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

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Voices from the inside: Enhancing Co-Teaching experiences through Student Perspectives at 'Small University' 1

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'**

My aspiration to become a special education teacher stems from my journey as an individual with dyscalculia, a disability that poses unique challenges in specific subjects, particularly mathematics. From the moment I received my diagnosis in fourth grade, my involvement in special education settings allowed me to appreciate the transformative impact of educators who dedicate time and effort to making learning accessible to all students. Consequently, when I enrolled at CSUMB, I eagerly embraced the opportunity to pursue a major in special education and obtain my teaching credential.

Unfortunately, my student teaching experience presented unforeseen obstacles that significantly affected my perspective on the profession. The most distressing aspect was the mental abuse I suffered from my co-teacher, which was compounded by our lack of compatibility and poor communication. These challenges hampered our ability to co-teach effectively and impeded my growth as a budding educator.

I must also acknowledge the role of systemic factors that exacerbated my difficulties. Despite CSUMB's heavy emphasis on cultural responsiveness and supporting teachers and students, I needed more guidance on essential co-teaching skills, such as navigating impromptu lessons and maintaining open lines of communication with my mentor. These shortcomings became glaringly apparent when I was expected to deliver lessons to second-grade students with minimal preparation, only to face criticism for any perceived shortcomings.

My ultimate removal from the credential program, albeit delivered with kindness, was precipitated by my co-teacher's negative feedback following a failed midterm lesson. While I initially found solace in escaping the daily dread of my practicum placement and the burdens of

late-night classes, I was blindsided by the revelation that my 300 hours of invested effort would not be acknowledged. This reality, coupled with the considerable financial burden incurred throughout the program—including fingerprinting fees, TB tests, program enrollment costs, housing expenses, and interview preparation—compounded my sense of disappointment and frustration. In addition to the obstacles encountered during the credential program, subsequent challenges emerged upon exiting the program and transitioning to a new major, which necessitated either undertaking a significant course load or incorporating a minor, along with completing a capstone project. These newfound requirements were not directly communicated but required independent exploration and initiative. Furthermore, support was limited and often necessitated proactive efforts to locate, leaving a sense of disorientation and a perception that concerns were not adequately acknowledged or addressed.

I want to look at teaching positively, and thankfully, I made some great relationships with other teachers at that school site. Unfortunately, it takes one bad experience to wreck a whole experience in a practicum setting. I want my story to impact the people who created this program and current and future credential candidates at CSUMB. The lack of information, support, and thoughtfulness among the students in the credential program at CSUMB requires an extreme amount of work, but it can be done. My experience, along with so many others, is crucial to the future of student teaching and the process that involves it. I want CSUMB and professors in this program to understand our challenges and lack of support, especially in the special education pathway. Becoming a teacher is already a challenge, so why can't we find more ways to make the process smoother and more enjoyable. My story is that of thousands worldwide

who struggle with credential programs at their school, but the difference is that I will make sure my story is heard in hopes of supporting those who cannot and have not shared it.

As I reflect on these experiences, it is evident that systemic changes are needed to improve the training and support provided to future educators, particularly within co-teaching contexts. Only through addressing these shortcomings can we foster an environment that empowers and equips student teachers to overcome challenges and thrive in their chosen profession.

### **Literature Synthesis**

Co-teaching has been used as an educational paradigm more and more in the past several years due to policies put in place and several case studies, journals, books, and articles showing the value of student teaching. In order to satisfy a variety of needs and improve teaching efficacy, co-teaching is a collaborative strategy in which two or more educators organize, deliver, and evaluate education together (Bacharach et al., 2010). In order to promote shared authority, active involvement, and a smooth transition to autonomous teaching, mentor-teachers, and teacher-candidates work together on planning, instruction, and evaluation in a co-teaching student-teacher model. The process of becoming a credentialed educator in California today requires a significant amount of effort and work involving taking exams, heavy coursework, and working on the EdTPA, the educational teacher performance assessment, all while co-teaching at the same time. All of these topics have a vast impact on students' abilities to learn, grow, and enjoy teaching. A student teacher had said, "The EdTPA took away from my student teaching

experience. With edTPA, it consumed all my time.” (Shin, M. 2019). These negative aspects of California's co-teaching program appear ineffective and discouraging to future educators.

Looking specifically into Monterey Bay’s California State University’s co-teaching program, we see these same issues arise. Nevertheless no one is working to support the current future educators participating in this program. Very few studies have investigated the conditions under which co-teaching is productive in supporting practicing K-12 teachers ‘learning.’

A California Senate Bill titled: “CASB 813 (1983) ” significantly impacted California's education by addressing finance, instruction, and teachers' role in reform. However, it led to reduced teacher preparation flexibility, limited certification pathways, hindering professional diversity, innovation, and overall education quality.” In 1983, there was a California law called Senate Bill 813, or the Hughes-Hart Act that aimed to improve education by tackling issues like funding, teaching, and the role of teachers in making schools better. While it did some good things, like helping make school funding more fair, it also made it harder for teachers to get the training and certification they needed.

This caused a few problems, making it more difficult for people from different backgrounds to become teachers. It also limited new ideas and teaching approaches, which affected California's overall quality of education. This shows that it is essential to be careful when making new education laws and consider how they might affect different parts of the education system, including teachers and their training.

### **Why is it an Issue/Opportunity?**

*What can be done to support our future educators, and what are their current experiences causing these challenges that either make them drop the program or not want to work in the teaching profession?* While co-teaching has advantages, student teachers may encounter particular difficulties and worries. These involve handling the intricacies of co-teaching relationships, negotiating variations in teaching philosophies and styles, and striking a balance between their duties and responsibilities and those of their mentor instructors. When people talk about education, they often break it down into different regions or topics, using a more narrow or focused way of speaking than what is needed to grasp the bigger picture of education fully. (Guay, D. A. (1986), p.15) With an emphasis on the advantages and difficulties of co-teaching, its effects on student learning and development, and its consequences for teacher preparation and professional development, this literature synthesis will examine the experiences and viewpoints of student teachers in co-teaching situations.

A positive vs. negative cooperating teacher and student-teacher relationship dramatically affects the likelihood of that student-teacher continuing the program and, in some cases, leaving the profession entirely. Saclarides (2022) found that their student-teacher participants identified six obstacles they ran into during co-teaching episodes. These obstacles fell into the general categories of teacher learning, pedagogical problems, and management and logistics. In addition, the participants recognized seven supports that allowed them to participate effectively in co-teaching. These included the broad areas of contextual variables, coach preparation, and management and logistics. (Saclarides, 2022, p.1) The difficulty with co-teaching relationships is that they require time and energy to establish since both educators must be dedicated to sharing,



communicating, reflecting, and learning from one another (DeBrincat, Flynn, and Trezek, 2020). Establishing these positive relationships can be hit or miss, and it all depends on where you are placed and what kind of teacher your mentor teacher is. Student Teaching Is Like Living with a Roommate (Hayes et al., 2018, p.122). Suppose your roommate is stressed, not organized, and does not like to communicate. In that case, you are going to have a horrible living experience that not only makes you upset but uncomfortable in your own space. A student teacher spends so much time working with their cooperating teacher. If their experience is negative, it creates many other tissues on top of everything else they have within their credential program.

Conversely, hostile relationships between co-teachers, specifically mentor and pre-service teachers, strain open and ongoing communication patterns (Scantlebury *et al.*, 2008). Once a bad relationship is formed, it is nearly impossible to mend. This is typically when the students coach, provided by their university, would get involved. However, as found in other research, the coach's input, or lack thereof, has been anything but helpful in recent years, and it is all due to their lack of training and support from the university. Scruggs et al. 2007 said, “Two reasons might explain the difficulties of co-teaching to become widespread in schools: research has repeatedly shown a lack of knowledge by teachers and schools that would help them implement co-teaching successfully, and that the lack of teacher training—in-service, and especially pre-service—become essential and yet is not taught” (Duran et al., 2021, p.496) Co-teaching is a challenging task that demands a lot both from the mentor and the student, but like any new skill being learned if there are no foundational rules explained to both parties, no training sessions, and no constant support, the skill will not only not be learned but not appreciated.

## **What Has Been Done? What Should Be Done?**

Student-teachers' experiences in credential programs are often overlooked despite literature offering potential solutions to support them better. Co-teaching success relies on transparency and collaboration among education professionals (Jortveit & Bobo Kovač, 2022). A significant factor in the effectiveness of co-teaching is education professionals' commitment to be transparent with one another about their professional identities and practices. Teachers who converse freely about their views, experiences, and pedagogical methods foster chances for group learning and development. This communication can be possible if universities become more willing to provide students with conceptual training on co-teaching while being allowed to practice it. (Duran, Flores, Ribas, and Ribosa, 2021, p.500). Universities can facilitate this through conceptual co-teaching training and sharing real-life experiences (Duran et al., 2021, p. 500). Conceptual co-teaching training highlights instructors' capacity to collaborate in the planning, carrying out, and evaluating instruction. This strategy, emphasizing varied teaching tactics and excellent communication, cultivates a collaborative culture that improves student results and enriches the educational process.

In order to prepare future teachers, it is imperative to provide an obligatory, practical training curriculum for student teachers that focuses on real-life experiences and obstacles encountered in practicum assignments. Case studies, role-playing activities, and group discussions may all be incorporated into this training to help participants gain a more profound knowledge of potential roadblocks and solutions. This focused approach fosters self-reflection and problem-solving by tackling important subjects like differentiated instruction and classroom

management. Ultimately, it helps student teachers become more resilient and self-assured as they negotiate the challenges of their teaching careers.

Universities need to acknowledge the value of co-teaching and incorporate it into pre-service training as a fundamental element to guarantee the effective use of this teaching approach in credential programs. University curricula prioritizing co-teaching and offering extensive training can give aspiring teachers the expertise, information, and experience they need to use collaborative teaching methods successfully. This proactive strategy is necessary to build a solid basis for co-teaching and encourage its broad implementation in education. It is crucial to give student teachers the chance to participate in co-teaching and benefit from it. (Duran et al., 2021, p. 506). Students' persistence and completion rates can be raised by implementing thorough admission procedures, required orientation, and extensive evaluations that qualified advisers support. Additionally, these initiatives can be strengthened by combining academic programs with student support services (Rodicio et al., 2014, p. 65). Universities and students must commit to these programs by actively participating in meetings and training that promote motivation and teamwork. While student teachers must be personally motivated to work with coaches, colleges must also offer the necessary tools and support structures.

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.

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). Student instructors gain more adaptability, communication, and mutual support skills that help them manage various learning environments. Colleagues can develop a solid educational toolkit by exchanging ideas and approaches, which boosts confidence and proficiency in meeting the requirements of students. Universities and coaches must assist student teachers in overcoming obstacles and having candid conversations with cooperating teachers to facilitate compelling co-teaching experiences, as they understand the value of teamwork and communication.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are a lot of obstacles and difficulties for aspiring teachers in California's teacher credentialing programs because of the existing co-teaching paradigm. Difficulties in practicum placements, a demanding workload, and a lack of suitable support

networks can result in depressing experiences, which may cause some students to second-guess their career decision or drop out of the program entirely. These problems are made worse by the unfair credentialing procedure, as some students cannot meet the rigorous standards and commit to full-time, unpaid co-teaching. Better coordination between university teacher education curricula and student teaching experiences is necessary to produce outstanding educators. (Guay, 1986, p.93) Acknowledging co-teaching's potential as an educational paradigm, it is imperative to tackle the contextual and systemic constraints impeding its efficacy. Universities may lessen the bad experiences and create a more favorable learning environment for student teachers by encouraging supportive relationships among co-teachers, cultivating a culture of cooperation, and providing sufficient resources.

Ultimately, the future of the educational system depends on comprehending and resolving the difficulties experienced by student teachers. We can guarantee a more egalitarian and helpful road to becoming certified educators by prioritizing their needs and experiences. This will eventually result in a more committed, diverse, and competent teaching staff.

The study of co-teaching has remained distinct from the study of teaching and instruction. Hence, teacher learning is primarily conducted within the context of inclusive education, which, although necessary, should be a secondary focus. The primary focus students and universities alike need to demand is training, more support, and more communication both with the university to the student as well as the university to the cooperating teacher. (DeBrincat, Flynn, and Trezek, 2020).

### **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 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 University”<sup>1</sup> 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.

**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.

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

**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.

### **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?

## **Procedure<sup>2</sup>**

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

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<sup>2</sup> <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.<sup>3</sup>

## 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

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<sup>3</sup> This paper was edited by Pi.AI.

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.

### **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)**

Working on this project taught me a lot about who I am today because of my experience within the credential program. Having this time to reflect and also hear other students' similar stories created space for me to really emphasize the change I want to see and why I want to see it. The topic my partner and I have worked on was very personal to both of us, not to mention relevant to the current moment in our educational careers. It was also helpful for me to feel like I was changing something so that future 'me's' don't have to suffer as much. I found in being able to educate myself on the current literature of my topic I found out just how not-alone I really am. I was surprised to find the amount of literature I did, mainly it being why co-teaching is beneficial, but I did find some sources regarding methods and solutions to making our credential programs better. Along with learning I found myself teaching my topic to my peers and their reactions to what I was trying to achieve is what kept me really motivated. Everyone I spoke to either had been in the credential program, had thought of joining it, or wanted to join it but couldn't. Having the opportunity to share what I learned from literature with these peers as well as learn more about their stories regarding this topic taught me the most out of anything I did within this project. Finally, being able to work towards change in the way of communicating with people actually involved in the credential program at this small university on the coast of California made me feel affirmed in all the work I have done as I actually got to communicate the change we need to see happen to people who can help make it happen. Although there is a lot more to be done to make the credential program both at this university and every university that has a credential program around the world, starting with creating a student panel opens up space for more conversations about necessary changes students directly in the program want to see.

### **Synthesis and Integration (Individual)**

**In connection with MLO 4:** As a Social Justice Collaborator, conducting these interviews gave me the opportunity to work with educational community stakeholders. I actively listened to and engaged with the stories of my colleagues in the credential program as an advocate for access, equity, and justice. Working together to find program-wide avenues for social change helped me to better appreciate the moral and social obligations of educators. By means of these interviews, I bolstered the voices of my colleagues, augmenting the joint endeavor to establish an equitable and advantageous learning milieu.

**Performing interviews for MLO 5:** Being a Subject Matter Generalist helped me communicate and collaborate with others to learn more about education. By interacting with individuals who have varying backgrounds and viewpoints, I was able to expand my knowledge on a range of subjects pertaining to California's public school system. By means of cooperative dialogues and the exchange of insights, I acquired a more profound comprehension of the subject matter and its utilization within academic settings. I was able to improve my expertise by learning more about the intricacies of education through this cooperative learning method.

Ideally I would like to continue sharing my findings about how credential programs can be best supported and how the research is out there for why so many students are currently struggling in said programs. I would love to continue learning about students' struggles within these programs and finding ways to amplify their words so others know they are not alone. My dream would be to write a sort of book regarding my findings and others findings, as the experience I had and learning about so many of my peers having similar experiences, showed me the main thing lacking in every credential program is having students' voices be heard. For now though I will continue an email correspondence with the leaders of the credential program at this university. I want to make this change happen and make it known so as to only help future generations of teachers.

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