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**Implementing a Full-Year Elementary Internship:
Challenges and Successes**

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This study examines implementation of a full-year internship at a Florida state university. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews to solicit participants' perspectives of the full-year internship. Seven mentor teachers, seven interns, five university supervisors, and five-course instructors comprised the total sample. Interns and mentor teachers were randomly selected and members of the research team conducted interviews, using questions collectively determined by the researchers. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using thematic analysis. Open and selective coding was documented on a spreadsheet and analyzed for emerging patterns and themes. As patterns or themes emerged, analysis across participants was conducted, and researchers noted if those themes crossed more than one group. Data collected highlighted both successful components of the program and difficulties.

Keywords: internship, student teaching, teacher preparation, elementary education

Introduction

The Unified Elementary Proteach (UEP) program is a five-year teacher preparation program at a state university with dual emphasis in elementary education and mild disabilities. After lower division requirements are completed, students apply for admission into the program beginning their junior year. Upper division undergraduate years are spent taking content courses

aligned with educational pedagogy. Consistent with the research (Darling-Hammond, 2006), content *learning* is brought together with content *pedagogy* through courses that address both simultaneously.

Within each of the four upper-division undergraduate semesters, there is a field component aligned with coursework allowing candidates to implement in the classroom the knowledge, theories, and practices they are learning in their courses. The academic work provides the conceptual knowledge and background needed for candidates to be successful in their fieldwork and offers the opportunity to connect theory directly to practice. Darling-Hammond (2006) emphasizes that the most impactful programs require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire program and to examine and apply concepts and strategies they are simultaneously learning alongside teachers who can demonstrate how to teach in ways that are responsive to learners. Sykes, Bird, and Kennedy (2010) argue that it is *practice* that should be the starting point with coursework structured around practice to provide more ambitious instruction for candidates within fieldwork. The UEP program provides this powerful and ambitious model of education.

Teacher candidates in the UEP program spend well over 400 hours in practicum work just in the undergraduate portion of the program. The demands of fieldwork gradually increase each semester culminating with a pre-internship at the conclusion of their undergraduate experience where candidates are placed in K-5 classrooms for sixteen hours a week (four mornings a week) housed in Professional Development Schools defined as collaborations of university faculty, K-12 teachers, administrators, and teacher candidates (Mantle-Bromley, 2002; National Association of Professional Development Schools, 2008). The heavy demands of the final semester in the undergraduate programs are a useful way to transition candidates into the demanding work of the graduate full-year internship in their fifth year.

The Graduate Full-Year Internship: Looking at the Literature

After graduating with a bachelor's degree, teacher candidates apply and enter the three-semester long master's program. The summer prior to their internship, candidates take four content courses to prepare them for content and organizational demands of teaching and functioning in a school setting on a full time basis. After completing summer coursework, candidates are assigned to K-5 classrooms located in public schools across the state where they begin their internship after a 4-6 week respite. As the internship progresses, interns gradually move from interns or *student teachers* to *teaching partners* with their mentor teachers while also taking online embedded courses designed to inform their work in the classroom during the internship. This design is consistent with Sykes et al.'s (2010) notion that *practice* should be the starting point of instruction. While traditional programs frontload preparation with coursework, the clinical model places school and classroom-based experiences at the center of teacher preparation. The experience culminates with the awarding of a master's degree with graduates who are eligible for certification in elementary education, the K-12 ESOL endorsement, and the K-12 reading endorsement.

New teachers usually identify student teaching as the most rewarding and useful aspect of their teacher preparation program. Multiple studies confirm that both experienced and newly certified teachers view clinical experiences as the single most powerful component of teacher preparation (Baxter Magolda, 2006; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002;). The research highlighted by Evertson, Willis, & Zlotnick (1985) provided little reason to believe that supervised practical experience for six to ten weeks, as it was and still is encountered in most student teaching situations, is a very effective way to educate teachers. McKinney et al. (2008) found that a short-term internship may not be sufficient to prepare teachers for the urban and demanding school context. In theory, if structured properly, a semester-long student teaching experience could promote teacher effectiveness; although, without time to fully develop classroom management skills, teacher effectiveness may be undermined in the first year of teaching by the fact that teachers focus more on controlling student behavior than facilitating learning (Evertson, et al., 1985). With increased time in the classroom to learn to manage student behavior, the result could be increased time to teaching and learning in the first year of teaching.

The duration of the internship and how it is structured should echo the program's goals (Clifford & Millar, 2007). Given the current pressures on teachers to produce high levels of achievement among students, even in the first year of teaching, a central goal of the full-year internship is to graduate teachers who perform more like *second-* rather than *first-* year teachers. Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that we “need programs that produce novice teachers able from their first days in the classroom to practice like seasoned veterans, productively organizing classrooms that teach challenging content to very diverse learners with levels of skill many teachers never attain” (p.12). Teaching experience has been identified as one of the few factors consistently related to student outcomes in the first years of teaching, with the difference most notable between the first and second year of teaching (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). Therefore, if programs can produce teachers who perform more like second- than first- year teachers, achievement produced by their students should look more like students who were taught by second- rather than first-year teachers producing increased student outcomes.

A secondary goal of the teacher preparation program is to produce teachers who remain in the profession. Henke, Chen, Geis, & Knepper (2000) cite that over one-third of teachers leave teaching within five years and those in alternative certification programs abandon the profession even earlier. In a large-scale study, (Andrew, 1990), researchers found that teachers who went through a 5-year program that included a full-year internship had a higher retention rate and consistently rated their teaching abilities higher than peers who went through a 4-year program, with a shorter, more traditional student teaching experience. Later, researchers of an interpretive study of five teacher candidates who had a full-year internship experience significantly contributed to the quality of what new teachers learned and the length of time they remained as teachers (Wilson, et al., 2002).

While research findings on the effects of the length of the internship on future teachers are mixed, there are well-grounded studies suggesting a positive relationship between the length of clinical experiences and positive outcomes as teachers (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007; Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, & Algozzine, 2008). Believing it is “common sense that candidates

who receive increased amounts of field experience and mentoring opportunities...are better prepared to deal with the complex realities of today's schools" (p. 264), Spooner et al. (2008) hypothesized that more time student teaching would produce better results for student teachers. In fact, they studied one university program in which teacher candidates selected whether they wanted a semester or full-year internship. Pre- and post-survey results showed a statistically significant difference in the quality of the interns' relationships with cooperating teachers, their knowledge of school practices and policies, and their perception of the adequacy of time spent in schools. Fives et al. (2007) surveyed teacher-candidates midway through and at the end of their 12-week internship. Findings show that interns' confidence in their abilities increased over time. These findings were supported by Andrews' 1990 study as well providing preliminary support to the perceived positive effects of full-year internships.

There is research suggesting that it is the quality not the length of a clinical experience that matters most (Chambers & Hardy, 2005; Grossman, 2010; Moore, 2010). Ronfeldt and Reininger (2012) surveyed 1,000 teacher candidates directly before and after their internship experiences to understand how the length and perceived quality of student teaching affected their preparedness, efficacy, and career plans. The findings show that "as length of the internship increases, the effect of student teaching quality weakens" (p. 1099) if teacher candidates are in classrooms with practices that do not emulate those they are learning in their teacher preparation programs and if mentor teachers are not of the highest quality. Of course, the true measure will be in the results produced by teachers during their first years of teaching. It is the contention of the authors that properly placed students in a full-year internship with associated embedded coursework can produce positive effects for teacher candidates and increase their likelihood for a successful first year of teaching. While this study focuses on the full-year experience for mentor teachers, interns, and intern supervisors, examining the positive and negative attributes during the full-year internship, studies of their performance in the first year of teaching are underway with encouraging findings thus far.

The Graduate Full-Year Internship: A Description

The graduate full-year internship was implemented at the authors' state university for the first time in the 2012-2013 public school year. Various stakeholders of the teacher preparation program had considered the aforementioned literature regarding semester versus full-year internships, as well as other factors, and decided to make the shift from a semester-long to a full-year internship. This *full-year* internship required interns to report the first day of preplanning and remain in the internship until the last day of the public school year. During the internship, interns participated in two 8-week, job-embedded online courses each semester. The courses never overlapped so interns could focus on one course at a time. Emerging evidence suggests that future teachers benefit most from participating in the culture of teaching, working with materials and tools of teaching practice, and examining teaching plans and student learning *while immersed in theory about learning, development and subject matter* (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Courses included a classroom management course followed by a reading practicum implemented in the classroom, a mathematics course, then finally a science course.

All courses were designed to provide interns with both conceptual knowledge and pedagogy to increase their effectiveness in their internship and to promote K-5 student learning.

A detailed handbook was developed to guide both the mentor teacher and intern through the year. The handbook contained a pacing guide gradually increasing the interns' responsibilities to form an equal partnership by the end of the first semester. Interns developed a professional improvement plan at the end of the first semester identifying goals they wished to attain during the second half of the internship. These goals then became inquiries for interns in the second semester. During the second half of the year, mentor teachers and interns were expected to co-teach throughout the remainder of the year with mentor teachers receiving training in co-teaching methods. Supervisors took on more of a *guidance* role than the traditional role of clinical supervision and evaluation.

Methods Used to Study the Full-Year Internship

This qualitative research study was designed to gather data on mentor teachers, interns, intern supervisors, and university course instructors' views and attitudes on the implementation of a full-year internship. As critical reflection and continuous improvement of practice are core values of the UEP program, the stakeholders and researchers felt that it was essential to capture the reactions during this pivotal time of the program. After obtaining an approved IRB, data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to solicit participants' experiences and perspectives of the full-year internship. Seven mentor teachers, seven interns, five university supervisors, and all five-course instructors comprised the total sample. Interns and mentor teachers were randomly selected; university supervisors, along with select other members of the research team, conducted interviews with questions collectively determined by researchers and intern supervisors. Semi-structured questions were asked of each sub-sample based upon their specific role. Interview questions are contained in Table 1: **Interview Questions for Study Participants** found below. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using thematic analysis. Open and selective coding was documented on a spreadsheet and analyzed for emerging patterns and themes. As patterns or themes emerged, analysis across participants was conducted, and researchers noted if those themes crossed more than one group: mentor, intern, intern supervisor, and instructor. For example, both mentors and interns repeatedly said the experience was worthwhile, and they would do it again if given the opportunity.

Table 1: Interview Questions for Study Participants

Intern	Mentor Teacher	Intern Supervisor	Course Instructor
Describe the 5th year in your teacher preparation program.	Describe your role with (student's name).	Describe your role with (student's name).	UEP fifth-year courses have been described as "job-embedded." Is the course you taught or are teaching "job-embedded"? What makes it so?
What important knowledge and skills do you think you have gained during this internship year?	What did it mean to be a mentor at the beginning?	Has your role changed over the course of the year? Please explain.	What do you perceive to be the benefits of job-embedded courses?
What experiences in your courses and your classroom contributed to this learning?	Tell me about co-teaching.	If we looked at a video of (student's name) teaching in August and a video of him/her teaching today, what similarities and differences would we see?	What revisions did you make during the course? Why?
Was the internship handbook helpful? In what ways? What might be improved?	Has your role changed over the course of the year?	What changes might not be visible but still important?	How have students responded/are students responding to your course?
What connections have you seen between your courses and your teaching context and practice?	If we looked at a video of (candidate's name) teaching in August and a video of him/her teaching today, what similarities and differences would we see?	What factors help explain the changes in him/her as a teacher?	How might you revise your course for the future?
How would your internship have been different if you had	What factors help explain the changes in him/her as a	What are (candidate's name) greatest strengths as a	What other thoughts do you have that might

just been assigned to a classroom for the year and not taken any courses?	teacher?	teacher?	help us strengthen the fifth year of the UEP program?
What teaching skills were you working on in your first semester?	What are (student's name) greatest strengths as a teacher?	What does (student's name) still have to work on?	Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about teaching a job-embedded course in the fifth year of UEP?
Second semester? How would your learning from this internship have been different if you had ended in December?	What does (student's name) still have to work on?	What is the role of the intern in the school culture and community?	
What's the value of being at (school name) for an entire year?	What is the role of the intern in the school culture and community?	Do you think it would have been different if the intern had only been at the school for a semester?	
If we looked at a video of you teaching in August and a video of you teaching today, what similarities and differences would we see?	How do you see the semester long with other Interns differing from the year long with (candidate's name)?	What do you perceive as the strengths of his/her teacher education program?	
What have you learned about students and student learning during your internship?	What do you perceive to be the challenges of the year- long internship?	Did knowing that you had a full year with (candidate's name) affect the way you worked with her? If so, how?	
Has your understanding about students and student learning changed over the internship?	What do you perceive to be the benefits of the year-long internship (as contrasted with a one-semester internship?)	What supports are needed to help you work with interns as co-teachers?	
What role has the cooperating teacher played in your	What do you perceive as the strengths of his/her	Students take courses while they are doing the internship. What	

development as a teacher?	teacher education program?	do you see as the benefits your intern derived from this coursework? What are the challenges?	
What role have your courses and course instructors played?	Do you think it would have been different if the intern had only been at the school for a semester?	Did you perceive that the university assignments your intern did were authentically connected to the teaching context and practice? What could have been done to make the connections stronger?	
Do you think the full-year internship had an impact on your ability to be a member of the school culture and community?	What do you perceive as the weaknesses?	What could be done differently in (student's name) program to facilitate his/her development as a teacher?	
What do you perceive to be the challenges of the year- long internship?	What supports are needed to help you work with interns as co-teachers?	Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience with a full-year intern?	

Findings: Emergent Themes

There were seven “positive” and encouraging themes that emerged from the interviews. Those themes include the following:

1. While stressful, the full-year internship was an extremely positive experience and was “worth the stress.” Interns appear much better prepared, and they noted that would recommend it to anyone. *This theme emerged within all sub-samples: interns, mentor teachers, supervisors and course instructors.*
2. Interns were able to form deeper relationships with students and mentor teachers that in turn resulted in deeper learning for both students and interns. *This theme emerged from interns, mentor teachers, and intern supervisors.*

3. Interns increased in confidence, initiative, and classroom management skills with the largest difference noted between the first and second semester. *This theme emerged among interns, mentor teachers, and intern supervisors.*
4. Interns evolved from intern to co-teacher to true teaching partner once the intern and mentor teacher fully understood and implemented the concept of co-teaching. *This theme emerged from interns, mentor teachers, and intern supervisors.*
5. While mentor teachers were concerned initially that their K-5 students would not get enough attention because they (the classroom teacher) would be focusing too much time on the intern, they found the opposite to occur. K-5 students benefitted from more individualized attention and help because the interns were more student-focused after the first few weeks. *This theme emerged among mentor teachers and interns.*
6. It was an intense, demanding, stressful, and expensive experience for interns but worth it. *This theme emerged from interns, mentor teachers, intern supervisors and course instructors.*
7. It was a more authentic learning experience than the traditional short-term internship with the intern fully integrated into the classroom and school community. *This theme emerged from all sub-samples: interns, mentor teachers, intern supervisors, and course instructors.*

Additionally, there were six themes that emerged as challenges or recommendations. These include the following:

1. There needs to be more training for interns and mentor teachers on the techniques of co-teaching in order to maximize the learning for students and the practice for interns. *This theme emerged primarily from intern supervisors and interns.*
2. Job-embedded courses are best when they are flexible, closely aligned to the classroom, and do not contain excessive readings and required online posts in order not to distract from the internship. *This theme emerged from interns, intern supervisors, and mentor teachers.*
3. There is little to no benefit to remaining through to the end of the school year rather than ending the internship at the end of the university semester. It was frustrating and offered difficulties for interns in obtaining certification and in applying for jobs that require certification. Additionally, mentor teachers mentioned they enjoyed having a little time with students by themselves. *This theme emerged from interns, intern supervisors, and mentor teachers.*
4. The full-year internship is definitely worth keeping, but close monitoring should be done to ensure there are quality mentor teachers and a good match between mentor teachers and interns as well as program philosophy. This is consistent with the research by Ronfeldt and Reininger (2012). *This theme emerged from interns and intern supervisors.*
5. The handbook was a useful and necessary support, but there exists a need for a more cohesive triad and increased communication between mentor, course instructor, and intern supervisor. *This theme emerged from all subgroups: mentor teachers, interns, intern supervisors, and course instructors.*
6. Interns need more time to teach on their own rather than maintaining a co-teaching model throughout the internship. *This theme only emerged from mentor teachers although*

interns mentioned they were a little nervous about teaching on their own when entering their own classrooms in their first year of teaching.

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the full-year internship is a valuable and effective way to prepare teachers for their first- year of teaching and to potentially retain teachers in the profession longer. Providing appropriately designed embedded coursework enhanced the experience for interns as long as the instructor was fully aware of the needs in the classroom, did not burden the intern with too many assignments and readings that did not directly relate to work in the classroom, and was flexible enough to adjust to the rhythm of the classroom. Quotes related to coursework offered by interns included the following:

- I felt like the courses related really well and I had the opportunity to see the methods and theories played out in the classroom. (Intern A)
- The reading course was a perfect way to apply all that we had learned about assessment driven instruction and differentiating instruction for individual students based upon their assessment results. (Intern D)
- Experience in the classroom that is hands on is better than more course work where you are not able to apply what you are learning such as simple reflections on readings. (Intern F)
- There was one course in particular that was too heavy with readings and online forum posts. I soon found I just did not have time to complete the readings and was not thoughtful in my postings. (Intern B)

While rigorous and intense, interns experienced feelings of competence and formed an accurate picture of what teaching comprises. They quickly moved from focusing on their own teaching and observations to student learning, sharing not “what a great lesson they did” but rather their excitement regarding the learning of *their* students. Statements from interns, mentor teachers, and supervisors exemplify this transition from lesson plans for teaching to lesson plans for student learning:

Mentor Teachers

- Initially the intern was more worried about observations and assignments but quickly changed to worrying about student learning. (Mentor Teacher B)
- Lessons became much more engaging the longer the internship lasted. (Mentor Teacher F)
- Soon she (the intern) didn’t concern herself with what I “thought” and took initiative and performed as an equal partner. That was very powerful. (Mentor F)
- We both viewed ourselves as a real teaching team because we had the time to form a deeper bond with each other and the students. (Mentor C)
- He (the intern) has a relationship with everyone in the school and is viewed by the grade-level team as a team member and an integral part of the entire school working toward maximizing student achievement. (Mentor D)
- There was more individualized attention for students positively influencing their achievement. (Mentor E)

Interns

- Without being there a year, I would not have seen the growth that occurs in students, the changes after Winter Break, and would not have had the chance to go to IEP meetings to develop strategies and accommodations, to see what it is like the testing semester, and to participate in so many parent conferences. I really feel so prepared. (Intern B)
- I become part of the teaching team, learning from a lot of different teachers, building relationships with more people that would not have happened in a semester internship. (Intern A)
- I began to learn what it takes to motivate students to learn. Sometimes it was frustrating but I never gave up. Every single child is different and just when you think you've got them "pegged," you don't – there is another thing to figure out. (Intern D)
- You have to constantly step back and speed up; you have to constantly be evaluating your instruction and their learning. (Intern A)

Intern Supervisors

- It was amazing the difference in the first and second semester. By the second semester, interns never worried if I was observing and our conversations almost completely focused on how to get students to learn or behave. (Intern Supervisor B)
- The biggest differences I saw in the intern's growth and development was in confidence, classroom management and discipline, and engaging lessons. I would not have seen this in a 10-week internship. (Intern Supervisor D)

Challenges

There were many challenges associated with a full-year internship, some of which were unanticipated. Several interns were offered positions before completing the entire internship. UEP stakeholders then established a residency internship so interns could accept the job while maintaining support from intern supervisors, mentor teachers located in nearby classrooms, and course instructors. These arrangements had variable success. Most students were very successful, but for a very few students it was a mistake, and they simply were not ready to take on the responsibilities of a classroom along with completing the requirements of the coursework.

Other challenges were related to the mechanics of the experience itself. Because interns were teaching full-time for an entire year, they were unable to work and supplement their income making it a very costly endeavor as the internship takes place in the graduate year with higher tuition rates. There were opportunities built in allowing interns to serve as substitute teachers in the school where they were completing their internship if all parties were in agreement. Also challenging was establishing clear and consistent lines of communication between course instructors, mentor teachers, and university supervisors primarily due to the fact that interns were placed literally all over the state. As is true with any internship, finding the most qualified mentor teacher and providing adequate training in co-teaching and in mentoring interns was also a challenge.

Conclusions and Future Research

Even with challenges faced during the implementation of the first year of the full-year internship, the UEP researchers and stakeholders believe it was well worth the effort. The researchers of this study are now conducting follow up studies with interns in their first year of teaching, and the data are very encouraging. One of the positive and unexpected results was the power that was demonstrated in classrooms where interns and mentors were effective at co-teaching. But even in settings where the co-teaching relationship was not as strong, all interns, university supervisors, mentor teachers, and instructors said they would definitely be willing to be part of a full-year internship and agreed it offered many more positives than negatives as compared to short-term internships. Changes suggested were to differentiate the second semester from the first semester experience possibly moving to a coaching model rather than an observation model. Plans are to pilot that model next year. Just as this university has done, teacher educators nationally are revamping teacher education programs to include more clinical experiences and establishing collegial and collaborative relationships with elementary schools to provide aligned training and mentoring (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011). This study supports those efforts and generated invaluable information as to how to best meet teacher candidate needs and provide future directions for the teacher preparation program. Overall, it was extremely successful. As summed up by one intern:

It seemed there were not enough hours in the day to do all that was expected with teaching, seminar, and coursework but I can say without reservation I appreciate it now and know I will be a better teacher for it.

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