An Internal Case Study of the University of North Georgia's Educator Preparation Provider

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Introduction

The faculty of the educator preparation programs at the University of North Georgia's (UNG) College of Education (COE) consistently improve the quality of its programs and the candidates' experience. During the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years, the faculty of the COE Assessment Committee were charged with conducting a qualitative inquiry to determine the prevailing trends of programmatic strengths and opportunities for growth and the impact of our completers on P-12 student success from the perspective of our completers and the administrators at our partnering schools. To accomplish this task, members of the Assessment Committee designated a qualitative sub-committee of faculty who designed a qualitative inquiry to investigate our completers' effectiveness, the strengths of our programs, and the opportunities for their growth.

Within this report, all initial and advanced programs are represented. The initial educator preparation programs represented included Elementary and Special Education, Middle Grades Education, Secondary Education, Art Education, Music Education, Health and Physical Education, Post-baccalaureate Education, and Masters of Arts in Teaching. The advanced preparation programs include the Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) and Educational Leadership (EDL). We report on the advanced programs separately from the initial programs. Still, it is important to note that there is, in some cases, an integral overlap with the initial educator preparation programs and the advanced Curriculum and Instruction Program due to administrators discussing them simultaneously. As units of our case study, we present an investigation of the Educational Leadership program and an investigation of the Curriculum and Instruction program in the Appendices.

Methods

Our faculty committee, under the direction of the then Associate Dean, designed this study in 2017 to investigate completers' impact on P-12 students and their strengths and weaknesses. It is important to distinguish that this was meant as an investigation of the quality of our programs and the impact of our completer's on P-12 students, rather than a traditional research study. Throughout this investigation, we employed qualitative methods, specifically case study methodology, through deductive inquiry, interviews, and thematic coding.

The Case

We investigated a single case with embedded units of analysis. The "case" in our investigation was our educator preparation provider (EPP) at the University of North Georgia's COE. Our EPP offers several initial- and advanced-preparation programs and all were a part of our investigation. The embedded units of analysis emerged during the process because we needed to reach different groups of participants in different roles. There were two embedded units of analysis - the C & I completers and the EDL completers, which became units of investigation within the case. In terms of demographics for our EPP (our case), our student body is predominantly white and female. In 2020, we had 808 total candidates, with 84% being female and 82% being white. We have a total of 16% males in our EPP, who represent a larger percentage of our Middle Grades and Secondary Education programs (19% to 64%) than of our Elementary and Special Education program (6%). In terms of racial diversity, our Latinx population is the largest group of students of color (8%), followed by our Black or African American students (4%).

Participants

        The investigators were the Associate Dean, Department Head, and faculty of the COE Assessment Committee's Qualitative Sub-Committee, who are also the authors of this report. To study our EPP, we developed interview questions framed by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation Standards (see Appendices). The participants in our investigation of the EPP included the following five groups: 1) administrators at our partnering schools or at schools where our graduates were employed (referred to as "administrators"), 2) EPP graduates in their first three years of teaching (referred to as "inductee teachers" or "inductees"), 3) teachers who served as mentors to the inductee teachers (referred to as "mentors" or "mentor teachers") 4) graduates of our Curriculum and Instruction program (referred to as "C & I teachers"), and completers of our Tier I Educational Leadership program (referred to as EDL completers). Our participants were solicited via email on a voluntary basis.

Data Collection

        To gather our data, we conducted focused interviews to investigate our EPP's completers, specifically, their impact on P-12 students' learning and development and the strengths and weaknesses of our programs in relation to this impact. We interviewed participants individually or in small groups, based on their availability and preference. To interview participants, the interviewer went to the participants' schools at a scheduled time and asked the focused-interview questions included in the interview protocol (see Appendices). Each interview took between 30 to 45-minutes, and each small group interview took between 45 minutes to one hour. We recorded each interview with our volunteers' permission and transcribed the interviews using rev.com's transcription service. Over two school-years, we interviewed a total of nine mentors, 37 inductee teachers, eight C & I teachers, 37 administrators, and six EDL completers.

Analysis

        The faculty investigators read and analyzed all verbatim transcripts from the interviews. We began with approximately five transcripts each to start the process of classifying data through a manually-conducted deductive coding process, informed by the interview questions. The faculty then met for discussion and used their notes to establish draft codes to apply to the transcripts. During this process, they also developed definitions for the codes to guide their work and to help ensure accuracy in coding with multiple coders. The faculty reviewed their transcripts again to apply the codes. From this application, the faculty refined their code structure and continued the coding process with a consistent understanding of the code definitions. The sub-committee met periodically to check in with one another on their progress and discuss whether there were new codes needed as they continued their work.

        After the first round of coding to establish the codes and work towards a common understanding of how the codes should be applied, we began using Dedoose to code all transcripts. By this time, we conducted more interviews. Due to the volume of transcripts, over 700 pages, we did not assign each transcript to multiple coders, but instead, we assigned multiple transcripts (approximately 12 on average) to each coder. At the completion of the coding process, we then summarized the results of our coding in the format of an introduction to the code, a presentation of the strengths, a presentation of the opportunities for growth, suggestions for improvement, and a brief summary of the code findings. Our analytical generalizations and results are included below in alphabetical order by code. Following the results, we present a discussion of the themes and their implications and limitations.

Results

Building Relationships and Rapport

Building relationships/rapport within the school context can include a variety of stakeholders essential to the educational process. Developing a connection and consistent communication with students, parents, colleagues, and community members is an important aspect of a teacher's responsibilities and management of the classroom. Within the interviews, the development of relationships was discussed by inductees, administrators, and mentor teachers primarily as it relates to student engagement, the creation of a positive and respectful classroom community, and the demonstration of genuine concern for students. Professional interactions and communication with parents were also discussed as evidence of relationships and rapport within the classroom.

Strengths.

Interviewees at all levels discussed relationship building as a strength and how important it is in the learning process and in the social development of students. Inductee teachers spoke about being prepared for interacting with diverse students through the preservice field placement settings they were part of and the courses they had taken related to classroom management (IT525, IT560). Several discussed the benefits of allowing students time to develop socially and emotionally through specific programs and making a positive contribution to their students' social and emotional health by engaging in conversations and demonstrating a genuine interest in their students as individuals. Witnessing the growth, both academically and socially, in their students from the beginning to the end of the year was a meaningful aspect (IT555). Many inductee teachers felt this was a prominent strength of theirs (IT505, IT510, IT535, IT545, IT560, IT575).

Administrators and mentor teachers described positively the evidence of preparation for building rapport, especially with students, that inductee teachers and Curriculum and Instruction alumni demonstrated, one even indicating they were more prepared than those previously hired. This administrator noted that four new hires from UNG had varied personality types but were all good at developing relationships with their students, indicating "…you don't see four people coming from the same place that all have that kind of trait unless it's taught. And so that's why I say something really good is happening (AD105). Many administrators discussed the relationships inductees had built with their students as an overall strength, indicating they were good at classroom management, developing a caring connection with their students, and creating a positive classroom environment, in which students felt safe to make mistakes and be themselves (AD145, AD175, AD205, AD210, AD220, AD225). One mentioned, "…you can't walk into her classroom without smiling and feeling the warmth" (AD130). Elements large and small were identified to make an impact on students, from greeting students at the door to being observant and intuitive in recognizing potential reasons for a student's behavior (AD210, AD230). Also mentioned was the idea that if relationships are built first as a priority, the delivery of content could always be developed and flow from that (AD125, AD175). Several administrators and mentor teachers highlighted inductee teachers who were especially effective in building relationships with students in the special education setting (AD210, AD235, MT210). One mentor teacher (MT206) described an inductee's ability to effectively relate to and make an impact on her students, specifically in the special education setting, saying, "For somebody who has a six, seven-word vocabulary, for his eighth to be this teacher's name, I mean that means she's touching him."

When administrators discussed the inductee teachers' relationships and communication with parents, they were described as "solid," "professional," and "respectful" (AD115, AD155, AD205). One administrator felt the inductee teacher being described demonstrated strength in building relationships with all stakeholders, specifically within the context of English Language Learners, saying it is "…about building culture and that classroom togetherness. She is very welcoming. She gets to know her parents. She has done home visits. She's very involved in our community. She just goes out of her way to make her English language students, her every day, born here subgroups feel welcome. There is a close community in that classroom" (AD170).

Opportunities for Growth.

While the building of student-teacher relationships was identified as an overall strength for inductee teachers, there were some elements related to the first years of teaching that were mentioned as areas in which to grow. One was the delicate balance between relating to students and maintaining authority. Administrators and at least one mentor teacher indicated it was often difficult for a first-year teacher to move beyond wanting to be a student's "friend" and relate to students in a genuine way and also be consistent in classroom management and maintain authority and educational impact as the teacher (AD150, AD225, MT204). Some mentioned the small age gap between recent graduates and the older students they teach as being a factor.

One administrator mentioned an individual inductee who might need to be more empathetic in building relationships with parents: "I would like to see [them] be more understanding and empathetic to what some of our parents are going through, rather than, 'I'm the teacher and this is the way that it should be'" (AD215). Other administrators added to the importance of working with parents, indicating that the more complex situations with parents, especially those in which difficult news must be communicated, take more experience and training to successfully navigate (AD115, AD160). Though a number of inductee teachers and administrators discussed positive evidence or preparation to make connections and manage student behavior in a variety of classroom contexts, one administrator mentioned the difficulties an inductee had in managing a special education classroom with numerous IEPs and varied behavioral needs (AD220).

Suggestions.

Suggestions provided by administrators were a bit broader and related to new teachers in general and focused on the importance of engaging all stakeholders and setting expectations early on in the school year. Several simply reinforced the essential nature of relationship-building in the development of future educators (AD180, AD210) and the need for teachers to set early expectations (AD220). One stated, "Educators enjoy education. Not all students appreciate that. And I think if there is a way that the colleges could provide how to build healthy relationships because that is probably... This is coming out of my mouth... More important than content" (AD180). This same administrator indicated a connection to the school and the larger community was additionally important in developing relationships with students: "The college students would fare well to feel that need to be involved in the community in some way that gives them that credibility with the students."

In response to the opportunity for growth of one inductee teacher mentioned in the previous section, one administrator emphasized the need for new teachers to be well-trained in managing student behavior in special education classrooms with multiple IEPs and diverse needs (AD220). Specifically related to the aspect of balancing positive relationships with students and authority as

a teacher, one administrator suggested emphasizing that component during the preservice teacher program (AD150).

Summary.

      Overall, interviewees indicated a positive perception of the preparedness and ability of alumni and inductee teachers to develop relationships and establish rapport and communication with students. Although this is sometimes a challenge for new teachers, who are working to strike a balance between relationships and authority, comments from all perspectives indicated this was a strength of alumni serving as in-service teachers.

      The few suggestions offered were varied in terms of topic, with several more generally related to new teachers as a whole, and one is specific to an individual inductee. However, several pieces of feedback provided useful information about the need for deeper preparation in working with specific stakeholders and populations of students in more complex situations. Elements that may need more emphasis within the preparation program include communicating positively and effectively with parents in difficult contexts and understanding the IEP process and management associated with it more deeply.

Children's Academic Growth

The description for Children's Academic Growth states: "How the inductees' students are doing in terms of academic performance and socioemotional development. Anything that discusses children's success should be classified here." Academic growth took on many forms in the discussion. Not surprisingly, many referred to test scores and student growth measures. Other areas mentioned include differentiation, instruction, authenticity, and relationships. When discussing academic growth, students often discussed barriers and their readiness to deal with the issues or their perceived reason for why those barriers exist.

Strengths.

There were many positive comments from administrators, mentor teachers, and induction teachers regarding children's academic growth. As one administrator noted, "These graduates are, I would say, highly successful overall. They come to us with great knowledge of pedagogy, fairly good content knowledge, and most of the ones on this list have good classroom management, and we've found overall that our North Georgia grads are typically highly prepared to begin day one in their classrooms" (AD 205). Meeting the needs of all students through differentiation, progress monitoring, and enrichment were strengths listed by administrators along with building relationships (AD145). Several described teachers working with small groups and providing meaningful enrichment to students. As another administrator stated of an inductee teacher, "she would conference with kids and she would go through and let the kids know she picked up on progress monitoring that we were doing the formulas and she knew where the kids were and could communicate that with them. It's very impressive because we don't always see that, I'll be honest, we never see that" (AD145).

Inductee teachers also indicated many strengths from their UNG program. One described using strategies learned from the reading class to help with her moderate and severe disability classroom: "I knew it was effective when I saw the kids using the strategy" (IT 525). They talk about students making connections to their learning when selecting books about a topic or visiting a place where a war happened (IT560). In various ways, all talked about the use of data to improve student learning from analyzing test results to having students set goals based on their individual data (IT 560).

Opportunities for Growth.

Areas of opportunity for growth tended to be student and context-specific. A general concern was expressed for the transfer of learning from one grade to the next or one subject to the other. For example, one inductee expressed concerns with some of their instruction most notably, writing: "Because they'll write for me, and it may not be the greatest, they'll get it done. And then, they'll go to science class and be asked to do the same thing, and they don't know what to do" (IT 560). Administrators questioned the ability of any university to teach reading effectively: "I mean, I feel like there's not one university out there that actually teaches reading the way it's supposed to be taught. I mean, just from my own personal experience, I never knew anything until I went through a separate program outside of my graduate degree that was specific to the skills needed to teach a child how to read" (AD110). This concern seemed more specific at primary levels.

Concern for covering the material and frustration of students being prepared for the current content arose among the inductee teachers. An algebra teacher expressed frustration with students lacking knowledge in graphing and having to prepare extra practice stating, "they're going to have to do kind of on the side because there are so many standards for algebra one" (IT 535). Inductees noticed a trend in benchmark testing where students demonstrate growth from the beginning to the middle of the year but not as much from the middle to the end of the year (IT 560). Some attributed this to a lack of memorization of vocabulary or multiplication facts and apathy or work ethic.

Suggestions.

The suggestions for improvement were varied. One area was helping students take a deeper dive into student learning versus just covering the standards: "you've got so much to teach and so much to do that the standards become a check versus let's dive deep, and I think that's just a new teacher not a UNG issue because there are other teachers that are not on this list that are new with us in the past three years, and just kind of taking that thinking to the next level" (AD155).

Several spoke to the need to understand that every student is different and that there will be several levels in the class. As one administrator noted, "The gaps I see, they're not pedagogical gaps, they're not understanding gaps, rather it's the actual working with kids in the room" (AD101). And yet another stated, "I think not being intimidated by the challenges. So when we sit down and we start looking at their class makeup and they start getting to know their students, and they know seven of your students are getting food sent home every Friday because they don't have it they're like, 'okay.' You know, not being intimidated by that and understanding that we have the most contact with students and we need to have the most hope, the most encouraging thoughts" (AD 155). Knowledge of the whole child is an important component.

Another stated when dealing with difficult students, candidates need the "understanding that students are not giving you a hard time, they're just having a hard time" (AD 155), understanding root causes for why students struggle and understanding that different strategies work for different students. Knowing the IEP process and understanding behavior intervention plans are critical (AD 200, AD 215, AD 21, AD 22, MT202). This was a universal suggestion.

Elements of literacy emerged as a suggestion. Teachers and administrators stressed the understanding of phonics (IT 500, CUR 5). Elementary teachers need to "have a full picture of what it takes for a student to learn to read" and a strong understanding of the development of numeracy in math (AD 205). One inductee (IT 500) expressed concern that she has the reading endorsement but wasn't aware of phonological awareness. Concern was expressed that we give

students "a platter of resources" (AD 110) versus the specificity of effective teaching. Reading Recovery was a specific program mentioned.

Summary.

It is important to note that the program the student attended, the school at which they are currently teaching, and the grade level impact their responses. While one teacher complained about reading preparation, another praised what she had learned in the program. The focus of upper-level teachers leaned toward content acquisition while those in the lower grades were focused on literacy. It is important to note that there was a strong element of building relationships and meaningful classroom instruction throughout the data.

Frustrations of teachers surrounding time management and student readiness, coded as opportunities for growth, are not unlike those expressed by veteran teachers. One take away from their comments indicated a lack of reflection on themselves as a teacher. For example, one teacher complained that the students never finish her test in one day, without reflecting on whether the test was too long. Again, this is not just true of inductee teachers.

Overall, inductees, mentors, and administrators were positive about academic growth of the students taught by UNG graduates. Suggested areas for improvement wrap around total understanding of the students, not just academically, but understanding their personal contexts.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is recognized as 'how an educator runs their classroom with regard to behavior and routines.' While there are multiple styles of classroom management, such as flexible, inclusive, and adaptive, directing student behavior is an essential function of holistic teaching. Effective classroom management can create a climate of learning that aids in organization and consistency toward student success. Inductee teachers felt a range of emotions regarding their abilities in classroom management, from excitement in leading their own rooms to fear of being prepared to supervise a class.

Strengths.

Inductee teachers overall suggested that their UNG education had adequately prepared them for entering the classroom (IT515, IT560, IT565) with their initial placements providing that first time to put theory into practice. The use of scenarios (IT545), philosophy statements (IT151), and UNG instructors who challenged their thinking of classroom dynamics (IT525) developed the foundation for leading their own classrooms. This confidence resonated with the mentors and administrators who echoed the sentiment of educational preparedness of UNG inductee teachers in classroom management strategies (MT202, MT212, AD190, AD205).

Managing diverse learners was a heavily recurring theme in regards to classroom management. Navigating the challenges of a diverse classroom is vital for inductee teachers to understand the difference between a classroom management system for everybody and a student who needs an individual behavior plan. Administrators repetitively shared that UNG inductee teachers were able to effectively adjust and create inclusive spaces for the diversity of needs of students (AD135, AD235, AD190, AD205). Whether behavioral, intellectual, and/or social, UNG inductee teachers responded to the needs of the students by establishing rapport and relationships (AD105, AD210, AD225) and creating engaging spaces (AD230, AD 210).

Establishing routines and procedures immediately (AD235, AD205, AD135) and enacting consistent schedules (AD135, AD170) were witnessed from administrators as a key function for

learner success in the classroom. Paving the way for learning to occur in a nurturing and safe space, administrator's noted the efforts of inductee teachers, "in her classroom that she had taken that time at the beginning to set up structures that enabled them to feel comfortable not only to share their thoughts and opinions but to converse appropriately with one another. She just really did a great job of empowering her students to be who they were in the classroom and learn" (AD205). Understanding the physical space and the need for movement and configuration was shared by all participants. Inductee teachers being considerate of the time of rotations (CUR2, IT515), the need for movement (CUR3, AD190), initiatives such as flexible seating (AD190, AD230), and recognition of the impact of these on the students were seen as necessary components of an engaged classroom: "They're more interactive lessons to where their bodies are moving, their hands are moving, their minds are actively engaged" (CUR3).

Opportunities for Growth.

One of the most common statements from the administration was that classroom management was seen as a struggle within the first-year transition (AD115, AD230, AD205). Inductee teachers may have had a very different experience in their educational placements as opposed to the dynamics of their first-year schools. Inductee teachers noted apprehension in their initial abilities to maintain a solo classroom: "I'd say my first-year teaching, classroom management was always, I mean, it always is the scary, like monster that you have to try to conquer. And so yeah, I think my first-year teaching, that was something I knew that I was going to be focusing on and trying to improve on, because it's now my classroom" (IT 545). Administrators recognized that preparation for classroom management was needed, but many felt that the only way to learn was once engaged in their own classroom (AD235).

A recurring issue stated by administrator and inductee teacher alike was navigating time management as an aspect of classroom management (Z05, AD230, IT545). Directing students through activities and lessons, while balancing grading, communication, and instruction was a struggle for many inductee teachers: "Making enough time for everything and trying to do it within the school day" (IT515).

Along with time management, behavior management was an area of opportunity for growth for inductee teachers. Commanding a classroom or being prepared to handle circumstances that call for more stern or firm responses were suggested (AD140, AD205, AD 150, MT212). Preparing with scenarios for how to address classroom disruptions, physical alterations, and differentiating the roles of teacher and friend were suggested, as well as continuing to develop strategies to motivate positive behaviors.

Summary.

Overall, UNG inductee teachers were well prepared in classroom management: "They know that's important in the beginning, making sure students feel welcome, safe in the classroom. I feel like they all have a good understanding of that piece" (AD 190). Inductee teachers recognized the needs of diverse learners, established consistent routines, and worked to configure inclusive space and opportunities for movement. While issues of time and behavior management and the actuality of being a solo first-year teacher were noted as struggles, being receptive and adaptable once in the classroom and marrying existing knowledge with the opportunity to continue learning from peers and mentors is just as valuable: "Our school is very diverse and so just having a good understanding of the way different students respond and because she has from our moderately intellectually disabled students all the way up to gifted students in her classroom. How to manage

that diversity in her classroom. I think for a lot of new teachers you're trying to build a rapport but you don't understand you can be firm and respectful and still build that good rapport with students without letting them, not get away with things because it wasn't that. She did have some things in place that she had learned I think from her student teaching. But every little suggestion that was made, she did it and it worked" (AD 235).

Collaboration

The code "collaboration" was defined as "working together towards a common good." In the context of education, that common good is a high-quality learning experience for students and is attained through cooperative efforts among colleagues and the larger school context, in addition to extending into the broader community. Interviewees primarily discussed collaboration both within an individual classroom and within a team of classrooms for the purpose of supporting students, providing consistency, and sharing strategies.

Strengths.

Overall, the perception of the collaboration skills of UNG graduates entering the teaching profession was positive, according to interviewees. Administrators, mentor teachers, and the inductees themselves felt new teachers were prepared to work with a team in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. Several administrators commented on the inductee teachers and C & I teachers as being "team players" (AD101, AD220) and "well prepared for collaborating" (AD130). One mentioned, "They came in with good skill sets in terms of 'Let's work together" (AD101). While some acknowledged that the content knowledge of the inductee teachers may not be as well developed as others on a collaborative team, they recognized a willingness in the inductee teachers to take initiative and be open to and interested in collaboration: "understanding the collaboration is part of the learning" (AD105, AD110, AD130). Beyond the classroom and the school, one administrator recognized the strength of some inductee teachers in being "very community-oriented" and with a focus on service-learning (AD145).

Within the context of the classroom and between classroom teachers, the administrators and mentor teachers interviewed commented on the ability of inductee teachers to work well with co-teachers and other teachers who share the same students. One interviewee stated UNG graduates "do a good job working with co-teachers or being the co-teacher" (AD155). Another described the inductee teacher's openness to feedback in working with co-teachers to determine what is best for the ELL students they share (AD200). A mentor teacher discussed the collaboration between an inductee teacher, leaders in the content team, and support teachers to determine how to best and most consistently address classroom management issues with particular students (MT210). Within the classroom, the idea of encouraging collaboration between students was described by one administrator as a strength of an incoming teacher (AD165).

Inductee teachers interviewed discussed their preparedness for collaboration on an instructional team and the positive elements of receiving collaborative support during the challenges of the first years of teaching. One discussed the benefit of planning together for the purpose of consistency for students, as well as to share and implement ideas for differentiation (IT560). Another simply mentioned it was "nice to be in that sort of team environment" (IT505). Parent communication and classroom management appear to be areas in which new teachers experienced challenges and enjoyed the opportunity to receive support from team members in those areas (IT535).

Opportunities for Growth.

Though the characteristics described by interviewees were positive overall, one administrator identified an opportunity for growth in a C&I teacher in terms of a reluctance to take initiative and be open to collaborating. The administrator acknowledged that there is a "learning curve in terms of collaboration and learning to work with others" and mentioned that the master's program helped with that aspect to some degree (AD175). Several inductee teachers described their experiences in working with new teams as a fledgling teacher and engaging in the co-teaching experience. One mentioned the lack of experience with co-teaching during the UNG program and the learning that was involved in developing a relationship with a co-teacher (IT560). This teacher also discussed the journey in "getting used to a variety of personalities on a team and learning to work with parents."

Suggestions.

One of the characteristics that sometimes takes time to develop in a new teacher is confidence, especially when joining a team that includes veteran teachers. This was the focus of some interviewee comments. One administrator discussed the importance of teaching developing teachers to know their strengths and to "understand what it is you're doing that makes you successful so that you can then share that with colleagues" (AD175). Another mentioned that new and developing teachers needed to be encouraged to speak up in team settings, saying some of the inductee teachers were comfortable sharing one-on-one but were reluctant to share in a group setting (AD190). While this comfort level often comes with time and experience, it is something the UNG programs could emphasize and practice with students.

Another idea mentioned by two administrators was UNG support of graduates as they enter the teaching profession. One recommended "an opportunity for UNG to have continued support that first year with their graduates as a support mechanism" (AD150). Another echoed the idea and added the support could continue with second-year teachers, as well (AD115). The faculty saw this as a need, as well, and in response, a relatively new support program has been developed for this purpose and is currently in the process of expanding from the pilot stage to include more programs.

Summary.

UNG graduates have been described by interviewees in a variety of positive ways, including the elements of collaboration within and between classrooms for the purposes of providing consistency and differentiation for students, as well as expanding the mindset to the broader community with a service-learning orientation. Inductee teachers have primarily enjoyed the support their collaborative teams have provided during the first years of teaching. Opportunities for Growth and suggestions from interviewees focused on developing confidence in new teachers to work with a variety of personalities and stakeholders in a collaborative way. One of the ways new teachers could be supported in the journey of the first few years of teaching is through a UNG program offering ongoing support as new teachers enter their chosen profession.

Communication

    Communication is defined in this investigation's coding descriptor as 'an ability to transmit and receive knowledge.' Communication in the academic environment is, however, multi-faceted and includes the sharing of information in different contexts: teacher/student, teacher/teacher, teacher/administration, and/or teacher/parent or guardian. Each form of communication comes with its own set of descriptors, but, broadly speaking, communication in the academic environment can be defined on two levels: 1.) the sharing of information within the school via staff, faculty, administration and other stakeholders; and 2.) the sharing of information within the school's community via student/s, parent/s, guardian/s, or other involved community members, and the previously mentioned school personnel. For purposes of this analysis of data regarding the communication of UNG inductees and alumni, communication should be understood as informal and formal engagement including face-to-face interactions, conferences, meetings, or casual conversation, phone calls, emails, webpages, blogs, the use of other forms of technology, or simply writing notes to students. As the below analysis demonstrates, the communication skills of UNG students and alumni are recognized as relatively balanced between its simultaneous strengths and opportunities for growth. Often referred to as an issue of "maturity" and/or "experience," participants in this study ranged in their commentary focusing on "impressive" relationship-building skills but a nervous "anxiety" for having "difficult conversations." Given what must be wildly different contexts, we must understand what follows is dependent on the individual skills and maturity level of the teacher, the situation, the support network provided by the school, and all possible concerns with subjective bias.

Strengths.

    Most administrators and mentor teachers highlighted the fact that communication can be intimidating for young and relatively inexperienced teachers. Most UNG alumni agreed that communicating to parents or guardians about the child they love can be "nerveracking [*sic*]" (AD220). With this being a topic of agreement, it is common for administrators and mentors to refer to UNG students and alumni as professional despite the challenges. "She has a finesse about her," AD170 reported, and "she is able to articulate [her concerns] to parents in a very unassuming way, and they're very receptive to her feedback." According to some administrators and mentors, personal style and motivation impact not only the perceived comfort of communication with stakeholders, but also the UNG alumni's ability to seek help from and communicate with colleagues, administration, and other faculty/staff who may be involved. One administrator went to some length to describe the way UNG alumni expressed collegiality and a "willingness to come in and say 'I don't know how to do everything here…teach me'" (Admin 1 in AD105) by sharing her desire to discuss an incident. In order to professionally solve the problem, the team met and "role-played" a possible phone conversation with the concerned parent. According to Admin 2, the teacher "play[ed] it out first [to] kind of see, and that helps them have the confidence which…gives them some more gravitas 'cause [*sic*] they feel secure in what saying and how they're presenting it" (in AD105). Again, according to Admin 1, the UNG alumni at the school "have parents eating out of their hands today" (in AD105).

    The collaborative spirit and the resolve of UNG alumni to best support the needs of students are similarly manifested in an ability to communicate with students relevantly and with nuance. One UNG alumni used football analogies to break down mathematics (AD115); another working in a self-contained setting seems to know "when to push" and "when to back off" (AD135). When conducting parent/teacher conferences, collaborating in team meetings, and interacting one-on-

one with students, many administrators referenced "professional" (Admin 25 in AD205, AD180, AD170) communication skills.

Opportunities for Growth.

As described above, communication in the academic setting spans several different constructs. For purposes of this analysis, it should be noted that at no time did the data reflect that UNG inductees were challenged by communication with colleagues, faculty, staff, or administration. All discussion of "opportunities for growth" in terms of communication centered around communication with parents/guardians or students across "difficult conversations" regarding behavior or performance in the classroom. On more than one occasion, administrators and mentor teachers referred to this form of communication as a "tough thing just like classroom management" (Admin 22 in AD220, Admin 14 in AD145, Admin 25 in AD205). Given that the majority of the statements of opportunity for growth concern UNG alumni that are either "young" (Admin 24 in AD210), "intimidated" (Admin 18 in AD230), "nervous" (Admin 18 in AD230), "resistant" (Admin 14 in 145), "hesitant" (Admin 14 in 145), "second guessing [themselves] constantly" (IT535), or unaware of "the nervousness of her body language" (AD185), the assessment that communication is a skill that must come with time, growth, and experience is well documented in the data.

Similarly, there's a desire from some administrators and mentor teachers for the UNG inductee to "not be so agreeable" and to assume his or her role as "the boss" (MT206) in certain communication scenarios with parents or students. According to one administrator, however, "even veteran teachers struggle with that" (AD185). According to this administrator, the act of sitting down and talking with a parent/guardian is intimidating, especially when the age difference between a 40-year-old parent and a 20-something teacher is considered (AD185). For some new teachers, calling a parent is always going to be "nerve-racking" (AD220) while it will be "easier to send a text…or an email, or even make a phone call" (AD185). While this tendency for UNG alumni to assume a "boss-like" responsibility is referred to as an opportunity for growth, it should be noted that at no point in the data did an administrator or mentor suggest that UNG alumni neglect the overall responsibility to communicate.

Interestingly, however, there was one area of opportunity for growth that might be considered an area of neglect: reading and returning emails. "I'm the one that doesn't read emails, and I don't, and it's bad," said IT530. "I read the important emails," IT530 continued, but "I don't read all of them." It should be noted that the UNG alumni, in this case, did not define "important emails" and went on to state that she recently missed a training event she was required to attend because she did not read the email. As an extremely important method of communication between teacher/parent and administration/teacher in this contemporary era, communication via email should be recognized as an important opportunity for the growth of the UNG inductee. Finally, perhaps the most interesting opportunity for growth mentioned by an administrator across the area of communication is the inability of most UNG inductees (and "all of us") to speak the Spanish language (AD130).

Suggestions.

The most profound suggestion made by administrators, mentors, and UNG inductees was made in reference to the most powerful critique of UNG alumni: that many mentors and administrators believe the UNG inductee to be "hesitant," "nervous," or "intimidated" by parent/teacher communication of difficult topics. The most common suggestion for improvement

in this area of communication was thus the need for proactive communication toward establishing positive relationships with parents and guardians. One administrator noted: new teachers "need to see the value of proactively calling parents…not waiting until something negative happens but calling for the purpose of establishing the relationship" (AD175). According to this administrator, making that "first contact" that says, "let's do something positive," might allow the UNG inductee to see "how far that goes with establishing positive relationships with the parents" (AD175). Speaking towards the same point of proactive communication, a second administrator states the power of building the relationship early: "the impression you make, whether it's a correct impression right on the parent, it's the way they're going to feel all year" (AD135).

In order to reinforce the importance of positive and proactive communication with parents, administrators suggest "role-playing" and practicing parent phone calls with professors, grad students, or other colleagues that may be scripted (Admin 1 & 2 in AD105, Admin 14 in AD145, Admin 22 in AD220). This kind of practice might, according to these administrators, alleviate the nervousness, relieve the anxiety, allow the new teacher to become more comfortable communicating with parents, and encourage confidence that will foster that previously referenced "boss-like" mentality. A bit less common but nonetheless important was the suggestion that UNG alumni might be better prepared to purposefully use technology such as the Google classroom (AD155).

Summary.

As referenced in the introduction to this analysis, the communication skills of UNG students and alumni can be recognized as balanced between simultaneous strengths and opportunities for growth. Participants in this study ranged in their discussion of UNG alumni as both possessing "impressive" (Admin 13 in AD135) communication skills but also a nervous "anxiety" (AD140) or hesitancy for having difficult conversations with parents and students. On the one hand, our students have been seen to be productive, collegial, articulate, and unassuming in their communication. On the other hand, they have been called "young" (Admin 24 in AD210) and "nervous" (Admin 18 in AD230). Given that no university or student teaching experience can appropriately control for the dispositional concern of maturity and youth, we might focus on our ability to provide more relevant and purposeful experiences that can foster additional growth in maturity. This might include practice with parent phone calls; it might include additional focus on positive communication; it may involve additional instruction in utilizing technology as a tool for curricular and pedagogical communication. Again, despite the valuable insight this data can provide, the above analysis must take into account that classroom communication, especially when focused on "difficult conversations," should be taken relatively and with concern for context and the possibility of subjective bias.

Content Knowledge

The description for Content Knowledge generally referred to the inductee teacher's ability to convey the content but also a commentary on the content they learned at the university. Overall, the feedback was positive around content knowledge and overall, for the preparation of teachers as evidenced by the following quotation: "These graduates are, I would say, highly successful overall. They come to us with great knowledge of pedagogy, fairly good content knowledge, and most of the ones on this list have good classroom management, and we've found overall that our North Georgia grads are typically highly prepared to begin day one in their classrooms" (AD 205). This theme was pervasive with the administrators with a few suggested areas for improvement.

The teachers responded by reflecting not so much on the content they were conveying but on the applicability of the content they learned while in the program.

Strengths.

With few exceptions, the administrators agreed the candidates were knowledgeable in their content and found creative ways to connect it to the students' interests. One states, "they were content prepared. I think all of those... I did not see any type of deficit with any of that. They're still continuing to perform it at high levels in their content" (AD180). Another describes how one student used a silly drawing of a cat to describe forms of government to his seventh-grade students. Another commented that this group of candidates, compared to other new teachers, understood that while they loved their content, that did not mean the students did: "I feel like they're all extremely solid in their content, but they don't expect kids to be as comfortable and solid in the content as they are. That's what has, in my mind, has really differentiated them from other new teachers coming in brand new to the profession walking in. They have always been good at their content, and other teachers have felt like they expected kids to be that good or that passionate about that content. This group of teachers has come in and said that's okay, you don't have to love it, but we'll work on this together. And that's really rare. And that's why this is such a good group of inductee teachers. So something's changed" (AD105). While specific course content was not mentioned often, one commented on strong math knowledge and another on successful novel studies. When asked about critical thinking, several mentioned how the students use real-world scenarios to convey the learning.

Inductee teachers had a variety of comments about content knowledge, most referring to their UNG coursework. One stated, "Having a strong content knowledge base and understanding it kind of freed up that time where I could focus on the classroom management, or focus on the relationships, or focus on the planning" (IT560). One had greater compassion for middle school students because of his coursework in adolescent learning: "It makes sense, now that I know the... physically what's happening in middle school" (IT4). Another commented on their competency for writing lesson plans due to the program at UNG: "I mean that's the main thing that I took away from UNG was that I was prepared when I came in and I knew what I needed to put into the lesson because I was made to do it over and over again" (IT565). C&I respondents spoke to the ability to give advice for change in the curriculum and that they were better researchers.

Opportunities for Growth.

Two administrators had concerns about the reading program with one stating they did not know of a university that was successful in teaching reading. Still another administrator states, "They do not know how to teach reading. They have a philosophy of reading and why reading is important, but actually the skills to teach reading, whether it's small group, individual, large group, reading workshop, reading center, anything. That's where they lack the most" (AD 19). One teacher describes her frustration over the difference in how running records were done in her program versus her new setting: "when we were on our reading class, all we knew were, you will do running records for your whole life. And then I got here and we were like, we do them online and it's actually a lot different, and it's just not the same" (IT 565).

The rigor of the work and the ability to implement rigor in the classroom arose from C&I teacher and administrator concerns: "The only thing I would like for them to do is, going back to that other question about the high-order critical skills, is making sure that everyone is exposed to the rigor" (AD 155). Another expresses this idea of rigor with the ability, especially of middle and

high school teachers, to incorporate reading and writing across the curriculum: "Bringing in texts that are sophisticated texts, and teaching kids how to work through that text and decompose the text, and then be able to synthesize and then produce a piece of writing" (AD 220).

The C&I candidates discussed the lack of rigor in the reading pathway versus the gifted pathway. They also expressed general frustration with the heavy research component of the program versus the applicability to the profession: "Well, I'm here to teach you your research," and she was like, "I get that. But ultimately, we got to take the GACE, and that is not what we just did on the GACE" (CUR 2). This frustration is captured with one candidate's take on what was stated by her professor.

Suggestions.

Reading instruction also appears in areas for improvement along with specific suggestions that could enhance the program. One administrator, advocating for literacy and numeracy, discusses the need for primary students to get basic skills needed for success: "I think philosophy-wise, as a general whole in teaching, we've lost that critical piece of those basic skills because we jump so fast to the output of it. If we could really hone in on the fact that there are developmental pieces that we've got to make sure students in the lower grades attain before they get to the upper grades, then you're going to have different kids in third, fourth, and fifth" (AD 25). An inductee teacher states the need for more reading classes: "And I And I mean, I know we took a reading class. But if there was like a reading conscious, specific class, like how to incorporate reading into math, that would be so beneficial. Because I would not know where to start" (IT 545). One administrator strongly stressed the importance for all students to have the ESOL endorsement, stating that while the gifted endorsement is valuable, ESOL is the strongest need.

A teacher of middle school students wanted another special education course: "because you get into the classroom and you go, oh my gosh, I have to follow 13 kids' accommodations and what goes here? And how does this work? And going through a real IEP before you actually sit in on an IEP meeting would be fantastic" (IT 545). The teacher also stated, "I remember like in middle grades, some of the math classes that I had to take, they were helpful, but I think a lot of the content focused on more like the elementary math [than] the middle school, like it barely touched on some of the concepts that I would actually be teaching" (AD 545). The ability to give effective feedback was another suggested area of improvement for this teacher. As mentioned in the opportunities for growth, there was concern around improving the C&I Program.

Summary

While there were certainly suggestions for improvement, overall respondents were positive about the content knowledge of UNG graduates. It is important to remember that there was not an overriding concern held by all, rather specific concerns held by some. There is also not enough data to state that any specific academic content was better than another in terms of student knowledge. Administrators of upper-level schools suggest the need for more rigor and critical thinking in the content while noting the candidates were strong in their subject. For example, two administrators held strong feelings about the reading program, but one student said it was the best course work she had at the university. Teacher concerns varied and none were universal. Indeed, apart from the C&I Program (discussed in another section), the data does not indicate a strong area for improvement. Conversely, the data describes solid support for the program outcomes in content knowledge. That said, the reading program is another area that should receive focus since it was

mentioned by administrators and teachers. Finally, as borne out by several respondents much of a teacher's learning happens when they walk into the classroom.

Data and Assessment

The code "data collection and assessment" represents the various methods of measuring the learning and performance of students and how that information is used. Examples of data collection and assessment instruments include achievement tests, minimum competency tests, developmental screening tests, aptitude tests, observation instruments, performance tasks, and so forth. For purposes of this analysis, data collection and assessment could be further broken down to include the use of formative assessments (designed to evaluate student learning at the beginning or during a module/lesson) and summative assessments (designed to evaluate student learning at the completion of a module/lesson). Data should be considered the information that can be gathered regarding a student and his/her readiness, understanding, learning, comprehension, motivation, and interests. Data-driven instruction can be understood as the act of organizing, interpreting, and analyzing various sources of information (data) to make decisions regarding the design of learning opportunities. As the below analysis demonstrates, the data and assessment proficiency of UNG inductees is recognized as relatively strong in some areas but in need of improvement in others.

Strengths.

Administrators and mentor teachers suggest that UNG inductees are "adept" (AD145) with data collection and assessment. They "follow the protocol" (MT206), succeed in "reading [their] classes…and picking up on needs," they recognize that student input can "drive" and "help strengthen instruction," and they make "a concerted effort" to pull feedback from students to improve instruction (AD175). UNG inductees, according to many, are prepared for the data-rich and demanding environment of the contemporary classroom. According to AD185, "Assessment and data is embedded into everything that we do" and UNG inductees are "really good about sharing the data in a way that makes sense with [the] kids." He continues, "We don't just look at the numbers. We unpack everything that we can…we look at attendance. We look at behavior…and we look at the whole profile when we're looking at academic success for students." UNG inductees, according to this administrator, continue this expectation as they are "constantly looking at the child's motivation and their initiative. At the same time, [they are] looking at their academics."

UNG alumni gather data well independently and across content teams and professional learning communities (PLCs); UNG alumni are successful at working with individual students and whole class environments. Speaking toward one teacher's independent data collection, AD 140 references a UNG inductee paying attention to how one child may be growing "more so" than another. Collectively, across a content area or PLC group, MT210 refers to another UNG alumni working collaboratively to assess whole class readiness and design further scaffolding. When working with individual students, AD 145 references a UNG alumni's "drive and a desire to go forward" with student supports: "I saw her personally monitoring and conferencing with kids" and "plugging in progress monitoring and talking to mentor teachers." This UNG inductee, according to AD 145, demonstrated this kind of individual, formative data collection process more completely than "other" teachers. Teachers from UNG, according to AD 145, come "prepared."

Opportunities for Growth.

Suggested opportunities for growth in the use of data and assessment have been focused on the separation of "summative" and "formative" assessment sources. As referenced in the above section, UNG inductees have been praised for their ability to gather, analyze, and then utilize summative data in their planning for the individual student and whole class needs. According to several administrators, UNG alumni could, however, improve in their ability to understand formative and/or observational data and the fact that "you don't have to have pencil and paper to prove that a kid knows something" (AD130). Administrators taking this line of critique sum up this perspective through the statement that, beyond the use of pre and posttests or other forms of summative assessment, the more knowledgeable an incoming teacher is in the variety of assessment opportunities, the better able they will be to gather meaningful data on student strengths and opportunities for growth (Z01). Some of this concern for recognizing the importance of formative assessment strategies comes down to behavioral analysis and the inability of teachers to recognize when a student's behavior patterns are contributing to his/her academic struggles (AD130, AD220, AD230); some of this concern is influenced by inexperience with the assortment of formative data collection opportunities, how to collect more of that data, what to do with it, and how it can inform future lesson design (AD130, AD215). For these administrators, this problem is about changing a mindset. According to AD215, most teachers "equate" assessment to the Georgia Milestones, CCRPI, or high stakes testing while they neglect that an assessment can be simply "a quick five-minute ticket out the door" that allows teachers to "just figure out what do kids know." AD215 continues, "So I think changing that mindset of assessment isn't bad. It's information for teachers and that's good. We need to assess kids. I don't know that they think that way."

Suggestions.

Suggestions for improvement in the data and assessment proficiency of UNG graduates concern the above-mentioned opportunity for growth in the area of formative data collection and creating the opportunity for pre-service teachers to participate in active learning scenarios or simulations with the whole class and individual data collection. Focusing on the use of formative data, IT520 suggests a stronger focus on "all the different types of data that you can collect" in the university coursework. She continues, suggesting that she would have benefited from greater emphasis on the fact that a teacher can and should collect data "without having students sit down and do a paper/pencil summative assessment." This line of approach is consistent for AD175, who suggests that UNG inductees might be more experienced in the area of "understand[ing] that your daily questioning in class is valuable data…not something you're logging into a spreadsheet…[but] any kind of feedback that you're getting that will guide your future instruction is important data." AD225 takes this perspective a step further suggesting that some schools place too much emphasis on "the numbers" and neglect the relationships with students that can provide equally important sources of data. Those schools, according to that administrator, are "all about numbers. Here it's all about relationships, and then the numbers." He continues, "I think just having a good understanding of what data can look like, and what data can do for you" prepares future teachers better for the reality of the data-focused environment of contemporary schools.

According to many administrators participating in this investigation, UNG's teacher education program can implement this kind of change by encouraging pre-service educators to "[get] over the fear of student data" (AD 175), understand what to do with the many forms of data collected (AD110, AD 215, AD155), "[narrow] the focus" of both formative and summative data collection (AD170), "break down the data" and "translate [it] into 'Now I can support'" (AD165), and "dig into data" while asking themselves "Okay, how can I help get this child from a one to a

two or two or three or whatever" (AD180). According to many administrators, mentor teachers, and UNG inductees, this can be accomplished through coursework that provides "situations or scenarios" that encourage pre-service teachers to gather many forms of data, work with it, and then ask, "How are you going to better the kids' achievement with that?" (C&I Teacher in AD225). The added relevance and reality of gathering real data from real students that such scenarios and simulations could provide is, according to IT535, the difference between "learning something versus actually having to do it."

Summary.

Importantly, this analysis of participant interviews focuses on the further unpacking of data collection and assessment into "formative" and "summative" assessments. As this analysis demonstrates, the data and assessment proficiency of UNG inductees is recognized as relatively strong in some areas but in need of improvement in others. The strength of UNG's alumni is in their proficiency, comfort with, and use of summative assessments. The largest opportunity for growth of UNG's alumni is in their understanding of, comfort with, and use of formative assessments. Given this suggested strength and opportunity for growth, administrators, mentor teachers, and UNG inductees agree that UNG's teacher preparation programs might more effectively prepare students by providing a more balanced understanding of the many uses and forms of data collection.

Differentiation

Differentiation, as defined for this report, is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is, rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Most interviewees, regardless of their position, talked about the need for differentiation in terms of individuals and the ability to, "tailor what individual kids' needs are" (AD175). A variety of instructional strategies were discussed for addressing differentiation. As one mentor teacher (208) advised, "Most everybody knows what it means to differentiate; content, process, or product." One of the specific strategies discussed most often across all interviewees was the use of "small groups" (AD180, AD210, AD130, AD140, MT204, IT505, IT510, IT515, IT535) and "how to form those groups based on formative assessments or class discussions" (AD180). Specific strategies used for differentiation mentioned included centers, choice, enrichment, preferred seating, slotted notes, one-on-one conferences (student check-ins), visuals, slotted notes, and PSYOP strategies.

All groups of interviewees agreed that meeting the needs of diverse learners through differentiation is one of the greatest challenges that all teachers face. Administrators were quick to acknowledge that, "differentiation is the hardest thing to do with a group of learners because public education is so diverse" (AD130). Administrator AD190 commented, "that's the hardest thing they have to do. They have to figure out how to [differentiate]." Administrators talked about the challenges of meeting the needs of students with an "unbelievable range of where they are" (AD130). Administrator 130 went on to comment that teachers have to "figure out how, how to deal with each [student]. I think that frustrates them probably more than anything and because they do struggle with [it], they struggle with it for a couple of years."

It is worth pointing out that administrators made it clear that the challenge of differentiating for the needs of diverse learners is something that is a problem for all teachers, even those with a great deal of experience. When asked about evidence for differentiation, one administrator

commented, "we see them differentiate in the classroom. Every day? No, but we don't see veteran teachers do it" (AD130). Another commented on meeting state requirements for differentiation: "we know differentiation strand four is definitely our weakest, and that's probably statewide" (AD115). When discussing differentiation in math, one administrator (AD185) commented that the inductee math teacher in their school was struggling with differentiation, but that "it's not just her. It's just the mentality of teachers in my building; Math is linear" (AD185). While differentiation is recognized by a majority of the interviewees as a challenge, it is possible to address. One inductee teacher commented, "As a teacher, you have to commit to it. You have to really, intentionally know that you're differentiating" (IT 575).

Strengths.

Without fail, nearly every administrator talked about how well UNG graduates were able to differentiate instruction once they entered the classroom. Twenty-four of the administrators interviewed made positive comments about how well UNG graduates were able to differentiate for their students (1, 2, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 101, 110, 115, 125, 130, 135, 140, 150, 160, 165, 175, 185, 200, 215, 235). Administrator 13 remarked, "they understand it; they're doing it" (AD130). Other comments included, "she's been great and very adept at changing what she's doing in the classroom to be able to meet the needs of those students" (AD165), a sentiment agreed to by a majority of administrators. The administrators talked about not only how astute UNG alumni are at differentiating, but also addressed how well they use data to recognize the needs of their students. One administrator stated that, "she looks at their IEPs to see where their opportunities for growth are and she follows their accommodations" (AD240). Administrator 130 commented that, "for [name], the pulling of the data is what really drives the differentiation within the instruction." These administrators further recognized the ability of UNG prepared teachers to use a variety of teaching strategies: "they're flexible in the way that they can teach the kids…using lots of different strategies" (AD140).

Many administrators were clear about giving credit to UNG for preparing these teachers to differentiate. Compliments about UNG's program included, "there is a class that they take; I'm not sure but I had three student teachers and two of them actually taught me some things from that class" (AD 140), "Other professionals in the building that I've known [that] have come from North Georgia have been great with that, too. I think that's critical to being successful as a teacher" (AD250), and "I wish that I could give some of my veteran teachers that experience that UNG has offered the undergrads" (AD160). There was a great deal of confidence in how well UNG prepared teachers were to differentiate. As noted by Administrator 130, "I feel like the differentiation that they already come in which has prepared them to no matter what we shift, they're going to do fine."

Mentor teachers were also quick to compliment the UNG graduates. Four mentor teachers talked about strengths, compared to only one who mentioned opportunities for growth in the ability of inductee teachers from UNG to differentiate. Mentor teacher 204 complimented their mentee who is, "great with pulling small groups and knowing exactly who needed help with what." Another mentee noted that, "He makes accommodations as necessary…. I think he was very well prepared" (MT212). One mentor teacher indicated that not only were first-year teachers prepared to differentiate for their students, but so are UNG "student teachers" (MT208).

UNG graduates were quick to give credit to the program for preparing them to differentiate for their students. Eleven new teachers and four alumni from the graduate program cited specific strengths in how they were prepared to differentiate. Inductee Z04 commented, "I felt for me, as a

first-year teacher, to come in and feel pretty prepared to understand that differentiation needs to happen, and there are ways to do it, and very good ways, and we knew how to implement." One graduate program teacher commented about what he/she learned in the program, "before I was differentiating for the sake of marking it on paper, whereas once I learned how to analyze data I was differentiating based on data, and I was able to look and see okay, this is why I differentiate" (CUR3). One theme that emerged was that these UNG graduates gave credit directly to their professors for preparing them to differentiate for their students. One inductee talked about a specific professor, "she was like SPED guru, and I just remember her just telling us all the different ways you can differentiate process, product… the ideas they give you is really what helps you" (IT 500). A new physical education teacher (IT540) commented, "we would do real-life scenarios, real-life acts, skits, or whatever in teaching where we had to learn to differentiate our instruction based off of these kids." One new middle school teacher talked about one of her professors:

> She taught us as if we were just her middle school students. And, I feel like that was probably the most beneficial thing I had, differentiation-wise, because she would show us the different ways. She differentiated with kids by actually doing the differentiated activities with us.

Opportunities for Growth.

Seven administrators discussed opportunities for growth of UNG graduates in their ability to differentiate (AD 14, 19, 120, 130, 150, 195, 215). Only three of these did not also make positive comments about the ability of these teachers to differentiate for their students (AD 14, 120, 195). Advance planning for differentiation was seen as a shortcoming, with two different administrators suggesting that they, "seem to struggle with prepping and lesson planning, and being ready well enough in advance to know… 'I need to differentiate this'" (AD14). As was pointed out by Administrator 120, "differentiation comes from instructional planning… that was again, the biggest opportunity for growth." Two administrators discussed opportunities for growth in terms of preparing pre-service educators with an in-depth appreciation of what it means to differentiate, as summarized by Administrator 120: "There was very little differentiation because they didn't understand the depth of the target." Two administrators felt that pre-service teachers were not getting adequate experience with differentiation in the classroom. One administrator advised that UNG graduates "don't get enough hands-on experience in classrooms, or even with individual children" (AD195) to effectively differentiate. However, lack of preparation was not seen as an opportunity for growth specific to UNG. Administrator 150 commented that new teachers "across the board [are] not being prepared to handle thirty kids in a classroom for different situations." One administrator commented about differentiation in terms of a specific subject, "I don't think I see a whole lot of differentiation, not in math" (AD215). Other administrators were less specific in their criticism and made comments about what they believed was a general opportunity for growth of new teachers from UNG in differentiating for students. For example, one stated that, "they need a little help" (AD130). Mentor teachers did not identify any opportunities for growth from UNG graduates related to differentiation.

Seven inductees (2, 5, 515, 530, 535, 560 & 575) and one graduate program teacher (C&I Teacher 1) did identify opportunities for growth in learning how to differentiate for students at UNG. Most inductee teachers talked about opportunities for growth in terms of how overwhelmed they felt when they entered the classroom but without specific comments about UNG or the program. One inductee teacher stated that, "I had a lot of 504 [plan students] and ended up having SST kids this year too…. So, I wasn't prepared to serve them" (IT2). Inductee teacher 5 echoed

the feeling, "I think it was difficult for me to wrap my head around, all of these different kids, and all the different things [it] required for them to be in my classroom, and have that happen every single day." A third (IT555) stated that preparing for differentiation, "was just something that wasn't super applicable at the time." One inductee (2) commented about the need to observe effective implementation of differentiation strategies, "you can talk about differentiation [practices], and say the names, and describe them, but unless you can see them in action, it's really hard to put them into place." This shortcoming was echoed by a second inductee who commented that it, "would have been helpful to see… how everything that goes behind actually planning that [differentiation] lesson in a class at UNG" (IT535). The only negative comment about UNG's program from C&I teacher 1, who when asked about the differentiation stated, "I honestly don't think that was very beneficial from that program, to be honest with you." While there were few, if any, specific shortcomings or opportunities for growth discussed, suggestions for improvement came from all groups of interviewees.

Suggestions for Improvement.

Suggestions for improvement that came from administrators related to four different areas; understanding what differentiation means, how to differentiate with a co-teacher, specific strategies for differentiation, and how to manage differentiation documentation. Two administrators discussed the need to develop a broader understanding of what differentiation means. Administrator A commented, "the more exposure we can give them, the broader definition they can have" (Z01). Three administrators (AD21, 22, 115) talked about improving the program by better preparing UNG inductee teachers to work with co-teachers. Administrator 22 summarized the need to teach pre-service teachers, "how to use… a co-teacher," including strategies and models. Two administrators suggested that UNG better prepare teachers to use "data to differentiate" (AD21) and to learn "how to read an IEP and pull out all the… important pieces" (AD22). Administrator 22 suggested that UNG's program should also prepare teachers to understand "that process of what is RTI [Response to Intervention] and what's the purpose."

Most suggestions for improvement related to teaching a broader range of instructional strategies for differentiation. Administrator 110 commented that the program should prepare graduates to not just know how to use data to group students, but also, "the process and product." This administrator went on to suggest that they had observed inductee teachers differentiating by presenting the same work in different ways, then "they move on." The problem they suggested is that teachers need to learn a wider variety of strategies because, "everyone does the same thing, instead of differentiating down to what the child actually needs" (AD110). Administrator 115 summed up this theme by stating that UNG could help better prepare inductee teachers, "with more of those strategies already in their toolbox, something that they didn't have to learn; then they'd be better prepared to step in on day one, and start rolling with kids."

There was only one Mentor Teacher (204) who made specific recommendations for better preparing UNG graduates to differentiate for their students. First, inductees needed to be better prepared to manage differentiation. Second, they need to learn "more strategies or more ways to differentiate; maybe tiered projects or tiered lessons." This mentor teacher made one additional suggestion for UNG's program: to provide more practice differentiating for the needs of gifted students.

Former UNG students, now inductee teachers, were able to be more specific in their recommendations for program improvement. One inductee (IT530) would have liked "a better explanation on what differentiation means," echoing administrators' suggestion that UNG should

provide pre-service teachers with a richer understanding of differentiation. The theme of choice also emerged, with one inductee mentioning they were denied the opportunity to student teach in a self-contained classroom, something that was important to them, "because I knew that's what I wanted to do" (I1). One inductee teacher would have liked to have the option of additional classes on differentiation (IT4). Another (IT500) suggested the program should include training on cultural biases, while Inductee 520 stated that they would have liked to learn more about specific disabilities. One former student echoed the Mentor Teacher comment about needing more training for teaching gifted students by stating, "I wish that we had a little bit more experience with planning for differentiation for gifted or accelerated kids. That is my biggest thorn in my side this year… coming up with ways to excel the kids who need acceleration" (IT565).

Summary.

In summary, it is more than fair to say that the evidence provided in these interviews supports the assertion that UNG is doing a good job preparing teachers to differentiate to meet the needs of their students. An overwhelming majority of administrators had nothing but compliments about how well graduates from the program were able to differentiate for their students, even though differentiation is seen as a challenge for all teachers, regardless of experience. A variety of strategies were cited as evidence for differentiation, which is seen as a strength for most of these UNG graduates. Only a small number of administrators identified opportunities for growth, however, several suggested that the greatest need is to improve instructional planning and management for differentiation. While no mentor teachers cited opportunities for growth, most former students discussed opportunities for growth in their own shortcomings, rather than the program. They felt that they were overwhelmed when they moved into the classroom and were not adequately prepared for the daunting task of differentiating for their students.

Finally, there were a variety of recommendations made for improving the program at UNG. More often than not, administrators discussed the need for graduates to learn a greater array of strategies for differentiation, as well as cultivating a broader understanding of what differentiation means. Working with co-teachers and learning how to manage differentiation program requirements were also mentioned as areas of improvement. The need for learning how to differentiate for gifted students came up with both the Mentor Teacher and Inductees. Most UNG graduates that made recommendations either suggested topics that should be covered (cultural bias, specific disabilities) or suggested that they would have liked more choice, or differentiated options, in how they engaged in the program (placement, additional classes). The praise for UNG's graduates and the program from administrators, mentors and former students is significant compared to the shortcomings or suggestions for improvement, providing overwhelming evidence that, in spite of the challenges that differentiation presents to educators at all levels of experience, teachers from UNG's program are well prepared to differentiate for their own students in the classroom.

Diversity

The definition of "diversity" is very general and broad within the code structure. "Diversity" was interpreted broadly amongst the interviewees – some thought of diversity as academic diversity and others thought of it as cultural diversity or socio-economic diversity. When discussing diversity in the interviews, some interviewees mentioned academic diversity, such as differentiation when teaching or working with students who are SPED (special education) or ELL (English Language Learners). Other interviewees talked about diversity as cultural diversity, such

as working with the Latinx population, and socio-economic diversity when working in Title 1 schools or with children who live in poverty.

Strengths.

There were many positive comments mentioned about diversity by administrators, mentor teachers, and inductees. Many administrators and mentor teachers (MT206, AD150, AD195, AD110, AD125) felt like the inductee teachers did a great job with differentiation (in general); their positive comments encompassed academic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. Some administrators (AD205, AD185) specifically mentioned that new teachers were well-prepared for academic differentiation. Other administrators and mentor teachers (AD130, MT206) mentioned that the inductee teachers treated everyone the same and did not "blink an eye" when they had to work with non-traditional students (such as those who were non-verbal, foster-care-system students, or students living in difficult circumstances). One administrator (AD230) discussed how the inductee teachers were very willing to embrace the different cultures at the school.

Moreover, there were a few administrators who made positive comments about the experiences our graduates had prior to becoming new teachers: One administrator (AD 160) commented that our college was doing a great job providing diverse experiences. Another administrator (AD 155) felt that graduating with a dual degree (assuming Elementary and Special Education, which is our only dual degree) was very helpful. The alumni (e.g., IT510, IT515, Z04, CUR3) also thought that they were very well prepared to work in diverse settings. Some (e.g., IT 520) thought that the diversity course was very beneficial, with one student (IT 525) saying, "I felt like the program couldn't have really prepared me any better to work with diverse students, because I was given the opportunity to do the resource, to do the SPED [special education]."

Opportunities for Growth.

There were not many opportunities for growth mentioned when the interviewees discussed diversity. There were also no patterns that emerged when discussing opportunities for growth within the topic of diversity. While many inductees felt that they were prepared to teach in diverse situations (see above section), one particular induction teacher (IT560) felt she was underprepared to work with Title 1 populations (students living in poverty) and also students who had IEPs and 504s (special education students). One administrator (AD220) suggested that one particular inductee was not equipped for academic diversity, as they did not know how to differentiate instruction or understand how to co-teach. Another administrator (AD101) could tell that student-teacher and intern experiences have been in "non-diverse classrooms." One administrator (AD155) mentioned that the inductees did not quite know what to do when students came in with specific issues, and the inductees would get down on themselves because they were not as prepared as they thought they would be.

An interesting comment was made from an administrator (AD205) about diversity; it was a comment that was not directed at UNG graduates specifically but did provide valuable insight regarding gaps within our diversity mindset. He/she brought up classroom management (as a "opportunity for growth") when discussing diversity, saying that sometimes teachers cannot come fully prepared for all the students they are going to receive (e.g., behaviorally challenging students). The administrator(s) mentioned that it is hard for new teachers to deal with diverse behavior, specifically understanding trauma and how trauma affects children and schooling. In essence, it seems that the administrator(s) was discussing gaps in teachers' understanding of "socio-emotional diversity" and how it impacts schooling.

Suggestions.

There are a few suggestions that would be helpful to consider as we move forward. The most frequently provided suggestion is to give preservice teachers experiences with working with children who live in poverty or who have trauma at home (socio-economic and socio-emotional diversity). Many administrators suggested having preservice teachers work with students in Title 1 schools as part of their placement requirement and having the students become more aware of the difficulties of home life that impact children (AD140). One administrator (AD135) suggested preservice teachers explore situations that they may not have experienced before, such as using a poverty simulation to teach preservice teachers about the impacts of poverty on children. Another (AD205) suggested having preservice teachers understand how trauma at home impacts the student's life and schooling.

In contradiction to the positive comments about diverse placements and experiences, some administrators suggested giving our students more varied placements (AD170, AD105, Z01). One rationalized that this provides preservice teachers an idea of the population or demographic that they want to work with when applying for jobs. A few administrators (AD190, AD235) discussed the importance of building the teacher's disposition so they can work with diverse students: "I just think that all of those components of having an understanding and being empathetic and trying to think from the student's point of view is super important." In short, they discussed the importance of having an empathetic disposition as teachers.

Regarding academic diversity, one administrator (AD105) suggested that we allow content area students to observe other content areas so that they can "take it all in." Another administrator discussed her wish to have our students leave UNG with an ESOL or Gifted endorsement. From an alumni's perspective, one UNG alumna (IT525) wished she had more experience in a self-contained classroom (but this is because she was interested in teaching in this particular type of classroom). As one can see, most suggestions revolve around providing additional opportunities to experience or understand socio-economic or -emotional diversity.

Summary.

It is important to note that there were some contradictions in comments regarding diversity (for example, interviewees provided both positive and negative comments when discussing the diverse placements/experiences of preservice teachers). These contradictions may be attributed to two things: (1) the program that the preservice teachers graduate from and (2) their varied field placement experiences. For example, candidates in the Elementary and Special Education program may have a lot more experience with academic diversity (and the differentiation of instruction) because they have four courses devoted to special education. In contrast, a preservice teacher specializing in middle grades or high school content area(s) will take only one special education course. Another possible cause of the contradiction may be the experience that students have in their field placement. Preservice teachers may be placed in a "diverse placement" without it being a Title 1 school. They could be placed in an ethnically diverse school that is within a high-socioeconomic region of the state. Preservice teachers would satisfy their "diverse placement" requirement by working in a culturally diverse school but would not experience the socio-economic diversity that one would typically experience at a Title 1 school.

Overall, there were many more positive comments about diversity than comments that indicated program opportunities for growth. The comments that indicated opportunities for growth were more about individual preservice teachers than about program-wide or college-wide issues,

as no patterns emerged from the comments. The feedback for improving the programs mainly revolved around providing students with a variety of diverse placements or course experiences, specifically ones that focus on Title 1 schools, children who live in poverty, or children who have experienced trauma in their lives.

Field Placement Experience

Institutionally, students' field placement experience is defined as "a distinctive characteristic of teacher preparation at the University of North Georgia is a commitment to providing long and intensive levels of clinical experience in public school classrooms." Entering their field placement experience, students have the ability to utilize their learned theory and pedagogy into practice. Students learn through teacher and student observation, creating lesson plans and curriculum, developing classroom management strategies, and begin to witness first-hand the challenges and successes that can occur in the classroom. Experiential learning that comes from the ability to participate in field placement experiences has been a positive predictor of preparedness, classroom success, and career retention. While this was not necessarily a topic posed for alumni and their employers, it is a topic that came up often enough to warrant its own code.

Strengths.

The most resounding strength of UNG's field placement experiences was the preparation for becoming a professional educator (Z04, AD110, AD135, AD185, Z01). Inductees' application of theory to practice was recognized by participants in their educational preparedness connected to entering the classroom (CUR01, Z04). In reflection, inductee teachers noted that working with teachers in their placements contributed to their future preparation. As one former student noted, "She prepared me in a lot of different ways. We worked up, and when I got the full load, she did a lot of just ... She let me go on everything" (IT515).

A noted reason for the recognized strengths of UNG's field placement experiences was in the year-long models (AD160, AD135, AD110, AD205). Educational administrators stated of UNG's inductee teachers, "we've found that they're typically more prepared. I think that is largely because of the fact that they're in a school for two complete years, or in schools for two complete years, and they stay in one school for each year, and they see the whole picture, and they build relationships among the staff" (AD 205). Having had previous experiences in schools led participants to positively express seeing growth between years and having a greater diversity of field experiences.

Inductee teachers expressed gaining characteristics during prior field placements that lead them to feel more confident in their current roles in the classroom (CUR01), increased ability to be flexible (Z 04), and increased understanding regarding the application of student data (Z04). Aspects of field experiences also grant students an opportunity to gain awareness of the ancillary aspects of collegial professional educators. Participants shared examples of recognizing challenges and understanding paperwork (Z01) as well as developing peer relationships (IT 535). Inductee teachers expressed that their field experiences offered the opportunities to get "involved with every aspect of the school building, the kids, your coworkers, administration. You know, the different meetings that we have set up throughout the day. I think just really being immersed in the environment of teaching is very eye-opening" (IT 520).

Opportunities for Growth.

Inductee teachers expressed a significant concern in academic assignments not preparing them for their field experiences or not being aligned with expectations of entering the classroom. Understanding the purpose or methodology of observation (IT545), developing applicable lesson plans (IT515), as well as being prepared to work and empathize with parents (IT500) were all noted as challenges entering field placement experiences. Suggestions for "altering some of the assignments so that they're more in line with what's actually going on in our student teaching. Some of the lesson plans that we were required to teach were not conducive to real world, and it was sometimes uncomfortable to ask our mentor teachers to have to teach it" (Z04) were provided to help better prepare students to enter their field placements.

Another opportunity for growth identified by participants was in preparation for working in diverse school settings. Inductee teachers felt ill-prepared to address unfamiliar behavioral issues, such as preparing IEPs and managing physical altercations (IT540, IT560). Inductee teachers would have appreciated having a better understanding of cultural bias and issues that occur in the classroom (IT500). As well, administrators felt more detailed preparedness for working with SPED and ELL students could be incorporated into both pedagogy and field experiences (AD135).

Summary.

UNG was well recognized in utilizing the field placement experiences to best prepare pre-service teachers for their future roles in the classroom. Their previous classroom knowledge set the foundation for preservice teachers to apply theory into their initial immersion into the classroom, and they were well supported by field supervisors: "I definitely really like how often you guys check in. I think that's really good and I think you give realistic answers to your students" (MT206). Inductee teachers were recognized for being "very prepared, knowledgeable about standards, and activities, and how to work with students who were having difficulties" (MT204).

While the opportunity for growth stated by participants revolved around more experiential assignment alignment and preparedness for diverse settings and behavioral issues, these concerns can still uncover potential learning opportunities for new teachers. Field placement experiences permit students to get the opportunity to not only learn about the type of educator they would like to be, but the type of institution they may seek to teach in: "And, I think I had just enough of the taste of everything to be able to make an educated choice on where I wanted to teach, or how I would teach in those different circumstances and not upset the relationships with the teachers that I was with" (IT560).

The overall strengths of the field placement experience in preparation, duration, and gaining awareness of secondary experiences, were summarized by one administrator: "I believe they are very well prepared. You're looking at students with two years of experience from the start of the school day to the end of the school day. So, they're not just seeing a block of time, but the entire day. And we are immersing them in to really see what it's like to have that classroom, the paperwork that goes into it, the meetings before school, after school. So, I think they are very well prepared" (Z01).

Pedagogy

Pedagogy can be defined as the practice or art of teaching. It may include teaching styles, instructional strategies, or theoretical models used in engaging and reaching every learner. Within the context of the interviews, examples of pedagogy focused on engagement, critical thinking

strategies, using data to drive instruction and differentiate, and the need for greater preparation in the area of literacy instruction.

Strengths.

Student engagement was emphasized in the responses of several interviewees when asked about strengths in pedagogy. Administrators described specific engagement methods they observed in inductee teachers, including games, centers, hands-on activities, and creating engaging learning environments through flexible seating, themed walls, and activities (AD180, AD220). One summarized the ability of teachers to relate to students better by "just tapping into their interests but also making it relevant, making the content relevant to whatever is going on" and "to relate things to what the kids are interested in these days" (AD180). Another administrator summarized this as a strength of UNG by saying, "I think North Georgia is giving them the skills to do that and not line up 25 desks in a row and sit and teach in the front…They realize you've got to keep the kids engaged" (AD225). One inductee teacher mentioned feeling prepared in this area through the resources they developed in the program for use in the classroom and developing the structure of lesson planning (IT555).

Within the element of student engagement is the ability to keep students cognitively engaged and appropriately challenged. Several administrators described the ability of inductee teachers to teach critical thinking and problem-solving skills, whether it be in math (AD180) or in the toolbox of overall strategies (AD185, AD220, AD235). One focused on an inductee teacher's use of questioning and the incorporation of higher-level thinking strategies, asking students "to think about, look about, analyze, compare, and contrast" (AD235). Another described the "cognitive struggle" that comes with appropriate challenge and critical thinking, saying, "She's taught them to be okay with the healthy struggle of not knowing the answer. But let's figure it out" (AD185).

The appropriate challenge for every student is essential for meaningful learning within the classroom. Administrators interviewed highlighted differentiation as a strength for several inductee teachers, with one indicating the inductee teacher held high expectations for all students (AD170, AD190, AD200). Within a classroom of diverse learners, inductee teachers used regular feedback and instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of the students in the classroom, according to the observations of these administrators. One mentioned the teacher meeting the needs of ELL students well (AD200). Another summarized this as a strength of the UNG program by saying, "I think they come out with a good understanding of every child learns differently, every child's going to be performing at different levels, and I, the teacher need to provide for those levels" (AD190).

Interviewees discussing the C&I program elaborated on the critical thinking aspect by discussing the concept of teachers as lifelong learners themselves. One administrator commented that the teacher had learned to be a "critical consumer" of research and pedagogy (AD195). One of the alumni mentioned a changing mindset to always consider the rationale behind the chosen research-based strategies being applied in the classroom. This teacher highlighted the need to be a "constant learner" (CUR4). Graduates of the C&I program were also highlighted as demonstrating strengths in the process of planning and instruction and in being flexible to try new strategies and modes of teaching (AD170, AD230).

Opportunities for Growth.

While the primary opportunity for growth mentioned by administrators was not clearly and explicitly connected to UNG programs, a few administrators discussed the overall opportunity for growth of new teachers in the area of literacy. One stated the following of incoming teachers: "I know I don't think our teachers come out with a strong enough pedagogy around literacy and a breadth of understanding" (AD195). Another pointed to a specific need for teachers to have a better understanding of phonics and phonemic awareness, along with overall research-based literacy strategies (AD215).

In the area of engagement, one administrator described a specific difficulty with a graduate in the classroom as being more personality-related than a lack of knowledge or effort. The interviewee noted that the teacher's thinking "is academic and maybe a disconnect between the age...when you're seven, eight, nine, like I've got to get to this level, I've got to come down to this level and engage and bring them back up with us. It's like some things go over the students' heads" (AD230). The administrator indicated this was a skill that was being addressed and developed.

Suggestions.

As mentioned in the previous section, several administrators stressed the importance of incorporating the teaching of research-based strategies within educator preparation programs, especially in the area of literacy (AD175, AD215). One believed this was necessary in order for new teachers to have a good foundation of knowledge and to be able to jump in and contribute as they enter the profession and work with a planning team. One of the C&I graduates felt prepared in the area of literacy, stating a strength was "reading content instruction just because we had so much of a focus on how to be an effective reading teacher" (CUR3). While this difference in perception was not necessarily between interviewees at the same site or within the same district, it could highlight the need for a more explicit and consistent focus on the overall application of research-based instructional strategies throughout the programs.

Related to the element of differentiation discussed earlier as a strength in the UNG programs, one administrator offered an overall suggestion for educator preparation programs to ensure they are adequately preparing teachers to use data to drive instruction, including the use of pre-assessments (AD190). In order for teachers to effectively address the needs of each learner within the classroom, ongoing assessment is essential. The administrator described the necessary process of "using that data to really look at and decide what do these children need, because I have this information? And then taking that data and planning lessons, activities using strategies that are different based on where kids are."

Summary.

Overall, the perception of UNG programs and graduates among interviewees was positive as it relates to pedagogy, including engagement, critical thinking, and differentiation. The areas mentioned as overall opportunities for growth or as suggestions for new teachers, and those who prepare them, were centered on research-based practices, specifically in the area of literacy and data-driven instruction. These are all areas of emphasis in classrooms today and certainly are already at the forefront of what is taught in classrooms within UNG programs. However, knowledge of these perceptions could lead to a more intentional and consistent focus on the practical application of these essential skills. One administrator summarized well the strength of a good teacher who simply knows good teaching, saying, "She knows best teaching practice, and I feel like she's been successful because of that" (AD220).

Professional Dispositions

The term "disposition" used within our coding contained example terms and keywords rather than a formal definition. Some keywords that were coded and discussed were adaptability, coachability, confidence, ethics/ethical, flexibility, growth-mindset, initiative, problem-solving, professionalism, reflectiveness, respect, willingness, willingness to ask for help, and willingness to admit one does not know something. Throughout the codes, many administrators, mentor teachers, and inductees mentioned these attributes, either explicitly or implicitly.

Strengths.

There was an overwhelmingly positive tone when describing the dispositions of preservice teachers as well as inductee teachers (AD225, AD200, AD190, AD202, MT210). Overall, the perspective of the interviewees was that UNG graduates were prepared for the profession when starting their teaching careers (AD145, AD105, AD200, AD190, AD160) – they knew what to expect, they knew how to act, and they were ready to jump in.

The most discussed positive disposition was "taking initiative." It was mentioned by nine interviewees (AD130, AD225, AD230, AD220, AD135, AD140, AD185, AD160, AD101). The administrators were impressed by how UNG alumni "took initiative" in teaching, collaboration, and extracurricular activities. The second most frequently mentioned positive disposition was how well UNG alumni interacted with administration, colleagues, parents, and students. Professional interaction was mentioned five times (AD205, AD180, AD230, AD170, AD150). Other positive dispositions that were mentioned five times were (1) the students' ability to collaborate with colleagues (AD175, AD105, AD235, AD185, AD101); (2) being reflective practitioners or being self-aware of one's own needs for support (AD175, AD530, AD105, AD235, AD185); and (3) willingness (AD105, AD185, AD130, AD101, MT206). The disposition of "willingness" described by interviewees varied: It included helping out wherever needed, the willingness to ask questions, and the willingness to learn.

There were other positive dispositions mentioned, as well, though not as frequently.

Positive Disposition	Number of Times Mentioned	The Interviewees Who Mentioned the Disposition
Confidence	4	(AD 130, AD 195, MT 210, MT 204)
Integrity/Character	3	(AD 230, AD 165, AD 101)
Community Orientated	3	(AD 145, AD 105, AD 200)
Strong Work Ethic	3	(AD 145, AD 560, AD 225)
Asks questions	3	(AD 115, AD 190, AD 160)
Positive Attitude	2	(AD 185, AD 115)
"Growth Mindset" orientated	2	(MT 206; AD 105)

From an inductee teacher's perspective, there was one alumnus who mentioned that the program prepared him/her to juggle a lot at one time. The program was so rigorous that he/she was able to experience what it felt like to be a first-year teacher. Looking back, the program allowed him/her to figure out how to handle the stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed before starting his/her career.

Opportunities for Growth.

There were two comments regarding dispositional opportunities for growth that were mentioned more than once by different interviewees. The first comment was about the inductee teachers' confidence levels. The interviewees (AD210, AD230, AD220, CUR2) noticed that the inductees were not always confident at the beginning. One administrator (AD205) specifically said that the new teacher had trouble finding his/her voice and had a difficult time with the command of the class. The second most common dispositional opportunity for growth discussed (AD205, AD180, MT210) was having to figure out the appropriate relationship dynamics between teacher and students. More specifically, the preservice and inductee teachers needed to figure out how to be the teacher in the classroom and not the children's friend. It seems that preservice and inductee teachers have difficulty navigating this relationship because beginning teachers try to build positive relationships with children by becoming their friends rather than building a positive relationship as the adult in the dynamic. It is important to mention that other dispositional opportunities for growth were mentioned too (e.g., leadership, asking for help, accepting help, handling constructive feedback, remaining positive when things don't go as planned, taking initiative). However, these comments only appeared once in the coding, and patterns did not emerge.

Suggestions.
The interviewees did not give any recommendations for ways to improve dispositions. Instead, interviewees mentioned dispositions that they valued as administrators or mentor teachers. These perspectives provide insight into the dispositional traits which are important to administrators. The most common underlying theme woven throughout valued dispositions is having a "growth mindset" – the idea that people should always be improving their craft of teaching. This theme was evident when interviewees mention that (1) it was important for new teachers to be "coachable" (AD180); (2) inductees don't act like a "know-it-all" (AD180); (3) new teachers be willing to ask for help or feedback and make changes based on advice (AD175); (4) inductees be willing to accept constructive feedback and act on it (AD125, Z01); and (5) new teachers be reflective in their teaching practices (AD125, AD175). Other dispositions that interviewees mentioned as valuable were flexibility (MT204), taking initiative and being eager to serve (AD235 and 180, respectively), taking on leadership roles (AD235), and being a team player (AD135).

Summary.
Overall, there were many more positive comments about the new teachers' dispositions than there were concerns. Many interviewees stated that UNG graduates are prepared for the profession when they start their teaching careers. Moreover, the comments provided by the interviewees gave us advantageous insight into the dispositional qualities that administrators value, such as having a "growth mindset," being "coachable," and being "open to feedback."

Social Growth of P-12 Students
Social growth in children is an important part of teaching. For coding purposes this term relates to how children learn to interact with others and build relationships. Children's social growth was not significantly discussed by interviewees. Only 13 administrators and four inductees made any comments about how their school, UNG inductees, and UNG graduates fostered the social growth of students. The need to teach for social as well as academic growth was emphasized by several administrators (AD18, AD28, 180). Teaching "the whole child, not just academically,

but how can we help them in other aspects as well" was stressed by Administrator 180. One administrator (AD18) framed the discussion in terms of "students with emotional needs and special [education] who just have either behavior contracts, or an IST or an SST for behaviors."

Often, these administrators discussed specific strategies that their schools implemented to help foster social growth. Administrator 18 reported that at their school, they "purchased a sensory path for brain breaks that all our students use." Another administrator (AD28) offered, "I'm a strong proponent of… really teaching more social-emotional [growth]." In their school, they address social growth by having students, "watch a little video about it, talk about it, read a book…. or going over it with kids in social-emotional time." The use of brief social exercises was discussed by one Administrator (AD18): "we all have social-emotional learning programs, structures in place…. ours is a specific time, about 10 minutes and it involves... specific lessons that we use through our program." Administrator 25 also commented about the value of brief lessons to help children develop socially: "We started morning meetings last year. Incorporating that has given [teachers] an avenue to incorporate some social/emotional in using PBIS."

Inductee teachers who discussed the social growth of students talked about the importance of addressing students' social development. One inductee (IT505) felt it was important for students to learn, "how to control their emotions and their responses to things." Another inductee teacher (I1) discussed social growth in the context of their special education classroom, "my classroom is a moderate and severe classroom, so we deal with a lot of functional life skills more so. They're all non-verbal."

Strengths.

Nine administrators (AD 18, 25, 160, 165, 170, 175, 180, 190, 235) made positive remarks about the ability of UNG graduates to address the social development needs of their students. The ability of inductee teachers to build positive relationships with their students was mentioned by two administrators, one who shared that one of their inductees, "does a great job of building relationships with her students… I think that relationship piece overall has really been beneficial for them" (AD25). Another felt that the ability to build relationships with students was evident in many UNG prepared teachers: "there is a good emphasis on building relationships and I see that across the board" (AD18). Several administrators made other positive comments about specific inductees and how they addressed the social needs of their students. These comments include, "she taught them to speak to one another, and I see that also in these two classes;" adding that this inductee, "is using a lot of great strategies to engage her students with one another, teaching them to agree and disagree appropriately through conversation" (AD25). Administrator 160 commented about one of their inductee teachers, "her students need a lot of the social and emotional learning techniques, she does a very excellent job." Administrator 165 noted that their inductee teacher, "creates a climate of inclusion in her classroom. As a result, her students feel supported and she's able to work with them that way." Another theme that came up was that several administrators (AD18, AD165, AD175) felt that UNG prepared teachers were willing to try new things to help foster the social growth of their students. For example, while discussing the "7 Mindsets" program, it was noted that one inductee, "embodies that in working with those particular lessons" (AD165).

Inductees most often talked about children's social development in terms of specific examples of social growth they noted in their students. While discussing one of her students, Inductee Teacher 515 commented, "just seeing the development of just being able to communicate is awesome [and] that she was able to communicate by the end of the school year with me and getting what she needed." Some of these inductee teachers talked about social growth in terms of

strategies they used to address it: "I am constantly tracking data, so that's how I know that we're making the progress that we need to make" (I1). Graduates from the C&I Master's program also made comments about how their students grew socially. One of these teachers (CUR2) proudly shared about one boy in her class; "he's now raising his hand asking, 'Hey, I don't want to sit here,' or he's telling us instead of getting angry and doing those types of behaviors." There was one comment made that could be directly attributed to how UNG is preparing future teachers to foster the social growth of students. When discussing their pre-service teaching experience, Inductee Teacher Z05 stated that "it helped me really prepare on how to talk to these kids and how to be sensitive to these kids' needs."

Opportunities for Growth.

The only group to comment about perceived opportunities for growth in preparing pre-service teachers to foster the social development of their students were administrators, and only three offered any feedback. When asked if the inductee teachers were being successful in building their students' social skills, Administrator 110 responded, "I don't think they are." Administrator 180 gave some insights into why teaches were struggling; "Sometimes, that's tough to convince them that it's okay to get to know the kids and to do the social-emotional part." This administrator was careful to point out that the problem teachers have when working with student's social growth is common, "across the board, even with graduate students," and that, "older teachers, also but newer teachers, are not coming out prepared for those new challenges." There were no opportunities for growth discussed by either mentor teachers or UNG alumni.

Suggestions for Improvement.

The prevailing consensus from the three administrators who made suggestions for improvement involve including more opportunities in UNG's preservice program to learn strategies for developing students' social growth. There were no specific suggestions for how to do that, or what strategies might be successful, just an emphasis on a need to have, "more preparation in the emotional stuff" (AD18). Administrators Three and Four (AD110) agreed that a greater emphasis on teaching pre-service teachers about the social growth of students is "an area that needs to be improved everywhere" (AD3). Administrator 18 talked about why there is such a great need; "younger students we're seeing [have] a lack of emotional regulation… and this is a newer trend…. that that will become a bigger part of teacher education programs…. because that is huge and we're not seeing that go away. That trend is only increasing at the elementary level."

Summary.

The topic of the social growth of students was not a predominant one during these interviews. Social development was talked about mostly by administrators who discussed specific strategies being implemented in their schools. There were a number of compliments about specific inductee teachers and how well they were able to meet the needs of their students for social growth. While administrators discussed what they observed with their teachers, teachers most often talked about what they saw with their students. Both groups provided some concrete examples of how UNG prepared teachers were able to meet the needs for social growth with their students. While several administrators recognized that there is a need for more training for social development in students, they recognized that this is a problem faced by teachers at all experience levels and not unique to UNG or its graduates.

Technology

Broadly speaking, technology includes the use of a wide range of scientific tools used in the pursuit of knowledge, including non-digital equipment such as microscopes and thermometers. However, in the context of the interviews conducted as part of our review, technology has a much narrower definition. Therefore, for coding purposes, technology in the educational setting is a term that applies to the use of digital tools and resources to communicate, find and share information, solve problems, conduct investigations, and design solutions. Codes used to explore the data include the general use of technology, technology applications for pre-service education, strengths, opportunities for growth, and suggestions for improvement. The preservice code refers to the use of technology occurring during the junior or senior year prior to graduation from the University of North Georgia, including references to coursework and field or clinical placement. When asked about the use of technology in the classroom interviewees most often discussed technology in terms of specific applications such as social media or Google classroom, specific equipment such as Chromebooks or iPads, or specific purposes such as communication or assessment. There were no references made to the use of technology outside of digital equipment such as computers or tablets.

While there was a general consensus about how administrators, mentors, and former UNG students defined technology, there was also widespread agreement about its importance in the classroom. One administrator (AD101) advised, "the way we teach is changing so quickly and our expectations of students from five years ago to now is so different. What we expect them to be able to do is so different." Five administrators (AD 19, AD22, AD130, AD185, AD230) emphasized the importance of technology use at their schools by advising that there is now a one-to-one ratio of computers or tablets to students in their classrooms. However, there was great variation in the expectations for which digital tools are the most useful in the classroom. Learning platforms were discussed most frequently with three administrators (AD21, AD135, AD 155) who advocated for the importance of *Google Classroom* and one (AD1) discussed *Its Learning*. The use of Social Media was a concern brought up by several administrators (AD25, AD200, AD230) although the level of utilization ranged from, "we don't really use social media" (AD25), to "we use social media in the building" (AD200). As discussed later, the use of social media was most often an area of concern for administrators. Inductee teachers discussed technology more often in terms of specific applications such as *Nearpod* which was mentioned most frequently (IT4, IT505, IT560), *Kahootz,* and *Poll Everywhere.* Tools such as a *Ladybug Camera* were mentioned once by an inductee teacher (IT155) and cell phones only once and in a negative context by one administrator (AD21).

Strengths.

Without a doubt, there was a general consensus among administrators and mentor teachers that UNG teacher education graduates were well prepared for using technology as an instructional tool. Twenty-six of the administrators (AD 1, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 25, 29, 30, 100, 101, 115, 130, 135, 140, 150, 155, 160, 170, 180, 185, 190, 200, 215, 235) praised the inductee teachers for their ability to use technology in the classroom. UNG teacher candidates are clearly able to use technology as indicated by their administrators; "they all come in very capable" (AD25), and "new hires from North Georgia, are very proficient technology-wise" (AD135). Administrators advised that UNG graduates not only know how to use technology but have a high level of understanding about the use of technology as effective instructional practice, including using applications that are, "way outside the box" (AD185). As an example, one administrator commented, "she's very

adept with technology, and is very hands-on in the classroom with it, and knows how to integrate it appropriately so her students are actively using (it) and participating" (AD170). Another administrator (AD29) commented:

> I remember going in there, going, 'Wow. It's amazing!'... she uses technology not just as a tool to make sure students are proficient with just skills, but she is guiding them to create their own stuff. She has them doing electronic portfolios to share. It was just ... it's amazing to watch.

Administrators also commented on the ability of UNG graduates to not only use digital resources in the classroom but that they have also become technology leaders in their schools. One administrator (AD160) stated that the inductor teacher *"leads professional learning with texts for our students and for our parents"* and another (AD100) claimed that "they're the leaders with technology" in his/her school.

Mentor teachers also discussed how well UNG prepared inductees were able to use technology. Seven of the mentor teachers interviewed (MT8, MT202, MT204, MT206, MT208, MT210, MT212) had nothing but praise for the inductee teachers' ability to use technology in the classroom. One mentor teacher (MT204) stated, "they're so much more knowledgeable with all the latest technologies;" and another, (MT208) claimed, "I see some cool stuff, what they're doing*."* Like the administrators, mentor teachers made specific references to using technology at a higher level of instructional practice. Mentor teacher 202 stated, "he was always able to bring in that engagement piece of the technology;" and another (MT204) elaborated that his/her mentee was, "technology savvy, very savvy with creating things." It should be noted that none of the mentor teachers provided any negative feedback about the ability of UNG prepared teachers to use technology in the classroom.

Former students talked most often about technology in specific terms about programs and applications they learned to use in their classes. While one student (IT500) made the broad statement, "I felt technology-wise, they prepared me," most shared that the importance of technology use in their classrooms was important and how they implement specific programs. IT520 shared, "I think that I became a little bit more comfortable with using a lot of different programs as far as technology goes." Several give credit to UNG for introducing them to technology applications that they feel are important to their success in the classroom. One graduate of the C&I program stated, "the lessons that they taught us were on Nearpod. But that was also to teach us how to use it within our classroom" (CUR3). A former student who is now teaching math commented that "the math technologies class was an interesting tool to stick in my toolbox" (IT535) and another former student (IT550) stated that:

> I learned how to use music writing software. I've been using it primarily for two reasons is writing warmups for each ensemble and I had a pep band and so arranging music. So yeah, that was definitely a skill that I learned at UNG was how to use that.

Opportunities for Growth.
There were very few opportunities for growth cited by any groups interviewed. Two administrators (AD1, AD105) felt that UNG graduates were not familiar with their school's learning platform and/or student learning management platform. It should be noted (as referenced in the introduction) that different schools and systems use different instructional platforms (Google Classroom, ItsLearning, etc.) and that UNG serves a wide range of counties and school districts such that access to and instruction on all systems used would not be possible. Of greater concern is a potential opportunity for growth for inductee teachers to understand and utilize social media

appropriately. One administrator (AD1) indicated that in regards to social media, "they've all struggled with it." Another administrator (AD145) went further to claim that the use of social media is a problem beyond just the inductee teachers, but, "a struggle we see; we see it with our own teachers, to be honest with you." Although only one administrator suggested UNG graduates fall short with using technology as a high-level instructional strategy, it is an important concern. According to this interviewee, "I do not see them using technology to produce anything. I think they're consumers of technology, not producers with technology. So, I don't see them coding. I don't see them doing any of that" (AD215).

While there were no opportunities for growth cited by mentor teachers, there were a few shortcomings mentioned by former students. Two UNG graduates, one in the C&I program, indicated that the technology they learned to use in their classes were research-related and not helpful for implementing a technology-rich classroom environment. When asked about preparing graduates to use technology in the classroom one graduate commented, "It's all research-based. I mean we did research and I can't pinpoint any one thing. So, no, not exactly" (CI1). Another stated, "the ones from the education college, the research class, I don't anticipate myself using that unless I'm going to go and write a research paper" (IT535). The only other opportunities for growth cited were from inductee teachers. One felt that while he/she learned technology applications, they were not helpful applications at an early childhood level: "I learned a lot of technology, but it's kind of hard with kindergarten. Like, Nearpod and stuff, it's just not working with them" (IT510). A final concern came from Inductee Teacher 515 who stated, "I just wanted to know more specifics of what we can do with it." To summarize, the opportunities for growth stated by former UNG students were limited to the types of programs introduced at UNG and how to best utilize them as a learning tool.

Suggestions.

Administrators provided the greatest number of recommendations for improving the quality of the program in terms of preparing graduates to implement technology resources in the classroom. While several administrators had concerns about the graduates' use of social media, one made a specific recommendation for the importance of, "reinforcing the critical need to be very careful with social media is very important" (AD110). Another area of concern summarized as an opportunity for growth related to the ability of students to use a variety of learning platforms. One administrator suggested that UNG could consider, "exposing them to all of the different up and coming platforms" (AD21). An important and related suggestion came from another administrator (AD1) who discussed the importance of learning technology from an instructional management perspective; "they've had experience from the student side, but not from the teacher side in how to manage the learning platform." The most common suggestion, coming from seven different administrators (AD15, AD22, AD110, AD130, AD135, AD155, AD215), relates to the common theme of learning to use technology as a problem-solving tool and high-level instructional strategy. Administrator 155 agreed that what they "would like to see more of is just some more of that, more 21st-century skills." Another administrator elaborated on the importance of teaching students "the use of technology for students to produce, not just to get on and play a game or to whatever. But the use of technology to produce a product" (AD110). The final suggestion made by administrators relates to the importance of providing instruction on the appropriate use of technology: "(they) probably need more emphasis on the appropriate use of (technology) because it's second nature to students coming out of college now, they may not realize the consequences of letting a child just go with technology" (AD135).

While mentor teachers made no recommendations, there was one former student who made suggestions for improvement. This inductee teacher (530) would have liked to learn about the specific grading platform at his/her school and suggested, "knowing how to work Infinite Campus, 'cause I messed up the recommendations for it this year for next year." This graduate further suggested, *"maybe a class on how to hit the save button"* might have been helpful. Overall, there were few suggestions for improving UNG's program to prepare graduates to use technology in the classroom.

Summary.

The strengths of the UNG program in preparing graduates to use technology in the classroom far exceeded either the opportunities for growth cited or suggestions made for improvement. All categories of interviewees, administrators, mentor teachers, and graduates, cited a great variety of strengths. These included the ability of former students to use technology and digital resources for instruction in multiple ways, and implementing a wide range of applications for teaching and learning. The use of high-level instructional practice for technology was seen as both a strength by some and an opportunity for growth by others. This suggests that practice utilizing technology as a producer, rather than as a consumer, is not being consistently implemented across programs and courses in UNG's teacher preparation program. The high level of concern for social media responsibility was another theme that appeared consistently by administrators, but not mentioned at all by mentor teachers or graduates. This suggests that this is an area that students may not realize is a problem and might need more emphasis. While a number of specific applications were mentioned as both a strength or opportunity for growth, the most common shortcoming is in the area of preparing students to work is in the area of specific learning platforms, according to the current program in use by a variety of schools and districts. This action might not be a feasible option to consider. However, the suggestion made by one administrator (AD1) to prepare graduates to think about how best to use learning platforms from an instructional perspective might be worthy of consideration. Overall, the extensive list of compliments about UNG graduates from administrators and mentor teachers, as well as specific strengths mentioned by former students, with few criticisms or complaints, provides ample evidence of the effectiveness of the program in preparing future teachers to appropriately use technology in the classroom.

Discussion and Implications

In presenting the perceived opportunities for growth in our EPP as related to our graduates' impact on their current P-12 students, it should be noted that the praise for UNG's graduates and programs from administrators, mentors, and inductee teachers is significant compared to the shortcomings or suggestions for improvement. Thus, providing overwhelming evidence that, in spite of the challenges that differentiation presents to educators at all levels of experience, teachers from UNG's program are well prepared to teach students in the classroom. It is important to remember that in reading this report there was not a single overriding concern about educator preparation held by all; rather individual concerns held by some that were specific to their context. While opportunities for growth are cited by different individuals in the course of our interviews, there are three predominant themes that emerged in the data. First, many of our alumni struggle with understanding the complexities of teaching during their first years. Second, they bring a limited perspective to their role as a classroom teacher because their experience is limited. And finally, many new teachers have an apparent lack of confidence that prevents them from being as

effective as they might otherwise be upon entering the classroom. By addressing these perceived weaknesses, our educator preparation faculty can work to improve our curricula so that we are better able to continue producing highly prepared and effective graduates in an ever-changing world.

The art of teaching is indeed a juggling act, requiring effective educators to multi-task and simultaneously address a variety of student needs. Teachers need an understanding of how all the parts of teaching work together; includes strategies, skills, communication, uses of data, relationship boundaries. All tasks must happen simultaneously and seamlessly for effective instruction to occur. As indicated by more than one administrator, even experienced teachers struggle with juggling all the tasks for successful teaching that are required at the same time. Our alumni are no exception. In some cases when discussing our alumni's weaknesses, administrators talked about teacher shortcomings in terms of classroom management; including the need to learn to manage student behavior in classrooms with multiple IEPs for diverse needs and developing strategies to motivate positive behaviors. Some administrators discussed shortcomings in terms of specific teaching domains. For example, Reading is a specific content and pedagogical area that was noted with concern in several conversations. In our interviews with administrators and teachers, we did find that there are varying impressions of how reading should be taught and there were multiple reading programs mentioned. Administrators explained that new teachers are prepared with a philosophy of how to teach reading and an understanding of why it is important, but they are lacking in specific strategies to teach reading. This is not a universal concern, though, as we had other graduates who felt their reading preparation was strong. Several administrators addressed a concern about the ability of our graduates to use data to drive instruction, and the need to develop a richer pallet of strategies across the board to implement based on assessment data. Other suggestions for growth included helping our preservice teachers learn how to manage documentation of student learning, working with specific instructional platforms, presenting students with more rigorous learning opportunities, and developing communication skills for dealing with parents and students about "difficult conversations" regarding behavior or performance in the classroom. It must be recognized that all of these skills put together are a complex set of behaviors that inductee teachers often can only learn through experience. Administrators interviewed indicated an awareness that these are weaknesses for all new educators, not just those from our program; and that additional experience and maturity as educators will allow the inductee teacher to grow the complex skill sets needed to be successful. This theme is especially founded in the data discussed in classroom management and communication, which are known to be two of the most challenging areas for new and veteran teachers alike.

A second broad theme relates to the limited perspective our graduates bring to the role of teaching. The data from our interviews suggest that they often have a lack of understanding about the broad spectrum of factors that influence what happens in the classroom; including students' academic performance and behaviors. The limited perspective includes a range of ideas, from not understanding the transfer of learning from one grade to the next or one subject to the other, to an inability of teachers to recognize when a student's behavior patterns are contributing to his/her academic struggles. Several administrators felt that our graduates could benefit from working in more diverse school settings, as well as develop a better understanding of cultural bias and issues that occur in the classroom. While the ability to use a variety of differentiation strategies is seen as a strength for our graduates, some administrators suggested that the inductee teachers needed a broader understanding of what differentiation means in a broader context; for example,

understanding the root causes for why students struggle and why different strategies work for different students. The lack of cultural diversity is also a recognized shortcoming, with a need for our graduates to become more aware of cultural biases, the impacts of poverty on children, and the difficulties of home life that impact children. This limited perspective is seen as an area for growth for our students.

Finally, a lack of confidence is a third theme that emerged as a shortcoming from our interview data. It should be noted that nearly every administrator that commented on various aspects of this theme indicated that this is a common problem for all new teachers that develops with time and experience. While classroom management was often cited as a strength, it is also seen as a potential area of improvement when rooted in our alumni's lack of confidence in the classroom. In some cases, inductee teachers have trouble finding their voice and have a difficult time with the command of the class. They need to learn to "not be so agreeable," and to assume their role as "the boss." Sometimes the lack of conference manifests in their relationships with parents. They are seen as, "hesitant," "nervous," or "intimidated" by parent/teacher communication, especially when it relates to discussions about difficult topics. Sometimes UNG alumni are seen as reluctant to take initiative or assert themselves as professionals in collaboration with their peers. It takes time for developing teachers to know their strengths and to understand what it is they must do to be successful, then to engage in professional collaborations based on their individual strengths. This lack of confidence is summarized as an inability to step into the role of the teacher, take charge, and take ownership of the role.

It is important to remember that in reading this report there was not a single overriding concern about educator preparation held by all, rather specific concerns held by some that were specific to their context. The themes that emerged as weaknesses in our alumni, including a limited perspective, a lack of confidence, and a broad understanding of teaching as a complex process, are common areas of concern for new educators. By addressing these themes in a holistic approach to the teaching profession, our faculty may be able to better help prepare our future teachers to be more confident in themselves through their preparation upon entering the classroom.

In all areas, the pervasive theme that emerged from interviews of administrators, mentors and inductee teachers is that our alumni present a range of strengths conducive to effective teaching, with the general consensus that UNG teachers are highly prepared and effective in terms of P-12 students' learning and development. In fact, administrators and alumni alike noted that graduates from UNG are ready to begin teaching from the first day. In general, three different themes emerged from interview data when reviewing the strengths of the UNG teacher education program. First, that our teachers are prepared and ready to teach upon entering the classroom. Second, that they demonstrate a high degree of professionalism. And finally, they are effective at building positive relationships and rapport with students, peers, colleagues, and parents of their students. These strengths, as discussed by administrators, mentors, and UNG alumni during interviews, speak to the overall effectiveness of the teacher preparation program at the University of North Georgia.

One of the most prevalent themes to emerge was how well-prepared UNG alumni are as first-year teachers. Administrators, mentors, and alumni alike noted that graduates from UNG have the knowledge and expertise to begin teaching from the first day in their classroom. UNG alumni possess the skills and strategies to be successful educators within both the cognitive and affective domains of teaching. These strengths include a solid foundation of pedagogy, strong content knowledge, the ability to meet the diverse needs of students through differentiation, and, generally, a strong foundation in classroom management. Other areas in which UNG alumni were well

prepared for teaching include the ability to write lesson plans, assess student progress, and gather, analyze, and utilize summative data in their teaching. Alumni from our program were often seen as strong leaders, with the ability to take initiative. Specific engagement methods observed in inductee teachers included the use of games, centers, hands-on activities, and the ability to create effective learning environments through flexible seating, themed walls, and activities. We know from other assessments that differentiation is similarly a challenge for both teacher candidates and veteran teachers. Counterintuitively, when we investigated this skill, we found that there was a surprising amount of recognition for our graduates' skills in differentiating. In fact, 24 administrators expressed positive impressions about the inductee teachers' performance in differentiating, and they were impressed by their application of differentiation in their classrooms and with how they shared ideas with their colleagues. The use of technology in teaching was another area in which UNG prepared educators seemed to excel in the classroom. In general, most administrators and mentor teachers felt the inductee teachers from the UNG educator preparation program were well prepared and demonstrated the necessary competencies needed to be successful upon entering the classroom.

A second theme that emerged was the high level of professionalism apparent in interactions with their peers, their administrators, the community, and the profession as UNG graduates moved into the classroom. Our graduates come to the teaching profession prepared to collaborate with a team of their peers in a wide range of contexts and for a variety of purposes. They demonstrate a high level of professionalism whether they are working with administration, colleagues, parents, or students. Inductee teachers from our REPP also respond well to support provided by colleagues and administrators. The UNG prepared educators are seen as willing to embrace different cultures at the school level, being "very community-oriented," with a focus on service-learning. They possess an astute awareness of the ancillary aspects of collegial professional educators. Clearly, one of the most resounding strengths of UNG's program is how well alumni are prepared to interact with all stakeholders in their role as an educator in a highly professional manner.

A final strength of the graduates of UNG's teacher preparation program is that they are effective at building positive relationships and rapport with students and their parents. Administrators and mentor teachers alike commented frequently about the ability of UNG prepared teachers to develop a caring connection with their students and create a positive classroom environment. They are seen as demonstrating a genuine interest in their students as individuals and building positive relationships with them by engaging in conversation. They are good at communicating with parents, even when they are a bit nervous about it, and put their students' needs first by developing a caring connection and creating a positive classroom environment. The ability to build positive relationships and rapport with students was cited frequently as one of the greatest strengths of UNG prepared educators.

While the UNG teacher education graduates had multiple strengths upon entering the classroom, they are seen as being highly effective, well-prepared educators who possess a great variety of skills and strategies to help them be successful in the classroom. They are good at planning, using technology, differentiating, and assessing student learning. They are also seen as highly professional educators, who take initiative and collaborate well with their peers. Their professionalism extends beyond the work setting into the broader community of their schools. Finally, UNG alumni are good at building relationships with students and use a variety of strategies to maintain a positive rapport. These strengths of our alumni present a picture of a program that is dedicated to producing highly effective educators with the knowledge, skills, and training to be successful in the classroom.

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The nature of qualitative methodology lends itself to a need for transparency of the distinguishing features of the subject of an investigation. Unless there are similarities to our EPP, the findings from our work are likely not useful to those who are outside of the EPP, unless they are a partner with a vested interest. The intent of this investigation was that of a self-analysis conducted by the faculty of the programs under review and for the purpose of continuous improvement. Therefore, the "lessons learned" that we will discuss are also ways in which we can conduct a better case investigation as we move forward.

It could be beneficial to provide interviewees with a definition of some aspects of our questions. This was most noticeable in our results when we asked the following interview question about diversity: "In what ways do you think these first-year teachers were prepared to work with diverse students?" We need to be very specific about what we are referring to and possibly expand our questions to include different types of diversity. As seen in the code results discussion above, our question about diversity was interpreted widely. The same is true of technology--there are many different ways of talking about technology in relation to teaching and learning, and we may need to be more specific about the use of technology as a learning and teaching tool.

Finally, this project was a large undertaking for our faculty. From what we have learned about our programs and our candidates' needs, there are many avenues for us to study the improvements we will make to our programs since we have identified the needs. Our faculty expressed an interest in continuing the self-study process of conducting qualitative interviews, but they would like to do so with the goals of working towards continuous improvement and conducting research.

Appendix A

Analysis of Education Leadership Tier 1 Program at UNG
by Jimmy Zoll, Sheri Hardee, Catherine Rosa

Introduction

The Tier 1 program at the University of North Georgia was developed in alignment with the state change to a tiered system of principal certification. These changes were heavily influenced by work from organizations such as The Wallace Foundation. Their study, Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World, (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerso, & Orr, 2007), examined exemplary pre- and in-service programs. These programs include an emphasis on school improvement and instructional leadership along with student-centered instruction and a problem-based focus of theory and practice. Student portfolios with feedback from university and school mentors are part of a performance-based internship at the school site. These programs align with national standards led by faculty who are expert practitioners and follow a cohort model. Finally, the goal to find the best candidates through targeted recruitment. The UNG Tier program embeds all these characteristics.

The authors began a year-long qualitative study on the program. Data came from Likert-style surveys aligned with stated and national standards completed by those in the program and those who completed a year ago. This survey is used yearly to assess our program. Open-ended questions were also part of the survey. Focus groups were held with six participants who are current leaders in the field. The researchers came together to analyze the transcripts using in-vivo coding to make sure the participants' voice was heard (Saldaña, 2013). Six codes appeared: voice, perspective or lens, mindset, andragogy, agency, and collaboration. Themes were then developed as we re-coded the information. The focus group and surveys were supportive of the program, but an overarching theme with three sub-areas appeared. As these candidates entered new roles, there was a discomfort in what we call "the in-between" in that the naturally dichotomous nature of the classroom was no longer present. While this is normal and at times beneficial, three sub-themes emerged in our candidates' perceptions. These are: a sense of self as a leader transition of thinking and complexity of the position.

For our framework, we used the framework of the third space developed by Homi Bhabba (1994) which describes the space as decolonizing and linguistic. It is described as a necessary space for change to happen stating "Being in the 'beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space … But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revision time … to touch the future on its hither side" (p. 10). While we do not want to take away from the original intent, the theory has found a foothold in K-12 education, and we believe if firmly applies to the world of K-12 leadership.

Findings

Sense of Self in the 'In Between.'

In this liminal space, these leaders were unsure of their roles and who they wanted to be as leaders. Sense of self is a person's way of viewing themselves, their beliefs, and abilities in whatever situation (Combs, Miser, & Whitaker, 1999). Though they had been successful in their course work, they were unsure of how to operate in this new area and were often naïve. They also began to see that they had voice which was unusual for some of these candidates. One tells:

"Being a part of the leadership conversations with the admin team regarding colleagues that I was not previously a part of those conversations, performance-based conversations about and strategizing about instructional weaknesses on our faculty." Another says: "One respondent said it was the first time "…that you have face time and you have the opportunity to lead meetings and to make suggestions that can improve our effectiveness in schools and just really having, feeling like you have the opportunity and the voice to contribute in a meaningful way."

As they gain experience, their confidence grows, and they begin to have a more realistic view of the work. "I learned a lot from Tier 1 the program in that understanding that the community stakeholder group is really crucial to continuous school … As a classroom teacher, you get a little siloed in that you're responsible for those that are in your four walls." While they still might rely on the familiar, their sense of self as a leader seems to improve over time. They all agree with this statement made by one of their peers, "the program has given me a sense of assuredness with going to administration and asking to make changes in the sense that I feel like something is not working."

Transition of Thinking in the 'In Between.'

Moving into the third space, changed the way of thinking for many of these candidates. Working with adults along with a deeper understanding of law and policy contribute to this transition of thinking. One candidate's thoughts on leadership changed "I used to think that leadership was the people who worked really hard and stayed really late and were willing to do anything that people asked. And I think my understanding is now that leadership is inspiring others to be the ones who work late with you and are willing to try new things and jump in the deep end, as well. It's not just about being the hardest working person. It's about being a magnet that gets other people to do similar work alongside you, I guess."

Understanding of legal impact in a different way was captured by this respondent "You just look at things differently. Whereas, when I'm at the car ride line, you're putting scenarios through your head. What would happen if?" This was particularly true with special education causing one to state "Yeah, especially special ed laws. I'm nervous. It's like every time I open my mouth, I'm like let me check that." Unsurprisingly, those transitioning directly from the classroom, a space where they felt comfortable, experience much transition especially in the area of teacher evaluation. One says "but now as I'm going in, and I'm observing and I'm evaluating teachers and realizing that your three levels, you have your rock stars, and you have your really good teachers that might just need a few things to be going from good to great, and then you have the other ones that you just really need to be on their team to help them grow and develop." Similarly, working with adults in this new arena was challenging. One candidate states:

> So, the most difficult transition has been working with adults and working through the communication in or-der to achieve a successful outcome, and whether that be working through a deadline, delegating tasks so that you have trust that it's going to be done to the level in which you want to put out a high quality product or whatever you're doing. And it's also understanding how others communicate and receive information and learning how to do that with adults, I think, has been the hardest transition. Spending years in the classroom, you hone your skills on being able to communicate with students and with young learners, but it's a whole different bottle of wax." They express surprise that not all adults follow the guidelines or procedures and that they are resistant to change.

Candidates agreed that the cooperative work and partnerships made during the Tier 1 program helped this transition. Hearing perspectives from rural and urban school settings enhanced their understanding.

Complexity of the Third Space.
The third space is a place of learning and growing and finding out who they are as a leader. The very nature of their role is "in-between" as most serve positions that are not in the classroom and not the head of school, most as assistant principals. Most respondents speak of the difficulty of navigating the role, but one iterates this issue as being one of the most difficult:

> I would say that one of the hard things for me has been, or the most difficult, and I don't know that it's necessarily unique is the idea of shared leadership and trying to increase the capacity of those around you, but people can be...They may have less attention to detail or may do things in a way that wouldn't be the way that you would do them. So, I guess letting go of some of that, especially when you're on an administrative team and there's blurred lines of who's doing what. And you don't want to step on their toes, because you're not officially an assistant principal. And you want to be helpful, but you don't want to just run with, "Oh, here, just let me do that. I'll just get it done." So, trying to play the... to be a good team player without being overbearing, I would say. I've been careful not to be overbearing. Does that make sense?

These candidates also struggle over the dichotomy of the teacher/leader roles, though this is a construct that should not exist. They struggle to move from pedagogy to andragogy but begin to see that the role of teacher and leader are intertwined. As one noted, it took time to realize "I'm having to influence teachers, which would then therefore influence students." Another asked, "How can I help my teachers to see what the kids in their class need, and then how can I give my teachers those tools so that they can serve their kids academically and increase their academic achievement in that way?" They begin to see the complexity of the role captured in this quote: "I think the most difficult part has been just all of the roles that I have to play and not anticipating how overwhelming all that can be when you have to wear so many hats and work with so many people, and then the expectations that you have from a lot of people." In summary the candidates leave the program with a sense of efficacy along with trepidation about this new space.

Conclusion
It is noticeably clear that the Tier 1 program at the University of Georgia aligns with the goals of principal preparation programs. Students leave the program with a solid foundation of the many roles embedded in instructional leadership. What is missing, however, is preparation for navigating the third space. We advocate that this should be explored in all principal preparation programs with the realization, that awareness does not necessarily make it easier to navigate. That said, it is important for all to learn that the in-between is not a negative space. It is there that collaborative decisions are made, and multiple voices are heard. In discussing classroom pedagogy, Dunlop states:

> The potential of such spaces spans far beyond to impact the very culture and climate of a school as well. In reference to the world of the third space, Dunlop (1999) noted the

following: By accepting multiplicity of voice, the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography and fiction, it seems possible to create new discourses that cut across gender and ethnicity. This language of pedagogy may be found through the discourses of interculturalism. These discourses acknowledge differences, as official tenets of multiculturalism would have us do, but they also seek to find places of understanding, some borderland or third space between cultures, by enabling the learner to find or recognize the "other" within her/himself (p. 59).

The UNG Tier 1 program creates spaces for dialogue and reflection that extends after the program ends. This is a vital space for our leaders to exist in and to understand so that they can meet the needs of their school and community. The study also emphasizes the great need for strong partnerships with support for candidates as they enter the space and not feel, as one stated, that he was thrown to the wolves. There is much to discover and learn about the third space in education, but the discussion is worthy.

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Appendix B
Curriculum and Instruction

Introduction and Overview

The University of North Georgia (UNG) College of Education (COE) began the Curriculum and Instruction (CI) Masters of Education Program in 2016. The program serves as a service-field upgrade for teachers in Georgia. Through the program, teachers increase their knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum design, program evaluation, and educational research. Candidates also select a focus track, such as reading education, gifted education, autism education, teaching English to speakers of other languages, or international baccalaureate education. To continuously improve and gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and opportunities for growth in the CI Program, COE faculty conducted qualitative interviews. Since 2016, the COE has graduated 26 candidates from the CI Program. As a part of the continuous improvement effort, a faculty member interviewed eight alumni. These graduates currently teach in elementary, middle, and high schools in the North Georgia region. All of the graduates were caucasian, and one of the eight candidates was male.

Strengths

Based on the graduates' feedback, the CI program boasts numerous strengths that were identified through themes. Specifically, the alumni identified the following strengths after completing the CI Program: *Content Knowledge - Research* (CUR 1-8), using *Assessment and Data* (CUR 1, 5, 6, and 7), impacting *Children's Academic Growth* (CUR 1, 3, 5-8), influencing *Children's Social Growth* (CUR 2-8), furthering *Pedagogical Knowledge* (1, 3, 4, 6, and 7), and implementing *Differentiation* (1 and 3-8). The alumni also noted strengths in their preparation in the areas of *Diversity, Technology,* and *Building Relationships*. Moreover, all eight alumni identified *Content Knowledge*, specifically, the development of their educational research skills as the most impactful component of the program.

Not only did the graduates learn how to conduct educational research in a way that applied to their current job setting, but they also learned how to be critical consumers of information and to implement that skill as they scrutinized literature, teaching strategies, curriculum, and programs. As one graduate noted (CUR6),

> "Without [name redacted] classes about 'what does research actually say' and 'nothing's ever proven, it's only supported,' I didn't understand what research meant when we were looking at research to support our education practices. That helped me to be a better consumer of educational materials for teachers."

This particular graduate also noted that she was inspired by learning how to conduct educational research and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the same field. Another graduate (CUR5) identified how the research skillset helped her learn to evaluate resources when she explained, "A lot of educators are gimmicky, and so, I do feel like it helped me not maybe fall victim to some of those gimmicks, to be able to look at it more critically."

An additional skill set that graduates identified as being beneficial is using data and assessment to determine learners' progress. Graduates of the CI Program described that they used

informal and formal assessment data to plan instruction and remediate students, group students, and triangulate across assessments. For example, one graduate (CUR 6) explained,

> "Focus[ing] on data for instruction and data for improving your teaching and those kinds of things really, really taught me how to use it in my classroom on a daily basis. Even when orienting my curriculum, I now have data to prove that did not work, or that did work, and I need to do more of those things. That one aspect, which I guess was four classes together, really I felt like shaped my teaching practice."

The connection across assessment assists educators in addressing individual student needs, like one graduate described, "I use a lot of data from anecdotal notes that I take with my students and with assessment data. Even if it's, like every other week my kids take a quiz in math and I use that to plan the next two weeks of instruction. I do flexible grouping that way. The same thing kind of in reading, with writing, we don't really do groups, but I can see their weaknesses based on their testing data, and so I plug back in myself and know who to target with instructional strategies."

Graduates of the CI Program also have a significant impact on P-12 students' academic and social growth. In some instances, we see these two areas intertwine. For example, one graduate explained,

> "I think that when they grow as readers, they are definitely growing in confidence...I find that working in small groups like that makes them want to help others more because they feel they are learning, they are much more ready to help another person when they see them struggling….I do think that it's helping to build their confidence in themselves and see themselves as part of that community."

Another graduate (CUR 1) described how she saw her young students being aware of and learning about their peers. She shared,

> "A parent messaged me the other day and was just talking about how her child was coming home and talking about how kids have strengths and weaknesses, and so I think the kids are starting to recognize in first grade what they're good at and what they struggle with, and for me, I think that's showing that they're growing as a student."

As the CI Program spans the P-12 grade levels, one can see how growth takes many forms. A unique feature of working with gifted learners is recognizing the depth at which they can learn and also helping them learn not to overthink. A graduate who teaches gifted students explained how she supports their needs,

> "We do spend a lot of our time still talking about deep learning, but we have also been doing some example questions from like USATestprep, examples of what a surface-level question would look like so that they can distinguish between a deep question and a surface-level question. We do try to still make it very engaging, but at a certain point they need to be able to see what a test is going to look like. I hate to bring in testing, but

unfortunately education is what it is. We do that for a little bit each day, and then we go into our exciting, in-depth engagement."

From these examples, one can see how the CI Program graduates impact students' academic and social growth across the P-12 continuum and in different educational contexts.

The structure of the CI Program allows candidates to grow in areas most pertinent to them, as they are prepared in curriculum, research, and an area of their choice. Several graduates noted that they furthered their pedagogical knowledge through the program. When asked about her greatest strengths, one alumnus (CUR 3), who graduated from a COE undergraduate program and the CI Program explained,

"My greatest strengths coming in were in the reading content instruction just because we had so much of a focus on how to be an effective reading teacher having the reading endorsement within my undergraduate….Honestly, both programs offering an endorsement." Other graduates spoke to specific strategies, such as Socratic Circles, Turn and Talks, and Kaplan's Depth and Complexity. One graduate explained how a novel approach expanded her instructional tools by sharing,

"Kaplan's Depth and Complexity is one that I continue to include. That's probably the biggest one that I didn't know, and now I do, whereas the others, maybe like emphasizing Turn and Talks, I'd heard of that, but I do it more now. The Kaplan's Depth and Complexity is a series of icons that you incorporate to get kids thinking about content from a specific angle, so ethics or multiple perspectives or patterns across time, those kinds of things. We'll use those lenses to look at specific areas of one issue."

Graduates of the CI Program also strengthen their instructional skills to implement differentiation. Some graduates finally understood why, as this graduate (CUR 3) explained, "Before I was differentiating for the sake of marking it on paper; whereas once I learned how to analyze data, I was differentiating based on data, and I was able to look and see okay, this is why I differentiate." Others describe how they differentiate to meet individual needs, as the following graduate (CUR 7) explained,

"I use a lot of small groups. That's the biggest thing. In reading, I have four small reading groups, even though two of the groups are reading the same book... I actually have skill-based groups and strategy groups in my math, and so it's working on their weaknesses based on their assessment data from MAP, and so we pull on the skills that it gives me from there, and then we're also doing strategy groups with current practice. Right now, we're focusing on fractions, and so I tried to pull back in and their skills that they need from previous reads, but sometimes I told them based on their skills that they're missing."

Overall, graduates overwhelmingly noted strengths in the CI Program that were immediately applicable in their work context.

Opportunities for Growth

While graduates noted many strengths, they also noted areas where the program faculty can work to improve. The largest area of growth was identified as *Content Knowledge* (CUR 1, 2, and 5-7) in the curriculum strand. The areas of *Children's Academic Growth* (CUR 1, 3, and 7), *Pedagogy* (3, 4, 7, and 8), and *Classroom Management* (CUR 6 and 8) were identified less often but were still areas where we can work to improve.

Interestingly, while *Content Knowledge* was considered the most impactful strength in the area of research, it was deemed the most impactful weakness in the area of curriculum. Candidates were challenged to recall what they learned in the curriculum strand, and more often than not, noted the curriculum strand was not what they anticipated it would be or what they had hoped it would be, as several graduates explained,

> "The curriculum, honestly, the class that I felt like I did not get the most out of was the one with [name redacted], and I don't remember the name of it. We had some assignments, and it felt like we were doing the same work over and over and over again. When it came time to like come into class, we would come in and make a poster, we would come in after and it was based on our reading and things like that. That was stuff that I was doing during my undergrad. I would have liked to have been more challenged in that way (CUR7)."

> "The curriculum classes for me fell short. It felt a little bit at times like busywork. I would have to say that the degree was different than what I had anticipated it being. I think I thought we were going to be a lot more in specific curriculums and digging through that type of thing. And it was a lot more research than I had anticipated (CUR 5)."

> "So there were just some of those that I just felt like it was kind of similar topics and I thought when I went into curriculum and instruction, it would have been some new things that I hadn't previously learned. So I guess this is me maybe just being naive, but I thought we were going to be given different curriculums and learn how to write curriculum and how to look at curriculum and be like, this is high quality, this is not for these reasons (CUR 1)."

The curriculum course strand falls short in challenging practicing teachers and expanding their understanding of curriculum and instruction.

In the area of *Children's Academic Growth,* graduates of the CI Program expressed several areas that are challenges in their classrooms. These areas are not explicitly noted as weaknesses in the program. However, in their own experiences, they are still areas where the program could provide teaching strategies, tools, and instruction to support its candidates in the future. Reading, writing, math, science, and social studies were areas where graduates expressed weaknesses in their contexts. In some instances, it's related to school-wide curriculum, as the following graduate explained,

> "I will say that we're frustrated as a grade level because we feel that social studies and science is getting pushed to the back burner, and that's actually what my master's study was on was implementing and integrating social studies. When you don't use that high

vocabulary that's taught in social studies in science, and it's not everyday language, that later when they get to fourth and fifth grade on milestones, that's one of the factors that cause students not to perform as well. So I would say that's kind of a frustration that we have (CUR 1)."

And, with other graduates, it's related to their content knowledge, as these graduates shared,

"Math is the biggest place that I see them struggle. Personally, I'm not as competent of a math teacher as I am an ELA teacher. I mean, I did do my reading endorsement and when I did my undergrad, I spent a lot of time focusing on literacy. It's an area that I continue to work on, and I tried, even when I did my research during my Program, I focused on math and so I was trying to help myself grow in that aspect. It's helped because now I know like what's effective and what's not, but it's still an area of weakness in my own instruction, and I can see it correlating into my students' work. I just want to continue to grow in that aspect (CUR 7)."

"Conceptual understanding of numbers has really given them some trouble this year. They're having trouble with multiplication specifically, any kind of fractions or geometries like geospatial awareness or just spatial awareness. They're not paying attention to what the numbers mean. It's like they have a knowledge on paper of what numbers are, but not of what those numbers are actually representing (CUR 3)."

Graduates were asked if they learned any content strategies through the CI program that they found effective in their classrooms. Unfortunately, their responses left much to be desired, which identified *Pedagogy* as an area with weaknesses. In answer to this question, one graduate (CUR 8) simply responded, "Not that I can think of," which indicates that this isn't an area of learning with lasting impact. She (CUR 8) expanded on her needs, though, when she shared, "I have a lot of ESL kids, so knowing different strategies and things like that I think would be really helpful. Not only with ESL kids, but since I am in special ed that those would apply to them as well." Another graduate explained she didn't learn new instructional strategies when she shared,

"I felt like there was really only one class that really focused on that, to be honest. I'll be honest; I didn't get a whole lot out of it ...so I felt I learned a lot of research pieces and so I know how to use a lot of that, but that particular class, I didn't feel like I got a whole lot out. I can't remember."

Classroom Management is another area where our CI Program graduates would have benefited from additional learning, but it's not an area of significant weakness. Graduates shared that it was an area of improvement in their administrative evaluations or just a barrier to learning in their classroom. For example, one graduate (CUR 6) shared, "In eighth grade, the biggest area that I needed improvement was actually behavior management...My administration worked with me a lot on that. I don't know that my C&I program really addressed that a lot." Another graduate (CUR 8), who works with students with special needs, identified classroom management as a distraction in her context and explained,

"And then, random other students dealing with behavioral things. Because I feel like sometimes the behavioral things obviously get in the way because if they're not willing to do it and then it's blown up and all that stuff. So, she [administrator] provided some resources for me to go and look at. And then we also have, you know like EBD teachers and things like that that we can use as, as resources. So, I feel like [I] definitely improved in that area since starting last year but still can work on it... I'm still learning to like step back and like remove from the situation and then use the strategies and things like that and so…"

Another graduate attributed her needs for improved classroom management to how times have changed, as she explained,

"As much as the teachers or the professors remember what it's like to be a teacher, I think what's not talked about enough is how children today have changed. So for a lot of them when they were in the classroom, certain management techniques did work. Unfortunately, those don't work anymore because parenting styles have changed. This is today's generation and sitting around and complaining about how this generation is different from the last one is not going to solve anything. We have to figure out how are we going to communicate and reach them as they are today."

While the CI Program has notable strengths, there are still a few areas that need improvement. CI Program candidates can be better supported and developed in the areas of *Children's Academic Growth*, *Pedagogy*, and *Classroom Management*. Of the three program strands, the curriculum strand was identified by our graduates as the most significant area of weakness.

Suggestions

When our graduates were asked what the COE faculty could do to improve the CI Program, they provided numerous suggestions through their lenses for ways in which to strengthen the preparation. Several graduates expressed that they wished they understood what the program and the three tracks entailed. To mitigate this weakness, the CI Program faculty implemented a more thorough orientation for each cohort and a program handbook for guidance and reference. At the orientation, the faculty assisted the candidates with understanding the program layout, their options for program tracts, and what the curriculum and research strands entail. Additionally, at the point of the orientation, faculty assisted candidates in understanding that they can direct their grade-level and content foci where it would be most beneficial in improving their practice. The previous graduates mentioned how they were unable to focus in areas where it would be most helpful for them to grow, although, each course allows for candidate-selected topics within the scope of the assignments. Faculty will need to guide the candidates and reinforce this concept starting at orientation and throughout their coursework. To better assist the candidates with understanding the purpose of the CI Program and the faculty in preparing for a cohorts' needs, an exercise in needs-sensing is recommended at the point of program entry. One way to accomplish this would be to ask in-coming candidates to self-assess their needs against the program standards. From this, faculty can gain an understanding of the candidates' perceived strengths and weaknesses and a better understanding of the needs of the entire cohort.

We mapped the program in alignment with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's program rules. Graduates shared many areas that could be strengthened, and this process enabled us to see where we may have overlaps or gaps across our courses. There are many recommendations we are working towards. For example, the three strands of the program need to be more balanced; the research strand was too prominent, and at times, overbearing. Research could be incorporated as a tool to enhance practice in the curriculum strand. Some graduates noted that the research strand wasn't what they needed to improve in their classroom, which also means that faculty need to find ways of helping candidates understand the connections between research and practice. Within the curriculum strand, the course objectives were examined and the assessments were aligned with the course objectives and program rules to ensure necessary coverage of the program rules and to make sure the assessments were beneficial to the candidates' development. Our faculty are also working to know their students better and to be more aware of their students' specific needs to tailor their instruction for each cohort. Lastly, graduates noted that they wanted the curriculum strand to provide them with more tools and experiences to prepare them for roles serving as a curriculum specialist or instructional coach. We are planning to incorporate these tools and strategies in the coursework, and the experiences could be provided through the CI Program field experiences with one-on-one work with individuals in those roles at the candidates' respective schools or school systems.

Graduates also noted specific pedagogies from their professors that were the most helpful. The graduates experienced a continuum of feedback styles. In one case, a graduate noted that one professor gave a grade of 100 on everything, even when she turned in incomplete assignments. She felt this undermined the strengths of the program, and she felt very insecure in her performance after that because she didn't know whether she was genuinely learning and growing or not. However, other candidates had a very different experience with professor feedback. Several graduates noted that they received detailed feedback from some professors. A specific favorite was the addition of one-on-one conferencing with the professor about their performance. Furthermore, the graduates expressed gratitude for their professors who took the time to provide them with detailed feedback. Another pedagogy that the graduates determined to be less beneficial was reading outside of class and bring that information to class to make posters and share through discussion. They commented that this type of work felt like busy-work or similar to the undergraduate preparation. Instead, the noted that they much preferred direct instruction from the faculty experts, meaningful collaboration, and purposeful learning experiences where they worked with data or exemplars.

Summary

In an effort to continuously improve, a faculty member from the COE completed qualitative interviews of graduates from the first three years of the Curriculum and Instruction program. The interviews were analyzed through qualitative coding, and themes were developed from those results. The greatest strength and deficiency were found to be in the theme of *Content Knowledge*. Specifically, graduates were best prepared in the area of educational research and were most concerned about their preparation in the curriculum strand of the program. Another theme with polarity was *Children's Academic Growth*. Graduates were able to positively impact P-12 learners by implementing what they learned in the CI Program, yet, at times, they noted they were limited by expectations within their teaching context. The theme of *Pedagogy* was also spread across a continuum, and the strengths far outweighed the weaknesses. Graduates confidently identified instructional strategies they utilized from the program, especially when it

came to the ability to differentiate for the various learners in their classroom. Being that these educators had experience working with the data systems in their school, they were able to connect the instructional strategies with the identified needs of children in their classes. They also indicated that their ability to use assessments and data to guide instruction was refined through the CI Program. While this is true of the masters-level graduates, this is not the case with the graduates of the initial preparation programs. The alumni also noted strengths in their preparation in the areas of *Children's Social Growth, Diversity, Technology,* and *Building Relationships* but were identified less often than the other areas. In addition, *Classroom Management* was identified as an area of weakness less often, but it is still an area where graduates said they could use additional preparation. Lastly, several recommendations were made for consideration to the program faculty to strengthen the preparation that our graduates receive.

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Case Study: Qualitative Interviews
- Need to interview students from all programs.
- Need representatives from the following programs:
  - ELE/SPED
  - MGED
  - SCED
  - KINS
  - ART
  - MUSIC
  - MAT/Post Bac
  - Curriculum and Instruction
- Need to interview principals, assistant principals, and mentor teachers (not our mentor teachers for teacher candidates but actual mentors to first-year educators).
- Need to record each interview so that they can be transcribed.
- Interview recordings must be saved on the u-drive
- Tips for the interviewer
  - Give purpose for the interview by providing an introduction and an overview of the interview process, carry it across the components, and ask if the interviewee has any questions
  - Listen attentively. Let people finish and give them time to think. Tolerate pauses. Your silence and nodding while listening will indicate to the interviewee that they are okay to continue talking.

Introduction
The purpose of this interview is to determine how well our graduates are doing in the field and to determine what modifications we might need to make to improve our programs. Indeed, I am conducting this interview today as a part of our self-assessment process, which is a continuous improvement effort ensuring we continue to produce successful educators and ensuring we garner feedback from our school partners and primary stakeholders. With your permission, I will use this recorder to capture our conversation so that we may transcribe and qualitatively analyze responses. This data will be utilized for the purposes of program improvement and accreditation reports. We will get started with a couple of warm-up questions and then move into questions specific to our programs and your experiences.

Optional Warm-up Questions
1. Which program did you complete at UNG and what areas did you certify in?

2. When you were in high school, did you see yourself becoming a teacher, administrator, or mentor?

3. If you were a student in your own first classroom/first school, what tip would you give yourself?

Questions for Alumni/Induction-Level Teachers
Teaching – General Information and Impact

For this first set of questions, I will ask you questions about your first year and your overall perceived impact on student success.

1.   Describe your first year of teaching.
        a.   What did you experience in your first year that was, perhaps, unexpected or unanticipated?
        b.   What has been the most difficult part of teaching?
        c.   What has been the most rewarding part?

2.   In what ways have you seen your students grow academically this year? Please be specific.

3.   In what ways have you seen your students grow socially and emotionally this year?
        Please be specific.

4.   How do you know your students are learning and how do you measure their success?

5.   Please explain how your students performed on any standardized testing measures this year.
        How did your students perform relative to the rest of their cohort and how did you prepare them?

6.   Where have you seen your students struggle this year in terms of academics?
         Give specific examples.

7.   How did you seek to address the academic challenges that you saw your students facing?

Give specific examples.

8. What techniques do you utilize to meet the needs of the various learners in your classroom and to ensure all students are learning?

9. Are there classroom lessons or activities you specifically learned about in your teacher preparation program at UNG that you currently use in your classroom? Give an example.

10. Did you learn technology / reading/ science (any content) strategies in the program that you have found effective in your classroom? How do you know these strategies are effective?

11. Based on your first year—including your daily work with students and your own teaching evaluations—where did you need the most improvement? How did your administration work with you to improve?

12. Similarly, what were your greatest strengths as a first-year teacher and how will you continue to expand on these strengths?

13. Would you allow us to come in and observe you in action in the classroom one day?
    a. Yes   _____
    b. No   _____

Preparation Information and Recommendations for Improvement

For this next series of question, I will ask you how your teacher education preparation program prepared you in particular areas of teaching. For each area, I will also ask you for recommendations for improvement.

14. Thinking back to your teacher preparation experience at the University of North Georgia, which aspects of your program best prepared you for the first year(s) of teaching? (Don't lead the interviewee, but if she/he struggled, perhaps suggest the following as prompts for feedback: internship, particular professors or courses, learning experiences, key assessments or assignments that were more relevant, type of instruction utilized, etc.).

15. How did your field experiences at UNG prepare you for your first year?

16. How did your coursework help prepare you for your first year?

17. How did your teacher preparation program prepare you to differentiate your pedagogy for the various learners in your classroom? In what ways could your educator preparation program have improved in this area?

18. How did your teacher preparation program prepare you to work with diverse students? In what ways could your program have improved in this area?

19. How did your teacher preparation program prepare you to use student data to improve

instruction? In what ways could your program have improved in this area?

20.   When you think about your first year and where you may have struggled the most, in what ways could your teacher education preparation program have better prepared you for the challenges of a classroom?

Questions for Administrators/Mentor Teachers
Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today. We know how valuable your time is, and we truly appreciate your sitting down with us and providing information to help us improve our programs. Our school partners are key to our success, and we want to ensure that our programs are preparing educators suited to the needs of students in our local communities. As part of our accreditation, we need to be able to discuss the impact of our graduates on P-12 students, so many of these questions center on their success with students during the first year. If you think of other measures that can help us relay this impact on P-12 students, please let us know.

Preparation of UNG Graduates
1.   Based on your experiences this past year with UNG graduates, in what ways are UNG teacher induction-level teachers prepared to be successful?

2.   In what areas do you see UNG induction-level teachers lacking or in what areas do you think candidates need additional preparation?

3.   How could UNG's teacher preparation program improve their preparation programs to ensure that its graduates are successful in the induction years?
        a.   Is there a particular area (i.e., content, pedagogical skills, classroom management, and/or professional dispositions) that might need improvements?

4.   How do UNG graduates compare to other induction-level educators with whom you have worked? Please be specific.

Preparation in Regard to Academic Success of Students
5.   How is academic success measured in your school?

6.   In what ways were induction-level teachers graduating from UNG successful in relaying skills and content to their students?
        a.   Where did UNG alumni excel in terms of moving their students from one academic level to the next? Provide specific examples.
        b.   Where might UNG alumni need to improve in terms of relaying content to their students?

7.   In what ways did UNG alumni create engaging and inclusive classrooms for their students? Please provide specifics.

8.   In what says did UNG alumni elicit critical thinking from and teach problem-solving skills to their students? Please provide specifics.

9.   In what ways were UNG alumni able to successfully engage with parents/guardians or other

stakeholders and where did you see the need for improvement?

10. In what ways were induction-level teachers from UNG successful in teaching their students emotional and social skills?

11. In what ways did induction-level teachers from UNG successfully navigate or struggle with classroom management in their first year?

12. In what ways did you see these first-year educators differentiating pedagogy for the various learners in your classroom? In what ways these educators have improved in this area?

13. In what ways do you think these first-year teachers were prepared to work with diverse students? Where do you see the need for improvement in this area?

14. In what ways did you see induction-level teachers utilizing student data to improve instruction? In what ways could the program have improved in this area?

15. How well prepared were UNG alumni in terms of teaching with technology and teaching their students about proper use of technology and social media in the classroom?

16. Beyond academic and pedagogical preparation, how well prepared were your UNG alumni in terms of their dispositions for their first-year of teaching? Where did you see strengths or weaknesses?

Overall
17. What overall advice would you have for improving our teacher preparation programs?

18. How could UNG work to build even stronger relationships with our P-12 partner schools?

19. What can we offer to our school partners to build reciprocal relationships?

20. Is there any additional information you would like to share with us at this time?

Appendix D
Interview Protocol for Educational Leadership Completers

University of North Georgia
College of Education
Education Leadership
Program Evaluation for Completers after Year 1

- **Case Study: Qualitative Interviews**
  - Need to interview Tier 1 completers
  - Need to interview principals, assistant principals, or other supervisors
  - Need to record each interview so that they can be transcribed.
  - Interview recordings **must** be saved on the u-drive.
- Tips for the interviewer
  - Give purpose for the interview by providing an introduction and an overview of the interview process, carry it across the components, and ask if the interviewee has any questions
  - Listen attentively. Let people finish and give them time to think. Tolerate pauses. Your silence and nodding while listening will indicate to the interviewee that they are okay to continue talking.

Introduction
The purpose of this interview is to determine how well our graduates are doing in the field and to determine what modifications we might need to make to improve our programs. We are conducting this interview today as a part of our self-assessment process, which is a continuous improvement effort ensuring we continue to produce effective school leaders. Your feedback is really important to this process. With your permission, we are recording this session to capture our conversation so that we may transcribe and qualitatively analyze responses. This data will be utilized for the purposes of program improvement and accreditation reports.

Let's start with the Ground Rules
1.   Speak loudly and clearly as this is being recorded.
2.   Try not to use identifying information such as names and places.
3.   Everyone will need to respond to every question.
4.   If someone says something that you agree with, say "agree" and feel free to add on more to the conversation. It is not necessary to repeat something that has already been said. If you disagree, we need to hear that also.
5.   Most questions have more than one part, and often ask how the TIER I program has prepared you. Please in responding, include all parts of the question.
6.   Please be open and honest with all responses. This information is used to help the program improve.
7.   Our role in this process is to be the research facilitator and provide you with the questions. We are not part of the conversation.
8.   Are you ready to begin?

Questions for Alumni/Tier One Completers

General Information and Impact

For this set of questions, I will ask you about your first year and overall impact on school and student success.

1. Describe your first year since receiving your Tier 1 certificate.
   a. What did you experience in your first year that was, perhaps, unexpected or unanticipated?
   b. What has been the most difficult part of being a leader?
   c. What has been the most rewarding part?

2. Our accreditation body requires that we demonstrate the impact that our graduates have on the impact on P-12 students' learning and development as educators. How do you define this idea of "impacting learning and development"? What helps you in your ability to impact student learning and development? What hinders you?

3. What induction services were provided to you as a new administrator at the county and/or school level?

4. Describe how you have been able to impact or further the school mission, vision and values for school improvement and/or student success.

5. Describe how your understanding of ethics and the law has changed since your involvement in the program.

6. How did the Tier 1 program prepare you to work with diverse populations? In what ways could your program have improved in this area?

7. Describe your involvement with curriculum implementation and/or change during this past year. How did your involvement in the Tier 1 program help in this endeavor?

8. Discuss ways you have been involved in making sure your school has a safe and caring environment. How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

9. What role have you taken in making sure that the academic needs of all students are met? How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

10. What role have you taken in making sure that the social needs of all students are met? How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

11. Discuss your role in the recruitment and retention of staff. How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

12. Discuss roles you have communicated and engaged with the community. How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

13. Describe ways you have participated in the overall organization of the school such as scheduling or resource acquisition. How did the Tier 1 program prepare you in this endeavor?

14. How has your vision of leadership changed since you wrote about it in your portfolio?

15. How would teachers/staff you supervise and work with describe you as a leader? Do you think their view is accurate?

Appendix E
Education Leadership Survey

1. Please circle the appropriate descriptor of your current professional position: (Select one)
2. If you are currently teaching, please let us know if you did any of the following before the current school year: (Select all that apply)
3. If you are currently coaching type position, instructional coach, academic coach, or graduation coach, , please let us know if you did any of the following before the current school year: (Select all that apply)
4. I am currently working as a(n) _____.

Strongly Disagree - Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
5. Overall, I am satisfied with my experience in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of North Georgia.
6. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to understand how to build a collective vision of student success and well-being.
7. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to develop strong abilities to champion and support instruction that maximizes student learning.
8. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me understand how to build a vision that encapsulates perspectives as a diverse school community.
9. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me develop my abilities to champion and support assessment that maximizes student learning.
10. My mentor leader in my current school is supportive regarding my educational needs.
11. The Tier I program taught me information that has helped me in my current professional position.
12. The assignments I completed in the program were meaningful to my current professional work.
13. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to understand how to help build a system of instruction and assessment that meets individual and diverse student needs.
14. The assignments completed across the program were relevant to my work.
15. The Tier I program provided me with opportunity to learn through clinical practice (feedback and reflection).
16. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to manage staff members' professional skills and practices in order to drive student learning and achievement.
17. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to develop staff members' professional skills and practices in order to drive student learning and achievement.
18. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to cultivate a caring and inclusive school community dedicated to student learning, academic success, and the personal well-being of every student.
19. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to understand how to effectively coordinate resources, time, structures, and roles to build the instructional capacity of teachers and other staff.

20. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to feel confident in my abilities to engage families and the outside community to promote and support student success.
21. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to understand how to develop and monitor operations efficiently and effectively. (Ex. Schedules, Budgets, School Safety Plans, etc.)
22. My work at UNG in the Tier I program prepared me to use the data to improve programs and learning opportunities for ALL students.
23. My work at UNG in the Tier I program has helped me to understand how to encourage the use of technology to enhance student learning.
24. I have used what I learned in the Tier I Program to analyze school data for improvement purposes for student achievement.
25. In have used what I learned in the Tier I Program to utilize data to pinpoint the most effective educators and instructional programs.
26. The staff at UNG were helpful to me getting documentation submitted for certification.
27. My work at UNG in the Tier I program helped me to feel confident in my ability to engage staff in regular analyses and disaggregation of data to improve curriculum and instruction.
28. I feel that I am able to contact my faculty advisor for advice or recommendations.
29. I would recommend this program to colleagues interested in working toward an educational leadership certification.

Open-ended Feedback Questions
In the space below, please provide us with open-ended feedback regarding your experiences:
31. In terms of academics (i.e., courses, content, research, assessments), what suggestions for improvement would you have for the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Georgia?
32. In terms of your clinical experiences, what suggestions for improvement would you have for the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Georgia (i.e., field assignments, time spent in field, supervision and feedback)?
33. In terms of logistics (i.e., advising, general communications, graduation), what suggestions for improvement would you have for the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Georgia?
34. How have your Professors supported you this past year?
35. How has your University Supervisor supported you this past year?
36. How has your assigned Mentor Leader supported you this year?
37. In what ways could you have been better supported this year?
38. How did the program help you in furthering your educational leadership career?
39. How did the program help you to become a stronger educational leader?
40. Please comment on the coursework and assignments in terms of depth and breadth. (How meaningful were the courses and assignments to your current professional positions?)
41. Any additional comments?