



# Teacher Education and College and Career Readiness for All Students: Year 2 Study Update

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**Teacher Education and College and Career Readiness for All Students:**

**Year 2 Study Update**

**Introduction**

While college and career readiness (or postsecondary readiness) has grown in favor as an educational goal for secondary students via schools and encouraged by states and economic partners (Conley, 2005, 2010; EPIC, 2009; McCaughey & Venezia, 2015; Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; ), there are still large achievement gaps among student populations, which many view as an access gap, i.e., access to a healthy postsecondary readiness system and climate (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Camera, 2015; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2012; McClafferty Jansky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2010; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Novice teachers graduate teacher education programs expected to teach content and to reach their students with “marketable skills” for postsecondary opportunities.

Thus, college and career readiness is an important topic for teacher educators to tackle, and this study considers ways to do so, via a focus on cohorts of students in a teacher education program as they transition into their first teaching jobs. This paper is meant to be read as a study update to the first white paper on the second academic year of data collection (Fall 2015-Spring 2016) from a three-year qualitative longitudinal study. The literature and focus of the work have not changed from the original study design (Hungerford-Kresser, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. In year two, I focused on the continuation of the themes from year one. In particular, I looked at the ways these themes manifested themselves in the data collected in the student teaching semester and in novice teachers’ classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see first white paper for details and background to the study not contained in this paper.

### **Methods**

Study implementation and data collection are ongoing. For this three-year longitudinal study, I collect data in one of my courses, a methods class, meant to teach pre-service teachers how to teach middle school and high school English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR, grades 7-12). Data are also collected in the student teaching semester that follows the methods course. Finally, I collect data on select participants as they enter their first classrooms (induction years). The first two years of data in this analysis included: the methods course during two Fall semesters (2014, 2015), two Spring student teaching semesters (2015, 2016), and the first year of teaching for two participants (Academic Year 2015-2016).

This is a qualitative study—a combination of action research methods (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Somekh, 2009, 2006) and case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Action research methodology is fluid, not fixed, and allows me to remain critical, adjusting in appropriate ways for the task at hand (Somekh, 2006). I want to be reflexive and reflective as a practitioner, continually returning to data and using it to transform my own practice while conducting the study, rather than waiting until the study's end to reflect and analyze (Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins, Amaro-Jimenez, 2013; Somekh, 2009, 2006). Case study is best used with phenomena that cannot be extricated from context (Stake, 1995), like the data in this study. I consider the methods class to be a case, each of the student teaching participants as a case, and each novice teacher as a case. I am investigating themes found across cases, but also those unique to individual cases (Stake, 1995). This study offers the opportunity to build transferable knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1984) that can impact other programs, the institution, and the field.

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

### **Phases of Research**

Phase I involved collecting data from the methods class in Fall 2014, and two student teachers (Alejandra and Stephanie) headed immediately into student teaching in the Spring 2015. Phase II involved a second semester of data collection in the methods class (Fall 2015), along with collecting data from five participants during student teaching (Spring 2016). The methods class was adapted based on last year's feedback, and the adaptations were a primary focus in data collection and analysis. I also collected data from the two previous participants in their first year of teaching. This included multiple observations of their teaching coupled with interviews after each observation (10 in total), along with access to lesson plans for the 10+ lessons I saw, as well as the lessons taught when I was not in attendance. Phase III will involve a third semester of studying the methods course and its variations/improvements, surveying students from the methods course as they enter student teaching, following as many of the former student teachers into their classroom as possible, and continuing the work with Alejandra and Stephanie in their second full year of teaching. A detailed description of the update methods follows.

### **Phase I & II Participants: Methods Class**

Of the 25 students enrolled (two Fall semesters, 2014, 2015), there were 20 females and 5 males. Of the 25 females, nine identified as Latina/o or Hispanic, and one as African American. All male students were white. 24 students participated in the questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course. From the questionnaire data, 10 students transferred to Urban State University (USU, a pseudonym) from a junior college, and 13 started their postsecondary educations at USU, with only two having first been at

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

another four-year institution in the state. The majority graduated from public, suburban high schools. When asked if they considered themselves “college-ready” upon arriving at USU, 12 responded yes, six said no, and six gave a combination response (yes/no, i.e., “in some areas yes, in some areas no”). 24 of those who completed the questionnaire were juniors or seniors studying English Education. Students need a cumulative 3.0 GPA to be admitted to the College of Education. One student in Fall 2014 was a graduate student studying second language teaching who opted to take the course as an elective.

### **Phase I & II Participants: Student Teaching**

In addition to Alejandra and Stephanie in Spring 2015, I followed five student teachers (Corey, Brenda, Carolina, Courtney, and Callie; all names are pseudonyms) from the previous semester into their student teaching placements in Spring 2016. I saw four of the participants six times each (three in their junior high/middle school placement, and three in their high school placement), and one participant just three times in her junior high placement. Four of the participants were female, with one identifying as Latina, and the other participant was a white male.

Each student teacher participant had two student teaching placements, one at a local junior high/middle school and one at a high school. They spent half of their student teaching experience in each. The demographics of the student teaching placements for Spring 2015 can be found in Table 1. Table 2 contains the enrollment demographics for the student teaching placements during Spring 2016.

**TABLE 1 Enrollment Demographics at Student Teaching Placements (Spring 2015)**

| <b>Student Teaching</b> | <b>Student Total</b> | <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | <b>African American</b> | <b>Hispanic</b> | <b>White</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

|                  |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Alejandra</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| High School      | 2843  | 51.9% | 16.3% | 39.8% | 37%   | 6.9%  |
| Junior High      | 722   | 64.1% | 18.4% | 46.8% | 28.8% | 6%    |
| <b>Stephanie</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| High School      | 2,333 | 17.3% | 18.3% | 19%   | 52.6% | 10.1% |
| Middle School    | 872   | 27.4% | 18.8% | 20.5% | 46.4% | 14.3% |

**TABLE 2 Enrollment Demographics at Student Teaching Placements (Spring 2016)**

| <b>Student Teaching</b> | <b>Student Total</b> | <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | <b>African American</b> | <b>Hispanic</b> | <b>White</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Corey</b>            |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| High School             | 2085                 | 27.1%                             | 32%                     | 25.5%           | 30.2%        | 12.3%        |
| Middle School           | 855                  | 55%                               | 34.6%                   | 24.7%           | 28.8%        | 11.9%        |
| <b>Brenda</b>           |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| High School             | 1656                 | 45.5%                             | 46.5%                   | 25.2%           | 15%          | 13.3%        |
| Middle School           | 929                  | 36.3%                             | 17.4%                   | 32.7%           | 41.2%        | 8.7%         |
| <b>Carolina</b>         |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| High School             | 2918                 | 55.8%                             | 33%                     | 36%             | 24.6%        | 6.4%         |
| Junior High             | 792                  | 37.4%                             | 17.3%                   | 18.2%           | 54.9%        | 9.6%         |
| <b>Courtney</b>         |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| High School             | 3361                 | 25.5%                             | 14.3%                   | 17.8%           | 57.4%        | 10.5%        |
| Junior High             | 1091                 | 94.2%                             | 13.1%                   | 77.6%           | 5.3%         | 4%           |
| <b>Callie</b>           |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| Junior High             | 797                  | 55.1%                             | 14.1%                   | 33.9%           | 48.1%        | 3.9%         |

### **Phase II Participants & Setting: Novice Teachers**

I continued following Alejandra and Stephanie into their first year of teaching. Descriptions of the two novice teachers and a brief synopsis of their educational backgrounds can be found in the original white paper from the study (Hungerford-Kresser, 2016). Alejandra began teaching at the high school she graduated from, in an English Department primarily populated by her former teacher. The school's principal was hers in high school as well. Stephanie began teaching at her middle school from her student teaching placement when her cooperating teacher retired. Both women secured

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

jobs by June following their senior year in college. The enrollment demographics of their campuses can be found in Table 3.

**TABLE 3 Enrollment Demographics in First Teaching Job After Graduation**

| <b>1<sup>st</sup> Year Teaching</b> | <b>Student Total</b> | <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | <b>African American</b> | <b>Hispanic</b> | <b>White</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Alejandra</b>                    |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| High School                         | 743                  | 69%                               | 12.1%                   | 57.3%           | 26.9%        | 9.7%         |
| <b>Stephanie</b>                    |                      |                                   |                         |                 |              |              |
| Middle School                       | 872                  | 27.4%                             | 18.8%                   | 20.5%           | 46.4%        | 14.3%        |

### **Setting**

USU is in a large metropolitan area in the southwest. In 2014-15, student enrollment was 34,868. The six-year graduation rate hovers at approximately 45%. Ranked fifth nationally in undergraduate diversity, 25.4% of the student body is Hispanic, which gives the institution a designation as an HSI, though in the past we had already obtained our Minority Serving Institution (MSI) designation. At the same time, in 2014-15, an estimated 43% were eligible for Pell grants and 29% were first generation college students.

### **Data Sources**

Over the course of the academic year, I collected a variety of data from varied sources. Participants in the methods class (each Fall semester, 2014, 2015) were given open-ended questionnaires via Survey Monkey about college and career readiness and the English Language Arts at both the beginning and end of the semester. All responses were anonymous, and I received 50 responses—half at the start and half at the completion of the semester. Some questions repeated and I asked them to try and articulate what changed their responses over the course of the semester. I also collected all their

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

classroom work (i.e., reader responses, Blackboard discussions, lesson plans, unit plans, Thinking Journals, Writer's Notebooks).

In student teaching (Spring semester), I collected all their assignments (i.e., weekly reflections, lesson plans, unit plans, teacher work sample). At the same time, I observed their teaching regularly (six times throughout the semester, in two different placements) followed by a meeting with a recorded interview. As well as reviewing their teaching in interviews, I tried to engage them in continued discussions about college and career readiness. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, in their entirety for analysis. I added this data to the data on Alejandra and Stephanie from the previous year (six visits for Alejandra and eight visits for Stephanie). I kept a research journal throughout the project in which I wrote analytic memos about emerging themes, ongoing questions, and ideas for reconfiguring the class or assignments the following academic year (Guba & Lincoln, 1984; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Mertens, 2005). I also filled out our college issued observation forms at each visit. During the 2015-16 school year, I visited Stephanie and Alejandra each five times in their new teaching jobs. I took observation notes, and then debriefed and recorded interviews with the women after each observation. Often, I stayed for multiple class periods to get a better idea of their teaching needs and the patterns in classroom composition. We discussed their teaching, goals, and college and career readiness. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. At the same time, I kept field notes and a research journal, making use of reflective memos as a means of impacting my teaching and curriculum alignment in the program, as well as furthering my research.

### **Data Analysis**

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I analyzed data in three waves. First, I coded the data from the methods class. I observed the questionnaires and highlighted common themes between the beginning of the semester questionnaire and the end of the semester questionnaire. I also highlighted outliers and looked for any apparent changes or disconnection from the course curriculum. Second, I coded all the interview transcripts from the student teaching semester in the same way. I found common themes and looked for outliers and apparent disconnect from curriculum or my goals as a facilitator. I compared to the first round of coding and tried to combine codes into related themes where possible. Third, as a means of triangulation, I analyzed various artifacts—student assignments, reflections, lesson plans and other key assignments, along with my own research journal, and looked for similar themes and codes or connections to any outliers. I highlighted preliminary themes are thus based on codes I saw across cases and context in the first year of data collection. Once Phase II ended, I followed the same process with year two data. I then charted where the preliminary findings were solidified in Phase II and any new themes that emerged as new findings. These will be used to complete analysis in Phase III, alongside the data collected in the third year. For this study update, I collected all of the data above, but for analysis I focused on the ways the themes from Phase I manifested themselves in the first year of teaching for Alejandra and Stephanie.

### **Findings and Discussion**

For Phase II of data collection and analysis, one of my key research questions was: Once in the classroom, how do novice teachers incorporate the themes of postsecondary readiness highlighted during Phase I of the study, if at all? While the

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

findings are less preliminary in the second year of the study, I will still need the third year of data and the longitudinal analysis to uncover my final themes and implications. The following were themes uncovered in Phase I (Hungerford-Kresser, 2016), and solidified or expanded on by data in Phase II. I have provided a few data excerpts to illustrate the points, but these are emblematic of prominent thematic threads in the Phase II data.

### **College and Career Readiness as a Partnership**

One of the themes that emerged in Phase I was that participants began to see themselves as future partners helping their students graduate college and become career ready. In other words, “college and career ready” was not something a student was or was not, but a mutual goal that could be encouraged and fostered via an ELAR teacher in the classroom. This concept solidified in student teaching and remained a theme throughout the first year of teaching for Stephanie and Alejandra. From the time they were in methods, throughout student teaching, into their first year in the classroom, both women focused on the importance of collaborative learning to a definition of college and career readiness.

Collaboration remained a key element in fostering college and career readiness among their students; they recognized a need for their students to be able to listen to others and disagree appropriately. This partnership between teacher and student to teach those marketable or “soft” skills also became a partnership for fostering learning among students within their classes, which they felt was vital to the classroom community. They both mentioned collaboration in their first interviews during the first month of school.

Stephanie explained:

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

I feel like the biggest key we hit on for being college-ready is collaboration...When you think of collaboration you think, 'Okay working together,' but it's not necessarily just working together. My mission when we get together is not working together, it's building on each other. So you say one idea, now I want you to take it a step further and elaborate on it, then I want you to go even further and elaborate more...I focus a lot on improvement...So it's not just collaboration, it's more like, I don't know, them teaching each other. I can't find the word, but it's them teaching each other." (Stephanie Interview, October 2015)

In fact, she reminded me, based on her own issues learning these skills in college classrooms that she believed, "It's a disability to not be able to hear others' opinions and at least consider them, I think" (Stephanie Interview, January 2016). Alejandra also argued early on that the skills they were encouraging in their students were based on their own understandings as young teachers, recent college graduates: "As a teacher, I'm always putting myself in the position of, 'I was just in your shoes guys, you will be in the shoes I was just in in college,' and that's a real benefit to them. They see that as a good thing, like you were just in college, you know what it's like" (Interview, September 2015), and that these testimonials were important to helping students understand that college was about more than reading and writing.

At the same time, because both women deemed it important to a college-ready classroom, it stayed at the forefront of their goals, and ultimately was something with which they found success. When I asked Stephanie about her successes at the end of her first year, she highlighted wanting her students to learn "how to be a contributing partner... because I wanted them to have to compromise and communicate. So they

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

learned to adjust to circumstances that made them uncomfortable, or foreign, and learn how to be accountable and reliable... it teaches them responsibility” (Interview, April 2016). Alejandra agreed in a Spring semester interview:

They’ve learned... collaborative learning, so I feel like they finally know, ‘Okay, when I tell you to discuss this with a partner, this is the topic I want to be hearing about.’ And I like the conversations I hear... surviving, I mean either whether it’s career-wise or college-wise, I mean if you don’t find a good support group or you’re not with your colleagues, you’re not on a team, I mean there isn’t a situation where you’re not going to have to work with other people, so make the best of the situation. I feel like that’s the point I have driven home. (Interview, April 2016).

Both could point to collaboration as key goal and a key success at the end of their first year of teaching (“I wanted them to compromise and communicate”; “I feel like they finally know...”) and the ways in which collaboration connects to postsecondary readiness.

### **The English Language Arts as a Vehicle for College Readiness**

In Phase I, participants began to view ELAR is a vehicle for college readiness, and began to understand the ways in which certain strategies in their classrooms promote college and career readiness. Via methods and throughout student teaching, they opted to practice, and adopt certain strategies for fostering postsecondary readiness as part of the teaching of their discipline. They managed to use a variety of strategies successfully over the course of their first year, including: Writers Notebooks, Quickwrites, Socratic Seminar, Philosophical Chairs, Cornell Notes, and One-Pagers (Field Notes, September

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

2015; April 2016). They could attach these strategies to definitions of postsecondary readiness they had built over the course of their training.

For example, Alejandra talked about Cornell Notes in her very first month of teaching: “We’ve been doing Cornell Notes... They need to learn how to take notes for lecture-style learning or lecture-style teaching... Then in college they’re not as lost. Cornell Notes help you make sense of information in a way that the brain can go back and test itself and make sure you have the depth of knowledge that you need for a specific topic” (Interview, September 2015). This was admittedly a struggle for her to incorporate, but a school-wide college and career readiness effort helped her keep adjusting the strategy to suit her content, and this was a theme at Stephanie’s school as well. Both women benefitted from a campus climate that encouraged college and career readiness, mainly through being AVID campuses (Mehan, Hubbard, Villanueva, & Lintz, 1996), and they could build off student knowledge of strategies and organizational skills. Observing Stephanie’s class, she introduced a One-Pager to her students to summarize their reading. Students began raising their hands and telling her the names of teachers and classes where they had already done One-Pagers before (Field Notes, September 2015). She was able to build on this prior knowledge and the few students who were unfamiliar were able to help those who were not.

This school-wide commitment to college and career readiness helped encourage these new teachers to master the ways in which their ELAR classrooms could be vehicles for college and career readiness, particularly through strategy instruction. While this study concerned itself with what was happening in these classrooms with these novice teachers, it should be underscored that both women referenced their campus-wide AVID

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

initiatives in every single interview. They were encouraged to try out strategies in their classrooms and they often did—AVID strategies they learned first in undergraduate courses and could practice during student teaching.

### **Adaptability, Metacognition & College-ready Classrooms**

The idea of a student needing to be adaptable and able to use metacognitive strategies was a part of the definition of college and career readiness that developed throughout coursework at USU. These women saw these attributes as important in the methods semester, and the concepts became more solidified throughout student teaching (Hungerford-Kresser, 2016). As they moved into their teaching assignments, they consistently talked about helping their students be adaptable in a variety of learning contexts, and helping them be more metacognitive learners in order to prepare them for postsecondary pathways (Interviews September 2015, January 2016, February 2016, April 2016) However, in Phase II, this idea of being metacognitive and adaptable took a turn when both women began talking frequently about reflection as a tool to make them better teachers—to help them grow in their profession.

They consistently mentioned reflection as necessary, particularly as a metacognitive strategy for teaching. However, neither felt she was doing a good job it, and they continued to bring it up as a goal. For example, Alejandra said, “Another thing I don’t feel like I’m doing a good job on is reflecting. Like I’m not able to find the time to sit down and reflect. And I was going through one of my notebooks from your class the other day, and I was like, you know what, I’m not really doing this. This would probably be really helpful” (Interview, February 2016). However, both starting practicing and trying to develop tools. When I would arrive for interviews, they would have notes and

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

charts about lessons they wanted to talk about, questions they had for me, areas of growth or concern, and this was all completely unprompted by me (e.g., Field Notes, April 2016, May 2016; Stephanie Interview, May 2016, Alejandra Interview, May 2016). Stephanie ended the year with this comment:

And that's something next year. I plan on getting a journal and reflecting— forcing myself to do it, because honestly it's not always the funnest thing to sit and reflect and improve this and sometimes it's exhausting... So that's another goal of mine next year to be in a constant state of reflection, state of just thinking back on did this benefit? And if so, how? And what other concepts and skills can they take away from this and take with them out in the workforce or into higher education?" (Interview, May 2016).

In her end of the year interview, Alejandra pulled out a notebook and stated: "I made a chart of things that were difficult, things that went well, and then things I want to do, experiment more with next year, just to try things out, put things in my toolbox so I have stuff to pull out" (Interview, May 2016). Both recognized the importance of metacognition in their students' lives as well as their own. It is encouraging to see novice teachers focused on building reflective practice, just as they are teaching their students to be more reflective about their own learning.

### **Conclusion**

This study indicates that discipline-centered instruction (in this case, ELAR), combined with mentoring opportunities, carefully threaded with the theme of college and career readiness, can impact the ways novice teachers view opportunities for teaching and learning in their classrooms. Additionally, data continue to suggest that an intentional

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

focus on strategy implementation and ongoing reflection helped participants develop an understanding of ELAR as central to college and career readiness and position themselves as able to impact future students' postsecondary pathways. These findings are programmatically encouraging, offering insight into possibilities for course curriculum and methods of mentorship for student teachers and novice teachers.

The first step in mentoring our future and novice teachers is exposing them to the idea that all students should be given opportunities that allow them to pursue a variety of postsecondary pathways (Conley, 2010, 2005; McCaughy & Venezia, 2015). No pathway should be off limits, and gauging how these future teachers respond and wrestle with this concept before and upon entering the profession offer important data for the field of teacher education. Similarly, looking at their classrooms (once they leave *our* classrooms) as sites of opportunity to foster postsecondary readiness for students can yield important data on how to transform our programs and mentoring schedules to help them better meet their students' needs.

### **Next Steps**

As a longitudinal project, this research is currently in its third and final phase. With three semesters of methods data, two semesters of student teaching observations, and two academic years of novice teacher observations, there will be myriad data to analyze and (re)analyze upon the study's completion. I look forward to answering the questions that led to the original study plan and design: How do I begin the conversation about college and career readiness with future teachers, both complicating and making the concept more concrete? Specifically, how can I help future English Language Arts teachers begin to grapple with an individual perspective on college and career ready

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

classrooms and give them strategies to best meet the needs of their future students? And finally, how do pre-service and novice teachers incorporate or distance themselves from these ideas in the classroom? I believe the answers will offer insight into programmatic and mentoring changes for university-based teacher education courses and the field of teacher education and the ways in which it connects to postsecondary readiness.

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