

# Clinical Practices for Elementary Teacher Preparation Across South Carolina

**WORKING PAPER SERIES I:  
Setting the Baseline for South Carolina**

## **RESEARCH TEAM**

Stephen L. Thompson

Kristin E. Harbour

Beth White

University of South Carolina

**OCTOBER 2019**



## + ABSTRACT

Policy documents have consistent recommendations regarding the clinical preparation of elementary teacher candidates and programs; however, the extent to which those policies are enacted in South Carolina is relatively unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this working paper is to explore the enactment of promising clinical practices for elementary teacher preparation across the state. Using an interview protocol established from policy recommendations, data were collected from 12 of the 28 Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) with elementary teacher preparation programs. Findings revealed many of the IHEs are engaged in practices consistent with guiding documents, although there is room for growth across all. A series of implications and recommendations for various stakeholders is presented.

## + EXPLORING PROMISING CLINICAL PRACTICES FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHER PREPARATION ACROSS SOUTH CAROLINA

One of the primary concerns regarding elementary teacher preparation is the frequent disparity between teaching practices learned in teacher education programs and teaching practices enacted in typical K-12 classrooms (Bullough et al., 1999; Zeichner, 2010). Research reveals that novice teachers frequently gain theoretical knowledge from their teacher preparation programs but do not have many opportunities to practice their newly learned pedagogical knowledge in authentic contexts (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald., 2009b; Windchitl, Thompson, Braaten, & Stroupe 2012). Some researchers advocate that a reconfiguration of teacher education programs is needed to reduce disconnects between theoretical and conceptual knowledge emphasized in university teacher preparation and teachers' practical work in classrooms (Grossman et al., 2009b). Other researchers argue that teacher education programs should create opportunities for novice teachers to engage in approximations of the work of teaching as a central component of their teacher preparation (Grossman et al., 2009a; Lampert et al., 2013).

The recommendations made by the teacher preparation research community are echoed in guiding national policy documents. For example, in 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) published a groundbreaking report on the state of teacher preparation. The blue ribbon report stressed that clinical practices must become the core of teacher preparation efforts. The same report suggested design principles to develop clinical practices and provided guidelines for wholesale changes needed within teacher preparation programs (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** *NCATE Design Principles for Clinical Experiences*

2010 NCATE DESIGN PRINCIPLES	
<b>A focus on PK-12 student learning</b>	Rigorous selection of clinical educators and coaches from both higher education and the PK-12 sector
<b>Dynamic integration of clinical preparation throughout every facet of teacher education</b>	Designation of specific sites funded to support embedded clinical preparation
<b>Continuous evaluation of a teacher candidate's progress and of the elements of a preparation program</b>	Integration of technology to foster high-impact preparation
<b>Preparation of teachers who are simultaneously content experts and innovators, collaborators, and problem solvers</b>	Creation of powerful research and development agendas and systematic gathering and use of data to support continuous improvement in teacher preparation
<b>Candidate engagement in interactive professional learning communities</b>	Establishment of strategic partnerships for powerful clinical preparation

(NCATE, 2010, pp. 5-6)

The NCATE blue ribbon report design principles (2010) acted as a catalyst for institutions of higher education across the country to re-examine the roles clinical practices play in teacher preparation and to re-think the ways university-based educators interact in K-12 school settings. The important role of clinical settings in the preparation of teacher candidates was further emphasized in a 2018 report prepared by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) Clinical Practice Commission. The AACTE report lamented that university teacher preparation programs have initiated unsystematic attempts and struggled with how to “immerse educator preparation in clinical practice” (2018, p. 6). IHEs in South Carolina are not immune to this condition.

Against this backdrop, the teacher preparation community has engaged in significant research to uncover the teacher preparation coursework and/or specific clinical field experiences that result in greater teacher effectiveness. This body of work has not identified specific courses or program components that account for differences in graduates’ outcomes (Gansle, Noell, & Burns, 2012; Goldhaber, Liddle, & Theobald, 2013; Koedel, Parsons, Podgursky, & Ehlert, 2015; Lincove, Osborne, Dillon, & Mills, 2013; and Mihaly, McCaffrey, Staiger, & Lockwood 2013). However, the collective research does point to methods course preparation (i.e., courses where teacher candidates learn how to teach within specific content area) as one factor that may increase teachers’ perceptions on their readiness to teach and persistence to remain in the profession (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012; Ronfeldt, Schwartz & Jacob, 2013). Interestingly, few studies have examined the effects of various teacher preparation dimensions, such as type of field experiences, on teachers’ value-added to student achievement. However, one small study found that program oversight of field experiences was positively and significantly associated with student achievement gains (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009). This result is consistent with previous qualitative research identifying field experiences as being an important component of teacher candidate preparation and also provides evidence that program faculty involvement in clinical field experiences makes a difference. Another related strand of research reveals that alignment between preservice and induction period teaching experiences are important in at least two ways. First, teachers benefit from preservice teacher preparation clinical practice that occurs in schools with student populations similar to the schools in which they may work (Goldhaber, Krieg & Theobald, 2016; Ronfeldt, 2012). Secondly, novice teachers receiving guidance from mentor teachers whose instructional approaches are consistent with the teacher preparation program has also been found to be important (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2018).

Collectively, these bodies of related research reveal that, “intensive methods instruction and high quality clinical experiences have an outsized impact” (SREB, 2011, p. 4) on teacher quality and persistence in the field of teaching. They also reveal the need for explicit collaboration between IHEs and local school districts in order to align instructional approaches and create mutually beneficial school settings. Because methods course instruction and clinical experiences have been identified as key factors contributing to high quality teacher preparation, the current study examined the ways that university-based teacher preparation programs in South Carolina are enacting methods courses and providing clinical experiences. Because alignment between preservice teacher preparation and clinical preparation settings is important to teacher development, this study also explored the ways IHEs and local school district partners are supporting alignment between instructional approaches and creating mutually beneficial clinical school settings. This study then compared how current elementary methods courses, clinical experience practices, and efforts to establish high quality clinical school settings align with recommendations emerging from national policy documents and research findings.

“One of the primary concerns regarding elementary teacher preparation is the frequent disparity between teaching practices learned in teacher education programs and teaching practices enacted in typical K-12 classrooms.”

— Bullough et al (1999), Zeichner (2010)

## + DEFINITION OF TERMS

For purposes of consistency and clarity in communication, we use several terms from the AACTE Clinical Practice Commission report within our paper. These key terms and definitions include the following:

**Clinical Practice** | Teacher candidates' work in authentic educational settings and engagement in the pedagogical work of the profession of teaching, closely integrated with educator preparation course work and supported by a formal school-university partnership. Clinical practice is a specific form of what is traditionally known as fieldwork.

**School-Based Teacher Educator** | An individual involved in teacher preparation whose primary institutional home is a school. School-based teacher educators are a specific type of boundary-spanning teacher educators who assume mentoring and partnership responsibilities in addition to their school responsibilities. A school-based teacher educator may be otherwise known as a university liaison, site facilitator, cooperating teacher, mentor teacher, collaborating teacher, or school liaison.

**Teacher Candidate** | An individual enrolled in a teacher preparation program that leads to a recommendation for initial-level state licensure.

**University-Based Teacher Educator** | An individual involved in teacher preparation whose primary institutional home is a college or university. University-based teacher educators are a specific type of boundary-spanning teacher educators who engage in evaluation, coaching, instruction, and partnership and assume expanded and multiple responsibilities within, and often across, each of these four domains. A university-based teacher educator may be otherwise known as a university supervisor, university liaison, clinical supervisor, or clinical faculty (AACTE, 2018, pp. 11-12).

In addition to the AACTE definitions, we define a number of other terms used throughout the paper for clarity and consistency.

**Clinical Placement Sites** | Elementary schools where teacher candidates engage in teaching enactments and other program related assignments. These can be associated with methods courses, as well as other program requirements (i.e., teacher candidates completing required hours in a school setting).

**Induction Teachers** | Novice teachers in their first three years in the profession.

**Supervisor** | An individual involved in teacher preparation whose primary responsibility is to coach and evaluate the teacher candidates' planning and teaching enactments. A supervisor may be a university-based teacher educator or an adjunct instructor.

## + PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this working paper is to explore the enactment of promising clinical practices for elementary teacher preparation across the state of South Carolina. Specifically, we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How are universities in South Carolina enacting promising practices for elementary teacher preparation?
2. How are clinical experiences and methods courses structured?
3. How are teaching experiences and related feedback systems designed (e.g., opportunities to observe, enact, and receive feedback on instructional practices)?
4. How do elementary programs and university-based teacher educators support clinical placement sites and induction teachers?

## + METHOD

### Participants

IHEs in South Carolina that have an elementary teacher preparation program were contacted to participate in the study. Using information from the South Carolina Department of Education (see <https://ed.sc.gov/educators/educator-preparation/approved-educator-programs/south-carolina-approved-educator-preparation-programs/pre-approved-educator-preparation-programs/>), 28 IHEs were identified as having an elementary teacher preparation program. By exploring IHE's websites, a point of contact was determined (e.g., program chair or leader within the program) and an initial email attempt for participation was sent (see Appendix A for contact email). As necessary, a follow-up email was sent to the original point of contact, as well as email correspondence with additional points of contact (e.g., methods instructor) at the IHEs in an effort to recruit more participants. Of the 28 IHEs, 12 responded, indicating agreement to participate in the study. Phone interviews were then conducted with 11 IHEs, and one IHE provided written responses. The participating IHEs varied on several demographics, including region, size, and public/private.

## + DATA COLLECTION

### Literature Synthesis on Promising Practices

To determine the constructs of effective teacher preparation, policy documents centered on teacher preparation generated by leading education organizations, including AACTE, NCATE, and SREB, were explored and synthesized. A similar exploration of related research study findings was also conducted. Key findings of those explorations are discussed in the introduction of the paper, with Table 1 showcasing the recommended NCATE design principles for clinical experiences (2010, pp. 5-6). The synthesized policy and research findings serve as the framework for our study.

### Interview Protocol

After synthesizing recommendations from research and national policy documents and determining the constructs of effective elementary teacher preparation programs, the researchers designed a structured interview protocol. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) elicited information in three areas: (a) clinical experiences, (b) methods courses, and (c) induction support. Interview questions were provided to participants prior to the interviews. The researchers conducted phone interviews with points of contact from participating IHEs, following the interview protocol. Audio recordings and anecdotal notes were used to collect responses. (Of note: One IHE provided a written response to the interview protocol rather than participating in a phone interview).

## + DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Themes/categories were created based on the constructs represented in the interview protocol. Three themes/categories were created (1) clinical experiences and methods courses, (2) teaching and learning and related feedback systems, and (3) support and alignment. Within each theme/category, several topics of interest were identified to support the overarching themes/categories (see Table 2 for specific topics). The collective research group then created numeric codes for possible responses related to each theme and used the codes to score the IHE responses as a means to generate comparative data. For example, a numeric rating that identified the typical personnel who provide feedback on teacher candidates' lesson enactments was created (Codes: 1 – School-based teacher educator, 2 – Supervisors, and 3 – University-based teacher educator). Descriptive statistics were then calculated and used to analyze the interview responses. Additionally, qualitative excerpts from the interviews were used to provide evidence when highlighting unique attributes of given IHEs.

Participating IHEs were not identified in the presentation of study findings. In order to maintain anonymity, each participating IHE was randomly assigned a designated letter code (i.e., A, B, C, etc.) used to track institutions and complete the related analysis. Initial drafts of the paper narrative were shared with participating IHEs, and their representatives were asked to provide feedback to ensure the study findings were accurate. This feedback served as an important form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) that enhanced confidence in the study outcomes.

## + RESULTS

Table 2 provides a summary of the data collected from the interviews with the 12 participating IHEs with elementary education preparation programs in the state of South Carolina. Additionally, qualitative data obtained during the interviews is also presented to provide content and details to the quantitative findings. We expand on the results in the following sections.

### **Clinical Experiences and Methods Courses**

#### CLINICAL EXPERIENCES

Across the participating IHEs, all elementary programs engaged in clinical experiences (100%), defined as independent fieldwork in an elementary school outside the university setting. However, there are wide variations in the number of clinical experiences provided to teacher candidates, when the clinical experiences typically began, and how the clinical experiences are connected to elementary teacher preparation coursework. Generally speaking, early onset of clinical experiences correlates with higher numbers of clinical field experiences for the typical teacher candidate within a given elementary program. Results indicated a range of when IHEs begin their clinical experience placements for teacher candidates, with three programs beginning in Freshman year (25%), four beginning in Sophomore year (33%), four beginning in Junior year (33.33%), and no programs beginning in Senior year (0%). Of note, it was unclear from interview data when one IHE began clinical experiences, but it was determined clinical experiences occurred during their program.

Based on interview data, all of the elementary programs required teacher candidates to complete assignments associated with the degree program within clinical placement sites. In most cases initial clinical field experience assignments were connected to a stand-alone field packet or degree program course and centered on transition to teaching issues such as instructional practices, school structures and culture, classroom management, student learning, and lesson planning. The initial clinical experiences primarily involved teacher candidates in observations of teaching, classroom management tasks, work with small groups of students, and initial teaching experiences. Later, clinical experiences were more likely to be connected to teacher candidates' methods courses.

## METHODS COURSES

Most elementary programs required teacher candidates to complete methods courses in four content areas: ELA, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, with additional methods coursework in ELA/Reading. The most common pattern involved methods courses starting in a typical teacher candidate's Junior year, coinciding with entrance into a professional education program, and ending the semester before traditional student teaching occurs.

Generally, methods courses were portrayed as the space for teacher candidates to learn about targeted instructional approaches and to gain practice rehearsing those approaches prior to independent enactment during clinical field experiences. Because methods courses focus on teaching, most elementary programs' methods courses included key assignments centered on lesson planning and teaching content to elementary students that were completed in clinical placement sites. However, two elementary programs did not require teacher candidates to complete methods course assignments during clinical field experiences. Instead, these elementary programs employed an immersion approach that provided teacher candidates with opportunities to shadow experienced school-based teacher educators. Across the cases we explored, most elementary programs reported that the work of establishing connections between methods courses and clinical field experiences and related teacher candidate assignments was left to the discretion of individual methods course instructors.

In addition to the diversity with initial clinical experiences, there was diversity with the physical location of where methods courses were taught across the participating IHEs. The vast majority of IHEs reported their methods courses were solely held on campus (66.66%), and the remaining IHEs reported their methods courses were held both on campus and at an elementary school (i.e., school-based; 33.33%). Few elementary programs opted to exclusively follow a single approach. Instead, the location of the methods courses was determined by individual university-based teacher educator/methods course instructors. Collectively, the study findings reveal that a variety of methods course approaches within a given institution is common, and the configuration and location of the methods course is primarily dependent on the instructor.

## + TEACHING AND LEARNING AND RELATED FEEDBACK SYSTEMS

### Teaching and Learning

All elementary programs required teacher candidates to complete teaching and learning experiences such as observing model teaching or practicing instructional approaches with peers and elementary students (i.e., teaching enactments). For discussion purposes, teaching enactments are categorized into two groups: independent and guided.

Independent teaching enactments, a requirement in all elementary programs, occurred within clinical placement sites and outside of methods course meetings. In these cases, teacher candidates completed small group and/or whole class teaching enactments within clinical placement sites with elementary students. One example strategy utilized by an elementary program was paired observations where teacher candidates are coupled for observations of school-based teacher educator teaching in the same setting. Teaching expectations increased for teacher candidates as they progressed through the degree program so that by the final semester they are creating, implementing, and reflecting upon autonomous lessons.

Guided teaching enactments occurred during methods course meetings. For methods courses that met on campus only, a common guided teaching methods strategy used across elementary program methods courses was rehearsals. In these cases, teacher candidates practiced their teaching skills amongst one another, with peers and university-based teacher educators assuming the roles of elementary students. Conversely, guided teaching enactments also occurred within elementary school settings (school-based). The most common school-based teaching enactment approach (School-based Methods Course Column, rating of 1) involved university-based teacher educators guiding teacher candidates in some form of model teaching observation (rating of 1). An example utilized in two elementary programs involved the university-based teacher educators and teacher candidates engaging in shared observations of model classroom teaching. A less common school-based approach (School-based Methods Course Column, rating of 3) involved university-based teacher educators guiding teacher candidates in long-term teaching experiences in classrooms. In these cases, teacher candidates completed teaching enactments within classroom settings while working with elementary students under the direction of a university-based teacher educator (i.e., methods course instructor) and expert school-based teacher educator.

### **Related Feedback Systems**

Those who provided teaching support, guidance, and feedback for teacher candidates also varied across IHEs. The most common response from participating IHEs (33%, n=4) indicated that teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teaching practices from school-based teacher educators, supervisors, and university-based teacher educators (rating of 1, 2, and 3). Sixteen and two-thirds percent (n=2) of IHEs reported their teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teaching practices from only university-based educators (rating of 3). Additionally, 8.33% (n=1) of IHEs reported their teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teaching practices from only school-based educators (rating of 1); whereas, another IHE (8.33%) reported their teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teaching practices from school-based teacher educators and supervisors (rating of 1 and 2). Finally, 8.33% (n=1) of IHEs reported their teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teaching practices from school-based educators and university-based educators (rating of 1 and 3), and another 8% (n=1) of IHEs reported their teacher candidates received support, guidance, and feedback on their teacher practices from supervisors and university-based educators (rating of 2 and 3). In the case of one elementary program, it was not clear who provided support, guidance, and feedback to teacher candidates (8.33%; no data).

In some smaller elementary programs, the size of the teacher candidate population allowed university-based teacher educators to directly observe their teacher candidates enacting lessons within clinical placement sites. However, in the larger teacher preparation programs most of the teacher candidates' teaching enactments were observed by school-based teacher educators and supervisors, who also provide them feedback and support related to their actual teaching performances. Several elementary programs were implementing strategies to enhance teaching feedback that teacher candidates receive. For example, the use of video recording is becoming more common. Teacher candidates submit recordings of teaching enactments that occur within clinical placement sites, and the methods instructor watches the recording and provides feedback on performance. Beyond these examples, the analysis revealed that systems for providing preservice teachers with teaching feedback vary widely across elementary programs.



## + SUPPORT AND ALIGNMENT

### Faculty Support of Clinical Practice Sites

There were a variety of ways in which university-based teacher educators support clinical practice sites. These may be in the form of school-based teacher educator training, supervisor training, and professional development for teachers (workshop and ongoing). The collegial relationship between the university-based teacher educator and the school-based teacher educator allows for the alignment of beliefs and pedagogy which extends to the teacher candidates. Seven IHEs reported their faculty engaging with clinical placement sites to enhance instruction to varying degrees (58.33%, rating of 2 or 3), four IHEs reported their faculty did not engage with clinical placement sites (33.33% rating of 1), and one IHE did not provide data that allowed us to determine if their faculty interacted with clinical placement sites (8.33%). Five IHEs noted having minimal interaction (41.66% which we defined as unsystematic, inconsistent, and/or not tied to clinical development (rating of 2). Minimal interaction may include communicating with a school administrator or school staff to schedule teacher candidates for completion of methods assignments. It may be through these assignments that university-based teacher educators share expectations for assignments and feedback from the school-based teacher educator. It is through these expectations that the school-based teacher educator may update practices by aligning more closely with methodologies presented in the course. The discourse between both the university-based teacher educator and school-based teacher educator lends itself to professional development, resulting in a mutual benefit, including learners in the school-based teacher educator's classrooms. Two IHEs noted having high interaction (16.66%), which we defined as systematic, consistent, and tied to clinical placement site needs and development (rating of 3). High interactions involve a more formal plan for a university-based teacher educator to provide professional development that supports the clinical placement site's goals. This may take the form of whole school professional development or working with select members of a school staff. Another example of high interaction was having methods courses taught at elementary schools, allowing for the collaboration between the university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators.

### Induction Support

IHEs may support teacher candidates in their search for teaching positions as well as immerse them in professional dispositions and expectations for teachers. However, teacher candidates need continued support as they enter their induction years, the first three years of teaching. IHEs have the opportunity to extend their programs to offer support to induction teachers. In our sample, the vast majority of IHEs indicated they do not provide induction support for their newly graduated teachers (83.33%, n=10, rating of 1). Conversely, two of the IHEs (16.66%) provided some form of induction support for new teachers. One IHE provided support (8.33%; rating of 2) through an annual new teacher recognition dinner and beginning teacher panel. One other IHE provided support for induction teachers (8.33%; rating of 3) through coaching and peer support, as well as ongoing and regular meetings related to issues of classroom teaching.

## + DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: CLINICAL EXPERIENCES AND METHODS COURSES

### Clinical Experiences

Providing opportunities in elementary schools for teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs is central to bridging theory to practice and contextualizing the learning. While these experiences may begin during the freshman year, many across South Carolina begin clinical experiences in the junior year. Early experiences in the classrooms or pre-internship field experiences provide opportunities for candidates to observe the application of practices, learn daily routines of a school and classroom, get to know the learners in the classroom, engage in multiple conversations with the school-based teacher educator about practices, and experience a wide range of engagements to begin the clinical experiences (Zenkov & Pytash 2018). During the senior year, common practice includes teacher candidate placements in elementary classrooms for a semester to a full year internship experience. Teacher candidates take on more responsibility as they gain experience in classrooms while fully immersed in the classroom. When teacher candidates have opportunities early in their programs to situate themselves in classrooms with young learners, it affords them opportunities to affirm their career choice, discern the needs of learners under the direction of a knowledgeable school-based teacher educator (i.e. classroom teacher), realize the diverse populations in schools, gain insight for involving families and communities, and collaborate collegially (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP); AACTE, 2018).

### Methods Courses

A majority of IHEs in South Carolina offer methods courses on campus with only a small percentage embedding methods courses on-site at elementary schools. Connecting a clinical placement site to a methods course provides opportunities for teacher candidates to practice the skills they are learning in a school. As such, methods coursework should be linked to the clinical experiences; however, research indicates there is a lack of clear, consistent connections between strategies and approaches emphasized in methods course work and clinical experiences (Bullough et al., 1999; Zeichner, 2010).

Our study identified that IHEs across South Carolina provided their teacher candidates with a variety of guided opportunities. These guided opportunities are possible strategies to reduce the discrepancies noted between research and practice. Guided observations of teaching demonstrations are important learning opportunities to provide to teacher candidates models of effective teaching (Sahakian, & Stockton, 1996). Moreover, guided teaching opportunities move teacher candidates' learning from passive observer to active participant. Employing guided teaching approaches requires teacher candidates to begin to make professional judgments, apply learning theories in the classroom, and engage in approximations to teaching in authentic settings. Guided teaching opportunities also provide greater opportunities for university-based teacher educators to provide feedback on teaching practices, rather than teacher candidates' written reflections on teaching practices. As a result, these guided opportunities have greater potential to impact teacher candidates' instructional practices and beliefs about student learning.

One way to combine both guided observations and guided teaching opportunities that was captured in this study is embedded methods courses. "These embedded experiences create an environment for simultaneous and continuous renewal that benefits all stakeholders" (AACTE, 2018, p. 18). Embedded methods courses have university-based teacher educators and teacher candidates immersed in the authentic work occurring on-site at elementary schools and within school-based teacher educators' classrooms. The structures of an embedded course are explicitly designed by the university-based teacher educator and the school-based teacher educator and allow for the construction of knowledge among all participants (e.g., both university- and school-based teacher educators and teacher candidates). The embedded structure allows teacher candidates to receive professional feedback from both the university-based teacher educator and the classroom teacher in the midst of the candidates employing pedagogical strategies (AACTE, 2018).

## + TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND RELATED FEEDBACK SYSTEMS

### Teaching and Learning Experiences

IHEs are implementing a number of initiatives designed to provide teacher candidates with teaching experiences that are supported by emerging research findings and policy recommendations. Strategies such as pairing teacher candidates to observe and reflect on model teaching (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009) or using methods course rehearsals (Kazemi, Ghouseini, Cunard, & Turrou 2016; Jao, Wiseman, Kobiela, Gonsalves, & Savard, 2018; Lampert et al., 2013) prior to teacher candidates' independent teaching enactments were common practices. While these strategies provide important modeling and practice opportunities, several limitations with these approaches have been documented. For example, pairing teacher candidates to observe model enactments of targeted instructional approaches requires a cadre of teaching exemplars as well as a good deal of coordination with school-based partners. Another common strategy, rehearsals, offers fewer complexities but ignores important factors associated with learning to teach well. For example, the rehearsal context does not closely mirror the contexts teacher candidates will encounter during independent enactment within their separate clinical placement sites (Jao, et al., 2018). In some instances, university-based teacher educators have created strategies that respond to these issues by guiding teacher candidates in shared observations of model teaching and/or engaging teacher candidates in long-term teaching experiences in elementary classrooms. However, elementary program respondents indicated that these sorts of bold initiatives are primarily undertaken by individual university-based teacher educators at their own behest and are not generally connected to or supported by strategic partnerships.

### Feedback

Feedback makes learners aware of gaps in their knowledge, understanding, or skill and helps guide them through activities necessary to better understand and perform (Black & Wiliam, 1998). University-based teacher educators at many IHEs are implementing strategies to enhance feedback that teacher candidates receive, such as the use of video recording. The video approach and other forms of feedback captured provide teacher candidates more in-depth feedback in comparison to a written assignment. Even so, this approach does not provide opportunities for feedback in the midst of the process of teaching and does not address the disconnect that is often noted between instructional approaches learned in methods courses and teaching that may occur in clinical placement sites.

All IHEs reported that teacher candidates' independent teaching enactments are observed by some combination of university-based teacher educators, classroom-based teacher educators, and/or supervisors who provide teacher candidates feedback and guidance related to their teaching performance. IHEs also reported various systems for preparing classroom-based teacher educators and supervisors for this important work with teacher candidates. The various structures for observing teaching enactments and providing feedback and support to teacher candidates was often cited by elementary program respondents as an area of needed growth. As a result, alignment between instructional approaches emphasized in elementary programs and clinical practice sites was not consistently high. This also created a context where strategies for mentoring of school-based teacher educators and/or supervisors to provide appropriate feedback varied across elementary programs. Given the role feedback plays in enhancing learning and related performance, this is an area worthy of further examination.

## + SUPPORT FOR CLINICAL SITES AND INDUCTION TEACHERS

### Induction

With each new school year, many beginning teachers start their journey in education. While each new year brings with it new expectations and responsibilities, elementary teachers generally attribute characteristics of their instructional practice to their initial teacher preparation programs (Avraamidou, 2013; Avraamidou & Zembal-Saul, 2005, 2010). From the first year to the third year, a novice teacher is learning the environment of the school and community, the professional expectations, and roles and responsibilities. Related research findings reveal that teachers often struggle to maintain contemporary beliefs about teaching when they enter their own classrooms (Cliff & Brady, 2005) and those beliefs can be diminished if they encounter unsupportive teaching conditions during induction (Britton, McCarthy, Ringstaff, & Allen, 2012). Hence the need arises for continued support beyond the first year.

Across the participating IHEs little to no support is extended to beginning teachers. One IHE in the state offers a formalized system for supporting induction teachers. Another offers support that is less formal and is intended to create a community of induction teachers. School districts vary in the support provided to induction teachers with most assigning a trained mentor to a beginning teacher. Mentoring, while valuable to beginning teachers, often focuses on survival level strategies (Wong, 2002; Bartell, 2005). Research reveals that novice teachers can implement the types of instruction envisioned in guiding education documents (Marbach-Ad & McGinnis, 2008), while researchers like Luft (2009) argue that adequate support during induction enhances the likelihood targeted instructional practices will be maintained.

### Implications

IHE representatives across the state of South Carolina stressed the importance of clinical experiences occurring early in preservice elementary education programs. Intentionally sequencing courses to scaffold candidates' growing knowledge and skills through clinical placements allows teacher candidates to be immersed in diverse learning environments and begin to notice and name the pedagogy as it connects to their methods course content and foundations of learning.

Professional development opportunities are imperative for classroom-based teacher educators and supervisors. University-based teacher educators extend these opportunities, but they are limited due to available resources. The benefit of university-based educators collaborating with classroom-based teacher educators supports the alignment of classroom practices with the methodologies on which methods courses are grounded. Additionally, the university-based teacher educators can offer professional development opportunities to the school, thus strengthening the mutual benefits of the partnership. The implications for this deep-rooted work triangulates the support of teacher candidates and the work in IHEs.

Induction teachers have invested years in preparing themselves for the classroom. A more formalized process of support would extend the learning of each novice teacher from the teacher preparation program into the profession. Typically, it is the responsibility of the school district in which the teacher works to acclimate, acculturate, and cultivate an environment that supports induction teachers' success. As the stakeholders primarily responsible for teacher preparation, IHEs must be partners in the advancement of novice teachers' learning during their induction years. With a more formalized system in place from all stakeholders, the support and mentoring provided has the potential to improve teacher retention rates and student learning.

## Limitations

As with much research, this study is not without its limitations, and results should be interpreted with these in mind. First, all IHEs in the state of South Carolina did not participate in the study. Specifically, 12 of the 28 identified IHEs with elementary programs provided data that is reported in the current study; therefore, findings are not generalizable across the entire state, although our sample did vary in some demographic information. Future research should focus on gathering data from the additional IHEs to have a complete picture of elementary education programs across the state and beyond. Second, the use of a structured interview protocol can be viewed as a limitation. While the interview protocol encompassed all of the pertinent questions for the current study, the responses were limited to the prescribed interview questions. Additional research is needed to gather more in-depth information on the intricacies of programs. Third, even though consistent and concerted efforts were in place, there is the possibility that orientation bias may have occurred. Policy documents and research were used to guide and frame the study in an effort to reduce such biases.

## + RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations, which have the potential to positively impact teacher preparedness, growth, and retention in South Carolina. We urge the South Carolina education and legislative communities to examine the recommendations as a set of ideas to be considered during ongoing debates related to improving K-16 education in our state.

- We recommend that a commission, which includes teacher preparation faculty and leaders, be created and tasked with conducting a more complete examination of teacher preparation programs and practices in South Carolina. Our analysis revealed patterns and wide variations in elementary teacher preparation practices across our state, as well as a trove of promising practices being enacted in isolation. However, our study was limited in participation and scope. A more complete and thorough examination, of all levels of teacher preparation, would provide a clearer understanding of the current state of teacher preparation and identify our initial strengths and most pressing issues.
- We recommend that the teacher preparation commission, or some similarly empowered group, identify and examine exemplar strategic partnerships (IHE and local school district). Our analysis revealed strategic partnership examples where multiple stakeholder groups are pooling resources to address overlapping needs (e.g., teacher candidates learning to teach in high need elementary settings). By determining the impact these exemplars are having on student learning and teacher development, our state has an opportunity to enhance educational opportunities for all citizens. Examining and disseminating such approaches would provide South Carolina with the opportunity to become a national model for teacher preparation.
- We recommend the creation (with ongoing support) of statewide teacher preparation symposiums. These events would create the space for university-based and classroom-based teacher educators to share best practices, discuss common problems, brainstorm potential solutions, determine questions to investigate, and most important, elevate the collective state of teacher preparation in South Carolina. IHEs in the state have the necessary collective expertise, but it is restricted by current contexts and restraints.
- We recommend that networks of “best practices in teacher preparation” be created. Such networks would act as catalysts for the collective growth of teacher preparation. Regional groups could be formed to deal with more localized issues. Site visits across institutions could occur so that the most promising practices in teacher preparation could be observed, documented, researched, and shared.
- We recommend that an induction teacher professional growth and support initiative be created. We know why new teachers are leaving the profession. Short of significant increases in teacher salary and reductions in typical teaching load, supporting teacher growth during induction in ways that are informed and likely to succeed is our most logical option.
- Our final recommendation is our strongest. Ongoing support for effective strategic partnerships must be provided. Grant funding or direct allocation of resources supported the most effective partnerships we captured in this study. We urge stakeholders to also examine reward structures (i.e., tenure, salary, promotion) for teachers and university faculty so that participation in such partnerships does not negatively impact professional opportunities. Existing partnership agreements provide initial starting points and guidance for these discussions. A key feature of such agreements is that they create and support named positions/personnel who lead the work associated with the strategic partnership.

While many of the findings we present highlight the promising practices in teacher preparation being implemented across the state of South Carolina, we also note there are areas of growth and areas of needed change. Thus, the outcomes of maintaining the status quo are clear. By engaging in honest, critical self-examination we can begin the process of collective enhancement that will benefit us all, and make South Carolina a national leader in teacher preparation and K-16 education. We offer this document as a starting point for this critical self-examination and urge the South Carolina education and legislative communities to view this work as an initial attempt to engage in collective discourse to improve elementary education in our state.

## + REFERENCES

- American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), (2018). Report of the AACTE Clinical Practice Commission. A pivot toward clinical practice, its lexicon, and the renewal of teacher preparation. Retrieved from <https://aacte.org/resources/clinical-practice-commission>
- Avraamidou, L., (2013) Prospective elementary teachers' science teaching orientations and experiences that impacted their development. *International Journal of Science Education*, 35(10), 1698-1724. doi:10.1080/09500693.2012.708945.
- Avraamidou, L., & Zembal-Saul, C. (2005). Giving priority to evidence in science teaching: A first-year elementary teacher's specialized knowledge and practices. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 42, 965–986.
- Avraamidou, L., & Zembal-Saul, C. (2010). In search of well-started beginning science teachers: Insights from two first-year elementary teachers. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 47, 661–686.
- Bartell, C. A. (2005). *Cultivating High-Quality Teaching through Induction and Mentoring*. Thousand Oaks, CA; Corwin Press.
- Boyd, D. J., Grossman, P. L., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). Teacher preparation and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, 416-440.
- Black, P., and William, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1): 7-74.
- Britton, E., McCarthy, E., Ringstaff, C., & Allen, R. (2012). Addressing challenges faced by early-career mathematics and science teachers: A knowledge synthesis. Retrieved from <http://www.mspkmd.net/papers/>
- Bullough, R., Burrell, J., Young, J., Clark, D., Erickson, L., Earle, R. (1999). Paradise unrealized: Teacher education and the costs and benefits of school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50, 381-390.
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), (2018). CAEP K-6 Elementary Teacher Preparation Standards, Retrieved from <http://caepnet.org/accreditation/caep-accreditation/caep-k-6-elementary-teacher-standards>
- Clift, R., & Brady, P. (2005). Research on methods, courses, and field experiences. In M. Cochran-Smith & K. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*, p. 309-424. Mahwah, NJ: American Educational Research Association and Erlbaum.
- Gansle, K. A., Noell, G. H., & Burns, J. M. (2012). Do student achievement outcomes differ across teacher preparation programs? An analysis of teacher education in Louisiana. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63, 304-317.
- Gardiner, W., & Robinson, K. (2009). Paired field placements for preservice teachers: A means for collaboration. *The New Educator*, 5(1), 81–94.
- Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J. M., & Theobald, R. (2016). Does the match matter? Exploring whether student teaching experiences affect teacher effectiveness and attrition. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research. Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.
- Goldhaber, D., Liddle, S., & Theobald, R. (2013). The gateway to the profession: Assessing teacher preparation programs based on student achievement. *Economics of Education Review*, 34, 29-44.

- Grossman, P., Compton, C., Igra, D., Ronfeldt, M., Shahan, E., & Williamson, P. W. (2009a). Teaching practice: A cross professional perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 111, 2065-2100.
- Grossman, P., Hammerness, K., McDonald, M. (2009b). Redefining teaching, re-imagining teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(2), 273-289. Doi:10.1080/13540600902875340.
- Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2012). Retaining teachers: How preparation matters. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 30-34.
- Jao, L., Wiseman, D., Kobiela, M., Gonsalves, A., & Savard, A. (2018). Practice-based pedagogy in mathematics and science teaching methods: Challenges and adaptations in context. *Canadian Journal of Science and Mathematics Technology Education*, 18(2) 177-186. doi.org/10.1007/s42330-018-0009-0.
- Kazemi, E., Ghouseini, H., Cunard, A., & Turrou, A. C. (2016). Getting inside rehearsals: Insights from teacher educators to support work on complex practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(1), 18–31.
- Koedel, C., Parsons, E., Podgursky, M., & Ehlert, M. (2015). Teacher preparation programs and teacher quality: Are there real differences across programs? *Education Finance and Policy*, 4, 508-534.
- Lampert, M., Franke, M. L., Kazemi, E., Ghouseini, H. N., Turrou, A. C., Beasley, H., Crowe, K. (2013). Keeping it complex: Using rehearsals to support novice teacher learning of ambitious teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(3), 226–243.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G., (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic inquiry, *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, (30), 73-84.
- Lincove, J. A., Osborne, C., Dillon, A., & Mills, N. (2013). The politics and statistics of value-added modeling for accountability of teacher preparation programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(1), 24-38. doi: 0022487113504108.
- Luft, J., (2009). Beginning secondary science teachers in different induction programs: The first year of teaching. *International Journal of Science Education*, 31(17), 2355–2384. doi:10.1080/09500690802369367.
- Marbach-Ad, G., & McGinnis, R., (2008). To what extent do reform-prepared upper elementary and middle school science teachers maintain their beliefs and intended instructional actions as they are inducted into schools? *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 19, 157-182. doi:10.1007/s10972-007-9085-0.
- Mihaly, K., McCaffrey, D. F., Staiger, D. O., & Lockwood, J. (2013). A composite estimator of effective teaching. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2010). NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning. Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers. Retrieved from <http://caepnet.org/~media/Files/caep/accreditation-resources/blue-ribbon-panel.pdf>
- Ronfeldt, M. (2012). Where should student teachers learn to teach? Effects of field placement school characteristics on teacher retention and effectiveness. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34, 3-26.
- Ronfeldt, M., Schwartz, N., & Jacob, B. (2013). Does pre-service preparation matter? Examining an old question in new ways. *Teachers College Record*, 116(10). doi: 01614681.
- Sahakian, P. & Stockton, J., (1996). Opening doors: Teacher-Guided observations. *Educational Leadership*, 53 (6), 50-53.



- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), (2018). Report of the SREB Teacher Preparation Commission. State policies to improve teacher preparation. Retrieved from [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/state\\_policies\\_to\\_improve\\_tp\\_report\\_web.pdf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/state_policies_to_improve_tp_report_web.pdf)
- Windschitl, M., Thompson, J., Braaten, M., & Stroupe, D. (2012). Proposing a core set of instructional practices and tools for teachers of science. *Science Education*, 96, 878–903.
- Wong, H. K. (2002). Induction: The Best Form of Professional Development. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 52-55.
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 89, 1-2
- Zenkov, K. & Pytash, K., Eds. (2018). *Critical, project-based clinical experiences: Their origins and their elements. Clinical Experiences in Teacher Education: Critical, Project-Based Interventions in Diverse Classrooms*. New York, NY; Routledge.

## + APPENDIX A

Dear Colleague,

My name is (Kristin Harbour/Beth White/Stephen Thompson). I am a professor in the Instruction and Teacher Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a study. The University of South Carolina elementary methods course instructors and I are creating a summary of practices in elementary teacher preparation programs across the state of South Carolina. We are particularly interested in learning about your clinical and methods course experiences and how they support elementary teacher candidate preparation.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief phone interview to answer questions about your elementary education teacher preparation program. You will find the questions attached for your convenience. Our goal is to create a working paper that describes the components of elementary teacher preparation programs throughout the state. Ultimately, we hope to disseminate the findings on the SC TEACHER website and to inform current discussions about education reform in South Carolina. Participation will be confidential and your institution will not be named specifically. Additionally, study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (803-777-6031, [whiteel@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:whiteel@mailbox.sc.edu)).

To ensure that your institution will be included in this important summary document, please respond to this email with a few dates and times that are convenient for you. If you are unable to answer these questions, please provide contact information for the appropriate person who can answer these questions.

Thank you,

Beth White  
Clinical Instructor  
University of South Carolina  
180 Main Street  
Columbia, SC  
803-777-6031  
[whiteel@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:whiteel@mailbox.sc.edu)

## + APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions for Elementary Education Teacher Preparation Methods Course Instructors

#### GENERAL PREPARATION QUESTIONS:

- How are clinical experiences structured in your program? Please describe the structure of the clinical component of your programs.
- When do clinical experiences begin? When do they typically occur (academic year and semester)?
  - How many clinical experiences are students provided?
  - What are the key clinical experiences (courses)?

#### METHODS/SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

- How do teacher candidates gain opportunities to observe and enact targeted instructional practices?
  - How do teacher candidates receive feedback during their enactment of targeted instructional practice? Who provides this feedback?
- Do teacher candidates have guided opportunities to enact targeted instructional practices? If so, describe the structure (e.g., how are they guided, who leads the opportunities?).
- Describe key methods course assignments (e.g., teaching lessons/small groups, formative assessments, work with kids, etc.).
  - How are the assignments enacted?
  - Where are the key methods course assignments enacted?
- Where are methods courses delivered (e.g., on campus or in elementary schools)?
  - If in schools, in what ways do you interact with the school/teachers to enhance the quality of instruction?
    - How is the partnership mutually beneficial?

#### INDUCTION QUESTIONS:

- Does your university provide support for teachers during induction years?
  - In what ways? (If “Yes”)
  - Can you describe the key support components/programs?

**Table 2. Clinical Experience, Methods Course, & Induction Support Summary Data**

IHE	CLINICAL FIELD EXPERIENCES	METHODS COURSE LOCATION	SCHOOL-BASED METHODS COURSE ACTIVITY <sup>a</sup>	METHODS COURSE ASSIGNMENTS COMPLETED IN SCHOOL SETTING <sup>b</sup>	PROVIDER OF FEEDBACK <sup>c</sup>	FACULTY/ CLINICAL SITE SUPPORT <sup>d</sup>	INDUCTION TEACHER SUPPORT <sup>e</sup>
A	Freshman Year	On Campus	N/A	1/2	1/2/3	3	1
B	Sophomore Year	On Campus & School-Based	1/2	2/3	1/3	2	2
C	Junior Year	On Campus	N/A	1/3	2/3	1	1
D	Junior Year	On Campus	N/A	No Data	1/2	1	1
E	Freshman Year	On Campus & School-Based	1	1/2	1/2/3	2	1
F	Freshman Year	On Campus & School-Based	1	1/2/3	3	2	1
G	Junior Year	On Campus	N/A	1/2	1/2/3	2	1
H	No Data	On Campus	N/A	No Data	No Data	No Data	1
I	Sophomore Year	On Campus	N/A	1/2/3	3	2	1
J	Sophomore Year	On Campus	N/A	1/2	1/2	1	1
K	Sophomore Year	On Campus & School-Based	3	1/2/3	1/2/3	3	3
L	Junior Year	On Campus	Not Applicable	1/2	1	1	1

<sup>a</sup> Typical activities that are guided by IHE faculty and occur within elementary school settings. Codes: 1 – Some form of school visits/observations; 2 – Focused, short-term experiences classrooms; 3 – Focused, long-term teaching experiences in classrooms.

<sup>b</sup> Typical methods course assignments that are enacted by teacher candidates and occur within school settings. Codes: 1 – Observations, student and teacher interviews, teacher shadowing; 2 – Small group teaching enactments (cotaught or independent); 3 – Whole group teaching enactments (cotaught or independent)

<sup>c</sup> Typical personnel who provide feedback on preservice teachers' lesson enactments. Codes: 1 – School-based teacher educator, 2 – Supervisors, 3 – University-based teacher educator.

<sup>d</sup> Extent to which university faculty and school-based personnel collaborate to enhance the quality of clinical site instruction and clinical field development. Codes: 1 – No Interaction; 2 – Minimal Interaction Unsystematic, inconsistent, and/or not tied to clinical site development; 3 – High Interaction: Systematic, consistent and tied to clinical site needs/development.

<sup>e</sup> Extent to which university faculty and school-based personnel collaborate to sustain novice teachers and contribute to their professional growth during the first three years in the teaching profession. Codes: 1 – No Support; 2 – Minimal Support: Unsystematic, inconsistent, limited cross-institutional commitment, and/or not tied to issues associated with classroom teaching; 3 – High Support: Systematic, consistent cross-institutional commitment, and tied to issues associated with classroom teaching.



## ABOUT SC TEACHER

SC TEACHER provides comprehensive research, visualized data profiles, and compelling stories to communicate impact of educator pipeline policies and promote transformative practices that inform policymakers, educators, and communities who care about education scaling economic opportunity.

SC-TEACHER.ORG