Impact on P-12 Learning and Development

AY 2019-2020

The Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) does not share any student or teacher data with EPPs. In order to meet CAEP Standard 4, Kansas State University-College of Education (KSU-COE) is in the process of conducting a longitudinal case study in which we will sample from all of our programs. This study will span over three academic years, starting in 2019. The data gathered from this research serves **to "demonstrate the impact of our completers on P-12 student learning and development, classroom instruction, and schools, and to better gauge the satisfaction of our completers with the relevance and effectiveness of their preparation" (CAEP 4.1).**

Participants: All participants selected for this case study are completers in their first or second year of teaching, who are also recent graduates from one of KSU-COE's teacher licensure programs. Refer to Table 1 for participant demographics:

Table 1.

Participant Demographics		
Academic Year 2019-2020	Academic Year 2020-2021	Academic Year 2021-2022
Cohort 1 (N=25; n=23) 10 UG Elem (Traditional) 3 MAT Elem 1 English 4 Social Studies 1 Math 1 Ag 2 Modern Language (Spanish) 1 Speech/Theatre	**Follow-up with Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** ***(N= 25; n=28)*** 3 UG Elem (Traditional) 3 UG Elem (Distance) 7 MAT Elem 1 MAT English I English (TELRN) 2 Social Studies 2 Math 1 Ag 2 Music 1 Biology 1 Chemistry 1 FACS 1 Early Childhood 1 Journalism	**Follow-ups with Cohorts 1 & 2** and **Cohort 3** ***(N=25)*** 4 UG Elem (Traditional) 3 UG Elem (Distance) 5 MAT Elem 2 English 1 Ag 1 Music 2 Modern Language (French and German)) 1 Art (TELRN) 1 Earth Science 1 Physics 1 Physical Education 1 Business (TELRN) 1 Art 1 Earth Science

This participant schedule reflects a representative sample from all teacher licensure programs in KSU-COE (refer to Figure 1). It also ensures that any findings are reflective of multiple perspectives. Please note that in year 1, we had 23 participants, representing all intended programs for Cohort 1, except for BSO (n=2). This program will be captured in subsequent cohorts, along with other programs that will be introduced.

Figure 1.

Agriculture (I, 6-12)	#	Agriculture (I, 6-12 MAT)
Art (I, PreK-12)		Biology (I, 6-12)
Building Leadership (A, PreK-12)		Business (I, 6-12)
Chemistry (I, 6-12)		District Leadership (A, PreK-12)
Early Childhood Unified (I, Birth - Kdg)		Earth and Space Science (I, 6-12)
Elementary (I, K-6)	#	Elementary (I, K-6 MAT)
English for Speakers of Other Languages (A, K-6, 6-12)		English Language Arts (I, 6-12)
English Language Arts (I, 6-12 MAT)		Family & Consumer Science (I, 6-12)
Foreign Language (PreK-12 MAT)		Foreign Language-Chinese (I, PreK-12)
Foreign Language-French (I, PreK-12)		Foreign Language-German (I, PreK-12)
Foreign Language-Japanese (I, PreK-12)		Foreign Language-Spanish (I, PreK-12)
Health (I, PreK-12 combined PE)	#	High Incidence (Adaptive) (A, K-6, 6-12)
History, Government, and Social Studies (I, 6-12)	#	History, Government, and Social Studies (I, 6-12 MAT)
Journalism (I, 6-12)	#	Low Incidence (Functional) (A, K-6, 6-12)
Mathematics (I, 6-12)	#	Mathematics (I, 6-12 MAT)
Music (I, PreK-12)		Physical Education (I, PreK-12 combined)
Physics (I, 6-12)	#	Reading Specialist (A, PreK -12)
School Counselor (A, PreK-12)		Speech/Theatre (I, 6-12)

Research Questions: In order to better understand the impact of our completers **on P-12 student learning and development, classroom instruction, and schools,** Cohort 1 participants were asked to identify and reflect upon the following questions:

- How do you identify student academic success?
- What challenges do you face in helping students achieve academic success?
- What measures do you take to address said challenges?
- Describe three documents/artifacts that would demonstrate your impact on student-learning growth.

Research Timeline: The following table (Table 2) outlines the timeline for our case study:

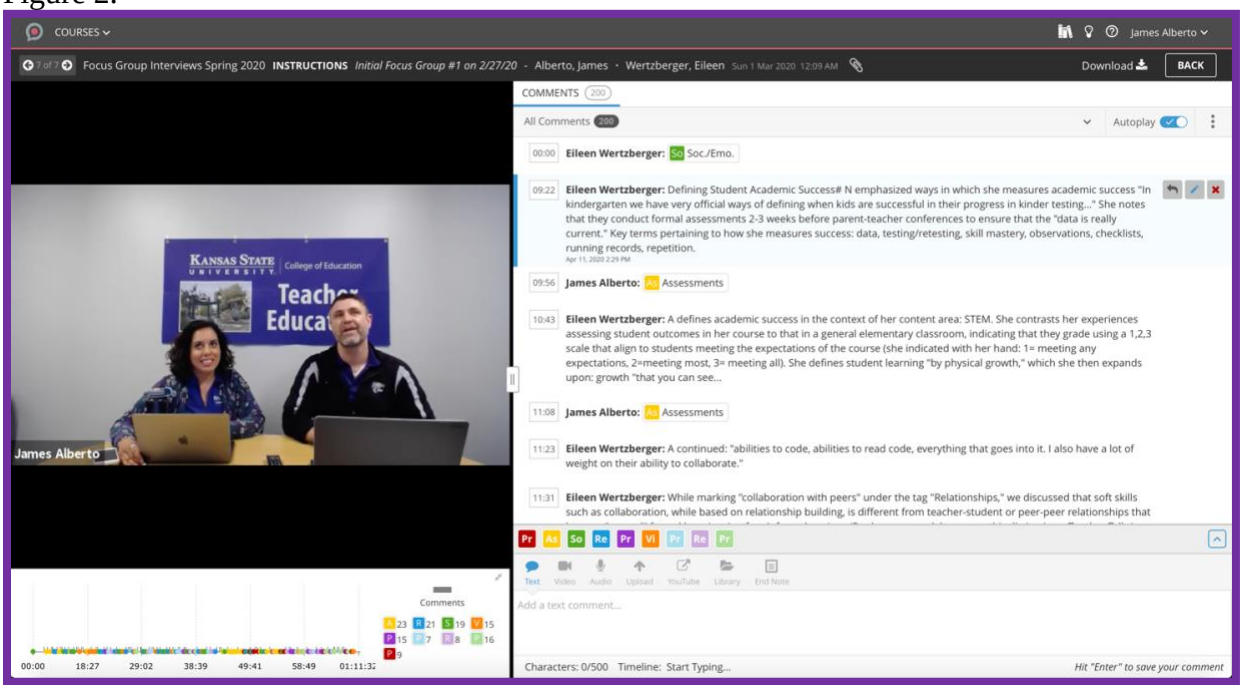
Table 2.

Research Timeline		
Academic Year 2019-2020	Academic Year 2020-2021	Academic Year 2021-2022
Fall 2019: Contact potential participants. February- March 2020: Conduct Focus Groups April-May 2021: Send Follow-up Survey February- June 2020: Data Collection and Analysis	Fall 2020: Contact potential participants. February- March 2021: Conduct Focus Groups April-May 2021: Send Follow-up Survey February- June 2021: Data Collection and Analysis	Fall 2021: Contact potential participants. February- March 2022: Conduct Focus Groups February- June 2022: Data Collection and Analysis April-May 2021: Send Follow-up Survey July-August 2022: Finalize Case Study Report

Methodology: The primary methodology for data collection were focus groups, 90 minutes in length (five in total for cohort 1) conducted virtually over Zoom. Focus group methodology was selected because of two key principles: 1) "that people are valuable sources of information about themselves" and that 2) "much can be learned from direct, extended conversations with individuals whose thoughts and opinions are critical for understanding a topic" (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 2013). We found that focus groups amplified participant voices (Liamputtong, 2015). Furthermore, because "participants are not required to answer every question," focus groups allow for more "spontaneous and genuine" responses, which in turn, increases the comfort and engagement level of participants; Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 2013).

Focus group interviews were recorded, and uploaded into GoReact, video assessment software that allowed researchers to code the data. Researchers approached the data through the lens of grounded theory, engaging in a deductive process of identifying and analyzing emerging themes and concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The following image (Figure 2) illustrates the functionality of using video platforms such as GoReact to comment and tag recurring themes. The program allowed researchers to color code emerging and recurring themes, and to see the frequency of theme emergence. Codes evolved over the course of the focus groups, as participants offered new/differing perspectives on their impact on their students' academic growth. The data was then transcribed, targeting portions for further analysis.

Figure 2.



Findings:

While their experiences as early-career completers were diverse, three key themes emerged that embody how participants defined their impact on student academic success and growth: 1) curriculum, 2) relationships, and 3) reflective practice. In order to better visualize how these themes and categories interact, please see figure 3.

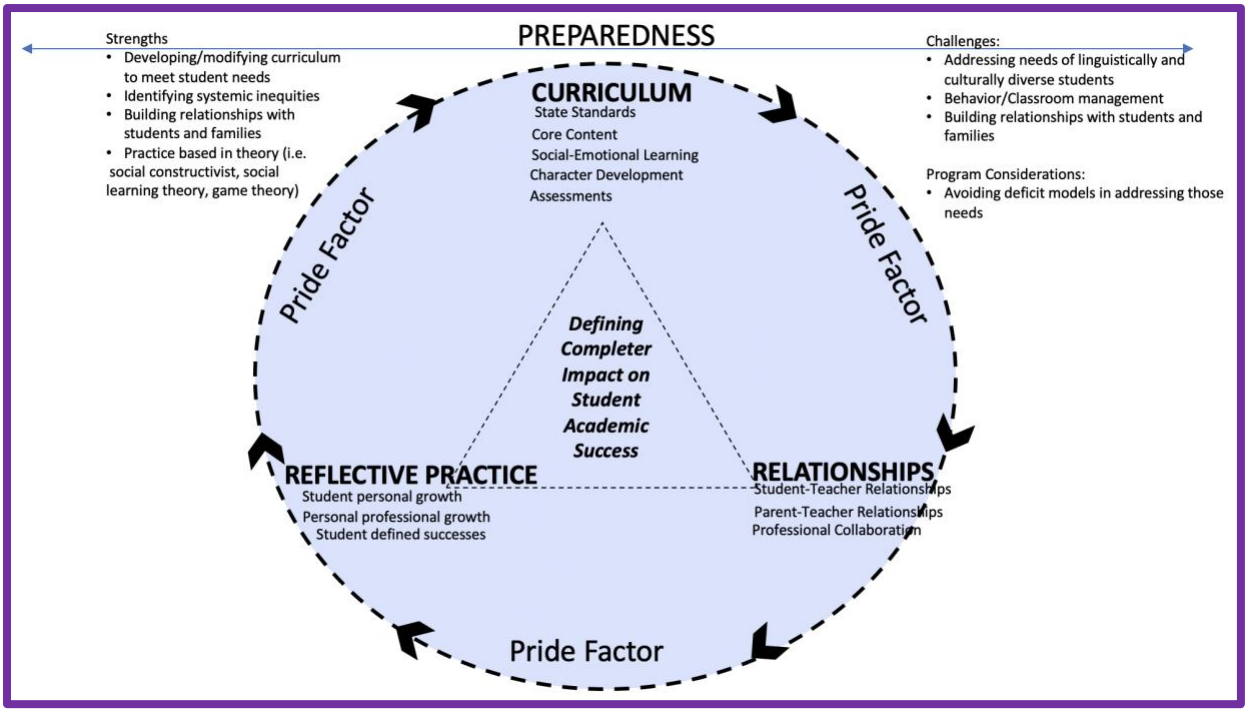


Figure 3.

While these themes have individual markers that warrant their own categorization, the dotted lines suggest their intersectionality. For example, curricular decisions were often products of extensive reflective practices, as well as considerations of how those decisions may impact relationships with stakeholders, particularly students. In the following sections, we will note how these themes emerged, and highlight the nuanced ways in which they interact.

Curriculum When defining their impact on students' academic success, participants often cited the variety of curricular decisions they had to make. They noted the degree of autonomy that they had in selecting teaching materials (which varied by teacher and district), as well as how they adapted and enacted that curriculum to meet their students' academic needs:

> *"My students (were not responding to) the curriculum, so I adapted it...you take it, and twist it a little bit so that the students have it in their hands, and it's their learning."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

When discussing addressing the needs of individual students, participants maintained the program prepared them well for the essential nature of being able to adapt and remain flexible regarding assessing the impact of curriculum and manipulating where necessary.

In addition, participants consistently noted the importance of using state standards, a variety of both state and district-level formal assessments, and teacher-created formal and informal assessments to gauge growth and adapt instruction accordingly:

> *"...(it's a balancing act between) my school, and my district, trying to be very uniform in how we define success...and meeting the individual needs of my students."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

Participants consistently noted the importance of being able to strike a balance between the disparate bodies all vying for the same things, student social, emotional, and academic growth, while often asking teachers to use competing methodologies to do so. Ultimately, participants reported it is necessary for EPP's to address the high need for preparedness in this area. Furthermore, respondents pointed to the intersectionality of these factors and a new teacher's own social and emotional health, indicating this as a potential area for teacher burnout if not properly handled.

Interestingly, participants also noted the importance of social-emotional learning as a key component of not only their curriculum, but also of how they viewed student success. Specifically, several participants highlighted the relevance of both explicitly teaching students soft skills such as collaboration, emotional regulation, etc. While not an area that is easily "tested," participants emphasized the importance of factoring social-emotional growth as a key area of impact:

"(I have) focused heavily on students' social and emotional character development."

— Recent Completer Elementary Education

There is a "need for teachers to (be prepared to) address the social and emotional needs of their students...KSU-COE prepared me for this."

— Recent Completer Elementary Education

Paraphrasing from Maslow (1943), lofty goals (or needs) cannot be realized until basic needs are first met. Participants echoed this sentiment when they repeatedly stated the importance of first looking observing students' personal needs, looking to meet those needs, then working to further the academic needs of students individually.

Relationships Another key indicator of our participants' impact on their students' academic success was relationship building. While related to social-emotional learning, participants identified the need for them to build healthy and meaningful relationships with their students as a way of impacting student engagement and achievement:

"(I) supplement (individual student needs) with games, supplement with curriculum, supplement with love" when working toward increasing student success.

— Recent Completer, Elementary Education

"If they cannot see themselves in what you are teaching, they aren't going to care to learn it.

— Recent Completer, Elementary Education

As asserted by Dewey (1902), the curriculum should come from the child (student). This requires a deep understanding of the individual student—likes, dislikes, dreams, and fears—which can be a tall order for any educator. Of course, this challenge can be compounded for a recent completer. Although participants expressed gratitude for having been prepared early for much of this work, they did reiterate the need for further preparation in this area, particularly in working with students of a reticent nature.

Albeit to a lesser degree, some participants reflected upon how they included parents into the students' learning. The participants acknowledged that effectively incorporating parents to ensure student success can be difficult and takes time to master. They expressed the deep need for building durable connections with parents in order to better understand their students' lived

realities. Also notable was the conveyed need for more pre-training of methods for navigating situations with absent or non-responsive parents.

Of particular importance, participants noted the relevance in collegial relationships in helping them grow professional, which in turn increases their efficacy in not only meeting students' needs, but also having a positive impact on their academic growth. They often noted planning and preparing materials with colleagues, as well as reaching out to colleagues to reflect on their practice:

> *"(We) are able to do more for (our) students by planning together, and sharing the responsibilities of instruction."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

Participant responses further explained a firm belief in the understanding that educators are stronger and more prepared when they face their responsibilities as a whole, a unit of trained professionals, rather than as individuals. They went on to describe how working collaboratively within the KSU-COE readied them for the necessity to build enduring relationships with coworkers in service of the pursuit for instructional excellence. Participants expressed the need for improved pre-service training on how to leverage these relationships to help foster an intent toward stronger reflective practice.

Reflective Practice Participants frequently spoke to the importance of reflective practice as a key factor in their ability to impact student academic growth and success. In addition to reflecting upon practice, as noted under *Curriculum*, our participants also engaged in reflective practice on their ability to help students achieve personal goals and milestones:

> *"I turn their struggles back on me, and (I ask myself) what other strategies can I give them?"*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

The intersectionality between individual strategies aimed at student academic growth, and students thriving socially and emotionally, was evident to participants. Interviewers came across multiple anecdotal examples where recent completers understood the connection between the two—academic growth and social/emotional well-being. Additionally, the reported actively engaging in reflective practices geared toward a finer assessment of how their own practices could impact this connection for their students.

In addition, participants often engaged in reflection pertaining to their own professional growth, looking at classroom successes and challenges as areas for improvement or of great pride:

> *"I find it to be challenging: meeting what my school demands of me as a teacher, and seeing that... these are five and six-year olds! They don't know! Why am I expecting all of this out of them? Collaboration with my coworkers has been the key to me processing and better understanding this."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

The above quote is significant, because it represents one of many examples where participants reported they frequently question systemic measures that don't align with their students' developmental and emotional needs. That is to say that, rather than viewing their students from a deficit model of why they can't reach expectations, they are inclined to push back on a system that may be more geared toward treating groups of students as a lump sum to be averaged rather than as individuals worthy of individualized instruction.

Pride Factor Interspersed throughout all of the focus group interviews, researchers noticed a "pride factor" in the personal anecdotes that participants would share. Specifically, "pride factor" is defined as key moments and observations that while not always measurable, were fulfilling to the participant. These included students of student personal growth, their own professional growth and identity, or student-defined successes and joys. The pride factor embodied all other themes, as represented by the outer circle in figure 2.

> *"I have to credit K-State for pushing me to be (an) advocate for my students...from the get-go. I was new to the team, but I was not afraid to speak up for what my students needed to be successful."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*
>
> *"KSU-COE has given me a strong sense of autonomy in my teaching, even if I am required to follow the district's plan."*
>
> *— Recent Completer, Elementary Education*

Recent completers, as new classroom teachers, face a litany of calls to meet the requests and demands of multiple stakeholders, while also being asked to 'do what is needed to meet the individual needs of students. The pressure of this type of situation can represent a major challenge for even a veteran educator, potentially leading some to exit the field. In light of this, study participants repeatedly claimed that the developed ability, learned while at KSU-COE, to comfortably and successfully practice autonomy in their curricular, behavioral, and instructional decisions is a profound source of teacher pride for them. This led to pride in their abilities overall, even in the face of significant challenge, that can potentially equate to more time spent in the field.

Completer Satisfaction In order to **better gauge the satisfaction of our completers with the relevance and effectiveness of their preparation**, researchers ended the focus groups by asking participants about what they felt were the strengths and areas of growth for the programs. These areas often correlated with what they perceived to be their level of preparedness in the classroom. While not uniformly true for all participants, these were some of the notable strengths of their preparedness stepping into their first years of teaching: develop and modify their curriculum to meet student needs; identify system inequities impacting students in their buildings; build relationships with students and families. Likewise, while not uniformly true of

for all participants, numerous participants indicated that they wish they had been better prepared to: address the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students; and manage student/classroom behavior. Some participants also indicated that they wish they had more strategies for building meaningful relationships with students and families. While preliminary in nature, this feedback offers a basis for further improving upon our programs to better prepare our completers.

References

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