

5-2024

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Voices from the inside: Enhancing Co-Teaching experiences through Student Perspectives at
'Small University'

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Abstract

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how students in the credential program at 'Small University' on the coast of California viewed their co-teaching credential experience and what they think could be done to improve it. An evidence based argument is offered that co-teaching be improved to be more equitable for students. Considerations of the issue should include the perspectives of credential program students. Expected benefits included an opportunity for participants to reflect on the co-teaching credential program at "Small University" and provide concrete suggestions for improvement that may be translated into action. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the data and explored as ways to address the issue presented. Paying student teachers for the hours they put in, regardless, is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of improving the co-teaching requirement.

Voices from the inside: Enhancing Co-teaching experiences through student perspectives at 'Small University'

From a young age, I aspired to become an educator, aiming to improve the learning experience for all students. I was an independent kid, and my parents were not present in my life. There were many instances where I needed to grow up fast and take matters into my own hands. Being an independent child and being strict with myself about school, I knew going to college was something I wanted to pursue, given that I did not have an advantage to just staying home. College had to be the option. I spent countless days in high school figuring out how to pay for college. This was the turning point for me in my education where I felt alone and unsure of what was to come. There are many students that feel unprepared and worried, which is why I felt teaching was important for me. I felt all my teachers had taught me many things, and I wanted to be that for students some day.

Entering college, I planned to pursue my degree and teaching credential. However, I felt unprepared and uninformed about the credential program's requirements and alternatives at CSUMB, particularly during the online-only first year. As a self-reliant student without parental support, I worked hard to cover my expenses. Financial aid and loans were essential in funding my education. Upon starting the credential program process in my junior year, I encountered unforeseen challenges, feeling overwhelmed by the information and requirements. This experience was daunting, leading me to question my initial plan. During the credential interview informational, I felt underprepared, as crucial details about requirements, limited financial assistance, and the co-teaching process were only revealed then. The recommendation against working, if possible, added to my stress, as I relied on work to support myself. The difficulty of finding and applying for scholarships and grants further complicated the situation. Upon reaching my senior year, I felt lost and uncertain about my future. My meeting with an advisor to discuss alternative options proved unhelpful, leaving me concerned about the utility of my degree without a teaching credential. In a discussion with my advisor about my options after leaving the credential program, I was informed that I needed to select a minor to complete my degree requirements. This unexpected development caused significant stress, as I was uncertain

about the implications for my academic timeline and graduation prospects. Ultimately, I chose Human Development and Family Sciences as my minor, due to its close alignment with my Liberal Studies major. Although I managed to remain on track for graduation, the shift in my senior year class schedule and the additional coursework required for the minor left me feeling as though my efforts had been wasted, since I would not be a certified teacher upon graduation. In the end, I was left questioning what I could do with my degree alone, feeling that my hard work went nowhere.

I settled with the fact that I will have to obtain my teaching credential once I am finished with college. Again, this felt like a setback, as the program was supposed to provide me with the faster option, which turned out to be completely different. I started to learn I was not alone in this situation. Many credential program students felt unprepared for what was to come and unsure of what was required of us. Also, I learned that the credential program at CSUMB is one of the best and fastest ways to earn your degree and credential at the same time, but in the end, it is not the most beneficial as it reduces the amount of units you take and how that can affect your pay grade in the future.

This challenging experience prompted me to question whether other students had encountered similar difficulties and confusion within the program. I felt completely unprepared as a college student, being a first generation there were many things I had to take into my own hands and learn how to apply for grants and research my other options. In an effort to better understand these challenges, I became interested in investigating the risk factors that might hinder students from successfully completing the program, as well as the factors that contribute to student success and program completion.

Literature Synthesis

Becoming an educator is a journey filled with challenges, especially within California State University, Monterey Bay's (CSUMB) Teacher Credential Program. Co-teaching is a collaborative approach where two or more educators jointly plan, deliver instruction, and assess student learning to meet diverse needs and enhance teaching effectiveness (Bacharach et al., 2010). In a co-teaching student-teacher model, mentor-teachers and teacher-candidates collaborate on planning, instruction, and assessment to facilitate shared authority, active engagement, and a gradual transition to independent teaching. While the program offers essential training and experience, it is not without its challenges. By exploring the obstacles faced by students and the value of diverse perspectives, gaining insight into the complex process of teacher preparation and identifying potential areas for improvement. The credential process presents several barriers for students, with financial strain being a significant hurdle. The cost of housing, food, books, and tuition can be overwhelming, making it difficult for students to focus on their studies. Additionally, the location of the program can pose a challenge, particularly for those who must relocate.

Diverse perspectives are critical for enhancing the learning environment and promoting inclusivity. Embracing these differences promotes growth and development. Diverse perspectives contribute in identifying potential challenges during the credentialing process. To improve the Small University's Teacher Credential Program, strategies should be implemented to meet diverse student needs, alleviate financial constraints, and provide assistance with personal challenges. By providing inclusive program pathways, improving resource accessibility, and providing guidance, we can effectively foster the development of future educators.

While the Teacher Credential Program provides a valuable pathway to becoming an educator, it is essential to acknowledge and address the challenges faced by students. By embracing diverse perspectives and implementing strategies to reduce barriers, we can enhance the learning experience and support the development of future educators. More research is

needed to capture those factors and determine how they can be set apart from other students in the program. (Newbury, 2009)¹

Why is it an Issue/Opportunity?

Universities can significantly impact the future of education by offering opportunities for students to obtain teaching credentials alongside their degrees. To overcome financial constraints that hinder participation, universities should develop alternative credential programs with accessible financial aid and utilize initiatives like Cal Teach. Additionally, providing equitable housing options for on-campus students will further reduce financial stress. By adopting this comprehensive approach, universities can foster an inclusive environment for diverse students, ultimately promoting a more equitable and diverse teaching workforce.

California's Senate Bill 813 impacted education by addressing finance, instruction, and teachers' role in reform (Guay, 1986). However, it led to consequences like reduced flexibility in teacher preparation and limited certification pathways, hindering professional diversity and innovation and affecting education quality.

A lack of decision-making consensus can lead to policies favoring certain stakeholders, affecting the profession's appeal to diverse, highly qualified students. Balancing rigorous standards with flexibility and inclusivity in credentialing is vital for an adaptive teaching profession supporting all students' needs. Despite the intentions of Senate Bill 813 to enhance education, its implementation had unintended repercussions, highlighting the importance of balancing standards with flexibility for attracting and retaining a diverse, qualified workforce (Guay, 1986).

What Has and/or Should Be Done?

Financial stress is a significant concern for students pursuing teaching credentials, as many already have accumulated student loan debt by the time they begin their credential

¹ Pi.ai was used to edit this paper

program (Hayes et al., 2018). The limited availability of grants and scholarships, coupled with strict eligibility requirements, exacerbates this issue. Consequently, universities should consider expanding financial aid options and participating in programs like Cal Teach, which allow students to apply Cal Grant A or B financial aid towards earning a teaching credential.

From an equity perspective as well as a global perspective, to address financial stress and promote inclusivity in teacher credentialing programs, universities should consider the following strategies: expand financial aid options, participate in programs like Cal Teach, create more flexible credentialing pathways, and foster an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives. These measures will help attract a diverse range of candidates to the teaching profession, contributing to being a dynamic and effective educator that meets the needs of all students. Many universities and most private universities do not participate in Cal Teach, globally this can improve the teaching credential process.

A balance must be struck between maintaining high standards and providing flexibility in the credentialing process. While Senate Bill 813 has improved education in California, it has also raised requirements for the teaching profession, reducing flexibility in teacher preparation and limiting available pathways (Guay, 1986). Addressing these issues and implementing new pathways and requirements can increase interest in the credentialing process and make more teachers available in California.

To address the teacher shortage and increase the number of effective educators in the classrooms, the certification process must be refined and redundant obstacles removed. The Senate Education Committee and Governor Newsom support eliminating complicated assessments like the edTPA and RICA in favor of more accessible tools like the literacy performance assessment. The state may improve its education system by updating credential programs to better meet the needs of teachers and students. (Bill Text - SB-1263, n.d.)

Inclusivity in the teaching credential process is crucial for attracting and retaining qualified, diverse teachers. By expanding financial aid options, creating more flexible pathways, and addressing the needs of a diverse range of students, universities can help ensure that the teaching profession remains dynamic, responsive to the needs of diverse learners, and able to support the educational goals and outcomes of all students. (Bill Text - SB-1263, n.d.)

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) must adapt to the evolving needs of the teaching profession by focusing on research-based instruction, culturally responsive teaching, technological literacy, and ongoing professional development. For example, behavioral training in classrooms will ensure that future teachers are well-equipped to meet the needs of their students, effectively use digital tools, and contribute to the continuous improvement of the profession (Curry et al., 2018).

Teachers with advanced degrees, such as a master's or professional degree, have a positive impact on student performance. Students with master's degrees outperform those with bachelor's degrees. Evidence suggests that having a professional degree can lead to improved student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Ensuring that teachers are well-prepared through detailed certification programs and advanced degree opportunities is important for improving student learning experiences and outcomes. This information tells us that programs are constantly being evaluated and there are levels in which degrees do matter.

Conclusion

The Teacher Credential Program at California State University, Monterey Bay offers aspiring educators a complex journey that balances challenges and opportunities. The primary barrier is the financial strain placed on students, which includes tuition, housing, and material expenses, which may prevent them from fully engaging in their educational pursuits. Further, the program's geographical location can present logistical challenges, in terms of having to pay high rent while not having the financial support that is needed.

However, the program provides a suitable atmosphere for embracing and utilizing the diverse perspectives of its students. Each student brings a distinct set of experiences and backgrounds, enriching the educational environment and providing valuable insights into teacher preparation. By implementing a supportive setting that values and integrates these diverse perspectives, the program can create a vibrant learning environment that better equips future educators. As well as providing more information to students throughout their process, could be

beneficial when making life changing decisions. Providing more options and opportunities for students can expand their knowledge and figure out which pathway is the best fit.

To effectively address these challenges and emphasize on growth opportunities, coordinated efforts must be taken. Expanding financial aid options and providing tailored support services can significantly reduce students' financial burden while ensuring equal access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, promoting inclusivity in educational planning and pedagogical approaches can help the program better prepare educators to meet the diverse needs of their future students.

Method

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how students in the credential program at “Small University²” on the coast of California view their co- teaching experience and what they thought could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they learned to formulate an action that responded to the co-teaching experience and how to improve it in a way that inspired, informed, and involved a particular audience.

Context

In this study, we conducted an in-depth examination of the perspectives and experiences of students enrolled in the credential program at “Small University” on the coast of California. The credential program consists of students studying to be Teachers and is located at the Small university.

Participants and Participant Selection

We invited five current and past students of the credential program and students who have not been able to complete the program to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experience or expertise.

² All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

L.Y. A graduated credential program student. She is currently teaching in Oklahoma for a second grade class.

I. M. A current credential program student in her final year. She is currently co-teaching in a 4th grade classroom in Saline, CA.

G.G. A past credential program student who opted out of the program.

S. M. A graduated credential program student.

R. E. A current credential program student in her final year. She is currently co-teaching for a fourth grade class in Pine Grover, CA.

You guys probably should interview each other so that you have more non-completer perspectives

Researcher

Nina. This topic is meaningful to me because there are many students that can not afford to complete and move forward with their credential program process. There are many factors that contribute to continuing the credential program. For me, I support myself financially and rely on paychecks. The schedule for co teaching does not allow time for a job or a reliable income. Many of the grants offered are not guaranteed and many of them also come with an “agreement” that most students cannot agree to. There are many factors that also help many students move forward and complete the program but ultimately, I want to touch on why certain students could not complete and what could have been helpful for them to stay in the program.

Hope. I chose this topic because: many students have different experiences regarding the credential program and not all students make it through. We want to figure out what factors play a role in completing the program at Small University on the coast of California and how we can make it more inclusive and successful for all students. There were many obstacles that made the program unfit for me, and that caused me to have to leave. The process of getting your credential involves a lot of money being spent to get into the program to get necessary testing done to be able to work in a school, on top of the cost of taking extra classes during summer. I had many bad experiences with my co-teacher that caused me to dread having to go to the school everyday and truly strayed me away from wanting to be a teacher. My mental health was at an all time low.

I was told by the department head that I could not continue the credential program due to my co-teacher not giving me enough experience to be able to go into the second phase of

co-teaching. I had worked over 300 hours in that school dealing with a mentally abusive teacher who not only didn't support me but did not like me, which in a day-to-day job where I am supposed to be communicating with them constantly, makes things very difficult.

My challenges with the co-teaching experience have taught me a lot about what makes an effective co-teacher and what kind of things would have been able to help me. Through being in the credential program and now being out of it I have gotten to know many people with both good and bad experiences. Both myself and Nina want to share their perspectives, as we feel the thing the credential program lacks the most is students' perspectives and experiences in their placement.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

The following questions were asked to current and past credential program students

Students who have experienced co-teaching in the credential program

1. How would you describe your experiences in the teacher credential program at Small university on the coast of California? What about the co-teaching; how was that?
2. What do you see as the challenges with the teaching credential program experience at Small University on the coast of California?
3. What is being done to make co-teaching better and deal with its challenges?" - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
4. What do you think should be done about the co- teaching experience?
5. What do you think are the challenges to doing something about the co- teaching experience at Small university on the coast of California?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the co- teaching experience and/or the improvement of the teaching credential program at Small university on the coast of California?

Students who have not experienced co-teaching but were in the credential program?

1. What do you see as the challenges with the credential program experience at Small

University on the coast of California?

2. What is currently being done to address the credential experience and challenges that come with - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
3. What do you think should be done to improve the credential experience?
4. What do you think are the challenges to improving the credential experience at Small university on the coast of California?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about improving the credential experience at Small university on the coast of California?

Procedure³

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews would take less than one hour, be audio-recorded (with participant consent), and take place at Small University on the coast of California. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, past/prior/current students in the credential program were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the credential experience. This is important because students have different experiences in the co-teaching credential program and establishing a more equitable experience can enhance and better the experience for participating

³ <http://my.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/>

students. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making requires evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: cost; time; and effectiveness/impact. Evidence-based decision-making evaluates Action Options based on cost, time, and effectiveness/impact. Cost analysis ensures resource efficiency, while time assessment guarantees feasible planning. Examining effectiveness and impact helps determine potential success and overall benefits, contributing to informed choices and optimal outcomes. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Cost	Time	Effectiveness or Reach/Impact
Student teachers compensated	High	Medium	High
Student teacher panel	Medium	High	Medium
Provide better support/guidance/coaches	High	High	High

Student Teachers compensated

“This might be unrealistic, getting paid for the work, like a paid internship. Or a guaranteed grant. Financially, it was so unrealistic for me, we were told we had to get into the mindset of teaching in the morning and having classes in the evening, which led to us having no time to work. I do not receive financial support from my family and it was unrealistic for me to not work” (G.G, 2024). This interview data coincides with my literature findings, the feelings of

financial stress were expressed. To address financial stress and promote inclusivity in teacher credentialing programs, universities should consider the following strategies: expand financial aid options, participate in programs like Cal Teach, create more flexible credentialing pathways, and foster an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives. These measures will help attract a diverse range of candidates to the teaching profession, contributing to being a dynamic and effective educator that meets the needs of all students. Financial stress is a significant concern for students pursuing teaching credentials, as many already have accumulated student loan debt by the time they begin their credential program (Hayes et al., 2018).

Paying student teachers could significantly improve the quality of the credential program. Offering pay acknowledges their hard work and could attract a more diverse range of talent to the profession, also, while easing the financial stress students experience in college. However, it could also minimize intrinsic motivation and strain already tight institutional budgets. These costs include not only direct compensation, but also additional expenses for administration, supervision, and training.

Managing the time commitments is possible with its evaluation being medium, but creating fair payment structures and dealing with complexities would require significant administrative attention. Still, the potential impact is high: compensating student teachers could enhance teacher recruitment, retention, and overall educational quality. Financial support can diversify the teaching workforce, alleviate financial burdens, and boost morale, ultimately fostering a more effective and sustainable educational system. While the initial investment and administrative hurdles are significant, the long-term benefits of investing in student teachers may outweigh the costs.

Student teacher panel

“Create a community within the program for the students. Make it a more welcoming and informative community where we can reach out to each other for support. (GG, 2024) In working to create a more communicative environment some professors and students are suggesting making a student panel alongside the teacher panel. So students have a place to reflect and talk about real issues happening in their practicum placements.” (R.E., 2024) In my literature it is discussed that better coordination between university teacher education curricula and student

teaching experiences is necessary to produce outstanding educators. (Guay, 1986, p.93) Part of a good student teaching experience is being helped and heard, and right now many students are struggling to feel both of those supports. Along with this the focus placed by student teachers during co-teaching experiences on developing their professional tools and collaborative skills underscores the substantial influence of this method on their growth (Duran et al., 2021). By prioritizing support, communication, and collaboration within the educational programs through creating an educational panel made up of students, students will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of their academic journeys and emerge as competent, well-rounded professionals in their respective fields while also getting the help they need directly from the people who can offer it.

Better support and guidance

The experiences shared by students, such as feeling rushed and lacking guidance from placeholder advisors, emphasize the need for a more individualized and supportive approach in academic advising. Some comments from students, both in the program or those who had to opt out, shared the way in which they were directly affected by the lack of support from coaches will be written out next, these opinions are formed from the students experiences and provide valuable insight into why the program at this university on the coast of California is struggling so. “When you talked to the other placeholder advisors it was like they were in a rush. No one takes time to sit down and explain things to you. They give you links, but you have to do the research and do it on time.” (GG, 2024) Another student said that she “Never saw a coach... I needed more feedback from my coach, having someone rooting for you and supporting you emotionally would be really helpful.” Along with this she said “There is not much support within the program. No one you can talk to for help, especially not regarding living on campus. I feel like there's nobody for me making sure I am doing this right.” (IB, 2024) This student highlights a very evident topic many students like them are facing, which is that the lack of support is causing confusion for the future of them pursuing a career in education. Being at a loss for support causes a lack of connection to teaching and to understanding everything they are doing. One interviewee gave a suggestion by saying: “There is a way of giving feedback in a way that doesn't have to be negative.” (LY, 2024) Similarly another interviewee currently in the program

gave the idea that “they should regularly call us to check in about how the program really is like how our co-teacher really is.” (RE, 2024) These changes are miniscule compared to what the program is asking of these students to accomplish. If support from someone who truly understands what they are going through, and that of which is already embedded into the program currently, is something do-able that students in the program are asking for, we must work to make it happen. A final comment from a student in the program recently said, “When I come to professors or coaches it always feels super close minded, I always feel stupid bringing up my ideas, they are very set in stone and like nothing is going to change. I feel like they are going to have an issue with the money aspect, as well as the three hour classes they always justify it but they need to have the students justify the three hours, not just them. Really finding the value in the students' time.” (RE, 2024)

The success of student teachers in working with coaches depends not only on their personal motivation but also on the resources and assistance provided by their educational institutions. Colleges play a critical role in establishing an environment conducive to effective collaboration by offering the required tools and support structures. These may include well-structured mentorship programs, regular feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for co-teaching and peer learning. Some insights provided by literature regarding the topic of effective co-teaching comes from some crucial topics and ideas for how we can better the programs and processes currently in place for coaches in credential programs. The development of educated and receptive coaches is necessary to strengthen credential programs. This may be achieved by combining academic programs with student support services, increasing students' persistence and completion rates (Duran et al., 2015, p.496). Universities need to acknowledge the value of coaches and increase their involvement in teacher preparation programs to produce qualified and committed teachers. Coaches play a pivotal role in the co-teaching experience, providing multifaceted support that transcends traditional supervision. Gitomer and Bell (2002) highlight that “coaches facilitate growth and development among student teachers through informal conversations, lesson observation debriefings, and modeling effective practices. These strategies promote self-awareness, trust, collaboration, and professional growth, ultimately enhancing the co-teaching experience.” (P.29) Recognizing the significance of coaches in credential students' lives, it is crucial to expand their role within teacher preparation programs,

investing in their development to ensure the cultivation of skilled and dedicated educators.

Conclusion

Recommendation.

We recommend the student panel as being the key resolution to bettering the current practices in place for co-teaching and an effective teaching credential program overall. The literature and comments from students in or those who had to opt-out from the program details how effective student input is. Having a student panel highlights many values but the main one is valuing students' opinions and current experiences while in the program. There is a current board of teachers who help direct the credential program, but they are not directly being affected by the process the credential program implies and demands. Incorporating a student board, similar to that of the board of teachers that is already meeting regularly, is the clear solution to bettering credential programs in every university, but especially the one benign focused on in this essay of which is on the coast of California.

Concessions.

Both compensating student teachers and enhancing coaching have unique strengths in improving teacher preparation programs. Offering financial remuneration addresses the financial insecurity faced by many students, creating a supportive environment for learning and attracting diverse talent to the profession. Additionally, it enables students to focus on their studies without financial worries. On the other hand, investing in well-trained coaches provides students with personalized guidance and feedback throughout their credential program, boosting their confidence and readiness to become effective educators. While compensating student teachers ensures financial security and incentivizes talent, investing in coaching fosters professional growth and success in the teaching profession.

Limitations.

Implementing a student panel in teacher credential programs can present several challenges. First, program coordinators may be reluctant to modify current structures, making it difficult to integrate the panel. Second, convincing decision-makers of the panel's benefits can be challenging, particularly if the program is already performing well. Additionally, limited resources and time constraints may hinder the establishment and maintenance of the panel. Finally, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and meaningful change based on panel feedback is

crucial for its effectiveness. The success of the panel relies heavily on the ability of program administrators to assess and act upon the recommendations provided by student teachers. Timely evaluation and implementation of changes that address the concerns raised are key factors in maintaining the panel's credibility and fostering positive outcomes.

Potential negative outcomes.

A significant consequence is the panel's inability to accurately represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of the student teacher community. This could hinder the panel's capacity to identify and address a broad range of concerns, perpetuating existing issues within the program. Additionally, low participation rates may create a disconnect between the panel's initiatives and the broader student teacher population, reducing the potential impact on improving the overall quality of the credential program.

Another possible negative outcome is the inefficient use of resources allocated to establishing and maintaining the panel. If students do not engage, the investment of time, energy, and funds may not result in the desired improvements in communication, inclusivity, and program effectiveness. To mitigate these issues, it is crucial to address potential barriers to participation and create an accessible and relevant panel that encourages widespread engagement.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, establishing a student panel emerges as the key solution to improving the current practices in co-teaching and enhancing the overall teaching credential program. The literature and insights provided by students, both those within the program and those who have opted out, emphasize the significance of student input in shaping a successful and inclusive learning environment. While a board of teachers is already in place, their distance from the direct experiences and challenges faced by students in the program underscores the need for a student-led counterpart.

It is important to acknowledge that implementing a student panel may face limitations, such as resistance from program coordinators or limited resources. Moreover, potential negative outcomes include a lack of diverse representation and inefficient use of resources. To minimize

these risks, efforts must be made to encourage widespread participation, address barriers to engagement, and commit to transparency and inclusivity in the panel's initiatives.

A student panel can serve as an effective catalyst for positive change within teacher credential programs. By providing a platform for student voices and fostering collaboration between students and program administrators, the panel can contribute to a more supportive and dynamic learning environment, better equipping future educators to face the challenges of the teaching profession.⁴

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

Dear all,

My name is Hope Brightman, and I work alongside my partner, Nina Cruz. We are seniors at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), pursuing our Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies. Currently, we are finalizing our capstone project titled "Voices from the Inside: Enhancing Co-Teaching Experiences through Student Perspectives at "Small University."

We aim to amplify student voices that speak to experiences within the CSUMB teaching credential program. In the process, we have identified a theme of concern that warrants your consideration. Such as, improving the support for all student teachers and figuring out a way to provide and guarantee financial support.

Throughout our interviews with current and former students in the CSUMB teaching credential program, we found that creating a student panel parallel to the existing faculty panel could significantly improve the teaching credential program's current co-teaching practices and overall effectiveness. Although there are educators guiding the credential program, students are directly impacted by the program's processes and requirements, and their input is invaluable for continuous improvement. Implementing a student panel, similar to the teacher board that convenes regularly, would ensure the inclusion of student voices and is a clear pathway toward strengthening credential programs, particularly at CSUMB.

We are eager to discuss this proposal with you further and would greatly appreciate your thoughts on the matter. If you are open to continuing the conversation through email or scheduling an online meeting, we welcome the opportunity to initiate a dialogue regarding the implementation of a student panel for the credential program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Hope Brightman and Nina Cruz

The focus is the student's perspective on the credential program and how it can be improved and equitable. We interviewed a past credential program student, three current students, and one student who had to withdraw from the program. The action options that emerged were a student-teacher panel, student teachers being compensated for the hours they are co-teaching, and providing better coaches that are equipped to support students. We implemented the student-teacher panel because this allows students in the program to improve their experience by actively participating in discussions. Panel members are invited to provide feedback on the program and what needs to be revised to improve its inclusivity for all students. We picked this option because it is the most likely option regarding cost and impact.

⁴ This paper was edited by Pi.AI.

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection (group)***Nina***

Throughout the semester, I actively participated in various writing and made significant contributions to our project. Using the templates provided by our professor assisted our collaborative efforts. The magnitude of the workload caught me off guard, but upon completion, I was intrigued by the results of my efforts. Flexibility became essential as I rearranged my schedule to meet deadlines and accommodate taking interviews. Through this process, I've realized the importance of shedding light on important issues and advocating for change, primarily through powerful interviews. Reflecting on my journey, I would have more information about the credential program and the experiences of the students we interviewed. Moving forward, we focus on implementing a discussion panel for student teachers.

Hope

For this action project, my partner and I created an email chain with the credential program heads to promote a student panel. We started working on making this action possible by interviewing peers who had either been in, had left, or had finished the program. Through these interviews, we gained insights into ways we could realistically incorporate our ideas into the current credential program at this small university. The most realistic option our peers came up with was that of a student panel alongside the current teacher panel on the credential board. We worked on starting a conversation with the credential program to make them aware of our research and to promote our action plan of having a student panel. In creating this project, I learned a lot about myself and my peers and how beneficial it is to spread their thoughts and experiences in building a successful and helpful credential program. The only thing we could have done differently was send out the email sooner so we could have more of a conversation to bounce off of and show here. For now, through the information we have gotten from our peers, literature, and being able to reflect via our LS400 course, we have uncovered a great deal about why this topic is so important and something to advocate for.

Critical Reflection (Individual)

This project taught me a lot about myself, particularly my research and problem-solving ability. I discovered that I can successfully navigate complex issues and advocate for change. In terms of teaching and learning, I learned about the challenges that student teachers face and the importance of creating supportive environments for their development. I also learned about the effectiveness of interviews in understanding other people's experiences and perspectives. Working for change taught me that it takes commitment, determination, and the courage to speak up. It's a challenging process, but significant improvements can be accomplished through collaboration and commitment.

Synthesis and Integration (Individual)

In connection with MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator, executing these interviews allowed me to collaborate with stakeholders in the educational community. I advocated for access, equity, and justice within the credential program by actively listening to and engaging with my peers' stories. This collaboration grew my understanding of educators' ethical and social responsibilities as I worked to identify paths for social change within the program. Through these interviews, I helped strengthen the voices of my peers, contributing to the collective effort to create a more just and beneficial educational environment.

Performing interviews for MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist allowed me to learn more about education through collaboration and communication. Engaging with peers who bring different perspectives and experiences to the table grew my understanding of various topics related to the state of California's public education. Through collaborative discussions and insight-sharing, I gained a deeper understanding of the topic's content and its application in educational contexts. This cooperative learning process allowed me gain more knowledge of the complexities of education, which enhanced my competency.

After completing this project, I intend to continue to be dedicated to learning, developing, and making significant contributions to education to become the professional I can see myself becoming. I plan to build a strong community of peers and mentors, focusing on their support to overcome obstacles and take on growth chances. I also want to improve my practical communication abilities because these are important for success in general. I am confident in my

capacity to achieve my professional goals and leave a lasting impression in my field of choice as long as I remain flexible and fully committed, as I felt during this project. This made me aware that I have a voice and that speaking up can help show awareness.

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