) or examined tensions between their racial and linguistic identities (Haddix, 2010). These studies are important for understanding how PSTs might grapple with their teacher identity construction and remind teacher educators of the prevalent overemphasis placed on assuming PSTs' needs are the same, leading to little or no attention given to race, class, gender, or language backgrounds.

In one study, Nuñez et al. (2020) engaged 14 Latinx PSTs who were enrolled in a bilingual EPP in completing self-created books. Narrative analysis of the books revealed PSTs struggled with how to reclaim and reconnect with their bilingual-biliterate identities where earlier experiences did not necessarily support these aspects of their identity.

Another study examined PSTs in dual language immersion (DL/I) settings; these are classrooms that aims to develop bilingualism and biliteracy (Howard et al., 2007). The research team studied four PSTs' identity and agency development as they completed an internship in DL/I classrooms within which their EPP treated the language of bilinguals as two separate and distinct systems (Varghese & Snyder, 2018). Using interview data with observations and field notes, the researchers showed how the PSTs' linguistic, racial, and cultural backgrounds created tensions. They highlighted ways in which the PSTs were marginalized within the program, such as not having courses available to them related to DL/I teaching, experiencing racial microaggressions in class, and an overall orientation of their classes towards English speakers. Despite these challenges, the PSTs used their own identities to connect with their students and express their agency in the classroom.

The findings from this body of literature suggest that identity work and attention to decentring dominant discourses on race and language should be a part of EPPs. This leads us to our next discussion of language ideologies.

Language ideologies

Participants in our study were also PSTs completing a concentration in English as a Second Language (ESL) or DL/I. Therefore, it is important to consider the ways in which language is connected to identities, institutions, and societal values. Such ideologies actively influence social interactions within the teaching and learning environment and beyond. The importance of this construct is seen in Sarmiento-Arribalzaga and Murillo's (2010) use of language autobiographies as a healing pedagogy with bilingual PSTs. The study demonstrated how language autobiographies allowed PSTs to understand how the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking families have been marginalized and devalued. Surfacing the traumatic effects of deficit-based language ideologies allowed them to explore pedagogical choices that might break the cycle.

In another study, Lew and Siffrin (2019) explored the impact PSTs' language ideologies have on interactions with students and their families, leading to the acknowledgment that linguistic discrimination exists. These findings are supported by Nuñez and Espinoza (2019) who identified how PSTs' language ideologies are influenced by how they observe language practices being supported or restricted. These studies highlight two distinct, observable patterns in classroom observations: the adoption of supportive linguistic practices and the deficit-approach focusing on the practice of fixing language.

Traditional, fixed views of language learning tend to hold less supportive attitudes toward multilingual learners (MLs), students whose home languages are different than the one spoken at school (Dixon et al., 2016). Therefore, when considering PSTs' reflective practice and the effectiveness of EPPs, teacher educators must consider ways to track PSTs' sense of preparedness to address the language needs of MLs through the instructional design strategies obtained throughout the EPP.

Methodology

This study took place at a university in the southeastern United States. The participants in this study were completing their degrees for elementary certification along with a concentration in ESL or DL/I, which also qualified them to obtain ESL licensure. The coursework (18-hours) for this concentration included a course in DL/I or community literacies; language foundations (e.g., phonology, sociolinguistics, translanguaging); legal, historical, and cultural implications of ESL; an abbreviated internship (10 hours for one semester) in an ESL or DL/I classroom; and global language requirements. Students who were bilingual in Spanish/English took the DL/I course while the others took the community literacies course. This was the only course that differed between them.

Participants

We focused on the graduating seniors who were elementary education majors and declared ESL or DL/I as their concentration. There were 12 students in all, and all of them consented to participate. They were not all in the same cohort, and they did not all necessarily know each other. They were all in their early to mid-twenties. Table 1 lists each PST along with their racial and linguistic backgrounds indicating that half of our participants were in the DL/I concentration and mostly Latina while the other half, all self-identified as White, were in the ESL concentration.

Research team

We gathered around this work as part of a larger project related to ESL instruction and increasing professional development and educational opportunities for PSTs and in-service teachers around teaching MLs and community-engagement. We were interested in further exploring PSTs' feedback on their program experiences and how those perspectives could be used to inform broader EPP programmatic decision-making.

Author 1 is a university teacher educator who is a former bilingual Spanish/English elementary school teacher and literacy coach. She is an Asian American, cisgender woman who teaches literacy and ESL teacher education courses with a lens towards increasing critical consciousness for PSTs and in-service teachers. Author 2 is a White, cisgender female university teacher educator with over 20 years' experience teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students PK-12 in the U.S. and abroad. She is bilingual and taught in a French/English DL/I program for 12 years before returning to the U.S. Author 3 is a bilingual Black, cisgender female post-doctoral researcher who served on the evaluation team of the EPP. She was a mathematics teacher in Southern Africa and a lecturer in an EPP in the same region.

We worked collaboratively to develop the interview protocol, conduct the interviews (for some interviews only one or two of us were present), and analyse the data. Author 1 knew some of the PSTs from course work, but not all of them. Authors 2 and 3 did not know the PSTs prior to interviewing them.

Table 1
Background Information for the PSTs

Name (pseudonyms)	Race	Languages Spoken
Ava	White	English
Brittany	Black	English
Claire	Biracial/Black	Spanish, English
Daniela	Latina	Spanish, English
Elisa	Latina	Spanish, English
Gabriela	Latina	Spanish, English
Helen	White	English
Julia	Latina	Spanish, English
Kristen	White	English
Michelle	White	English
Nicole	White	English
Selina	Latina	Spanish, English

Data collection

We learned about the PSTs' perspectives on their experiences through survey and interview data. The PSTs completed an initial survey, which included providing informed consent and selecting an interview appointment. The initial survey also included yes/no answers about prior experiences with language learning and Likert scale responses to questions about their identity alignment with educators and students during their teacher preparation experience (e.g., coursework, field placements, and internships). We conducted structured, individual interviews via Zoom (see Appendix A), which were recorded and transcribed and lasted between 20 to 40 minutes.

Data analysis

We used grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyse the survey and interview data, which was imported into ATLAS.ti 9. Mindful of how experiences are socially constructed, we intentionally looked for ways in which PSTs used their reflections to make meaning of their experiences and perceived social variables, such as power, race, class, language, and gender (Vygotsky et al., 1981).

We analysed qualitative data within individual interviews at the sentence level and developed codes to identify themes and patterns across the responses (Miles et al., 2014). Each member of the research team independently coded four transcripts. To establish interrater reliability, we met to review and refine our coding. We created code groups, defining codes and provided examples and non-examples for each. We then cross checked the coding scheme by reviewing data initially coded by other members (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Minor disagreements in coding were resolved then. The remaining data was then coded and reviewed by the research team. Table 2 outlines our coding scheme with an explanation of

each code and a sample quote. Codes are sorted by overarching themes that are used in the findings section.

Table 2
Coding Scheme with Descriptions and Sample Quotes

Theme	Code	Explanation	Sample Quote
Program Structure: Student Opinions and Thematic Patterns	Team Leader Influence	Reference to the role, actions, or attitudes of a designated team leader (e.g., cohort leader, lead instructor, or supervisor) that shape PSTs' experiences, learning, group dynamics, or perceptions of the program	<i>I think my team leader, (team leader's name), really pushed us to teach and not just sit there, which was wonderful.</i> Ava
	Desire to Stay Connected	Reference to participants' expressed interest in maintaining contact with the EPP after graduation, including ongoing communication with faculty, peers, or mentors, participation in alumni activities, or contributing feedback to support future PSTs	<i>I would like to stay involved at [University Name]. Maybe with workshops... like you set up ESL workshops and we can come and attend them on the weekends...</i> Brittany
	Program Choice	Reference to participants' decision to enrol in the EPP because of its structure, particularly the integration of language/ESL preparation with general teaching coursework. Includes perceived advantages such as enhanced employability, the opportunity to remain bilingual or leverage existing bilingual skills, and a general interest in language and language teaching	<i>So, I was like, I'm gonna drop Spanish and I'm gonna just focus on elementary ed, but I still wanted to do something with language. And so that's how I really ended up choosing ESL, because I didn't want to just drop the language part altogether.</i> Brittany
Course Content: Impactful Course Content and Theories	Influential Courses and/or Materials	Reference to specific courses, concepts, or authors (e.g., translanguageing, dialogic learning environments) that significantly shaped PSTs' perspectives, knowledge, or practice	<i>...the whole translanguageing idea and like the code switching, where like, bilingual people have this like funds of knowledge of like, information in both languages.</i> Selina

	Influential Experiences	Reference to specific classroom experiences (e.g., Identity project, sharing out among peers) that significantly shaped PSTs' perspectives, skills, confidence, or professional growth	<i>We had identity projects. So... we each presented, and we found like the benefits, and I would love to include them into my future classes. And we did it ourselves.</i> Daniela
Internship Experiences: Differences and Areas for Improvement	DL/I or ESL specific internships	Reference to internship experiences focused on Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) or English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, including work with multilingual learners, language-focused instructional strategies, or culturally and linguistically responsive practices	<i>I got to teach kindergarten and kindergarteners who are in a dual language immersion class. That was an experience.</i> Claire
	Opportunities to Teach	Reference to instances during internships where PSTs were given hands-on teaching opportunities	<i>And I'm the teacher; I am learning, like, everything that a teacher does. And I'm having to think on my feet, and just all of that and actually use everything that I've learned from the past couple semesters and apply it.</i> Michelle
	Relationship with CT	Reference to interactions, communication, and rapport between PSTs and their cooperating teacher (CT), including the CT's support, mentorship, feedback, and overall influence on the PST's internship experience	<i>I definitely think I had good relationships with my CTs that I could relate to or identify with.</i> Ava
Critical Consciousness	Wished for Increased Diversity	Reference to a desire for increased diversity in the EPP program or in their former schools	<i>I'm thinking of my background as Hispanic or Spanish speaking, and maybe it was just the courses I've taken. But I don't recall ever having a professor that shared a similar, similar background to me in my time at [University]. Daniela</i>

Importance of Cultural Representation	Reference to the value placed on seeing teachers who reflect students' cultural, racial, or linguistic backgrounds, including participants' desire to become educators who provide the representation they lacked in their own schooling experiences	<i>And I want to be a teacher in order to help students that are like me, and some that are aren't like me to have a great education.</i> Gabriella
Normalization of Monolingualism	Reference to linguistic diversity or the lack thereof	<i>Growing up, I guess, since we didn't have a lot of dual programs that were accessible to us growing up. So, I feel like I didn't really appreciate my bilingualism until I got to college.</i> Julia

Findings

We present our findings under four broad categories. Figure 1 represents how inquiring about PSTs' perceptions of their program holistically allowed us to engage a reciprocal reflective process that has potential to increase the critical consciousness of the EPP, its teacher educators, and PSTs. In this section, we share findings related to PSTs' experiences with the structure of the EPP. Then, we present findings related to program structure and course content. Next, we share their experiences and recommendations related to their internships. Additionally, we present findings indicating that critical consciousness emerged as a salient theme in participants' responses.

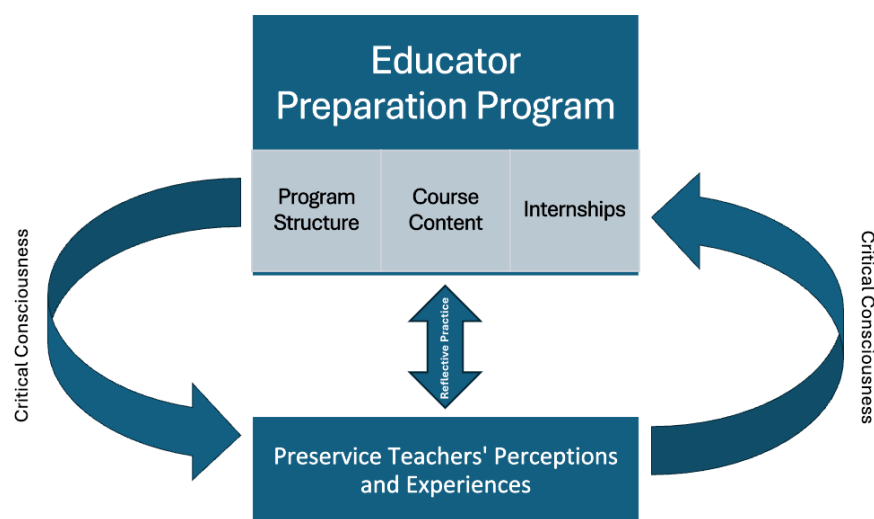


Figure 1. *Reciprocal Reflective Process*

Program structure

A prioritized goal we had with interviewing the PSTs was to learn about recommendations they have for program revisions. When we coded the data, we specifically looked for areas they wished had

been different. This could have been in response to a direct question (e.g., What were some experiences you wish the program had offered?) or embedded into the conversation about their experiences more broadly.

One area in which PSTs offered feedback related to being part of a cohort. Some cohorts engaged in more community building activities than others. PSTs seemed to be aware when they were not in cohorts that engaged in bonding activities. Thus, the cohort design facilitated relationship-building among peers, which PSTs appreciated. For instance, Helen said,

We've been able to go with each other all the way through, and we've been through the normal, the initial craziness and the COVID hit, and being able to make such tight relationships and friendships with some of them [our peers].

In the absence of opportunities to build community, some PSTs did not feel connected to their classmates. For example, Michelle suggested, “maybe just doing stuff outside of the classroom as a team would have just made us closer, and able to talk to everybody and work together more as a team, rather than just as individuals.”

Indeed, feeling isolated from classmates was something that came up for others as well. Selina, a Latina PST, shared what it felt like to be in a cohort with mostly White PSTs, “There was exactly one other Hispanic, like one other Mexican girl in my cohort. And it was just; it's kind of isolating.” For Selina, cultural and racial differences made it difficult for her to relate to her peers.

The role of team leaders in organizing team building activities and creating opportunities for these relationships was also highlighted by PSTs. For instance, Brittany felt that her team leader “really focused on making relationships with the people in the team that he led.” PSTs went on to report that team leaders’ model genuine, meaningful, and supportive personal relationships with students that transcend their academic and professional lives and include personal life, health, and fitness. Nicole shared,

I feel like they also model for us every single time. How to care about your students; how to assess where they are; and how to give them what they need; and not just what you think they need.

Not all PSTs enjoyed such empathy and support from their team leaders in the face of the external pressures they experienced. As Selina shared her experience with the disconnect between family cultural expectations and university expectations, she talked about how she struggled with her classes one fall because she was “*having a lot of, like family issues to deal with.*” She felt her team leader had difficulty understanding the cultural expectations of her family saying, “*you're doing your school. You're here in [town name], your priority is your education.*” For Selina, this lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the importance of her family role was a burden.

Course content

Another area PSTs reflected on related to their courses. They often mentioned influential courses or assignments throughout their interviews. One assignment that stood out for many PSTs in the program was creating their own identity text, which placed identity affirmation and literacy engagement as equally relevant and can be an anti-oppressive form of pedagogy (Schissel & Stephens, 2020). Kristen, for example, said,

And we got to hear all our classmates share, and they all shared in a different way. So, nobody was the same. It was great. So, it was a great example of something that we can include in our own classroom in the future, to incorporate students' identities and their cultures and anything that they would like to tell us otherwise.

Most often, the PSTs mentioned the impact of specific university courses or named explicit concepts. Daniela, for example, shared how the theory of translanguaging (García, 2009; Jackson, 2015) influenced the work she has done throughout the program when she said,

So translanguaging was just like something that has stuck with me ever since she [the professor] introduced it to us. So yeah, that theory has been like just intertwined in everything else that I've turned in all the assignments, like how are you going to provide equitable opportunities for these students.

PSTs also mentioned specific authors/scholars, such as Peter Johnston and his conceptualization of dialogic learning environments (2023). PSTs saw how this theory could “*really get students talking and communicating and get less teacher and more student involvement*” (Kristen). PSTs also mention the impact of reading Gerald Duffy’s work (e.g., 2014). Ava described how the concept of student-led learning environments surfaced in her professional experiences:

We read a lot about Gerald Duffy, and those are things that I will always bring with me to the classroom now. It's kind of... it's who I am as a teacher now. And I can always think, hey, are my lessons student-led? And just quotes from Duffy's book, and it's just, it's who I am as a teacher now.

Overall, the course experiences the PSTs shared were ones that affirmed their identities or connected with their sense of self as a teacher.

Internships

Internships were an important part of the PSTs’ experiences, and many wished they could have spent more time in ESL and DL/I classrooms in addition to their regular internships. For example, Gabriella highlighted the importance of her placement in a DL/I classroom when she shared, “We got to actually teach in Spanish and use what we've been learning—put it into practice.” Because PSTs experienced multiple internships over their junior and senior years, they could compare experiences, surface dispositions and skills they wished to prioritize or avoid in their own future classrooms.

I am interning at [name of school] of [town] and everything that they represent and stand for is what I believe in and what I hold true to teach, like what I think teaching should be. [whereas in my other placements] it was a lot of teaching to the test. (Nicole)

In this example, Nicole contrasts her different internship experiences, which helped her to vocalize her teaching philosophy.

Overall, PSTs appreciated that they were “teaching alongside teachers, talking to actual teachers and implementing what I've been learning” (Selina). Even though several acknowledged that some placements allowed for more hands-on interaction with students than others. The CT/PST relationship was highlighted by some PSTs as influential to their experience. For example, Ava acknowledged that “the CT-intern relationship can be kind of complicated. So, I definitely think I had good relationships with my CTs that I could relate to or identify with.” Whereas Brittany found herself in a situation where PSTs

walk into some classrooms and you don't get acknowledged. I had that happen my second semester in the program in a first-grade classroom. I ended up being removed from the teacher because she legit would not let me do anything.

Michelle, a White student who had studied some French and Spanish but did not consider herself bilingual, spent part of a semester in an ESL classroom but wished she could have had more time. Additionally, Michelle elaborated on how she thought her elementary practicum experience could have been improved overall, which was to be “*in a school where there were more Spanish speaking students or other languages spoken in the core classroom.*” For Gabriela, a bilingual Spanish/English speaker who was placed in a DL/I classroom as part of her elementary internship, she would have also liked to have interned in an ESL classroom too, “*I wish I would have had an ESL placement, because I've only had the regular, like, traditional classroom and a DL/I classroom, but I've never set foot in an ESL classroom.*”

Critical consciousness

As PSTs brought up issues related to equity, we noted the ways they were developing critical consciousness. PSTs spoke about power structures and systems that undervalued diversity and ways they might transform them. Our deepening understanding of PSTs' experiences surfaced impacts on our own work in teacher education. For example, Ava explicitly used terms like social justice when she described the kind of teacher she wanted to be and some of her experiences with planning social justice-oriented units in her internship.

Right now, I'm teaching my students an activism unit. And so, I've been giving them mystery people each week, who are famous activists for different groups. So, I have, you know, the civil rights movement, but then I'm, this week, I'm doing the LGBTQ community.

While most PSTs did not use terms like social justice, they articulated injustices they experienced or observed. For instance, all our Latina PSTs described inequitable conditions related to growing up as bilingual when monolingualism and Western values were privileged. They also shared that they rarely had teachers who looked like them or spoke Spanish in their PK-12 schools, a trend that would continue into their university education. This relates to why many of them wanted to become teachers. For example, Selina shared, *"They [schools] still weren't providing materials in Spanish as much as they did, when my youngest brother was going to school. So that was all what sort of inspired me to become a teacher."*

A lack of representation continued as Selina moved into her teacher education courses. When she was placed in a school that was "80% White", she explained how she would have preferred to be in a school where Spanish was more prevalent, *"just not being able to use that part of my identity like in my teaching was really difficult because it made me feel like I wasn't giving everything I could to my teaching."* Selina went on to express her desire to teach in a DL/I or Spanish immersion school in the future.

Julia, also a bilingual Latina, did not develop an appreciation of her bilingualism until she went to college. Having spent a semester interning in a DL/I classroom, Julia reflected on her own experiences, *"Growing up, I guess, since we didn't have a lot of dual programs that were accessible to us growing up. So, I feel like I didn't really appreciate my bilingualism until I got to college."* Like Selina and the other Latina PSTs, Julia did not see teachers who looked like her or spoke Spanish during her PK-12 school experiences.

For Daniela, learning about translanguageing (García, 2009) was important for affirming her own bilingual identity and for supporting her students. She even incorporated it into her videotaped lessons for her state licensure requirements as she saw translanguageing to equitably support her MLs.

The Latina PSTs were not the only ones to recognize injustices related to language. For instance, Kristen, a White PST placed in a mainstream English classroom, explained,

And a bunch of them [students] in the classroom know a second language, but they never get the chance to use it. Because we don't often ask about it. And we don't bring it up. But I think it's very important, and it should be seen, as far as books in the classroom.

Kristen went on to explain she thinks representation in children's books is important. Despite not identifying as bilingual herself, Kristen believed classrooms, even mainstream classrooms, can be a site for multiple languages.

Other ways we recognized PSTs sharing their critical consciousness was when they evaluated their experiences. For example, Nicole reflected on observed practices during her internship that created tensions.

It was a lot of teaching to the test. It was a lot of reading from the script. The way that students were addressed as humans is not how, like now that I've seen what it's like in other schools, I understand that that was not okay in those other settings.

Not only did Nicole disagree with “teaching to the test,” she also disagreed with how students were spoken to, which did not resonate with her desire to be the type of teacher who “[shows] each of my students how wonderful they are and how much they are loved.”

The two Black PSTs, Brittany and Claire, brought up issues related to race. Brittany wished for Black professors in her teacher education courses and expressed her reasons for teaching as relating to representation and being a role model.

Because I'm a huge advocate for children to see teachers that look like them. So that comes from their background; so that they know that 'oh, if she can do it and if she can make it in this world, then I can too'. And there's not enough of them [Black teachers].

Claire, a Black biracial PST, shared her experiences with how others perceived her and how this related to students in her internship.

When I started school, a lot of my students or a lot of my peers, they would say things to me about, like, the way that I acted, or some of the things that I did they kind of generalized me with other students that looked like me. So, they would say things like, why do you dress like that? That's not how Black people dress. Or that's not the way that Black people talk, like, you talk like a White person. And I've experienced make generalizations about other cultures.

In this example, Claire uses a critically conscious lens to make sense of generalizations some have made about her different identities. She recognizes this in her students' behaviors. One example of how she addressed an issue in her internship was when she explicitly told a student not to generalize after hearing music in Spanish on a learning app and saying she did not like Mexican music.

And I explained to her, I said, first of all, we don't generalize, you know, not every music that has that type of sound is Mexican. I said, it's Spanish music because there are many other countries that speak Spanish. And so, I just kind of took that moment to teach her something.

Rather than keep quiet or not address the student's misconception, Claire used this opportunity as a learning moment. We need more examples of the ways in which PSTs can be supported in developing their critical consciousness and how they can act this perspective in their teaching. Ending with this insight, we now turn to our own reflections and how they can be used to inform our EPP.

Discussion

In this article, we shared PSTs' reflections on their program experiences. PSTs' reflection provided insights into the perceived support of specific programmatic choices. Although these interviews were connected to specific aspects of our EPP, our findings could influence programmatic changes across institutions of higher education. In this section, we examine useful adjustments and implications for teacher educators. First, we highlight the value of asking PSTs about their collective experiences to inform decision making. Typically, PST preparation is studied through individual components only (e.g., internships) rather than holistically (c.f., Goh et al., 2020; Sharp et al., 2019). This study fills a need in the literature to consider PSTs' perspectives across their entire program. Having scheduled interviews with PSTs should be a regular part of teacher educators' practice to encourage their own reflection and inform improvement plans. Given the results, we are planning to conduct them with each graduating class of PSTs.

Secondly, we recognize the need to ensure teacher educators give special consideration to the ways in which the profession and relationships in teacher education are humanized. In particular, teacher educators can engage in regular dialogue with PSTs about the external pressures they experience, e.g., financial support during student teaching, family obligations, etc. Although EPPs may not be able to solve these problems, empathy goes a long way in recognizing the complexity of their lives outside of our courses and internship requirements. Our findings showed that this may be done through building

trusting relationships and ensuring community building activities with their peers as well, so PSTs feel supported rather than alienated. PSTs' feedback highlighted the importance of integrating community building outside of a welcoming teaching and learning environment. Doing so can be one way of affirming and supporting PSTs' identities, which is especially important if PSTs have different racial and/or linguistic identities from their peers or instructors (Haddix, 2020).

Third, our findings identified a need to increase the amount of time PSTs spend in varied internship experiences, such as having more options available to them for being in ESL and DL/I classrooms. Another way to address this is by examining specific courses that could include more field experiences. For example, DL/I courses could also include a field experience component to increase the overall amount of time the PSTs spend in DL/I classrooms. In addition to increasing the amount of time spent in internship experiences, findings underscored the need to address the relationships between PSTs and CTs, particularly when the CT is not considered supportive by the PST (Lu, 2013). This is something that deserves priority given the importance PSTs ascribe to their internships. While we do not know more specific information about Brittany's adverse internship experience, we are left wondering about the ways to ensure PSTs and CTs have a good working relationship. One solution is to cultivate opportunities for PSTs and CTs to be together for professional development and dialogue, to ensure they are on the same page about their roles and have time to reflect together on guiding questions like, "What tensions do we notice in our teaching practices?" This relationship is especially important given the amount of time spent working together and the opportunities for teacher development (Toe et al., 2020).

Additionally, it is paramount to consider the experiences of our PSTs of Color given the structural obstacles associated with recruiting, preparing, and retaining them. EPPs, particularly teacher educators, must be intentional in establishing more inclusive perspectives and backgrounds. Ideally, EPPs would increase the diversity among faculty, supervisors, and CTs. This may be a long-term goal, shining a spotlight on the immediate need to work with faculty, supervisors, and CTs to be sensitive to the ways in which PSTs of Color might experience the program differently from their White peers. The ways in which PSTs of Color may be marginalized and experience challenges related to race, culture, and language is an area that has been noted in the literature (Varghese & Snyder, 2018). Our study highlights the need to further understand how to combat negative experiences.

Findings also accentuated the importance for EPPs to identify and improve upon programmatic features aimed at developing critical consciousness. The interviews we conducted revealed varying levels of critical consciousness (Joseph & Evans, 2018). Teacher educators may seek to clarify and articulate philosophical foundations and to ensure these are incorporated throughout program experiences (i.e., field experiences and integration in coursework). In this study, PSTs completed ESL and DL/I coursework because of their concentration. These classes included topics like translanguaging and other equity-related topics that may not be covered with all PSTs. Therefore, EPPs could examine how equity-related topics are woven throughout PSTs' experiences (Dixon et al., 2016).

Based on what we learned from the PSTs and the changes we are considering, we offer the following implications for teacher educators. First, teacher educators should plan for time to talk with their PSTs to include their voices in their decision-making and to learn about the external pressures PSTs may be facing as they complete their program. Building in time to learn from PSTs can not only strengthen relationships and contribute to building a sense of community, but it can also help teacher educators be more attuned to PSTs' needs. Although accreditation requirements drive certain measures, considering PSTs' voices and taking time to reflect on their program experiences holistically would allow programs to be more responsive to students' needs. Secondly, teacher educators can attend to diversity in their programs through examining all aspects that involve PSTs—their internship experiences, the instructors and supervisors they meet, the ideas and theories included in coursework, and the backgrounds of the PSTs themselves. Lastly, teacher educators should consider how they can

continue to support and stay in communication beyond graduation. Developing a network of graduates can continue to inform program decisions and sustain the sense of community built in the program.

Some of our suggestions may already be frequent practice in EPPs; however, we would like to emphasize the importance of considering all aspects of the program holistically, rather than in isolation. Based on our review of the literature and knowing how our own program has handled changes in the past, we believe it is more often the case that decisions are made to address specific components rather than the whole program.

Conclusion
Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Give recommendations for next research and practical matters. Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Give recommendations for next research and practical matters. Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Conclude your study briefly. Draw attention to significant findings. Give limitations if there is any. Give recommendations for next research and practical matters.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study we would like to acknowledge. First, the data we collected is from one interview with each PST at the end of their program. Had we interviewed the PSTs about their experiences at other times during their program and not just at the end, we may have had more nuanced understandings of their experiences and been able to use that information to make changes before they graduated. Another limitation is that we only interviewed the PSTs enrolled in the ESL or DL/I concentration, so their views are not representative of all our PSTs. We recognize that it is important to hear the voices of all our PSTs, so another plan of action is to undertake this work with all our PSTs. Additionally, with a small number of participants, 12 in all, we recognize that generalizations taken from this study may be limited and context specific.

Finally, our interview data may have been enriched had we also been able to observe the PSTs in their internships and interview others who worked with them such as their CTs, their supervisors, or instructors. Although the focus was on understanding the PSTs' perspectives, interviewing others who worked with the PSTs might have provided more contextual information and a broader understanding of their experiences.

Conclusion

In this article, we explored the experiences of elementary PSTs and the impact their perceptions have on possible program revisions. We argue for the need to listen to what our graduates have to say. As teacher educators, we must particularly pay attention to the assumptions we make. The needs of all students in teacher education are not the same. EPPs often lack adequate consideration for differences in PSTs' life situations and experiences, race, class, gender, and language backgrounds (Haddix, 2010). Accessing this information requires, in large part, opportunities to talk with PSTs to gain insights into how they have socially constructed their experiences, reflected on their teaching and learning, and the ways they have perceived and experienced the enactment of power in their program and program experiences.

Spaces for community building and dialogue are essential in communicating that teacher educators value and listen to PSTs' feedback and perspectives. Therefore, we contend that listening to PSTs (Sarmiento-Arribalzaga & Murillo, 2010) can be a powerful and valuable way of examining our own teacher education practices and can inform program revisions. By adapting the reflective process presented in this study, programs can consider individual contexts, allowing the results to inform a larger international body. We argue that developing an understanding of how teacher preparation experiences

are lived by PSTs should inform programmatic decisions and practices. Their voices can help teacher educators rethink, reshape, and reimagine teacher preparation.

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