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STUDENT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CAREER READINESS AND THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF A TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM

By

Josue Dantas

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Lynn University

College of Education

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2015

ABSTRACT

Student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program

This study investigated student teachers perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University. In 2011, research conducted by McCulloch, Burris, and Ulmer emphasized that there are more than 1,400 colleges and universities in the United States preparing students to enter the teaching profession. Teacher preparation programs in the United States continue to graduate many individuals who do not go into a teaching career long-term. This study was designed to provide insight into whether or not student teacher perceptions might be used as a different perspective in terms of teacher preparation program evaluation. The investigation was conducted through the collection of data from a demographic survey and the administration of semi-structured interviews with the research participants. The data were organized through the categories of analysis proposed by the researcher: Category A: Effective classroom management skills; Category B: Programs and Endorsements; Category C: Instructor recommendations; Category D: Program requirements and features; Category E: Test preparation – State requirements and further combinations among them. The findings of this study may be useful to contribute to the development of teacher preparation programs, to educational research literature, and also in terms of planning and implementing effective professional development for teachers.

**STUDENT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CAREER READINESS AND THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF A TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM**

Josue Dantas., Ed.D.

Lynn University, 2015

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my awesome wife, Janaina. Her countless sacrificed hours helped to make this dream come true. Without her overwhelming support and unselfishness displayed over the past three and a half years, I would have never made it to this point. She gave me strength and peace during a great time of personal, intellectual, and spiritual growth, and for that, I am ever grateful. This dissertation is also dedicated to my two wonderful children, Samuel and Rachel, I love you both. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Savior Jesus Christ for His unconditional love, His abundant grace, and His strength throughout this process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

In 2011, research conducted by McCulloch, Burris, and Ulmer emphasized that there are more than 1,400 colleges and universities (not including online programs) in the United States preparing students to enter the teaching profession. Teacher preparation programs in the United States continue to graduate many individuals who do not go into a teaching career long-term. Approximately 30 percent to 50 percent of new teachers end up leaving their jobs within five years (Levine, 2006). There are many students who do not feel they are prepared by teacher preparation programs to follow this career path (National Research Council, 2010). Despite the substantial amount of research that has been conducted in the field of teacher preparation, minimal research was found to investigate student teacher perceptions towards career readiness as an aspect of program evaluation (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Harris & Sass, 2007; Levine, 2005; Mondale, 2001; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). This study was designed to provide insight into whether or not student teacher perceptions might be used as a different perspective on teacher preparation program evaluation. The findings of this phenomenological study will be useful to contribute to the development of teacher preparation programs, to educational research literature, and also in terms of planning and implementing effective professional development for teachers.

The teaching profession seems to be at a crossroad of change, both in recruiting as well as curriculum issues (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). Due to the demands of society, the advancement of technology, and recent reform movements, the

environment of education has changed substantially (Castells, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002; Tatz, 2013). At the end of teacher preparation programs, many students still have doubts regarding their own readiness to enter the education profession. These doubts create a challenge for teacher educators and teaching preparation programs (Tatz, 2013). Factors which currently contribute to student teacher perceptions of career readiness must be identified in order to establish and provide students with the career skills necessary in choosing a teaching career, which may contribute to finding job satisfaction following graduation, and remaining in teaching as a career. Therefore, in order to attract, retain and prepare bright, motivated, and capable students for a teaching career, there must be adjustments in teacher preparation programs to provide and assure accurate and definitive perceptions related to the teaching career (Goe, Bell & Little, 2008).

Even though there is a great diversity of topics in education, teachers' preparation remains one of the most debated topics in this area (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). There are debates over the best way to prepare teachers to improve outcomes for students they teach; consequently, there are those who believe that high quality preparation is the most important aspect related to teacher preparation (Levine, 2006; Sawchuk, 2013; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). There is another important perspective to be addressed: the student teacher perceptions towards this preparation.

The college environment is a setting that provides substantial opportunities to change and develop intellectually. Many colleges familiarize students with diverse sources of knowledge, facilitating training in logic and critical thinking, present alternative ideas and courses of action (Darling-Hammond, 2002). In their review of over

3,000 studies that look at the effect of college on student outcomes, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that college students gain knowledge over their course of study and the gains are larger in their focal areas.

By reading the wide body of literature in this area, it can be noted that there are constant institutional efforts among American universities to improve university policies and programs, and educational research has been performed through different approaches (Tatz, 2013; Vinovskis, 2009). Among them, student teacher perceptions have often been studied mostly through two different perspectives: there are studies dedicated to investigating student perception regarding the effectiveness of online programs (Herbert, 2006; Huss & Eastep, 2013; Jurczyk, Benson & Savery, 2004); and there are also studies dedicated to investigating student perceptions regarding teacher/instructor effectiveness in traditional programs (Bissessar, 2014; Devlin, 2002; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al, 2007; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002).

Although the effectiveness of online programs and teacher/instructor effectiveness constitute critical topics, they are not the only important aspects related to teacher preparation programs (Tatz, 2013). According to a recent research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 37 percent of students admit that they would drop out of college if they thought their attendance would not help their future job chances. In turn, the Complete College America Report (2011) states that the dropout rates in colleges and universities in the State of Florida are around 32 percent. Therefore, from the point that perceptions perform a pivotal role regarding the development of the students' mindset, this study investigated student teachers' perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation

program at Lynn University, in order to provide an alternative approach related to this topic.

Significance of the study

The teacher performs many important duties, such as managing interactions among students, production and evaluation of educational materials, promotion of integration in society, and the approach of work values (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Being a teacher entails a steady commitment related to social practices (Freire, 1999). In this scenario, the evaluation and improvement of teacher preparation programs has taken a prominent position as it relates to this area of human knowledge. On the other hand, studies related to student teacher perceptions have achieved great relevance in terms of educational literature due to the increase of proposals available in the present days (Bissessar, 2014; Devlin, 2002; Herbert, 2006; Huss & Eastep, 2013; Jurczyk, Benson & Savery, 2004; Liaw, 2008; Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2011; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, et al, 2007; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002).

The teacher's role is crucial in the current education system and society. A teacher should perform his/her job wisely in order to mediate and facilitate the interactions among students as a discovery process, through exchange and cooperation, promoting integration in society, and work values (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Taking this as the pivot point, the main goal of a teacher preparation program is to train students to be competent members of the education profession and to qualify them to contribute in the society (Levine, 2006). However, not all students feel well enough prepared to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program. The literature in education addresses many reasons why a student stays in a higher education program and

how perception exerts influence regarding this process. There are students that relate their enrollment at a higher education institution with effective teaching practices (Allan, Clarke & Jopling, 2009). On the other hand, there are students that base their continued enrollment at higher education institutions, in part, on their perceptions about how well an institutions' program and services meet their expectations (Plank & Chiagouris, 1997). Consequently, there are students that tend to compare the value of their postsecondary education with the level to which that education prepares them for their future careers (Farrell, 2007).

Although there are many institutional efforts related to the improvement of teacher preparation programs in the United States, there is still a significant number of students for whom these programs remain ineffective, which has contributed to the increase in dropout rates in some teacher preparation programs across the country (Levine, 2006; NACE, 2013; Sawchuk, 2013, Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). From the point that perception exerts a main role regarding the development of the students' mindset, the relevance of this study focused on this approach: investigating student teachers' perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University might be helpful to develop alternative strategies to improve and aggregate quality to the program.

Rationale of the Study

The teacher preparation program should take a holistic approach to education, be thoroughly designed, and enable students to utilize their full potential for the benefit of others (Levine, 2006). Teacher preparation programs should be engaging and provide students with the requisite skill sets to succeed in the profession (Buchanan, Lang, &

Morin, 2013). The conceptual rationale for this study was based on the point of view that student teachers should be aware of pedagogy and training to develop themselves as future teachers, as well as the pivotal role of perceptions in terms of mindset development (Buchanan, Lang and Morin, 2013; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner, 2005; Goe, Bell and Little, 2008). Therefore, the investigation of student teacher perceptions enabled the researcher to identify the student's perspective regarding these issues through the analysis of data. This approach might provide insights devoted to improve the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University, in order to provide an alternative approach related to research on this topic. The research was conducted at Lynn University, a small private educational institution in south Florida, through the application of a demographic survey and semi-structured interviews to achieve the data. The findings of this study may contribute to the literature of teacher preparation and to the use of student teachers' perceptions in educational research. The results may enable institutions to evaluate their programs based on its findings and recommendations.

Research Question(s)

Q1. (Research Question #1) What are student teacher perceptions regarding their own readiness to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q2. (Research Question #2) What are student teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q3. (Research Question #3) What is the comparison between student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Delimitations

The targeted population in this phenomenological study included males and/or females, age range between 18 to 35 years, in the final year of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University. The researcher investigated 8 students. Furthermore, the criteria to be included in the study were: be enrolled in the 4th year of the program; agree and sign the terms of the research. The criteria to be excluded of this study were: express disagreement with the terms of the research and refusal in participate.

Definitions of terms

Bias: Distortion of research data that renders the data suspect or invalid.

Bias may occur due to characteristics of the researcher, the respondent, or the research design itself (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

Career readiness: The term career-ready is generally applied to students who are considered to be equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed to be essential for success in the modern workforce, or the kinds of educational programs and learning opportunities that lead to improved workforce preparation. The career-ready concept is also related to 21st century skills and college-readiness (Conley, 2008).

Phenomenological study: The purpose of the phenomenological study is to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the subjects in a situation. Often, the phenomenological study's approach is based on gathering information and perceptions through qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation. The data is represented from the perspective of the research participants (Creswell, 2009).

Student perceptions: The process by which students translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them. Perception is equated with reality for most practical purposes and guides human behavior in general (Devlin, 2002).

Target population: refers to the population to which the researcher ideally likes to generalize results (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

Teacher preparation program: "a state-approved course of study, the completion of which signifies that an enrollee has met all the State's educational or training requirements for initial certification or licensure to teach in the State's elementary or secondary schools. A teacher preparation program may be a regular program or an alternative route to certification, as defined by the "State" (Harris & Sass, 2007).

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to introduce the reader to concepts related to student perceptions, teacher preparation programs, and career readiness in order to build awareness regarding the use of student perceptions in educational research, specifically in teacher preparation programs. From the point that the integration of teaching, research and student preparation for careers are some of the main functions of the university, these programs should be thorough, well organized and tailored to socioeconomic demands, welfare, progress and social justice as well (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Vinovskis, 2009).

The educational activities in higher education settings used to occur through standards, established by the institutions themselves, which review and evaluate their programs continuously (Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In turn, a teacher preparation program seeks to develop competencies such as instruction, evaluation, planning, and accomplishment of reading programs for students, in order to bring quality to the educational sector (Tatz, 2013).

The enrollment and active participation of students in a teacher preparation program relies on several factors. One such factor is the perception of the student regarding their own preparation program (Astin, 1993; Adelman, 2006; Baum & Ma, 2007). Consequently, student perception is vital to achieve the necessary mindset to develop those competences, and to achieve the sense of career readiness, which will define how the students will conduct themselves in and at the end of a teacher preparation

program (Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In turn, the use of students' perceptions in terms of improving development, and teacher preparation programs' evaluation is often focused on teacher/instructor effectiveness, and online programs effectiveness (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2011; Huss & Eastep, 2013; Jurczyk, Benson & Savery, 2004; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier & Moore, 2007).

Concepts of student perceptions and teacher preparation programs

The use of perception in research has a long history in the United States. According to Follman (1995), in 1896 in Sioux City, Iowa, students in grades two through eight were invited to provide input on effective teacher characteristics in a study dedicated to approach student perceptions regarding their teachers. In other research, Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) conducted empirical literature reviews of public elementary and secondary students' teacher effectiveness ratings through the 1990s, which also used perceptions as a category of analysis.

The concept of perception derives from the Latin term "*perceptio*" and refers to the action and the effect of perceive (Abbagnano, 2000). Perception might refer to knowledge, an idea or inner sense which results in a physical impression made on human senses (Wolfe, Kluender & Dennis, 2009). From a psychological perspective, perception is the function that allows the organism to receive, prepare and interpret information that comes from the surrounding environment through the senses (Panksepp, 1998). According to Wolfe, Kluender & Dennis (2009), perception is the first cognitive process, which allows the subject to capture the surroundings' information through the energy arriving at the sensory systems.

The process of perception has an inferential and constructive character: the internal representation of what happens outside comes in the form of a hypothesis (Huss & Eastep, 2013). The information arriving at the receivers is analyzed gradually, in the same way that occurs with information that comes from memory, which contributes to the formation and interpretation of representation (Panksepp, 1998). According to Quick & Nelson (1997), information is processed through perception, which allows different interpretations and ideas from of a single object. Therefore, the subject can feel different qualities based on the same object and unite different ideas through perception to determine what a single object is (Quick & Nelson, 1997).

The studies of perception have contributed to broaden the understanding regarding cognition and to clarify how this phenomenon works. Thereby, the concept of perception can be approached from a strictly biological or physiological point of view, involving electrical stimulation evoked by stimuli in the sense organs (visual, olfactory, tactile, taste, and auditory perception), or even from the psychological or cognitive point of view, where perception also involves mental processes, memory and other aspects that can influence the interpretation of perceived data (Smith, 2002). Accordingly, social perception relates to a process which is the basis of social interactions: it consists of formation of views and impressions of the subject about others and the exterior world (Grundmeyer, 2012). The way the subject perceives social situations and someone else's behavior guides his own behavior. Social perception is closely related to social groups and also to the social context in which the person lives (Huss & Eastep, 2013).

According to Dretske (2000), one of the most famous scholars regarding perception process was the German Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Dretske (2000) points

out that Kant argued when we realize what we call objects, we find the mental states that seem made up of bits and pieces. For him, these elements are arranged so they have some sense, not simply through association processes. Consequently, Smith (2002) argues that during the process of perception, the mind creates a complete experience. Perception does not constitute a passive combination of sensory elements, but an active organization of the elements to form a coherent experience (Wolfe, Kluender & Dennis, 2009).

The concept of perception, according to Merleau-Ponty (2002) refers to the field of subjectivity and historicity, to the world of cultural objects, social relations, dialogue, tensions, contradictions, hate and love as an amalgam of affective experiences. He points out that the subject's personal experiences exert a huge influence on the way he perceives the world. Moreover, this phenomenon is also extended to the way the subject perceives his educational and professional experiences (Thompson, 2010).

Perceptions and expectations regarding professional careers form the beliefs whose elements are materialized in everyday life (Rosas & West, 2011). In turn, teacher preparation performs a major role regarding the goals and achievements pursued by educators, since it is the teacher who, in their practice, performs the actions designed by policymakers in educational reforms (Tatz, 2013). In addition, teacher preparation does not occur simply by mere accumulation of knowledge. It is an achievement, accomplished through several resources: instruction, books, and teachers, participating in classes, conversations between teachers, and Internet, among others (Ralph, 2003).

According to McCulloch, Burris & Ulmer (2011) since the first discussions related to teacher preparation programs in the last decades of the seventeenth century there have been many efforts devoted to the accomplishment of teacher preparation

programs' objectives. From the creation of Normal Schools (*écoles normales*) as institutions dedicated to teacher preparation in France until the current Alternative Certificate Programs in United States, there was a huge sort of changing movements regarding teacher preparation (Harris & Sass, 2007; Mondale, 2001; Tatz, 2013). In the early decades of the twentieth century, the prevailing model of teacher preparation in Europe was based on a strong emphasis on content transmission, while the current models of teacher preparation converge on models which occur through dynamic and evolving process which includes a wide range of learning and experience throughout the different stages of formation (Mondale, 2001). There is a cycle of transformation and reconstruction of continuous learning, both formal and informal, that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, including articulation between theory and practice (Allen, 2003; Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002; Labaree, 2004; Lucas, 2006; Mondale, 2001; Ogren, 2005; Tisher & Wideen, 1996; Trow, 2010; Weiner, 1993). However, there are different approaches toward teacher preparation in present days.

In the United States, three historic traditions have influenced ideas and approaches regarding teacher preparation (Tatz, 2013). Each tradition can be linked to a different type of institution offering a different kind of preparation to a different group of clients. The normal school tradition was intimately connected with the preparation of elementary teachers; on the other hand, the liberal arts tradition had early ties to the preparation of secondary teachers in liberal arts colleges; lastly, the tradition of professionalization through graduate preparation and research were promoted by the

modern university which sought to prepare educational leaders (Lucas, 2006; Mondale, 2001; Thelin, 2011).

Although major changes and curriculum innovations have marked this area of study throughout the twentieth century, teacher preparation has experienced one of its greatest challenges in recent decades (Harris & Sass, 2007). According to McCulloch, Burris & Ulmer (2011), in the United States, teachers are prepared in more than 1,400 large and small, public and private colleges and universities. The U.S Department of Education (2011, p. 23) points out that “approximately 200,000 students graduate annually in teacher education in the USA, which is insufficient to complete the needs of North American public schools”. However, there are other issues. According to Levine (2006, p. 43):

Teacher preparation in the U.S. continues to graduate many individuals who do not go into a teaching career. Approximately 30 percent to 50 percent of teachers who obtained the registration of degree leave school at the end of the fifth year. The number of teachers leaving teaching is higher in certain areas of the country.

The lack of commitment to teaching as a career occurs due to several reasons, including the low status of the teaching profession in society as a whole, poor working conditions and low degree of professional autonomy (Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002; Levine, 2006). In addition, there are a huge number of students which do not feel well enough prepared by teacher preparation programs to follow this career (National Research Council, 2010). Also, according to recent research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 37 percent of students admit

they would drop out of college if they thought their attendance would not help their future job chances.

Due to the relevance of education in terms of its role in the process of structure and organization of society, there are many studies devoted to studying teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002; Harris & Sass, 2007; Levine, 2006; Tatz, 2013). From the point that perception plays a pivotal role regarding students' mindset, there are studies which address students' perception in educational research in higher education settings in several perspectives. Among them, is the study proposed by Okpala & Ellis (2005). The authors argue that perceptions have relevance in terms of beliefs which are formed due to accumulation of prior experiences in home and at school. On the other hand, Smith (2002) states that students' perceptions exert influence regarding what they bear in mind about their days as students, and also their impressions about the good teachers and experiences they had. Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier & Moore (2007) stated that teachers need knowledge of pedagogy and training to develop themselves as adept teachers confident of their own ability and with faith on the potential of the students. Lastly, Ronfeldt (2010) believed that attitudes, expectations, and perceptions of teaching students during training periods must be taken into account by teacher educators regarding their evaluation and supervision.

There are several studies which have used perception as a category of analysis, as aforementioned. Among them, there are studies devoted to the approach of students' perception both of students in online programs as well as in studies dedicated to teacher effectiveness (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Wiedmaier & Moore, 2007). There are

also studies devoted to students' perceptions related to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in higher education settings (Paris, Roth, & Turner, 2000; Perna & Thomas, 2009).

The recurrent use of students' perceptions as a category of analysis emphasizes the relevance of this topic in educational research, especially in teacher preparation programs. Thereby, the following topic is dedicated to the approach of studies in this specific area of human knowledge.

The use of students' perceptions in teacher preparation programs' evaluation

Teaching practices and teacher programs' effectiveness have been widely discussed within the university, especially after the educational reforms of the last three decades which reaffirmed the importance of higher education for human growth and socioeconomic development of the country (Tatz, 2013). Thereby, the emphasis regarding institutionalization of internal and external evaluation processes of higher education institutions also contributed to this issue. In this process of evaluation, students' perceptions have been approached constantly (Gansle, Noell & Burns, 2013).

The formulation of strategies dedicated to the development and evaluation related to teacher preparation has occupied a huge portion of discussions on education in recent decades (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000). In a society marked by constant technological advancement, and also the persistence of social inequalities even in one of the richest countries in the world, teacher preparation must be organized in order to prepare future professionals to be committed to teach the skills required by law, preparing students as future citizens, critical thinkers, productive members of society but also committed to democracy and social justice (Dewey, 2008; Freire, 1999).

The phenomenon of human interactions within a teacher preparation program in a higher education institution is focused on formal educational processes and represents a complex system, which establishes relationships with their social and historic context (Bates & Poole, 2003). Yet, education constitutes a dynamic process in which many elements – student and teacher input and environment – are interacting so that results are not necessarily predictable and do not follow a simple cause/effect process. However, the education process can be organized in order to achieve its goals and purposes (Gansle, Noell & Burns 2013).

Teacher preparation is essential to the practice of teaching in all levels (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). The teacher must be prepared for many different situations that involve the process of teaching and learning. In this sense, it is noteworthy that teacher preparation must overcome the logic of training and must go beyond learning how to work effectively in classrooms (Freire, 1999).

The future professional must build a deep understanding of educational practice because teacher preparation exerts a key role towards professional development of teachers and on the construction of their identity (Crowe, 2010). This preparation should represent an excellent opportunity to exercise critical thinking and collective reflection since the future professional might examine his own practice in order to achieve new propositions for educational action (Schon, 1983).

Teacher preparation plays a crucial role in order to enable teachers to take ownership of knowledge and to develop the necessary skills to operate in educational environments (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Teacher preparation must encourage students to learn continuously, to research, to invest in their own training and

to use their intelligence, creativity, sensitivity and ability to interact with others (Goe, Bell & Little, 2008).

The effectiveness of teacher preparation programs is often examined in order to improve ideas and practices, aiming to determine, at least in part, the extent in which teachers are prepared by these programs and if they are able to produce gains in students' knowledge and skills (Herbert, 2006). On the other hand, Gansle, Noell & Burns (2013) argue that the main purpose of evaluation of teacher preparation programs is to judge the worth or merit, to ensure accountability, providing information for consumers, and enabling self-improvement by those programs.

The evaluation of teacher preparation programs often uses students' and teachers' performance, surveys, faculty qualifications, program philosophy, standardized observations, and diversity courses as parameters within its procedures (Centra, 1993; McEwan, 2003; Peterson, 2000; Sawchuk, 2011; Tatz, 2013). Effective teaching techniques and strategies have always been important, and, in recent years, the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in producing high-quality teachers has become an issue of national concern (Peterson, 2000). This trend on teacher education programs can be observed through the attention being paid to the creation of valid and efficient tools to assess teachers and teacher preparation (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2006).

According to Tatz (2013) recent studies have highlighted three methods—value-added models of student achievement, standardized observation protocols, and surveys of performance—that can be used by teacher education programs to demonstrate that the candidates who complete their programs are well prepared to support student learning. In

turn, the studies dedicated to address the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs through student perceptions are divided in two different approaches: there are those which state that teacher preparation programs must invest in personal characteristics of the student to achieve effectiveness (Cullingford, 1995); and there are approaches which define that program effectiveness depends exclusively on investment in staff of the institution (Stronge, 2002).

According to Crowe (2010), to produce effective teachers, teacher preparation programs must assist students to discover their personalities, who they really are, and how to perceive themselves in a positive manner. He also states that it is only when the student has a feeling of personal adequacy that he or she feels confident enough to give proper attention to the program. Conley (2012) refers to this achievement through the term career readiness, which relates to the dedication and improvement of a specific career. Therefore, even though it is a relatively new topic in teacher preparation studies, there are some studies dedicated to address this issue, as shown in the next section.

Student perceptions regarding career readiness

The meaning of the term “career” is not related only to a job. A career is a path. It is a way to provide a family sustaining wage and pathways to advancement and requires postsecondary training or education (Conley, 2010). Although a job may be obtained with only a high school diploma, it does not mean a guarantee of advancement or mobility in companies or organizations (Camara & Quenemoen, 2012). According to Conley (2012), “a career ready person capitalizes on personal strengths, talents, education and experiences to bring value to the workplace and the community through his/her performance, skill, diligence, ethics and responsible behavior” (Conley, 2012, p. 14).

However, not all individuals leave university prepared to contribute effectively in the community through his chosen career (Buchanan, Lang & Morin, 2013).

The terms “career ready” and “college ready” are used interchangeably, and some discussions around the concepts about college and career readiness are limited to traditional academic skills that allow students to successfully enroll in postsecondary education (Camara & Quenemoen, 2012). According to Carey (2004) the term college readiness is generally applied to students who are considered to be equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in university, college, and community-college programs. On the other hand, Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) argue that the term career readiness is generally applied to students who are considered to be equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed to be essential for success in the modern workforce.

There are notable differences that can be found between college readiness and career readiness. According to Carey (2004), college readiness generally means the ability to complete a wide range of general education courses, while career readiness refers to a readiness in an occupational area or certificate. While the foundational content knowledge is similar in all cases, the precise skill profile associated with success in a career course pathway may be more focused. This means that secondary schools and universities can prepare all students in a common core of foundational academic knowledge and skills while also acknowledging the strengths of students who have interests in particular career pathway areas (Conley, 2010).

The concept of career readiness is related to choice, dedication and improvement for a specific career. According to Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006), career readiness

involves three major skill areas: academic skills and the ability to apply those skills to concrete situations in order to function in the workplace and in routine daily activities; employability skills (such as critical thinking and responsibility) that are essential in any career area; and technical, job-specific skills related to a specific career pathway. These skills have been emphasized across numerous pieces of research and allow students to enter true career pathways that offer family-sustaining wages and opportunities for advancement (ACT, 2006).

To be career-ready, students need to be able to apply academic skills in different contexts and some academic skills need more attention and development (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Conley (2010) emphasizes that employers often cite deficiencies in English and written communications, such as memos, letters and complex technical reports, which supports the idea that most of the written material students will encounter in their careers is informational in nature, such as technical manuals and research articles, and they must be equipped academically to analyze and use these materials. Furthermore, often these skills are not emphasized in traditional academic classrooms (Camara & Quenemoen, 2012). Students must also be able to apply academic knowledge to authentic situations they may face in their careers, a skill that takes practice and intentional instruction that may need to be tailored to a student's specific career goals (Aldeman, 2010). Conley (2012) states that students preparing to be nurses, for example, need to be able to calculate and apply ratios, proportions, rates and percentages to determine drug dosages, while architect students need to be able to apply geometrical principles to design and implement building plans. Moreover, a career-ready student will keep moving

forward to assure that those skills are improved continuously. This takes the student to the next set of skills which he/she must develop: employability skills (Taylor, 2011).

Employability skills have often been cited by employers as the skills most critical to workplace success in the 21st-century economy (Conley, 2010). These skills include (but are not limited to) critical thinking, adaptability, problem solving, oral and written communications, collaboration and teamwork, creativity, responsibility, professionalism, ethics, and technology use (ACT, 2006). Students must be provided opportunities to gain these skills and to learn to apply them to real life and work situations (Adelman, 2006). Chenoweth (2007) highlights that many of these employability skills are also necessary for college readiness, creating some additional overlap between these two concepts.

In order to actually be considered ready to enter a career, an individual must also possess at least some level of job-specific knowledge and skills, the so called technical skills (Conley, 2010). While many career opportunities include a strong element of on-the-job training, some of these technical or industry-based skills must be acquired in advance. For example, technical skills are required for licensure in many professions, such as in most health care fields, or for broader industry certifications. Also, more specific pathway-level skills begin to hone students' abilities in a more defined career area. That is exactly what happens in education (Levine, 2006).

The teacher's role is crucial in society. It is the teachers' responsibility to mediate and facilitate the interactions among students with knowledge as a discovery process, production, exchange and cooperation, promoting integration in society and work values (Dewey, 2008). If we consider the adaptation of the individual to society as a main function of education, such as it is presented, it is concluded that the school and even

more the university, should prepare future professionals to act as best as they can do in society (Harris & Sass, 2007). From the point that we live in an unequal society (due to the persistence of some factors such as unequal income distribution, gender issues, poverty, and violence) the education (conceived and executed as an adaptation process to this society through several ways of instruction delivered to the future professional) should prepare the subject to act as an instrument for transforming society (Castells, 2010; Freire, 1999).

In an unequal society, the subject needs to take ownership of knowledge, ideas, attitudes, values, and behaviors, in a critical and reflective way that will, in turn enable him to act toward the transformation of society (Freire, 1999). Moreover, there is no doubt that this insertion constitutes a challenge to fresh professionals out of university (Buchanan, Lang & Morin, 2013). Future teachers are no exception. Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) state that undergraduate education for aspiring teachers can be perceived “as one end of a continuum that spans the entire career of a teacher” (p. 40). Thereby, the received preparation while in college begins their professional journeys and determines what standard of excellence they will pursue throughout their careers. However, at the end of their training course, the number of individuals who feel confident enough to perform their duties satisfactorily is not large, which ultimately influences their way of proceeding (Buchanan, Lang & Morin, 2013). According to a recent Gallup report (2013), college educated employees appear less engaged in the workplace than those with a high school diploma or less. About 66 percent of people who either did not graduate high school or only received a high school diploma are engaged at work. That number drops to 54 percent for people who have some college education or a full degree.

Therefore, from the point that teacher preparation programs have a relevant role in education, there exists an emphasis on evaluating the various aspects and requirements that relates to those preparation programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002; Tatz, 2013).

Although research on career readiness is relatively new, there are many studies devoted to this topic (Aldeman, 2010; Camara & Quenemoen, 2012; Reid & Moore, 2008). Theorists have dedicated themselves to propose an accurate definition of the concept, and the differentiation between college and career readiness (Conley, 2010). There are also studies dedicated to address this topic in higher education settings.

The available studies devoted to address student perceptions towards career readiness have several approaches. Among them, are the studies of Wilson (2012), Taylor (2011), Grundmeyer (2012), Powers (2012), Thompson (2010), Buchanan, Lang & Morin (2013), and Rosas and West (2011). These studies have some similar characteristics and contrasts related to each context.

Wilson's (2012) study attempted to predict how first semester college freshmen become prepared for college. He analyzed predictive relationships between conventional predictors of college and career readiness and other academic and social factors that may be better predictors of college success, using American College Testing's (ACT) Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) to predict the academic success of first semester college students at a mid-sized, southwestern public university. Taylor's (2011) study examined freshman composition students' perceptions of their secondary school English classes and the extent to which the English classes prepared them for college composition. Taylor (2011) also emphasized how academic tracks (remedial, standard, advanced/accelerated)

the students enrolled during secondary school influenced their learning. Lastly, Grundmeyer (2012) used a phenomenological strategy to explain first-year college students' perceptions of the effects of a 1:1 laptop experience on their readiness for college and the uses of technology for instructional purposes by high school teachers and college professors. The 1:1 laptop experience refers to a computing initiative in which every individual has a computer, typically a laptop. Based on the findings of this study, the exposure to 1:1 laptop programs in high school promoted college readiness among the subjects of the study because they perceive themselves more organized, efficient, confident, and connected (Grundmeyer, 2012).

Powers' (2012) study investigated new public school teachers' perceptions of their level of preparation in classroom management and how prepared they were during their first year of teaching to handle various classroom and discipline issues. This investigation was conducted using existing survey data regarding percentages of new teachers who felt well prepared in the area of classroom management. The study approached new teachers' perceptions of their preparation in classroom management and their correlation to job satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession. Descriptive statistics were used to identify new teacher perceptions of the level of preparation in classroom management through percentages, as well as to describe the level of priority assigned by new teachers in the area of classroom management for their professional development needs. Lastly, this study provided an overview of new teachers' perceptions of how well prepared they were in their first year of teaching in the area of classroom management.

Thompsons' (2010) study addressed how the participants of the research (beginning teachers) perceived their preparation for teaching high school English, what specific aspects from their preparation program they implement in their classrooms on a consistent basis, and what alternative sources provided them classroom support. In addition, this study also examined administrator/department chair perceptions of these beginning teachers and their ability to improve student achievement. Lastly, the study provided specific and concrete examples of how influential a well designed teacher education program can affect its graduates in the classroom, and, in turn, affects student achievement.

The research conducted by Buchanan, Lang & Morin (2013) aimed to address the efficacy of teacher preparation pathways between teachers who received training through ALPs (Alternative Licensing Programs) and teachers who received certification through Traditional Licensing Programs (TLPs). This study also examined the perceptions of building principals with respect to efficacy of teachers trained through ALPs compared to the efficacy of teachers trained through TLPs. The findings of this study demonstrated that no significant relationships were found between the amount of teacher training and their perception of self-efficacy in the four domains of professionalism, instruction, environment and planning.

The study conducted by Rosas and West (2011) addressed teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach math. Their study's design was based upon a review of literature, which indicated that there was "heightened concern for both the quantity and quality of teachers to fill mathematics teaching positions" (p. 4). Specifically, their study explored Ohio pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding their readiness to teach mathematical

concepts and their preparation to integrate mathematical topics in instruction. Rosas and West discovered, “pre-service teachers rate their perception of readiness to teach mathematics only in the adequate range” (p. 16). This is concerning because research has shown that a teacher’s lack of mathematical understanding “significantly impacts students’ opportunities for learning” (p. 4). Therefore, it is predicted that a teacher’s perception of partial readiness to teach math concepts would have at least some impact on student learning and achievement (Rosas & West, 2011).

Although the aforementioned studies have addressed student perceptions towards career readiness in higher education settings through different approaches, none of them were tailored to approach student perceptions towards career readiness at the end of a teacher preparation program. That confirms the gap which this study aims to overcome - build awareness regarding the use of student perceptions in educational research, specifically in teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, considering the importance of perception regarding the subject’s life, the use of this element in research constitutes an excellent alternative to comprehend how students understand, and to evaluate a teacher preparation program.

Summary

In considering research related to teacher preparation programs, and career readiness, theories related to student perceptions constitutes a viable measure to address a research proposal. The present review of literature on student perceptions aims to provide helpful insights in terms of planning the proposed research and to develop the items for the questionnaire. It was evident from the research and literature review that student perceptions plays a pivotal role regarding academic performance outcomes, behaviors,

and the way the subject perceives his preparation at a teacher preparation program and the sense of career readiness, which are very important elements in terms of development of the future professional.

The approach of career readiness demonstrates the relevance of this concept in a teacher preparation program context (Conley, 2010). Furthermore, the concepts of student perceptions presented in the review (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Smith, 2002) provide theoretical framework to contribute to the understanding of the topic. However, it can be noted also that the literature is lacking in studies investigating student perceptions towards career readiness in teacher preparation programs. Once these factors are identified, recommendations can be made to improve teacher preparation programs through the analysis of student perceptions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents principles of research and outlines the methodology which was used to conduct this phenomenological study, which involved philosophical assumptions that guided the actions on collection and analysis of data on this research process (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program. This chapter includes an overview of the research design, an explanation of the selection of participants, and the study setting. Additionally, the data collection procedure, the used instruments, and a summary of data analysis procedures were addressed. Lastly, the trustworthiness of the data also was explained.

The qualitative research design of this phenomenological study was chosen in order to gain a better understanding regarding perceptions that student teachers have regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University. This study used demographic survey and semi-structured interviews, which were administered in order to accomplish these determinations. Additionally, a description of the population, criteria, limitations and delimitations of the research was included in this chapter, as well as the protection of human subjects and ethical issues. Lastly, this chapter included components that specifically describe the procedures applied in data collection and data analysis as well as methods to assure the validity of the study.

Research Questions

The researcher conducted data collection related to the first two research questions, in order to answer these questions. After these steps, the collected data were be analyzed through triangulation of data (which refers to the third research question). The research questions are:

Q1. (Research Question #1) What are student teacher perceptions regarding their own readiness to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q2. (Research Question #2) What are student teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q3. (Research Question #3) What is the comparison between student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Context of the Study

The context of this phenomenological study was a teacher preparation program at Lynn University, a small university located in South Florida, which is an independent, nonprofit American private university that was founded in 1962. The students at this institution (2100 students) come from all over the United States and approximately 85 other nations: 25 percent of students have citizenship of countries outside the United States, which justify its position among the top five most international schools by U.S. News and World Report's America's Best Colleges (2014).

This university utilizes a semester-based academic calendar and is accredited by the SACS (Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and

Schools) to award associate's, baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees through its academics units, such as School of Aeronautics, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and Management, Conservatory of Music, College of Education, and College of International Communication. Through these academic units, this university offers more than 20 undergraduate majors. In turn, graduate students can study in more than 20 master's degree and certificate programs. There is also a Doctorate Program, which is offered by the College of Education.

The College of Education at this university offers a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. This program is designed to prepare students to teach in grades kindergarten through 6th grade. The major areas in this program include, but are not limited to topics in child development, literacy and classroom management.

The curriculum in this teacher preparation program provides the student the opportunity to define his own path in the first year, choosing the courses according to his academic interests. In the second year, the courses are devoted to approach topics related to language and culture. The third year of this program is devoted to the approach and achievement of teaching skills. Consequently, at the end of the 4th year of this program, the students are engaged in Practicum and Clinical Internships. The student-to-faculty ratio is approximately 15:1 at this institution, although this ratio may be smaller in the last year of certain programs.

Population

The targeted population in this phenomenological study was students, males and females (age range between 18-35 years) enrolled in the last year of the teacher preparation program. The researcher worked with 8 students.

The researcher sent a formal invitation to all students at the end of the specific program at the beginning of the study. The students received a copy of the IRB Approval, handout and consent forms, which were outlined the specific purposes and expectations of the study. The researcher asked them to read and sign the consent form and they received a copy of the form for their records. Also, they were encouraged to keep all conversations confidential.

The students who agreed to participate in the study filled out the demographic survey and participated in individual semi-structured interviews. The choice of students at the end of a teacher preparation program is due to the fact that, at the end of the program, these students already have a better perspective towards the program than students at the beginning of this program.

The criteria to be included in the study were: be enrolled in the 4th year of the selected teacher preparation program at Lynn University and agree and sign the terms of the research. The criteria to be excluded of this study were: express disagreement with the terms of the research and refuse to participate. The research participants in this investigation were chosen by using criterion sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Criterion driven selections involve meeting predetermined criteria prior to being considered for the study (Patton, 2002). The research questions were developed to capture the perceptions of individuals involved in the study, regardless of age, color, sex or religion.

Research Design

Qualitative research is descriptive in its approach, using as many details of a specific contextual setting as possible to shed light on the phenomenon being investigated

(Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to understand human and social behavior not from an outsider's perspective, but from an insider's perspective, as it is lived by the participants in a specific social context (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Consequently, data collected in qualitative studies are considered sensitive, using the details to describe the setting being investigated (Creswell, 2009).

The purpose of qualitative research is to achieve holistic perspectives of groups of people, environments, programs, events, or any phenomenon which the researcher seeks to study by interacting closely with the people participating in the study (Patton, 2002). This design model is necessary because it gives the researcher the flexibility to explore deeper into the setting where needed, in order to better understand what is happening in the most accurate way possible (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The phenomenological approach proposed in this research design seeks to investigate student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program in a small private university located in South Florida. Accordingly, the researcher will attempt to capture the perceptions of the students, to understand how they feel and think, and to provide a clear description that comes from their unique points of view.

Phenomenological study is a qualitative method of research which aims to determine whole experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The phenomenological study focuses on the appearance of things, studying descriptions through verbal pictures, which helps to create an accurate understanding of the subject, phenomenon, program or event (Patton, 2002). Investigating a phenomenon involves questioning in order to reveal the

attitudes and perceptions of those involved and the phenomenological researcher often has a personal interest in the phenomenon being studied (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

The phenomenological approach holds the data of experiences, reflecting, and judging as evidences of scientific investigation (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, the reality of experiences should be assimilated into an authentic picture of the lives of the subjects involved in the study (Patton, 2002). Also, phenomenological studies are designed to describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of this experience as perceived by the people who have participated in it (Patton, 2002). Moreover, the teacher preparation program at this small private university in South Florida is designed to prepare students to teach in grades kindergarten through 6th grade. But at the end of this program, do these student teachers feel themselves ready to enter the profession? How do these student teachers feel about the effectiveness of the program? Although school leaders can analyze standardized test scores, attendance rates, discipline data, and reports, a phenomenological approach is needed to understand the perceptions of the student teachers regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of this program.

In this phenomenological study, the focus was using data gathered through the administration of semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) with the students to describe and analyze what are the student teacher perceptions regarding their own career readiness and the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program. The analysis of data derived from the study might allow educators to see through the eyes of the participants. According to Creswell (2009), the researcher writes descriptions of the participants'

experiences and how those experiences were perceived through the analysis of the interview data.

The procedures used in this phenomenological study follow those suggested by Patton (2002). First, a phenomenon to study was identified, in this case, the student teacher perceptions towards their own career readiness and the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program; second, the researcher must put aside his own experiences assuming that he knows nothing about what the students are experiencing, specifically regarding their perceptions; third, data were collected from participants using in-depth semi-structured interviews; and lastly, data were analyzed utilizing specific quotes or statements made by the participants involved. Therefore, the phenomenological approach, using qualitative research methods, was the premise for this research.

Data Collection

This proposal investigated and described student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University in South Florida. To accomplish this purpose, the researcher collected data through the application of demographic survey and semi-structured interviews. The following table presents a data collection plan:

Collection of data: steps			
<i>Sample</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Type of data collected</i>
Student teachers of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University.	6-8	Demographic survey; Semi-structured interviews;	Focused on quantitative data: demographic information and students' perceptions regarding career readiness

Student teachers of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University.	6-8	Semi-structured interviews	Focused on qualitative data: students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program
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Table 1: Steps of the collection of data. (A figure created by J. Dantas using Microsoft Word Table Maker)

The data collection occurred through two distinct phases. Phase One involved the collection of data devoted to reach demographic information and student teachers perceptions regarding career readiness. Phase Two referred to collection of data related to reach student teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program.

Instruments – data collection procedures

Both phase One and Two of the research consisted of a series of targeted semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) with selected students. Additionally, the demographic survey instrument (Appendix B) was used in order to obtain demographic information from the research participants. The semi-structured interview seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life of the subjects. Also, the main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Creswell, 2009).

Consequently, the interviews were related both to the first and the second research question of the study: the instrument was designed to help determine teacher student perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program. Furthermore, the use of interviews is based on the point that semi-structured interviews seeks to cover both a factual and a meaningful level, though it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaning level (Patton, 2002).

The collection of data in this study was thorough. The demographic survey used in this study was sent to the eight participants through email. They were invited to respond to a few questions in this demographic survey, related to the following features: Sex, country of origin, formal degrees earned, current program, why did you choose this program. All students answered those questions and returned to the researcher through email account.

The interview procedures followed the steps recommended by Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012) and Patton (2002). According to these authors, the semi-structured interview is characterized by basic questions that are supported by theories which relate to the themes of research: the questions may allow the rise of new hypotheses arising from the responses gathered from the participants. In addition, the focus of semi-structured interview promotes not only the description of social phenomena, but also its explanation and the whole understanding of its entirety.

The interview questions of the semi-structured interview instrument were organized in such a way to capture the information required to successfully address the research questions. The interview questions 3, 5 and 7 pertain to research question 1: What are student teacher perceptions regarding their own readiness to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University? On the other hand, the interview questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 were related to the second research question: What are student teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University? Lastly, the interview questions 8 and 9 were related to the third research question: What is the comparison between student teacher perceptions

regarding career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews followed this sequence: once all research participants were identified, the researcher scheduled a date/time/place to conduct the interviews with the students. The scheduling process of the interviews was suggested by the Director of Education of the Elementary Education Grades K-6, the teacher preparation program at Lynn University, and was entirely based on the participants' convenience. The introductory letter/handout (Appendix D) and informed consent (Appendix E) were delivered to the research participants prior to the interview. The researcher also brought copies of both introductory letter/handout and the informed consent to each interview and personally provided a copy to each research participant. Time was afforded to each participant before the interview to read the introductory letter, and to read and sign the informed consent.

Preceding all interviews, the researcher informed the research participants that their confidentiality was assured (research participants were assigned a participant number - RP1, RP2, RP3, etc.), that the interview would be recorded (audio only), and that the researcher would be taking notes during the interview. The researcher also assured each participant their participation was completely voluntary and reaffirmed their right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time. Each interview participant was also given the opportunity to review the interview protocol before the interview began.

Throughout the interview, the researcher made every attempt to create an environment of trust by ensuring that data would have only academic purposes, which

enabled the participants to feel a sense of comfort during the interview process. Such an environment was essential in order to attempting to extract participant responses that would ultimately contribute to the research study. All research data created or collected, written or auditory, were saved on the researcher's personal computer and sent to researcher's personal email for backup purposes.

Quality of Data

Although any research activity is laborious, the most difficult step of research, no doubt, is a collection of data (Bracey, 2006). Dealing with issues related to perception was never an easy task (Jurczyk, Benson & Savery, 2004). In this proposal, the researcher believes that developing appropriate instruments to collect data efficiently constituted the best strategy to minimize threats to validity.

When conducting qualitative research, it is imperative that multiple data sources are utilized in order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Credibility and trustworthiness in a qualitative research study are needed to provide confidence that the researcher's observations, interpretations, and conclusions are believable (Creswell, 2009). In addition, triangulation of data is a necessary component of qualitative research.

To achieve success during the data collection, the researcher ensured that the application of the instrument to collect the subjects' perceptions related to career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher program occurred through diligent attention to the specific research questions of this study, by keeping out of reach threats to validity of data. Furthermore, the researcher considered all possible steps to ensure the welfare of research participants, such as informing them that participation in research was voluntary and they could withdraw from it at any time if they so choose.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the assurance that another researcher might conduct similar research and reach similar results (Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness in quantitative research is related to the replication and generalization (Creswell, 2009). According to Patton (2002), trustworthiness in qualitative research (due to the process of contextualization and flexibility) is related to the consistency of theoretical, methodological and empirical articulations proposed by the study.

The discussion devoted to approach trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research refers to the establishment of systematic and reliable mechanism of the ways of grasping social dynamics (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). On the other hand, Patton (2002) suggests specific criteria for qualitative research, such as transparency of the processes related to the results, appropriate procedures and consistency and relevance of the research question. Moreover, the main goal of trustworthiness is to ensure that the study's findings are reliable (Creswell, 2009). The researcher did everything possible in order to ensure that methods used in the study were consistent, through the definition of detailed instruments of data collection and cohesive analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The accurate use of semi-structured interviews provided the necessary sources in order to obtain the triangulation of data (which is related to the third research question) necessary to ensure that the findings from the various sources support each other (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). Since the focus of the study was on understanding student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, it is more appropriate to use the semi-structured interviews rather

than using additional data sources that are limited in their ability to investigate the students' perceptions.

Data analysis constitutes a critical step of research. Thereby, in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the process of data analysis, a systematic process for analysis of data it was started through the generation of categories and themes (related to the research questions of the study). Also, questionnaire forms, recordings of interviews, transcriptions, and notes will be exhaustively analyzed. Consequently, all field notes, categorized information, and emerging themes will be kept in a digital format on the computer for further analysis. After gathering all of the information, this researcher will analyze the data (from the interviews) by taking the following steps:

1. Categorize information gathered from questionnaires;
2. Identify statements that were directly related to the research questions.

Irrelevant information was discarded. Relevant data was linked into segments that reflect specific thought patterns.

3. Divergent perspectives were then be considered on interviews.
4. A composite was developed to serve as base for a proposal of improvements.

Triangulation of data is a strategy applied to reduce the inconsistencies and contradictions of a research. Triangulation of data combines methods and sources of both qualitative quantitative data (interviews, questionnaires, and observation and field notes, documents, among others) as well as different data analysis methods: content analysis, discourse analysis, methods and techniques descriptive and/or inferential statistics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The main goal of triangulation of data is to not only examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives, but also enrich understanding, allowing the

emerging of new and/or deeper dimensions (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation of data helps to stimulate the creation of inventive methods, new ways of capturing a problem and to find balance with conventional data collection methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Triangulation of data contributes both to validity and reliability, composing a clearer picture of the phenomenon through the convergence of information (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The researcher understood that this strategy constituted the best way to proceed during the data analysis, facing the potential of data triangulation to reduce or minimize biases and/or validity/reliability issues in this study. Although it is not a definitive solution to address the threats to internal validity of a study, the triangulation of data constitutes an excellent alternative for this purpose, which justifies its use in this research proposal.

The information gathered and analyzed in this study was used as fundamental elements to present the findings which were delivered to the institutions' authorities. Therefore, the findings, which emerged from the study, were labeled and organized. The proposal was designed in order to be useful to build awareness regarding the use of student perceptions in educational research, specifically in teacher preparation programs.

The researcher used the conventional method of transcription (listening, typing and transcribing the records). The audio files were handled by the researcher through windows media player, which enabled the researcher to listen, rewind, move forward and listen again before typing that information. Overall, the transcription process for all participants' interviewed took the researcher approximately two weeks to complete. Once the transcription process had been completed, the researcher sent the transcribed interviews to the research participants for their final approval.

To become familiar with the collected data, the researcher read over the researcher's notes, listened to the audio-recordings, and read through the transcripts in a repetitive manner. This process was essential in order to achieve greater understanding into the thoughts and statements of the interview participants, which facilitated the process of interpretation of data. Consequently, the data were organized into categories and themes that captured the general consistencies that student teachers expressed throughout the study, and then they were analyzed and described through triangulation of data (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Limitations

There were a large number of activities at the end of an undergraduate program. Among them, are the practicum and clinical internships, which involve the supervised practical application of previously studied theories in the teacher preparation program. There were three areas are outside the scope of this study: 1) Students' evaluation performance and grades 2) Teacher/instructors' evaluation performance 3) Students' perceptions towards professional styles. Additional limitations may include:

- The study will depend on the responses of the participants. It will be assumed that each interview question will be answered honestly by the students;
- Interpretations of data will be influenced by the judgment of the researcher;
- The findings of this study will be influenced by the analysis and interpretations of the researcher.
- Research bias: small number of participants may not be generalizable;

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate student teachers' perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lyn University. The participants in this study include student teachers at the end of a teacher program. The researcher applied semi-structured interviews. The data was collected, coded, and categorized. Issues of trustworthiness and research bias will be discussed along with a description of the data sources and methods that were used.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at the end of the program at Lynn University. Prior to beginning the study, an application was made to the university internal review board (IRB) for research involving human subjects (Appendix A). In the application, details of the study objectives, selection of participants, research methods, informed consent and benefits of the research were provided. The application was accepted and the full IRB approval was granted on April 07, 2015. Since the purpose of the study was to capture the perceptions representative of a specific student population, data were gathered at this study through two different strategies: demographic survey (Appendix B) and semi-structured interviews (Appendix C).

Findings

The results of this study are presented in two different parts. Part one refers to an overview of the participants of the study. Part two focuses exclusively on the research questions guiding this phenomenological study, which were presented in three different sections: the first section provides a detailed description of the collected data related to the first research question of the study; the second section presents a detailed description of the data related to the second research question of the study; lastly, the third section presents a detailed description of data related to the third research question of the study.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the description of the results of the investigation related to student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the

effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University as described by the participants. In addition, following the reported results, a composite description is provided. This detailed descriptive narrative is intended to report the perceptions of the participants as they relate to career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program, in order to better comprehend the phenomenon under investigation.

Results of the study – Part 1

Participants of the study

In a phenomenological study, it is important to note that the essential element of the research is people, which are selected based on experience and relevance (Patton, 2002). The researcher chose the criterion sampling for this study, which involves selecting subjects that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The set of criteria in this study was: be enrolled at the end of the teacher preparation program at Lynn University and agree and sign the terms of the research. To appropriately select individuals for this study, the researcher selected only individuals who matched the criteria mentioned above. Below is a summary account of some demographic information and what lead the students to pursue the teaching career.

Participants of the study	
<i>Research Participant 1:</i>	Research participant 1 is an American male with B.A (Bachelor of Arts) in Anthropology. He is currently enrolled in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University. He owned a small business in Maryland 6 years ago, where he used to host children’s birthday parties, a sort of technological adventure filled with the latest technology. After working with children and their parents for 4 years, he was interested with the aspect of building solid relationships with both the parents and children. When Participant 1 had to sell his business due to financial issues, he decided to look for guidance. Participant 1 enjoyed spending time working in an educational career, which made him feel this was a calling after his business was closed.

<p><i>Research Participant 2:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 2 is a female from the Bahamas, with no former professional experience in teaching. Participant 2 declared herself as somebody that always wanted to teach. She affirmed that Lynn University has the most appealing Education program in the area (Broward/Dade/Palm Beach County) and that motivated her enroll in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University.</p>
<p><i>Research Participant 3:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 3 is an American female, with no former professional experience in teaching. She defines herself as a person who is extremely passionate about helping children learn and grow as a person. Participant 3 also considers being a teacher a personal dream and she states always wanted to follow the teaching career.</p>
<p><i>Research Participant 4:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 4 is an American female who has earned an associate's degree in Science prior to enrolling the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University. Participant 4 chose this program due to several reasons, such as: it is offered in a small setting; this institution offers all of the degrees in which she was interested, from bachelor's through doctorate degree, which may allow her to avoid transferring to a different institution in the future.</p>
<p><i>Research Participant 5:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 5 is an American female, with no former professional experience in teaching. Participant 5 declares she has a passion for education. She attributes her participation at the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University to the fact that Lynn University did not offer a Social Work program, so she decided to try the teaching program. Nevertheless, she fell in love with the preparation program.</p>
<p><i>Research Participant 6:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 6 is an American female who has earned a bachelor's degree in Science prior to enrolling in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University. Participant 6 attributes her enrollment in this program to her interest in educating and her commitment to ensure to them a safe place to learn (school).</p>
<p><i>Research Participant 7:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 7 is an American female, with no former professional experience in teaching. Participant 7 earned a high school diploma prior to enrolling in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University. Participant 7 affirmed that she always wanted to be a teacher. In addition, she emphasized the small class sizes at Lynn University as one of the most important factors in her decision to enroll in the teacher preparation program at Lynn University.</p>

<p><i>Research Participant 8:</i></p>	<p>Research participant 8 is an American female, with no former professional experience in teaching. Participant 8 decided to enroll in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University due to her ideals. She claims that education is a privilege that should not be exclusive for those who can afford it. Participant 8 wants to devote herself to deliver education to those who truly need it for a promising future.</p>
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Table 2: Participants of the study. (A figure created by J. Dantas using Microsoft Word Table Maker)

Summary of part 1

The demographic survey indicated that student teachers in this specific class are quite young, which indicates that they will be active professional teachers at an early age upon completion of their teacher preparation program. According to Darling-Hammond & Bransford, (2005), the age of the teacher is one of the main characteristics of his/her performance and encompasses some issues possibly related to acceptance of new educational concepts, issues related to experience and to professional maturity, among others.

Data collected through the demographic investigation in this study demonstrate students are mostly born in the United States. Among them, only one is an international student. However, all these students belong to different cultural contexts: they are a very heterogeneous group. In addition, data also shows that 7 of 8 students enrolled in the last year at the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University are woman. The data reaffirms what several studies have shown: women's presence in teacher preparation programs, mainly at early childhood and elementary education specialization is greater than men (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Levine, 2006; Tatz, 2013; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

Results of the study – Part 2

The procedures outlined in chapter 3 were strictly followed for this investigation. The information collected from the participants was read and analyzed repeatedly, in order to classify the answers in the most proper way. The themes which emerged from this investigation are described through the research questions that guided this study, and were organized from the following categories:

Category A: Effective classroom management skills - refers to courses and content devoted to approach the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers should use to promote organization in the classroom; also refers to techniques directed to keep students focused and attentive on task, and academically productive during a class;

Category B: Programs and Endorsements - refers to specific courses and endorsements offered at the program; ESOL and Reading endorsements are some of these;

Category C: Instructor recommendations - set of suggestions and proposals made by instructors in order to recommend the best course of action on tests, assignments, specific courses or related to the program itself;

Category D: Program requirements and features - refers to the foundation upon which the program was designed: the necessary skills which students must to develop and the path designated by the institution to achieve it, including its structural features, class sizes and the way courses are offered;

Category E: Test preparation – State requirements - it refers to exam preparation, tutoring services, and educational resources designed to increase students' performance on licensing exams. It is also developed based on State requirements.

According to Patton (2002), diligent analysis is the correct procedure to analyze the studied phenomenon in the most accurate way possible. Analyzed information is described in the paragraphs below.

Results for Research Question 1: Patterns, themes and discrepancies

The first research question that directed this study was: What are student teacher perceptions regarding their own readiness to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University? The interview questions 3, 5 and 7 were developed in order to address the student teachers perceptions regarding career readiness.

These results are described below:

Table 3: results from the first research question

Category A: Effective classroom management skills
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP1: I learned how to deal with situations which may happen, which unfit or have the background to handle with the proper intervention. This will make a huge difference in my career as every day is a totally new experience and you never know what each new day will bring when dealing with six and seven year olds.
RP5: I've learned about how many hats a teacher has to wear; Intervention Strategies, Professional Development; How to understand the new common core material, particularly in math.
RP 8: I learned how to apply effective classroom management skills, especially for first

<p>grade students. I feel if I never participated in this course, I feel I would have a negative impact (since I might show constant sarcasm).</p>
<p>Category B: Programs and Endorsements</p>
<p>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</p>
<p>RP 2: In the college of education the professors focus heavily in assessments and ESE/ESOL strategies because the school district has a widely diverse population of students that vary in language (Creole, Spanish, Portuguese and French) and a multitude of cultures and socio-economic status. I feel the college prepared me to interact and teach all students.</p> <p>RP 4: The fact that the professors went out of their way to get us CRISS and AVID trained will definitely aid me in my future career because it makes me more appealing to principals.</p> <p>RP 7: Through Lynn, I got CRISS certified which is a program that encourages student owned activities. This will help me not only be a better teacher because I have more strategies to use, but it also puts me ahead of others candidates.</p>
<p>Category C: Instructor recommendations</p>
<p>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</p>
<p>RP6: When we all come together we can't stop learning from each other. Our professors had done a great job using materials books etc that we can use later on, so we can continue learning.</p>
<p>Category D: Program requirements and features</p>
<p>Direct Quotes from the Research Participants</p>
<p>RP 1: Practicum it was extremely important, you cannot just be throw into the classroom,</p>

and practicum allows you to grow as a teacher and teach as well as learn from your cooperating teacher. This was an essential aspect of the whole experience.

RP 2: I do believe the most beneficial part of my practicum experience was actually being in a first grade classroom and being in a fourth grade classroom. I realized I would not teach anything lower than fourth grade. Also, another beneficial experience I had in practicum is the observation, self-reflection is another amazing tool that I found helps me with my lessons. Whether it is coming from a cooperating teacher or supervisor you really get to see where your strongest areas are and where you are not so strong and after going over that lesson you reflect and then the next day you are able to present the content in a different way where it is beneficial for you and the students.

RP 8: I observe the teachers who are passionate and burned out. I see, we both experienced the school, same grades, different teachers and, we have the opportunity to see teachers with... passion and teacher who has lost the passion, or without a goal. They look at you, you can see how they are happy when they see you, that smile, I had a good experience at supervision.

Results for Research Question 2:

The second research question that directed this study was: What are student teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University? Interview questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 were developed in order to address the student teachers perceptions regarding effectiveness of a teacher preparation program.

These results are described below:

Table 4: results from the second research question

Category A: Effective classroom management skills
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 8: They have prepared us by outlining effective instructional practices which are currently incorporated in today's classroom.
Category C: Instructor recommendations
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 5: This University has amazing professors. However, I think they over do it with memorization assignments instead of relevant high order thinking assignments. The professors themselves make the program and classes interesting. But the curriculum requirements need to be enhanced into.
RP 6: They can teach us all they like but until we actually get in the classroom, it is up to us to use all they taught and imply what we learned. I think that they have done a great job preparing us and touching all the areas that we may or may not need to use.
Category D: Program requirements and features
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 1: Lynn has a very effective teacher program, mainly because you are in small classes and receive instruction; small class is better instruction.
RP 7: An effective teacher preparation program would include more time in elementary school than in a classroom at a university. While the university classes are important, there is no better experience than being hands on in the classroom.
RP 8: An effective teacher preparation program must reveal the authentic reality of working and managing in a school/classroom. At Lynn University, the education major

provides to students the chance enter elementary schools in their first year. From freshman year to sophomore year, the student participates in field observations. Within this time, students are able to witness how a state certified teacher creates the numerous activities for his/her students. Afterwards, in junior and senior year, students enter practicum and student teaching. These two years introduce the genuine life of a teacher to me, to the point, I had questioned if this career is rightfully for me.

Category E: Test preparation – State requirements

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 2: The only disadvantage that I have truly experienced was the testing/certification. I find that some students have trouble testing where as others excel. I would have preferred more time to prepare for all tests.

RP 8: If I do not pass the FTCE (Florida Teacher Certification Exam) I will not obtain a B.S in Elementary Education. Imagine four years of US\$ 15.000 dollars per semester tuition amounted to one test.

Results for Research Question 3:

The third research question that directed this study was: What is the comparison between student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University? Interview questions 8 and 9 were developed in order to reach the student teachers perceptions regarding the relationship between their own career readiness and the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program in which they participated. These results are described below:

Table 5: results from the third research question

Category C: Instructor recommendations
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 7: Yes, I have had wonderful professors who have become my mentors and wonderful cooperating educators who have taught me an immense amount.
Category D: Program requirements and features
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 6: More “in class” experience and less observation hours and more` actual teaching.
RP 7: I think that more hands on hours in the classroom would be beneficial.
RP 8: Informing potential teachers with ALL the requirements to achieve the graduate. I think we can incorporate to the program to students whom are freshmen on sophomore, they still working on observations, they don’t have much opportunity to spend more time at school. So, speaking if possible, more “hands on” activities.
Category E: Test preparation – State requirements
Direct Quotes from the Research Participants
RP 5: Well, I passed all of the exams but that because I studied.
RP 6: Still working on it I can meet the standards and know legal issues but then is so much more I haven’t learned but I will.

The research participants were candid in discussing every topic suggested in the interview. They outlined their perceptions and thoughts regarding their own career readiness to enter the teaching profession which were built during the teacher preparation program through the contact they had with different instructors, professional models

presented by scholars in different books they read throughout the program and teachers which they had contact in classroom all over the practicum.

The students demonstrated they were satisfied with the experience they had at that teacher preparation program at Lynn University, although they would recommend increasing “hands on” activities during the program, in order to get in touch with real world problems. They also recommend more preparation for professional exams throughout the program, not only at the end of that program, when they must to split their attention with practicum and internships.

The themes which emerged through the investigation demonstrated that research participants indicated they believe that effective classroom management skills exerted a very important role in terms of their preparation for future careers in the same way as supplemental programs such as CRISS (Project CRISS - Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies), AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and ESOL/Reading program/endorsements. In addition, they believe that an effective teacher preparation program depends on combinations of effective classroom management skills, programs and endorsements, instructor recommendations, program requirements and features, and test preparation for State requirements. However, the perceptions of the research participants regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs also emerged through the combination of different categories, as shown below:

Table 6: results from combination

Category F: combination between Category A (Effective classroom management skills) and Category B (Programs and Endorsements)
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Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 2: The most three important strategies that prepare students for student teaching is classroom management, assessment strategies- because data driven instruction is very important to teacher/student success, and ESE/ESOL Strategies, simply because everyone does not learn in the same way, at the same time.

RP 3: Having a resume building class and classes to get you more prepared for the interview process and getting you ready to teach on your own.

Category G: Combination between Category A (Effective classroom management skills), Category B (Programs and Endorsements), Category C (Instructor recommendations) and Category D (Program requirements and features);

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 1: More meetings with your university supervisor, some more guidance would be nice. This year was difficult as the two university supervisor changed positions and this threw me off a bit as they have two different styles of observing. They should also add more guidance when it comes to dealing with students who have behavioral issues, or refuse to listen or who do not care about how you discipline them they still act awful.

RP 2: I think we can incorporate our ingrained testing course for all Florida State and other tests. I think it can be incorporated more study in STEEM instruction to the program. Like, there are tones of new curriculum, new ways of teaching ... so along all this current information we got here at this university with our professors I think we should focus more on Science and Technology, Engineer and Math, so that way we will be track about what we think of Education, because things are moving forward in 100 miles per hour, everything is always changing and I guess, in order to remain highly

effective we have to know the skills and strategies and the new curriculum there are, I think, that is important when looking at education in the future.

RP 7: I feel that our teacher preparation has been highly effective in terms of comparing it to other large universities. Being a small school we have been given many new opportunities to be involved in the district and community; and our teachers are highly qualified – they have many years of experience in the field so they serve not only as professors but mentors in the field of education which in turn makes us better teachers as we are better prepared. In terms of advantages, I have been given many opportunities to get involved in the community through our program such as getting AVID and CRISS trained and participating in programs such as ASK (adults supporting kids) and FCCI (Farm workers Children Tutoring). I also feel that being at a small university allows me to form a great bond with my professors and I feel like they truly care about me. I have yet to find any disadvantages in this program.

Category H: Combination between Category A (Effective classroom management skills), Category B (Programs and Endorsements) and Category D (Program requirements and features);

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 1: An effective teacher preparation program needs to incorporate every aspect of teaching. The program needs to stress classroom management as one of the important point as behavior and elementary students “acting out” seem to be the main issues. They need to prepare you to all the experiences which you may find yourself in. Behavior, planning, effective instruction.

RP 2: An effective teacher preparation program essentially prepares a pre-service

educator to manage a classroom, prepare and conduct high quality, effective, thought-provoking students centered lessons. In addition to creative lesson plan writing/preparation such teacher preparation programs will educate the pre-service teacher the routine tasks, duties, and commitments of any teacher. The college of education at Lynn has prepared me to be an effective educator.

RP 4: I would describe an effective teacher preparation program as a program that not only prepares you to go into the classroom, but also prepares you to get a job in your field of study. I also believe the program should put emphasis on more hand on assignments that are used in class instead of just written assignments.

Category I: Combination between Category A (Effective classroom management skills) and Category E (Test preparation – State requirements);

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 1: Some important things I think I am prepared for are our classroom management skills. It was a great experience and I wished it lasts longer because I think it is so valuable. Also, something that we are really prepared to teach the new common core math. I went into this thinking math is my worst subject and I would do horrible and after a year of teaching in this course, I know things that the teachers don't know...in how to interpret the standards and teach the math the way the child needs to learn this new math.

Category J: Combination between Category B (Programs and Endorsements) and Category D (Program requirements and features);

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 3: In class teaching time ESOL Endorsements; having guidance along the way;

knowing the details of a lesson plan.

RP 4: ESOL Endorsement; Reading Endorsement; that we have to do 75 hours in upper elementary and 75 in lower during the practicum.

Category K: Combination between Category C (Instructor recommendations), Category D (Program requirements and features) and Category E (Test preparation – State requirements);

Direct Quotes from the Research Participants

RP 1: I feel very prepared to meet state requirements, some better preparation for the state test would be nice but it is ultimately up to you to do the work and put in the time.

RP 3: Yes and No. I feel there could be more guidance and help through the testing process with valid studying tests questions.

Summary of Results

Phenomenological studies keep their focus on the interpretation of the world, which comes through the subject's perception and, in the same way that happens in society, the interpretation of actions, ideas and concepts occurs through different points of views, different perspectives (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). According to Patton (2002), there is no phenomenological method implemented through fixed and immutable procedures. Thereby, in matter of phenomenological research, the subject's understanding of a particular phenomenon is related to subject's perception about what is being investigated and that understanding is expressed by the own subject participating in the research (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012).

The phenomenological approach is not restricted solely to the human being: it also seeks to reach the senses that the individual demonstrates in the intersection between the experiences of the subject in a certain context, with himself and with people from the group to which he belongs. In addition, the investigator/philosopher tries to think about the world, other people and himself, in a process which consists in relearning how to see the world and different perspectives (Merleau-Ponty, 2011).

Creswell (2009) affirms that phenomenological investigation shows the consciousness of the subject, his perception regarding a certain phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon under investigation has been student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at Lynn University. Moreover, in order to describe the experiences and perceptions of that phenomenon from the perspective of the participants in the most accurate way, a textual description utilizing triangulation of data is offered below, given that providing a textual description via data analysis is the end goal of a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012; Patton, 2002).

The participants of the study have their own personal attributes. They share several characteristics among them: they are young; they face education like one of the most challenging careers and they believe they choose the best option in terms of the teacher preparation program at Lynn University – they believe they will be able to make the difference at this career.

Teacher students tend to focus on “hands on” activities as the most effective teaching strategies. They believe that kind of experience is the best strategy in terms of

preparation for real world situations, devoting a large amount of their attention to those activities. Consequently, they believe that effective classroom management skills, and programs and endorsements among others courses offered at that teacher preparation program mostly effective contribute to prepare the student for a teaching career. In addition, they also attribute the enhancement of the teacher preparation program to the increase of “hands on” activities as well as the organization of an extensive chronogram devoted to preparation for exams.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The results of this study revealed that there are five aspects of teacher preparation which exert influence on student perceptions both regarding their own readiness to enter the teaching career and the effectiveness of teacher preparation program. These aspects include: effective classroom management skills, programs and endorsements, program requirements and features, and test preparation for State/professional exams.

The research participants consider that increase courses and content devoted to approach skills and techniques that teachers should use to promote organization in the classroom are both useful to prepare student teachers to enter the teaching career as to contribute to the enhancement of the effectiveness of the teacher preparation programs. Concerning programs and endorsements, the participants considered that specific courses and endorsements offered at the program might be useful in terms of offering extra tools, making students more appealing in the job market and the program more attractive to potential new students. In turn, instructor recommendations perform an important role in the whole process: it represents the human element, the different styles and models they had access throughout the program. The program requirements and features, such as the practicum activities, the small class sizes and tutoring represent the path designated by the institution to facilitate the teacher preparation program. Lastly, test preparation for State/professional exams play an important role in terms of teacher preparation, both in

terms of career readiness of students, since those exams might help determine if the students hold the proper training and if the program has an appropriate course of study.

The research questions, which were used to provide the proper guidance to the investigation also, were useful to organize the results of the study: the data related to the first research question demonstrated that the research participants felt themselves well prepared for the teaching career. In turn, the data related to the second research question demonstrated that research participants tend to consider the teacher preparation program at Lynn University an effective program, although they hold some suggestions in order to enhance those aspects they consider there are some gaps. Lastly, the data related to the third research question of the study demonstrate the research participants are able to identify the impact of a teacher preparation program on their careers. Moreover, the implications of this set of data are shown below.

Discussion of Findings and Implications for Practice

Every participant interviewed at this study indicated their perceptions regarding what they think about their own readiness to enter the teaching profession and what would be an effective teacher preparation. The results of this study demonstrated that:

1. The research participants of this study perceive themselves as ready to enter the teaching profession from the teacher preparation program at Lynn University, although they feel they need more “hands on” experiences before they assume their duties as professionals;
2. The research participants consider the teacher preparation program at Lynn University effective, mainly due to its features;

3. The research participants consider that the program endorsements, the instructors' recommendations, the program requirements and features were relevant in order to achieve their readiness to enter the teaching profession, although they suggest that the preparation for State/professional test should follow a different timeline in order to reinforce its effectiveness.

By considering themselves well prepared to teach, they consider the teacher preparation program at Lynn University as an effective program. However, they also had their own suggestions about how to improve the teacher preparation program, some thoughts and ideas regarding the skills that they considered to be of primary importance in order to better prepare student teachers to feel themselves ready to enter the teaching career. Those suggestions justify the existence of implications and recommendations of this study for further investigations at this area.

Although teacher preparation constitutes one of the most important areas in education, the constant discussion in this area might grant new alternatives in terms of enhancement of those programs. Policymakers, school districts, teacher preparation programs, instructors, schools, teachers, and students can all benefit from a better understanding of the data collected from research in this area. Results from this study raised some issues for consideration. Furthermore, these findings may have implications for the development of teacher preparation programs.

Based on the research literature for this study, perception exerts a pivotal role in terms of developing the student mindset (Bissessar, 2014; Buchanan, Lang & Morin, 2013; Okpala & Ellis, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier & Moore, 2007). Consequently, the development efforts devoted to teacher preparation programs

should pay attention to those perceptions in order to embrace the aspects investigated in the present study. In this sense, this study addressed some critical components for success in teacher preparation programs including: effective classroom management skills, programs and endorsements, instructor recommendations, program requirements and features, and test preparation/State requirements.

With the literature indicating effective classroom management skills and test preparation/State requirements as some of the top reasons teachers leave the profession, it is an area of concern in terms of loss of student achievement (Levine, 2006; National Research Council, 2010; Peterson, 2000; Tatz, 2013). As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) indicated, because it is a complex issue with many perspectives, teacher preparation programs must continue to look for ways to better prepare and support students in this area.

An important implication from this study is that teacher preparation programs may enhance their practices by increasing their offer of “hands on” experiences under the guidance of expert instructors (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). These “hands on” experiences should be more active in nature, and less observational. Since the practicum is a privileged moment of teaching and learning, it may allow student teachers to achieve a more effective integration into the school environment, where they will be able to find real situations related to the teaching-learning process, school organization practices, and to be familiarized with the public policies which govern education at school ((Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002).

Teacher preparation programs should reinforce their focus on effective classroom management skills. Since the act of teaching is a dynamic process, which is attached to

cultural contexts, the organization of educational activities should be performed through current strategies, content, curriculum and methods (Ralph (2003). Furthermore, teacher preparation programs should establish a closer relationship between theory and practice, in order to prepare student teachers to present the skills and competencies required to contribute to society from the beginning of their professional practice. These effective classroom management skills courses need to be taught by instructors who invest in real world situations in this area. As Levine (2006) indicated, teacher preparation programs need to prepare student teachers to perform their practices through a wide variety of strategies for managing student behavior. By adopting these practices, teacher preparation programs will prepare their students to hold specific skills to perform their duties in a most accurate way. This reflects on students, which may feel themselves ready to teaching career more appropriately.

The research participants declared themselves satisfied with their instructors at Lynn University. Due to the institution features, such as small class size, low student-to-faculty ratio and tutoring programs, they can take full advantage of the contact with their instructors in that teacher preparation program. In addition, the research participants consider the programs and endorsements offered into the program (ESOL/Reading endorsements, AVID and CRISS programs, among others) extremely relevant in terms of their preparation for a teaching career and also they made the teacher preparation program more appealing. According to Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy (2001), the offering of supplemental programs and endorsements by teacher preparation programs might reinforce those programs proposal in terms of empowering their student teachers to perform their professional duties in the most accurate way.

Although the research participants feel themselves ready and well prepared by the institution to enter the teaching career, they suggested that the preparation for State/professional tests should follow a different timeline than the one proposed in the program. They would like to participate in a preparation for tests throughout the program instead of being committed to that test preparation only in the last semesters of the program. According to Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos & Mia (2003), the appropriate academic preparation for State/professional tests must be designed to allow students a fair opportunity to prepare academically while ensuring that such preparation does not invalidate test results. On the other hand, McDonnell (2004), affirm that the best academic preparation for State/professional tests is good instruction. By adapting its instructional principles and practices to approach content, standards and frameworks of those tests throughout the whole program, the institution will be able to ensure that students of that teacher preparation program will master those tests until the end of that program.

Trustworthiness achievement

Due to its methodological characteristics, phenomenological studies deal and present data in a different way as it is done in quantitative studies (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). According to Patton (2002), provisions related to the trustworthiness of a qualitative research design are fundamental in terms of its applicability and practicability for future research. Consequently, the qualitative researcher should ensure their studies will demonstrate that the methods used are reproducible and consistent, that the approach and procedures used were appropriate for the context and can be documented, and that external evidence can be used to test conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Since the development of appropriate interview questions is crucial to obtaining credible data, the administration of those questions also should follow the same principle (Patton, 2002). The information gathered in this phenomenological study was organized and analyzed through distinct categories of analysis in order to strengthen the credibility of the conducted study, as proposed by Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012). Moreover, those provisions recommended by the authors were applied in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

This phenomenological study investigating student teachers perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University has its limitations. The results of this study cannot be directly applied to other teacher preparation programs throughout the country. The research findings are specifically relevant to the unique demographics from the Elementary Education Grades K-6 teacher preparation program at Lynn University. Thereby, additional phenomenological inquiries replicating the study in similar programs are strongly recommended. In addition, a broader context in which the data can be further supported would improve the trustworthiness of the findings of this study.

The present study does not intend to exhaust the discussion on this topic. Instead, this study aims to serve as a starting point for addressing the perceptions of students in teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, the dataset for this study was not longitudinal. In order to understand student teachers' performance and behavior over time through a greater perspective, it would be beneficial to also investigate teachers' perceptions after completion of their first and second years of teaching. This would allow

for comparison of new teacher attitudes and perceptions up to a 5 year period of time. It is also recommended that future research in this area include a socioeconomic status indicator such as the percentage of students in the teacher preparation program receiving student loans or specific scholarships.

An additional limitation of this study was that the investigations did not include any amount of time devoted to observations during the student teachers' experiences at practicum. Further studies should include that important moment among their data collection strategies. Lastly, the demographic information survey used in this study delimited the student teachers' responses to those areas perceived by the researcher to be important. During the interviews and subsequent data analysis, other issues and questions emerged that could be addressed through further research. Additionally, studying the habits of the student teachers who are preparing themselves for professional exams may add insight about best practices of preparation for tests at teacher preparation programs.

Summary

Teacher preparation programs are structured in order to prepare students to perform their duties through higher standards after their graduation. Successful professionals in a teaching career use didactic knowledge, articulated with others teaching knowledge such as classroom management skills and professional development to perform their duties at school. In addition, student teachers must be able to pass State/professional tests before they get their licenses. However, some programs have not reached all students. Considering that perceptions perform a pivotal role regarding the development of the students' mindset, these perceptions should be taken into account in order to enhance those teacher preparation programs.

The process of career choice and insertion in the labor market becomes harder day by day, creating doubts and anxiety, which means that career choice possibilities are not related only to personal characteristics, but mainly to the historical context and the sociocultural environment in which the young newly graduate is living. Since professional occupation is a social construction which refers to socioeconomic and cultural issues, changes in the labor market and its relationship with the professional training requirements, and the social representations of professions associated with status and salary are certainly factors that influence the attractiveness for choosing between different careers. Considering that a teaching career is related to career preparation and career choice, which is a process permeated by dilemmas, conflicts and contradictions, involving not only personal characteristics, but also the historical context and sociocultural elements, the way teacher preparation is executed demands thorough data collection. That perspective directed the execution of this study.

This phenomenological study revealed that students defined the teaching profession as challenging and rewarding, but also with limitations and difficulties. They understand that the teacher preparation program at Lynn University has prepared them appropriately: they highlighted the small class sizes, the ESOL and Reading endorsements, the instructors, and the mentoring program as some of the elements that help the program achieve success at this academic area. However, students have suggested that increasing the offering of effective classroom management skills, time extension at practicum and others “hands on” experiences as well as different timelines related to preparation for State/professional tests by the program would be highly beneficial. From the point that universities must assume the responsibility to improve,

develop, and organize their teacher preparation programs in order to prepare students for the teaching profession, the findings of this study might be useful at least to start the discussion related to the use of student perceptions in terms of evaluation of teacher preparation effectiveness.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval



LYNN UNIVERSITY 3601 North Military Trail

Boca Raton, FL 33431-5598

Josue Dantas

Sent by email 4/07/15

IRB #2015-003

Dear Josue Dantas

The proposal that you have submitted "Student teacher perception regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher perception program" has been approved by the Lynn University's Institutional Review Board. You are responsible for complying with all stipulations described under the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 (Protection of Human Subjects). This document can be obtained from the following address: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm>

Form 8 (Termination Form)

https://my.lynn.edu/ICS/Portlets/ICS/Handoutportlet/viewhandler.ashx?handout_id=ble2f159-ce0f-4774-b727-3dd56c4bfb34 needs to be completed and returned to Farideh

Farazmand (██████████) when you fulfill your study. You are reminded that should you need an extension or report a change in the circumstances of your study, an additional document must be completed. For further information, please click on the following <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/anprmchangetable.html>

Good luck in all your future endeavors!

Warmest regards,

Farideh Farazmand, PhD

IRB Chair

Cc: Dr. Gregg Cox

File 2015-003

Appendix B – Demographic Survey

Lynn University in Boca Raton, FL

Dissertation Title: Student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program

Investigator: Josue Dantas

Date of IRB Approval: April 07, 2015.

IRB Number: 2015-003

Instructions: Please complete the demographic survey below and return to Josue Dantas via email at [REDACTED]. Your name is not being used in the study. A case number is assigned for privacy and confidentiality purposes.

Demographic Information	
Question	Response
Sex	
Country of Origin	
Formal Degrees Earned	
Current Program	
Why did you choose this program	

Appendix C: Guiding interview questions



Doctorate of Education
Josue Dantas – Cohort 04

Guiding interview questions

1. How would you describe an effective teacher preparation program?
2. What are your perceptions towards the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program that you have participated in at this university?
3. Tell me about something that you learned from your participation at this teacher preparation program. Do you think it will make a difference in your future teaching career? Explain your response.
4. What advantages and disadvantages have you experienced from your participation in the teacher preparation program at this university?
5. Of all the skills or strategies used in the program, which three do you think are the most important in order to prepare students for the teaching career?
6. What are some aspects of the teacher preparation program you felt were surprising to you at the end of this program?
7. How beneficial was the practicum experience in preparing you for the classroom?
8. What do you think could be incorporated into the program to enhance the teacher preparation program at this university?
9. Do you feel yourself prepared to meet the State requirements and legal examinations, in order to achieve the professional standards of teaching profession? If yes, explain your point of view.

Appendix D: Introductory letter/handout

Josue Claudio Dantas – COHORT 4

STUDENT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CAREER READINESS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Although there are more than 1,400 colleges and universities in the United States preparing students to enter the teaching profession, continue to graduate many individuals who do not go into a teaching career long-term in the country. Approximately 30 percent to 50 percent of new teachers end up leaving their jobs within five years (Levine, 2006). There are many students who do not feel they are prepared by teacher preparation programs to follow this career path (National Research Council, 2010). Despite the substantial amount of research that has been conducted in the field of teacher preparation, minimal research was found to investigate student's perceptions towards career readiness as an aspect of program evaluation (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Harris & Sass, 2007; Levine, 2005; Mondale, 2001; Walsh & Jacobs, 2007; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at Lynn University, in order to provide an alternative approach related to research in this topic. The research will be conducted at Lynn University, which is located in south Florida, through the administration of semi-structured interviews to achieve the data.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1. What are student teacher perceptions regarding their own readiness to enter the teacher profession at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q2. What are student teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

Q3. What is the comparison between student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University?

POPULATION

The targeted population in this phenomenological study includes males and/or females, age range between 18 to 35 years, in the final year of a teacher preparation program at a small private university in south Florida. The researcher will investigate 8 students. Furthermore, the criteria to be included in the study are: be enrolled in the 4th year of the program; agree and sign the terms of the research. The criteria to be excluded of this study are: express disagreement with the terms of the research; and refusal in participate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to introduce the reader to concepts related to student perceptions, teacher preparation programs, and career readiness in order to build awareness regarding the use of student perceptions in educational research, specifically in teacher preparation programs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The phenomenological approach proposed in this research design seeks to investigate student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University. Accordingly, the researcher will attempt to capture the perceptions of the students, in order to provide a clear description that comes from their unique points of view.

DATA COLLECTION

This proposal will investigate and describe student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program at Lynn University. To accomplish this purpose, the researcher will collect data through semi-structured interviews.

QUALITY OF DATA

To achieve success during the data collection, the researcher will ensure that the application of instruments to collect the subjects' perceptions related to career readiness and effectiveness of a teacher program will occur through diligent attention to the specific research questions of this study, by keeping out of reach threats to validity of data.

DATA ANALYSIS

The use of semi-structured interviews will provide the necessary sources in order to obtain the triangulation of data (which is related to the third research question) necessary to ensure that the findings from the various sources support each other (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). After gathering all of the information, this researcher will analyze the data (from interviews) by taking the following steps:

1. Categorize information gathered from interviews;
2. Identify statements that relate directly to the research questions. Irrelevant information will be discarded. Relevant data will then be linked into segments that reflect specific thought patterns.
3. Divergent perspectives will then be considered on interviews.
4. A composite will be developed to serve as base for a proposal of improvements.

LIMITATIONS

- The study will depend on the responses of the participants. It will be assumed that each interview question will be answered honestly by the students;
- Interpretations of data will be influenced by the judgment of the researcher;
- The findings of this study will be influenced by the analysis and interpretations of the researcher.
- Research bias: small participants may not be generalizable;

Appendix E: Informed consent



PROJECT TITLE:

Student teacher perceptions regarding career readiness and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program

Project IRB Number: 2015-003 - Lynn University 3601 N. Military Trail Boca Raton, FL 33431

I, Josue Dantas, am a doctoral student at Lynn University. I am studying Educational Leadership in the Ed.D. program. One of my degree requirements is to conduct a research study.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANT

You are being asked to participate in this study. Please read this carefully. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator, Josue Dantas, will answer all of your questions. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this study. You acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age, and that you do not have medical problems or language or educational barriers that precludes understanding of explanations contained in this authorization for voluntary consent.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of the study is to investigate student teacher perceptions towards career readiness and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the end of a teacher preparation program, in order to provide an alternative approach related to research in this topic. The research will be conducted at

Lynn University, in the Elementary Education Grades K-6 program, with a total of eight participants, through the administration of interviews. The findings of this study may contribute to the literature of teacher preparation and the use of students' perceptions in educational research. The results may enable institutions to evaluate their programs based on its findings and recommendations.

PROCEDURES:

Interviews

The interview begins with mutual introduction of the researcher and participants followed by your response to demographic questions. Next you will be asked to elaborate on questions that are relevant to this study and to provide your insights about it. The interview should take about 40 minutes to complete.

Audio Tapes

All interviews will be audiotaped. Audiotaping will allow the researcher to accurately document participants' words during the interviews. It will also allow the researcher to study the content of the interviews at a later time during the study. The participants will not be anonymous to the researcher but case numbers will be used in order to preserve anonymity to others. Only the researcher will have access to the audiotapes. The researcher will listen to and transcribe all audiotapes verbatim.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to decline participation and/or withdraw from participation at any time during the research study. There will be no penalty for doing so.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no potential physical or mental risks for participants in this study. Furthermore, this researcher will use all available means to protect the confidentiality of participants in this research: by using case numbers for the research participants, respecting the

participants' availability, and the free will of the participants to finalize activities anytime.

Benefits of the Study

Research participants can benefit themselves by participating in study which grants to them an alternative opportunity to provide their feedback through an innovative perspective, providing to them an extra way to reflect on their preparation. On the other hand, teacher preparation programs can benefit by receiving scientific research findings, potentially useful to provide guidance on topics directly relevant to their institutions.

Compensation and Injury

There is no compensation or payment for participating in this study. Participation in this study is not expected to cause any physical or psychological injury. Student participants will not be awarded extra credit or any form of academic benefit for their participation in this research study.

Copy of Informed Consent

A signed and dated copy of the Informed Consent form will be given to each participant before the first interview. Participants may request a copy of the research findings upon completion of the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Only the researcher, Josue Dantas will know who you are. During the Interview you will be given a case number. Data will be coded with that case number.

Interview data, including the audio recordings will be coded so that there is no personally identifying information. They will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator, Josue Dantas and faculty advisor Dr. Suzanne King. They will be transcribed and coded. At the end of the study, all audio tapes will be destroyed in a responsible manner.

All the data gathered during this study, which were previously described, will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Data will be stored in password enabled locked files in the researchers computer and destroyed at the end of the research

All information will be held in strict confidence and will not be disclosed unless required by law or regulation.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS/ACCESS TO CONSENT FORM: Any further questions you have about this study or your participation in it, either now or any time in the future, will be answered by Principal Investigator, Josue Dantas who may be reached at [REDACTED] and Dr. Suzanne King, Faculty Advisor who can be reached at [REDACTED]. For any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call Dr. Farideh Farazmand, Chair of the Lynn University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at [REDACTED]. If any problems arise as a result of your participation in this study, please call the Principal Investigator, Josue Dantas, and the faculty advisor, Dr. Suzanne King, immediately.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

AUTHORIZATION FOR VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read and understand this consent form. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been assured that any future questions that may arise will be answered. I understand that all aspects of this project will be carried out in the strictest of confidence, and in a manner in which my rights as a human subject are protected. I have been informed of the risks and benefits. I have been informed in advance as to what my task(s) will be and what procedures will be followed.

I voluntarily choose to participate. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I understand that by signing this form I have not

waived any of my legal rights. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's printed name

Participant's signature

Date

I voluntarily agree for the interview to be audiotaped. I know that I can withdraw this consent to participate at any time without penalty or prejudice. I understand that by signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's printed name

Participant's signature

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT: I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above project. The person participating has represented to me that he/she is at least 18 years of age, and that he/she does not have a medical problem or language or educational

barrier that precludes his/her understanding of my explanation. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who is signing this consent form understands clearly the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation and his/her signature is legally valid.

Signature of the Investigator

Date of IRB Approval

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