

## **The Process of Change for Teacher Candidates: Learning to Collaborate**

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*Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) College of Education implemented an innovation through the integrated undergraduate teacher education program beginning in the 2000-01 academic year. This study was conducted over a five year period. The integrated program consists of specific program hours for Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education teacher preparation majors. In addition, the program includes full endorsement for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) content.*

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### **Introduction**

Change is not new; rather the understanding of the process of change is relatively new. Oppenheimer (1955) pointed out that what is *new* is the focus on change. This continues to be true. Literature on change in educational reform has been the subject of exploration since the middle 1950s. In the 1960s, the focus began a shift towards the implementation of innovations and individual behavior towards change (Hall & Hord, 2001).

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2000-01 academic year. This study was conducted over a five year period. The integrated program consists of specific program hours for Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education teacher preparation majors. In addition, the program includes full endorsement for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) content.

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Faculty from Early Childhood, Elementary, and Special Education programs are well aware of the increasing complexities involved in teaching students in today's public and private schools. With the move toward inclusion of both ESOL and students with special needs in regular education classes, Response to Interventions (RtI), and the implementation of multi-age class groupings, teacher candidates must demonstrate a better understanding of the diverse learning needs of their students. Thus, teacher education programs are being redesigned to clearly reflect the diversity issues across all levels pre-K-12.

As a result of the many complexities in today's student population, teacher candidates must challenge and change their thinking about the core concepts and approaches of different disciplines, to see issues from multiple perspectives, and to apply the approaches, concepts, and tools of disciplines and professions to solve real-world problems. Through the Block system of teacher education, students explore a topic or theme in depth by working on projects that call for intellectual inquiry, physical exploration, and community service.

The projects result in valuable products that have the potential to extend the knowledge and work of individuals far beyond the scope of the students who created them. For example, products that might result from a first semester block course -- *The Diversity of Human Experience* -- might take the form of developing a guide for working with parents of students of varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds, devising a comprehensive chart identifying learning difficulties of children with diverse needs and backgrounds and identifying strategies to meet their respective needs, or any number of similar real and valuable products.

These challenges prompted faculty to explore the concerns, the perceptions, and the process of change of the students involved in the integrated teacher education program. This reconceptualization of a traditional teacher education program underscores the unifying vision in FGCU's College of Education program by providing opportunities for prospective teachers to acquire, construct, and communicate knowledge, skills and attitudes that empower them to create a quality of life in their respective learning communities.

### **Literature**

Several relevant bodies of literature associated with educational change and teacher education were reviewed for this study and include: (a) the process of change in education and the models of change that have influenced educational reform, (b) philosophical and theoretical perspectives on educational change, (c) the Concerns-Based Adoption Model

used to facilitate innovative change in education, and (d) teacher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The model of change that has influenced educational reform the most is the Local Process of Change model (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). This model stemmed from the results of the Rand Change Agent Study; a study that longitudinally examined four federally funded educational programs in the 1970s. The study focused on the adoption, implementation, and institutionalization of 293 innovative projects in eighteen states. The initial Rand Change Agent Study (1974) is the most widely cited because of its implications for change in educational settings.

The results of the Rand Change Agent Study (1978) suggested that schools change new practices, gain support, adapt to local practices, and then become integrated into the regular operation of the institution (institutionalization). The report emphasized change as a three-stage process (a) initiation or gaining support, (b) implementation and change of the innovation, and (c) institutionalization, when change becomes part of the system.

In as much as history has influenced the profession of education, similar philosophical perspectives have affected the process of educational change. Changes in education and teacher education have been shaped by three specific philosophical perspectives, behavioral, cognitive, and social responsible or constructivist (Hall & Hord, 2001).

The hallmark of teacher education in the 1960s and through the 1970s was the behavioral perspective. As the 1980s approached, teachers began to focus on student outcomes and the application of knowledge by process. This particular emphasis centered on students' constructing knowledge and meaning for themselves. This approach, while cognitive in orientation, was known as the constructivist approach (Hall & Hord, 2001).

The 1990s brought about a greater awareness of the sociological and the physical environment for teacher education. Cooperative learning and multicultural education became the forefront of changes facing teacher education. Community building and shared learning were emphasized for *all* children (Hall & Hord, 2001). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, standards based learning has become the focus with teacher collaboration, dialogue, and reflection being emphasized as a professional development activity (DuFour, 2004).

Next, literature on change focuses on adult perceptions; addressed as "concerns" by Fuller's (1969) Concerns Theory. In Concerns Theory, change must be considered as a process rather than as an event. Individuals experience the process of change at different times and express different concerns. This implies that those individuals involved in the process of change went through a developmental pattern. Concerns Theory (1969) examines the concerns of and the developmental path taken by preservice and inservice teachers.

Dr. Frances Fuller developed and administered the Teacher Concerns Statement (TCS) questionnaire and identified two areas of concern – concerns for self and concerns for students. Her model was refined and modified over time to include three areas of concern: (a) concerns unrelated to teaching, (b) concerns for the role of the teacher and, (c) concerns about teaching and the needs of the student.

From this theory, Fuller (1969) proposed a developmental conceptualization of the concerns of teachers. Teachers' concerns were then categorized into three phases: preteaching, early teaching, and late concerns. Preteaching concerns were characterized as low involvement in teaching with little or nothing to do with the act of teaching. Consequently, this phase became known as non-concerns and unrelated to teaching. Early teaching concerns were appropriately labeled self-concerns, as they centered on concerns related to expectations of the classroom and the role of teaching. Late concerns were characterized by concerns for student outcomes and professional development.

Using this theoretical framework, and seeing similarities in teachers and professionals involved in the adoption of new innovations, The Texas Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas in Austin (R&DCTE) began to gather qualitative data and document individuals concerns in the process of change. As a result, Hall, Wallace, and Dossett (1973) developed an assessment of innovations model known as the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM).

The concern for continued professional development of novice teachers continues to concern teacher education programs and form the basis of a disconnection in the application of theory into practice for new teachers. Murray (1999) implied that these disconnections require attention from and participation of academic leaders and the professional education community. Much like the Holmes Group (1995) and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) reports indicated that the improvements in teacher education lie in the reform of university teacher education programs – the curriculum, the faculty, the students, pedagogy, and school partnerships (Murray, 1999).

Imig & Switzer (1996) confirmed a widely held view that teacher education programs are not responding to the needs of school reform. The Holmes Group (1986) brought national attention to teacher education in the 1980s by calling for reform and research. Darling-Hammond (1990) indicated that research and reform begin with analysis of the theory of teacher education. By addressing how teachers' learn, and addressing how knowledge about teaching serves to interpret teaching dilemmas, research studies of teacher education theory using constructivist approaches highlights analysis of knowledge in action (Schön, 1983).

In sum, the literature on these educational issues, systemic reform of university teacher preparation programs, examination of teacher educators, and research on analysis of constructivist theory have indicated that teacher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will continue to be influenced by change.

In an effort to recognize the change efforts that have begun, the process of addressing the concerns and areas of reform previously identified, this study will use the Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) as a vehicle for the examination of change in the selected university teacher preparation program. Hord and Hall (2001) offer that the CBAM has been recognized as an appropriate tool for identifying the perceptions and concerns of individuals involved in the process of change.

After recognition of the concerns, change agents can then begin the process of developing intervention strategies aligned with concerns to aid in making the innovation work more smoothly (Hall & Hord, 2001). The seven stages of concern are:

- 0 - Awareness** – a beginning understanding of the innovation
- 1 - Information** – has information on the innovation
- 2 - Personal** – is more concerned with personal issues
- 3 - Manage** – wants to know how to manage the innovation
- 4 - Consequence** – wants to understand the results of the innovation
- 5 - Collaborate** – wants to work with other colleagues and the innovation
- 6 - Refocus** – has complete understanding of the innovation and is developing new strategies for working with the innovation

There is an alarmingly high rate of teacher attrition—between 30 and 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Gratch, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1996). Moreover, new teachers are being required to have improved teaching skills, and an awareness of new practices and innovative approaches in order to become successful in contemporary public schools.

The acceptance of an integrated approach in teacher preparation can become a vital component of national educational reform efforts directed towards these new teacher requirements. The acceptance and awareness of this innovative approach to teacher education may provide the mechanism for the renewal of teacher education and the recruitment and retention of new teachers.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to examine and describe the perceptions, the concerns, and the process of change of the teacher candidates involved in the reconceptualization of the teacher education curricula. The – Integrated Teacher Education Program - an integrated learning approach – was the innovation identified in the change process at the College of Education, Teacher Education Program at Florida Gulf Coast University.

In addition, the study described the stages of concerns and the process of change as perceived by the teacher candidates involved in innovative change in the selected university teacher education program. To describe these concerns and the change process, the study used the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ).

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study was: What are the individual concerns of teacher candidates enrolled in Blocks 1 and 5 of the Expeditionary Integrated Teacher Education Program (EIP) at FGCU. Recognizing that the process of change is a highly personal experience - the variable - change - is the catalyst for the discovery of the concerns and perceptions of the individuals involved in the teacher education program.

### **Sample Population**

Participants selected for the study were recruited from teacher candidates who had completed Block 1 and Block 5 of the program for three consecutive academic years; in other words, teacher candidates at the beginning – Block 1, and teacher candidates at the end – Block 5, of the Integrated Teacher Education Program. There were a total of 120 students who completed the surveys.

### **Research Method**

The method chosen as a means to examine the research questions was a descriptive cross-sectional study. A cross-sectional method was used to develop comparisons among and between the Blocks (Verma & Mallick, 1999). A questionnaire was favored for its ease in design and data collection.

Recognizing that change is a process, a cross-sectional methodology was used to assess concerns at the various stages of transition through the change process. Specifically, the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) from the CBAM was preferred for its ability to assess individual perceptions and concerns in the process of change for this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data for the study was conducted in a three-step process. First data from the questionnaire was sorted and analyzed using the computer program SPSS. The data was then outlined on a matrix relating the research question to the variables and the questionnaire. Finally, using the interpretation detailed in the SoC manual (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1998), the scores were used to establish relationships between Blocks.

### **Results**

Preliminary data analyses indicate there was a statistically significant difference between Block 1s and Block 5s. Block 1s were primarily concerned with stage 0-awareness and/or stage 2-personal, whereas, Block 5s were primarily concerned with stage 3-managing (see Figure 1). There appears to be a consist trend of Block 5s moving toward stage 5-collaboration which is consistent with the research of teacher candidate attitudes (Fuller, 1969, Hall & Hord, 1996, Elliott, 2005). Typically, candidates who enter the program would be in the zero to two stages as they have little knowledge or understanding of the program.

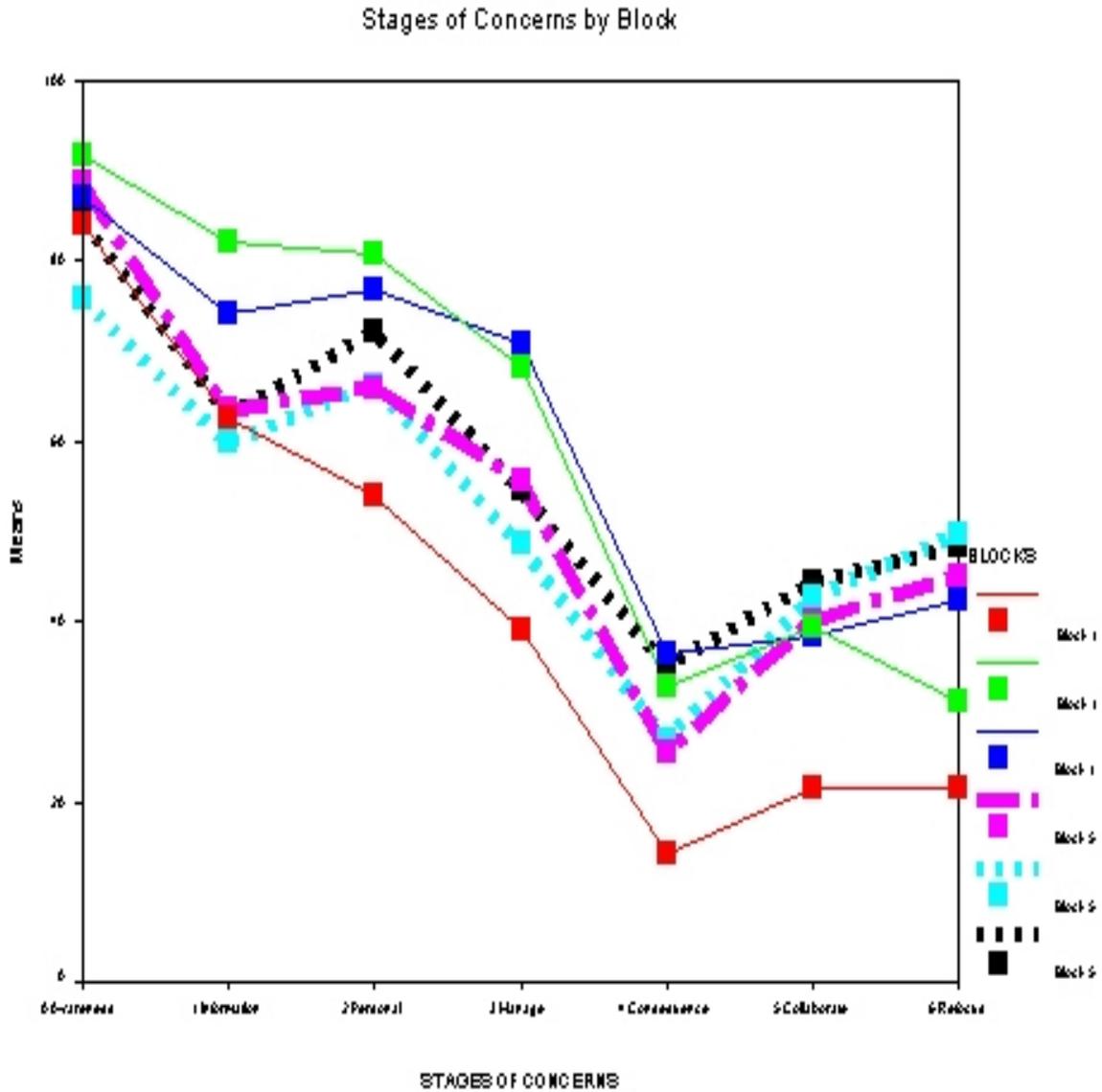
However, by the time candidates reach Block 5 they have been schooled in collaboration and collaborative activities for at least four semesters. The intent of the program is to develop teachers who understand the art and science of teaching through collaborative methods.

Professional development in teacher education research supports the influence of revisiting and reflecting on pedagogical activities to enhance teaching and learning (Lucas, 1988; Jones & Vesilind, 1996). Teachers reflect on their teaching and the children in their classroom with the notion towards modification, correction, adjustment, and supplementing future teaching and learning situations (Lucas, 1988). University teacher education programs support this practice as well by encouraging reflective practice (Schön, 1983).

Dewey (1938) suggested that greater experience in the art and practice of teaching occurs through collaborative and reflective activities. In the educational setting, collaboration is defined as interactive planning and problem solving by teams of two or more teachers (Welch, 1998). Dewey (1938) implied that novice teachers become members of the teaching community by serving as assistants and develop collegial relationships with children and other teachers as a means for growth and development; a form of collaboration. This may be evidence of why collaboration was so easily embraced and collaborative practices were so readily adopted.

In this study, collaboration was a clear artifact of the innovation. Almost every individual concerns profile indicated that by Block 5, their highest stage of concerns was a stage 5-Collaboration concern. In the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) collaboration as an influence of the innovation is considered an advanced stage of change. Prior to Block 5, the candidates exhibited typical behavior as well, demonstrating their highest stage of concerns being awareness and personal.

While this in itself is not surprising, what is significant is the consistent upward movement of all candidates in the program. Each candidate moved from having high personal concerns – concerns 1 and 2, to developing understanding - concern 3, to managing change – concern 4. A consistent pattern designed by the Block system. As candidates progressed their understanding of the integrated curriculum increased. This consistency in pattern helped faculty members gain insight into how well teacher candidates understood and applied the concepts being taught in the Integrated Teacher Preparation Program.



### Conclusion

The teacher candidate results demonstrated movement toward collaboration. Collaboration is the highest stage of concern in the Stages of Concerns Questionnaire. This movement toward collaboration indicated that there was an overall influence from the innovation. Additionally, constructivist and social constructivist perspectives naturally encourage collaborative ideas and activities. All of the teacher candidates were schooled using both perspectives.

Yet we cannot ignore the fact that Hord and Hall (2001) indicated that a high Stage 5-Collaboration concern is considered “the ideal goal of a concerns-based implementation effort” (p.71). Furthermore, Hord and Hall (2001) consider high Stage 5-Collaborations as “very rare” and suggested that the individuals associated with the change process are doing something special. Thus, what all of the teacher candidates’ responses indicated was a high

degree of understanding the notion of collaborative effort. In the process of change, individuals identify challenges and work to make them successes. This appears to be what is happening with these teacher candidates as they engaged in the process of change from candidate to professional teacher.

As teacher educators continue to analyze the innovative nature of this teacher preparation program, they continue to understand the process of change that undergraduate students go through as they work toward becoming professional teachers. Research also reflects that new teachers are continually challenged by the application of theory into practice in the field and continue to adapt new innovations to help bridge this gap. The Integrated Teacher Preparation Program at Florida Gulf Coast University is one such example of the continued process of change.

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### Article Citation

Elliott, E. E; Vazquez, E. V., Mayberry, S.; & Christensen, L. (2010). The Process of Change for Teacher Candidates: Learning to Collaborate, *Florida Association of Teacher Educators Journal*, 1(10), 15-24. Retrieved from <http://www.fate1.org/journals/2010/tomei.pdf>