

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN?
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS
WHO ARE ALUMNI OF A
GROW YOUR OWN TEACHERS PROGRAM

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Doctor of Education

By

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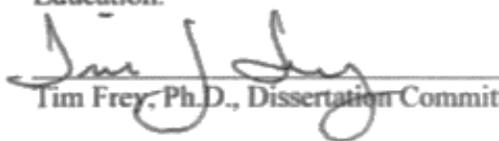
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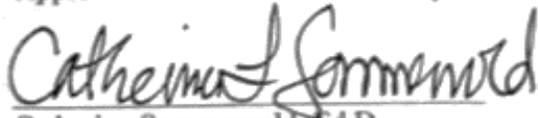
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WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF
COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ARE ALUMNI OF A GROW YOUR OWN TEACHERS
PROGRAM

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Doane University, 2018

Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Sunderman

Each year schools across the United States are feeling the teacher shortage and struggling to recruit and retain teachers. Specific recruitment needs exist in shortage areas, urban and rural settings, and in recruiting teachers for diversity. This study was a follow up with college students who are alumni of a grow your own teachers (GYOT) program called Education Academy in Meadow Lane Central Schools (MLCS) located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in a Midwestern state. The research used a narrative inquiry approach seeking themes through stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Data was collected through 9, semi-structured, individual interviews lasting 90-120 minutes each, with alumni representing college first years through seniors, attending a variety of colleges, and studying multiple areas of education. Interviews were transcribed and coded with 6 major themes and 30 total subthemes emerging in detail with supporting information included from each participant focusing on what can be learned from exploring the stories and advice of these alumni in order to inform decisions. This research was guided by one central question: How do college education majors, who are alumni of a high school GYOT course, describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their decision to pursue a career in education and desire to return home to serve their communities? Findings included a clear understanding that adults, usually teachers,

inspire students to pursue education; internships and other Education Academy activities were highly beneficial in preparing and increasing the confidence of students before they went on to college; the value of mentors for aspiring teachers as well as first year teachers; and detailed recommendations for school districts to include in a GYOT program, as well as ways to follow up and recruit alumni back to the school district.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband Sam, my daughter Halle Jordon, and my son Liam Matthew. I hope I have shown you that anything is possible through education and hard work, Halle and Liam. Keep your dreams big, my loves!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We all have emotional triggers that remind us of the places we call home. The places where we have roots and ties to the past hold memories. “Who Says You Can’t Go Home?” The 2004 song written by Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora reflects upon youth trying to get away from home but in looking back, finding that home brings something we cannot replace. The lyrics refer to having experienced much and being all around the world, leaving only one place left to go . . . home, where you are always welcome, where you are always known, and where they call you one of their own (Bon Jovi VEVO, 2009). When we reflect upon our youth, these triggers often are due to people and experiences that made lasting impressions upon our lives.

Each year schools across the United States are feeling the teacher shortage and struggling to recruit and retain teachers (Heim, 2014; Merrow, 1999). Specific recruitment needs exist in shortage areas, urban and rural settings, and in recruiting teachers for diversity. In Meadow Lane Central Schools, a high school Education Academy was designed to give students a closer look and hands on experiences of a career in education. Alumni are familiar with many people, systems, and procedures so when they have returned as teachers, principals have usually found them to be impressive, well-prepared educators, as evidenced by several Grow Your Own Teachers (GYOT) programs cited in the literature review of this study. What can we learn from exploring the chronologies of pivotal moments, experiences, influences, and advice of these alumni in order to make informed decisions and be prepared to welcome alumni back home to teach? This research explores the stories of nine alumni of Education Academy.

Before one can understand the research, it may be important to have an understanding of why I wished to study this topic more than any other for my dissertation. Meadow Lane Central Schools is a pseudonym chosen as a nod to the place that I call home, where I lived from birth until college. While life did not lead me back home to teach, the idea is not outside of the realm for me and I did stay in my home state to pursue a career in education. Home is also the place where I was influenced by my earliest and best teacher, my mom, an elementary teacher for 28 years. It was also the influences of other teachers, activity sponsors, and coaches which prompted me to study education in college.

Now, I have been an educator for eighteen years with varied experiences as a special education teacher, high school administrator, and human resources administrator. In each role I have had experiences in one way or another in recruiting, hiring, training, mentoring, evaluating, and retaining new staff members. My roles have allowed me to help promote the field of education at the elementary, middle, and high school level and work with college students who are pursuing degrees in education during their practicum and student teaching experiences.

I serve in a professional capacity as a member of a consortium of human resources personnel in the Greater Meadow Lane metropolitan area and as a member of my state, regional, and national professional organizations. I have been a presenter at the American Association for School Personnel Administrators National Convention with a presentation focusing on hiring new staff and building relationships during their first year. All my roads tend to lead to building relationships that will allow our school district to hire and retain great teachers.

I have strong beliefs that relationships with the community in which teachers work can lead to job satisfaction and longevity. I understand the value of hands-on experiences in high school coursework such as internships. MLCS offers a variety of these authentic, academy experiences. As a high school assistant principal, I had the chance to observe the Education Academy class several times a year as well as do mock interviews with the students at the end of each year. The learning that I saw when students were actively engaged in such real-life experiences, was a powerful contributor to their learning and personal growth. I have spoken with students who were transformed through the connections made with teachers, coaches, as well as teacher mentors in Education Academy. I have also talked with several who found their inspiration in volunteer work outside of school. All of these observations and discussions have contributed to my interest in research in the area of GYOT.

In leaving high school administration for district level administration, one way I have stayed in touch with students is through observations, class presentations, and connections made with them through Education Academy. In my role in Human Resources, I am invited in by the teachers to engage with the students while they are in the high school program by presenting to both during the Year 1 class and Year 2 class. I have conversations with them and hear about their current learnings, internships, future aspirations, and the outlook on education topics. I also still take part in the mock interviews at the conclusion of their junior year. Their teachers instruct and lead the class and I am just one of the many practitioners the students work with throughout Education Academy. I have also had the opportunity to stay in touch with several alumni as they have gone to college, then entered the teaching profession. Conversations during high

school and after have helped me to see the power of this culminating experience where they are taking many life lessons and putting them to test during high school in Education Academy. Many talk about using that opportunity to explore a possible career and several shared their desire to return home after becoming a teacher. Conversations with alumni of Education Academy have left me with unanswered questions about how we can fully understand the motivation to enter the teaching profession, how prepared Education Academy students are for college education coursework, and if we can be even more strategic in solving problems in education and recruiting great teachers. This, in turn, inspired this research.

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report on teacher turnover in 2015, 30% of teachers leave the field within the first five years. That number is significantly less when new teachers are mentored as the number leaving reduces to 14% (Alvarez, 2017). What if that mentoring relationship started much earlier than the first year of teaching? Could school districts work to grow youth into curious future educators by exploring a teaching career long before even setting foot on the job? What collection of experiences encourage talented youth to pursue a career in education? Which relationships influence students the most in career and life decisions? Could the sense of community and purpose fostered through the formative years encourage students to return home following college to teach the next generation? What can districts learn by asking questions and following up with alumni who are now in college and studying to become teachers?

This research involved a purposeful sampling of college students majoring in the field of education. Each is a recent alumnus of the same Midwestern suburban school district, referred to in this research by the pseudonym, Meadow Lane Central Schools (MLCS). Participants have graduated from high school in the past two to three years. Participants took part in career academy courses, referred to in this research as Education Academy, during junior and senior years of high school in MLCS. Throughout their experiences in Education Academy, participants:

- mentored youth in the district's elementary schools,
- shadowed certified tenured school district teachers,
- studied an introduction to careers in education,
- heard presentations from school district professionals from the building level through the district level, and
- participated in a capstone internship in an area of education they hope to pursue as a career someday.

This study followed up with alumni of Education Academy in MLCS and sought to gain more information about experiences and influences that have continued to impact them in their educational studies and future plans. Through a narrative inquiry approach, the stories and experiences of these alumni help to glean meaning from the research.

Teacher Influence and Shortage

Class size, curriculum, family involvement, school district budget, and culture all are strong influences on student achievement, but none have as large an impact on eventual student success as does the classroom teacher (Stronge & Tucker, 2000). Hiring quality teachers is the most important job leaders in schools face each year. "The bottom

line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school. And it is the teacher who creates a good classroom” (Wong, 2013).

The teacher shortage remains a crucial reason that school districts must make quality hiring decisions. Across the U.S., approximately 60,000 classrooms were without teachers last year resulting in shifts needing to be made throughout schools to provide coverage for all students. Among contributions to the shortage is the 35% decline since 2009 of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Heim, 2014).

Besides the shortage of future teachers in teacher education programs in post-secondary, the deck is stacked against schools in yet another way. Many who become teachers do not stay long. An estimated 30% leave the field within five years; in cities, the exit rate is 50% (Merrow, 1999). Adequate training and support for beginning teachers are called upon as much needed remedies to fix the retention problem.

Not only are outside factors such as the national teacher shortage facing school districts, internally, districts also face major budget shortfalls. With 80-85% of a districts’ overall budget for personnel, hiring and retaining qualified teachers becomes even more paramount (Ellerson, 2013). Furthermore, teachers in the United States leaving the industry each year cost an estimated \$2.2 billion in recruiting, hiring, and training. School leaders are not typically astute to seeing the costs created by employee turnover which would include training employees, hiring costs, onboarding personnel, and mentoring costs (Ingersoll, 2003). School districts must work to make a lasting investment in teachers as it may result in employees who stay.

Grow Your Own Teachers Programs

In a world where it is difficult to find and retain quality educators, it makes a great deal of sense that districts turn to grow your own teachers (GYOT) programs and begin to focus on tactics to recruit young people into the profession through experiences at a much earlier age. A review of literature in the areas of existing work around GYOT showed a variety of programs used across the United States in rural and suburban areas. Programs exist to help districts dealing with specific areas of shortage and to give students hands on career exploration experiences (Scherer, 2003).

Existing programs also seek to recruit for diversity in staffing teaching jobs. A 2015 report compiled for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that 50% of the students in the U.S. are minority an increase of 15% since 1995. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the teachers in the U.S. were white in the most recent report by NCES. With racial diversity growing in schools at a rate of nearly 1% each year, education experts are turning to hiring more teachers of color as one way to help students connect in school and decrease the achievement gap (McGuire, 2015).

Just as urban districts in the United States face hiring shortages, so do their rural counterparts. Many rural schools have teaching staffs that are seasoned and nearing retirement (Cummings, 2015). With this significant turnover looming, districts worry about how they will lure younger teachers to their towns when so many have greater interests in opportunities, both socially and career-wise, that large cities can give.

Cassville R-IV in Missouri, uses a GYOT approach and has experienced success with hiring alumni who have pursued degrees in education. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the teachers are alumni (Potter, 2015).

GYOT programs exist to solve a variety of problems including specific areas of shortage such as the need for bilingual educators, special educators, and teachers in math, science, and vocational trades. Research on the topic reveals a large variety in ways that GYOT programs are used throughout the United States to address shortage issues facing school districts (Alvarez, 2017; Illinois State Board of Education; Mahan, 2010). What the research does not show in depth is how college students who are graduates of GYOT programs and pursuing degrees in education have been influenced by their experiences. It would be beneficial to know themes surrounding experiences and future plans of these college students, as well as to know how these high school GYOT programs help college students. It is also crucial to know how relationships and experiences as a whole in their hometowns have impacted these college students. Alumni are a key source to provide feedback and recommendations to school districts of how alumni may better be supported if they are to return home to teach one day.

Research is also lacking on the particular GYOT program in question for this study in MLCS. It is not unique for me to refer to the students and teachers of the MLCS Education Academy while I am visiting with other educators in our Midwestern state and around the country about these issues which are affecting us all. Quite often, I am asked to share more about the program, the mission, the syllabus, and logistics so that others may try and put something similar into place. One major question I am asked is, “Does your district do a follow up with the students after high school?” While an exit survey is done at the time of high school graduation, a formal follow-up study has not been conducted. A follow up study is needed regularly to be certain that MLCS is on track to

give students the best experience possible while also adjusting procedure based on this feedback.

Research around GYOT specifically calls for further study in the area of creating a sense of belonging to and working for the good of the community from where teachers grew up. There is also a deficiency in the current literature of the causes and effects of predictors of success to improve the already promising grow-your-own programs (Mahan, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore college students' stories about their experiences and influences throughout K-12 education including participation in a "grow your own" teacher program while in high school. Participants were students who are alumni of the Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy program, having taken part as juniors and seniors in high school. Data was collected through semi-structured 90-120 minute interviews conducted individually, in person with 9 participants. The research used a narrative inquiry approach seeking themes through stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Participants were also asked to share and discuss any memory artifacts—photos, books, pieces of writing or art, that causes them to reflect upon the decision to pursue a career in education.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following terms were used to create a general understanding of the topic.

Education Academy was used to describe a specific two-year course taken in high school meant to explore the field of education through coursework, reflection,

observation, mentoring, and internship. Courses are titled Education Academy Year 1 and Education Academy Year 2. The courses are offered to juniors and seniors in MLCS and involves an application to be accepted into the program. Table 2 includes specific items from the syllabi of Education Academy (Hermsen, 2016).

Academies are an extension of the high school curriculum course offerings in MLCS which provide students with authentic, hands on learning experiences exploring a career of future interest. In the academy programs, students work with practitioners in the field (MLCS Webpage, 2018).

GYOT will refer to “Grow Your Own Teachers,” a concept used by school districts and lawmakers to allow a pathway for residents to gain careers in the field of education and teach in the community in which they currently live or were raised (Skinner, 2011).

Teacher shortage refers to statistics reported to the U.S. Department of Education that may include specific content areas falling short in number of qualified teachers, as well as locations where too few teachers take jobs (US Department of Education, 2017).

Recruiting for diversity refers to school districts’ desires and attempts to attract and hire educators who more closely match the racial diversity represented in the student population (Alvarez, 2017).

English as a Second Language refers to an endorsement education majors may study to allow them to teach and meet the educational needs of students who do not speak English as their first language.

Co-teacher or collaborative classroom refers to a classroom setting in MLCS in which both a general education teacher and Special Education teacher work together with their students, each taking an equal part.

Internship refers to Year 2 of Education Academy when the student spent two class periods per day interning with a master teacher and students in a classroom setting.

Internship teacher refers to the classroom teacher or practitioner with whom Education Academy student was placed during Year 2.

Kids Campus refers to a before and after school and summer child care program run by the MLCS Foundation.

Title I refers to schools which qualify for financial assistance due to having populations with high percentages of low income families (Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A) , 2015).

Educators Rising is an organization for students to have opportunities to be prepared for a career in education (Nebraska Educators Rising, 2018).

Future teachers refer to graduates of a GYOT program such as Education Academy.

Research Questions

This research was guided by one central question: How do college education majors who are alumni of a high school GYOT course describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their decision to pursue a career in education and their desire to return home to serve their communities?

Six sub-questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do participants describe the influences which lead to their interest in the field of education?
2. How do participants describe their experiences in the Midwestern suburban high school Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy?
3. How, and to what extent, do participants believe their influences and experiences prepared them for college education major coursework?
4. How do participants believe their specific experiences in Meadow Lane Central Schools have influenced their decision regarding if and where they will apply for teaching positions?
5. How have mentor relationships effected participants' decisions to pursue education as a career?
6. What recommendations can participants provide school districts to explore, encourage, and support students interested in pursuing careers in education?

Significance of the Study

This study was unique because the participants were college students who are graduates of a GYOT program, yet, the study does not assume that the GYOT program was the only factor leading to a career in education. There is not yet a follow up study about the specific GYOT program in MLCS, nor were studies found that followed up with college students. The study addressed the deficiencies by delving into motivations and individual stories and results that came of influences and relationships. The study sought to understand which experiences were the most powerful in determining future pathways. The study gathered recommendations from college-age alumni for school

districts to help with teacher shortages and recruiting efforts. In addition, the research contributes to the body of work existing in GYOT programs by looking for indications of whether or not the college students are likely to seek a teaching position back home.

Education Academy is a type of GYOT program that exposes students to teaching careers and hands on experiences while in high school. Grow your own teachers programs exist to introduce possible future teachers to the field of education and recruit them back to their home school districts after earning teacher certification. Grow your own teachers programs may help to solve a variety of issues, such as recruiting for diversity, recruiting in rural settings, and filling teacher shortage areas. While various grow your own teachers programs, such as MLCS Education Academy, do exist throughout the country, most literature on the subject is published informally as sharing of ideas and information between school administrator colleagues in newsletters, blogs, and websites. There is relatively little scholarly in-depth research done on these programs.

The professional audiences who will be interested in reading this body of work include college education departments and school administrators. Colleges will be able to make more informed decisions on programming and partnerships with school districts in order to answer the call of recruiting and retaining quality teachers and providing pathways for students interested in pursuing education careers right out of high school. School district administrators and teachers seeking to recruit educators for a variety of reasons will find use in the data. Schools will learn how to support and stay connected with alumni who are pursuing degrees in education. This research will aid curriculum administrators and teachers in changes in current policies and practices, as well as help to

design powerful experiences for students. Schools can learn about putting programs into place to help students experience the rewards of a career in education, as well as seek valuable partnerships with colleges. Human Resources and other school district hiring administrators will be drawn to the value of GYOT programs and recruiting alumni. In addition, they will recognize value in connections with students who are considering careers in education. Information will be collected seeking answers to questions that may benefit any school district seeking to implement a similar grow your own teachers program or seek to imbed other meaningful experiences into K-12 education.

Finally, students may also gather insights through reading this research as it will open them up to experiences, stories, and influences as shared by their current or eventual peers/colleagues in the field of education.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of professional literature in reference to early influences and experiences of college students who participated in a career academy introducing them to a career in education. For the purpose of focusing on a broad topic, the research has been divided into three sections. First, the importance of teacher selection is reviewed. This includes teacher impact on student learning, teacher shortages in the United States of America, the investment that school districts put into teachers, and teacher retention rates. The second section provides a look at existing programs in the area of recruiting high school students to enter the field of education, also referred to as “grow your own teachers” programs. Areas explored include high school career academies, recruitment in rural and urban areas, and recruiting for diversity. The final section reviews research on relationships of adults in a school workplace experience through mentoring and collaborating professionally.

Importance of Teacher Selection

Research has shown that class size, curriculum, family involvement, school district budget, and culture all are strong influences on student achievement but none have as large an impact on eventual student success as does the classroom teacher (Elmore, 2013; Stronge & Tucker, 2000; Wong, 2013).

Hiring quality teachers is the most important job leaders in schools face each year, as teachers will, in turn, impact every other area of importance in a school. Harry Wong cites an exhaustive review of two hundred studies focusing on factors that lead to student achievement. The study determined the top predictor of student success is a teacher who

possesses both knowledge and skill. “The bottom line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school. And it is the teacher who creates a good classroom” (Wong, 2013).

The Obama administration placed an emphasis on teacher quality, citing the importance of an excellent school experience leading to students who are proficient readers and writers and eventually enroll in post-secondary programs to gain special skills needed to obtain gainful employment. However, it all depends on the quality of teachers. President Obama talked about this in his remarks to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in 2009.

To complete our Race to the Top requires the three pillars of reform—recruiting, preparing, and rewarding outstanding teachers. From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents. It’s the person standing at the front of the classroom. (President Obama’s Remarks, 2009)

When studying teacher effectiveness, it is evident that a teacher who is effective will have positive results with all types of students no matter their academic levels, background, race, or poverty level. Likewise, a teacher who is ineffective can have such a negative effect on students that it can take up to three years to recoup the lost learning that occurs (Mendro, 1998).

Throughout decades, educational researchers have reached consensus: When it comes to student learning, the teacher is the most significant element. With high stakes testing and student achievement being at the forefront of federal education mandates, it has become even more evident that competent, compassionate teachers are essential to attain high levels of student achievement.

The teacher shortage remains a crucial reason that school districts must make quality hiring decisions. Each year, the U.S. Department of Education publishes a report showing the teacher shortage areas for each state in the U.S. This report is meant as a tool for teacher preparation programs, as well as for recent college graduates. It is also helpful to school districts to use as a resource in the process of teacher hiring. In Nebraska, the state in which this study took place, there have been teacher shortages every year since the report was issued in 1991. The lowest year was 1993-1994, showing four areas of shortage, whereas the largest year was 2002-2003 when Nebraska schools reported 14 areas of shortage: Agriculture, Business Education, English, Family and Consumer Science, Foreign Languages, Guidance Counselor, Industrial Technology, Math, Media Specialist, Music Sciences, Special Education, Speech Pathology, and Spanish/World Languages (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 97). Across the U.S., approximately 60,000 classrooms were without teachers in the 2016-2017 school year, resulting in shifts needing to be made throughout schools to provide coverage for all students.

Among contributions to the shortage is the 35% decline of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs since 2009. In addition, more teachers are leaving mid-career than ever before. Vast differences in pay compared to equally educated counterparts are blamed, along with job dissatisfaction according to a study by the Learning Policy Institute (Heim, 2014).

The 2016-2017 shortage report showed such an increased shortfall nationally that it prompted the Washington Post to publish an article stating, “The United States is facing its first major teacher shortage since the 1990s, one that could develop into a crisis for schools in many parts of the country.” The article goes on to state the detriments of

fewer teachers will be felt by teachers and students alike as schools will have to decrease course offerings, increase the student-teacher ratios, or hire teachers who aren't yet qualified to do the job (Heim, 2014).

John Merrow, moderator of the PBS series on education, believes that the issue really isn't a shortage of teachers as much as teacher retention. He says,

The fact remains that our nation's 1,300 schools and colleges of education already produce more than enough teachers. But about 30 percent of those newly minted teachers don't go into classrooms. Many who become teachers don't stay long. An estimated 30 percent leave the field within five years; in cities, the exit rate is an astonishing 50 percent. (1999)

Merrow (1999) goes on to cite adequate training and support for beginning teachers as remedies to fix the retention problem.

A longitudinal study over the five years between 2007 and 2012 conflicts with earlier reports of turnover rates being 50% in the first five years to showing the rate is actually closer to 17% turnover. The study analyzed earnings, ages, education, and locations. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of those earning more than \$40,000 their first year, stayed on for a second year, versus only 87% who earned less than \$40,000.

Mentoring showed to be powerful as only 84% of teachers without a mentor returned for a second year and after five years, only 71% were still teaching. When beginning teachers did have a mentor the first year 92% returned and by the fifth year 86% were still teaching (Gray, Taie, & O'Rear, 2015). The National Education Association (NEA) responded to the study showing support for findings that NEA has long advocated for—high quality mentors and competitive salaries both to aide in retaining teachers (Fensterwald, 2015).

The shortage of teachers isn't only seen in the United States. The Association of School and College Leaders reported a 7% drop in the number of students entering teacher training courses in 2016 in the United Kingdom. This equates to 4,000 fewer teachers than will be necessary to maintain existing numbers. A \$1.6 billion government investment specifically in recruitment and retention has been put into place in order to turn things around. Consequences are feared if there isn't a greater emphasis on education careers include larger class sizes, replacement of teachers by technology, and untrained staff (Morrison, 2017).

School District Investment in Teachers

In addition to outside factors such as the national teacher shortage facing school districts, internally, districts are faced with major budget shortfalls. According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), experts across the board plan for 80-85% of a district's overall budget to be used towards personnel costs (Ellerson, 2013, p. 1).

Thus, making a large investment to hire a teacher is an important undertaking. National Public Radio (NPR) Education writer Owen Phillips interviewed Richard Ingersoll, a researcher who specifically looks at turnover in schools and considers what we might do to fix the problem (Ingersoll R. , *Revolving Door of Teachers Costs Schools Billions Every Year*, 2015). Ingersoll has found teachers leaving the industry each year cost an estimated \$2.2 billion. Furthermore, school leaders are not typically astute to seeing these costs created with employee turnover, which would include training employees, hiring costs, onboarding personnel, and mentoring costs. The Center for American Progress (2012) published a study looking at the costs of turnover specifically

focusing on positions that require very specific skills such as teaching. The cost of turnover averaged 21% of employee's annual pay. Those numbers for employees earning less than \$50,000 (where you will find most new teachers) held true at 20%. Specifically, looking at teachers, a study of turnover in five school districts reported the estimated costs of turnover related to recruiting, hiring, and induction ranges between \$4,366 and \$17,872 (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).

School districts must work to make a lasting investment in teachers in order to see improvements in retention. When done correctly, retention can equate to increased student achievement. Research for the Teaching Commission (The Teaching Commission, 2004) discussed the impact of teachers on student achievement citing, "All good schools have one thing in common: good teachers. Top-quality teaching fosters high student achievement and high achievers can harness their talents and energies to become successful, contributing citizens" (p. 12) O'Laughlin discussed, "Nothing contributes more to the quality of education our children receive than the quality of the teachers working in schools. The process of recruiting and hiring high-quality teachers is therefore critical" (O'Laughlin, 1999).

Attention Given to Teacher Selection

School administrators in the United States face a large number of challenges as they seek to fill open teaching positions. Factors include a national teacher shortage, competition to attract the best candidates, budget and time constraints, and principal workload and stress.

Kyle Ingle, Stacey Rutledge, and Jennifer Bishop (2011) studied how school leaders approach hiring. They found principals' personal beliefs and background as well

as notions for what good teaching looks like tend to shape the hiring decisions that those at the helm make. Principals also pay close attention to needs in the specific position and school such as subject knowledge and poverty level. In addition, there was consistency in findings that

regardless of personal characteristic or organizational priorities, (principals) prioritized caring, strong teaching skills, and subject matter knowledge as preferred characteristics. Principals tend to be heavily influenced by past experiences including hiring decisions, work experiences, and specific teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, principals expressed a keen interest in assessing applicant enthusiasm, motivation, and work ethic in order to get a sense of how an applicant may perform in the classroom and after tenure. (Ingle et al., p. 9, 2011)

Existing Work in the Area of Grow Your Own Teachers

GYOT programs are implemented and used for a variety of reasons including as career academies in high school to give students an early look at the career, as well as to recruit educators in rural areas, urban areas, and to increase diversity. A focus of grow your own teachers programs exists as a solution for recruiting diversity to school districts and the teaching population as a whole. A look at the report compiled for the National Center for Education Statistics in 2015 shows that 50% of the students in the U.S. are minority, an increase of 15% since 1995. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the teachers in the U.S. were white in the most recent report by NCEES (Teacher Characteristics-Public Schools, 2014).

The trend is similar in the Midwestern state where this particular research took place. According to the 2015-16 Education Profile from the Nebraska Department of Education, 32% of students in schools statewide are non-white or have one or more races. The same report shows that only four percent of Nebraska teachers are non-white (2015-2016 Profile for State of Nebraska, 2017). With racial diversity growing in schools at a

rate of nearly 1% each year, education experts are turning to hiring more teachers of color as one way to help students connect in school and decrease the achievement gap (McGuire, 2015).

In Austin Public Schools in Minnesota, there is an influx of students from Sudan, Mexico, and Burma. Austin is a school district where 90% of teachers are white. Seventy percent (70%) of the students are white. In seeking a benefit when students are learning from someone who comes from a similar diverse background, the Governor of Minnesota set aside \$25 million in 2015 specifically for school districts to recruit teachers of color, specifically in areas of high need such as special education. School districts like Austin Public Schools have taken advantage of the programs going to work on such recruiting. Efforts have included finding alternative certification means for district paraprofessionals, of over 50% who are not white. Partnerships with colleges and universities have been an important piece in the recruitment efforts as well. Loan forgiveness programs and scholarships have provided means for individuals to pursue careers in education. Partnerships with area businesses who have provided scholarships have also been useful in Austin, Minnesota (McGuire, 2015).

Just as urban districts in the United States face hiring shortages, so do their rural counterparts. Many rural schools have teaching staffs that are seasoned and nearing retirement. With this significant turnover looming, districts worry about how they will lure younger teachers to their towns when so many have greater interests in opportunities, both socially and careerwise, that large cities can give (Cummings, 2015).

One rural district that is using a grow your own approach is Cassville R-IV in southwest Missouri. In Cassville, high school students do field experience work

shadowing teachers along with deliberate classroom discussions for all students centered around the benefits of becoming teachers in rural areas. Several of the teachers in Cassville are also adjunct faculty at a local community college, teaching pre-education courses. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the teachers in the district are alumni (Potter, 2015).

In Dallas County Independent School District (DISD) in Texas, a program called Tomorrow's Teachers (TT) has been developed. TT is known as a collaborative initiative between the district and an area community college as well as with local universities. Thirty-six (36) teachers were produced from a two-year pilot program and over 100 are in the program now enrolled to become teachers. The program begins identifying students with interest in teaching as early as elementary school and gives hands on experiences at all levels elementary through high school. Then, the district selects current DISD students to attend the local community college and then provides them with the opportunity to transfer to a four-year college or university to finish their teaching degree. DISD gives the assurance that the alumni will be hired back home when they graduate. Through the years of college, the district partners with several entities to help the recruits including Building Futures in Education. For example, passing the Texas Academic Skills Program and meeting university admissions requirements are made more seamless. A real benefit to TT has been recruiting back teachers in DISD's highest area of need, bilingual teachers. Formal programs such as TT also hope (though are not yet supported with data) to beat the statistics of teacher turnover which are sometime seen in other programs (Gilroy, 2003).

Riverside Community College near Los Angeles has a program called Latino Educators of Tomorrow (LET) that recruits at-risk students into the field of education. In the 8 years it has been in existence, 20 teachers have graduated and are now local teachers. There are an additional 60 in the program now nearing completion of their degrees. The program has supports in place to help the students overcome hardships they are experiencing due to having parents that are not familiar with college. Students in LET also have other barriers that other students may not such as parents that did not attend college, financial barriers, and transportation problems. LET takes students through goal-setting and leadership courses to prepare them for careers of giving back in education. There are also a number of service learning opportunities that LET students are involved with to insure that the main focus of their lives is giving back. Since so much of the service learning focuses on the local community, graduates of the program are led to stay in education careers locally to make a difference (Gilroy, 2003).

Some of the programs nationally that exist in growing your own teachers initiatives are successful because of state government partnerships with school districts and colleges. This is the case in Illinois where in 2006 the State Board of Education issued a task force to seek successful strategies to support specifically non-traditional candidates in becoming teachers for the states low-income schools. The initiative was called Grow Your Own Teachers Initiative Statewide Learning Network. Joint coalitions and state funding have been the backbone of this program (Illinois State Board of Education, 2006).

“Grow Your Own Illinois has four distinct goals -- to reduce teacher turnover in low income schools; to increase the numbers of teachers of color; to prepare teachers for

hard-to-fill positions; and to increase the cultural competence and community of teachers.” Grow Your Own (GYO) Illinois is seeing success in Chicago as well as five other urban areas. Many of the successful candidates have been living and working in low-income neighborhoods and they want to become teachers. Most are non-traditional students who are parents and paraprofessionals. Through loan forgiveness and extra supports GYO Illinois was been successful in placing 70 teachers by 2010 in low income classrooms. Eighty-four percent (84%) of the participants in GYO Illinois are people of color. Over 250 more teacher candidates are in the program preparing to become teachers (Grow Your Own Illinois, 2017).

Educators Rising is a national organization focusing on high school students interested in careers in education. The mission of the organization is to “Provide passionate young people with hands-on teaching experience, sustain their interest in the profession, and help them cultivate the skills they need to be successful educators.” With a need for 1.5 million new teachers in the United States by 2020, Phi Delta Kappa designed Educators Rising, which has replaced the former Future Teachers of America organization. A large focus of Educators Rising is to support and grow future highly qualified teachers. Teachers in high schools, such as Education Academy in this study, are able to partner with Educators Rising for opportunities, conferences, resources, scholarships, curriculum, college credit, and support. State and city organizations are on the rise. The goals of Educators Rising revolve around helping teens experience the impact of a career in education, develop transferrable skills, increasing diversity in the teacher workforce, and exploring shortage subject areas (Educators Rising, 2017).

As a part of states' Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strategic plans, several states are including plans for funds which will aid in GYOT programs. Missouri has written a pilot program for a GYOT effort that, if effective, will use recruiting efforts to lure 1,000 high school students, 15% who will be non-white, into education programs. Pennsylvania is considering a grant program which would finance local efforts to increase teacher diversity. North Kansas City School District is partnering with Northwest Missouri State University to allow high school students opportunities exploring teaching careers through hands-on experience and would include two years of free college tuition. Mississippi is using district coaching and mentoring to mend a high turnover rate of teachers of color. GYOT programs throughout the United States are vast, because they are designed for specific needs of districts and states (Muniz, 2018).

The National Center for Teaching Residencies (NCTR) seeks to recruit high numbers of diverse teachers into the program with 45% of student teachers (residents) identifying as teachers of color. In turn, students are more likely to see the academic benefits of learning from a teacher that is of their own race. In Boston, the program has prepared over 600 graduates to be teachers and almost 50% are teachers of color (Recommendations for State Support, 2017).

Each year, 300,000 new teachers are hired in the United States. Phi Delta Kappa estimates that 60% of these are teaching within 20 miles of where they went to high school. Following the recruitment of talented new teachers, school districts face the challenge of retaining them (Maxson & Maxson, 2002).

The Power of Mentoring and Collaboration

There is one thing that schools in small towns, large cities, suburban areas, and sparse counties all have in common—cherished, veteran teachers are retiring and some new teachers are only staying in the profession for a short number of years. New teachers are now the largest population among teaching staffs (Ingersoll, 2012). As veterans retire, school districts must plan effectively to support new teachers. “The new teachers who seek to replace these veterans have big shoes to be filled . . . the expectations are high, the hours are long, the paperwork is unending, and the isolation of the classroom can be demoralizing” (Saphier, Freedman, & Aschheim, 2001, pp. 15-16).

By 2010, 27 states were mandating some type of mentoring or structured induction program, this equated to about 180,000 teachers a year (Goldrick, Osta, Barlin, & Burn, 2012). The first dose of career mentoring for young people can come in their K-12 school years when youth look to teachers for advice. In 2015, *The Guardian* found that 37% of teachers were inspired to join the profession because of a teacher they had. The same study also cited 42% of new teachers longing for collaborative mentoring relationships on the job (Marsh, 2015).

Teaching is a complex job. We are in an age of accountability, of incorporating high standards, and see a very broad range of students with needs from mental health to learning needs. Getting the right teacher in front of students is more important than ever. Study after study has shown that the teacher is the single most important contributor to student success (Mendro, 1998; Sanders & Reeves, 1998; Wong, 2013).

The research regarding teacher turnover is alarming and the proof that schools need mentoring programs to support new teachers could not be greater. Linda Darling-

Hammond led the National Commission on Teaching for America's Future. Findings of the commission were published in "What Matters Most: Teaching and America's Future," where it was reported 20-30% of teachers are leaving the profession in the first five years. The numbers are even more shocking in urban school districts where 50% are leaving before reaching their 5th year of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Teaching has a 4% higher rate of turnover than any other profession (Gray et al., 2015).

Researcher Richard Ingersoll argues that there is not a shortage because too few teachers are being produced, but rather, a variety of other reasons leading to attrition. When teachers do leave it is due to dissatisfaction (48%), family or personal reasons (34%), to pursue other jobs (34%), school staffing action (17%), and retirement (15%) (Ingersoll R. , 2003).

In a comprehensive look at participation in induction programs, there was a link found between beginning teachers participating in an induction program and their retention. The strongest factors in reducing turnover were having a subject area mentor teacher and regular collaborating and planning time with other teachers in that same grade level or subject area. When induction is looked at as a package of many options of supports such as a mentor, meetings with administration, courses or activities, and collaboration time, as the number of components increased, the turnover of beginning teachers decreased (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In 2007-08, only 5% of beginning teachers had the option of an induction program that was comprehensive of several key components (Smith & Ingersoll, 2011). In this same review of research, a correlation was also found between the participation in induction programs and the achievement of students in the classrooms of beginning teachers. In periods of budget shortfalls for

school districts, induction programs (which vary in costs) are a benefit worth the effort and cost (Ingersoll R. , Beginning teacher induction what the data tells us, 2012).

Collaboration is a key to success in working with people in many jobs. In education this involves forming strong relationships between students, staff, families, and communities. Stronger relationships strengthen learning environments and make for an invigorating profession. Teacher leaders are mentors for their students and those that are skilled in the art of relationships keep in contact with students long after high school. Mentoring former students in the education profession can help up and coming educators from the community to become empowered, informed teachers themselves. Being a mentor also feeds those already in the profession (Brown, 2016).

Education is a helping profession. Supporting and holding each other accountable, working together, celebrating successes all are keys in practitioners getting better for the good of the cause—student learning. Like many other professions such as medicine, law, and business, educators feel a responsibility to support those new to the field. Programs such as apprenticeships, residencies, and internships connect new hires to skilled mentors, with a common goal of growth and a successful induction (Saphier et al., 2001).

If new teachers can get the support they need from seasoned staff, they are more likely to remain in the career. Ninety-five percent (95%) of teachers who get the support, find connections, and remain teaching (Bartell & Ownby, 1994). Teachers who are provided with support also are better teachers, implementing more strategies, engaging lessons, exercising sound decision making, and managing classroom discipline more effectively (Saphier et al., 2001).

Mentors also report that they have improved teaching practices from the collaborative experience of working with a new teacher. Mutual benefits cited by mentors include the idealism and positive energy provided by new teachers, and the ability to show tenacity even when the days are challenging. Mentors report that their own teaching improved through the professional conversations about planning, techniques, and practices (Scherer M. E., 1999).

Induction and mentoring programs can increase the likelihood that a teacher will stay in the profession by 35% (Lemke, 1995). Data in the past 20 years has shown that mentoring programs do make a difference on retention of teachers. Most commonly, administrator face time and mentor support are reported as having a strong effect on whether beginning teachers stayed or left (Goldrick et al., 2012; Ingersoll, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Connectedness with a mentor and quality cooperating teacher in student teaching showed positive results in a study by the American Institute for Research. The study looked at a new teacher preparation program in Aspire Public Schools and San Francisco Unified School District, student teachers are spending a full year in the Urban Teacher Residency United program. While a highly selective program, allowing only 11% of applicants into the program, the year spent with a master, mentor teacher has equated to 82% still teaching after five years. Teach for America is also highly selective accepting only 12% of applicants into the program and providing four weeks of student teaching. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of beginning teachers remain teaching after five years (Recommendations for State Support, 2017).

In the book “Keeping Good Teachers” Marge Scherer (1999) looks at research done regarding induction in other parts of the world can help to open the United States up to possibilities. In New Zealand a new teacher may have five classes each day which can easily get overwhelming. However, 20% of the day is spent observing other teachers. In China, a beginning mathematics teacher plans lessons with a group of teachers, attends new teacher seminar groups, and has time to observe other teachers all built into the schedule. In Switzerland, a beginning teacher has a small group in which classroom dilemmas can be discussed. The group is led by a trained facilitator but the beginning teachers set the agendas for each meeting (Scherer, 1999).

Summary

When young people are recruited to the profession, there must also be paths formed—paths for these new teachers to have professional, meaningful relationships with experienced teachers. To me, more powerful than the statistics are the real stories of youth who were inspired by a teacher, who found a mentor in a coach, who still turns to a high school teacher to ask advice and seek mentorship. Through GYOT programs, these mentoring relationships can start much earlier in a teacher’s career. The possibilities of connections through early exploration of classrooms and social media connections and internship work can be a powerful start to a young person’s career in education. This research will explore this and gain insights from college students who may possibly return home to teach in the future.

CHAPTER 3: PROCEDURES

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative studies are common in the field of education because researchers deal with learning more about practices and how to make them better. It is meaningful to make a decision about trying a new intervention or incorporating a program after reading what other educators were able to learn from a similar process or program. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cite “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives.” Qualitative research focuses on using carefully designed questions to seek meaning into the stories of participants and understand deeper impact of the actions. From a personal standpoint, GYOT is an area in which making an impact and discovery is possible since there were not a lot of studies following up with GYOT program participants who are now in college. The possibilities exist that we can learn something new and make adjustments to current practices because of the findings. Those possibilities led me to this qualitative study. The review of literature indicated that it is evident that we have more to learn about GYOT, particularly from college students, and themes that arise from this study bring about recommendations to aid school districts no matter the size or resources that exist.

There are several key characteristics which define qualitative research: natural setting, researcher as the key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, participants’ meanings, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account. Possessing an understanding of these basic characteristics helps those who seek information to more thoroughly interpret the research (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186).

Qualitative researchers generally have face-to-face conversations with participants in natural settings to allow for free and open ended conversations. Researchers typically are the collectors of several sources of data such as conducting the interview, making observations, and reviewing artifacts themselves rather than using questions or protocols designed by a different researcher. It is common for researchers using qualitative methods to glean information themselves as human instruments, then make sense of the data, text segments, and other materials, by organizing them into themes. Researchers work back and forth between these themes using an inductive process and then using deductive concepts to analyze the information. The focus is put on participants' meanings and findings that emerge directly from the data as opposed to meanings already derived from literature or from researchers' opinions. Qualitative research is an emergent design, with research questions and methodological procedures potentially changing as data pieces are collected.

Qualitative researchers recognize reflexivity, and how their personal experiences and background may potentially effect understandings and analysis. The data produces a large amount of details, giving a deep understanding to researchers and readers. However, according to Patton, "the credibility of qualitative methods, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork—as well as things going on in a person's life that might prove a distraction." (Patton, 2002, p. 14)

By conveying multiple participants' stories and perspectives, researchers are able to give a holistic written and visual account of the research (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers seek to understand participants' experiences through words and images; i.e., through observations, artifacts, documents, visual materials, and interviews, in order to

extrapolate meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this particular research, the types of data lend very well to qualitative study. The importance of individuals' viewpoints and stories who have taken part in Education Academy provide rich insights in answering the research questions.

Creswell's (2014) philosophical assumption with implications for practice in this study is ontological. There are multiple realities based on the views of the participants and the research is reporting "different perspectives as themes develop in the findings." The philosophical assumptions are important to recognize in explaining the importance of the research study to an audience. In this specific study, knowing that this is ontological, it would not be a surprise to the audience if each individual participant had a different experience or story (Creswell, 2014).

Narrative Research Approach

Narrative research tells stories of individuals and their experiences through the collection of forms of data, including interviews. Collaboration on the narrative research between the participants and the researcher help the stories to emerge (Creswell, 2014).

Experience is a key word in narrative research. John Dewey was an academic philosopher and proponent of educational reform (Biography.com Editors, 2014). He used the criterion that from experiences grow other experiences and each experience can lead to an experiential future. Through inquiry these puzzles and problems can lead to personal and social expansion of ideas (Clanndinin & Connelly, 2000).

"The idea of temporality is a key term in narrative research. As experiences are embedded within larger narrative of social science inquiry, the people, the schools, and educational landscapes studied can be contextualized within a longer-term narrative."

Narrative inquiry is a collaboration between the researcher and the participants to understanding an experience, to interact socially and make sense of a series of experiences, and to explore stories that have been lived and show how those stories may be important to others (Clanndinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 19-20).

Because this study focused on participants who have been through Education Academy and are now studying education, their words, backgrounds, and experiences for many years are important in the research, making narrative inquiries an appropriate approach. Furthermore, narrative inquiry is needed to provide in-depth stories and perceptions of each individual as the research seeks to determine what have been pivotal moments. The topics are personal, subjective, informative, and will provide helpful insight to school districts interested in this application of the findings that emerge from these college students who are alumni of a GYOT program. School administrators must find new areas of focus to help solve problems such as teacher shortage and retention and consider how school districts can engage alumni so that they might consider returning home to teach.

Narrative inquiry is informative as the researcher seeks to understand the topic. Each participants' story can bring new, innovative ideas to the readers. Those who are interested in both qualitative and quantitative can find purpose through the stories and insight for further studies. These new thoughts and findings in narrative inquiry can be seen as a source of inspiration to inform readers to think outside of the box (Dauite & Lightfoot, 2004), for example, a school district looking for creative ways to impact the teacher shortage in their community.

Narrative inquiry is concerned with exploring memories that may trigger a recollection or feeling. Photographs, art, and music can be collected throughout life to provide a source of memories. Memory boxes are sometimes kept to collect memories of important times, people, and events (Clanndinin & Connelly, 2000). Application of this technique of narrative will be implemented in the research as participants share and reflect.

Participants

This narrative study explored the stories of nine college students who are education majors and graduates of MLCS having participated in Education Academy in high school. In this study, as the researcher, I conducted the interviews face-to-face and gathered other forms of data to focus on the experiences of college students. It is also understood that the process was emergent with slight design shifts needed as research was obtained. It was essential in the study's design that the focus be on the participants' opinions, experiences, and influences. My background as an educator and human resources professional increased value in the study and helped to shape the direction in order to better inform the existing body of research. Visual data representing themes that emerge overall are shared to give a holistic account of the study.

Intent

The intent of this study was to gather the stories of college students who participated in Education Academy while in high school and are now education majors planning to enter the field in the next several years. By using a narrative inquiry approach the research questions looked at this group that are graduates of the same school district and GYOT program and justified the greatest effect on their decisions to study education

and whether or not to return home to teach. Participants had some history in the field of education as they each begun pursuing their interests when they began Education Academy as juniors in high school.

The ontological philosophical assumption of this study uses a transformative framework. Creswell highlights the transformative framework of D.M. Mertens (2003) which describes “the basic tenet of this transformative framework is that knowledge is not neutral and reflects the power and social relationships within society, and thus the purpose of knowledge construction is to aide people to improve society.” (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 1998) This research worked to not minimize the contributions of each participant and asked the participants to contribute artifacts or other pieces of data. The voice of the participants was heard in the findings in particular in “change-oriented forms of narrative research” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I gravitate toward social research that can have a positive impact on the both the organization and the greater field of education. In education, we should always be able to answer the question, “Is what we are doing good for students?” In research, I strive to make meaning based on stories and experiences of others and value those personal experiences greatly. One of the characteristics that I believe is most helpful about Education Academy is the impact that it can have on our overall organization:

1. The high school students (referred to as interns) are gaining insights to a career in education, honing their skills in mentoring and teaching, and forming

solid background knowledge and a network that will be helpful to their professional future.

2. Students in the schools where the interns work are benefiting by having another “teacher,” more one-on-one attention, intervention time, and mentoring from the intern.
3. Teachers of the interns benefit by having the opportunity to share their classroom and knowledge. They are honing their mentoring skills and giving back to the profession by helping to bring new teachers into the field. Their skills in lesson planning, leadership, and designing instruction are sharpened in the process.
4. The school district has a vested interest in the Education Academy program as it is implemented to give high school students a chance to explore a possible future career, network within the district, and see the inside workings of a possible future place of employment.
5. I would not engage in research that could not be shared and could not be used to ultimately help students.

Based on my background with hiring teachers and with Education Academy as a high school teacher, administrator, and now district Human Resources administrator, I recognize that I bring several potential biases to this research. My personal biases include beliefs that:

1. Students experiencing Education Academy will be better prepared to make a decision about whether or not they want to study education in college.

2. Students who took part in Education Academy made connections that motivated them to return home and pursue teaching.
3. Family, along with community and school connections, lead alumni to make the decision to return to their hometown to live and work following college.
4. All educators and students of education have defining moments or positive mentors in the field of education that make them want to pursue an education degree.
5. Schools should seek to recruit teachers to better match the diversity of their student populations.
6. Alumni who return to teach in the school district where they grew up will be less likely to turnover and leave the district or leave teaching because of the familiar connections and philosophy that already exists in their home district.
7. Alumni of a GYOT program such as Education Academy have a higher rate of success in college teacher preparation programs because of the head start they received in the academy.
8. Internships or mentoring experiences in K-12 help to better equip future teachers.
9. More can be done to maintain relationships with alumni so that they continue to feel a connection with home through college years.
10. Ultimately whether or not a teacher from a GYOT program returns home to teach is not as crucial as it is that they find and experience success in a career of education, giving back to students in any capacity at home or away from home.

I outlined my biases at the outset of this study and made every attempt to suspend or bracket them in order to objectively represent participants' perspectives. Furthermore, I made and will continue to make every attempt not to let the information gleaned from this study affect future hiring decisions. When participants of this study are interviewing with MLCS, I will recuse myself from the process.

Data Collection Procedures

In selecting participants for a qualitative narrative inquiry study, it is crucial to select participants that will best help the research to understand the issue at hand and thus make contributions to the research body. In addition, it is necessary to have an appropriate amount of participants for the study. In qualitative work, this can be from one to thirty or more participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 189).

Nine participants were purposefully selected to participate in this study. Creswell describes purposeful sampling as selecting individuals and sites for the research because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 156). Researchers make decisions regarding participants and criteria for selection based on the information they hope to gain. This research used purposeful sampling because participants were graduates of Education Academy who have gone on to major in education in college. All participants were currently majoring in education and each level of college—seniors, juniors, sophomores, and first years—were represented. Participants have a variety of majors representing elementary, secondary, and special education as well as K-12. Because the element of increasing diversity in a teaching staff is important to consider, I also purposefully selected participants that would bring diversity in the form of race and gender. Education

Academy instructors in MLCS, Mrs. H and Mr. C, aided in the selection of participants. Because I seek stories that make the study worthwhile, a purposeful sampling was appropriate in this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). In addition, the goal was to reach saturation with nine participants.

Several methods were used to collect data for the study. Each participant was asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide basic information (Appendix A). Once participants signed the informed consent form (Appendix B), they were interviewed using a semi-structured in depth interview protocol consisting of 24 open-ended questions (Appendix C). The questions included probes to ask for clarification or elaboration when needed to further understand the participants' responses. Interviews were conducted in the fall of 2017 in a quiet, mutually agreed upon location. Interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by an IRB trained transcriptionist who signed a pledge of confidentiality (Appendix D). Participants were asked to review the transcript of their interview to ensure that it was accurately transcribed and were allowed to make any changes or additions.

A pilot interview was completed prior to the proposal with consent in order to test the questions and questions were revised based on the pilot. I retained the right to use this pilot interview in the findings of the research and to follow up with the pilot interview participant to seek further understanding.

I asked participants to provide and elaborate about an artifact, photo, writing, or art, which evokes feeling about the field of education within themselves. Some participants did not bring an artifact to share. For some of the participants, I also had artifacts from their time in high school including journals and memories that we

discussed if they were available. Each of these pieces of data helped to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' contributions and were discussed by participants during the interview when applicable. Depending on the participants, I may or may not have had access to those. Data included semi-structured in-depth interviews. The stories of college students gave details of what inspires students to enter the field of education, where they plan to live and apply for teaching positions, and how their high school internships, relationships, and preparation has impacted the participants personally. Participants were also asked to provide the name and email address of a college professor who knows their work and would be able to answer a few questions as I triangulate the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the time the interviews were being conducted. Data was coded and analyzed and first summarized for each participant to tell the important story of each individual. It was then aggregated into themes and subthemes for each research question. The transcripts had space in the margins for one or two word codes. Codes were then clustered into similar themes and groups and important quotes were extrapolated for each theme. Visual data displays have been employed to give further meaning to the themes that emerged.

In order to conceptualize the data, narrative research seeks to retell the participants' stories through the use of plot, setting, activities, or significant moments (Clanndinin & Connelly, 2000). Readers will get to know the participants through the retelling of stories and pivotal experiences. Techniques that I used which are specific to Narrative Inquiry include seeking epiphanies or pivotal moments (retelling stories) to develop the storyline and constructing a chronology of unfolding events. My role as a

researcher also sought to tell a story through the narrative so the reader can feel a connection to each participant (Miller, 2014). This study lends itself to several types of data including interviews, journals, and visual representation and I reviewed all the data to make sense of it and organize it into various themes (Creswell, 2014).

Narrative inquiries are storytelling in nature and revolve around a particular puzzling question that has been left unanswered prior to the study. As we begin to analyze the data collected, narrative researchers may retell experiences learned about in the interviews, usually proceeding in a chronological manner. Even when presented chronologically, researchers tend to label sections with titles that connect to the interpretations of the research. Researchers may share “stories, conversation fragments, and field notes, all of which are interspersed with interpretive comments” (Clanndinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 160).

Researchers bring forth stories in the form of themes that may help to make sense of the research question. There is a goal for the reader to have a strong sense of the participants’ viewpoints and stories that have shaped them. When analyzing data of narrative inquiry, the researcher takes an active role in gathering stories and then “restory” those into a framework that will make the most sense to the readers. The retelling may be chronological, sharing a beginning, middle, and end of the elements and struggles of the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Data analysis and representation of data for Narrative Inquiry, like other methods, has unique characteristics. Narrative, also referred to as biography in a later published edition, is identified in Table 1.

Table 1

Narrative Data Analysis and Representation

Data Analysis and Representation	Narrative Inquiry/Biography
Data organization	Create and organize files for data
Reading, memos	Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
Describing	Describe objective set of experiences—chronology of life
Classifying	Identifying stories Locate epiphanies Identify contextual materials for life
Interpreting	Theorize toward developing patterns and meanings

Adapted from (Creswell, 1998)

Verification Strategies

To ensure accuracy and trustworthy results in the data, this study used the key constructs founded by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are five ways to gain credible data in a study: prolonged period of engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Some of the five were employed in this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Prolonged period of engagement is meant to spend a large deal of time with participants in order to gain understanding, trust, and knowledge of the subject matter. Persistent observation reports upon specific details that are important to ensure the researcher has a complete understanding of the study and results. Triangulation allows for several methods of data collection or theories to achieve a complete understanding of the research questions. Peer debriefing engages the partnership of an external auditor to delve into every detail of the study. Member checking allows the participants themselves to

check for accuracy and credibility by reviewing the work of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To achieve accuracy and credibility, as the researcher, I attempted to show that findings are consistent with real life. I spent time engaging with the participants to gain trust and understanding. When researching with humans, sometimes interpretations of what reality is can be told through observations and interviews. Researchers in turn, are very close to the reality (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000). That is certainly the case in this study where I have a vested interest in the accuracy and transferability of the results.

Member checks were conducted. Interviews were recorded electronically and then transcripts were sent to the participants to verify accuracy and invited each to amend anything inaccurate about the data. No amends were made. Participants were told not to be concerned about punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure but rather to focus their assessment on the content.

Results of the study may be applied to other settings and situations in order to help make decisions. I used multiple sites, as participants attended Education Academy at two different high schools in the Meadow Lane Central Schools. In addition, participants attend multiple different colleges, both in the state as well as out of state. Utilizing multiple sites is another way to achieve external validity (Miller, 2014).

Transferability and applicability checks determine whether the results of the study may be applied to other settings and situations in order to help make decisions. In this case, that was very important as a reason for choosing this topic. With school districts across the country experiencing the need for teachers, it was important that this study respect the participants' time, efforts, and most importantly their contributions, in having

findings that would be transferrable to other settings, anywhere in the United States or throughout the world for that matter.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, the researcher must recognize and address the significance of respecting the privacy, rights, and contributions of a participant (Creswell, 2014, p. 208).

In making first contact with the participants, I conveyed a verbal description of the study: the purpose statement, interview protocol, time expected, voluntary nature of the interviews, and the use of the findings. Each participant who verbally consented, then was asked to complete the participants' questionnaire (Appendix A) and was asked to sign an informed consent prior to participation in the study (Appendix B). The informed consent included the title of the study, the principal researcher's name, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. It provided an overview of the data collection procedures, research objectives and how data would be used. It identified potential risks and benefits, and statements about protecting anonymity and confidentiality. It provided participants the assurance that all efforts would be made to protect anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, however anonymity cannot be absolutely promised. All data has been held in confidence, accessible only by the researcher and the transcriptionist. The form described the right to participate in this research as voluntarily and the right to withdraw without penalty. It also detailed the expected time commitment and contributions to the study by participants. The form explained the intended use of research results and provided contact information for questions or concerns. As the researcher, I reserve the right to publish the findings or present the findings at conferences. Participants may

request copies of the study final results. Finally, the form sought written permission to take part in the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

What follows is information to help understand the study and interview data broken into three major parts. Part 1 study context includes:

- a restating of the research questions to provide the context for the interviews,
- an introduction to Meadow Lane Central Schools,
- a look at the Education Academy syllabi including highlights of Year 1 and Year 2, and
- an introduction to the participants.

Part 2 is comprised of nine narratives based on the perspectives of the interview participants. The narratives are credible because they have been member-checked. The narratives include real stories. Each participant's section begins with what I felt was a meaningful quote extrapolated from the interview with that individual. Part 2 is essentially my way of introducing you, the reader, to each individual. Each was interviewed and offered thoughts on the various influences that led to their interest in the field of education, experiences in Meadow Lane Central Schools including Education Academy, preparedness for college major coursework, thoughts about whether or not they will apply for teaching positions back home, feelings on mentoring relationships in MLCS, and recommendations for MLCS students and staff as it pertains to Education Academy.

Part 3 will explore themes gleaned from the stories told by the nine participants. Their stories touched me and helped me to gain insight to explain themes in Part 3.

Part 1: Study Context

Research Questions

An overall emphasis in this study was placed on the central research question: How do college education majors who are alumni of a high school education academy describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their desired career in education and likelihood to return home to serve their communities?

Six sub-questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do participants describe the influences which lead to their interest in the field of education?
2. How do participants describe their experiences in the Midwestern suburban high school Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy?
3. How, and to what extent, do participants believe their influences and experiences prepared them for college major coursework?
4. How do participants believe their specific experiences in Meadow Lane Central Schools have influenced their decision regarding if and where they will apply for teaching positions?
5. How have mentor relationships effected participants' decisions to pursue education as a career?
6. What recommendations can participants provide school districts to explore, encourage, and support students interested in pursuing careers in education?

Introduction to Meadow Lane Central Schools

To understand the interviews, it's first important to have a clear understanding of Meadow Lane Central Schools (MLCS). Total student enrollment of K-12 students is

11,607 in 2017. MLCS students represent 21% minority, 23% free and reduced lunch, and 11% military families. The district has a 94% graduation rate with 90% going on to post-secondary education, 4% to military, 3% to the workforce, 2% undecided, and 1% other (MLCS Annual Report, 2017).

MLCS is a rapidly growing suburban school district in a Midwest metropolitan area with approximately 900,000 people. Two suburban towns of 40,000 people make up the majority of the school district. Within the next 5 years, the district is expected to grow by at least 1,600 students. The district has a growing preschool program, 15 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 high schools, an alternative high school, and a young adult transition program. Any one of the schools may be utilized for Education Academy Year 2 internship, depending on the intern's needs.

Introduction to the Education Academy Concept

According to the district's strategic plan, personalized learning is a goal for MLCS as it is the vision that all students are adequately prepared for the transition into the next phase of life after graduation. One way this is accomplished is through the academy programs such as the Education Academy. In total, MLCS offers nine academies taught by district teachers and cooperates with local colleges and universities to offer additional academies. The academies provide hands on, authentic learning experiences in areas where students have future career interest. Students have opportunities to work directly with successful adults currently working in the field. All participants of this study were students in Education Academy during both junior and senior year in high school. Table 2 includes pertinent information about Year 1 and Year 2 as told in the course syllabi.

Table 2

Education Academy Year 1 & Year 2 Syllabi Highlights

MLCS Education Academy Syllabus

The Academy for Future Educators provides students with a college preparatory curriculum focusing on skills related to careers in education. Academy courses are geared toward developing the research, presentation, and personal interaction skills necessary in education and other professions. The academy provides in-field experiences in local educational institutions. Year 2 provides an entire year internship.

Year 1 and Year 2 Course Objectives:

- To promote and enhance a positive image of the teaching profession.
- To attract talented students of various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds into educational careers.
- To increase awareness of the broad career opportunities and expanded job-related tasks of educators by providing students with extensive field experiences and observations in various educational settings.
- To encourage and train students to keep abreast of current and emerging research and technology and their impact on the educational community.
- To provide strategies and opportunities for students to apply educational theories to actual classroom practice.
- To facilitate access to institutions of higher education among students who might not otherwise have such opportunities.
- To involve educators in the encouragement and preparation of teachers.

Year 1 Course Topics & Activities:

- The teaching profession & hot topics in education
- American schools' historical foundations, philosophy and impact
- Schooling in a diverse and multicultural society
- Legal and political control and financial support
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment in effective schools
- "Teach With Your Strengths"- Liesveld and Miller
- "7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens"- Covey
- "What Successful Teachers Do"- Glasgow and Hicks
- Interviewing and resume writing for education
- Mentoring, job shadowing, and observing classrooms

Year 2 Course Topics & Activities:

- Skills of success- people skills, networking skills
 - The passion of education- burnout, retention
 - Communication issues and examples
 - Class management and time management
 - Professionalism
 - Daily internship (two hours) beginning end of August
 - Monthly class seminars
 - Weekly class online discussion board
 - Educators Rising activities
-

Introduction to the Participants

Narratives were constructed from a semi-structured interview lasting between 90-120 minutes as shown in Appendix C. Twenty-four (24) open-ended questions guided the interview. Participants were purposefully selected in order to get the stories needed for research as well as to intentionally honor diversity of the participants and their various chosen majors, colleges, gender, and year in college. Each participant chose a pseudonym. The text was created from these face-to-face interviews, written participant information, artifacts shared by some of the participants and the researcher, and follow up checks for accuracy. It should be noted that not all of the participants chose to share an artifact. A check for triangulation of data was conducted with participant permission by contacting a professor of the participant's choice at the college level. Two of the college first years did not yet have a professor who they felt knew them well enough to contact and several of the other professors did not return multiple requests for information. The findings are organized by year in college of the participants with seniors being first and first year students last. Each level was represented in interviews. Students attend a variety of colleges as evident in Table 3.

Part 2: Participant Narratives

Part 2 of this chapter tells the stories of nine participants who are college students and all took part in the MLCS Education Academy as juniors and seniors in high school. They represent alumni from both high schools in the district. All have gone on to declare a major in education in college. Participants range from college first years, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in college and all are represented.

Annalise Robbins

I was always persistent . . . “I want to be a teacher; I want to be a teacher.” And so when high school came around and I found out about Education Academy I said, “I want to do that, so I know for sure like, it’s what I want to do, it’s not just a dream.” (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

Table 3

Participant Information

Participant Pseudonym	Year in College	Endorsement(s) Pursuing	College Description	College Distance from MLCS	Years Spent in MLCS as a Student
Annalise Robbins	Senior	Elementary Education & Special Education	Out of state, public university, 7,000 students	2 hours	7 years Grades 6 th -12 th
Nina Black	Senior	K-12 English Language Learners & 7-12 Spanish	Out of state, private Christian, liberal arts college, 1,500 students	2 ½ hours	8 years, elementary grades & Grades 7 th -12 th
John Gome	Junior	7-12 Social Sciences Education & English Language Learners	In-state, private, Christian, liberal arts university, 1,000 students	1 ¼ hours	10 years, Grades 3 rd -12 th
Kate Brooks	Junior	Elementary Education & STEM endorsement	Local, public university, 15,000 students	20 minutes	13 years, Grades K-12 th
Jessica Bond	Junior	Elementary Education & Special Education	In-state, public university, 15,000 students	20 minutes	12 years, Grades 1 st -12 th
Ashley Gilbert	Sophomore	Elementary Education	In-state, public college, 3,500 students	2 hours	4 years, Grades 9 th -12 th
Joe Curry	First Year	Elementary Education	In-state, public university, 15,000 students	20 minutes	13 years, Grades K-12 th
Lee Johnson	First Year	K-12 Music Education	In-state, private, Christian, liberal arts university, 1,000 students	1 ¼ hours	8 years, Grades 5 th -12 th
Ann Paul	First Year	Elementary Education Special Education	Out-of-State, public university, 25,000 students	3 hours	12 years Grades 1 st -12 th

Annalise Robbins is a college senior currently completing her last semester. She is a 22-year-old, Caucasian female. She moved to MLCS when she was a 6th grader and attended through 12th grade. Annalise's family is important to her and she visits home when she can although has stayed very busy with college coursework and activities. She is a captain on the color guard and was recently named Homecoming Queen at the university. Annalise has a brother that is still in high school back home and attending his activities when time allows has also kept her connected to home. She entered college as an education major and will graduate this spring with endorsements in both Elementary Education and K-12 Special Education. Her university is home to a lab school where education majors are able to practice their craft with students on a regular basis. She returned home during her last semester of college to student teach in MLCS after attending college out of state about two hours away from home.

Influences leading Annalise to interest in the field of education. Annalise is one of those people who always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Growing up she recalls always wanting to play school. She remembers in first grade when she verbalized, "I want to be a teacher. My whole life I was just drawn to it. Summer camp, working with other students in and out of school, being around kids, was affirming." She kept her dream going and early on, her teachers recognized her potential as well, pairing her with students who needed some extra help and buddying her up with students with special needs.

Annalise experienced two Education Academy teachers in high school, one junior year and one senior year. She recalls each helping to give a true picture of being a teacher and setting an early foundation. Her first academy teacher had a positive energy and was

very encouraging to the students, showing the ins and outs of education, but was careful not to oversell it. Annalise remembers her telling the students, “It’s a lot of work, but you’re going to enjoy every moment of it.”

She also spoke highly of her internship teacher Mrs. C, being an inspiration. In particular, she made learning fun and she was very organized using color and order in her teaching. An early influence for Annalise was her own her 4th grade teacher (prior to her moving to MLCS). Annalise reflected:

She was the hippest old lady ever . . . she gave each letter of the school name and mascot a characteristic like I was for INTEGRITY. And each week she gave awards for those words. She was just so fun, and she also deserves credit for my organization. She had a color for everything, all our math stuff was red and science was green, and that has stuck with me forever. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

During her internship, Annalise had an experience that made her push harder to pursue her teaching career. Her Education Academy teacher happened to visit a class on a day that ended up being a challenging one in the classroom. She remembered that nothing really went right in the lesson and her teacher indicated in a roundabout way, “Maybe this isn’t the right path. Maybe you want to stick to elementary, not special education.”

Annalise took this as a challenge and remembers thinking, “Well I am going to do this!” There was also an eye opening experience with Annalise’s brother in the past few years that also motivated her. He suffered a sports related head injury and struggled to get better. Months went by and he wasn’t improving, rather, he was becoming a very different person. It made him work harder and it made Annalise realize how important the teachers and principal were in the process of helping him to get back on track.

Annalise's experiences in Education Academy. When Annalise was in high school she recalled learning about the option of applying to Education Academy. As she went through the experiences of the two years, her future career became very clear to her:

The moment I knew it was really for me was halfway through Year 2 of the Ed Academy when I was doing the internship. I was teaching the kids and I remember I would go home at night and make things and take them in thinking maybe we could use them in the classroom with the kids. Then I would see the teacher using them and it would make me so happy. I was just so invested in it and I enjoyed it so much. I thought "I want to do this for the rest of my life." and it was really cool to be exposed to that before starting college because I just felt so much more confident in college. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

Annalise interned in a Kindergarten classroom as well as a Special Education classroom. Both have remained interests for her future career. She spoke about a particular activity that she has continued today called "It Works." Each week the interns would pick something from the classroom that they liked and could use in the future. "I started building my toolbox . . . my list of tricks that worked. Things that I saw that I remember thinking were genius and something that I would absolutely use in the future." She still keeps this list going on her Google Drive and also has a list "Books I must buy when I'm a teacher." She laughs thinking it's "the longest list ever."

As the researcher, I shared a specific memory with Annalise that I retell regularly as I am meeting with current students in Education Academy. I talk with students about making the most of their internship experience and taking the time to soak up everything it has to offer and I share with them this story of a time I saw Annalise. It was May of her senior year of high school and I observed Annalise at the site of her internship at a local elementary school. I was there picking up my own child and while waiting in the front foyer of school, I witnessed Annalise coming down the hallway, leading a group of students. The students were clearly accustomed to this routine and were showing respect

to themselves, each other, and Annalise, their teacher at the moment. She was dressed professionally and carried herself with confidence as she led the class to their next classroom. If I were an outsider, I would have thought she was a young teacher or perhaps a student teacher. The most impressive part of this story, though, is the fact that Annalise had already graduated high school. In MLCS, seniors graduate about two weeks before the rest of the students. Confused about why she was still reporting to her internship site, I spoke with her Education Academy teacher for clarification. I learned that every day since her high school graduation, Annalise had been reporting back to the school all day to gain more experience and be of assistance in the classroom. I shared this with the principal of the school and the Human Resources department as I believed she would definitely be a teacher candidate to watch for in four years. I share with current students that her quest for experience and knowledge really showed she is willing to go above and beyond for students and for a classroom. While other recent graduates were spending their time sleeping in until noon, Annalise was doing something she found meaningful.

Annalise told me about a specific story while working with her Kindergarten students during her internship,

I was there for writing time and it was really cool to see the different kids' ideas and how they would not be able to spell a word but as we went on there would be monumental moments of suddenly having success spelling a word. There was a student in the classroom who was fairly low functioning and I would get to do some one-on-one work with him and really see that I was making a difference for him. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

Annalise's preparedness for college major coursework. Annalise highlighted her preparedness through experiences. She shared with me her first lesson plans from Education Academy. She quickly critiqued it saying that she had too many sentences and

not enough accommodations. She recognized that she had evolved in her planning and showed me an intense plan she had written for her Science Methods course.

Annalise noted that because of Education Academy she went into college and was able to declare a major right away rather than try other paths:

I didn't waste time or money. I also had an idea of what engaging teachers should look like, how to make lesson plans, and go into my classes with background knowledge. It was all very comforting and a good confidence boost that I knew it because of what I had learned the last two years. Classmates would make comments, "Oh my gosh, you're just so amazing." Teachers would comment, "These are the best lesson plans I've seen," and "You're always so prepared," and "You were made for this." Adding on two years of experience of anything just makes you that much better and gives you a huge step up. I had practice and I understood professionalism. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

Annalise had one college classmate who experienced a one-year internship program in high school, however, says that she wouldn't discount the experience gained in Year 1. "It's a great introduction to what teachers actually do, the behind the scenes work for what it takes to prepare is a totally different world."

Annalise also remembered getting hands on experience working with parents in her internship. She was able to practice for parent-teacher conferences and then actually took part in them. In college she also had to participate in parent-teacher conferences and she recalled not being nervous at all due to having already had the experience.

That was the nice thing about Ed Academy, it was like the whole like first year and a half of college, were all things that I had been kind of introduced to already. And so I wasn't nervous. I felt confident going into things, because I was thinking, "I've done this," or "I have an idea of what you're talking about," or I knew answers, and the other kids were a bit in lala land, I was like "I got this guys," and I could help others. So that was really cool, because it just like reassuring too. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

To triangulate my data, Annalise gave me permission to speak to one of her most trusted college professors, Dr. F. In reaching out to Dr. F I learned that Annalise

performed above average in education classes from the beginning. Her lesson plans have since gone on to be exemplars for other students. As a practicum student, Annalise would stay extra and assist substitute teachers. Dr. F also observed that Annalise was the strongest teacher candidate she has ever observed in working with data. Simply put, Dr. F said that Annalise “excels to the point where it’s hard to remember she is a student” and she is “beyond her years as a teacher candidate.”

Annalise’s thoughts on future career opportunities. During our interview, Annalise shared a book she had kept from her internship. She had written a journal of what she learned from each student and if that student had given her something, she had also placed it in her binder. Looking back at it she recalled some precious times and individual characteristics of the students. She said it makes her fondly remember home and she would not hesitate to come back to teach. She said, “Every time I drive by (my internship school) I get the feeling.” This is evident by her moving home to student teach.

Everyone thinks I’m crazy and I’m thinking, “No! I get to live at home for free. I love the community here because it’s a growing community but it has a small town feel. Everyone is so supportive of each other yet there’s still a small town rivalry. I love this place. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

Annalise tells me that her home district is her top choice to accept a teaching job. Within the months that followed our interview, Annalise accepted a job with MLCS for the next school year.

Annalise has also always had a dream to teach abroad and she will do so this spring as she moves to Finland for six weeks to complete the rest of her elementary student teaching. She sees this as a way to explore her interest of teaching abroad prior to beginning her first job. She hopes to begin her Masters degree soon after starting to teach

and would like to explore Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction, or Educational Leadership.

Annalise's thoughts on mentor relationships. Annalise regularly keeps in touch with several of her former teachers. She is friends on Facebook with her internship cooperating teachers, both of whom have since moved far away from MLCS because of their spouses' careers. She calls Mrs. C from her internship a mentor as well as a college professor who is willing to help with everything from life to school. She also remembers a high school coach who really helped her come out of her shell, making her into a confident person. She still keeps in touch with the coach, who has since retired from MLCS.

She also fondly remembers the positive relationships that she had with her teachers. She keeps in contact with them primarily on social media or through email updates or occasional text messages. She feels that teaching alongside them would take a little getting used to as she sees them as very far above her but also can see that it would show she's worked hard and it would be rewarding to reach that point. She believes she would get along well with former teachers as colleagues as she already feels comfortable with them. Because of that prior relationship, Annalise says it would be easy to ask questions and hopefully get to a point someday of being that go-to person for other new teachers.

Annalise says a mentor is crucial for first year teachers. She believes it would be a checkpoint to make sure she's not forgetting something and a person who could help her feel not as overwhelmed in the first year. Learning from a person who might be able to offer suggestions or solutions would be something she would be looking for in a mentor.

Annalise's recommendations for MLCS. Annalise made me reflect on how important it is that the right teacher is selected to be a mentor in the internship during Year 2 of Education Academy. She found the real conversations and Mrs. C's willingness to be very open to be helpful. As a fairly young teacher herself, Annalise found Mrs. C to be very relatable.

She was open with me about the transition from college to a teaching career and she was always willing to share everything with me. I have a lot of what she gave me in my toolbox now. She was also very personable as she asked about my life, gave me advice, and showed me better strategies and more creative ways to do something. (A. Robbins, personal communication, 2017)

This semester Annalise will return to her old high school and speak to Education Academy students. One of her Education Academy classmates and now best friends, will join her. Both are have returned home to MLCS to student teach. Annalise stressed the importance of those early networking relationships that can be gained from Education Academy. The two of them became close during the academy and ended up roommates in college, often together making connections from their internship experience.

As a part of our current student teaching group, Annalise has taken part in an introduction meeting in which Human Resources shares about our school district, the hiring process, our benefits and salary, as well as the outlook for employment. Annalise shared that this meeting helped her gain a lot of clarification and she felt it would be beneficial for any juniors and seniors to participate prior to their job search. She could see alumni taking advantage of this opportunity and would encourage them to do so.

Annalise would recommend having someone from the school district checking in throughout college. She suggested texts or emails such as "Congrats on accomplishing your first semester of college. How's everything going? Anything I can help you with?"

She also has a college classmate who is from a small school and the district gives \$500 scholarships to students attending college to pursue education degrees. Her friend used that money to buy her teacher clothes. Annalise saw it as a message from the school district of “We believe in you . . . use this to pay for books or anything that can help you keep going.”

Annalise is a member of the Education Academy group on Facebook. She sees Facebook as a way we should continue to keep in touch with alumni. She also suggested the app GroupMe or texting. An occasional reunion was also interesting to Annalise since she had a very tightknit Education Academy group.

Nina Black

I really like making connections with students, whether it's personal relationships or through my content areas. I enjoy making connections between cultures and making people aware that yes, we're different, but not that different. I like inspiring people to learn more about what they are surrounded by and how their neighbor might be perceiving the world. And I like giving them hope for a better future with more unity and peace through showing each other hospitality. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Nina is a 21-year-old, college senior, completing her last semester of college. She attended K-2nd grade in a neighboring community. Then her elementary and middle school years were spent both in MLCS as well as the parochial elementary school in the community. Her high school career was spent at MLCS. Nina possesses a strong desire to make the world a better place through compassion and love. Nina is Asian and the daughter of an immigrant mother. She has a wide variety of interests including understanding cultures and education. After first semester of her first year of college, Nina left the large, local university in search of something smaller and further away from home. She has spent the rest of her college career at a small, private, Christian college in a nearby state. Her parents moved to a distant state since Nina finished high school. Pursuing her interest in Spanish, as well as helping others to better their lives, Nina recently moved to Nicaragua to complete her student teaching in Spanish and English as a Second Language. She spent some time there a few years ago during a study abroad.

Influences leading Nina to interest in the field of education. Nina cited two strong educators in MLCS that made a big impact on her life. Her third grade teacher found a way to break through despite Nina's hate for math. She remembered, "I still don't really like math, but I hated math. But she made it really fun and she taught me all these songs that I still use." At that point, Nina didn't know that she wanted to be a

teacher but she now finds herself thinking that Ms. K is someone whom she would like to emulate. Nina was a little later in thinking about being a teacher than the rest of the study participants. On a mission trip to Mexico at age 15, she found herself leading a group of youth from ages 6 through 17. She didn't speak Spanish at the time and had to figure out how to communicate. She said she specifically remembered thinking, "Man, I kind of like teaching. . ." Shortly after, she learned of the MLCS Education Academy and decided that she would give it a try citing saving time and money to try it in high school rather than college.

At that point, she had an English teacher that had really challenged her. Nina said,

I like how she related to students, but she didn't baby us. She gave us an independence and make us take responsibility for our own learning. She asked intriguing questions and I remember thinking, "Wow . . . I want to be like her. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Nina remembers feeling like English was a strength and she knew that her own writing was very strong. She had a paper that Mrs. T "just destroyed" and as Nina remembers it, "tore down my ego a bit." That ended up being an important lesson for Nina:

It made me sit down and reevaluate things in real life and see that there is always room for improvement no matter where you may be. You don't ever reach a point of perfection in life. That was a very important lesson that I took away from her. I knew that if I was wanting to be a teacher, I don't necessarily need to know everything perfectly and I would always have room for improvement. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Nina also shared about her childhood citing various experiences that make her want to work with students who are from low income families or with immigrants. Because her mother immigrated to the United States, Nina had an outside, early understanding of the difficulties students can be facing when parents may not speak English. Nina expects teachers to step up in that situation. She did inner-city volunteer

work in high school that helped shape her thinking in that realm as well. Those experiences also make it easier for her now to make connections with students who are from low-income families. She recognizes that the last thing students need is to have someone standing over them and talking down to them because of where they are in life.

While Nina doesn't have family members that are teachers, she still felt that they influence her decision to pursue education as a career. She said,

My family has always been supportive of whatever I want to do. I have kind of a hippie family . . . they're very much about following your heart. They would say, 'Do whatever makes you happy.' And so I did. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Thus, in a round-about way, Nina credits them. They encouraged her to try new things and she has found purpose in her life by doing something she enjoys and can make an impact in doing so.

Nina's experiences in Education Academy. Nina was a unique participant in Education Academy as she completed both Year 1 and Year 2 while she was a senior in high school. Most students complete Year 1 as a junior and Year 2 as a senior. She doesn't regret having completed the full experience. In a seven period school day, she took Year 1 during 5th hour and then left for her internship (Year 2) for 6th and 7th period. She felt that classroom experience in the internship, in a middle school English classroom, had the biggest impact on her, but not in the most typical of ways. She learned that she really enjoyed students and forming those teacher-student relationships but she also decided during this time that being an English teacher was not what she was meant to do. Nina remembers expressing relief that the students responded well to her, she was helpful to the teacher, and the students noticed her and thought what she was doing was important.

The content of Year 1 was helpful for Nina to put directly into place in her internship. Learning about lesson planning and discussion about philosophy of education as well as her Gallup Strengths Finder had a lasting impact on Nina. Her strengths in particular, she was able to rattle off in the interview, a full four years later. They are: responsibility, empathy, context, connectedness, and restorative. Hearing Nina refer to these, I immediately could see her putting her strengths into action, translating that to her experiences she's gaining now in college. She also remembers for the first time gaining a strong grasp on the vast amount of work it takes to be a teacher.

I didn't necessarily know everything a teacher actually did . . . how much work went into it, and I didn't understand the behind-the-scenes work. I saw ideas and philosophies that teachers had to have in order to be effective. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

During her internship, Nina also had the opportunity to work with a Special Education teacher, as the class was a co-taught course. In MLCS inclusion is highly valued and it is common to have two teachers serving students with very little pull-out for students with special needs. There were times that Nina felt a little "in the way" with two other teachers in the room but she took the opportunity to move beyond her comfort zone and find out where she could be most useful for the teacher, sometimes in more of an assisting role like walking around the room helping individuals as well as helping with grading papers and bulletin boards. Nina described it,

I think it was a confidence issue and I remember her telling me that I'll be a good teacher if I can gain more confidence. Looking back, I wish I would have been able to move past my own insecurities about teaching and just do it. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Nina also remembered gaining a lot of insight on classroom management as she watched the teacher deal with various off task students. She noted too that middle school students

have no problem calling each other out when they are having difficulty concentrating due to a peer's behavior.

Nina's preparedness for college major coursework. When Nina began college as an education major, she felt confident that she would be a teacher. Where she wavered was which subject area to choose—many areas held her interest—English, Spanish, Native American Studies. Her semester abroad in Nicaragua brought some clarity. “I have to feel I'm doing something for other people,” and she declared Secondary Education with a Spanish Endorsement along with English as a Second Language.

As far as the classes that she was taking in her major, Nina found that she went in feeling like they were being thrown in the deep end and then quickly realized, “I already had a year worth of teaching (in Education Academy), this is round two. So Education Academy had helped me understand what I was getting into and how to work with others and collaborate.” She said that early on it was evident that she had been better prepared than some of her peers, but by the end of college they are on a more even playing field.

Nina recalled a college assignment where she had to write her educational belief statements. She remembered writing her philosophy in Education Academy and pulled out her work from high school. She was shocked that her philosophy had not changed much and the core of her beliefs are still quite solid.

Nina gave me permission to speak to her college Spanish professor who shared that Nina's curiosity and creativity make her stand out from her peers. She also cited that Nina had the confidence to do an early study abroad which was a beneficial experience that built her resiliency. Throughout her time in college, Nina has shown a passion for educating others which can be seen in her final products.

Nina's thoughts on future teaching opportunities. Nina is in a unique situation in that her family has since moved away from the MLCS community. Upon our interview, she shared that she will likely seek a job in a very large school district, possibly in Texas (near family) or on the West Coast (a long time dream). She also has connections in Australia. Nina has a zest for adventure, evident through much of our interview. Since the interview, however, Nina has followed up with me. Now that the time is actually here for her to begin applying and interviewing for jobs, there are a few things calling her back to the area where she grew up. Nina said that she feels moving to her home state is more realistic to start her career when considering the more reasonable costs of living in the Midwest compared to say, the West Coast.

I absolutely loved the MLCS district. I was blessed with great teachers and classmates. I was truly prepared for all life had to throw at me. It is what really inspired me to pursue a career in education and I really want to contribute to that. (N. Black, personal communication, 2017)

Upon our last conversation, MLCS did not have job openings in Nina's field area, however she was scheduled to interview with the largest school district in our area, a district that fits her desire to work in a highly diverse school district—both ethnically and socioeconomically. Nina has since been offered and accepted a job in the neighboring metropolitan district. This type of revelation made me glad that I shared with my participants that no matter where they end up teaching, we always wanted to make sure they knew that it makes us so proud they are pursuing teaching as a career.

Nina's thoughts on mentor relationships. Nina still keeps in touch with several teachers from MLCS. She has asked for some materials from Shelley, her 3rd grade teacher. She is friends on Facebook with Mrs. H, her internship teacher. She fondly remembered several teachers and said that if she did return to the MLCS area, she could

definitely see herself teaching alongside her high school Spanish teacher. She recalled the enthusiasm that her teacher brought to everything she taught. Nina said she would welcome any possibilities to collaborate in the future. She shared that the small community feel and inclusivity of the school is something that she thinks about a lot. Collaboration was a key word that Nina mentioned several times and it will be a goal when she begins her teaching career.

On the subject of mentors, Nina thought that a mentor during her first year of teaching would be largely beneficial. She said she knows that it will be a hard transition process to begin on her own and it would make sense to have someone who has been there to discuss questions with and have as a mentor.

Nina's recommendations for MLCS. With being so close to finishing her college career, Nina has some keen insight for students in high school who are considering a career in the education field. She says to realistically think about whether elementary or secondary is a better fit, and she added, "Do you have the patience that littler kids require?" She wants them to actually consider their skills, think about the realities of a teacher, take the time to explore the many different areas of education careers, and to take advantage of Education Academy as an experience.

Along with that, she has some advice for the school district. Though the district has a large number of higher need and more diverse schools, she did not experience those in Education Academy. She hopes that this will be a consideration in moving forward and she wants all future teachers to get to see the impact that a more diverse experience can have on both students and teachers.

If MLCS offered a session each winter for college students who are education majors, Nina said she thought it would be very beneficial. She recommended practice interviews, resume reviews, and gaining feedback from administrators.

Nina also shared some insight on her college capstone course during which there are various groups each student attends to delve further into topics in education. She is a part of groups with each of these focuses: racism, refugees, failure, finances, and hospitality. It was evident that this has been an impactful class and is perhaps something we could learn from as we continue to develop education academy.

John Gome

Junior year in high school, I began thinking outside of myself. I was a part of this greater picture and experiences allowed me to start thinking about mentorship and how I can impact others . . . I think teaching is a career field where you are able to do those things every day . . . I've been ignited and awakened from that by somebody else, but I can hopefully spread that fire. (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

John Gome is a 21-year old, Caucasian male, in his junior year of college. He was an Air Force child and moved several times in elementary school. He credits those moves and experiences with the way he socializes now as a young adult, "I had to make friends a lot quicker and learned how to socialize differently." He moved to MLCS in 3rd grade and when his father retired from the military while here, the family decided to stay. His mom had a teaching job at a neighboring district and her family was in the state as well. Following high school, John stayed relatively close by attending college an hour and a half away from home at a small private college. He is majoring in Secondary Education with endorsements in Social Studies and English as a Second Language.

Influences leading John to interest in the field of education. John has fond memories of growing up and playing school with his older sister during the summer and days off of school. He laughed remembering,

She (his sister) was the bossy one who always wanted to be the teacher and I would be the student, but we would trade roles occasionally. We would watch a video and then come up with questions on how to engage the class. (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

It was in high school, that he remembers having his first serious thoughts of being a teacher, specifically his sophomore year. John shared,

I had a teacher who always used to say, 'We are who we are because of the people we've met, the places we've been, and the opportunities that have been afforded to us.' And that always clung to my heart because I know it's true. (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

He remembered secondary teachers who had a big impact on him. He recalled a teacher who provided a lot of life lessons in her teaching. He also shared a relationship building technique that his sophomore World Civilizations teacher used that was very powerful for students.

He was really impactful and did a lot of really neat things as a coach and as a teacher. He always played a coaching role for his students, cheering them on and offering advice to succeed. Every day he would spend at least 10 minutes writing letters to students. Every student got one throughout the year. I received one. It was hand written, which made it so much more from the heart. I remember receiving it before a football game and he wished me luck and reminded me that I'm a strong leader on the team whom others counted on. He also talked about me receiving (a leadership) award. I remember going back my freshman year of college and asking how he did that, and did it every single day. I found it so impactful to students. He said, "I can take 10 minutes out of my day to write a few words." (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

John also talked about his mother being in the education field as an early childhood teacher. In addition, growing up with his sister who also had a dream of being a teacher, he recalls looking up to her in Education Academy during high school. She was interning in an elementary classroom and he loved hearing her stories every day and always noticed she came home with a smile on her face. Even now, when she is a second year teacher, they talk about school. She provides him advice and encouragement about class and he does the same for her about her school endeavors. He shared, "Now we both have further knowledge in (our) career field and we're able to speak on a higher level about it."

It is also with pride that John talks about his grandmother who was a teacher and a principal. He shared that she always had many good stories to share about working in a small schoolhouse in the country and then later as a principal in a large neighboring district.

While it seems that the schooling system is a lot different now, her heart is just the same as a teacher should be now . . . the way she cared for students even if they were in trouble, she would handle that in such a positive way and help the student learn from it. Instead of her giving up on them, she helped it be a decision that they can learn from. (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

When asked if he had any negative experiences that made him want to be a teacher, John told about a close friend in high school that was suffering from mental illness. He remembered some very hard times and knowing that he was someone who, while he didn't completely understand what his friend was going through, he could have empathy for her and be an encouraging, positive person in her life. He said, "The experience expanded my thinking and understanding of how to work with humans of different kinds."

John's experiences in Education Academy. John credits the learning in Year 1 Education Academy to helping him realize the impact that he could have as a teacher. He remembers watching TED talks and other videos watching powerful teaching in action. He recalls learning about all the behind the scenes work in an educator's life and began to feel that this work was really for him.

He recalled taking the Gallup Strengths Finder and quickly rattled off his strengths, "Context, Strategic, Learner, Ideation, Positivity. . . . It's an interesting conversation piece and I plan to have them on my resume."

John talked a lot about his internship experience as it was particularly influential for him. He made a point of being a keen observer as he wanted to be sure to pick up on qualities and characteristics of effective teachers. He said he enjoyed his co-taught class and noticed techniques that they were using when teaching and how they engaged specific students. The Education Academy class kept connected while out on their

internships through a Google+ group. Weekly, the students would post journal updates discussing the class. He found it helpful to review the stories that his peers were posting and he picked up on some techniques that their cooperating teachers were using and how those were having an impact on students.

We looked at one of those journals that John wrote during his internship:

I think that what I have done best in my internship so far is building solid and positive relationships with the students. They are very comfortable coming up to me with questions. I call them all by their names. Last week was spirit week and one of the days was dress like a staff member day. One of the students in my 8th hour class dressed up like me, I thought it was so cool. Of all the teachers he has and interacts with during the day, he chose me. My favorite part of my internship is when I get to one-on-one teach a student. If a student is struggling and I can see that I will go over to them, give them a different explanation or way of looking at the topic. There is one student in 7th hour who has expressed how he doesn't like history because he thinks he is no good at it. I encouraged him and told him that he can, it just takes a little bit more effort. I look forward to seeing how he ends up doing in the next few weeks. (J. Gome, High School Education Academy Weekly Online Journal, 2014)

John had shared a photo as well of himself and the student that dressed like him (J. Gome, Education Academy Artifact, 2014). The student had the complete look down—nametag and all. It was clear that even as a senior in high school, John recognized the impact he can have and he is humble in discussing this impact. He views this power as a large responsibility which sometimes takes teachers several years into teaching to fully realize.

John also had to experience adversity in his internship. The teacher he was with had mold discovered in the walls and ceiling, thus right near the start of the school year, the whole classroom was relocated to a make-shift classroom location. It wasn't the ideal situation to deal with as the class size was a larger one.

John had brought several other artifacts to share with me, one being his belief statements that were written during his time in Education Academy. He said that in college, they hadn't yet gotten to this assignment but he knew it was coming.

The fact that I have belief statements already set is very powerful. When we get to do this in college, I'll be able to pull this up and see how it's changed. Looking over them I've already seen that while some things have remained the same, there are other things where maybe I'll change to include something else I've gained over time. (J. Gome, Artifact, 2014)

In his belief statements, John included a Nelson Mandela quote, "Speak to a man in your language and it goes to his head, but if you speak to another man in his language, it goes to his heart." John said that he had chosen that quote before adding ESL to his studies. He talked about his belief statements remaining strong over time and that he found it important to communicate words that connect him with another person. He said it shows that one cares and is listening.

He also enjoyed the experiences working one on one with students in the internship. He would try to help them in struggling areas and help them to see it in a different way to understand concepts better. He recalled specific students that were struggling at the start of the year gradually begin to show improvement in part due to the one-on-one work and someone who took interest in trying to understand them better.

John said that this experience was very impactful to him.

John's preparedness for college major coursework. Since he had dual enrolled while in Education Academy, John did not have to take the first Introduction to Education class offered at the college level. He instead stayed engaged through a service project in his leadership class working with students and tutoring daily. It helped him feel confident in his major and explore areas of endorsement.

That confidence continued in the summer when John encountered the chance to work with students from Japan. He talked about the friendship that his college has with this school and through the partnership the students come and spend some time each year in the United States and on his campus. Students from the United States and locally take classes together and cross the language barrier. This experience has had a big impact on John and his decision to add an endorsement in English as a Second Language. The sensei teacher has also been very influential for John. He also cited the opportunity to travel abroad to Puerto Rico during a high school class that gave him an appreciation of different cultures. One of his high school teachers even had him come in and teach a lesson to the students about Puerto Rico.

Being in his junior year of college, John has already had the opportunity to do three semesters of practicum and has completed a lot of lesson plans. He felt that he was very prepared to do so and credited his experience with Madeline Hunter lesson planning format in Year 1 of the academy:

Education Academy prepared me for lesson planning but the areas it gave me the most benefit was the actual field experience. While a lot of my peers were scared and worried about getting into the classroom for their first practicum experience, I was already in there for an entire year. I kind of knew what to expect of the behavior of kids and how to be a professional. I also already knew about different theories and methods of teaching. Just having been in the classroom, I could draw on specific examples that I had already seen in my experiences. (J. Gome, personal communication, 2017)

John thinks his peers can see a confidence in him. He doesn't have a problem getting up in front of a class. He generally knows what to do for assignments and it goes smoothly for him. Professionals in the field would agree. For triangulation of my data, I conversed with Dr. K, a professor that John has worked with in college. She said, "John stood out the first time we met when he was a prospective student considering (the

college). I was struck by his maturity and passion to become a teacher. He had already drunk the Kool-Aid!” (Dr. K, personal communication, 2017).

Dr. K has observed that John’s “why” has always focused on a teacher’s ability to impact society. He understands the big picture. She also noted that his appreciation for diversity stands out and noted his strong connection with international students. That paired with his leadership skills makes him well respected among staff and peers.

John’s thoughts on future career opportunities. With student teaching just a year away, John is getting close to the time of making decisions about his future as a teacher. He is hoping to do some studying abroad, possibly even for his student teaching. He has also explored the idea of student teaching in MLCS in a different secondary school than where he attended and also different than where his internship took place. He plans to pursue a Master’s degree right away. He may see how his experience abroad goes and then considering teaching overseas. Whatever experiences come first, John ultimately sees himself coming back to teach in the area in either Social Studies or ESL.

John’s thoughts on mentor relationships. John very easily could see Education Academy alumni being mentored by the cooperating teacher from the Year 2 internship.

He has seen me grow and would know what areas were my strengths and weaknesses. I think he’d be willing to be tougher on me because we already have that relationship. I was impacted by his enthusiasm and encouragement as well as how he made things relevant for students. (J. Gome, Education Academy Artifact, 2014)

John recognizes that the cooperating teacher he had during his internship has since retired from teaching but he thought this would be an interesting mentor/first year teacher combination to explore for others.

John also mentioned that it would be comfortable to be mentored by his secondary teacher whom he talked about writing the personalized notes. “He was positive and encouraging to me. He helped me learn about humanness and the content area. We have developed professional friendships.”

John was recently invited back to his high school by the current principal to speak to teachers and kick off the school year. John hoped that it was encouraging to teachers to see the students that they had impacted. John said he was very humbled by the opportunity to share and he had a hard time deciding what he could give the teachers in return for what they had done for him. He decided to talk about serving others and how we can all work together for the common good.

Social media is something that John doesn't widely use to keep in touch but he does keep a few of his former teachers as friends on Facebook and he does email them occasionally or stop to talk when he's back in town. He said he will sometimes look up former teachers on the school's website and email them to say, “I just wanted to let you know that you had a huge impact on me and this is what I'm up to now.”

John's recommendations for MLCS. The connections that John has had with former teachers have been influential for him. He thinks that it would help Education Academy graduates to have a mentor assigned to them as they head off to college. His ideas included communication to check in on them or even meeting up and having a cup of coffee when the student is home from college on break. He said those conversations have been helpful to keep current in what his mentors are seeing in the classroom and what they find as impactful and helpful for students.

John is a member of the Education Academy group on social media. He doesn't use social media often but it is something that he occasionally checks in on for updates. He did think that a gathering among his academy group would be interesting.

Kate Brooks

The school district creates a collaborative environment with great resources and are always striving to be better for students. It's the kind of place I want to be. This is a community I want to be a part of, it's where I'd want to start a family because it's where I grew up and I loved my experience. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate Brooks is a 21-year-old, female, Caucasian, college junior. She is a regular around the MLCS district. She attended school here her entire career. In high school, she began working a part time job at Kids Campus at the elementary school she grew up attending. She took part in two years of Education Academy and interned at that same elementary school. Kate chose a local university that is within 20 minutes of home. She is majoring in Elementary Education. Throughout college, she continued her Kids Campus job in college and has been promoted to Assistant Director. She also has obtained credentials to be a substitute teacher and a substitute paraprofessional with MLCS and takes jobs when her school schedule will allow the time. Knowing all of this may help you get an idea of Kate's personality too. It doesn't take long upon meeting her to discover that she's loyal, kind, charismatic, and a self-described "creature of habit." She likes to know what she is getting into before the time comes to make big decisions. She's reliable and easy to get along with. Kate is currently finishing her junior year of college where she is in a lengthy practicum in a neighboring district. This has been a good experience for her as she steps out of her shell and gets closer to the point of graduation from college. She will be student teaching next year at this time.

Influences leading Kate to interest in the field of education. Kate felt a strong interest in teaching early in life as her mom and her stepdad were both teachers and she

spent her fair share of time around schools. Kate specifically remembered the first time she went to school with her mom.

My mom is a kindergarten teacher and I remember when I was seven or eight years old, I just watched her and saw how much fun she was having. She made the kids laugh and she just enjoyed everything. As I grew up and started thinking about a career, I remember realizing that people get into routine jobs and just kind of go through life day-by-day . . . I don't want to do that. I want to do something where I can have fun and feel like I enjoy it. I've always felt like I was a kid at heart so just seeing her up there having fun, sparked that initial interest for me. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate talks a lot about the influences her mom has had upon her life. They speak daily and she is Kate's go-to for any school related questions. Back when Kate first learned about Education Academy, it was her mom who said to give it a try and gain the experience.

Kate says that she also had a second grade teacher that was very influential and helped to spark her original interest in teaching. This particular teacher made it fun to come to school as learning was not tedious and routine under her . . . she knew how to make it fun. Kate calls her a "big influence, and the reason why I wanted to do second grade." There were different things that her teacher did to make learning fun and to motivate her students. Kate remembered, "She would say, OK if you guys get at least 8 out of 10 on your spelling test, I will do a cartwheel." Kate says the class got so pumped up by this possibility and would try their hardest. She also remembers her teacher getting to know her family well and showing that she cared, even years later.

She knew my Grandma and she knew that we were very close. When I lost my Grandma, she really helped me and she was there for me. She told me about times that she remembered my grandma coming and helping out in the classroom and she really helped me through it. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate also cited her Education Academy teacher, Mrs. H, as someone who was a big influence. “She helped me a lot and she still gets in touch with me every now and then and checks to see how things are going” (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017).

In addition, another high school teacher who taught math has been a positive influence. She is the one that introduced Kate to the idea of STEM which is now an area of concentration along with Kate’s elementary education major.

Kate did have a few negative experiences with teachers in college that pushed her to be a better teacher. There was a situation where a teacher showed very little respect for the students, yet expected respect in return. In addition, the teacher did not appear to care about the students and their success. She wasn’t clear about expectations and students had difficulty succeeding. Kate remembers,

I want students to know that I care and I want them to be the best that they can be. I don’t want them to feel that they came into my classroom and that I won’t help them. I am not going to watch them fail. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate’s experiences in Education Academy. Kate says that when the opportunity to take part in Education Academy came her way, she knew it was a chance for her to try something that had been a dream and passion and see how it went. She found the experiences to be more reassuring than anything else. She still is grateful that she went to a school that offered such an opportunity. Kate recalls her high school teachers as being very supportive and throughout the academy experience, she felt that support too as she went out to explore something that seemed like the perfect opportunity to “get myself out there” according to Kate. She cites Education Academy on making the biggest impact on her for making the decision to pursue a career in education.

Year 1 Kate had a pretty strong feeling that education would be her future career, however she knew that there were many vast career choices and her options were unlimited. She recalled, “Being able to get into a classroom in high school, to reassure myself that I’m going the right path, was an opportunity I knew I needed to take.”

During Year 1, Kate recalls gaining experience in lesson planning. She felt this activity was a huge help that she draws upon even now in her junior year of college. She also appreciated being exposed to different methods of teaching, taking a look at various curriculum, and just learning the beginning stages of a career in teaching. The mentoring on Fridays was impactful for Kate. She also remembers attending a local college (incidentally, the same one where Kate now is enrolled) and gaining information from panels of experts.

Kate appreciated the closeness of her small Education Academy class. She recalls them feeding off of one another as they each shared about their days whether it was a story of mentoring or an idea that someone had picked up.

Kate took the Gallup Strengths Finder and remembers feeling the results were very accurate and well-suited to her. She also recalled the mock interviews done with the principals. As a researcher, I had a unique story to share with Kate and that is of the time she interviewed with me, one of her principals at the time. Kate remembers feeling very nervous and anxious until she got into the groove and just started sharing about what she loves. I told Kate my memory of her which was our discussion after the interview. I’ve even shared it with several students since. I recall telling her that she performed as well in the interview as many first year teachers do, even though she had far less experience. The

amount of growth and learning about the profession seen during Education Academy Year 1 truly astounded me.

When the internship began during Year 2, Kate feels lucky to have been placed in the elementary school where she grew up attending. She was placed with a 2nd grade teacher who helped to build her confidence and start making the pieces of what she was learning, fit into a classroom. Kate remembers leaving her high school right away and heading straight to the elementary school for her internship as she was excited to get there each day. She said she wanted to soak up all the time with the students that she could. Kate's experience reassured her that education was something she was passionate about and could continue to pursue. The feedback that she got from the teacher also helped her to improve. Kate values this connection and continues to keep in touch with her cooperating teacher.

The teacher actually let Kate take over the class several times, especially in areas that Kate felt strongest. Primarily she was there for writing and science classes. She worked hard to connect with each student and helped them be comfortable with her. When the semester ended, it was tough to leave, another way that Kate knew this was the career path for her.

We grew really close to each other and it was hard leaving them. They helped me grow into the person that I am today. I came in shy and timid and I gained confidence and comfort. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate even recalled the day that she came to class and there was a substitute teacher. The lesson plan was slightly laid out but had a very important sentence, "Miss Kate has it today." Kate could see that her cooperating teacher had such confidence in her that she could be entrusted to the entire lesson. Kate recognizes that now, three years

later, her cooperating teacher is still someone that is a go-to for her with classroom management advice and ideas. This is made easier because Kate works at the same building daily for Kids Campus.

Kate's preparedness for college major coursework. Kate recalls being very confident with her major as she entered college. She says that many of her peers were uncertain but she just could not wait to get into the education classes. She is now three years into her major and says that she has never questioned her decision. She is especially excited to teach math and make it a fun and interactive experience for students. Kate also recognizes that the teacher's attitude means a lot and can effect whether or not the students will be interested in learning.

Kate especially felt her preparedness was exceptional when it was time to get into specific experiences in the field in actual classrooms.

So many of my classmates were really nervous about it . . . and I was nervous too, but I kept thinking that I've done this before and I was just really excited to get out there. When we would get up and do presentations for our class, they would tell me I act like I've done this before and I tell them, I did—in high school!
(K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate said she is a step ahead of those who have not had an opportunity such as Education Academy highlighting experiences she had every day such as seeing routines being put into place, transitions, and classroom management. "Having that experience helped me and I just keep building off of that." Kate doesn't know of other classmates that had the academy experience with the exception of one who also grew up through the MLCS Education Academy.

When I triangulated my data and talked with Dr. P, she said she could see that Kate's preparation was different. She noticed right away that Kate had a natural presence and confidence in the classroom.

She excelled in all areas of her class, quizzes, written work, class presentations. . . . She stood out as being exceptionally well-prepared as a teacher candidate. The lessons and presentations that she made were of the highest quality. She is personable and engaging. She did well in practicum working with a wide-range of diverse students and was able to engage them and work effectively with them. She presents herself as a professional and is eager to be the best teacher she can possibly be. She wants to help students learn and is willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen. (Dr P., personal communication, 2018)

Kate's thoughts on future career opportunities. The idea of returning to MLCS as a teacher is exciting to Kate. Because she has stayed even more connected with MLCS through her job with Kids Campus, she says she really would like to return for student teaching and "hopefully" for her first job.

The school district creates a collaborative environment with great resources and are always striving to be better for students. It's the kind of place I want to be. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

During my interview I even noted that Kate used the word "our" when talking about the students of MLCS. She said, "The district is always building excellence and wanting our students to get the best education that they can." This tells me she is engrained and would easily assimilate as a first year teacher.

Kate also recognizes that her family is nearby and in particular refers to her mom as a strong rock in her life. She doesn't see herself traveling abroad and actually describes herself with laughter:

I'm a home-body. I want to student teach here, get to know more people in the district, and this is my first choice for a future job. . . . This is a community I want to be a part of, it's where I'd want to start a family because, it's where I grew up and I loved my experience. (K. Brooks, personal communication, 2017)

Kate also hopes to pursue a Master's degree program designed for first year teachers through the local university. This is a program that MLCS supports and partners with for first year teachers.

Kate's thoughts on mentor relationships. Kate continues to keep in contact with her 2nd grade teacher as well as the teacher she was placed with during the internship. She said, "I've asked her (internship teacher) questions and expressed any concerns that I have." Because of the comfortability that she feels with them, and with all her teachers she had growing up, she said that she could really see herself being a first year teacher, working alongside them, and having any one of them as her mentor. When thinking about being a first year teacher, Kate said, "I think having someone to be able to go to and talk to is essential. When you are struggling or have questions, it would be nice to have someone who I already trust to go to."

Kate has also been mentored by her boss at Kids Campus. After working there the summer after high school, Kate put in her resignation, thinking it would not be something she could maintain while in college. Her director called her and encouraged her to retract her resignation, stating that they would figure out a way to make things work and she did not want to lose her. Kate is so grateful for that moment and for the many moments of mentorship since.

Kate's recommendations for MLCS. Kate has gained a lot of experience and connections in the school district through her work with Kids Campus. As mentioned, she is currently the assistant director. Her days consist of going to her job at Kids Campus before college in the morning. She then goes and does her practicum work for college at another elementary school, and then returns to Kids Campus for the PM shift when the

students have gotten out of school. Those experiences have kept her active in our schools. Making these connections early in Education Academy could be of great help. While she gained valuable people skills working her part time job at a grocery store, Kate wishes that she would have started working at Kids Campus earlier in high school.

Kate has been back to high school and has spoken to the Education Academy class. She hopes she was able to give them information that will help their future success. She encourages students to volunteer at schools, get as much experience as they can, and also work for Kids Campus.

Kate stays in touch with several former teachers through social media and always feels very encouraged by her former teachers when she posts something about her successes in college. She also follows various Facebook pages for the district, her high school, and several of the elementary schools. She is a part of the Education Academy group on Facebook and thinks that this makes sense as a way to stay connected. She also felt that contacts via Messenger by school district personnel are a good way to check in on students once they have gone to college.

Kate liked the idea of having Human Resources host a winter session providing information about the district. She said it would help to prepare herself for an interview as well as make her more comfortable.

Jessica Bond

Having early exposure to a career in education before I even went to college was crucial for me. While I had friends struggling and jumping from major to major, I just knew this is it for me and I made the right decision . . . there are times I feel light years ahead in my preparations. (J. Bond, personal communication, 2018)

Jessica Bond is a 20-year-old, Caucasian female, in her second year of college, yet has enough credits to be classified as a junior. She is majoring in Elementary Education with a Special Education concentration at the local university near MLCS. She still lives in MLCS and commutes daily to campus. Jessica grew up in a military family living in Florida before being stationed locally when she was in the first grade. Upon her dad's military retirement, the family stayed in the MLCS area. She attended two elementary schools in MLCS as well as middle school and high school. In high school, she participated in Education Academy as a junior and senior. When she began college, her schedule allowed her to work afternoons and she chose to do so three hours a day as a Special Education Paraprofessional in the school where she did her Education Academy internship. Jessica has now been accepted into the Education program and is in practicums in her major so recently had to move to substitute paraprofessional status instead of daily work. Jessica was also the participant with whom the initial pilot interview was completed in February of 2017 so a follow up interview with Jessica was conducted to round out the study in February of 2018, just before the study was completed.

Influences leading Jessica to interest in the field of education. Jessica looks back on her elementary years and says,

I was a textbook definition of a future teacher . . . always staying after school to help the teachers . . . getting home from school and playing school with my siblings . . . doing workbooks all summer and practicing flashcards.

From very early on, she just knew it was what she wanted to do with her life as she gained satisfaction from helping others learn and being around people. The earliest Jessica remembers the support she received from teachers was when she was in 2nd grade. Her teacher, Mrs. A, used to let her stay after school to help out.

I just remember all my elementary teachers being so supportive of me and letting me find little ways to help all the time. I think they knew this was something I loved that early on. I look back and think how silly it probably was to them but they never responded negatively to me or acted like they were too busy for me. (J. Bond, personal communication, 2017)

Expressing this interest in the field of education at an early age, Jessica's mom was always very encouraging. She backed her daughter's desire to do something that would make her happy and something that she could wake up to each day and be excited to go to work. As a nurse practitioner, her mom is no stranger to a career in a helping field. Her dad was a diplomat in the military and pushed for a career that would be more financially prosperous but Jessica was unwavering and he sees that passion.

Jessica was compelled by a more difficult situation as well---the vast behavioral issues she encountered with students during her internship. She felt motivated to become a teacher to be a help to the students and find ways to help them learn. Now having served in other high poverty schools, she still is very moved by difficult situations.

Jessica's experiences in Education Academy. Jessica remembers Year 1 of Education Academy very vividly. She found it exciting to learn about the history of education and affirming that this was something that sparked her heart's interest. She enjoyed the mentoring days and immediately felt that she was lucky to be having this experience to try out a future career. She knew she wanted to use the experience to help her hone in on what she would be good at doing. She remembers learning a lot about

working together to make students successful and using patience and understanding when problem solving with a student.

Jessica credits her internship experiences as the most solidifying they could have possibly been as she firmed up her career goals. She said she always had an idea in her head that she had dreamed of this career but until she was there and putting all her effort in and using the knowledge she had gained that she really knew 100% this was the career for her. “The internship made it real,” she stated.

Jessica spent her internship in a third-grade classroom in a Title I building in MLCS. Nearly 40% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch status. The class had a lot of behavioral needs and four students were on IEPs. The school is a National Blue Ribbon award winner, the only school receiving this honor in MLCS. Ms. M was the cooperating internship teacher for Jessica and is also a graduate of the MLCS Education Academy. Ms. M was in her third year of teaching when the internship occurred and was already a standout teacher. Jessica learned from her cooperating teacher how to try something to fix a problem and then have to think about why it didn’t work and try something else. She said, “I learned we can’t just sit back and relax, we have to get things done and prepare the students to be successful in the classroom.”

Jessica remembers feeling that it was the best experience she could have had but as a senior in high school, it was also the most challenging.

I would get home feeling defeated and wonder if I had wasted time and not accomplished much with the students. Yet, the next day, students that had been the most challenging the day before would greet me as if it was a brand new start, offering a hug and easy hello right away. Their actions made me take a deep breath and work to problem solve the behavioral issues that had derailed them the day before. I realized that those students needed their teacher to come back the next day ready to have a fresh start. The perspective and experience that I gained in the internship is what made me approach each situation from a vantage point of

knowing that it could be solved and if not in this way, then in another way--it was just a matter of finding out what worked. (J. Bond, personal communication, 2017)

Jessica said she picked up on a lot of innovative classroom management ideas that year. During the internship, she was also working a part time job at a daycare setting. She appreciated that she could take a technique learned from her cooperating teacher and try it immediately in her job.

Jessica's preparedness for college major coursework. Heading into her first semester at college, Jessica was excited to begin her studies in education and felt very sure of her major. She had taken advantage of dual enrollment courses throughout high school so she only had one semester of general education classes left to take. She was able to begin classes in her major right away and that is something that is unique to a student in their first year at a university. She noticed that having general education classes already completed made for a smooth transition into college. Jessica is expecting to graduate a semester early from college.

Jessica felt that Education Academy helped to prepare her for one of the most traditionally difficult classes such as Math for Elementary Teachers. On a side note, this is typically a class that I hear of and see on transcripts as a struggle for education majors.

Concepts in that class started to click for me right away. I think it's because I had worked with kids in Math during the internship and a lot of others didn't know what was going on. Ed Academy just gave me a really good base knowledge. (J. Bond, Study Follow-Up Interview, 2018)

Jessica's experiences in her internship also led her to a part time job for her first year and a half of college. There was a paraprofessional opening in MLCS at the school where she interned. The principal had been impressed by Jessica and gladly requested that Human Resources place her in the school. In a follow up interview with Jessica, she

stated that her comfortability with classroom situations grew so much because of her paraprofessional experience:

I do not mean to sound conceited so please don't take it that way, but there are regularly situations where I feel light years ahead of my peers because of the preparation and exposure I have gotten thus far. I've been in several different schools, learned from multiple teachers, and I feel so much more comfortable jumping right into my practicum and helping out. My confidence level is a lot higher than my peers and my instructors notice it. My college courses require regular debriefing sessions where we talk about our practicums and how things are going. I hear them say they are still unsure and many times using practicum as an observation time. I'm initiating things that need to be done for students and jumping right in. I remember when I was tentative and that was at the start of senior year internship, three years ago. (J. Bond, Study Follow-Up Interview, 2018)

Jessica's thoughts on future career opportunities. More than anything, Jessica strikes me as grateful for the variety of opportunities that she has gotten from MLCS. She says she recognizes that there are good schools and good jobs around the whole area and she knows she would be happy anywhere. Ultimately, her top goal is to teach in MLCS. However, she mostly is looking for an opportunity to make a difference and she knows those chances are all around her.

Jessica went on to focus on her particular thoughts about MLCS:

I know I'm biased but I just really love how the whole focus in MLCS is on the individual and the community works together to make sure that each child learns to be successful. Kids don't hate going to school, they know it's a safe place for them. (J. Bond, personal communication, 2017)

Jessica said she especially notices and appreciates the things she loves about her hometown when she's been traveling. "I notice that other places I'll smile or say hi to someone and it just isn't friendly . . . here it feels like a community . . . a neighborhood."

She looks ahead to the future and hopes to take part in a Masters degree program during her first year of teaching. The particular program that she mentioned is something

that MLCS collaborates on with the local university. First up though, Jessica is a year away from student teaching and hopes to do so in the MLCS area and would like to gain opportunities and broaden her network in another elementary building.

Jessica's thoughts on mentor relationships. Jessica says she is very comfortable texting Ms. M, or Mrs. B, a teacher whom she also worked with as a para. She said she can easily ask them questions and know they will give her support or suggest resources. Even more than texting, social media is the primary form of connection for Jessica to stay in touch with Ms. M and other teachers she has met. She also keeps in touch with many of her high school teachers through social media. She finds it is an easy way to stay connected and in touch:

I can absolutely see myself working with or learning from any of the teachers I grew up having. They made me love school and learn how to help others who were struggling. They had a huge impact on me. If I were a first year teacher here, I would be thrilled to have any one of them as my mentor. I have great relationships with them and learned so much from them so to have the opportunity to keep working with them as a teacher would help me learn and would make me feel very comfortable in the situation of being a new teacher. (J. Bond, personal communication, 2017)

Jessica's recommendations for MLCS. Jessica encourages all students who have an interest in a career in education to take advantage of any work or volunteer activities with children. She said, "Babysit, observe an elementary classroom, try out Education Academy . . . anything that gives you a chance to try this now before you go to college and spend money figuring out what you like."

When moving on to college, Jessica can't stress enough how helpful the experience as a paraprofessional was to her. She cites this from her own experience in being a part of the beneficial partnership and staying on as a paraprofessional while she started college. It is a recommendation she would pass along to any Education Academy

students that go on to college locally. Along the same lines, Jessica is now to the point that she can qualify for a Local Substitute Teaching Certificate. This is something that she would now like to explore and do during semesters when she is able to have a day off of college during the week (J. Bond, Study Follow-up Interview, 2018)

Jessica reflected on the vast differences between the school where she mentored at and where she interned. One was a Title I school and getting to see the differences and similarities of the schools was helpful. She thinks that is helpful for students as they grow as educators.

Jessica was a part of the first group with Education Academy in which MLCS Human Resources met with upon completion of Year 2's internship and offered a congratulatory letter and invitation to come back to MLCS and automatically receive an interview for a teaching job. She said that the letter made her feel very supported and appreciated. In fact, she keeps the letter in the envelope and it's strategically placed in a spot where she sees it daily. Next to it, is a memento that was given to Jessica by her Education Academy teacher, Mrs. H. Jessica says that Mrs. H had collected comments from each child in her intern classroom and made this token. She said, "I've pulled these two items out any time things get tough and they've been a very good reminder that I have people who support me."

Jessica also recommends to both Human Resources and to the graduates to try and continue a professional relationship with one another. She said she feels comfortable working with Human Resources in MLCS to get advice or to ask about opportunities. Jessica said that if there was a winter session offered to ask questions and get advice from

Human Resources, she would take advantage of that in the next year as she nears student teaching and the completion of college.

Jessica is a member of the Facebook page for MLCS Education Academy alumni and hopes to see this continue. She recalled a recent post by Mrs. H that advised students on how to get a discount on their Praxis test and shared, “Little things like that are so helpful and really make us know someone back home is looking out for us and wanting to help us succeed.”

Ashley Gilbert

You are assigned a teacher and you really have no idea what will go on. I remember thinking, “Ok, I can either go about this and be shy and not get that much out of it, or I can step up right away, start helping those kids, and see where I am needed.” I told myself, “You’ve done this before, you know what you’re doing.” (A. Gilbert, personal communication, 2017)

Ashley Gilbert is a 20-year-old, female, Caucasian, college sophomore. Ashley has something unique about her from the rest of the participants of the study . . . she’s the only one that is the daughter of two educators, as both her mother and father work in MLCS. Ashley attended two different school districts growing up, making the move to MLCS her 9th grade year of high school. She participated in both years of Education Academy during high school and also was a Kids Campus employee. Following high school graduation, she chose to attend college for Elementary Education at a mid-size college two hours from home. Although only a sophomore in college, she has already taken an active role in many campus leadership activities, including the student education association for future teachers. Upon meeting her I instantly felt that she is warm and caring with a love for her family and friends.

Influences leading Ashley to interest in the field of education. Ashley knew early on that she wanted to be a teacher because she recognized that she is an empathetic person and wanted to be that person in the lives of students. She shared with me about signs in her past pointing to a career in education:

I’ve always wanted to be a teacher. I have this picture that I loved of me when I was younger . . . I had written on two rocks in chalk—one A and one B. I was sitting in this red wagon and my sister was in front of me and I’m just teaching her. I was the oldest of four children and I remember wanting to play school growing up and actually putting that into action teaching Sunday School and helping out in the kids’ program. (A. Gilbert, personal communication, 2017)

Ashley had a wonderful elementary school experience at a small metropolitan school near MLCS. She remembers having so much fun learning that she began thinking that she may want to be a teacher herself. Her 4th grade teacher is the first time that Ashley remembers noticing a teacher who not only taught academics, but also about life and being there for each other. Ashley recalls her really making each student feel comfortable in the classroom and showed each that they were special in their own unique way.

Not only were both of Ashley's parents educators, her grandma, a big influence in her life, also has spent years in education. Mostly, Ashley remembers her grandmother's job as a high school assistant principal and most recently working at the college level teaching future teachers. She has really noticed through her life the impact that her grandma has made on others. "Everywhere I go, people will ask me about her and tell me about how much she has helped them. She is always my go to when I have issues and she's really one of my favorite people ever."

Ashley had one negative experience with a teacher that motivated her to be the kind of teacher she wants to be. After typically having positive experience with teachers and being well liked, Ashley had one teacher that just didn't seem to like her. That same year, Ashley was also bullied by another student. The combination made for an unpleasant year and made Ashley realize how important it is for her students to feel well liked and cared for by their teacher.

Ashley has never looked back on her choice to pursue a teaching career. She said, "If I didn't pursue education, I don't know what I would do. My later goal is to become a school counselor."

Ashley also felt influenced by her time in youth group for her church and had two small group leaders that were very impactful. In addition, Ashley talked about her boss in Kids Campus as being a positive influence. She said, “She showed me what it means to have great work ethic, to be determined, and to stand up for yourself.”

Ashley’s experiences in Education Academy. Ashley enjoyed her time in Education Academy. Year 1 she enjoyed “dipping our feet into the water” as students became acclimated to an afternoon each week mentoring in a school. She recalls taking the Gallup Strengths Finder and still uses those to reflect on her learning in college. The most prolific strength that she could recall was empathy. She also really looked forward to the mentoring done each Friday at a local Title I elementary school. She appreciated seeing the day to day life of students living in poverty. Her mentoring time occurred during recess and she took advantage of that time to be a bright spot in the lives of kids who sometimes had it tough at home and also maybe struggled at school. Ashley also got her first chance at designing lesson plans during Year 1.

Ashley was especially impacted by her Year 2 internship experience. She brought a few artifacts to share with me from her experience including photos of the 2nd and 6th grade classes that she had worked with. Ashley had also taken some visual documentation of several parts of the classroom such as the candy store, the charts, and storage areas. She took all these hoping to be able to add to her own bag of tricks someday. She recalled helping out at a district-wide 1st grade field trip and also the visit to the local university for an educational conference and competition.

A typical day of her internship consisted of having classes at school all morning, then lunch and then heading off to her internship for the last two hours of the school day,

and then finishing her day working 3-4 hours at Kids Campus. She remembers it as one of her busiest times of high school but also the most rewarding. At first in the internship, Ashley felt timid, worried that she would overstep her boundaries. With some encouragement from the teacher, she quickly found her place. The teacher would ask Ashley to do some one-on-one work with students who needed that individual attention.

Ashley remembered spending some time with one student who had special needs. He was in 2nd grade and they quickly developed a bond. He was also a student she would see after school in Kids Campus so that helped to have an understanding of his needs in school.

Ashley also got to experience an internship in the 6th grade classroom and it happened to be a grade level that she was quite worried about being a good fit for her. She discovered that there were things she enjoyed about the upper grades including challenging students. She learned a lot of strategies from the teacher and taught her first lesson in that class. Being in Education Academy was a reaffirming experience in Ashley's opinion.

Ashley's preparedness for college major coursework. When she began her education classes, Ashley felt very well prepared. Many students were nervous about their first field experience and Ashley says she was excited because she had already built the confidence needed through her time in Education Academy. She said her performance and confidence were reflected in the evaluation that the teacher did for her upon the conclusion of the field experience. She recalled:

You are assigned a teacher and you really have no idea what will go on. I remember thinking, "Ok, I can either go about this and be shy and not get that much out of it, or I can step up right away, start helping those kids, and see where

I am needed.” I told myself, “You’ve done this before, you know what you’re doing.” (A. Gilbert, personal communication, 2017)

Ashley brought in a lot of general education credits when she began college, all credits she had earned through dual enrollment in high school. Because of that, she was able to begin education classes right away her first year. She had chosen not to take Education Academy as dual credit because she wanted to experience those classes at her college which was a different school than where dual credit was granted. Because of her other dual enrollment credits, this spring she actually has enough college credits (60) to be able to qualify for a program which allows college students to substitute teach.

Overall, Ashley felt that Education Academy prepared her well and set her up to be an achiever in college. When triangulating my data, I was able to connect with Ashley’s college advisor who was very positive about Ashley:

Ashley was one of my best students last semester. During class last semester, she was an active participant in small and whole group discussions. I had the opportunity review her 3 lesson plans that she wrote using 3 instructional models (collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, and direct instruction). The learning activities in those lesson plans were engaging and required students to use higher-order thinking skills. I also had the opportunity to observe her teach with a partner at an elementary school. They planned a 15-minute science lesson that was delivered to approximately 4 groups of children. While teaching, Ashley seemed confident and well-prepared. She is an engaged learner and seems passionate about becoming an educator. I believe that she has the potential to become a teacher leader in the future school that she works in. (Dr. L, personal communication, 2018)

Ashley’s thoughts on future career opportunities. Ashley feels strongly about MLCS being like a family and thinks it would be a great place to teach primarily because it’s an atmosphere that is always improving and is very welcoming. She loves visiting her internship site and Kids Campus at the same site as well. The students and teachers are welcoming to her and always greet her with hugs. The love she has for them even made

her think that maybe she should reconsider her choice of attending college further away and instead attend the local university.

Ashley hopes to return home for student teaching and MLCS would be in her top two dream districts to work in. She hopes to spend some time in the summer traveling but doesn't have an immediate plan to study abroad.

Ashley's thoughts on mentor relationships. The teachers that Ashley worked with in her internship are still people that she keeps in touch with, though not regularly, but she says the relationship is comfortable. She thinks she would like to teach around the 2nd grade level and would feel very comfortable with her internship cooperating teacher as her mentor.

Ashley's recommendations for MLCS. Ashley recalled her Education Academy visits with Human Resources and follows the Twitter page of HR for the MLCS district. She also follows several other Twitter accounts and is a member of the Education Academy Alumni on Facebook.

Ashley highly recommends that high school students do Education Academy in order to get their feet in the door and see if this is a career that they want. She also would advise getting a job with Kids Campus or volunteering in their church--anything to be around kids as much as possible.

When considering ways that MLCS could support future teachers who were a part of Education Academy, she said she knows it's costly but scholarships would be very helpful. In addition, she appreciates the occasional text messages from back home and would even think that it would be helpful to hear from Human Resources, just a quick "Hi, how are you doing this semester?" Ashley also welcomed the idea of coming in

during winter break to hear about upcoming job opportunities and advice from the school district. She would also like hearing pointers on interviews and have someone look over her resume.

Overall, Ashley didn't think MLCS could go wrong with any follow up after high school graduation. She said, "Hats off to MLCS because I truly feel that you want to put things into place and still help us after we graduated. That's really cool and shows this is a really great district with great people."

Joe Curry

During mentoring, I definitely think it made a difference both as a male and as an African American because so many of the teachers they see are female and they see that I'm a guy and I can be a teacher. Race doesn't play a role to me for the position I am in but I like that students can see, "Hey not all of our teachers are going to be this race or this sex, we have a more diverse population of staff that can bring different experiences." (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe Curry is an 18-year-old, male, African American, in his first year of college at the local university. He spent his entire K-12 career in the district. His major is Elementary Education. He lives at home which allows him to continue his job as a Kids Campus Assistant Director, a job that he has progressed to in his two years of working there. Joe is an African American male and some questions in the interview were asked specifically to him regarding the aspect of diversity that he brings.

Influences leading Joe to interest in the field of education. Joe has a much more unique path that led to his desire to be a teacher than most students. Joe opened up about a very hard time of his life.

I don't know if I ever told you but when I was in junior high five years ago, my dad passed away very unexpectedly. It happened on a Saturday and I took two weeks off of school when it happened, and the funeral was the next weekend. I remember at the funeral, all of my teachers from junior high were there. My mom and I were looking in the guest book later and she was writing thank you notes and I just started to remember that they were all there. When I went back to school I asked my history teacher, and I remember this conversation very vividly, "Why did you all come? I'm just one of your students." He said, "Because when I look at my students, I look at this class like a family. This is a big thing in your life and we had to be there to support you." And that's when I knew this is what I wanted to do. Over time, I just have continued to have that passion for this career. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe went on to talk further about that history teacher, Mr. B, who ended up being one of his biggest influences. "He's just a great teacher. He makes history interesting and he genuinely cares for his students."

Joe also has an aunt in a nearby state who is a Special Education teacher and an uncle who works a job that just pays the bills. Joe has noticed that his uncle's job isn't necessarily something that he has a passion for, but it's something to be able to do as a career. On the contrary, he has memories of visiting his aunt and she was always at the store purchasing something for her students and they were all she talked about. "I started to notice that with teachers, it's a profession that is a passion. It's never just a job for teachers . . . they are there to make a difference," he said.

Joe cited Kids Campus as another big factor in building his passion for education:

Even outside of work when my co-workers and I get together, the kids are all we talk about because we just love them so. The kids and families are just great. I've certainly thought about getting a part time job that pays more but I just love it too much. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Especially important to Joe have been the times when he has had a breakthrough with students. He recalled a particular student who had some behavior issues and somehow, Joe ended up the person with whom the student could most connect.

Joe also credited his mom for supporting his passion for a career in education. Both she and his dad chose careers in business. He appreciates that his mom is always encouraging him to find a career he can be passionate about and happy every day.

Joe cited one negative observation that helped him want to be a teacher and it happened during his senior year internship:

I learned the differences between a good teacher and a teacher that probably shouldn't be in the profession. Sometimes a teacher has their passion go away and I could see that they are really there for a paycheck, not to make a difference. I find it motivating to choose something that I can always have a passion for the career. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe's experiences in Education Academy. Joe enjoyed Year 1 of Education Academy and found that he noticed processes in education that were rewarding. Whether

that was following a plan, grading papers, or creating something, he could find a process. During Year 1 he learned how much work goes in to being a teacher . . . the presentation has to be made, lessons must be meticulously planned. Joe remembered noticing that it's a lot of work, but was something that he wanted to do.

Joe recalled taking the Gallup Strengths Finder and he knows that a strength that stands out for him is "significance." He explained this as "wanting to make a difference in the lives of other people as well as being noticed yourself."

The internship that Joe participated in during senior year was something he found to be especially impactful. He remembers feeling very connected to the students and sad to leave. During his last week he went to the store and purchased each student a little mason jar in which he wrote each student a note. He collaborated with his mom on the project and appreciated her support. He was so excited that the students liked his gift to them.

Joe had the opportunity like other participants, to bring artifacts that he would like to share. He brought several letters that students had given him during his time in the two elementary schools where he had mentored and interned. One read, "Thank you for helping my class and for helping me learn things I didn't know before. Thanks for giving our class a chance." Joe said that last line had gotten to him. He knew the students were from a school with high poverty rates. He remembered:

It means a lot to me because at that school, they come from a different situation than you and I come from, and it's interesting to see that these kids may not get a chance if they don't have a caring adult. But they felt I made a difference in the hour a week I was there to mentor them and I gave them a chance. (J. Curry, Study Interview, 2017)

Joe shared another one of his favorite letters from students, “Dear Mr. Curry, I want to be a 2nd grade teacher just like you.” He went on to say how touched he was that he had the chance through Education Academy to get a chance to make a difference in their lives and maybe even influence their future career choice. There was one more letter he shared where the student talked about how much Joe would be missed and how appreciated he was and then an abrupt question to end the letter-- “By the way, do you like the Packers? Cause Packers rule.” Joe got a chuckle out of that remembering that he always tried making connections with students and thinking that a conversation they had about football must have stuck with that particular student. (J. Curry, Artifact, 2017)

I took this opportunity to ask Joe whether or not he felt he could make a larger impact and contribution as an African American male elementary teacher. He responded:

During mentoring (at the school with more diversity and higher poverty rates) I definitely think it made a difference both as a male and as an African American because so many of the teachers they see are female and they see that I’m a guy and I can be a teacher. Race doesn’t play a role to me for the position I am in but I like that students can see, “Hey not all of our teachers are going to be this race or this sex, we have a more diverse population of staff that can bring different experiences.” (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

This was a good opportunity for me to reminisce with Joe about how we met. A week before he graduated from high school I was invited to speak to Joe’s class of seniors in Education Academy. He was wearing a Kids Campus shirt and I struck up a conversation with him afterwards about it. I learned that he was at one of our elementary buildings and I mentioned to him that we had an opening there for a paraprofessional to finish out the school year (about three weeks). I asked if he would have any interest and he said he would. I wasn’t sure I’d hear from him again but I told him how to apply if he wanted to and I gave him my number. The seniors finished school on that Thursday at

noon and that afternoon, he was in our office filling out his paperwork and that Sunday he graduated from high school. Monday morning, he began a job with MLCS as a paraprofessional in the elementary school where he also worked at in a before and after school Kids Campus job. I shared with Joe that this impressed me so much and that his is a story I tell now when I speak to classes. His work ethic really shined through. As a former high school administrator I knew other seniors were sleeping in until noon and staying out late at night, but he was taking the next step towards his future goals. His reliability was very important to the school to finish the year in a positive manner.

Joe talked quite a lot about his internship experience in Year 2 where he was with 4th grade in the same elementary school where he worked before and after school for Kids Campus. He found a very powerful mentor in the classroom teacher, another male. He took the unique opportunity of being in the same building as his part time job to capitalize on the relationships that he already had with students, staff, and families. Joe shared:

I knew a lot of the families, had a good relationship with the principal and staff, and it was good to build that connection even stronger and help students because of those connections. I remember at one point the principal had observed me teaching and she kind of wagged her finger at me and said, “If I was a parent or if I was somebody else coming in, I would have thought you were the teacher. There is no big difference between and you and your cooperating teacher . . . this is your element . . . this is your niche.” (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe’s preparedness for college major coursework. Like most of his classmates who went through Education Academy, the experience made Joe more certain of his major. He does find himself thinking of other careers a bit since there are such vast offerings at his university. He is intrigued by careers that help others and knows that he wants to work with people. He says that he is becoming more sure that education is the

best career for him. He has noticed a few things in the way of getting right into his career field such as ACT score but he looks forward to beginning his education classes during second semester. When asked how he thinks he will feel in terms of preparedness he said,

I think I'll know a little bit more than kids that didn't get the chance to do an academy experience and it will just make me take it to another level. I will know the reasoning behind why we make certain decisions in lesson plans and what material to cover. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe's thoughts on future career opportunities. Joe fondly thinks of the MLCS community like a family and would like to see himself working in the district someday. He feels that the location in a metropolitan suburb is ideal and the mid-size district allows for growth but also for a feeling of closeness. He cites the "small town feel, with big city perks" as characteristics that make "home" a desirable place to return to work. During college, Joe has continued as a Special Education substitute paraprofessional and he still works at in Kids Campus, recently being promoted to Assistant Director. He hopes that he can get his certificate to be a local substitute teacher when he has earned enough college hours. While in school, he looks forward to vast experiences in MLCS and around the area. He hopes to do a study abroad at some point like teaching English in China. When it comes time to student teach, Joe looks forward to doing so in MLCS and hopes to look for jobs in his home district as well.

Joe's thoughts on mentor relationships. The cooperating teacher that Joe had for his internship, Mr. C, has continued to be a strong mentor for him. He says it would be ideal for him to be a first year teacher in MLCS and have Mr. C be his mentor. Joe revealed what he appreciates most:

He's honest and he is constantly reflecting. Even though he's been teaching for a while now, he asks himself what he can do better every day and he wasn't afraid to help make me better too. He helped me understand that it is not about being perfect but about growing. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

When talking about mentors, Joe also reflected upon the best teacher he ever had which was his high school journalism teacher. He told about how he accidentally became involved in the activity but then was instantly interested because of the teacher's quirky and energetic personality. He recalled the way his teacher would not let anything get in the way of the students' learning.

He might be having the worst day and I could tell and kind of see it on his face but the minute the bell rang, he would pick right up and go and that's what I loved about him. I also plan to take on a certain philosophy that he showed me of letting students forge their own way. "He would say, "I let my students drive their car. If they start to veer off the road, I'm going to start steering. If they don't go fast enough or go too fast, I can always take control but I want to be there to help encourage them when they need me to drive." And he was always there to notice what I needed. I liked to call him my driver's ed instructor. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe told that story with a smile. He echoed the sentiment that Mr. R would be a great mentor for him as a first year teacher but says he is certain that the elementary school environment is right for him rather than high school where Mr. R teaches.

Joe's recommendations for MLCS. Joe has advice for students considering a career in education. He said he understands that sometimes students shy away from educational careers because of the money but he echoes what his mom said to him, "Try it out, there are a lot of careers in education and there are definitely benefits to this career too." For those who are already in Education Academy, Joe said to look for any jobs and volunteer experiences that will give them experience working with children. "You may not necessarily be teaching, but you'll be building those connections, and it will help you to know what you want to be." He also notices that the experiences he's had working at

Kids Campus make it less intimidating to work with parents later on when he is a teacher. He shared, “It’s been a good experience to talk with families about their kids.”

When asked what types of advice he can offer the district, he cited a few things that are currently done, such as inviting Education Academy graduates back for interviews in a few years. He also thinks it is important that we keep connections and be willing to help out. He said,

It’s encouraging to know that even you all in HR know me and I know if I need anything that you are here for me and pulling for me. I’m comfortable dropping you an email or asking for advice. And not everyone has those types of connections with HR. (J. Curry, personal communication, 2017)

Joe recommends that Education Academy give students a really strong background of what the K-12 system looks like but also opportunities in early childhood and young adult programs. He recommends visits to those places so that students can get a real picture of everything that is available for opportunities. Joe also cited the differences between his experiences in a Title I building and a non-Title I building. He shared that he would encourage all students to get both experiences through Education Academy.

Joe is a member of the Education Academy Alumni Facebook page and thinks that it could be a forum for college students to ask questions and seek advice. He also regularly keeps tabs on Twitter pages of his favorite coaches and teachers. He really appreciates texting with mentors such as Mr. C from his internship who encouraged him to reach out if he ever needs anything. He also recommends that the district use Messenger to keep in touch and reach out to individuals.

Lee Johnson

The music classroom is a combination of constant self-improvement while also constantly improving the people you are working with. It's hard to say I'll ever be as good as my cooperating teachers but I definitely was able to affirm that this is what I want to do. . . . I get to move around the class and help others focus on improvement. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Lee Johnson is an eighteen-year-old, Caucasian, male, in his first year of college studying K-12 Music Education at a small, private in-state university a little over an hour from MLCS. Lee's parents are both in the military and he attended public school in Alaska, England, Wyoming, New Jersey, and England again, before moving to MLCS when he was in 5th grade. Craving stability, he quickly became acclimated to the area and got involved in a lot of activities. Lee's parents both deployed far away from home while he was in high school but having already established himself and accomplishing a great deal, he decided to stay with a local family that he had become close with through his leadership and musical endeavors in school. He still considers MLCS home, and visits on holidays and occasional weekends. Even as a college first year, he has quickly gotten involved in multiple activities, all related to music or leadership.

Influences leading Lee to interest in the field of education. Lee remembers the first time he really gave a lot of thought to being a teacher. He was a freshman in high school and enjoyed conversations with one of his teachers, Mr. M. There was a particular time when he was standing in the hallway with Mr. M and a student walked by cursing. Mr. M discussed with Lee that one of his pet peeves is swearing as it changes his mind about people as a professional putting their best foot forward. From that conversation, Lee made a commitment to not swear. He remembers thinking, "Wow I really look up to this teacher and if this is something he lives by, I can do so as well."

As high school went on and Lee became more involved in leadership activities, he learned of Education Academy and thought it seemed interesting and suitable to him. By mid-sophomore year, he was sure he wanted to try it out. At this point, he had several other teachers as well whom he admired, including both his band and vocal music teachers. He had a love for music and began trying to pick up on things that his teachers would do. Having never really settled down due to military life, music was where he really began to make long lasting connections with people and he recalls that it was the first time he had friends for more than three years. He saw the way his music teachers interacted with students, developed real relationships, and fostered teamwork among their classes.

One of Lee's largest influences has ended up being a high school music teacher, Mr. J:

He's a good person, a good caretaker, and a good educator all at the same time. The way he thinks about pedagogy in education is so fascinating to me. He has such excellent communication. He puts as much focus on his students as he does the music and that makes the students more apt to learn and also makes them succeed in other areas of life as well. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Lee appreciates the passion that Mr. J shows towards the classes but also he genuinely cares about the students. Lee plans to emulate several things he learned from Mr. J including greeting each student at the door as they come in from the hallways, many times including a high-five. He also plans to have "Opportunity Day."

Every Monday, he reminds his classes that today is Opportunity Day and that means you have the opportunity to choose how the week is going to go. If you choose that it will go poorly, that is your sad choice and he will do what he can to help you, but he hopes instead it's a week in which you can help yourself discover something new, learn a skill, or at least pretend to be happy. He understands that people are people and they might have turmoil but he works hard to understand and get to know each person. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Lee also had an assistant principal, Mr. S in high school that influenced him greatly. Lee noticed that he had a regular presence in classrooms always making sure people knew he cared and making them smile. “I think that passion and caring that exists in him isn’t always apparent in his role, so being able to see that and learn from him was really incredible for me,” Lee shared.

Lee’s experiences in Education Academy. Lee learned about Education Academy very early in high school and since he already had a strong sense that he wished to be an educator, he always felt he would take the path. He took the opportunity in Year 1 to explore different careers in the field and had an epiphany that music is his life and he could intern in music education.

The mentoring opportunities in Year 1 were also beneficial to Lee. He was paired with two students that didn’t have male figures in their lives and he was to spend time just talking about things that the students were interested in and also getting some homework done. He recalled a particular goal that he and the boys worked on:

I remember one of the things the students said was that they want to help people. So we made a long list of all the small ways they could help people. Every time we met they would show me what they had accomplished on the list and eventually everything on the list was checked off and they were so excited and felt genuinely good about helping. One of the students had a particularly bad home-life and he didn’t smile very often so I made sure that I could do something each week to impact him. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Internship time spent in the middle school where he attended as a young teen, allowed Lee to work with veteran band and choir directors. He recognized that both the teachers he worked with are near retirement and both are really seen as icons in their field.

In choir, the teacher, Mrs. P, had Lee work with small groups of male singers, helping them to understand their parts better. At one point, Mrs. P relinquished control of the warm ups to Lee and he had to work on his command of an entire classroom of singers. He also learned about working with other staff since the classroom had an accompanist and two teachers. He remembers coming to the realization that being flexible is an essential skill for teachers. The time helped Lee to zero in more on which grade levels he may want to teach and also brought some clarity about the immense undertaking that a career in music education brings. He found himself working on his patience as he grew frustrated with students that did not really want to be in music classes, but rather were there to appease parents. He struggled with how to make the experience the best it could be for the students that really had a desire to learn and grow in their musical capacity. Lee decided that high school music was likely a better fit for him personally, but he really appreciated the tips he picked up by watching Mrs. P deal with students who weren't living up to their potential.

In band, Lee worked with Mr. J who was getting ready to retire at the end of the school year. Mr. J found it important to give Lee experience working with every instrument, just like band directors must. Lee held sectionals with the students, first beginning with his primary instrument of training, saxophones. Next, Mr. J said it would be essential to learn correct percussion strokes so Lee took home a pair of sticks and would spend hours learning technique and how to properly adjust the stick-head height to produce different sounds. He then held sessions with the percussionists in school, teaching them the same things he was learning himself. He found himself beginning to

think very musically and used the opportunities to really push himself as a musician. He stated:

The music classroom is a combination of constant self-improvement while also constantly improving the people you are working with. It's hard to say I'll ever be as good as my cooperating teachers but I definitely was able to affirm that this is what I want to do . . . I get to move around the class and help others focus on improvement. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Lee told of a story during his internship that he hopes MLCS could potentially learn from for future interns. His internship cooperating teachers were both absent on a specific day to attend a state music conference and Lee discovered this upon arriving to class in the afternoon. The students were excited to see Lee and were asking him if he was conducting them on that day but when actually seeing the plans left, Lee discovered the students were watching a movie musical instead. He felt it was a wasted opportunity and was sad that he didn't get to lead the group in music. He was wishing that his teachers had given the substitute teacher the latitude to let him try conducting class. He also felt frustrated that there wasn't communication in advance about their absences since they were planned.

Lee's preparedness for college major coursework. Lee took the opportunity during high school to take many dual enrollment credits and has been able to enter college ready to take classes in his major immediately. Primarily, he has begun with a lot of classes for music majors. He often finds himself around groups of students ranging from first years through seniors. Recently a sophomore was working on homework for an education class and struggled with designing an anticipatory set. Classmates were surprised to see that Lee, a first year, had jumped in and explained the concept. He said

he hears the same types of stories from Education Academy classmates attending other schools. Lee shared,

In particular, my Education Academy teacher was very good about preparing me for what it is like to be an education major and understand all the different aspects that go into the career. I'm prepared . . . I'm ready for the classes. (L. Johnson, personal communication, 2017)

Lee's thoughts on future career opportunities. Lee is quick to say that MLCS is the place he would like to be in a few years when he is ready to accept a teaching position. He recognizes that first year teachers aren't typically placed in large high school music programs but he would like to set his goals on a high school job after gaining some experience. Lee said he is already comfortable with the music educators of MLCS as colleagues and is already willing to ask them questions and recognizes that he has so much to learn. Lee also could see himself pursuing a career teaching at the collegiate level. In the meantime, he realizes he has a few years before he would reach this point and a lot of learning has to occur. He will be unable to student teach in his home school and instead hopes to be nearby with a cooperating teacher who was his student teacher his senior year of high school.

Lee's thoughts on mentor relationships. Lee has continued to keep in touch with Mr. J, his high school music teacher, even recently meeting up for dinner after a music event. Ultimately, this is someone who Lee would like to have as a mentor to him when he is a first year teacher. The comfortability and relationship as respected musicians and teachers already exists between the two of them and Lee believes it would be a very beneficial process to be mentored by Mr. J as a first year teacher.

Lee also would appreciate having either one of his internship teachers as a mentor to him in his first year. He reminisced about them, "Generations of current music teachers

have learned from them and the knowledge they possess is so vast. I feel so fortunate to have learned from them as a student and as an intern.”

Lee’s recommendations for MLCS. Lee describes MLCS as the place he calls home, not because he actually has a home there, but because it’s where he feels most comfortable. He says that his interactions with the schools and community will keep him coming back. While away at college, he keeps in touch via social media (mainly Twitter) and email with his former teachers. He also thinks it is very important to keep the social media Facebook group going for alumni of Education Academy. He would enjoy get-togethers where students can network and talk about what they are currently doing. He also looks forward for the opportunity to do a screening interview, an opportunity in which his class was invited to do four years from the semester of their high school graduation. Lee said that he would welcome the opportunity to network with the district during winter break. He also recommends continuing to give Education Academy a lot of exposure so that students know it is an option for them.

Ann Paul

More than anything, I want a difference making job and in education, you are shaping the entire next generation of people . . . I loved working with the students in Special Education during my internship. It was exciting see how much they would grow and they really appreciated having me there each day. Now during college, I stopped back last week to see the students and they were excited to reconnect. (A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

Ann Paul is a 19-year-old, Caucasian, female in her first year of college out of state at a large public university. She is majoring in elementary education and special education. Ann and her family moved to MLCS when she was in 1st grade and she attended elementary, middle, and high school all in the district. Her father is a district level administrator in MLCS and her mother is a leader at a local hospital. She completed her internship in both elementary and special education at the school where she attended growing up, which is also the school where in high school she worked a Kids Campus job. She plans to continue that job next summer. Ann also is employed as a Substitute Special Education Paraprofessional with MLCS. She was able to work several days while home on winter break and plans to do the same over spring and summer break as her schedule and MLCS needs allow.

Influences leading Ann to interest in the field of education. Ann had a very early influence from her father who is an educator. She said that she and her father have always been very close and since he's in the education system, she's also always wanted to be a part of it. She began to have these thoughts early on in elementary school. When she started kindergarten, her dad was a superintendent in a small town. Following that, they moved to MLCS where he was a principal and then a district office administrator. Ann and her brother spent a lot of time at the school and at activities. She noticed how he made even his very serious job of being an administrator enjoyable and how he interacted

with students, staff, and families. She recalled, “I appreciated getting to see first-hand how he runs schools and how he gets everyone involved.” She said he readily offers his advice when she needs it and she learned from him the value of relationships and communication.

Ann also really looks up to her 6th grade teacher, Mr. K:

He was probably the best teacher I ever had. He would always keep everybody working as a team and he emphasized teamwork, even if you don’t like someone, which was very important in 6th grade. He brought a lot of humor into the classroom and I hope to do so as well one day. (A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

The most important trait that Mr. K did was to bring passion to his job and to show each student that he cared. She remembered a few weeks into 7th grade when she and her classmates had moved on to middle school, all students got a letter from him. He was reminding them that they are very capable and to work hard in middle school. Each had an individual touch to the letter about something that he knew was a challenge to the student but reminded them that they can do it. He also stressed the importance that once he had been their teacher, he would always care about what they did and what happened to them. Ann remembers going back to his classroom later on when she was in high school and he continues to keep in touch and be a favorite among many of his former students.

Ann remembers having a negative experience with a teacher as well, that makes her persevere and become better herself. She shared, “I had a teacher who should have been very motivating to us in high school as he was teaching us some essential future skills. He would emphasize relationship building but he wasn’t very good at it. It made

me want to be a teacher even more and do the complete opposite of what I saw him doing.”

Ann’s experiences in Education Academy. Ann found Year 1 to be a year of introduction to education. This included learning about lesson planning, and she enjoyed the mentoring at the elementary school on Fridays. She recalled taking the Gallup Strengths Finder. She recalls having woo, empathy, developer, and competition. Ann said that she does find herself thinking of these strengths and how they fit into her career area. She also had to do a similar test in college and found that similar strengths emerged even now, a few years later. Mostly though, Ann was excited to get involved in Year 2 which was when her passion really began to grow.

Year 2 experiences in the internship really stand out to Ann. She always really had a feeling that she wanted to teach 6th grade and asked to be placed with that age group for her internship. As she got more involved working with 6th grade, Ann realized she didn’t really think that was the age she wanted to work with. In retrospect, she realizes that her 6th grade teacher was her favorite and that year stood out to her in her own educational journey. She enjoyed the relationship building of the age level and found that with older students it is easy to connect, but it was also easy for the students to try and be her friend too much. Ann said, “I quickly realized I had to set boundaries and an example for them of what was appropriate.”

Ann recalled coming to the realization of what an important age 6th grade is as students start to figure out who they are. She especially tried to make an impact on one male who was exploring with his dress, hanging out with and relating mostly with girls,

and visiting the counselor often as he was confused about his feelings. Ann told me about a conversation she had with the student:

I said, “Hey you are ok. You don’t need to do anything but be who you want to be. If you want to wear a choker necklace, then wear it, and look awesome in it. And you don’t need a huge group of friends. Be friends with those who are good to you. When you go to junior high, you are going to find new friends, too. Don’t settle for people who are trying to change you.” (A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

Ann also accompanied the students on an overnight camping trip where their class got to explore the outdoors and nature and have a truly unique experience. She recalls that she had to lay out some boundaries and that was when she began to notice the students treating her with respect.

During her second semester she moved to the Special Education internship and found a lot of motivation and excitement generated by the students. She remembered:

I worked a lot with a girl who had autism and I learned so much about how each day can vary for students. I just loved helping her out and she helped me figure out what I wanted to major in and how I could handle situations with students who needed me. (A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

Ann felt that Year 2 was very exciting and full of new learning. That year, her Education Academy class would have meetings every Wednesday where they would share about their experiences and provide advice to one another.

At this point in her high school career, Ann was also still involved with Kids Campus. She found that techniques that she was learning in her internship were easily transferrable to her job. She had learned the importance of relationship building and she knew if she wanted to get the students to be productive on their homework or play nicely on the playground, she would have to get to know them first. “The internship helped

teach me how to adapt to certain students and learn what they required for their own individual situation,” she shared.

Ann’s preparedness for college major coursework. Ann is grateful for Education Academy because she had a chance to explore what she thought would be a love of 6th grade and realized that she would like to work with younger students. Now when she prepares to start practicum experiences she knows that won’t be a detour that she takes. She also appreciates that it allowed her to find her love for special education. Ann says that she entered college very certain of her major and knows that this is a career field that she can feel passionate about for a very long time.

Ann says that she is very prepared to begin her education classes and is anxiously awaiting the semester when they start. She says that she is well prepared and knows what to expect since she’s already been in a classroom setting. Ann says that she already notices that her confidence level is higher than a few years ago and she doesn’t feel that she will have quite the learning curve of some of her classmates. She will begin education classes next year as a sophomore but she did have a short introductory class where she recalled:

We were all talking about our graduation plans and everyone was super nervous about where they would student teach and I shared that I kind of already did that. Others were more wondering, “What am I going to do when I get in there?”
(A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

Ann’s thoughts on future career opportunities. With having a double major, Ann will have a full year of student teaching when the time comes. She hopes with having chosen a college further away from home she will have gotten some of those needs to get away out of her system and would like to someday come back home to teach.

Ann says that the thought of coming back is exciting to her and she appreciates the public schools we have.

Ann says that she may explore the possibility of student teaching at a military school and she enjoyed the military aspect of the community of MLCS growing up. Ann also would like to explore the possibility of teaching in a high poverty school someday. She shared:

I want to teach in a high poverty school because I feel like I could make an even bigger difference. I want to be the good place kids come. I had a close friend who grew up in poverty and she said that school was the place that she could always genuinely enjoy going to because she knew her teachers would understand.
(A. Paul, personal communication, 2017)

Based on some of her father's administrative experiences too, Ann explained that she has a good understanding of the different types of issues you deal with in high need schools. We discussed the possibility of a TEACH grant and I informed her that five of our MLCS elementary schools would qualify.

Ultimately Ann does see herself returning to MLCS to teach but there is a little part of her that may want to do some exploring of places that she's never experienced before, but she recognizes that she has several years to figure that out. But first, Ann also has plans to continue into a Masters degree program after finishing college.

Ann's thoughts on mentor relationships. Ann says that she would definitely appreciate the chance to work with either of her internship teachers again if she were to return as a first year teacher to MLCS. She said she had really good relationships with both of them and felt they are incredible role models to young teachers. Both teachers remembered and understood what it was like to be learning the art of teaching and were very willing to share with Ann as she progressed.

Ann also had several high school teachers that she looked up to and still feels she can ask for advice when needed. She feels it is powerful to have that network and to feel like they still care about her. She said, “I have a lot of people here that I can come back and ask for their input on different things and I always get a response when I ask. They know just how to calm me down and send me in the right direction.”

Email and social media are the primary ways that Ann keeps in touch with former teachers, her internship teachers, and MLCS in general. She also has stopped in to visit in both her high school and internship sites when she has been back home.

Ann’s recommendations for MLCS. Ann gives a high recommendation for Education Academy when it comes to high school students exploring interests in the field of Education. She says she would tell them that it will be hard but to do it anyway because it will have a big impact on the future. Ann says more than anything, she learned from Education Academy the importance of a good teacher and the power of relationships. She recommends that even if students have a small inkling that they may want to be a teacher, Education Academy is worth the time and effort.

She also would highly recommend that anyone considering a career in education obtain a part time job working with kids. In particular, she likes that her Kids Campus job was in a school setting and allowed her to broaden her network. Getting to practice skills she’d learned in the classroom and transferring those to Kids Campus really helped her confidence level.

From a district level, Ann recommends having a system of little check-ins with Education Academy alumni. She would appreciate quick texts stating, “Hey just checking in. How’s college going? How are your education classes? Do you need anything from

us?” She said that texting is comfortable for both parties and wouldn’t make her as nervous to respond as if it was a formal email.

Ann also liked the connection that she was able to make with Human Resources to secure a few substitute para jobs when she was home over winter break. It was an opportunity to reconnect with MLCS and make a little bit of money. She has not joined the Education Academy Alumni group on Facebook but does think that social media is a smart way to keep in touch. She could also see herself being interested in asking questions in that sort of platform.

Part 3: Themes and Subthemes

Each of the nine participants' thoughts and views on the six questions of research in this study were reviewed. Part 3 will discuss the themes and findings summarized from the interviews. This discussion addresses six questions with tables that depict the themes from the participants' experiences. All participants were encouraged to bring artifacts to share of their time in Education Academy. Most did share various artifacts and some of those will be highlighted in the discussion. Specific examples related to each subtheme are conveyed in the discussions.

Theme 1: An Adult or Experience Influenced Participants to Become Interested in the Field of Education

Every participant talked about adults that made an impact during their school age years and usually that adult was a teacher. Experiences also were a large factor leading to a continued interest. Participants largely cited teachers who were influential during K 12th grade years as the number one influence leading to a career in the field of education. Participants also cited influences of family members, both inside and outside of the field of education. Most participants also shared a negative experience in which motivation was drawn to become a teacher and change the negative experience. Several participants also drew inspiration and clarity for the major of education from a part-time job in Kids Campus (see Table 4).

Elementary or secondary teachers. Every participant talked about a positive teacher they encountered growing up for influencing and inspiring them to eventually be a teacher. For those who ultimately decided to major in elementary education, most of the time there was an influential elementary teacher. Perhaps most notable was Kate's

experience. Kate told of specific examples that her 2nd grade teacher did to keep her engaged in learning as well as personally show she cared. That relationship has continued to this day.

Table 4

Influences Leading Participants

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Elementary Teacher	X	X		X	X	X			X
Secondary Teacher or Coach	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Family member who is an educator			X	X		X	X		X
Family member (non-educator)	X	X			X		X		
Negative Experience	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
An influential experience	X	X	X			X		X	
Kids Campus				X		X	X		X

Likewise, for those who are pursuing secondary education, most of the time, it was a secondary teacher who was most influential. This includes participants such as Lee who didn't even think of the possibilities of being a music teacher until he began to watch and learn from his high school music teachers who continue to be largely influential in his career path. Several participants also had a coach or extra-curricular sponsor who was influential, including Annalise who was inspired by a coach and credits coming out of her shell due to the experience.

Many participants listed both an elementary and secondary teacher as influential. Largely, participants named relationship builder, engaging, kind, patient, and helpful as characteristics most found in these influential teachers.

Family members who are educators. Family members were the next largest influence for participants as nearly all talked about a family member. Several of the participants have family members who are educators and those talked quite extensively of the early influence they felt. Most of the time it was a parent, like in the case of Ann, who feels that she grew up in the schools as her dad has been a teacher, principal, and district level administrator. John, Kate, and Ashley also talked about parents who are educators. John and Ashley were also largely motivated by grandmothers who were principals. Ashley talked a lot about all the conversations about being an educator that she had with her grandmother. Joe talked about the joy he watched his aunt experience as she excitedly talked about her students and helped to provide them with items they may need.

Family member who is not an educator. Participants were also largely influenced by family members who are not in an education profession. Many times these family members are in a helping career of some sort where making an impact on people

is at the forefront. More often though, participants talked about being encouraged by their family members to choose a career that would make participants happy. Family members also encouraged participants by talking about the impact that educators have on others. Finally, family members were essential in encouraging participants to find something that is a passion. Joe talked a lot about being influenced by his mom who he says has always regretted not following her passion. The amount of appreciation that participants have for the encouragement of these family members was immense.

A negative experience. Most participants were able to recall a negative experience that was motivation to enter the field of education. In most situations, there was a teacher who was not viewed as impactful and rather potentially harmful to student learning. Kate talked about having positive experiences with educators until college when she had several professors who did not show care and compassion for the students and did not work to make the class meaningful. She vowed to not be that type of teacher.

With other participants, they witnessed someone they were close to go through a difficult challenge and saw that teachers were people who helped see the person through. For John, it was a close friend going through a difficult diagnosis of mental illness and multiple episodes that followed. The experience had a lasting impact on him and he knew that because of the experience, he could be a better educator.

However, there was no story so moving in the entire study as the story that Joe shared regarding his decision to become a teacher. This came during the very difficult time in his life of losing his dad in middle school. It was teachers that showed up for him and continued to support him afterwards that made him realize that schools are like

family. He wants to be that teacher for other students who need a positive role model and a supportive family-like environment.

An influential experience. A few participants talked in-depth about another experience that was influential in their decision. This was most evident with Nina who talked about leading a group of youth when she was 15 years old and on a mission trip to Mexico. John talked about a college mentor and summer experience working with visitors from Japan. Both went on to study English Language Learners. Nina also talked about volunteer work she had done in high school in a high poverty area.

Job at Kids Campus. Each participant that worked a part-time job at Kids Campus stated this as an influential and motivating job that helped in making their career choice to teach. Most shared details about a boss who was a mentor on the job and recognized something in the participant, encouraging them to work with children. Kate's story was very powerful. When she was heading off to college locally she resigned her position at Kids Campus unsure how she would manage both schedules. Her boss called her and told her she didn't want her to quit and they would work out the schedule. Now Kate is in her third year of college and the Assistant Director of a school's Kids Campus in MLCS. The school happens to be the same school Kate attended growing up and it is the school where she completed her internship. Joe also began working at Kids Campus part time in high school and now has been promoted to Assistant Director and is now in his first year in college.

Theme 2: Participants Describe their Experiences in Education Academy as Beneficial to Their Future in Multiple Ways

Participants had a great deal of positive experiences to share about both Year 1 and Year 2 experiences in Education Academy. Each of these participants did continue on to pursue studies in the field of education. In reality, not all students move on to Year 2 or move on to study education. That is affirmation that the “academy concept” is doing the job that the school district expects in personalizing learning and allowing students to have authentic experiences while exploring future career possibilities (see Table 5).

Year 2 Internship experiences were the most beneficial and impactful experiences of Education Academy. The experiences solidified the career choice and helped to narrow down to specific areas of endorsement. Internship experiences helped participants to gain necessary confidence in going on to college educational experiences. Participants also felt the internship gave them a very realistic look at what teachers do on a daily basis. Year 1 experiences were also impactful. Participants found the mentoring to be their favorite part of Year 1. They also enjoyed Gallup Strengths Finder and refer back to the results now. Participants enjoyed learning teaching processes such as lesson planning.

Internship experiences solidified education as a career choice. Every participant shared that the Year 2 Internship was the most valuable experience of the two-year Education Academy. Each participant found the experience to be solidifying of the choice to pursue a career in education. Stories emerged of the impact that educators make and most participants found this to be affirming as well. Joe brought letters from students to share as his artifacts, one which read, “I want to be a 2nd grade teacher just like you.”

Table 5

Participant Experiences in Year 1 and Year 2 of Education Academy

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Internship experiences solidified education as a career choice	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Both Year 1 and Year 2 gave a realistic look at the career and helped participants to gain understanding of the career		X	X	X	X	X		X	
Internship helped participants gain confidence for college major			X	X	X	X	X		X
Participants overcame adversity in the internship			X			X	X	X	
Internship experiences immediately transferrable to a job				X	X	X	X		
Mentoring was a powerful experience	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Variety of learning in Year 1 was a helpful experience	X	X	X	X	X		X		X

Participants also found that the internship helped to narrow the area of study in which they would eventually pursue. For Nina, she wasn't sure that middle school would be for her and she ended up really enjoying the age of students. For Lee, he realized that high school students enrolled in music courses on their own accord was something that he desired to teach more than middle school. Ann tried both 6th grade and Special Education, finding that she was making the biggest impact in Special Education.

Both Year 1 and Year 2 gave a realistic look at education as a career and helped participants to gain an understanding of the career. Participants agreed that Year 1 and Year 2 objectives were helpful in gaining a realistic look at what the field of education entails. Participants were pleased that their instructors were honest with them about the challenges of a career in education. All of these culminated in Year 2 when students saw first-hand the everyday challenges that teachers encounter including time management, stress, behaviors, classroom management, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Ashley was most impressed with the ease in which her internship teacher handled classroom management and organization. For her artifact, she chose to share photos of ideas she collected from the classroom systems that were put into place and Ashley hopes to emulate some of those ideas in her own classroom one day.

Internship helped participants gain confidence for a college education major. Most of the participants talked about the confidence that was gained by working with real students in both mentoring and the internship. Several shared that when internship began there were definite nerves but as the year went on, the comfort area rose. Kate even remembered the day she got to the classroom to find that the teacher was sick and lesson plans for the afternoon included notes that Kate would be there and would mostly handle

the class. The confidence that these cooperating teachers had in the academy students was felt by the participants. Most participants talked confidently about their readiness to go into college education coursework and credited the experience in the internship.

Participants overcame adversity in the internship. Participants felt a true picture of the trials and tribulations of the career. Several participants discussed overcoming adversity in the internship much like a young teacher does. Ann shared that she had to establish a culture of respect and build relationships with the students and began to see a positive shift in the way that students were perceiving her. Annalise discussed a time a lesson did not go at all as planned in the presence of her Education Academy teacher. Jessica dealt with some very difficult behaviors in internship and had to come back the next day ready to move forward with her students. In each situation, the participants felt they were able to rise above adversity.

Internship experiences were immediately transferrable into a job. About half of the participants also worked a part-time job in the field of childcare. Most worked at Kids Campus but others did babysitting or nanny work. All participants working in childcare were able to immediately transfer skills learned in the internship to their employment experiences. The opportunity gave real-life practice in a timely manner. Following graduation, several participants began working as Special Education Paraprofessionals and were able to also use tips and tricks used in the internship. Annalise would go home at night and design engaging activities and take them back the next day for her cooperating teacher to try. John shared that when he got to college and didn't have an education course the first semester, he really missed the opportunities to

work with the students so he engaged in mentoring and tutoring at the local school instead.

Mentoring in Year 1 was a powerful experience. Nearly all participants talked about the mentoring opportunity provided to the class one afternoon each week during Year 1. Ashley said that it allowed participants to “dip their toes in” before being fully emerged into the internship. Participants liked the opportunity to impact a student or small group of students at an elementary school. Lee told about the work he did with two students who didn’t have father figures. Joe shared letters of thanks from the students he worked with.

Learning about many facets of education in Year 1 was a helpful experience. A variety of lessons learned in Year 1 were powerful for the participants. Two participants were glad to have done a “Beliefs Statement” activity and both referred back to it in their college coursework. John was glad to see that Education Academy had allowed him to formulate his beliefs and was surprised to see that in college those beliefs had largely remained the same. Jessica was glad to have a chance to learn about the history of education and how the American Education system evolved. Several participants mentioned learning how to design a lesson plan and Annalise shared how much she has grown in that area since Year 1. Many of the participants talked about the opportunity to take the Gallup Strengths Finder. This was an activity that participants regularly refer back to in college.

Theme 3: Participants Believe Education Academy Prepared Them Well for a College Major of Education

Every participant talked about the confidence and preparedness gained by participating in Education Academy. Most discussed the feeling of being well prepared and understanding concepts in an Introduction to Education class in college.

Overwhelmingly the participants talked about feeling confident and ready to go out into actual classrooms whereas many classmates felt nervous. In follow up checks for data triangulation, college professors who responded to the request for information were very positive and complimentary of the preparedness that the participants showed. In addition, while it didn't stand out as a theme, several participants mentioned that having the Education Academy experience meant not wasting time and money in college trying to figure out a major (see Table 6).

Education Academy gave participants a feeling of confidence in their college education courses and experiences. Overwhelmingly one word was used by participants over and over again as to how their Education Academy experiences helped them feel as they entered college and began taking Education courses: confidence. Lee recalled being a first year and explaining the concept of “anticipatory set” to students a year ahead of him in college. Annalise noticed early on that it was evident she was better prepared than her peers. She also recalled having to participate in parent-teacher conferences in college and feeling confident having already interacted with parents in a conference setting while in her internship. Ashley found herself a little nervous before her first practicum and then reminded herself, “I’ve done this already.” John said his peers notice a confidence in him

Table 6

Participant Perceptions of Preparedness for College Major Coursework

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Confidence in the major of education	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Understanding of the job of teaching and big picture of schools			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
College professor noticed excellence in participant	X	X	X	X	X	X	N/A ^a	DNR ^b	N/A ^a

^a Participant did not provide a college professor in which to triangulate data.

^b College Professor did not respond to requests by the researcher.

when he gets up in front of class to teach and practice. Emily recalls other first years nervously chatting about getting into classrooms with students and she shared her understandings with already having a year of experience in classroom settings. The stories go on and on . . . confidence in the major, in actions as a pre-service teacher, in working with children.

Education Academy helped to give a big picture view of schools. Somewhat redundant of notes from Theme 2, when discussing preparedness, participants largely discussed understanding how schools work. This was viewed as a positive by the participants. Annalise said, “I had a good idea of what engaging teachers look like, how to make lesson plans, and go into my classes with background knowledge.” Kate talked about understanding routines, transitions, and classroom management. Jessica noted that her background knowledge helped her feel “light years ahead of peers” in regards to preparedness. Joe is a first year and just starting classes in his major. He expects that his preparedness put him a little ahead of peers and he plans to use that challenge to take his learning to the next level.

College professors noticed the skill and preparedness of participants. In a triangulation of data, I contacted one college professor of seven of the nine participants. I asked, “What can you tell me about (participant’s name) as a student and regarding future potential as an educator? What stands out about him/her?” The responses from professors showed that the preparedness of participants stood out from their peers.

Ashley’s college advisor stated that she was one of his best students, noting that he had witnessed her actively participating in class, writing lesson plans, and engaging with students in a classroom setting. He went as far as to say he anticipates she will be a

teacher leader someday. Nina's professor noticed her curiosity and creativity early on and felt those traits make her stand out from her peers. She cited that Nina had the confidence early on to do a study abroad which helped to build her resiliency. John's professor noted that he stood out to her the first time they met. He was passionate about education, mature, and already had a vast "big picture" understanding of the career. She said that his leadership skills have made him stand out among his peers. Kate's professor said that she immediately stood out as being "exceptionally well-prepared as a teacher candidate." She noted that she has seen her excel in all areas.

Theme 4: Participants' Future Plans Include Possibilities of Teaching in MLCS, in a Low Income School, Abroad, and Pursuing Master's Degree

Every participant discussed interest in returning home to MLCS to teach. For some participants, that is an immediate interest. For others, they wish to explore opportunities abroad first. Several participants also expressed interest in teaching in a low-income school, which MLCS can offer in some schools. Participants also showed interest in pursuing a Master's degree shortly after completion of undergraduate studies (see Table 7).

Interest in returning to MLCS to teach. Every participant discussed the possibility of returning home to MLCS to be a teacher. Reasons vary though on what might draw each back home and whether or not those plans would be immediate or further down the road. Annalise talked about the feeling of elation she gets when she is back home and drives past the school where she completed her internship. She has since accepted a teaching job with MLCS. Nina admitted to interest in moving away to a much

Table 7

Participants' Plans for Future Teaching Opportunities

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Interest in returning to MLCS to teach	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Interest in teaching in a low-income school		X	X		X				X
Interest in teaching abroad	X	X	X			X	X		X
Interest in pursuing Master's degree	X		X	X	X			X	X

larger district in a place where she's never lived before, however had second thoughts upon seeing an opening in large metropolitan district nearby MLCS. She has now accepted a job with this neighboring district and plans to move locally this summer despite the fact that her family has since relocated. Kate discussed MLCS as her first choice for an eventual teaching job highlighting her family, the schools, and the community. She shared that she hopes to start her own family someday locally.

Interest in teaching in a low income school. Some participants found great purpose in experiences they have had working in socioeconomic diverse settings and shared a calling to teach in a building with a significant low income population. Ann talked about desiring to make a bigger difference in a high poverty school and we discussed opportunities for that in MLCS. Jessica echoed this saying she would be looking for an opportunity where she could make a big difference and she stated that she has seen those opportunities in Title I schools in MLCS.

Interest in teaching abroad. Most of the participants have a fire inside of them to teach abroad at some point. For Annalise that will be during her student teaching. John is also looking at a student teaching opportunity abroad. He said he would also be considering staying abroad for his first teaching position. Nina is also student teaching abroad and while she doesn't specifically have plans to follow up and teach abroad, she does not discount the possibility. Ann talked about her interest in doing some exploring away from home before eventually considering a job in MLCS. She said those opportunities may involve working at a military base school abroad or locally. Joe specifically has interest in teaching English in China someday.

Interest in pursuing Master's degree. Considering furthering education after undergraduate work is not a foreign concept to these future educators. They recognize the value of becoming an expert in some area of the field of education. Kate, Annalise, Jessica, and John all talked about a highly selective Master's degree program at the local university that pairs with school districts in a coaching model of first year teachers obtaining master's degrees. Annalise also mentioned that it would not be out of the question for her to move back home for a few years and save money while getting her master's. Lee thinks about teaching college someday and cites that as a reason to get his advanced degree.

Theme 5: Maintaining Mentor Relationships

All participants talked about some way of using technology to keep in touch with a teacher whom they view as a mentor. Though not all participants were familiar with the concept of having a mentor as a first year teacher, once explained, each agreed that is a benefit to have in place for new teachers. Several participants would be interested in having the teacher whom they worked with in the Education Academy internship as a mentor. Participants also talked about learning from an impactful teacher from elementary or secondary who inspired them to be an educator (see Table 8).

Keeps connected via technology to someone in a mentor-like relationship.

Each participant built relationships at MLCS which continue today. While it is not unusual and was mentioned by several participants that they will stop by and see a possible mentor teacher, technology makes keeping those relationships sound over time. A variety of forms of technology, primarily social media, were cited by participants as

Table 8

Mentors Relationship

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Keeps connected via technology to someone from home in a mentor-like relationship	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Interest in having internship teacher as first year mentor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Interest in having one of his/her own elementary/secondary teachers as mentor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

how it has been possible to keep in touch. Text and email were the other methods being used. John talked about emailing his high school teachers whom he sees as mentors. Jessica is very comfortable texting teachers she met in her internship when she has questions and appreciates their support and suggested resources. Ann has emailed a teacher from high school whom she knew would help her with a difficult class in college. These relationships have been invaluable.

Social media was a more commonly mentioned means of participants keeping in touch with mentors. Annalise is friends on Facebook with her internship cooperating teachers as well as several teachers from high school. Jessica has also used Facebook and Instagram to keep connected. She said she enjoys seeing the families of her former teachers and watch as their kids grow up. Being further away and not often returning to the area, Nina has also used Facebook as her primary means of keeping in touch. Several participants mentioned still following the MLCS school district account on Twitter as well as different Twitter accounts from their high schools. Most participants said they are members on the MLCS Education Academy Alumni Facebook group.

Interest in having internship teacher as first year mentor. Each participant was informed in the interview process that MLCS assigns a mentor to each first year teacher. I asked each about the possibilities of working with the teacher from internship in Year 2. Participants found this to be an interesting concept and quickly got excited talking about the possibilities. Ann felt returning to teach on the same team with her internship teachers would be ideal highlighting that they are both incredible role models to young teachers. Annalise said she easily connected with her internship teachers and would not have to spend time building the relationship as the trust is already there. She

also stated that they each have the positivity that first year teachers need to be around.

Kate talked about the comfortability that she already feels with her internship teacher and says she could see herself working alongside her. Lee felt that he was extremely lucky to have the master teachers he had in internship and says he would appreciate having either one of them as a mentor.

Interest in having one of his/her own elementary/secondary teachers as mentors. Participants also got just as enthusiastic about the possibility of working with a classroom teacher from elementary or secondary school. Ashley talked about her elementary teachers being the people who made her love school to begin with and stated that she would be “thrilled” to work alongside one of them and to have one of them as her mentor. Joe shared that he plans to emulate some of the things that his favorite high school teacher did and if he were planning to teach high school, would be glad to have him be a mentor as a first year teacher. Lee enjoys getting together with his high school music teacher and says they have a “comfortability and relationship as respected musicians” that would make for a beneficial mentoring relationship when Lee is a first year teacher. John recently was invited back to speak to teachers at his home high school in MLCS and took the opportunity to remind the teachers of the impact they have. He said he has developed professional relationships with his high school teachers and would benefit from already having that relationship and could get right into feeling comfortable getting advice if one of them were his mentor in his first year.

Theme 6: Recommendations to MLCS for Continuing the Relationship between District and Education Academy Alumni

Perhaps the most beneficial part of this study moving forward will be recommendations from the discussion with participants regarding what MLCS can do for them. Many suggestions were offered centering around the subthemes listed in Table 9.

Keep in touch informally. Nearly all participants encouraged MLCS to find ways to continue keeping in touch with alumni of Education Academy. Most agreed that this could be done in very informal ways. Most said that they are members of the Facebook group for education alumni and appreciate little tidbits shared. One cited the recent post by Mrs. H, who teaches Year 1 and Year 2 at one high school. She shared a link for a coupon code which could be used for a discount on a well-known test for teacher certification. Kate mentioned that Facebook and Messenger are great ways to quickly check in and stay connected and she said both platforms are widely used by college students and the messages which are casual in nature are helpful. Ann echoed those thoughts. John thought it would make sense to be strategic and have individuals such as mentors or internship teachers checking in. Joe said he receives casual messages from time to time from his academy teacher asking how classes are going. Ashley encouraged Human Resources (HR) to stay connected and said she has been impressed that HR cares about their alumni and possible future teachers. Jessica and Joe agreed that being able to connect quickly via text with a contact in HR has helped them.

Table 9

Participant Recommendations for MLCS

Subthemes	Annalise	Nina	John	Kate	Jessica	Ashley	Joe	Lee	Ann
Keep in touch informally	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Offer annual gatherings or informational sessions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Seek partnerships in MLCS				X	X		X		X
Offer scholarships	X					X			
Provide diverse experiences		X			X		X		X
Offer future interview	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	N/A ^a	X	X	X	X	X

^a Participants not in Education Academy years receiving invitation for future interviews.

Offer annual gatherings. Several participants said they would gladly take advantage of opportunities to bring the district together with Education Academy Alumni. Some would prefer this to be in more of a reunion format while others thought it would be helpful to learn information from the district such as how to apply for a job and interview practice. Annalise put this into perspective with a helpful suggestion. Being a student teacher in MLCS she has seen the informational sessions that are conducted with student teachers. She suggested offering something of this sort to Education Academy Alumni once per year. John talked about the tight knit group of his class and would be interested in more of a reunion format.

Seek partnerships in MLCS. Kate has been back to speak to Education Academy in her home high school. She and several others shared that they would enjoy offering advice to those in Education Academy now, whether it is in a class format or more casual manner. Kate, along with Joe and Ann, also have kept involved in the school district through jobs at Kids Campus and cite that they enjoy being in the schools and have powerful relationships with students and families. Kate said she would also recommend to others to seek out these opportunities. Jessica talked about the extreme value she found in working as a paraprofessional part-time in MLCS while in college. She felt it gave her a new perspective and expanded upon her internship experiences. Joe and Ann have also worked as sub paraprofessionals when college schedules have allowed. Both talked about the comfortability of returning to MLCS in that manner and the perk of making some extra cash while in college. Kate and Jessica are also far enough in their college studies that they qualify for Local Substitute Teacher Certification and can sub teach in MLCS.

Offer scholarships. While only two participants brought up the idea of offering scholarships, my sense is that this would be a popular suggestion among the participants. Annalise mentioned one of her classmates in college whose school awarded all education majors a \$500 scholarship to be used at the discretion of the recipient. Annalise's friend purchased her "teacher clothes" with the money. Annalise said it sends a message, "We believe in you." Ashley also talked about the idea of scholarships and recognized that while costly, scholarships would be a nice gesture from home.

Provide diverse experiences. Several participants mentioned wanting to teach in buildings of higher diversity and socioeconomic need. Through discussion about this, I learned that several participants did not experience much diversity in their internships or mentoring. Nina said that it was helping diverse groups that motivated her to go into education and she would recommend that each student has a diverse experience.

Offer future interview. Two years ago, HR began meeting with Education Academy classes at the completion of senior year and offering a letter of congratulations. In the participants' eyes, several of them mentioned the more important part of that letter . . . being invited back for an interview upon graduation from college. Several participants mentioned that invitation as motivation and connectedness to MLCS. Jessica even keeps the letter posted in a place where she can refer back to it regularly. Those who are juniors and seniors in college were not a part of the groups that received those letters.

Summary

As Chapter 4 ends, it is important to recognize these nine individuals who are alumni of Education Academy, a grow your own teachers program in MLCS. Participants shed light on a future career in teaching and on the people and experiences supporting

them along the way. Six major themes and thirty total subthemes were discussed in detail with supporting information included from each participant.

Chapter 5 includes discussion of this study's central question and six sub questions and study implications, offers recommendations for school districts to connect with future educators, identifies areas for future research, and provides a retrospective reflection.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter reviews this study's purpose, central question, and six sub questions, existing research, and limitations. Recommendations for school districts to connect with future educators and identified areas for future research are also presented. Finally, the chapter ends with a retrospective reflection.

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore college students' stories about their experiences and influences throughout K-12 education including participation in a "grow your own teachers" (GYOT) program while in high school. Participants were students who are alumni of the Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy program, having taken part as juniors and seniors in high school. Data was collected through semi-structured 90-120 minute interviews conducted individually, in person with nine participants. The research used a narrative inquiry approach seeking themes through stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Participants were also asked to share and discuss any memory artifacts—photos, books, pieces of writing or art—that causes them to reflect upon the decision to pursue a career in education.

This research was guided by one central question: How do college education majors who are alumni of a high school GYOT course describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their decision to pursue a career in education and desire to return home to serve their communities? Six sub-questions were addressed in this study: How do participants describe the influences which lead to their interest in the field of education? How do participants describe their experiences in the Midwestern suburban high school Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy? How, and to what extent, do participants believe their influences and experiences prepared them for college

major coursework? How do participants believe their specific experiences in Meadow Lane Central Schools have influenced their decision regarding if and where they will apply for teaching positions? How have mentor relationships effected participants' decisions to pursue education as a career? What recommendations can participants provide school districts to explore, encourage, and support students interested in pursuing careers in education?

While the stories of each participant make this topic more real, the themes and findings help us to make sense of what schools need to know. Improvement can be made once we have full understanding of the themes which arose from each research question. What follows are interpretations and transferability of this study to answer the broad questions of this research.

Reconnecting Existing Research

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report on teacher turnover in 2015, 30% of teachers leave the field within the first five years. That number is significantly less when new teachers are mentored as the number leaving reduces to 14% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Class size, curriculum, family involvement, school district budget, and culture all are strong influences on student achievement but none have as large an impact on eventual student success as does the classroom teacher (Stronge & Tucker, 2000). Hiring quality teachers is the most important job leaders in schools face each year. "The bottom line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school. And it is the teacher who creates a good classroom" (Wong, 2013).

The teacher shortage remains a crucial reason that school districts must make quality hiring decisions. Across the U.S., approximately 60,000 classrooms were without teachers last year resulting in shifts needing to be made throughout schools to provide coverage for all students. Among contributions to the shortage is the 35% decline since 2009 of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Heim, 2014).

Many who become teachers do not stay long. An estimated 30% leave the field within five years; in cities, the exit rate is 50%. Adequate training and support for beginning teachers are called upon as much needed remedies to fix the retention problem (Merrow, 1999).

Other than outside factors such as the national teacher shortage facing school districts, internally, districts are also faced with major budget shortfalls. With 80-85% of a districts' overall budget for personnel, hiring and retaining qualified teachers becomes even more paramount (Ellerson, 2013). Furthermore, teachers in the United States leaving the industry each year cost an estimated \$2.2 billion in recruiting, hiring, and training. School leaders are not typically astute to seeing these costs created with employee turnover which would include training employees, hiring costs, onboarding personnel, and mentoring costs (Ingersoll, 2003).

Existing work around GYOT showed a variety of programs used across the United States in rural and suburban areas. Programs exist to help districts dealing with specific areas of shortage and to give students hands on career exploration experiences.

Research is lacking on the particular GYOT program in question for this study in MLCS. While an exit survey is done at the time of high school graduation, a formal follow-up study has not been conducted before this study.

Research around GYOT specifically calls for further study in the area of creating a sense of belonging to and working for the good of the community from where teachers grew up. There is also a deficiency in the current literature of the causes and effects of predictors of success to improve the already promising grow-your-own teachers programs (Mahan, 2010).

Implications of Findings

The central question of this study asked, “How do college education majors who are alumni of a high school GYOT course describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their decision to pursue a career in education and desire to return home to serve their communities?” Each of the sub questions described below help to explain the overall themes and findings which could be emulated by any district with an existing GYOT program or any district seeking to add components of a GYOT program. In short, the impact of programs such as Education Academy can be summarized as being authentic and mutually beneficial experiences for both the students (future teachers) and the school district.

Future Teachers Are Influenced by Teachers, Adults, and Experiences

The first research question asked how participants of a GYOT program describe the influences which lead to their interest in the field of education? It might be expected that in almost any field, experiences are an influence for someone choosing that career path. Future teachers are influenced by experiences, but even more-so by adults and in particular by teachers.

Teachers' Influence

When teachers and other school staff need an extra bit of motivation, perhaps it can be that little voice in the back of your head saying, "Remember, what you are doing matters. You are influencing the future." Future teachers are heavily influenced by teachers they learned from in K-12. Many teachers decide years before high school graduation that they want to become a teacher and most of the time there was a teacher that made them want to pursue the field. Future teachers recall ways that they personally were engaged as a student by favorite teachers and plan how they want to someday emulate these exemplary teachers.

Adult Influence

Many future teachers also have had positive influences by other adults to pursue a degree in teaching. This adult is usually a family member and may be a family member who also has been or is currently a teacher. Future teachers are watching adults and looking to adults for guidance and support in this future career area. Though sometimes adults may try and persuade against a career in education because of hard work and little pay, future teachers pay attention to their strong mission and calling. Future teachers are also watching and learning from family members who are educators and they cherish the conversations and advice from these adults.

Other Experiences

Future teachers have both positive and negative experiences that contribute to their decisions to pursue a career in education. No matter the experience, the feelings are very personal to each individual. For some, it is overcoming a very hard time in their life and realizing that school is a stable, caring place much like a family. For others, there

were poor teachers that make future teachers want to be better for the next generation. Experiences such as travel abroad and work with children motivate future teachers to give the career a chance.

Participation in a Well-Designed Grow Your Own Teachers Program Can Be Beneficial in Many Ways for Future Teachers

The second research question asked how do participants describe their experiences in the Midwestern suburban high school Meadow Lane Central Schools Education Academy? There are multiple beneficial experiences to include in a GYOT program like Education Academy but none as motivating and assuring as an internship.

Internship Experience

When a GYOT program includes an internship experience future teachers find they become more sure and confident in pursuing education as a career. Allowing students to choose areas of interest in which to intern is one way a GYOT academy can personalize learning. Academies should allow students to have authentic experiences while exploring future career possibilities. Mentoring experiences working with students are also powerful. When high school students get the opportunity to learn from expert teachers and interact with students, they are getting a very real look at the field of education.

Internship experiences also give students a chance to see the difficult parts of teaching. Students may overcome adversity much like a teacher has to when dealing with tough situations in the actual career. At the same time, internship experiences are easily transferrable into other career experiences that high school and college students can

readily enter into, such as childcare and assistant teaching in preschool and daycare settings.

Power of an Introduction to Education Course

Students in a GYOT program who get the opportunity to take a class such as Introduction to Education (possibly even for dual college and high school credit) gain the necessary background knowledge important to know in education. Having an idea of the history of education, the country's educational system, student engagement, lesson planning, and possible careers in education are just a few helpful background topics for students to know.

GYOT Programs Increase Confidence and Preparedness for a Major in Education

The third research question looked at how influences and experiences prepared participants for college major coursework. Knowing that a major is a good fit is important for any college student in order to save time and money. When students have an authentic academy experiences, such as a GYOT program, the confidence can be felt in the major of choice. In addition, those that have been through a GYOT program feel a great deal of confidence as college students in their education coursework. The preparedness they feel is much greater than peers who did not experience a GYOT program. When practicum experiences begin in classrooms, these students are very confident and ready to go into the schools while their peers are hesitant and more nervous.

GYOT Programs Prepare Future Teachers for a Multitude of Plans

The fourth research question took a look at participants' decisions about their future and whether or not they will return to Meadow Lane Central Schools having had

the experiences they have. While most future teachers do consider a career back home, there are other experiences considered, too, such as teaching abroad. It should be noted that with the national teacher shortage as well as shortages in other countries, any program that helps to add more teachers to society is beneficial on a national and even global level.

Most Students Will Seek a Teaching Position Back Home

While the future is difficult to predict and life brings many twists and turns, having had a positive experience in a GYOT program seems to increase the likelihood that a future teacher will return home to teach. Continuing to keep in touch with former teachers, coaches, internship teachers, and administrators helps students to feel connected to home. Having been through a GYOT program, trusting relationships have been built and maintained.

Students Have Desire to Pursue Other Interests for the Greater Good

It is quite possible that having had diverse experiences will open the eyes and possibilities for an alumnus of a GYOT program. Future teachers may wish to return home to teach in a low income school or possibly teach abroad or in a military school. Having discovered an early mission for the career in education may be one reason for this desire.

Students Wish to Pursue a Master's Degree Early in the Career

Perhaps it is the early understanding of the career that also motivates students who are alumni of a GYOT program to seek a Master's degree shortly after completion of undergraduate studies. Many future teachers already know areas of future specialization interest in education and some even have looked into degree programs.

Students Look Forward to Mentor Relationships

The fifth research question asked if mentor relationships effected participants' decisions to pursue education as a career. While college students do not seem to know a lot yet about mentor relationships and mentor programs for new teachers, the possibilities of learning from and having a go-to person during those first few years is calming and exciting to them. Those feelings are even more powerful when students discuss the possibilities of getting to work side-by-side and be mentored by someone who has been that future teacher's former teacher or internship teacher in a GYOT program. Having already built that connection and relationship may break down barriers and make it easier to ask questions or seek feedback from a mentor.

Districts Should Seek Opinions of Alumni of GYOT Programs

The sixth research question analyzed recommendations from alumni who have participated in a GYOT program and can provide school districts to explore, encourage, and support students interested in pursuing careers in education. Alumni have experiences and opinions that should be shared and used to improve programs. Taking time to look at a program from time to time through participants' eyes can help districts to gain invaluable information that may not otherwise be discovered.

Future Teachers Want to Keep in Touch with Someone Back Home

Future teachers welcome the opportunity to hear from someone back home. It is powerful to have even casual checks, such as a text asking how the semester in college is going. Social media is another powerful, yet non-threatening way that alumni of GYOT programs like staying connected to home. There can be links with helpful articles shared,

messages of hello, or invitations to come back and visit the class . . . the possibilities are endless.

Future Teachers Would Take Advantage of Informational Sessions Back Home

Offering an annual get-together for alumni of GYOT programs would be a beneficial way of staying connected and offering the district's help. This could include a session over winter break where a district talks about hiring practices and prospective openings coming up in the district and may include interview practice or a time to look over resumes and cover letters. Alumni welcome any opportunity to reconnect.

Partnerships between School Districts and Future Teachers Should be Utilized

There are many powerful opportunities that already exist in school districts that could help to keep connected with future teachers. Partnering with before and after school care programs are a work experience that will aide future teachers and help the school district. Likewise, alumni who attend college locally can also work part-time as a paraprofessional, sub paraprofessional, or even in substitute teaching jobs in the school district. Many times even those who are not attending college close by are still home in the summer or around holidays when school districts need the help. Feeling comfortable and confident in these jobs help future teachers and also foster building of a professional network.

Scholarships

School districts can put scholarships or giving programs into place for alumni of GYOT programs to show support. The dollars would not have to be limited to scholarships. Ideas could include giving a stipend to use for classroom resources or to purchase "teacher clothes" for a first job. While this could be a costly endeavor, college

students who receive this sort of support may feel appreciated by their school districts. There may be other community partnerships to explore that could help with this project.

Provide Diverse Experiences

Future teachers want to have diverse experiences including experience working in Title I buildings. GYOT programs should provide diverse experiences. If there is a mentoring component, future teachers may benefit from having this early chance to make a difference in a student's life. In turn, the school and students where the mentoring occurs could also benefit from this positive relationship. Having an experience like this one may also provide opportunities for future teachers to explore loan forgiveness programs like TEACH grants.

Offer a Congratulatory Message from the School District

Students who complete a GYOT program in high school should have the opportunity to meet with district officials upon completion of high school before graduating and going to college. It is impactful for students to hear that their home school district is proud of them for considering a career in education and that the district cares about the future endeavors of these now alumni. When an opportunity to interview for a teaching job while still in college is presented, students feel it is a gesture of pride and appreciation from the school district.

Recommendations for School Districts

1. Find ways to recognize and thank the teachers and family members who have positively influenced future educators to pursue a career in a teaching profession.
2. Encourage educators to have conversations with students about being an educator.

3. Provide authentic mentoring opportunities for high school students to work with children and significant, structured internship experiences in settings and subject areas where students have a future teaching interest.
4. Provide a diverse experience in a Title I school for each student in a GYOT program where experiences working students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds can occur.
5. Encourage high school students to have other experiences working with students such as mission trips, volunteer work, and studies abroad.
6. Provide dual-credit opportunities in “Introduction to Education” types of classes to give students an early big picture look at a career in education.
7. Offer high school seniors a culminating experience of a resume, cover letter, application, and mock interview upon completion of the high school GYOT program.
8. Consider different avenues of social media to communicate with alumni of GYOT programs and reevaluate the platform every few years as it may need to change with the changing times. Consider Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Messenger, Google Hangouts, and What’s App.
9. Find personal authentic ways, outside of social media, to keep in touch with alumni of GYOT programs once they have moved on to college. This could include former teachers, internship teachers, academy teachers, or human resources checking in via text and being available for questions and support.
10. Offer alumni of GYOT programs a contact in Human Resources and an invitation to return to an interview upon completion of a college education degree.

11. Offer annual informational sessions where alumni who are future teachers can learn about district hiring processes, get help with resumes and interviewing skills, ask questions, and reconnect.
12. Partner with before and after school care programs and in-district substitute teaching or paraprofessional part-time jobs to provide experiences to students attending college locally. Those not attending college near home may apply to work in the district when they are home on breaks from college.
13. Encourage students who bring diversity to explore careers in education and to participate in a GYOT program.
14. Seek ways to enhance the diversity of the district's teaching staff including partnerships in GYOT programs.
15. Consider partnerships with a district foundation or community contacts to create a scholarship fund for graduates of a GYOT program going on to college to major in education.
16. When alumni of a GYOT program are hired back home to teach or returns as a clinical practice student teacher, consider assigning a mentor teacher whom the alumni have already built a trusting positive relationship with.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study raised several questions which could be studied in future research.

1. What impact do teachers of color have on their students? On a district?
2. What impact does having diverse experiences in a GYOT program have on future teachers?

3. Does having a mentor whom a first year teacher is already connected with from previous experiences in a GYOT program with aid in retention of new teachers?
4. Have Education Academy Alumni gone on to be teacher leaders?
5. What recommendations can be offered by students who completed Education Academy or another GYOT program and did not go on to major in education in college?

Retrospective Reflection

As I began my years in Doane University's Education Specialist program and continued on in the Doctorate of Education program, I kept a notebook of many ideas for my doctoral research. When it was time to make my decision and choose a topic, I chose a topic that I cared for and one in which I could find meaning—a follow up study of college students who are alumni of a GYOT program. Because of the stories these alumni told, I have been able to see incredible possibilities come out of this study.

As I come to the conclusion of my research, I am certain that I found and explored the right topic. I am motivated by the words of the participants to do more and do better to support our students considering careers in education. I am inspired by and in awe of the adults who influenced them to become teachers. I am extremely appreciative of and wowed by Mrs. H and Mr. C who teach Education Academy in MLCS and help young people understand this big, incredible, trying, and rewarding field of education. I light up when I talk about this study because I know that what has been gleaned can truly help school districts to work to solve the problem of a teacher shortage as well as to retain their best and brightest teachers, and to also lead home alumni to become teachers.

More than anything, because of this study, my life has been enriched by the relationships and connections I've formed with these participants who I know are going to do amazing work in the field of education someday. I hope they always know that they have people back home who are rooting for them, who are inspired by them, and who are so proud of them for wanting to teach the next generation. I would welcome the opportunity to work with them again someday. I want for them to always know that someone at home is wishing them the best no matter where this incredible career should take them. Finally, I want them to know that they are always welcome back home where we are proud to call them one of our own.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet

Pseudonym first and last name: Please thoughtfully select a pseudonym to be used in this study.	
Age:	Race/Ethnic Group:
Marital status:	Number of children:
Are you currently a college student?	Year classification: FR SO JR SR
College/University:	Anticipated Graduation:
Degree obtaining:	
Major(s):	Minor(s)/Concentration(s):
Have you been accepted into the education program?	If yes when? If no, when do you anticipate your application to the education program?
List any current organizations or activities in which you belong in college:	
List any volunteer activities in which you currently take part:	
Do you hold a job? Full or Part time?	If yes, what is your job?

High School Attended:	Circle which semesters you were involved in High School Education Academy: Junior 1 st Junior 2 nd Senior 1 st Senior 2 nd
In which school and subject/grade did you complete your Ed Academy internship?	Who was your cooperating teacher?
List any organizations or activities in which you belonged in high school.	
List any volunteer activities in which you took part in high school.	
Did you work in high school? If yes, what was your job?	
List any hobbies or special interests in which you currently have.	
List any awards or special recognitions.	
Is there any other pertinent personal information you would like to share that may be important as you take part in this study?	
In one paragraph, please describe a short personal biography of yourself.	

Thank you! Please bring this completed document with you to the interview or return it via email before the interview to the researcher.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Study: Who Says You Can't Go Home Again? A Narrative Inquiry of College Students Who Are Alumni of a Grow Your Own Teachers Program

Researcher: Kati Settles, Doane University Education Doctoral Candidate

Purpose: You are being asked to participate in a qualitative research study to explore influences and experiences of college students who participated in a “grow your own” teacher program while in high school. The research will use a narrative inquiry approach seeking themes through the stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences of college students who are both majoring in education and who took part in Education Academy in [REDACTED]. For anonymity, a pseudonym will be used for [REDACTED] and it will be referred to as Meadow Lane Central Schools (MLCS). Experiences such as Education Academy may also be referred to as “grow your own teachers” programs.

Central Question: How do college education majors who are alumni of a high school education academy describe the influences and experiences that have shaped their desired career in education and likelihood to return home to serve their communities?

Guided research questions will include:

1. What influences led to an interest in the field of education?
2. How do participants describe their experiences in Meadow Lane Central Schools High School Education Academy?
3. How do participants believe their experiences prepared them for college major coursework?
4. How do participants believe their specific experiences in MLCS have influenced their decision regarding if and where they will apply for teaching positions?
5. How have mentor relationships effected participants' decisions to pursue education as a career?
6. What recommendations do participants provide others interested in pursuing careers in education?

Data Collection Procedures: One semi-structured interview will be conducted lasting between 90-120 minutes. The interview will be guided by an interview protocol consisting of 24 open-ended questions. The interview will be audio taped with your permission and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. You will be asked to review the transcripts for your accuracy. When available, the researcher will provide, or ask you to provide, existing documents from your time in high school including journals or blogs you wrote during Education Academy, scholarship essays, letters of recommendation, and your resume. In addition, you will be asked to provide documents for review including your resume, relevant college coursework artifacts—personal reflections, blogs, essays, inspirations, photos, art, books, and your application and essay used for admission into the college of education at your respective college or university. In short, you may bring anything from past courses or experiences that may help to explain your journey in education thus far. These items may be a part of the interview. A follow-up interview may be requested if further questions or the need for clarification arises.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks to participants associated with this study. Participation in this study will allow you the opportunity to share your stories and experiences leading up to your studies in the field of education thus far. You will be encouraged to share about these experiences and people who have influenced you. This work will result in a collection of stories to advance the work of such experiences like Education Academy and grow your own programs to aid in the teacher shortage, teacher retention, recruiting for diversity, and relationships.

Confidentiality: Participants in this study have the right to remain anonymous, and every effort will be made to protect anonymity in the written report through the use of

pseudonyms for individuals and organizations. Any identifying descriptions shared by participants will be withheld. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data with the exception of an advisor and transcriptionist which may assist in handling the data. In such case, they will be informed of the confidentiality of the data.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. If, at any time during the study, you become uncomfortable with the process, you have the right to withdraw without repercussions, and your data will not be used.

Intended Use of Research Results: Data will be used by the researcher only, and only for the intended purposes of the study, as articulated in this consent form. A written report will be submitted to Doane University and will be housed in the libraries on the Crete and Lincoln campuses. The researcher reserves the right to publish materials related to this research and/or present findings at professional conferences.

Questions or Concerns: If participants have any questions or concerns, you should feel free to contact the researcher via the phone number or email provided. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. Please sign and date the form below to document your consent to participate in this study.

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pseudonym: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Just to refresh your memory of our telephone conversation, you are being asked to participate in a research study investigating long-range thoughts, influences, ideas, stories, and experiences of college students who are both majoring in education and who took part in Education Academy while juniors and seniors in high school. To insure participants' and the school district's anonymity, the pseudonym of your Midwestern suburban school used throughout this study will be Meadow Lane Central Schools (MLCS). Experiences such as Education Academy may also be referred to as "grow your own" programs throughout the interview.

I will be conducting this semi-structured interview, lasting between one to two hours. The interview will be guided by an interview protocol consisting of around 24 open-ended questions. Your signature on the consent form indicates to me your permission that this interview will be audio taped and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. In the upcoming days, you will be asked to review the transcript of this interview for accuracy. I brought with me existing documents from your time in high school that were available and possibly applicable to our discussion. In addition, you were asked to provide documents for review including anything from past courses or experiences that may help to explain your journey in education thus far. I also asked you to bring an artifact—a photo, writing, art, a book-- to share that evokes feeling about the field of education in you.

A follow-up interview may be requested if further questions or the need for clarification arises. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this research!

Tell me about yourself and your educational journey thus far.

Where have you been,
where are you now,
where are you going?

This may also be a good time to share items that I brought as well as to talk about items that you brought. You may bring these up as a part of any of your answers to my questions throughout this interview.

I brought:

___ journals or blogs you wrote during Education Academy

___ scholarship essays

___ letters of recommendation

___ your resume

___ other:

Let's take a look at what you brought:

___ your resume

___ relevant college coursework artifacts:

___ personal reflections

___ blogs

___ essays

___ inspirations

___ your application and essay used for admission into the college of education at your respective college or university

___ other

At what point do you first remember thinking you might want to be a teacher?

(SQ1)

Experiences...

School-

Outside-

Home-

Jobs-

What positive influences inspired you to become a teacher? (SQ1, SQ4, SQ5)

Influencers...

Family? What careers were your parents in?

Peers?

Educators?

Mentors?

Education Academy?

Any specific examples?

What negative experiences or challenges made you want to become a teacher? (SQ1)

Challenges you have overcome?

Barriers?

Internships

Any specific examples?

What had the biggest impact on you in making the decision to pursue a career in education? (SQ1, SQ2)

Could you tell me (more) about your year 1 class experiences in the High School Education Academy? This will not include your year 2 internship—we will get to that part in a minute. (SQ2, SQ3)

(Researcher may refer to artifacts brought)

What affirmations did it provide you?

Do you remember doing the Gallup Strengths? What do you remember?

What did you learn about education that you didn't yet know?

Tell me a little about the internship that you participated in senior year of Education Academy. Remember, names will not be used. (SQ2, SQ3, SQ5)

Talk about the teacher that you worked with for your internship.

Talk about the students.

Talk about the classes you worked with.

Any stories that stand out to you that affirmed your decision to study education in college?

Is this someone who has been a mentor for you?

We assign every 1st year teacher in our district a mentor who helps guide them on the many facets of teaching. Hypothetically, if you were a 1st year teacher in our school district, is this someone you would like to have mentor you? Why or why not?

Tell me about the best teacher you have ever had. (SQ1, SQ4, SQ5)

What made this person stand out to you?

Hypothetically, if you were a 1st year teacher in our school district, is this someone you would like to have mentor you? Why or why not?

What other adults influenced you and how? (SQ 5)

___ Coach

___ Clergy

___ Family

___ Other

As you entered college what was your level of confidence in your major? (SQ3)

What was your major?

How confident were you that you would stay with that major?

Thoughts of changing major?

Challenges or stumbling points?

How would you describe experiences in your college education classes thus far? (SQ3)

Preparedness?

Dual enrollment classes?

Affirmations?

Contradictions?

How did Education Academy help to prepare you for your education classes in college? (SQ2, SQ3, SQ5)

(Researcher may refer to artifacts brought)

Do you feel you knew what you were getting into?

What specific experiences or activities have impacted you the most?

When you reflect back on your experiences and learnings in Education Academy, what do you think about?

Do you have anyone from your home school district that you ask questions of as you go through your college coursework?

How do you believe your preparedness compares with that of your peers who did not experience Education Academy? (SQ3)

What makes you feel this way?

How do you know this?

What types of comments do your peers make that make you know you have been prepared/exposed differently?

Do any classmates talk about participating in “grow your own” programs?

How would you describe your relationships with your K-12 teachers? (SQ4, SQ5) (Researcher may refer to artifacts brought)

Did you go K-12 to MLCS?

Could you see yourself teaching alongside them? (Tell me more about why you feel so.)

What interests or excites you about the possibilities of working alongside them?

Are there things that make you take pause about returning to work in the school where you grew up?

How would you describe the towns of the MLCS to outsiders? (SQ4, SQ5)

How do you feel when you return back to the area?

Have you returned to your high school? How has that made you feel?

Have you visited your internships site?

Are you in touch with any K-12 teachers? Which ones & describe your relationships?

-social media

-working alongside

Do you keep in touch and if so how do you keep in touch with your...

-former teachers?

-former schools?

-former community?

What are your plans for the rest of college? (SQ6)

-student teaching?

-experience abroad?

-research projects?

-applying for jobs?

Where do you see yourself in five years? (SQ4, SQ6)

-teaching in MLCS?

-teaching elsewhere?

-specifics?

What advice would you give to students in middle or high school considering a career in the field of education? (SQ6)

What advice would you give high school seniors considering majoring in education in college? (SQ6)

**What hoops have you encountered with being accepted into the teacher education program at the college? If you are not there yet, what steps do you foresee? (SQ6)
As you progress through the program what problems have arisen. What difficulties have you had?**

What ways can the school district support you through your college years? (SQ6)

- Would this have an impact on whether or not you choose to return home to teach?
- What ways can we stay connected with you, future teachers?
- Social Media
- Gatherings
- Text
- Mailings
- Other

As you know, we assign all 1st year teachers with a mentor when they come to MLCS. What recommendations do you have for the school district in this regard? (SQ5)

- Does knowing you will have a mentor make coming to work in MLCS more attractive?

As a follow up to help triangulate my data, I would like to contact someone from your college who may speak to your time thus far in the college's education program. I will ask them a short open-ended question about you. Could you provide me the name, title, and contact information for a college advisor or instructor whom you would be comfortable me following up with?

- Open ended question: I was fortunate to meet _____, a student at _____, and alumni of the Meadow Lane Central Schools High School Education Academy. _____ has graciously agreed to be a participant in my study, "Who Says You Can't Go Home Again? A Narrative Inquiry of College Students Who Are Alumni of a Grow Your Own Teachers Program." As a part of our interview, I asked _____ to provide me with the name of a college advisor or instructor with whom he/she would be comfortable with me following up and he/she provided me permission to speak to you. What can you tell me about _____ as a student and with future potential as an educator? What stands out about him/her as a future teacher?

What else haven't we discussed that might be important in helping me understand your journey thus far and your aspirations in education?

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

From: IRB Doane <irb@doane.edu>
Date: August 29, 2017 at 9:49:07 AM CDT
To: Kati Settles <kati.settles@doane.edu>
Cc: Barbara Sunderman <barbara.sunderman@doane.edu>
Subject: APPROVAL F17 008 DC IRB HS

TO: Kati Settles, Barbara Sunderman (Faculty Sponsor)
 FROM: Timothy Frey, IRB Chair
 RE: APPROVAL of Project entitled “ Who Says You Can’t Go Home Again”
 DATE: August 29, 2017

Your project, *Who Says You Can’t Go Home Again*, has been approved via the expedited review process. You may begin data collection.

The approval code for this project is **F17 008 DC IRB HS**. Please use this code to indicate to participants that the project has been approved by the Doane University institutional review board. Any changes to the procedures, protocol, or instruments will require additional review.

The project is approved for one year from today’s date, August 29, 2017. All recruitment and data collection must cease prior to August 30, 2018, unless a separate request for continuation has been approved by the Doane IRB prior to that date.

Please add the approval number and contact information for Doane IRB to your consent form. You may list the Doane IRB email contact: irb@doane.edu

This approval is based upon the assurance that you will:

- Protect the rights and welfare of research participants;
- To the extent allowed by the protocol, select subjects equitably among the potential populations of participants
- Adhere to all Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects, as written in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46);
- Maintain copies of all pertinent information related to the research study including, but not limited to, video and audio tapes and other forms of image capture, instruments, copies of written consent agreements, and any other supportive documents in accordance with Doane University IRB Policies and Procedures Relating to Human Subjects.
- Report to the Doane University IRB immediately if any of the following occur:
 - Unanticipated problems
 - Unanticipated deviations from previously approved protocols
 - Any proposed changes from the previously approved research.

If you have any questions regarding the protection of human participants, or the IRB process for human subjects research, please do not hesitate to contact the Timothy Frey, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at (402) 826-8648 or irb@doane.edu.

Tim Frey
 Chair, Institutional Review Board
 Doane University

APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement made on this 20th day of November 2017, between Kati Settles, primary researcher, and Cindy DeRyke, transcriptionist.

The transcriptionist agrees to keep any and all communication (oral and written) pertaining to the research study conducted by Kati Settles strictly confidential. This includes, but is not limited to, any and all conversations, audio tapes, audio files, or e-mail correspondence to the transcription, and/or transcription copies (electronic and paper).

The transcriptionist agrees not to duplicate any materials provided by the researcher or presented to the researcher without the consent of the primary researcher. This includes, but is not limited to, audio tapes, audio files, and transcriptions. The completed transcriptions will be electronically sent to the primary researcher after completion and also saved onto a flash drive, provided by the primary researcher. Any e-mails, electronic correspondence, or files containing transcribed information will be destroyed after receiving confirmation of receipt from the primary researcher.

The transcriptionist will destroy any electronic copies or paper copies of the transcriptions within a reasonable amount of time as set by the transcriptionist and the researcher.

By signing this confidentiality agreement you agree to the terms discussed above limiting you, as the transcriber, from sharing any information obtained during the transcription or through the use of the audio tapes or audio files to anyone except the primary researcher.

Signature 

Cindy DeRyke
Print Name

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL FROM MEADOW LANE CENTRAL SCHOOLS

August 29, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to confirm that the [REDACTED] has approved Kati Settles' request to complete her dissertation on "Who Says You Can't Go Home Again? A Narrative Inquiry of College Students Who are Alumni of a Grow Your Own Teachers Program".

[REDACTED] is aware that on 8/29/2017, Kati's research design was approved by Doane University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as exempt status. This approval attests to the fact that Kati's research design meets the rigorous standard for ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. As such, Kati has been granted access to interview alumni of the Education Academy so that she may complete this qualitative study.

Finally, the District would ask that Kati visit with the Director of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation, and any other pertinent staff, once her study is complete and her dissertation defended, in an effort to gain insight into her findings.

[REDACTED]

Director of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW AUDIT TRAIL MATRIX

Interview Date	Time	Pseudonym	# of Transcription Pages
2/27/17 ^a	3:00 PM	Jessica Bond	42
9/3/17	7:00 PM	Annalise Robbins	45
9/4/17	8:00 AM	John Gome	77
10/27/17	8:30 AM	Joe Curry	47
11/12/17	10:00 AM	Kate Brooks	74
11/22/17	2:00 PM	Lee Johnson	42
11/25/17	10:00 AM	Ann Paul	48
12/03/17	11:30 AM	Ashley Gilbert	42
12/27/17	2:00 PM	Nina Black	58
2/23/18 ^b	2:45 PM	Jessica Bond	16

^aPilot interview conducted for Advanced Qualitative course

^bFollow up interview