ABSTRACT

KRAUT, NAOMI JANE. What it Means to Feel Prepared to Teach: A Mixed Methods Investigation into Preservice English Language Arts Teachers’ Perceptions of Preparedness. (Under the direction of Dr. Carl A. Young.)

With university-based teacher preparation programs currently under fire, and with calls for teacher preparation programs to be re-thought, re-designed, and held to new standards of accountability, it is a critical time for research into the preparation of teachers. While we know that teacher education matters for teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2006), researchers have called for more evidence and research into teacher preparation, specifically multifaceted research approaches that go beyond using test scores as metrics (Cochran-Smith, 2006). This study provides a rich and dynamic look at teacher preparation through an examination of preservice English language arts (ELA) teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach at the end of their teacher preparation program. Using a sample of an undergraduate and a graduate cohort of preservice middle and secondary ELA teachers enrolled in a College of Education teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southeast, I employed a mixed methods design to explore the essence of feeling prepared to teach. Results from the study indicate that feeling prepared to teach is a complex and nuanced phenomenon, in part because perceptions of preparedness are task specific. Preservice ELA teachers’ definitions of preparedness and the factors impacting their perceptions of readiness to teach are dependent on teacher candidates’ backgrounds and dispositions, and they hinge on the experience of student teaching. These results yield implications for selecting and supporting preservice ELA teachers; selecting, matching and evaluating cooperating teachers; and leveraging the role that teachers outside of the cooperating teacher play in preparing preservice ELA teachers for the classroom.
What it Means to Feel Prepared to Teach: A Mixed Methods Investigation into Preservice English Language Arts Teachers’ Perceptions of Preparedness

by
Naomi Jane Kraut

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Curriculum and Instruction

Raleigh, North Carolina

2013

APPROVED BY:

________________________
Dr. Carl A. Young
Chair of Advisory Committee

________________________
Dr. Jessica Decuir-Gunby

________________________
Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli

________________________
Dr. Carol Pope
DEDICATION

To the original Kraut five, which already includes two Dr. Krauts. I know I said I’d never get a Ph.D., but…

And to the growing Kraut Okun clan, who keeps me focused on the important stuff in life.
BIOGRAPHY

Naomi Jane Kraut received her B.A. in English from Carleton College and her Ed.M. in Teaching and Curriculum from Harvard University. As an English education doctoral student at North Carolina State, she served as an instructor, university supervisor and research assistant. Naomi is a member of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on English Education (CEE), and the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE), and she serves as a reviewer for the English language arts section of Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education (CITE). She has presented her work at NCTE and SITE conferences. Prior to her doctoral work, she taught high school English in the Chicago area.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................... viii  
LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................................... ix  
Chapter One: Toward a Definition of Preparedness for Teaching ............................................. 1  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1  
  Background of the Study ............................................................................................................ 3  
  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................. 6  
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................................... 8  
  Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................... 10  
  Overview of Methodological Approach ...................................................................................... 12  
  Overview of Research Methods .................................................................................................. 13  
  Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study .................................................................... 16  
Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature .............................................................................. 18  
  Introduction: Scope of Literature Review .................................................................................. 18  
  Teacher Preparation in the Critical Spotlight ......................................................................... 20  
    Contextualizing the criticism of teacher preparation ............................................................... 25  
    The Context of the History of ELA Teacher Preparation ....................................................... 28  
      A cornucopia of committees and reports, figures and recommendations ............................ 29  
    The Impact of ELA Teacher Preparation History on Defining Preparedness ....................... 37  
  Best Practices and Key Components to ELA Teacher Preparation .......................................... 41  
  Research in ELA Teacher Preparation: Pondering the Lack of Reform .................................. 46  
    Research highlighting the disconnect between the university and the classroom .................. 49  
    Research on the transition from preservice teacher to teacher ........................................... 51  
    Research on the ELA methods course ..................................................................................... 52  
    Scholars reflect on the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught ............................................ 56  
    Ideas for achieving reform in the teaching of ELA ................................................................. 59  
  Connection Between Perceptions of Preparedness and Teacher Efficacy ............................ 66  
  Studies on Perceptions of Preparedness ...................................................................................... 70  
  Room for Further Research ....................................................................................................... 73  
  Chapter Summary ..................................................................................................................... 74  
Chapter Three: Methodology ...................................................................................................... 75  
  Introduction to a Mixed Methods Design ................................................................................ 75  
  Research Design ....................................................................................................................... 76  
  Research Questions ................................................................................................................... 78  
  Overview of Research Methods .................................................................................................. 79  
  Sample and Participant Selection ............................................................................................. 80  
  Data Collection ......................................................................................................................... 83  
    Quantitative + qualitative phase 1 ......................................................................................... 83  
    Qualitative phase 2 ............................................................................................................... 86  
  Procedures ................................................................................................................................ 87  
    Quantitative + qualitative phase 1 ......................................................................................... 87
Qualitative phase 2 ........................................................................................................ 88
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 89
Quantitative + qualitative phase 1 ............................................................................. 89
Qualitative phase 2 .................................................................................................... 92
Validity/Reliability ..................................................................................................... 93
Quantitative phase 1 .................................................................................................. 94
Qualitative phase 1 + qualitative phase 2 ................................................................. 94
Subjectivity Statement ............................................................................................... 97
Ethical Issues ............................................................................................................... 98
Chapter Summary ...................................................................................................... 101
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Results ................................................................. 102
Introduction: Approach to the Data Analysis and Results ........................................ 102
Quantitative Phase 1: Likert Scale Survey Analysis and Results ............................... 103
Who took the survey .................................................................................................. 103
Likert scale analysis and results: snapshot of an overall sense of preparedness ....... 104
Likert scale analysis and results: overview of all data ............................................. 105
Likert scale analysis and results: by factors .............................................................. 106
Preparedness to promote student learning ................................................................. 106
Preparedness to teach critical thinking and social development ............................ 109
Preparedness to use technology ............................................................................... 112
Preparedness to understand learners ..................................................................... 114
Preparedness to develop instructional leadership .................................................... 116
Questions not in a factor ............................................................................................ 118
Summary of Likert scale data analysis findings ......................................................... 120
Qualitative Phase 1: Open-Ended Survey Questions Analysis and Results .......... 121
Question 4 analysis and results: Please describe what the phrase “preparedness to teach” means to you ........................................................................ 122
Summary of question 4 data analysis findings ........................................................ 128
Question 5 analysis and results: How would you describe your current feelings of preparedness to enter your first year of teaching? ........................................ 128
Summary of question 5 data analysis findings ........................................................ 135
Question 6 analysis and results: What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year? ................................................. 136
Summary of question 6 data analysis findings ........................................................ 142
Question 7 analysis and results: Based on these factors, where would you say your perception of preparedness comes from / on what is it based? ...... 144
Summary of question 7 data analysis findings ........................................................ 144
Qualitative Phase 2: Case Study Interviews Analysis and Results ............................ 151
Introduction to analysis of the case studies ............................................................... 151
Selecting and profiling the interview sample ............................................................ 151
Case study #1: Profile of Jordan ................................................................................ 152
Recruitment rationale ............................................................................................... 152
Background and disposition ................................................................. 153
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 154
How prepared she felt ................................................................. 154
Case study #2: Profile of Josh ................................................................. 155
Recruitment rationale ................................................................. 155
Background and disposition ............................................................... 156
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 156
How prepared he felt ................................................................. 157
Case study #3: Profile of Annie ................................................................. 158
Recruitment rationale ................................................................. 158
Background and disposition ............................................................... 159
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 160
How prepared she felt ................................................................. 161
Case study #4: Profile of Britney ................................................................. 163
Recruitment rationale ................................................................. 163
Background and disposition ............................................................... 163
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 164
How prepared she felt ................................................................. 164
Case study #5: Profile of Lyra ................................................................. 165
Recruitment rationale ................................................................. 165
Background and disposition ............................................................... 165
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 166
How prepared she felt ................................................................. 168
Case study #6: Profile of Rachel ................................................................. 168
Recruitment rationale ................................................................. 168
Background and disposition ............................................................... 169
Student teaching experience ............................................................... 170
How prepared she felt ................................................................. 171
Approach to case study interviews analysis and results ..................... 172
Results across cases RQ1: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?” ................................................................. 173
Summary of RQ1 data analysis findings: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?” ................................................................. 177
Results across cases RQ2: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach? ................................................................. 178
Personality / disposition ................................................................. 179
Background ................................................................. 182
K-12 education ................................................................. 185
Teacher preparation program ............................................................... 187
Student teaching internship ............................................................... 191
Cooperating teacher ................................................................. 196
Other factors ................................................................. 200
Summary of RQ2 data analysis findings: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach? .......... 201

Results across cases RQ3: Based on their definitions and the factors impacting their perceptions of preparedness, how prepared do preservice ELA teachers feel to teach at the end of their student teaching internship?

“ Adequately prepared:” Jordan ................................................................. 204
“ Adequately prepared:” Josh ................................................................. 206
“ Adequately prepared:” Annie ................................................................. 208
“ Well prepared:” Britney ......................................................................... 211
“ Well prepared:” Lyra ............................................................................ 212
“ Well prepared:” Rachel ......................................................................... 214

Chapter Summary .................................................................................... 217

Chapter Five: Implications, Limitations, and Areas for Future Research ........ 218

Introduction ............................................................................................. 218
Macro Discussion of Implications ............................................................ 218
Implications: Selection and Support of Preservice ELA Teachers .......... 222
Implications: Selecting, Matching, and Evaluating Cooperating Teachers .. 226
Implications: The Role of Observations and Other Teachers in Preparing Preservice ELA Teachers ......................................................... 229
Implications: The Structure of the Student Teaching Internship .......... 231
Implications: Big Questions that Remain ................................................. 233
   Alignment between teacher preparation programs and future teaching jobs ..................................................................................... 234
   Differences between undergraduate and graduate student experiences .... 235
   Preparing preservice ELA teachers for the “realities” of the classroom ... 236
   Inherent limitations in feeling prepared to teach .................................. 238

Limitations of the Study .......................................................................... 239
Areas for Future Research ....................................................................... 241
Chapter Summary .................................................................................... 242

REFERENCES ........................................................................................... 244

APPENDICIES .......................................................................................... 255

Appendix A. Recruitment Script for Student Teachers for Survey .......... 256
Appendix B. Open-Ended Questions and Likert Scale Survey .............. 258
Appendix C. Recruitment Script for Student Teachers for Interviews .... 260
Appendix D. Student Teacher Interview Protocol .................................... 261
Appendix E. Survey Consent Form ............................................................ 262
Appendix F. Student Interview Consent Form .......................................... 265
### LIST OF TABLES

| Table 4.1 | Preparedness to promote student learning | 107 |
| Table 4.2 | Preparedness to teach critical thinking and social development | 110 |
| Table 4.3 | Preparedness to use technology | 113 |
| Table 4.4 | Preparedness to understand learners | 115 |
| Table 4.5 | Preparedness to develop instructional leadership | 117 |
| Table 4.6 | Questions not in a factor | 119 |
| Table 4.7 | Question 4 results | 123 |
| Table 4.8 | Question 5 results | 130 |
| Table 4.9 | Question 6 results | 137 |
| Table 4.10 | Question 7 results | 145 |
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1  Preparedness to Promote Student Learning .................................................. 109
Figure 4.2  Preparedness to Teach Critical Thinking and Social Development .............. 112
Figure 4.3  Preparedness to Use Technology ................................................................. 114
Figure 4.4  Preparedness to Understand Learners ......................................................... 116
Figure 4.5  Preparedness to Develop Instructional Leadership ..................................... 118
Figure 4.6  Questions Not in a Factor ............................................................................. 120
Chapter One: Toward a Definition of Preparedness for Teaching

Introduction

With university-based teacher preparation programs currently under fire, and with calls for teacher preparation programs to be re-thought, re-designed, and held to new standards of accountability, it is a critical time for research into the preparation of teachers. While we know that teacher education matters for teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2006), researchers have called for more evidence and research into teacher preparation, specifically multifaceted research approaches that go beyond using test scores as metrics (Cochran-Smith, 2006). This study provides a rich and dynamic look at teacher preparation through an examination of preservice English language arts (ELA) teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and the factors influencing these perceptions. Because perceptions of preparedness have been identified as the strongest predictor of teacher efficacy (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002), and because teacher efficacy is significantly related to student achievement and teacher behavior (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), perceptions of preparedness provide an important lens with which to examine teacher preparation. Thus, this study explores the concept of preparedness by investigating preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach at the end of their student teaching internship. Using a sample consisting of an undergraduate and a graduate cohort of preservice middle and secondary ELA teachers enrolled in a College of Education teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southeast, I investigated how these preservice teachers defined and perceived of their preparedness to teach, as well as the various factors that impacted their perceptions.
In addition to contributing to the research on teacher preparation in general, this study adds to the knowledge base of ELA teacher preparation specifically. As there is a limited amount of research devoted to the preparation of ELA teachers, this study responds to the call for more scholarship in this area, especially as English educators lament the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught. Moreover, this study fills a gap in the literature by providing a definition of preparedness emergent from preservice ELA teachers’ experiences, a definition that had not existed prior in the scholarship on teacher preparation.

In responding to the call for more research into ELA teacher preparation, results from the study indicate that feeling prepared to teach is a complex and nuanced phenomenon, in part because perceptions of preparedness are task specific. Preservice ELA teachers’ definitions of preparedness and the factors impacting their perceptions of readiness are dependent on teacher candidates’ backgrounds and dispositions, and they hinge on the experience of student teaching. This variation in how student teaching is experienced has to do with the diverse cultures of placement schools, with the range of dynamics with cooperating teachers, and with how these forces collide with the skills, experiences, dispositions, and perspectives that student teachers bring to their internships.

A closer look at how preservice ELA teachers define preparedness to teach reveals that the phenomenon can mean very different things to teacher candidates. Feeling prepared to teach can mean having appropriate knowledge and skills; being in possession of strategies, tools and qualities; and having confidence in one’s ability to teach. Preparedness is also defined by preservice teachers as having a grasp on pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and classroom management skills, and it involves handling administrative
hurdles, navigating the political or bureaucratic elements of teaching, and embracing the collaborative nature of teaching, whether in the form of professional learning teams (PLT’s) or getting along well with colleagues.

Along with this range of definitions of preparedness are the myriad factors that impact preservice ELA teachers’ perception of preparedness to teach. These factors include student teaching, the cooperating teacher, the teacher preparation program, and the role of observations and teachers outside of the cooperating teacher at a placement school. Outside of the teacher preparation program and the student teaching internship, factors include a preservice teacher’s own K-12 schooling, how and why a preservice teacher decided to teach, and preservice teachers’ backgrounds, prior experiences, personalities, dispositions, confidence, and feelings about entering the teaching profession. Given these definitions and factors, the results from this study yield implications for selecting and supporting preservice ELA teachers; selecting, matching and evaluating cooperating teachers; and leveraging the role of observations and teachers outside of the cooperating teacher in preparing preservice ELA teachers for the classroom.

**Background of the Study**

There are several relevant contexts in which to consider the topic of perceptions of teacher preparedness, including the current trends in teacher preparation reform, the literature on ELA teacher preparation, as well as scholarship on teacher efficacy as it relates to perceptions of preparedness. Within the realm of teacher preparation reform, this study is set in the university-based teacher preparation program, where teacher preparation is currently under attack. Education leaders are among those calling for a “sea-change in our schools of
education” (Duncan, 2009), as programs are faulted for having low admission and graduation standards, weak curricula, out-of-touch faculty, and inadequate contact with schools (Levine, 2011). In addition to the public criticism of university-based teacher preparation programs, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) has called on teacher preparation programs to be revamped to reflect a more hands-on, clinical model (Kiley, 2010). Along with this new design, education schools are to be held more accountable for their teacher candidates’ performance in the classroom in an effort to raise the bar for teacher preparation programs. This focus on reforming teacher preparation has led to scholarship examining the influence of teacher preparation programs, with lenses ranging from the value-added impact on student test scores (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Henry, Thompson, Bastian, Fortner, Kershaw, Purtell, & Zulli, 2010) to an examination of the effects of different pathways to certification on perceptions of preparedness (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). As this study contributes to the research base on teacher preparedness, it addresses the demand to know more about the impact of teacher preparation.

Because teacher preparation must be considered as a content-specific endeavor (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009), this study is also situated within the literature on ELA teacher preparation. Within this context, this research responds to the call for further investigation into the training of ELA teachers (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009; NCTE, 2006), especially as English educators continue to lament the lack of reform in how English gets taught (Mayher, 1990; Quisenberry, 1981; Tremmel, 2006; Wolfe & Antinarella, 1997). The reasons for the stagnant approaches to the teaching of ELA, despite innovative and progressive ideas being
pushed in the profession, include the phenomenon of the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), whereby students resort to teaching as they were taught (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Marshall & Smith, 1997), as well as the perceived “clash” between the liberal pedagogies espoused in the university-based teacher preparation program and the conservative realities of schools (Dickson, Smagorinsky, Bush, Christenbury, Cummings, George, Graham, Hartman, Kynard, Roskelly, Steffel, Vinz, & Weinstein, 2006; Smagorinsky, 1999; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002;). Reform in the teaching of ELA would embrace a student-centered, experience-oriented curriculum (Mayher, 1990) and would begin with the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, as they bridge the best practices of research and application.

In considering preservice ELA teacher preparation, I also turn to the lens of perceptions of preparedness for teaching, as highlighted by Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) in their study comparing the perceptions of preparedness of teachers prepared through university-based programs and those prepared through alternative pathways. Their study points to the importance of teachers’ feelings of preparedness, as the authors found that, “Sense of preparedness is by far the strongest predictor of teaching efficacy” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 294). Teacher efficacy, in turn, as developed from Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1997), is an important factor to consider in teacher preparation, as researchers have found a significant relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher effectiveness (Ashton, 1984; Coladarci, 1992; Tschanne-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Specifically, teacher efficacy, defined as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific
teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 233) has been shown to be related to student achievement and motivation, as well as teacher behavior and classroom management (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Thus, perceptions of preparedness of preservice teachers matter, as they relate to teacher efficacy and subsequent student and teacher outcomes.

As a result of the link between perceptions and efficacy, researchers have examined the perceptions of preparedness of teachers, as they relate to teaching in an urban environment and teaching culturally diverse students (Casey, 2011; Harris, 2010; Thompson, 2011), to different routes of certification (Jones, 1998; Matson, 2007; Wooten, 2009), and to the difference in perceptions of preservice and beginning teachers (Clark, 2009; Moore-Hayes, 2008). While these studies focused on teachers’ perceptions of preparedness, there existed a gap in the scholarship when it came to defining the phenomenon of feeling prepared to teach. This study addresses that gap by exploring the concept of “preparedness to teach,” as experienced by teacher candidates themselves. With a keener understanding of what we mean by “preparedness to teach” and the factors impacting how the phenomenon of preparedness is experienced, we can better address how to best prepare preservice ELA teachers.

**Purpose of the Study**

With direct implications for improving the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, this study examines what it means to feel prepared to teach, as experienced by teacher candidates at the end of their student teaching internship. To gain insight into the phenomenon of preparedness, this investigation considers the range of factors that influence
preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach, including the reasons why teacher candidates chose the teaching profession, as well as other work and life experiences that may influence a sense of readiness for teaching.

In an effort to best understand this phenomenon of teacher preparedness, I employed a mixed methods research design that moved from a less dominant quantitative + qualitative phase to a more dominant qualitative phase (quan + qual → QUAL) (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). As this equation indicates, the less dominant quantitative and qualitative phases of the study served to inform the more dominant qualitative phase, in part through using the first two phases to help select a sample for the third phase. The quantitative phase replicated a scale used by Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) in their examination of teachers’ views of their preparation for teaching. In addition to this measurement, definitions of preparedness and the factors influencing perceptions of preparedness were solicited from participants via four open-ended questions on the survey. Based on the survey results, a sample of six student teachers, representing a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach, were interviewed. This interview data were analyzed in the form of case studies that contextualize the phenomenon of preparedness and ground the concept within the myriad factors that impact a preservice teacher’s sense of readiness to teach.

Ultimately, the results from this study have implications for preparing and supporting preservice ELA teachers, as we come to better understand the extent to which teacher candidates feel prepared to teach and the reasons behind their perceptions of readiness. As this study wrestles with what it means to feel prepared to teach ELA, the findings contribute
to the literature on ELA teacher preparation by forging new ground in defining “preparedness to teach.”

**Definition of Terms**

In working towards a definition of preparedness, it is important to define the terms in this study, as used specifically in the context of preparing ELA teachers. Clarifying the terms used throughout the research sharpens the lenses used in the study and grounds the research in an established body of literature. As such, the following terms are defined:

**Beginning teacher** (or **novice teacher**): A beginning or novice teacher has been teaching for less than 5 years or has not yet received tenure (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005).

**Disposition:** As the term disposition is defined as one’s tendency, inclination or temperament (“Disposition,” 2013), I include the term here to emphasize the impact of **multiple factors** on student teachers’ predispositions that they bring to their teaching. The psychologist Richard Lewin (1935) emphasized that multiple environmental contexts lead to multiple modes of behavior, which, in turn, correlate to one’s disposition:

Reference to […] an aggregate of specific environments is indispensable to the concept of predisposition: a disposition or individual characteristic of the person cannot be defined by one specific mode of behavior, but only by an aggregate of modes of behavior of such kind that different environmental situations are correlated with the modes of behavior they elicit. (Lewin, 1935, p. 71)
Thus, this perspective highlights the importance of investigating the multiple factors and contexts (background, education, experience) that impact a student teacher’s disposition, which, in turn, colors his or her perception of preparedness to teach.

**English vs. English language arts:** While “English language arts” (ELA) is the term used more frequently for middle grades and “English” for secondary or high school level, I use the term “English language arts” in this study to apply to both levels. I use this broad term in an effort to be all encompassing and inclusive of ELA content as applied to both middle and secondary levels and to align with the use of the term by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE):

> We continue to use the term *ELA* to emphasize the richness of the discipline and the ways in which ELA teacher candidates need to embrace an understanding of their content that goes beyond the confines of some traditional English majors to encompass a study of the complexities of literacy, including media and technology literacies, the developmental nature of language and of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and the many diverse kinds of interactions readers can have with texts of all sorts and with each other through the use of the language processes. (NCTE, 2006, p. 6)

**Induction:** As defined by Harry Wong (2004), teacher induction is “a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development progress – that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program” (p. 42).

**Preservice teacher:** A preservice teacher is a teacher candidate who is preparing to become a teacher, as distinguished from an in-service teacher, who is already employed as a teacher.
**Perception:** Certainly there are different contexts and meanings of the term “perception.” While the American Psychological Association (APA) defines it as, “The processes that organize information in the sensory image and interpret it as having been produced by properties of objects or events in the external, three-dimensional world” (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002), I use the term to refer to the psychological mental processes, “by which intellectual, sensory, and emotional data are organized logically or meaningfully” (“Perception,” 2002). Because intellect and emotion factor into perception, I use this term to underscore that the unique experiences and dispositions of each student teacher will impact his or her perception of preparedness to teach. Moreover, as the psychologist Richard Gregory (1970) argued, prior knowledge and past experience play important roles in perception, and thus, I turn to participants’ knowledge and experiences as a way to glean their perceptions of preparedness to teach.

Defining these terms serves to contextualize my research topic, as I concentrated specifically on the perceptions of preparedness of ELA teacher candidates. In addition, the use of these terms throughout the study points to the broader implications for teacher education in general, as I work towards a definition of preparedness for teaching.

**Significance of the Study**

This study, then, has implications for both preparing preservice ELA teachers as well as for enriching our understanding of what it means to feel prepared to teach within the context of teacher education. As education scholar Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) points out, there is “substantial and growing evidence that teacher education matters for teacher
effectiveness” (p. 6). However, we need more evidence and research into teacher preparation, and education scholar Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2006) specifically advocates for “the development of multifaceted research approaches that pose a range of questions, incorporate multiple research paradigms, and define pupil learning outcomes in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (p. 25). In addition, while the current trends in teacher preparation embrace clinical models and value-added assessment measures, “there is growing mutual agreement that we should focus on program content and on candidates’ experiences and knowledge rather than debate which kinds of programs or organizational structures are best” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 20). Hence, this study responds to the call for more research into teacher preparation by focusing on teacher candidates’ experiences and by considering the readiness of preservice ELA teachers “in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 25).

In addition to contributing to the research on teacher preparation in general, this study adds to the knowledge base of ELA teacher preparation specifically, as English educators continue to call for more scholarship in this area. Examining the perceptions of preparedness of preservice ELA teachers has direct implications for preparing future ELA teachers, as this research considers the impact of the teacher preparation program, as well as numerous other factors – including experience, education, and dispositions – that influence a preservice teacher’s sense of readiness to teach. Knowledge about these perceptions and factors can be leveraged for deeper contemplation of ELA teacher preparation, as I consider best practices of the curricular and experiential components of teacher preparation, as well as implications of the dispositions and backgrounds that preservice teachers bring with them to the teacher
preparation program. Moreover, this study fills a gap in the literature by providing a definition of preparedness emergent from preservice ELA teachers’ experiences, a definition that had not existed prior in the scholarship on teacher preparation.

**Overview of Methodological Approach**

In order to provide a rich and multifaceted look at teacher preparation, this study employs a mixed methods research design that examines preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and the factors influencing these perceptions. Using a sample consisting of an undergraduate cohort and a graduate cohort of preservice middle and secondary ELA teachers enrolled in a College of Education teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southeast (n = 23), this research design moves from a less dominant quantitative + qualitative phase to a more dominant qualitative phase (quan + qual → QUAL) (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This mixed methods approach provides a measure of how prepared preservice ELA teachers felt to teach via a Likert scale, with questions replicated from Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2002) study; definitions of preparedness based on four open-ended survey questions; as well as a more in-depth and contextualized look at how and why participants felt prepared to teach via case study interviews. In this way, employing mixed methods enabled me to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in an effort to better understand the phenomenon of feeling prepared to teach (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003, p. 353).

Ultimately, this study unpacks the essence of feeling prepared to teach ELA, as well as how preservice ELA teachers experience the phenomenon of preparedness, by inquiring into the following research questions:
RQ1: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?”

RQ2: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach?

RQ3: Based on their definitions and the factors impacting their perceptions of preparedness, how prepared do preservice ELA teachers feel to teach at the end of their student teaching internship?

Overview of Research Methods

To answer these research questions, I recruited undergraduate and graduate preservice ELA teachers who were enrolled in the middle grades and secondary ELA methods courses in the fall of 2012, and who were student teaching in the spring of 2013. The main instrument for the initial quantitative phase of the research consisted of a Likert scale survey replicated from Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2002) study that investigated whether teacher education influences what teachers feel prepared to do when they enter the classroom. Added to the Likert scale survey were four open-ended questions that asked participants to define what feeling prepared to teach meant to them and the factors influencing their perceptions. I used the Qualtrics survey software to create and distribute the survey.

After selecting six student teachers who represented a range of perceived preparedness to teach based on the survey, I used an interview protocol for interviewing the sample of student teachers. In conducting the interviews, I used the interview guide approach, whereby “topics are prespecified and listed on an interview protocol, but they can be reworded as needed and are covered by the interviewer in any sequence or order” (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 305). I transcribed all interviews myself.

To analyze the results from the Likert scale surveys, I conducted a descriptive
statistics analysis to determine the general trends in the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In part, the results from the Likert scale survey were used to develop maximum variation sampling for the qualitative phase of the research study, as the results helped to inform the sampling plan and interview protocol of the interview phase of the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 120).

To analyze the open-ended questions on the survey, I initially used open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as a way to get at the ideas and meaning contained in the raw data (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, pp. 138-139). These initial coding rounds led to the creation of codebooks, which I employed as I engaged in intercoder reliability with an English education colleague. I subsequently employed axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as I sought to “identify any connections that may exist between codes” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 139). As the coding process is both fluid and iterative, I conducted multiple coding rounds until I felt I reached saturation (Richards, 2009). Throughout this coding process, I kept memos as a way to monitor and track my data analysis.

The analysis of the interview data initially looked similar to the coding of the open-ended questions, as I openly coded the data to create codebooks and engaged in axial coding as I looked for categories and themes across codes. As this phase of data analysis ultimately yielded case studies of the six student teachers, I followed case study methodology in approaching the interview data. Thus, I was interested in comparing themes across interview data as one dimension of data analysis (Stake, 1995), and I employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a way to “construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179).
Through the processes of collecting and analyzing my data, I remained cognizant about my researcher bias and thoughtful about the impact of my worldview on my study. Operating from a constructivist epistemology, I assume a transactional / subjectivist stance that sees “knowledge as created in interaction among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). This is especially true given my background as an ELA teacher, university supervisor, and English educator, which led to my unique stance of having both been in the participants’ shoes and played a role in helping to prepare preservice ELA teachers. From this perspective, which I bracketed at times and drew upon at times throughout the study, I sought understanding of what it means to feel prepared to teach by soliciting “individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112). With this stance, I kept in mind the constructions that I, as the inquirer, hold as I worked towards an understanding of “preparedness to teach.” The subjectivity inherent in this worldview, however, need not be seen as “a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 45).

Furthermore, in pursuit of validity in my study, I sought to be methodical in presenting evidence, so that it has “sufficient clarity (e.g., in separate texts, tables, and exhibits) to allow readers to judge independently [my] later interpretation of the data” (Yin, 2012, pp. 14 – 15). In addition to keeping memos and presenting evidence with such clarity, I employed member checking as a way to ensure that I accurately captured the students teachers’ meanings in their interviews. I also used pseudonyms for participants in the interest of protecting the anonymity of their responses.

In using both quantitative and qualitative measures to examine the phenomenon of
teacher preparedness, this study provides a rich and dynamic look at what it means to feel prepared to teach. Coming at a time when teacher preparation programs are under fire, and when English educators are calling for more research into the preparation of ELA teachers, this study contributes to the knowledge base of teacher preparation with important implications for preparing future ELA teachers.

**Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

With university-based teacher preparation programs currently under fire, and with calls for teacher preparation programs to be re-thought, re-designed, and held to new standards of accountability, it is a critical time for research into the preparation of teachers. With direct implications for improving the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, this study examines what it means to feel prepared to teach, as experienced by teacher candidates at the end of their student teaching internship. In an effort to gain insight into the phenomenon of preparedness, this investigation uses a mixed methods design to consider what preparedness to teach means to preservice ELA teachers by taking into account their experiences and perceptions as well as the range of factors that influence a preservice ELA teacher’s sense of readiness to enter the classroom.

In Chapter Two, I review and synthesize literature on the various contexts that help to ground this study in the history, trends, and scholarship that surround the topic of ELA teacher preparation. Thus, I consider the current trends of teacher preparation reform, the history and literature on ELA teacher preparation, as well as scholarship on teacher efficacy as it relates to perceptions of preparedness.
In Chapter Three, I present my methodology and research design, going into detail about my sampling criteria, data collection, procedures, and analysis. In addition, I define research validity and reliability in relation to my mixed methods study and examine my subjectivity and positionality as it pertains to my research. I also address ethical issues of the study.

In Chapter Four, I present the results from my data, and in Chapter Five I discuss the implications of my research, specifically what the findings imply for the preparation of preservice ELA teachers. I also consider the limitations of the study and suggest areas for future research.
Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction: Scope of Literature Review

The topic of perceptions of teacher preparedness can be seen through a variety of lenses and contexts. As such, the literature relevant to this topic is broad in scope and is comprised of overlapping contexts. Investigating preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness leads me to first examine the current trends in teacher preparedness in general, given that university-based teacher preparation is under fire and the topic of teacher preparation is in the spotlight. Therefore, I begin this literature review with a look at the zeitgeist of teacher preparation, including the current trends and policies that either already or soon will impact how teachers are prepared.

Following this context of teacher preparation in general, I focus on literature about ELA teacher preparation specifically, as the preparation of middle and secondary ELA teachers is necessarily content specific. I first provide a brief history of the preparation of ELA teachers, as this history provides the foundation for preparing ELA teachers today and informs our understanding of what constitutes a well-prepared ELA teacher as well as best practices for preparing future ELA teachers. I then examine scholarship on ELA teacher preparation, some of which has highlighted the lack of reform in how ELA teachers teach, whether because teachers teach as they were taught or because they are unable to enact what some perceive as the “liberal pedagogy” (Smagorinsky, 1999) espoused in their university-based preparation program in a more conservative-leaning school environment. I highlight English educators who have decried this lack of reform in how ELA gets taught, as it relates
to the preparation of ELA teachers, and what these scholars have to say about how to begin
enacting reform.

After setting up these contexts, I provide a rationale for why perceptions of
preparedness matter, as they impact a teacher’s sense of efficacy. This sense of efficacy, in
turn, has been shown to be related to positive student and teacher behavior. However, rather
than seeking to measure teacher efficacy or examine perceptions of preparedness through this
metric, I seek to make the connection that perceptions of preparedness matter because teacher
efficacy matters. However, I delimit this look at teacher efficacy as an overview rather than
a comprehensive examination.

With this connection established, I highlight other studies that examine perceptions of
preparedness to teach. Because there is a limited amount of published literature that focuses
on perceptions of preparedness of ELA teachers specifically, I include “perceptions of
preparedness” studies outside of the ELA content area. While these studies focus on
different areas of preparedness (vs. my focus on perceptions of preparedness), they use the
framework of self-efficacy as a way to understand and even measure perceptions of
preparedness to teach.

I acknowledge how broad in scope this review of relevant literature is and how many
lenses I draw upon in order to lay the foundation for my research. Rather than being
comprehensive in scope, these backgrounds provide the overlapping contexts for situating
this study within current trends, relevant history, and existing scholarship. These lenses are
meant to provide a layered and nuanced perspective with which to consider preservice ELA
teachers’ perceptions of preparedness, as I endeavor through this research to provide a rich
and multi-layered understanding of the phenomenon of preparedness with implications for preparing future ELA teachers.

The wide net that I cast in this literature review also speaks to the unique aims of this study. That is, there are no existing studies that have sought to define what preparedness to teach – ELA or in general – means to teacher candidates themselves. Therefore, as I grapple with what it means to feel prepared to teach ELA, I aim to contribute to the existing literature on ELA teacher preparation as well as to forge new ground in considering definitions of and factors contributing to “preparedness to teach.” To this end, I consider the state of teacher preparation in the critical spotlight, the history and literature on ELA teacher preparation, as well as scholarship on teacher efficacy as it relates to perceptions of preparedness.

**Teacher Preparation in the Critical Spotlight**

This examination of teacher preparation in general begins with a 2009 speech at Teacher’s College, where Secretary of Education Arne Duncan acknowledged the storied negative perception of teacher education: “Almost since colleges of education came into being they have frequently been treated like the Rodney Dangerfield of higher education,” he expressed (Duncan, 2009, p. 16). Teacher preparation programs have never received respect, he went on to say, whether from university offices or governmental agencies. Darling-Hammond (2006), who has devoted much of her research to teacher preparation, also references this history of bad press that has befallen teacher preparation programs: “Since normal schools for training teachers were incorporated into universities in the 1950’s, a steady drumbeat of complaints has reiterated the perceptions of program fragmentation, weak content, poor pedagogy, disconnection from schools, and inconsistent oversight of teachers-
in-training” (p. 6). Underlying this criticism, she explains, is the myth that teachers are born and not made. In addition, she acknowledges the challenge that teacher education faces in terms of competing with the experiences and predetermined ideas that teachers bring with them to the classroom from their days as students, resulting in the perpetuation of traditional and potentially ineffective ways of teaching.

While university-based teacher preparation has been plagued by negative perceptions through the years, the current criticism of teacher preparation programs has reached a fever pitch. In Duncan’s (2009) speech, he specifically called for a “sea-change in our schools of education” and went on to say that, “Many if not most of the nation's 1,450 schools, colleges, and departments of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom” (p. 13). Arthur Levine (2011), the former president of Teachers College at Columbia University, echoed Duncan’s sentiment. He has directly called on universities to close the large number of teacher education programs that are failing:

Too many programs have low admission and graduation standards, weak curricula, inadequate time in school classrooms, faculty who are out of touch with practice, and limited contact with schools. There has never been a better time than right now for states to dramatically improve university-based teacher education.

The charge of scrutinizing teacher preparation programs has even been taken up by U.S. News and World Report, which began assigning grades A – F to more than 1,000 teacher colleges in June, 2013, in partnership with the independent advocacy group the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (Gabriel, 2011).
This NCTQ group also published its own June, 2013 report criticizing teacher preparation programs for having low admission standards, teacher candidates who lacked content knowledge, and student teaching internships that were less than effective (Ingeno, 2013). Of the 1,200 elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs reviewed, only four programs received the four-out-of-four-stars rating (Ingeno, 2013). Darling-Hammond (2013) criticized the report for using a narrow measure of inputs (e.g., syllabi and catalogs obtained from websites) rather than considering any output measures, and for using blatantly inaccurate information to “grade” programs. These inaccuracies resulted, at least in part, from the less than 1% cooperation rate the NCTQ reported having with teacher preparation programs across the country (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

At the local level, New York City released its own scorecard for the city’s teacher preparation programs, based on metrics including the number of teachers placed in low-performing schools; the number of teachers certified in high demand areas, such as math, science, and special education; teacher performance as measured by tenure and principals’ ratings; as well as teacher retention (Hernandez, 2013). Although New York might be the first urban district to compare and grade its own teacher preparation programs, other states such as Ohio and Tennessee have efforts underway to evaluate their university-based teaching preparation programs in a similar way (Hernandez, 2013).

Building up to this flurry of grading and criticizing teacher preparation programs was a November, 2010 report released by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE – now Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, or CAEP), which called on education programs to be revamped to reflect a more hands-on clinical
model, similar to how medical schools prepare doctors (Kiley, 2010). The report criticizes
the current model of teacher education, with its emphasis on coursework and theory, and
calls for a radically different approach that places hands-on preparation at the center of
teacher preparation. The new recommended model would have students gaining practical
experience in the classroom as soon as they begin their program, rather than waiting until
their coursework is under way. Along with a new design for teacher education programs,
education schools would be held more accountable for their teacher candidates’ performance
(via K–12 students’ test scores) in an effort to raise the bar for teacher preparation programs
(Kiley, 2010).

This type of accountability is already underway in Louisiana in the form of value-
added assessment that links K-12 student achievement back to the teachers and institutions
where student teachers were prepared. This accountability metric was also the focus of a
large-scale study by Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) that examined
the effects of teacher preparation on teachers’ value-added impact on student test scores. In
performing a detailed analysis of 31 elementary teacher preparation programs (both
traditional and alternative), the authors sought to know whether the effects of teachers’
preparation ultimately had an impact on student achievement as represented by test scores.
The authors of the study found that “learning that is grounded in the practice of teaching –
such as that proxied by the capstone project, studying curricula, and oversight of student
teaching – is associated positively with student achievement gains in the [teacher’s] first
year” (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 434).
One result of the negative perception of teacher education programs, as well as the calls for stricter accountability measures and program overhauls, has been the increase in alternative routes for obtaining teacher certification. One estimate is that of the nation’s 3.6 million teachers, 500,000 have entered the teaching profession through routes other than the university-based teacher education program (Otterman, 2011). Other estimates put the number of teachers prepared through alternative pathways at 20% (Feistritzer, 2009).

Indeed, just as NCATE called for, these programs, including Teach for America and the Relay Graduate School of Education, stress early immersion in the classroom rather than coursework prior to practical experience. In a June, 2010 report published by the Carolina Institute for Public Policy, and similar to Boyd et al.’s (2009) study in terms of its focus on test score outcomes, researchers examined the connection between teacher preparation and student test scores in North Carolina. Comparing teachers who entered the profession through undergraduate preparation programs at 15 University of North Carolina institutions against teachers who entered the North Carolina public schools through another route, the study found that “NC undergraduate prepared teachers perform near the middle of the pack but slightly better than teachers from several other sources” (including teachers who were prepared out-of-state) (Henry, Thompson, Bastian, Fortner, Kershaw, Purtell, & Zulli, 2010). Teach for America teachers, on the other hand, were found to outperform UNC undergraduate prepared teachers, sometimes by wide margins (Henry et al., 2010). The focus on this type of data highlights the current demand to know more about the impact of teacher preparation on the K-12 students that they teach.
**Contextualizing the criticism of teacher preparation.** As the calls for reforming teacher preparation (which is not just a U.S. trend but one that other countries are paying attention to [Cochran-Smith, 2006]) grow louder, it is worth examining the attitudes underlying the criticism. These assumptions reveal that teacher preparation, as it relates to teacher quality, is a complex issue. Just as teacher quality “is not a single concept with a single meaning” (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 6), nor is teacher preparation, as it encompasses a range of complex and even controversial issues (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 6). As such, the current criticism of teacher preparation can be seen through a variety of lenses that highlight these complex issues.

Perhaps the most popular lens is the economic argument for the improvement of teacher education, hence teacher quality, hence student achievement. Seen from this perspective, teacher education plays a role in the economic prosperity of the United States, as this prosperity “depends on the ability of all its citizens to complete in the knowledge economy – which depends on teachers and schools” (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 7). This argument is at the crux of the Obama administration’s calls for teacher preparation reform, which stems from the need for a “more talented and effective teaching force” along with “rigorous new standards and assessments for students” (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 7).

Other trends in teacher preparation reform, as highlighted by Cochran-Smith and Power (2010), highlight underlying concerns pertaining to teacher preparation. One of these issues has to do with the increasing diversity of students, who bring a range of cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities to the classroom. Teacher preparation must reflect the
needs of these diverse learners, this argument asserts. When teachers are not prepared to meet these demands, the achievement gap is exacerbated via the teacher-quality gap, which stems from “schools with large numbers of poor and minority students [being] most likely to have teachers who are inexperienced, teaching in areas outside their fields, or otherwise unqualified” (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 7). Teacher education must account for the increasing demands of students’ needs as well as for the growing teacher-quality gap, which perpetuates unequal access to a quality education.

Although the issue of teacher preparation is complex and multifaceted, the solutions that have dominated trends in teacher preparation reform are less nuanced. These solutions focus on outcomes and results via student and teacher performance on standardized assessments. The premise is that “the effectiveness of preparation programs and pathways should be assessed in terms of student and other outcomes and results rather than inputs, such as curriculum and resources” (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010, p. 8). As Cochran-Smith (2006) explains, this trend towards outcomes in teacher education accountability “is part of a larger shift toward defining education accountability more broadly” (p. 24), and it is a focus that heavily favors the economic argument of teacher preparation reform.

This trend toward outcomes can also be viewed in connection with the prevalence of standards-based education, including the 2001 passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). As former NCTE president Joanne Yatvin expressed in her 2007 annual address at the NCTE convention about NCLB, “[By] using test scores as the sole criterion of effective teaching and learning, federal law […] put[s] derogatory public labels on schools, humiliates teachers, and robs school districts of the resources they need to serve students effectively” (p. 2). In
her speech, Yatvin points out that NCLB makes an erroneous focus on achievement rather than learning, and she criticizes the act for its narrow definition of a highly qualified teacher. Left out of NCLB’s definition are a teacher’s abilities to “inspire students to learn, to incorporate their interests into the curriculum, to earn their trust and cooperation, and to channel their energies into productive work” (Yatvin, 2007, pp. 8 – 9). These are not metrics that can be captured by data-driven evidence of a teacher’s effectiveness, and while Yatvin alludes to the possibility that policies might improve with the administration following Bush, the focus on measuring student and teacher achievement through test scores has been pushed further by the Obama administration’s Race to the Top initiative (Rush & Scherff, 2011).

Ultimately, whichever lens we use to consider teacher preparation, we know that how we prepare our teachers is a critical component of teacher quality. As Darling-Hammond (2006) points out, there is “substantial and growing evidence that teacher education matters for teacher effectiveness” (p. 6). However, we need more evidence and research into teacher preparation, and Cochran-Smith (2006) specifically advocates “the development of multifaceted research approaches that pose a range of questions, incorporate multiple research paradigms, and define pupil learning outcomes in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (p. 25). In addition, while the current trends in teacher preparation embrace clinical models and value-added assessment measures, “there is growing mutual agreement that we should focus on program content and on candidates’ experiences and knowledge rather than debate which kinds of programs or organizational structures are best” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 20). Hence, this study heeds the call for more research into teacher preparation by focusing on teacher candidates’ experiences and by considering the readiness
of preservice ELA teachers “in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 25).

The Context of the History of ELA Teacher Preparation

Any consideration of teacher preparation must include the history and trends of preparation in that content area, as this context provides both a foundational understanding of that content area’s issues surrounding teacher preparation as well as a lens with which to consider current trends in content-specific teacher preparation. Therefore, I provide a brief history of ELA teacher preparation as a way to situate this study within the context of ELA teacher preparation research and issues throughout the years. Just as teacher preparation in general is under great scrutiny, “we are currently experiencing a watershed moment in terms of English teacher education standards and program assessment” (Zancanella & Alsup, 2010, p. 70). Accordingly, it is a critical time to look back at the history of ELA teacher preparation and to consider the influence of this history on the current state of ELA teacher preparation.

This history of ELA teacher education can be viewed as a history of committees and commissions, of influential scholars and teachers, of seminal works and publications. It includes the initial struggle to get ELA recognized as a legitimate school subject, the opposition to the influence of the college entrance exam on the ELA curriculum, and the push to teach grammar in context. As former NCTE president Alfred Grommon (1968) writes, the history of ELA teacher preparation is a “succession of events, documents, and people. Each seems to represent not only a culmination of scattered tendencies but also a gathering of forces for a fresh look ahead” (p. 523). Grommon (1968) provides a
comprehensive history (through 1968) of ELA teacher preparation in *The English Journal*, the same year as NCTE’s first publication of *Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English*, which NCTE has revised and published every ten years since. These NCTE Guidelines, along with standards from other bodies such as CAEP, continue to form the backbone of what influences ELA teacher preparation.

**A cornucopia of committees and reports, figures and recommendations.** The history of ELA teacher preparation can be traced back to New England in the 17th century. While laws were passed in Massachusetts as early as 1642 that established schools for the teaching of ELA, the subject itself was considered of little importance in American schools and colleges as late as the 1870’s (Grommon, 1968, p. 484). Things shifted when Harvard changed their entrance exam in 1873-1874, requiring applicants to write a composition related to certain selections of English literature. Specifically, applicants were called upon to “write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time” (Hoffman, 1956, p. 231). The books upon which the exams were based became the early canon, and the weight given to the exam and these books had enormous influence on the teaching of ELA: As ELA gained importance as a subject in school, more consideration was given to the methods of teaching ELA, and there was increased demand for teachers prepared specifically in ELA (Grommon, 1968, p. 485). In the history of ELA teacher preparation, this was the first influential milestone.

While the increasing number of articles in professional journals and textbooks on the teaching of ELA during the second half of the 19th century pointed to the growing
“acceptance of the front-rank importance of the field and the need for teachers especially prepared to teach it” (Grommon, 1968, p. 486), the importance of the field was solidified in 1892 when the Committee of Ten was appointed by the National Education Association to create a study of secondary school programs. The Conference on English was one of these nine programs, and it put out specific recommendations about ELA teacher preparation: ELA teachers should be familiar with grammar, should be able to teach dialects and literary language authority and usage, and should be familiar with the decay of inflections (Grommon, 1968, p. 486). Of greater influence was the precedent that the committee established of working closely with universities and governmental agencies on educational issues. The work of the Committee of Ten also resulted in the formation of the Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education and a Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools. It was the Subcommittee of the Committee of Fifteen that made recommendations for improving teacher preparation, including a suggestion for an early version of micro-teaching and for a postgraduate year of training for teachers – what would become the student teaching internship.

Following the influential work of these committees was the publication in 1903 of *The Teaching of English in Elementary and the Secondary School*, written by George Carpenter, Franklin Baker, and Fred Scott. Scott wrote the section on “The Teacher and His Training,” in which he discusses the importance of teaching grammar in context: “[The ELA teacher] should come to see that in teaching grammar his chief duty is to awaken the minds of his students to the meaning of their familiar modes of expression” (as cited in Grommon, 1968, p. 490). In addition to grammar, Scott presents recommendations for the preservice
ELA teacher for reading literature, for studying a foreign language, for methods of teaching and evaluating writing, and for studying the “psychology of speech” (Grommon, 1968, p. 490). Scott, along with James Fleming Hosic and Edwin Miller, went on to found NCTE in 1911, an event which came about, in part, as a result of the “growing dissatisfaction with the influence of colleges upon high school programs, making them too restrictive and irrelevant for many, if not most, students” (Grommon, 1968, p. 492). While NCTE was not yet formally involved in the preparation of ELA teachers, Hosic directly was, as he was a member of the 1912 National Joint Committee on the Reorganization of English in the High Schools, which offered recommendations for the preparation of teachers. This committee took a holistic approach to the preparation of ELA teachers, recognizing the importance of studies in the subject of ELA, educational principles and methods, as well as experience. In addition, Hosic acknowledged that other factors impacted an ELA teacher’s success, including class size and resources (Grommon, 1968, p. 492). Perhaps most significantly, Hosic’s committee presented perspectives that got away from the study of ELA being dictated by and geared toward the college-bound student.

Whatever focus that did exist on ELA teacher preparation at this time centered mainly on the study of literature, literary criticism, and language. In addition, personality traits as well as performance attributes were considerations in the preparation of preservice ELA teachers. As English educator Kristine Marshall (1984) describes, ELA teacher candidates were expected to be in possession of certain, if unrealistic, personality traits. Marshall (1984) explains: “Patience, determination, passion, sympathy, cultivation, personality: these are myriad, diverse, elusive qualities seemingly impossible qualifications to be found in a
young person at the start of professional training” (p. 64). Marshall (1984) also explains how voice training was considered crucial to an ELA teacher’s preparation.

In addition to these qualities, the question of who was responsible for preparing ELA teachers also influenced how ELA teachers were prepared during the first half of the 20th century. Because the responsibility fell on English scholars, preservice teachers were prepped in areas deemed important to the academic field of English. This lack of divide between the preparation of English majors preparing to teach versus the preparation of English majors not preparing to teach contributed to a tension between the subject of English (as studied in college) and the subject of teaching ELA (as taught in grades K-12). It is a tension that NCTE still addresses today, as the most recent 2006 Guidelines takes care to establish the distinction between the needs of the two strands of English majors.

Other themes of ELA teacher preparation arose during the first half of the 20th century, with the next wave of influence emerging in the form of a figure and a curriculum guide, both of which were early promoters of experiential learning and student-centered instruction. Walter Barnes was an English educator and an influential figure in the preparation of ELA teachers, as he emphasized “the importance of teachers’ attending democratically in the classroom to the wide range of students’ characteristics, needs, experiences, abilities, interests” (Grommon, 1968, p. 494). In addition to promoting a student-centered classroom, Barnes also emphasized the importance of talk, the use of English in everyday life, relating writing relevant to students’ personal experiences, and picking literature that would appeal to students. Capitalizing on the child’s experience was also at the heart of An Experience Curriculum, published in 1935 as a result of the work of
the NCTE appointed Curriculum Commission, which was tasked with creating an ELA curriculum that could be used for K-graduate school. As Grommon (1968) writes, the underlying principles in *An Experience Curriculum* illustrate how an ELA program can be “designed to accommodate the wide range of individual differences in and out of school, and to foster each child’s creativity” (p. 496). This focus on experience extended to the college and graduate school curriculum, which, according to *An Experience Curriculum*, should also be based on the premise that “experience is the best of all schools” (Grommon, 1968, p. 496), as experience provides opportunities for students to get hands-on practice and real-world application.

Following Barnes and *An Experience Curriculum* came the work of English educator Dora Smith, who wrote and researched extensively on ELA and English education in the 1930’s and 1940’s. Smith posed a series questions related to ELA teacher preparation that are still relevant today:

How do the requirements and options in preservice programs relate to the realities of teaching English in the varieties of schools and communities? How are changes brought about in programs that are largely irrelevant to the kinds of teaching called for in the schools? What can be done to acquaint teachers with the results of respectable research in their own fields and then help them use the results in their teaching? How can we stimulate teachers to continue to read the professional literature in their field? How can institutions and school districts help teachers keep from returning to outmoded concepts, materials, and methods of teaching soon after they have completed their preservice preparation? (as cited in Grommon, 1968, p. 501)

Smith’s insights and research on ELA teacher preparation led to her appointment as Director of the Commission on the English Curriculum, established in 1945. Through the 1950’s and 60’s this Commission published five volumes known as the *Curriculum Series*, and along
with other influential reports, this body of work on English education led many states to increase the number of credits teachers needed to be certified to teach ELA. These other reports included *The Basic Issues in the Teaching of English*, published as a supplement to *The English Journal* in 1959 by the Conference on the Basic Issues in the Teaching of English. This report raised questions about how many courses in education versus English preservice teachers should have, as well as what standard qualifications in English should be established for secondary ELA teachers (Grommon, 1968, p. 506). This report was followed by the 1961 publication of *The National Interest and the Teaching of English, A Report on the Status of the Profession*, which decried the adequacy of the preparation of ELA teachers (Grommon, 1968, p. 508). Next came “A Standard of Preparation to Teach English,” developed by the NCTE Committee on Preparation and Certification of Teachers. A precursor to the later *NCTE Guidelines*, this report outlined the scope of preparation needed for ELA teachers in modern English language and literature as well as the skills needed to implement effective ELA teaching. Though Grommon calls it “modest in scope,” he highlights how this report represented “an important first step toward the identification of specific standards” (Grommon, 1968, p. 508).

The next round of ELA teacher preparation events, reports and guidelines in the 1960’s put a spotlight on the relationships within and collaborations between the school and university-based teacher preparation program. One such collaboration of English educators and ELA teachers involved a summer institute of courses, designed by professors of English and ELA teachers, which were offered to secondary ELA teachers in an effort to “help teachers overcome […] deficiencies in their preparation as revealed in published surveys”
(Grommon, 1968, p. 508). Each candidate for the institute was required to include a letter from his or her principal stating that he or she could implement what was learned. As a follow-up to the summer institute, an English educator would visit the ELA teacher’s classroom during the year. As Grommon (1968) explains, this was a true collaboration between school and university:

The teacher and his students had an opportunity to confer with an English specialist from a college or university; the professor had the sobering, firsthand experience of seeing in the classes what it is really like to teach English to high school students. (p. 509)

Moreover, this collaboration provided a model for professional development, whereby the school had to agree ahead of time to let the teacher implement what he or she learned.

The work of James Bryant Conant, who was president of Harvard University from 1933-1953, also considered the cooperation between university and school and between professors in the teacher preparation program. Although not specific to ELA teacher preparation, Conant’s influence on teacher preparation certainly impacted the training of preservice ELA teachers. Conant published *The Education of American Teachers* in 1963, the result of a two-year investigation into the preparation and certification of teachers as well as into the educational and political workings of the educational establishment in several states (Grommon, 1968, p. 511). Conant helped to establish the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program (as a departure from the five-year undergraduate degree), and he outlined a recommended program of courses for both elementary and secondary candidates, which included experiences working with children. Conant also advocated a close cooperation
between English professors and the methods professor, calling this dynamic essential to the teacher preparation program (Grommon, 1968, p. 512).

Also published in 1963 was *The Education of Teachers of English for American Schools and Colleges*, prepared for NCTE by the Commission on the English Curriculum. In their comprehensive study of the recruitment and education of preservice teachers, the Commission asserts that “the responsibility for recruiting qualified future teachers of English actually begins with the elementary and secondary schools and the communities they serve. [...] In the colleges, the responsibility belongs to the departments of English and education” (as cited in Grommon, 1968, p. 513). Just as Conant had advocated, the Commission called on colleges and universities to foster cooperation between departments responsible for preparing teachers and to establish institution-wide committees as a way to pull in all available resources for the teacher preparation program.

Perhaps the biggest ELA teacher preparation event of the 1960’s came in the summer of 1966, when the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English was held at Dartmouth College. This seminar brought together over 50 American, British, and Canadian educators to discuss the direction of teaching ELA. The “Dartmouth Seminar,” as it became known, was critical of traditional approaches to teaching ELA and placed importance on “the teacher’s concept of his subject and of the relationship of it and himself to his students” (Grommon, 1968, p. 521). In addition, the Dartmouth Seminar proceedings placed great importance on the individual experience of the child, especially those experiences with language (Grommon, 1968, p. 521). As John Dixon wrote in his report of the conference,
“Language is learnt in operation, not in dummy runs” (as cited in Grommon, 1968, p. 521), another way to name the paradigm of teaching grammar in context.

The 1960’s also saw NCTE’s first publication of The Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English, recommendations which NCTE has revised and published every ten years since. As English educator Thomas McCracken (1997) describes, the Guidelines mainly served the function of informing graduate and undergraduate programs of principles to build or modify programs in English education. They were voluntary and did not command the attention of a significant number of programs and universities. (p. 133)

This changed in 1988, however, when the NCTE Guidelines became connected to the NCATE guidelines, holding more weight for teacher preparation programs, and, according to McCracken (1997), providing “the best understanding of what teacher preparation in English should be right into the next century” (p. 134).

Through one lens, then, the history of ELA teacher preparation can be boiled down to commissions and committees, influential reports and figures, yielding key ideas such as capitalizing on students’ experiences and teaching grammar in context. The recommendations resulting from these committees and reports have enormous influence on our understanding and practice of how we prepare ELA teachers today.

**The Impact of ELA Teacher Preparation History on Defining Preparedness**

Although NCTE’s Guidelines on Teacher Preparation were recommendations until they became tied to NCATE standards, a look at these Guidelines, beginning with the original publication in 1968, inform our current understanding of what it means to be well prepared to teach ELA. The earliest version of these Guidelines focuses upon “personal
qualifications, skills, and kinds of knowledge which contribute to effective teaching: the teacher’s personality and general education; his skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and his knowledge about and ability to teach language, literature, and composition” (English Teacher Preparation Study, p. 529). As the authors of the 1968 Guidelines wrote, two assumptions underscored the recommendations: that ELA teachers must have a foundation of subject matter and pedagogy, and that ELA teachers should have a background in the liberal arts, including psychology (p. 530). These early Guidelines were boiled down to five main topics, including the personal qualities a teacher of ELA should possess, recommendations for the program in ELA for both the elementary and secondary ELA teacher, the necessity for an understanding and appreciation of a wide body of literature, the importance of an understanding of child and adolescent development, and the criticality of the methods course and of supervised teaching experience (English Teacher Preparation Study, p. 531). An effective ELA teacher preparation program, then, would give weight to each of these five topics.

A decade later, the 1976 Guidelines emphasized the notion highlighted in the 1960’s of ELA as process, whereby the study of language should be approached holistically and the learning of literature should embrace more than just New Criticism. Related to this process-oriented perspective is the view that the skills emphasized in language instruction – and indeed the connection between language, literature and composition – are interrelated. Ten years later, the increase in standardized testing, the growing popularity of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics on teaching English language learners, and the advent of the “microcomputer” and need for “computer literacy” influenced the 1986 Guidelines. These 1986
Guidelines further the idea of ELA instruction as process, and assert that honoring a process approach “requires the building of student-centered, interactive classroom environments” (NCTE, 1986, p. 3). To build these environments, the Guidelines call for ELA teachers’ knowledge of language development to include the notions of how “growth in language maturity is a developmental process,” of how “speaking, listening, writing, and reading, and thinking are interrelated,” and how “social, cultural, and economic environments influence language learning” (NCTE, 1986, p. 3). In addition, the 1986 Guidelines recommend that ELA teachers understand the major developments in language history, major grammatical theories of English, as well as “how people use language and visual images to influence the thinking and actions of others” (NCTE, 1986, p. 8). Finally, the 1986 Guidelines call for ELA teachers to be well versed in “how students respond to their reading and how they interpret it” as well as “how readers create and discover meaning from print – as well as monitor their comprehension” (NCTE, 1986, pp. 8-9).

But while the 1986 version of the Guidelines acknowledges that, “We live in a world represented and interpreted by electronic media,” the 1996 Guidelines expound on the themes related to the computer age and computer literacy, in addition to taking up themes that run throughout earlier versions. Included in these themes is a continued call for a distinction to be made between requirements for an English major versus an English major who will become a teacher. The 1996 version also agrees with earlier versions that language study should be approached holistically, but it disagrees that teaching ELA should only be a student-centered approach; there’s a place for direct instruction, too, asserts the 1996
Guidelines Committee, and so a well-prepared English teacher will use multiple modes of instruction.

The 1996 version of the Guidelines also includes expanded underlying principles of ELA teacher preparation, including principles of diversity, principles of content knowledge, principles of pedagogical knowledge and skill, principles of opportunity, and principles of dynamic literacy (NCTE, 1996, pp. 7-9). An effective ELA teacher will have been exposed to curricula and experiences relating to these principles, as the 1996 Guidelines present desired outcomes rather than recommendations for specific courses of study that a well-prepared ELA teacher will have taken (NCTE, 1996, p. 5). Furthermore, the 1996 Guidelines encourage teacher preparation programs to “provide opportunities for prospective teachers of English to construct their own unique versions of the beginning ‘English language arts teacher’” (NCTE, 1996, p. 42) rather than have this vision imposed upon them. These Guidelines go on to establish the goals in the student teaching experience, including providing realistic teaching experiences, encouraging professional development, and fostering a sense of professionalism and collegiality, and they highlight the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to continue to support their teacher candidates once they are in the field (NCTE, 1996, p. 46). A well-prepared ELA teacher will benefit from these partnerships and experiences, as they form their own vision of their ELA teacher self, a self which includes the professional and collegial responsibilities required of effective ELA teachers.

But a well-prepared ELA teacher is not just “made” during a teacher preparation program, and the 2006 Guidelines are even more emphatic with the belief that “teacher
preparation does not, and cannot, end with the completion of a teacher certification program” (NCTE, 2006, p. 4). These Guidelines give specific recommendations that teacher preparation programs should continue to support interns and new teachers through computer-mediated communication (such as email), or through bringing teacher graduates back to campus for continued professional development. A well-prepared ELA teacher, then, is one who continues to be connected to English education through professional development and continued ties with his or her teacher preparation program.

In addition, the 2006 Guidelines discuss teacher preparedness in a post 9/11 world, one in which “literature from all cultures and experiences is more readily available to help us better empathize and know ourselves and ‘the other’” (NCTE, 2006, p. 2). Beyond this sensitivity to the increasing importance of reading a variety of literature, a well-prepared ELA teacher, according to the 2006 Guidelines, should have:

Confidence in themselves, the knowledge of students, the understanding of their discipline, the awareness of the ways in which contexts affects education, and the need to make the appropriate choices – about goals, objectives, materials, strategies, assessments – to help as many students as possible learn and grow in skill, content knowledge, and understanding of self and others. (NCTE, 2006, p. 4)

An ELA teacher is ready to teach once he or she has obtained knowledge about content, pedagogy, and adolescent psychology, as well a bigger appreciation for the broader contexts of education. A well-prepared ELA teacher assumes the responsibility to know his or her students and uses a variety of approaches to help all students learn.

Best Practices and Key Components to ELA Teacher Preparation

Just as the various versions of *NCTE’s Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts* impact our current understanding of ELA teacher preparation, they
have also contributed to recommended best practices for preparing future ELA teachers. NCTE and individual English educators through the years have made recommendations for ELA teacher preparation that include English education faculty being required to return periodically to the schools to teach for a few weeks, increasing the emphasis on racial, cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher preparation programs, maintaining support for graduates once they are in the classroom teaching, and building in more hands-on experience and interaction with practitioners during the program. Again, these recommendations and best practices provide a context for considering ELA teacher candidates’ perceptions of preparedness to teach, especially as these perceptions are brought to bear on ELA teacher preparation.

English educator Charles Duke (1980) offers several recommendations for ELA teacher preparation programs, calling for more cooperation and communication between the English and English education departments in order to “distribute the work accordingly” in terms of preparing future ELA teachers (p. 224). Furthermore, Duke (1980) advises that, “Anyone at the university or college level engaged in teaching prospective teachers should be required to return periodically to the public schools and teach several different classes for a period of weeks” (p. 223). In addition to recommending that teacher preparation programs use student surveys to identify areas of weakness in their programs, Duke (1980) advises ELA teacher preparation programs to be more selective of their candidates. As he asserts, “Rigorous screening in terms of personality and skills levels […] is a must if we are to upgrade the quality of classroom teaching” (Duke, 1980, p. 226). Finally, Duke (1980) calls
on ELA teacher preparation programs to be more selective in assigning cooperating teachers. He writes:

Too often student teachers are simply thrown into the classroom – the old sink or swim theory – and the scars remain for a long time, sometimes a lifetime. If we view student teaching as a true learning experience, and are concerned that it be the best instructional experience possible, then we need to take much more care in identifying cooperating teachers. (Duke, 1980, p. 225)

While Duke was writing over 30 years ago, his recommendations may still be taken to heart today.

In a 2010 policy research brief entitled “Preparing, Inducting and Retaining English Language Arts Teachers,” NCTE also puts forth recommendations for teacher preparation programs. Specifically, the authors of the brief encourage ELA teacher preparation programs to increase the diversity of programs by providing scholarship support for teacher candidates, as well as providing diversity experiences that “support teacher candidates in appreciating cultures of the diverse populations of school children” (NCTE, 2010, p. 16). In addition, the policy brief encourages ELA teacher preparation programs to “emphasize culturally responsive approaches in teacher preparation” (NCTE, 2010), by offering courses dedicated to the perception of race, presenting perspectives that highlight the cultures of others, and encouraging “ethnographic explorations of communities surrounding under-resourced schools” (NCTE, 2010). Finally, ELA teacher preparation programs are encouraged to foster reflective practice, which might take the form of action research on the part of teachers and collaboration on the part of faculty.
The *NCTE Guidelines* also provide perspectives on best practices of ELA teacher preparation programs. As outlined in the 1996 *Guidelines*, prior to its graduates being hired, the ELA teacher preparation program should:

- Know it reflects the most current research and practice and meets NCTE guidelines;
- Guarantee it has strong linkages with schools by developing school-based development programs; Have faculty who are regularly involved with public schools and who understand the demands placed on beginning teachers; Bring former ‘new’ English language arts teachers on campus regularly to discuss with students expectations about their first teaching position; Provide prospective English language arts teachers with practice in interviewing, advice on developing placement files, and assistance in obtaining information about certification policies in states where graduates might teach;
- Publicize current listings of available English language arts teaching positions; Provide information about NCTE and other professional organizations. (NCTE, 1996, p. 53)

Ten years later, the 2006 *Guidelines*, again, stress the fact that teacher preparation should not end with the completion of the teacher certification program, and that teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to continue to support its teacher candidates once they have graduated. The authors of the 2006 *Guidelines* proclaim, “We believe that teacher preparation programs should help future teachers develop both the disposition for and skill in self-analysis and reflection required to engage in lifelong learning and professional development” (NCTE, 2006, p. 5). These most current *Guidelines* also emphasize that “there is no single methodology or pedagogical approach that is universally appropriate and effective for all students and in all contexts” and that the “central goals of effective teacher preparation programs are developing ELA teacher candidates’ respect and enthusiasm for teaching, diverse learners, the secondary English curriculum, and evidence or assessment of learning” (NCTE, 2006, p. 10).
Published a year before the 2006 *Guidelines*, the book *Supporting Beginning English Teachers: Research and Implications for Teacher Induction* by English educators Thomas McCann, Larry Johannessen, and Bernard Ricca (2005) also calls for teacher preparation programs to do more to support teacher candidates once they are beginning teachers. This recommendation is based on a 3-year study investigating the concerns and experiences of beginning teachers as contrasting with experienced teachers. While McCann et al. (2005) suggest that teacher education programs maintain contact with new teachers after they have graduated (not being as explicit as the *Guidelines* about what this contact might look like), they mention the steps that universities and high schools can take together in pursuit of a mutual relationship. One of these steps is to “maintain a regular dialogue that exposes the college or university to the current students and curricula in the high schools and that exposes the schools to advances in theory, research, and best practices” (McCann et al, 2005, p. 133).

McCann et al. (2005) also suggest that teacher education programs can maintain an awareness of contemporary high schools by “enter[ing] the schools to collect data to support research or to assist classroom teachers with their own action research projects” (p. 134).

These recommendations and best practices, as identified by English educators and their research, provide a framework with which to consider the experiences of preservice and beginning ELA teachers, especially in light of the implications of these experiences on ELA teacher preparation. But, as Grommon (1968) warns, while the history of ELA teacher preparation in general and the *Guidelines* specifically may represent the consensus of the profession,
What may be missing here [...] is explicit recognition of the influence of the attitudes, points of view, spirit, sense of awareness of what is going on in the field of the instructors teaching the courses and supervising prospective teachers’ professional experiences. (Grommon, 1968, p. 522)

Is there a divide, then, between recommendations for preparing ELA teachers and how they are actually prepared? And, is the collection of reports, committees, guidelines and recommendations based primarily on a small number of influential English education figures rather than on research? This relationship between recommendations for preparing ELA teachers and the reality of how ELA teachers are prepared is one to be considered more fully, particularly as this study seeks to contribute to both the research on and best practices of preparing ELA teachers. Therefore, I turn the spotlight to research on how ELA teachers are prepared and the impact of this preparation. Here, the underlying theme is that more research is needed.

**Research in ELA Teacher Preparation: Pondering the Lack of Reform**

In considering the recommendations for desired outcomes of ELA teacher preparation programs and the relationship between research and practice in ELA teacher preparation, the reality is that there is minimal research on ELA teacher preparation specifically. As English educator James Quisenberry (1981) points out, “The relatively meager amount of literature on English teacher preparation is comprised mainly of professionals’ statements on how teachers of English should be prepared, or on how they have not been prepared” (p. 71). The 2006 *NCTE Guidelines* acknowledge this lack of research in ELA teacher preparation:

We became aware that there does not seem to be a strong body of evidence that documents a clear link between the beginning English language arts teacher’s specific content knowledge and his or her ability to teach students in ways that help develop particular knowledge and skill bases. (NCTE, 2006, p. 7)
Without this research into how beginning teachers are able to use what they learn and “translate it into effective instruction” (NCTE, 2006, p. 54), it becomes trickier to know what courses are beneficial to preservice ELA teachers. Indeed, the 2006 Guidelines authors warn that without research, “adding courses or removing them from the curriculum [of a teacher preparation program] is, in essence, a zero-sum game” (NCTE, 2006, p. 54).

The minimal amount of research that does examine the preparation of ELA teachers often focuses on the relationship between what preservice ELA teachers learn in their teacher preparation program and what they are able to enact once they get in the classroom. This relationship often amounts to a disconnect between these paradigms, which is a contributing factor to ELA getting taught the same way decade after decade. Education researcher James D. Quisenberry (1981), writing over thirty years ago declared that little has changed “in any aspect of the teaching of English in the past 20 years, despite the innovations and reforms proposed during the decade of the 1960s” (p. 71). Influential English educators Denny Wolfe and Joseph Antinarella (1997) concur with this sentiment that, “While the most thoughtful reform ideas of the past have filled the literature on teaching and learning, they most certainly have not filled the schools” (p. xii). Researchers writing about why teachers are unable to enact real reform in the classrooms often cite education scholar Dan Lortie’s (1975) phrase “apprenticeship of observation.” After many years of being observers of teaching as students, new teachers, regardless of the curriculum of their teacher preparation program, resort to teaching as they were taught. Darling-Hammond (2006) highlights this phenomenon, as it applies to all teacher candidates: “The problem of learning to teach is
complicated by the common experience virtually all adults have had of school, which creates strong views among prospective teachers and members of the community alike about what school and teaching are ‘supposed’ to be” (p. 35).

English educators, specifically, have examined this apprenticeship of observation phenomenon as it applies to preservice ELA teachers. In a 1997 study, English educators James Marshall and Janet Smith wanted to know what kind of practice professors of preservice ELA teachers were modeling in their classrooms, how that practice was shaped by theory, and the extent to which it aligned with the kind of teaching their students would undertake as teachers in the public schools (p. 248). After examining the syllabi of undergraduate English courses geared for preservice teachers, as well as interviewing 10 English faculty who frequently taught English education students, Marshall and Smith (1997) determined that “twenty or more years of watching teachers perform cannot help but influence new teachers as they make their way into the profession, and that influence will, almost by definition, pull instruction back in a conservative direction – to the way it was done before” (p. 264). This conservative direction in the ELA classroom often means a focus on decontextualized grammar instruction, a New Criticism approach to teaching literature, and a teacher-centered classroom where knowledge is assumed to be transmitted from teacher to student. Marshall and Smith (1997) caution, “The preparation of teachers is anything but simple, especially English teachers, and the gap between the institution that teaches them and the institution where they must teach is anything but healed” (p. 267).
Research highlighting the disconnect between the university and the classroom.

The gap between English education and ELA teaching is highlighted by English educator Peter Smagorinsky (1999), who has examined the tension between education schools and the realities of the classroom. “Many people who aspire to teach,” Smagorinsky (1999) writes, “are attracted to the profession because they had succeeded as students in schools emphasizing content mastery and authoritarian teaching approaches, and seek such environments for their own careers” (p. 50). Despite resorting to conservative approaches to teaching which they experienced in their own educations, Smagorinsky argues that many preservice teachers are able to espouse the more “liberal, progressive pedagogy” that dominate their education courses. The blame, according to Smagorinsky, partly falls on the conservative agendas and practices of schools:

The overwhelming majority of preservice English teachers in the United States learn teaching methods in their universities that are constructivist, student-centered, process-oriented, fluid-time, progressive, and therefore at odds with the highly predictable, structured, content-driven, form-oriented values that predominate in most schools. (Smagorinsky, 1999, p. 69)

Smagorinsky points to the culture of schools, as well as to larger policy contexts that use standardized measures to assess the quality of schools, as contributors to the conservative approach to learning and teaching that continues to dominate classrooms.

Not all researchers put the blame on schools, however. While not specific to English education, researchers Kenneth Zeichner and Robert Tabachnick (1981) surveyed the literature on college and school impact on the socialization of teachers and found that “a critical view of the university culture may be as important as or more important than a critical view of the school culture” (p. 10). The authors call on education programs to be more
reflective of their approaches by focusing on improving their own teacher preparation programs if they “hope to prepare progressive teachers” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 10).

Outside of placing blame, researchers agree that the tension between teacher education programs and the realities of the classroom is felt most acutely by the teachers who are prepared in progressive university-based teacher education programs. Randi Dickson and Peter Smagorinsky (2006) assert,

The ideals typically encouraged in teacher education courses – authenticity, engagement, justice, equity, inquiry, and so on – are often thwarted in the field by mandated testing, factoid-oriented curricula, skills-based instruction, cynical faculty, and other factors that comprise the context of field-based preservice experiences. (pp. 315-316)

Given this disconnect, the question is how this tension is experienced by new teachers once they are forced to negotiate it in their classrooms. Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson (2002) examined this tension between liberal university coursework and conservative school environments by conducting a study with six preservice teachers from the same teaching cohort. The authors focused specifically on one new teacher’s experience, as they explored “how her teaching identity was affected when she attempted to enact a student-centered, i.e., liberal, pedagogy in a school district that was in the process of introducing a heavily scripted language arts curriculum tied to district standardized tests” (Smagorinsky et al., 2002, p. 188). In addition to conducting interviews and observations with new teachers over a 2-year period, various supervisors and mentors were interviewed to obtain their views on mentoring and their perceptions’ of the new teachers’ performances. Ultimately, the authors found that the tension had a negative impact on teacher identity as they tracked the frustration one
teacher felt at enacting a conservative curriculum: “As a result she did not like the person who was teaching her classes, feeling distant from the teacher she had become and fearful of the teacher she might become” (Smagorinsky et al., 2002, p. 210).

**Research on the transition from preservice teacher to teacher.** In addition to having to contend with the differing paradigms between the university and the school, the transition between preservice teacher to teacher can be challenging in terms of the gap between expectations and reality. English educator Dana Fox (1995) conducted two case studies of new teachers transitioning from being English majors to ELA teachers and inquired about the extent to which these new ELA teachers could “enact their visions of English in the classroom” (p. 17). By gathering the stories of two new teachers’ initial teaching experiences, Fox (1995) gained insight into the experiences of new teachers, as she found that one important factor in these new teachers’ development was their ability to overcome their preconceived ideas or mental stereotypes of teachers and teaching (p. 22).

These initial perceptions or stereotypes of preservice ELA teachers can impact their early teaching experiences, as their expectations bump up against the reality of the school environment. Again, this was one of the themes explored in McMann et al.’s (2005) study highlighting the major concerns of beginning secondary ELA teachers. Through their investigation of the salient concerns of new teachers, the authors found that many of the frustrations of beginning teachers derived from the fact that new teachers’ experiences were often dramatically different from how they anticipated teaching to be (p. 10). Specifically, the preservice teachers involved in the study “commonly express[ed] concerns about having the freedom to put into practice the concepts and beliefs about teaching they [had] embraced
during their college or university training” (McCann et al., 2005, p. 6). McMann et al. (2005) wondered if preservice teachers have significant misconceptions about the teaching profession (p. 44) and recommended that methods instructors “carefully select whom they invite to class and how they structure and facilitate the discussion to go beyond superficial scans of schools and to showcase the thinking process that guide experienced practitioners” (p. 113).

**Research on the ELA methods course.** Indeed, the methods instructor in an ELA teacher preparation program plays a prominent role in helping to prepare preservice ELA teachers, and, as such, the methods course has been the focus of both scholarly and practitioner research on ELA teacher preparation. The Conference on English Education (CEE), which is a stem of NCTE, has recently paid particular attention to the state of the ELA methods course. In a report from the Commission on English Methods Teaching and Learning in 2003, English educators Kia Jane Richmond and Alyson Whyte (2003) highlighted the importance of methods courses: “Methods courses are an important locus where English language arts teachers’ paradigmatic and narrative knowledge about teaching come together, bridging preservice teachers’ university programs in education and the enactment of pedagogical content knowledge in teachers’ own classrooms” (p. 324). Noting the growing interest and published research related to ELA methods courses and the effects of these courses on beginning teachers’ practice, the Commission called for more “professional conversation, research, and publication on methods instruction that inquire into teachers’ beliefs and actions during the early years of teaching” (Richmond & Whyte, 2004, p. 325). In addition, included in the Commission’s four main areas of concern was the
connection between methods courses and school practice (Richmond & Whyte, 2004, p. 325).

Several years later, at the CEE summit, this integration of university-based teacher education practices with policies of schools was still the focus of discussion. Again, the Commission called on the community of English education to focus debate on the importance of methods classes. In a report of this summit, Dickson et al. (2006) highlighted the need for more dialogue “within the profession about what and how and why methods matter” (p. 322). Collecting more data about the methods course, they determined, was a vital next step.

Indeed, ELA methods instructors have conducted research and engaged in reflection about their own methods courses. English educator Brian White (1995) specifically wanted to know how his students’ “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) impacted their perceptions of teaching literature. As White (1995) notes, “Preservice teachers acquire literary perspectives and strategies prior to explicit instruction in methods, and these pre-methods acquisitions have proven to exert great influence upon the decisions of classroom teachers” (p. 222). In conducting a self-study, White aimed to reveal some of the major pedagogical influences that served to shape his students’ literary training. He also reflected on the fact that prior to his study, he had no means for assessing what his methods students knew and what they needed to know. By using a diagnostic in his methods course to gain a clearer sense of students’ past and present stances on teaching literature, White sought to improve his instruction: “When I find out where my students are…both they and I can
proceed with clearer vision, with more appropriate expectations, and with more thoughtful reflections on who we are, what we believe…and why we teach literature” (p. 235).

In a similar fashion, English educator Carol Pope (1999) reflects on the effectiveness of her own teaching in her methods course. Pope (1999) describes her process of reflection, one that involves challenging her initial reflections and reactions to her students, a process she calls “refraction.” “I have to turn the mirror and see the class from different angles,” writes Pope (1999, p. 180). Through refraction, Pope comes to see that “the students’ voices, concerns, and views, along with my commitment to their futures as English language arts teachers, drive the teaching and learning decisions of the methods class” (Pope, 1999, p. 179). Similar to White, refracting allows Pope to meet her students where they are, to address their specific needs and to consider each cohort as a distinct group of students, thereby helping to better prepare them for the challenges of teaching. This reflection is similar to English educator Pamela Stockinger’s (2007) case study of two preservice elementary school teachers enrolled in her ELA methods course. While Stockinger (2007) focuses on teaching writing, and while her students will go on to teach elementary school, Stockinger, like Pope (1999) takes stock of the influence her own reflection can have on the preparation of her preservice students.

While White (1995), Pope (1999), and Stockinger (2007) engage in self-reflection and self-studies, Peter Smagorinsky and Melissa Whiting (1995) took a more comprehensive approach to examining the ELA methods course. Prior to Smagorinsky and Whiting’s 1995 study, which examined 81 ELA methods course syllabi from a range of public universities across the country, there hadn’t been a comprehensive or substantive investigation into how
methods course are taught (p. 1). Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) sought to know what books instructors assigned, what types of activities and assessments students engaged with, and what types of general experiences students were having prior to their student teaching internships. The authors describe their intent: “Through our discussion we tried to understand the instructional approach, content, and processes of the courses and how that information could be helpful to those designing methods classes for their own students” (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995, p. 6). Through analysis of the syllabi, Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) found that instructors used one or more of the following approaches: survey, workshop, experience-based, reflective or theoretical (p. 9), and the authors present advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Among their findings, Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) determined that the syllabi represented the adage: the more things change, the more they stay the same (p. 100). The authors described their report as “the beginning of a discussion that we hope will rely less on ‘lore’ and more on more formal understandings of how and why we teach as we do” (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995, p. 111).

In addition to the practitioner and scholarly literature on the ELA methods course, a handful of researchers have looked at how well the ELA methods course prepares students specifically for student teaching and teaching. In a short dialogue piece between two English educators, Ronald Sion and James Brewbaker (2001), ponder the question of how well prepared ELA student teachers are to teach content and ask what university faculty can do better. Other researchers have devoted their dissertations to this question. Linda Jobe (1994) investigated how student teachers decide which strategies from their methods class to use in their student teaching experiences as a way to measure the effects of the methods course on
the success of student teaching. Jobe’s (1994) findings reveal that, “While many uncontrollable variables influence the student teachers' choices of methods, two controllable variables – the methods class and the cooperating teacher – are strong influences” (p. 1). Pamela Cocke (2003) asked similar questions in her dissertation, which focused on how ELA methods courses can best meet the needs of first-year teachers. From her analysis, Cocke (2003) found that new teachers wanted a “practical and integrated course” that realistically and informatively prepared them for the realities of teaching (p. 1).

**Scholars reflect on the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught.** While the methods course provides an important context in which to consider the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, and while this course serves as the setting where instructors may seek to challenge a preservice teacher’s “apprenticeship of observation” or impart best practices of teaching ELA, English educators continue to reflect on the lack of reform in how ELA is taught. For example, we know that grammar should be taught in context, that experience should be at the heart of curricula, and that writing should be approached as a process-oriented and fluid endeavor, rather than as a series of assignments (Whitney, Blau, Bright, Cabe, Dewar, Levin, Macias, & Rogers, 2008). And yet, still, grammar is frequently decontextualized, and curricula often focuses on in-school learning and on the transmission of knowledge, where mastery is proved through narrow measures of achievement. To explain this stagnation in how ELA is taught, English educators offer their insights into the barriers to reform in the teaching of ELA and the preparation of ELA teachers.

Robert Tremmel (2006) has one explanation for the prevalence of testing and accountability measures that champion out-of-context grammar approaches and a curriculum
based on mastery. Tremmel’s explanation of the dominance of standards-based education has to do with the unrelenting popularity of the Cartesian-Newtonian way of looking at the world, and he sees four specific impacts of this paradigm on American education: “a) the schools’ focus on subject matter; b) the segmentation of knowledge into subject areas, facts, and objectives; c) how the school is divided; and d) the emphasis on test scores” (Tremmel, 2006, p. 13). Tremmel likens the Cartesian-Newtonian model to fragmentation, or a way of thinking which “disposes the mind to regard divisions between things as absolute and final, rather than as ways of thinking that have only a relative and limited range of usefulness and validity” (Bohm, 1985, pp. 24-25). Tremmel sees this principle of fragmentation as lying at the heart of the standards argument, a mode of education which segments and decontextualizes each aspect of school life (Tremmel, 2006, p. 20). But if we recognize this limited way of approaching education, why is it so hard to change it? Tremmel (2006) explains:

Most humans – including English teacher educators – struggle to maintain allegiance to familiar programs of thinking, like fragmentation, even when they prove to be less than satisfactory. We do this because those ways have become such a central part of how we see ourselves and the kind of work we do, that we can often imagine no other. (p. 23)

Through this kind of “program thinking,” according to Tremmel, we begin to think that the solution to any perceived educational failing is more standards, as this paradigm continues to dominate English teachers and educators’ day-to-day identities.

While Tremmel (2006) uses the lens of a physics paradigm to explain the lack of real reform in how ELA and ELA teachers get taught, English educator John Mayher (1990) explains the problem through what he terms a “commonsense” approach to teaching and
learning. This commonsense approach to education – to language education specifically – is about bottom-up, part-to-whole learning (as opposed to a top-down, holistic approach), where errors are seen as proof of deficiency (as opposed to evidence of learning), where there is a marked difference and importance placed on the learning that goes on in-school and out-of-school, where the belief persists that if something is learned, it must have been taught, where students are sponges and knowledge is transmitted, and where language is most certainly taught out of context. In commonsense ELA teaching, reading is about decoding – the answers just need to be extracted from the text – and language education is made up of vocabulary and spelling lists, phonic rules and prescriptive grammar drills. Common to these strategies is that “they are not seen as part of the process of learning language in meaningful ways, but are presumed to be prerequisites of it” (Mayher, 1990, p. 111). Mayher’s call to reject our commonsense impulses in teaching and learning could most certainly have come at an earlier time period in the history of ELA teacher preparation, as his statement that “the principal flaw of standardized tests in reading and writing is that they almost completely ignore the fact that both processes are individually meaning centered” (Mayher, 1990, p. 257) echoes the assertion of English educators who have come before him.

So why do commonsense approaches to teaching ELA persist if English educators and scholars have been touting the very opposite approaches for decades and decades? Part of it, explains Mayher, is that it’s ingrained in us and is socially sanctioned. He explains how he himself came to believe in and adopt commonsense teaching: “The conception of English teaching appealed to me partly because I was good at what was being taught” (Mayher, 1990, p. 15). In addition to commonsense approaches pulling him into the field of teaching ELA,
he was prepared as an ELA teacher in the same way. So while English educators may preach a certain way of teaching to their preservice ELA teacher candidates, they are not necessarily embodying this way of teaching themselves. Mayher (1990) writes,

Even when we may have advocated different approaches to instruction or a different theoretical framework underlying it, insofar as these alternatives have not been embodied in our own practice, our students have easily learned to discount them; to do as we do, not as we say. (pp. 271-272)

Instead of practicing what we preach, explains Mayher, English educators too often teach teacher-centered classes that undermine the paradigms being advocated.

**Ideas for achieving reform in the teaching of ELA.** So what do we do about this disconnect between what preservice ELA teachers are taught in their teacher preparation programs and how they actually teach ELA once they are practicing teachers? If the educational policies at various levels only serve to enforce the commonsense “mastery” approaches to teaching and learning, how can we ever achieve real reform or innovation in how ELA gets taught and how ELA teachers get prepared? English educators and scholars offer several solutions, including listening to the NCTE community on what constitutes a quality ELA teacher, conducting more research in the field of preparing ELA teachers, collaborating with other departments in the university, breaking our “program thinking” mode of operation by actually listening to each other – especially those with whom we disagree – and, finally, shifting our attitudes and our practices to an “uncommonsense” approach to teaching and learning.

Certainly, the question of improving the preparation of ELA teachers is one on the minds of the English education profession. Three past *English Education* editors were asked
how the profession can improve the preparation and renewal of all English educators, and their responses give us a starting point for considering “solutions” to getting unstuck from the status quo. While Patricia Lambert Stock calls on English educators to encourage their colleagues and students to become active members of NCTE and CEE, “to join together in a professional community to reimagine and reconstruct ‘English education’ for our students in our time” (as cited in Rush & Scherff, 2011, p. 6), Ruth Vinz advises English educators to “wonder and wander, trust not-knowing and un-knowing, and reflect and question to perpetually keep the buzz and exhilaration of anticipation alive in the stomach, heart and brain” (as cited in Rush & Scherff, 2011, p. 7). Vinz laments that incentives such as Race to the Top don’t foster such wondering and reflection, and former English Education editor David Schaafsmma agrees. In response to the news that the Teacher Performance Assessment will partner with the publishing company Pearson to create a “body of evidence” of teaching competence as a way to “systematically examine assessment data” to improve teacher preparation programs, Schaafsmma’s response is: “Measurability, privatization, standardization, thinking like a machine: I’d say it’s time to wake up and see what choices we actually do have to make as a profession” (as cited in Rush & Scherff, 2011, p. 11).

These choices ultimately boil down to our perceptions of how to best prepare ELA teachers to be highly qualified members of the profession. And while it may be tempting to think that what constitutes a highly qualified ELA teacher today is different than what it used to be, given the increased diversity and needs of the student population and considering the 21st century skills needed to succeed in the digital age, a 2006 survey given to NCTE members about what distinguishes a highly qualified ELA teacher and how to assess the
qualifications of an ELA teacher shows otherwise. According to the survey by Dudley-Marling, Abt-Perkin, Sato, and Selfe (2006),

Areas of professional development that have been the focus of recent attention in English education reform – computer-based approaches to instruction and culturally responsive approaches to instruction – do not seem to be highly valued by NCTE members who teach in K-12 classrooms. (p. 184)

Instead, the survey points to NCTE members’ opinions that pedagogical content knowledge remains the most important characteristic of a highly qualified ELA teacher. As the authors note, despite the innovations in technology and communication systems, and even with growing cultural and linguistic make-up of students, “English teachers are still interested in discussing and learning more about how to teach the traditional English language arts – literature, composition, and grammar” (Dudley-Marling et al., 2006, p. 184). In terms of the implications for ELA teacher preparation programs, Dudley-Marling et al. (2006) see the analysis of the survey as pointing to the value of the methods course and to experiences in the field that are focused on these “basics” of teaching ELA. What’s needed, state the authors, is further research to corroborate the study’s findings about the importance of pedagogical content knowledge as being the foundation of a highly qualified ELA teacher.

English educators Anne Ruggles Gere and Daniel Berebitsky (2009) agree that more research is needed into how to identify and prepare highly qualified ELA teachers. The authors are surprised that so little research has been devoted to the quality of ELA teachers specifically and assert that “the current inattention of researchers to the quality of English teachers is particularly unfortunate because of the importance of English in the high school curriculum and the prominence of English-related skills in tests” (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009,
Gere and Berebitsky (2009) go on to explain that while measurements used to assess teacher quality in the past were focused on data about an individual teacher, such as SAT scores, transcripts, and GPA, or what they term an “input model,” current discussion of teacher quality has shifted to an “output model,” using metrics based around teacher practices, student achievement, and teacher tracking (p. 249). However, both models fail to take into account the contexts in which teachers work. These contexts help to shape the quality of new teachers and include “the human, social, physical, and cultural capital possessed by a school district; the professional culture of the school; the school’s performance on state tests; the state policy environment; and student tracking practices” (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009, pp. 251 - 252). In addition to taking a holistic approach to defining a quality ELA teacher, Gere and Berebitsky (2009) recommend that research on teacher preparation must be specific to content area. The authors caution:

Policy and research that ignore disciplinary differences are necessarily ignoring the way teachers think about their practice and their professional identities; they are ignoring the specific resources essential for instruction in a given content area; they are ignoring the meaning a particular discipline gives to policies that have classroom implications. (Gere & Berebitsky, 2009, pp. 254 - 255)

Therefore, Gere and Berebitsky (2009) call for more specific research into the nature of a highly qualified ELA teacher as well as how preparation and school context help to produce such teachers.

Mayher (2012) also addresses the issue of preparing quality ELA teachers, and he recommends more collaboration among university departments in preparing ELA teachers. Mayher sees this need as tied to the growing diversity of the student population and to the demands placed upon teachers in the new era of the ELA Common Core State Standards
Mayher (2012) explains that traditional secondary English education curricula have been focused on literature and often housed in the English department, but that this focus leaves graduates without the skills to teach students who lack adequate literacy skills. The university-based teacher preparation program, advocates Mayher, should take a broader approach to preparing future ELA teachers by fostering collaboration among departments and by including the departments of special education and elementary education in a preservice ELA teacher’s preparation. Through this collaboration, the ELA teacher preparation program could better encompass a literacy focus that preservice ELA teachers need in order to serve their future ELA students. As Mayher (2012) states, “Learning to read and write, speak and listen in all areas of the curriculum (and life) cannot be neatly divided into disciplines” (p. 182). Therefore, all of the departments that address the topic of literacy should communicate and collaborate rather than operate in a vacuum. Insisting on collaboration among all disciplines that touch on literacy education will help to better prepare future ELA teachers: “We must share our understandings of the demands being placed on the teacher, and especially new teachers, and try to do a more adequate job of building integrated curricula that will speak comprehensively to the full range of competencies they need” (Mayher, 2012, p. 185).

Mayher also addresses the demands placed on ELA teachers by the newly adopted ELA CCSS. On the one hand, laments Mayher (2012), the CCSS creates pressure for more tests and for a narrow definition of achievement – tenets of commonsense teaching. On the other hand, Mayher (2012) also sees some good in the CCSS, in its “stress on integration of all aspects of literacy within [ELA] and across the curriculum, its recognition that there could
be many different paths to the standards it sets, and its emphasis on both literature and nonfictional texts” (pp. 183-184). In order to improve the way that we prepare ELA teachers, Mayher (2012) asserts that the profession must be prepared to “reexamine our self-concept and be prepared to redefine who we serve and how we do it” (p. 182). In the age of CCSS, this requires a paradigm shift according to Mayher, a shift that sees more collaboration between the school and the university as well as between university departments.

Tremmel (2006), in his call to ease the Cartesian-Newtonian mode of operating that dominates the standards-based approach to education, also calls on English teacher educators to “discover new grounds for thought and action” (p. 26). Similar to Mayher’s recommendation, this involves communicating with others – especially those with whom we disagree. “We need to get outside ourselves,” urges Tremmel (2006), to “move beyond our own academic circle, and make contact with others who are trying to think and act beyond the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm – regardless of how unlikely the alliance might seem” (p. 31). Within our circles of ELA teachers and educators, Tremmel advises that we need to listen more closely to each other. All of this listening and communicating and being open to new ideas is a way to limit the fragmentation that lies at the center of standards-based education. In addition, Tremmel (2006) puts forth activity theory as a way to combat this fragmentation, as activity theory emphasizes “process, action, collaboration, and the connectedness of the classroom to broader social and cultural contexts” (p. 34). This echoes other English educators’ calls for contextualizing student learning, for giving equal weight to the learning that happens outside of the classroom, and for putting experience at the center of the curriculum. If we can replace fragmentation with collaboration and contextualization,
and if we can dialogue specifically with those with whom we disagree, Tremmel (2006) feels confident that “it is not too late for English teacher educators, uniquely positioned between university and community, between theory and the streets, to initiate a turn in thinking” (p. 39).

Mayher (1990) also sees English educators as having a special responsibility to model for future ELA teachers “alternative models of beliefs and practices” (p. 272) if we seek change in how ELA gets taught and in how ELA teachers get prepared. For Mayher, this means practicing and preaching the tenets of an “uncommonsense” approach to learning, where, rather than starting with a list of skills that must be mastered, we begin with the needs and experiences of the students who enter the classroom. Because Mayher’s (1990) uncommonsense theory of learning centers on the idea that “human beings are active meaning makers who are continually learning” (p. 79), Mayher’s uncommonsense approach emphasizes the importance of out-of-school learning, of language learned in use, and of learning rather than of teaching. But how do we achieve uncommonsense schools, and how do we prepare new ELA teachers to teach in uncommonsense ways? According to Mayher (1990), the most important change is to “place student learning back at the center of the school agenda and to encourage teachers to reclaim their rightful control over the processes of teaching and learning that take place in every school” (p. 247). This shift, of course, requires others to be on board with uncommonsense teaching, including administrators, parents and community members. For English educators tasked with preparing future ELA teachers, it starts with embodying the cornerstones of uncommonsense teaching in their own university classrooms.
Connection Between Perceptions of Preparedness and Teacher Efficacy

Thus far, I have reviewed empirical and scholarly research that highlights the history of ELA teacher preparation, best practices for preparing ELA teachers, as well as the reasons for and ways to address the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught. Again, these contexts provide a framework for considering current ELA teacher preparation in terms of the issues and rationales surrounding how ELA teachers get prepared, as well as ideas and recommendations for future ELA teacher preparation. Because this study aims to give voice to the experiences of ELA teacher candidates themselves, as a way to enrich our understanding and thinking on ELA teacher preparation, I shift from a focus on ELA teacher preparation history and research to a focus on the notion of “preparedness” and why it is a concept worth studying in the first place.

Preservice teachers’ perceptions of preparedness for teaching provides one lens for considering teacher preparation, and it is a lens taken up by Darling-Hammond et al. in their 2002 study. Using data from a 1998 survey of almost 3,000 beginning teachers in New York City, the authors examined teachers’ views of their preparation for teaching, their beliefs and practice, and their plans to remain in teaching as a way to compare the perceptions of preparedness of teachers trained through university-based programs and those trained through alternative pathways. While the authors found that teachers trained in university-based program overall felt more prepared than those trained through alternative routes, Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2002) study points to the importance of teachers’ feelings of preparedness, as this perception relates to teachers’ feelings of efficacy. They state:
Teachers who felt better prepared were significantly more likely to believe they could reach all of their students, handle problems in the classroom, teach all students to high levels, and make a difference in the lives of their students. Those who felt underprepared were significantly more likely to feel uncertain about how to teach some of their students and more likely to believe that students’ peers and home environments influence learning more than teachers do. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 294)

Even after controlling for variables of age, gender, experience, teaching level, and teaching within area of certification, the authors found that “sense of preparedness is by far the strongest predictor of teaching efficacy” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 294). Their study, then, highlights the link between perception of preparedness and teacher efficacy.

Indeed, teacher efficacy is an important factor to consider in teacher preparation, as researchers have found a significant relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher effectiveness. Teacher efficacy stems from Albert Bandura’s (1997) concept of perceived self-efficacy, which refers to “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). This perception matters because “if people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Teacher efficacy, then, impacts a teacher’s efforts to make things happen in the classroom, and, as such, is defined by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (p. 233). Teacher efficacy has been shown to be related to student achievement and motivation, as well as teacher behavior and persistence (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). In addition, researchers have found teacher efficacy to be
significantly related to teachers’ adoption of innovation, superintendents’ ratings of teacher competence, and teachers’ classroom management strategies (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990, p. 81).

As Theodore Coladarci (1992) reminds us, though, teacher efficacy has to do with a teacher’s beliefs, rather than behaviors that can be observed (p. 323), and, therefore, has historically been measured using a Likert scale, including the Rand two-item scale, the Gibson and Dembo 30-item scale, and Bandura’s 30-item Teacher Self-Efficacy scale (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005). As an example of what teachers with a high sense of efficacy self-report, they feel

- that their work with students is important and meaningful […], that they have a positive impact on student learning […], expect students to progress […], set goals for themselves and their students […], and are confident that they are able to influence student learning. (Ashton, 1984, p. 29)

And high efficacy begets increased efficacy and effort. The cyclical nature of the attitudes and behaviors associated with teacher efficacy point to the importance and continuing returns on having high teacher efficacy: “Greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to better performance, which in turn leads to greater efficacy” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 234).

As a strand of teacher efficacy research, researchers have found it important to investigate preservice teachers’ sense of efficacy, as “some of the most powerful influences on the development of teachers’ sense of efficacy are experiences during student teaching and the induction year” (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005, pp. 343 – 344). In part, this is because once established, teacher efficacy beliefs seem resistant to change (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005, p. 346). In addition, the student teaching internship provides a “critical
source of efficacy information” (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008, p. 167), as cooperating teachers have been found to be an important source of efficacy information for student teachers. Through both vicarious experience and verbal persuasion, cooperating teachers “could play an essential role in the development of the student teachers’ efficacy beliefs” (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008, p. 168). For example, Xiaoping Li and Mingyuan Zhang (2000) found that preservice teachers with high perceived cooperating teachers’ efficacy beliefs had significantly higher general teaching efficacy scores. Furthermore, the higher a teacher’s efficacy, the more likely he or she is to stay in teaching (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

But while teacher efficacy composes an entire body of literature and a well-researched construct, the goal in this study is not to measure teacher efficacy or self-efficacy beliefs. Rather, the concept of teacher efficacy is important in this research context as it relates to teachers’ perceptions of preparedness, specifically during their student teaching internship. That “the perception that a performance has been successful raises efficacy beliefs, which contributes to the expectation of proficient performance in the future” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 229) points to the importance of perceptions of preparedness of preservice teachers. With this connection established, and because I seek neither to comprehensively review teacher efficacy literature nor to measure teacher efficacy in this study, I turn my attention to studies incorporating the concept of perceptions of preparedness, as I seek to define “preparedness to teach.”
Studies on Perceptions of Preparedness

Perceptions of preparedness of preservice and beginning teachers has been the focus of only a handful of studies, specifically as the topic of doctoral dissertations. Within the area of ELA teacher preparation, Cynthia Thompson (2011) examined how beginning teachers perceive their preparation for teaching in an urban ELA classroom, as well as how school administrators perceive the teaching ability of graduates. In an effort to address the assertions that teacher education “lacks substance and applicability to the classroom,” Thompson (2011) investigated the “degree to which beginning teachers implement and apply the theories, methods, projects, and experiences from the Master’s level English teacher education program” (p. 147). Through analyzing data collected from questionnaires, interviews, observations, artifacts and photographs, Thompson (2011) found that participants felt well prepared to teach as a result of their teacher preparation program, with both graduates and school administrators expressing that graduates would be better prepared with “more classroom experience, a better understanding of student motivation and the reluctant learner, more classes on composition and grammar pedagogy, and more instruction on classroom management” (p. 149).

Other scholars have compared the perceptions of preparedness of teachers according to different routes of certification or years of teaching experience. In her dissertation, Jill Lynn Matson (2007) investigated the perceived preparedness, practices and resources of certified ESL fourth and fifth grade teachers, as these elements related to meeting the needs of English language learners in general education classrooms. Her data analysis of a survey and focus group interviews revealed that, “Teachers reported differences in their perceived
preparedness based on years [of] teaching experience, years of ESL certification, professional development hours, and university ESL courses, but not on certification route” (Matson, 2007, p. i). Ultimately, Matson (2007) found that teachers in her study were often not addressing the academic language development of their students and recommended more professional development focused on second language acquisition.

Albert Franklin Jones (1998) also investigated perceptions of preparedness in teacher education in his dissertation, which compared the perceptions of preservice teachers who completed a teacher education program with those who began teaching without completing a teacher education program. Jones (1998) specifically compared the perceived level of preparedness of teachers to address content and different learning styles, apply a variety of teaching methods, interact with parents, formulate lesson plans, manage the classroom, interact with school officials, and to understand the legal rights and responsibilities of students and teachers. While Jones (1998) found that both groups of teachers perceived themselves to be prepared to teach content, overall, he found the perception of preparedness in these areas to be higher for teachers who had completed a teacher preparation program.

A comparison of perceptions of preparedness was also undertaken by both Colleen Moore-Hayes (2008) and Sarah Kartchner Clark (2009) in their dissertations. Like Jones (1998), Moore-Hayes (2008) focused on specific areas, including inclusion, classroom management, technology integration, and the teaching practicum, as a way to measure preservice and beginning teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach. These perceptions were gleaned through measuring teachers’ efficacy scores obtained from a Likert scale survey. Ultimately, Moore-Hayes (2008) found no statistically significant difference in any
of the constructs between how preservice and beginning teachers perceived their preparedness to teach. In contrast, Clark (2009), in her dissertation comparing elementary education preservice and novice teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and teacher efficacy, found that preservice teachers reported higher teacher efficacy as preservice teachers than when they started teaching, indicating that “there is room for improvement in presenting the realities of teaching” (Clark, 2009, p. iv).

In her 2009 dissertation, Karen Wooten also investigated beginning teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach by certification route, examining the effects of traditional versus non-traditional pathways to teaching. Wooten found that there were statistically significant differences between traditionally prepared and non-traditionally prepared teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach before and during the first year of teaching, but that these differences fell away during the second year. These results led to Wooten’s (2009) assertion that the impact of different teacher certification pathways are limited to the preservice and induction period for teachers.

Perceptions of preparedness and efficacy scores of beginning teachers, as they relate to a specific domain, has also been the focus of dissertation studies. Michelle Casey (2011) investigated beginning teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy to differentiate instruction among students with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Using a survey and focus groups, Casey (2011) found no significant differences in perceptions of preparedness based on number of certificates or years of teaching but determined that beginning teachers lacked an understanding of the philosophy of differentiation. Dallas Leigh Harris (2010) also studied teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and reported self-efficacy as related to their
ability to instruct culturally diverse students. In her dissertation, Harris (2010) reported finding a significant relationship between cultural competence and self-efficacy but did not find a relationship between teacher preparation and cultural competence or teacher preparation and self-efficacy. Finally, Heather Lynn Carter (2006), in her investigation of the impact of student teaching on preservice teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, found that student teachers’ scores on the Teachers Sense of Efficacy Scale increased after student teaching, specifically as they correlated to their perceptions of their mentor teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs.

**Room for Further Research**

Examined as a whole, this body of literature provides a foundation from which to consider preparing ELA teachers, from the history of ELA teacher preparation, to the calls for more research and shifts in how we teach ELA and prepare ELA teachers, to the lens of perceptions of preparedness and its link to teacher efficacy. These various lenses also highlight gaps in ELA teacher preparation research, as English educators have called for more research into how we prepare ELA teachers, and education scholars, such as Cochran-Smith (2006), have called for more multi-faceted research into teacher preparation in general. In addition to heeding both of these calls and contributing to the knowledge base of teacher preparation and ELA teacher preparation specifically, this study fills a significant gap in capturing the phenomenon of preparedness. As of yet, there are no published studies that attempt to define preparedness, particularly as experienced by teacher candidates themselves. Therefore, this study will contribute to research on ELA teacher preparation by investigating perceptions of preparedness as a topic in and of itself rather than as a springboard to other
topics. With a better understanding of what we mean by “preparedness to teach” and the factors impacting this definition of preparedness, we can better address how to best prepare preservice ELA teachers in their teacher preparation programs.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provide a review of literature relevant to the topic of ELA teacher preparation. This review is broad in scope and made up of overlapping contexts including current trends and policies in teacher preparation in general, a brief history of the preparation of ELA teachers as well as best practices for preparing future ELA teachers, followed by scholarship on ELA teacher preparation – much of which highlights the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught. After setting up these contexts, I provide a rationale for why perceptions of preparedness matter, as they impact a teacher’s sense of efficacy. I then turn to a group of studies that use the framework of self-efficacy as a way to understand and even measure perceptions of preparedness to teach.

These various contexts are meant to provide a layered and nuanced perspective with which to consider preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness, as this research aims to provide a rich and multilayered understanding of the concept of preparedness with implications for preparing future ELA teachers. As I grapple with what it means to feel prepared to teach ELA, I aim to contribute to the existing literature on ELA teacher preparation as well as to forge new ground in considering definitions of and factors contributing to “preparedness to teach.” After laying out the contexts that serve to ground this study, I turn to the methods of the research in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction to a Mixed Methods Design

As researchers have called for more evidence and research into teacher preparation, specifically multifaceted research approaches that go beyond using test scores as metrics (Cochran-Smith, 2006), this study provides a rich and dynamic look at teacher preparation through an examination of preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness and the factors influencing these perceptions. Because Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) identified perceptions of preparedness as the strongest predictor of teacher efficacy, and because teacher efficacy is significantly related to student achievement and teacher behavior (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), perceptions of preparedness provide an important lens with which to examine teacher preparation. Accordingly, this study probes the concept of preparedness by investigating preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach at the end of their student teaching internship. Using a sample consisting of an undergraduate and a graduate cohort of preservice middle and secondary ELA teachers enrolled in a College of Education teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southeast, I investigate how these preservice ELA teachers define and perceive their preparedness to teach, as well as the various factors that impact their perceptions.

To unpack this phenomenon of teacher preparedness, I employed a mixed methods research design that moved from a less dominant quantitative + qualitative phase to a more dominant qualitative phase (quan + qual → QUAL) (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The quantitative phase replicated a Likert scale used by Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) in their...
examination of teachers’ views of their preparedness for teaching. In addition to this measurement, definitions of preparedness and the factors influencing perceptions of preparedness were solicited from participants via four open-ended questions on the survey. Based on the survey results, a sample of six student teachers, representing a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach, was interviewed. This interview data was analyzed in the form of case studies that contextualize the concept of preparedness and ground the phenomenon within the myriad factors that impact a preservice teacher’s sense of readiness to teach. As this study grapples with what it means to feel prepared to teach ELA, the findings contribute to the literature on teacher preparation in general and ELA teacher preparation specifically by forging new ground in considering definitions of and factors influencing “preparedness to teach.”

**Research Design**

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) define mixed methods inquiry as “an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research)” (p. 113). The mixed methods approach employed in this study includes a snapshot via a survey of preservice ELA teachers’ definitions of and perceptions of preparedness to teach at the end of their student teaching internship, as well as a more in-depth look at these definitions and the factors impacting perceptions of preparedness by way of case study interviews. In this way, employing mixed methods allowed me to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in an effort to better understand the phenomenon of feeling prepared to teach (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003, p.
This use of both quantitative and qualitative tools was born out of my desire to capture preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness via quantitative measures as well as give weight to individuals’ experiences and perspectives via qualitative means. Lincoln and Guba (1994) illuminate how the meaning individuals attach to their experiences can yield nuanced, enlightened understandings through qualitative design:

Human behavior, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities. Qualitative data, it is asserted, can provide rich insight into human behavior. (p. 106)

Thus, I used a more dominant qualitative approach for the second phase of my study, as I sought to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). In using a mixed methods design, I recognize the subjective nature of the qualitative approaches. But as Stake (1995) contends, this subjective nature is integral to research itself. “The function of research,” he writes, “is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (Stake, 1995, p. 43). To this end, I turned to thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (Stake, 1995, p. 43) for the qualitative portions of the study.

Furthermore, as the interview phase of the study took the form of case studies of preservice ELA teachers, I drew on casework methodology in my research design. As Stake (1995) defines it, case study is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Specifically, I employed what Stake (1995) describes as instrumental case study, which occurs when we have a deliberate research question, “a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and
feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case” (p. 3). Collective case study, then, occurs when a researcher studies several instrumental cases, and, indeed, this is what the second qualitative-dominant phase of my research design entailed. Using collective case study fostered an in-depth look at a handful of preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach by examining the bigger picture contexts of the factors influencing their perceptions. This case study approach led to deeper contemplation of the concept of preparedness to teach within the contexts of real-world experience, as lived and described by the participants.

This focus on context in my research made case study an appropriate methodology for the dominant research phase, as Merriam (1998) describes case study knowledge as “more contextual – our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies” (p. 31). The experiences of the six student teachers whom I interviewed provided the “boundaries” of each case, as I considered how their education, work, personal experiences, and dispositions contributed to their perceptions of preparedness to teach. In addition, case study lent itself to this investigation as I worked to unpack the phenomenon of preparedness for teaching. Merriam (1998) suggests the use of case study “for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (p. 33), and indeed, it was access to this “knowledge” of preparedness that led me to use case study for the dominant qualitative portion of this study.

**Research Questions**

In my quest to shed light on the phenomenon of preparedness to teach, this study originates from “a problem or issue that needs to be explored” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39) – that
is, how preservice ELA teachers perceive and define preparedness to teach and the factors impacting their perceptions. As such, this study investigates the essence of feeling prepared to teach ELA as well as how preservice ELA teachers experience the phenomenon of preparedness by inquiring into the following research questions:

RQ1: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?”

RQ2: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach?

RQ3: Based on their definitions and the factors impacting their perceptions of preparedness, how prepared do preservice ELA teachers feel to teach at the end of their student teaching internship?

Overview of Research Methods

To answer my research questions, I recruited undergraduate and graduate preservice ELA teachers enrolled in a College of Education teacher preparation program at a large research university in the Southeast (n = 23). Students who were enrolled in the middle grades and secondary ELA methods courses in the fall of 2012, and who were student teaching in the spring of 2013, were recruited via email in February, 2013.

For this study, I employed a mixed methods research design that moved from a less dominant quantitative + qualitative phase to a more dominant qualitative phase (quan + qual → QUAL) (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The quantitative phase replicated a scale used by Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) in their examination of teachers’ views of their preparation for teaching. In addition to this measurement, definitions of preparedness and the factors influencing perceptions of preparedness were solicited from participants via four open-ended questions on the survey. Based on the survey results, a sample of six student
teachers, representing a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach, was interviewed. This interview data was analyzed in the form of case studies that contextualized the notion of preparedness and grounded the concept within the myriad factors that impact a preservice teacher’s sense of readiness to teach.

**Sample and Participant Selection**

Recruitment for this study involved both convenience and purposeful sampling within the College of Education at a large research university in the Southeast. Two cohorts of students who were enrolled in methods of teaching ELA courses in the fall of 2012 were recruited via email in February of 2013 (Appendix A): undergraduates student teaching in the middle grades ELA classroom and graduate MAT students student teaching in both middle and secondary ELA classrooms (n = 23). These student teachers were asked to participate in an online survey (Appendix B) about their perceptions of preparedness for teaching. This survey included a 40-item Likert scale survey developed by New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit organization in New York City, and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future Urban Initiative. This survey, which solicited beginning teachers’ views on their preparation for teaching and their beliefs and practices, was sent to approximately 3,000 New York City teachers with 4 years or fewer of teaching experience in 1998. To this 40-question survey, I added four open-ended questions, which asked participants to describe their definitions of preparedness to teach and the factors influencing their perceptions of preparedness. Participants were asked to include their names on the survey, as I used the survey results, in part, to select a sample of student teachers to interview for the second qualitative phase of the study.
Based on the results of the online survey, six student teachers were recruited via email to participate in the interview phase of the study (Appendix C). For this selection process, I used maximum variation sampling, whereby “diverse individuals are chosen who are expected to hold different perspectives on the central phenomenon” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 174). In choosing a sample of six student teachers to be interviewed, there were several criteria that I considered. The most important criteria was that I select a range of perceptions – ideally a mix of students who felt “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well” prepared in response to question 40 on the Likert scale survey, which asked participants overall how prepared they felt to begin teaching. A diversity of perceptions and experiences, would, in theory, lead to a rich data set from which to probe my overarching question about the essence of preparedness. In addition to seeking a mix of responses to question 40, I wanted a balance of undergraduate and graduate student experiences, again to capture a range of experiences and backgrounds. While I was not looking to generalize or have these preservice ELA teachers’ experiences represent the larger population, I wanted the richest data possible that would help shed light on why and how student teachers felt prepared – or in some areas didn’t – to take over their own classrooms.

As I started to examine the survey data, I realized that selecting an interview sample was not as simple as selecting student teachers based on a range of responses to question 40. For starters, no participant selected “poorly” prepared for question 40. And while 10 students (43%) selected “adequately” prepared overall, and 13 students (57%) selected “well” prepared overall, there was a great range of what students selected for the other 39 Likert scale questions, as well as what participants indicated feeling in the open-ended
responses. For example, while some participants answered the Likert scale questions with a mix of “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well prepared,” others consistently selected “well prepared” or “adequately prepared” for most, if not all, of the Likert scale questions. I made a couple of assumptions in looking at these trends: that participants who marked mostly “adequately” or “well prepared” for the Likert scale questions either felt overwhelmingly one way about their preparedness, or that they had a limited amount of time to spend on the survey. Either way, I didn’t consider these student teachers as candidates for interviews. In addition, some participants went into detail in their open-ended responses, while other participants offered very short responses. In my pursuit of insightful data, I decided to hone in on the student teachers who both selected a mix of “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well prepared” for the Likert scale questions and who offered detailed responses to the open-ended questions that warranted further probing in an interview.

Furthermore, there was the issue of who was willing to be interviewed. After sending my initial and follow up recruitment emails for the survey, it proved harder to recruit undergraduate students to participate in the survey than it was graduate students; only 3 of the 23 possible undergraduate students responded to the initial email about taking the survey, and of those initial three respondents, two of them took the survey after three reminders and one never ended up taking it. While I eventually recruited nine undergraduate students to participate in the survey, many of them answered “adequately” or “well prepared” for the majority of the Likert scale questions. In contrast, 14 out of the 15 MAT students agreed to take the survey – seven from the initial recruitment email sent. That I served as these
students’ instructor in their fall 2012 methods class may very well have played a role in their willingness (or pressure they felt) to participate.

So while I had initially wanted to interview three undergraduates and three graduate students, it proved challenging to recruit undergraduates for the interviews. (I also couldn’t select participants who didn’t put down their name on the survey, which was the case with two survey participants.) Three undergraduates whom I emailed about participating in an interview either did not respond or were unavailable, and I decided that I did not want to interview an undergraduate just for the sake of balance of undergraduate and graduate experience. The goal of this study was not to compare the graduate and undergraduate student teacher experience when it comes to perceptions of preparedness, and so while a balance would have been nice, more important to me was collecting rich data from participants who would be willing to share their insights and experiences. Thus, while I ended up with three interviewees who selected “adequately prepared” for question 40, and three interviewees who selected “well prepared” for question 40, my interview sample consisted of five graduate students and one undergraduate student.

**Data Collection**

**Quantitative + qualitative phase 1.** The main instrument for this phase of the study consisted of a Likert scale survey (Appendix B) replicated from Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2002) study that investigated whether different programs and pathways to teaching influence what teachers feel prepared to do when they enter the classroom. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) used the data from the original survey, which was sent to 3,000 beginning New York City teachers in 1998. While the Likert scale survey employed for this phase of the study
was not originally created or used to compare the impact of different pathways to teaching or to measure preservice teacher’s perceptions of preparedness for teaching, the survey contains questions that are relevant and appropriate to the investigation of perceptions of preparedness, especially as they relate to teacher efficacy. The survey breaks down preparedness into specific factors and tasks, and this organization and division parallels the task-specific nature of teacher efficacy. Because my goal was to investigate the complex phenomenon of preparedness, it proved helpful to see a snapshot of how preservice ELA teachers answered task-specific questions about their perceptions of preparedness.

Furthermore, education researcher David Silvernail (1998) had already conducted a factor analysis on the original survey to lend reliability to the Likert scale. (Darling-Hammond et al. [2002] did not cite whether they conducted their own test of reliability, nor did they respond to the question posed over email). Because there are no other established or published surveys that examine perceptions of preparedness for teaching (and none that examine perceptions of preparedness of ELA preservice teachers specifically), this Likert scale survey proved to be the most helpful tool available to consider the task-specific nature of perceptions of preparedness for teaching.

To add to the Likert scale survey, and in an effort to collect rich data that addressed my research questions, I added four open-ended questions that asked participants to define what feeling prepared to teach meant to them and the factors influencing their perceptions. I put the four open-ended questions before the Likert scale questions, as I wanted to solicit student teachers’ responses about general feelings and definitions of preparedness without being prompted by the specific tasks and terminology used in the Likert scale survey. In addition, I
wanted participants to be “fresh” when they answered the open-ended questions, where they were asked to generate responses rather than select a response on the Likert scale survey. I used the Qualtrics survey software to create and distribute the survey.

During a pilot study conducted in the spring of 2012 (Kraut, 2012), I used an almost identical survey in a test run of my dissertation study. While I tweaked the wording of two of the open-ended questions for the sake of clarity, I kept the rest of the survey (and interview protocol) identical. In moving from the pilot study to the dissertation research, I considered whether to include the entire Likert scale survey, or to just jump to question 40, which asked participants the extent to which they felt prepared to teach overall. Did I need participants to consider and respond to the other 39 Likert scale questions, or could I save them time and effort and just ask them how prepared they felt to teach overall? After completing the pilot study, I decided to include the entire Likert scale survey in the dissertation research for the following reasons:

- I deemed it important for participants to consider all of the different areas in which they may (or may not) have felt prepared to teach, as this thinking set them up better to answer the question of how prepared they felt to teach overall.
- I wanted to maintain the validity of the survey, as established by Silvernail (1998) in his factor analysis conducted on the original 1998 survey.
- Because teacher efficacy is task specific, I thought it valuable to have a breakdown of different areas in which participants felt prepared to teach. Indeed, including all of the Likert scale questions ultimately gave me a detailed and nuanced picture of the specific ways and areas in which participants did or did not feel prepared to teach. In
turn, this picture served to inform the data analysis of the survey as well as the sample recruited for the interview phase of the study.

In addition to tweaking the wording of two open-ended questions and deciding to retain all of the Likert scale questions on the survey, I made one other decision about the online survey in moving from the pilot study to the dissertation study: The very first question of the survey asked participants to include their first and last name. While the survey consent form (Appendix E) explained that participants’ names were solicited only for the sake of identifying a sample for the interview phase of the study, and that no one other than the principal investigator would see their names associated with their responses, there were a couple of participants in the pilot study who chose not to include their name. Thus, for the dissertation study, I added this qualifier to the first question asking participants to include their name: *Please note: No one other than the principal investigator will see your name associated with your responses, and this identification will only be used for the purposes of selecting a sample for the interview phase of the study.* In spite of this qualifier, there were still two survey participants who chose not to include their name, and thus, they could not be considered for an interview.

**Qualitative phase 2.** After selecting six student teachers who represented a range of perceived preparedness to teach based on the online survey (in looking at their responses to all of the Likert scale questions as well as to the insight provided in the open-ended questions), I used an interview protocol (Appendix D) for interviewing the student teachers. This protocol included questions to be asked during the interview, space for recording information gathered during the interview, as well as the time, day, and place of interview...
(Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 178). Specifically, I used the interview guide approach, whereby “topics are prespecified and listed on an interview protocol, but they can be reworded as needed and are covered by the interviewer in any sequence or order” (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 305). This approach helped to serve the qualitative nature of this portion of the study, as “interviews that sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information are properly called qualitative interviews” (Weiss, 1994, p. 3). Furthermore, during these case study interviews, I kept Stake’s (1995) position in mind that an interview should not be conducted as a survey with the same set of questions addressed to each interviewee; rather, the interviewee should be prompted to describe his or her own unique experiences and stories. Therefore, the interview protocol served as a starting place for eliciting responses from each participant, but I let the specific experiences of each interviewee inform the questioning.

To this end, I tried to only “prompt” interviewees when necessary. For example, none of the interview questions asked student teachers about preparedness to teach ELA specifically rather than preparedness to teach in general. This wording stemmed from my interest in letting the participants’ experiences and perceptions lead, as well as from my desire to get at the essence of preparedness before delving into content-specific areas. (While some participants talked about areas in which they felt prepared to teach ELA specifically, others talked about preparedness to teach in general.)

Procedures

Quantitative + qualitative phase 1. Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the College of Education’s ELA methods courses in the fall of 2012 were recruited via
email (Appendix A) to participate in the online survey. The initial recruitment email was sent out in February of 2013, when students were roughly halfway through their student teaching internship. Student teachers were asked to respond via email indicating their willingness to participate in the survey, at which point I emailed them the survey consent form (Appendix E) and a link to the survey. Student teachers who did not respond to the initial recruitment email were sent two “follow-up” emails over the course of 2 weeks. For those student teachers who agreed to participate in the survey and who were sent the consent form and the link to the survey but who had not yet taken the survey, I sent a total of three reminder emails over the course of 3 weeks. After the third reminder email, I considered the participant as having withdrawn from the study.

**Qualitative phase 2.** Interviewees were recruited via email (Appendix C) after the survey data had been analyzed. After accepting an invitation to participate in the interview, participants were emailed the interview consent form (Appendix F), which was also provided in hard copy form at the interview. The six interviews were conducted either during the last weeks of the student teaching internship in April, 2013 or when the internship was completed in May, 2013. The 25-to-30-minute interviews took place at sites that were comfortable and convenient for participants, which ended up being restaurants or coffee shops often near their school sites. The interviews were digitally recorded using both a digital recording device as well as the software tool Audacity, and I transcribed each interview within a week of the interview date.
Data Analysis

Before I began coding my dissertation data, I made sure that the data were organized into folders on my computer – backed up and stored securely. Creswell (2007) recommends that following organization, the researcher get a sense of the whole database by reading transcripts in entirety, perhaps several times (p. 150). Being more familiar with the transcripts as a whole allowed me to immerse myself in the contextual details of the data before breaking it into parts.

**Quantitative + qualitative phase 1.** To analyze the results from the Likert scale surveys, I “visually inspect[ed] the data and conduct[ed] a descriptive analysis (the mean, standard deviation, and variance of responses to each item on instruments) to determine the general trends in the data” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 206). I used the results from the online survey to identify the sample for the next qualitative phase of the study. In this way, I used the quantitative data to “define a population of interest to study in depth” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 465). In using the surveys to develop maximum variation sampling for the qualitative phase of the research study, the results helped to inform the sampling plan and interview protocol of the qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 120).

For the open-ended questions of the survey, I first read through the data “to develop a general understanding of the database” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 207) before deciding how to break up the data into discrete segments or chunks. I initially used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which “allow[ed] for exploration of the ideas and meaning that are contained in the raw data” (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, pp. 138-139). So as not to limit this exploration too early, I divided the data on the “level of
meaning” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 145). This initial pass at the data involved using both in vivo codes, or names “taken from or derived directly from the language of the substantive field” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33), as well as “names the researcher composes that seem to best describe the information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 153). Both types of codes were assigned in the interest of creating a codebook for each open-ended question, which DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) define as “a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data” (p. 138). As per the authors’ suggestion, I included three components in each codebook: the code name or label, the full definition (with inclusion and exclusion criteria), and an example (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138). As Strauss (1987) explains, the aim during this coding phase was to “produce concepts that seem to fit the data” (p. 28) as I worked towards “open[ing] up the inquiry” (Strauss, 1987, p. 29).

Before moving on to a higher level of coding, to looking at themes or categories across codes, I engaged in the process of intercoder reliability by asking a colleague – a fellow English education doctoral student – to code two selections of data taken from two different open-ended questions. Essentially, intercoder agreement in qualitative research, as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), is the process whereby the same passage of text is coded by several individuals using a predetermined coding scheme who then compare whether they arrived at similar or different codes. To engage in this process of intercoder reliability, I sent my colleague samples of 19 different text passages from open-ended question 4 and question 5. Again, I created a separate codebook for each open-ended question because the data from each question were different enough in nature as to warrant separate categories and codes. Thus, I sent two different codebooks to my colleague. The
codebooks for question 4 and question 5 included a definition of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as an example of a data segment assigned that code. In addition to the data segments and the codebooks, I sent my colleague an Excel spreadsheet for each open-ended question that contained a blank chart with the codes specific to that question in horizontal boxes running across the top of the chart. Her instructions were to cut and paste words, phases, and sentences from the data segments from questions 4 and 5 underneath the codes she thought appropriate to assign based on the codebooks. When she had completed the exercise, she emailed me back the two spreadsheets with the coded data segments. I then compared her coding assignments to mine. Out of the 19 different data segments that she assigned codes to, we agreed on 15 of the codes, for an agreement percentage of 79%. We subsequently engaged in a discussion of the codes and the coding process, and we talked specifically about the data segments to which we assigned different codes.

Recruiting my colleague to help at this stage of data analysis gave me more confidence in the codebooks and in my assignments of codes, as our post-coding discussion gave me further insights into whether codes made sense or needed to be revised, and whether someone else (with a potentially different theoretical perspective) would code the data in the same way as I. As a result, I had more faith in my codebooks and in the consistency of my codes through this process of intercoder reliability. In addition, as I wasn’t working on a team to code my dissertation data, I periodically coded a clean version of a selection of data that I coded earlier. Richards (2009) advises this practice to maintain consistency in coding over time, as “it is important that you discover how different your coding will be now” (p. 109).
Once I created the four codebooks, and with more faith in my codes after employing intercoder reliability, I was ready to assign codes to the data and to engage in axial coding, whereby I “identify[ed] any connections that may exist between codes” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 139). Strauss (1987) describes the importance of axial coding, as a process that results in “cumulative knowledge about relationships between [each] category and other categories and subcategories” (p. 32). Throughout the process of open and axial coding, and because the coding process is both fluid and iterative, I conducted multiple coding rounds until I felt I had reached saturation, where “nothing new [was] happening” (Strauss, 1987, p. 31).

At this point in the data analysis, memoing was a crucial part of the creation of the codebooks and of the coding itself, as Richards (2009) advises to “periodically monitor what you are coding, where and why” (p. 110). Writing memos allowed me to make notes of what I learned about the categories as I created and assigned them, and of differences and similarities that surprised me (Richards, 2009). As such, this type of memoing helped me to keep track of my coding decisions as well as the rationales behind my processes.

**Qualitative phase 2.** For this phase of data analysis, I followed a similar approach to coding the open-ended questions in terms of breaking up the data into segments or chunks, exploring the themes of these data segments to develop initial codes, creating a codebook from the initial themes and assigning codes, and then looking across codes to see what kind of meaning and patterns emerged. However, because the data from the interviews was more complex and layered than the data from the open-ended questions, I kept Creswell’s (2007) guidance in mind that coding is a process of “winnowing,” where not all information or data
may be used. Interviewees may have offered interesting insights into their experiences, but if they did not relate to the concept of preparedness, I did not necessarily code them. As Richards (2009), cautions, “There is no point in coding a category if you are not going to use it for discovery that’s relevant to your project” (p. 110).

After coding the data from the interview transcripts, my data analysis became more layered, as I “[took] the text or qualitative information apart, and look[ed] for categories, themes, or dimensions of information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 153). Furthermore, I followed case study methodology in approaching this phase of data analysis. As Stake (1995) explains about making meaning in case study, “Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meaning about cases are through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class” (p. 74). Thus, I was interested in comparing themes across the interview data as one dimension of data analysis, but I was also interested in looking at the themes relevant to each specific interviewee and case as a way to holistically make meaning of the perceptions and experiences of each student teacher. Through this process, I was cognizant that case study reporting may be “a chronological or biographical development of the case; a researcher’s view of coming to know the case, description one by one of several major components of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 127).

**Validity/Reliability**

In employing a mixed methods research design that used a variety of data collection techniques, I employed triangulation in pursuit of presenting valid and reliable research. As Merriam (1998) asserts about using multiple methods of data collection and analysis,
“Triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity” (p. 207). Within each phase of the study, I addressed the issues of validity and reliability in the following ways:

**Quantitative phase 1.** Silvernail (1998) conducted a factor analysis on the initial data from the Likert scale survey that grouped 36 of the 40 items into five factors describing teachers’ sense of preparedness to promote student learning, teach critical thinking and social development, use technology, understand learners, and develop instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 288). In order to obtain the Cronbach’s reliability, and to gain permission to use the survey, I contacted Darling-Hammond via email in the fall of 2012. While she did not address my request seeking the Cronbach’s reliability, she did give me permission to use the survey in my study (L. Darling-Hammond, personal communication, October 31, 2012). I also contacted Silvernail via email for both the Cronbach’s reliability and for the original article he wrote about the survey results (Silvernail, 1998), as this article is unavailable online. While he responded to my email, he was unable to locate the original article or the Cronbach’s reliability (D. L. Silvernail, personal communication, January 19, 2013).

**Qualitative phase 1 + qualitative phase 2.** The issues of validity in qualitative research involve “the impact of the researcher on the setting, the values of the researcher and the truth status of a respondent’s account” (Silverman, 1993 p. 233). According to qualitative scholars, the goal is to “release research from the stranglehold of validity as truth” (Angen, 2000, p. 379), which would mean finding a way to assert trustworthiness and legitimacy without espousing a universal truth (Angen, 2000, p. 379). In this way, a qualitative researcher can conduct a valid study by ensuring trustworthiness and reliability.
rather than an infinite truth. Memoing can be viewed as one of the ways to assure reliability in a qualitative research study, as a researcher can use memos to keep track of the rationales behind the research approaches. As Richards (2009) writes, “The best way to assure that your work is reliable is to have well-validated procedures in all that you do, so people can see that you always ‘deliver the goods’” (p. 150), and memoing about the coding process presents one such tool. Therefore, I used memos throughout the research process, particularly when it came to coding my qualitative data.

In addition to using memos, Yin (2012) stresses that researchers need to be methodical in presenting their evidence, so that it has “sufficient clarity (e.g., in separate texts, tables, and exhibits) to allow readers to judge independently your later interpretation of the data” (pp. 14 – 15). Thus, I strived to be thoughtful and meticulous about how I presented the data from both the open-ended survey questions and from the interviews, and I made use of organizational charts in presenting the analysis of the survey data.

Beyond memoing and presenting evidence with sufficient clarity, Creswell (2007) describes validity in qualitative research as a process rather than verification whereby researchers “employ accepted strategies to document the ‘accuracy’ of their studies” (p. 207). One such strategy that I employed is member checking, which I used as a way to ensure that I accurately captured the student teachers’ meaning in their interviews. After transcribing the interview data, which I did within a week of each interview, I sent each interviewee the transcript to ask if there were any changes that he or she wanted to make. I also asked participants if there was a specific pseudonym they wanted me to use.
Turning more specifically to the coding process, reliability in coding relates primarily to “the reliability of multiple coders on a team to reach agreement on codes for passages in text” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 211). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) explain that reliability actually plays a minor role in qualitative research, in large part because in qualitative research, “there is more of a focus on validity than reliability to determine whether the account provided by the researcher and the participants is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 211). However, when there is interest in comparing codes among different coders or simply in establishing reliability in coding for a reader, researchers can turn to the process of intercoder reliability.

Again, although I wasn’t working on a team to code my dissertation, I still wanted to establish reliability in my coding process, and I did this by enlisting the help of a fellow English education doctoral student to code data segments from two different open-ended questions. This was an important part of the coding process because “when making judgments based on complex data […] people often use intuitive heuristics that may introduce bias or random error” (Hruschka, Schwartz, Cobb, St. John, Picone-Decaro, Jenkins, & Carey, 2004, p. 308). This intercoder agreement exercise, which, again, yielded an agreement percentage of 79% and included a post-coding discussion with my colleague, allowed me to more closely examine my rationale behind assigning codes and to consider any possible bias that may have entered into my coding process. Thus, comparing the assigning of codes helped me to be forthcoming about how my own theoretical perspectives may have informed the bias in my coding process.

Finally, in my pursuit of validity in my study, I remained cognizant of my researcher
bias throughout the study, as I considered “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Being transparent about this bias is important so that the reader may understand the biases and assumptions that may impact the investigation and results. As Merriam (1998) asserts, “Clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (p. 204) will help to enhance the internal validity of the study.

**Subectivity Statement**

Examining my biases and assumptions as a researcher was a key component of my research process. Because I used qualitative research approaches in this mixed methods design, I kept in mind that qualitative research is a form of inquiry whereby “researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. The researchers’ interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). Therefore, and as per Stake’s (1995) suggestion, “It is better to give the reader a good look at the researcher” (p. 95).

Throughout the processes of collecting and analyzing my data, I was aware of my researcher bias and cognizant of how my worldview colored my study. Operating from a constructivist epistemology, I assume a transactional / subjectivist stance that sees “knowledge as created in interaction among investigator and respondents” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). This is especially true given my background as an ELA teacher, university supervisor, and English educator, which leads to my unique stance of having both been in the participants’ shoes and played a role in helping to prepare preservice ELA teachers. From
this perspective, which I bracketed at times and drew upon at times throughout the study, I sought an understanding of what it means to feel prepared to teach by soliciting “individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112). With this stance, I kept in mind the constructions that I, as the inquirer, hold as I worked towards an understanding of “preparedness to teach.” Furthermore, as a way to bracket my experience, I did not seek to interview any participant for whom I served as a university supervisor in the spring of 2013, and at the time of the study, I was no longer responsible for grading any of the participants.

While my experiences as an ELA teacher and an English educator impact my positionality as it relates to this study, my passion for preparing preservice ELA teachers may also be viewed as a strength, as I have been on both the preservice teacher side and instructor side of teacher preparation. As I am reflective about how my positionality may have colored the study, the subjectivity in my research design need not be seen as “a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 45). As Stake (1995) describes it, it is both the privilege and obligation of the researcher to shine a light on what they consider worthy of attention and to draw inferences and conclusions from such inquiry. In addition, the experience and passion that I brought to the study helped me to be thorough and thoughtful during all phases of the research, as Strauss (1987) advises that, “Researchers, as workers, can and should care very deeply about their work” (p. 9).

**Ethical Issues**

In an effort to be transparent about the risks and benefits for participants in this study, I considered the ethical principle of beneficence – that the harm to subjects should be the
least possible (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). Even more ideally, participants should gain something from their participation in the study: “There should be reciprocity in what the subjects give and what they receive” (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). For this study, student teachers may have welcomed the opportunity to develop their professional dispositions further and may have felt empowered to provide feedback that not only has potential for change in their own programs, but also the field at large. Furthermore, reflection on the part of student teachers may have yielded a heightened self-awareness and better understanding of their evolving role and development as professional teachers. As one of the interview participants wrote in an email after “member checking” the transcript of her interview, “Talking to you about this experience was just as enlightening for me” (“Jordan,” personal communication, April 22, 2013). Indeed, personal and professional reflection is an important tool for beginning teachers as they develop their identity and hone their practice.

In terms of potential risks to participants, I considered my role as methods instructor in the fall of 2012 and university supervisor in the spring of 2013 for the MAT ELA teacher candidates. While both of these roles lent my involvement to helping prepare preservice ELA teachers, my focus throughout the study remained fixed on developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of preparedness rather than on conducting an evaluation of how preservice teachers are prepared. By both acknowledging and bracketing my role in helping to prepare preservice ELA teachers, avoiding a conflict of interest remained a priority throughout the study.

In addition, for the MAT preservice ELA teachers, there existed the potential for some of them to feel pressure to participate, as I served as their methods instructor in the fall 2012
semester and served as the university supervisor for one MAT ELA student in the spring of 2013; however, I ensured them that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that their participation would have no bearing on any evaluations of them or their work. Furthermore, I assured students that the study had no evaluative lens on their performance as student teachers, and that I would not seek to interview the MAT student whom I supervised during the spring semester. In addition, the phrasing of the interview questions focused on the teacher preparation program in general, rather than on the methods class specifically.

Finally, because my participant populations for this study are small, there existed a reasonable risk that participants may be identifiable in the final report. I addressed this risk in the following ways:

- Participants’ names only appeared in the initial survey data, which I used to choose my purposeful sample for interviews. After participants were selected for the interview, the link between students’ name and survey data was destroyed, as I deleted from the survey the question that asked participants for their name. Other than the initial survey, data was collected, integrated, and analyzed without identifiers. For the analysis of the interviews, I asked participants to choose pseudonyms to be used throughout the study, or if they had no preference, I created pseudonyms for them.

- In terms of the interview data, while I could not guarantee confidentiality or anonymity, as the study will be read by people other than myself, I worked to protect the identity of the participants by not using their actual names and not listing the
actual names of the school sites or the school personnel associated with the participants.

- The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by only me. All data, including completed surveys, interview recordings and transcriptions, and data analysis was immediately transferred from my computer to my password encrypted external hard drive at my house. I then erased all data from my computer upon transfer and deleted all raw data from my external hard drive once the study was complete.

**Chapter Summary**

After reviewing the research questions and design of my study that investigates preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach, I discuss my rationale for using a mixed methods approach that moved from a less dominant quantitative + qualitative phase to a more dominant qualitative phase (quan + qual → QUAL) (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) and that employed case study, specifically, for the dominant qualitative phase of the study. I present my decisions regarding sample selection and data collection and describe the approach that I took to analyzing my data. In addition, I address the issues of validity and reliability in my research and reflect on my subjectivity as it relates to the study. Finally, I consider the ethical issues surrounding student teacher participation in the research. The analysis and results from this research are presented in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction: Approach to the Data Analysis and Results

Chapter Three describes the details of my methodology. Here, in Chapter Four, I present the results from my study in the order of my research design, beginning with a) the less dominant quantitative + qualitative phases and then moving to b) the more dominant qualitative phase. The main instrument for the initial quantitative phase of the research consisted of a 40-question Likert scale survey – replicated from Darling-Hammond et al.’s (2002) study – that asked participants how prepared they felt to accomplish a variety of specific teaching tasks. Added to the Likert scale survey were four open-ended questions that asked participants to define what feeling prepared to teach meant to them and the factors influencing their perceptions. Based on the results of the survey, I recruited a sample of six student teachers who represented a range of perceived preparedness to teach to participate in individual case study interviews.

In terms of presenting the data analysis and results, I begin with the Likert scale survey first, as a way to build up to the detailed and rich qualitative data. This order deviates from the order of the actual survey; participants were presented with the open-ended questions before the Likert scale questions since I wanted them to answer the open-ended questions while “fresh” and unprompted by the wording of the Likert scale questions. In presenting the analysis and results of the Likert scale survey, I first present the results from question 40, the last question on the survey, which asked participants, “Overall how well prepared do you feel to begin teaching?” I provide this “snapshot” of the results as a way to get an initial big picture read of participants’ perceptions of preparedness, and because I
considered this to be an important question in terms of choosing a diverse sample to recruit for the interviews. I then present a brief overview of all of the Likert scale data, highlighting the results from questions that had the highest and lowest frequencies of “well prepared” and “poorly prepared” responses. I next present the Likert scale survey results according to the five factors determined by Silvernail (1998) in his factor analysis of the survey.

After the Likert scale survey results, I present the data analysis and results of the four open-ended questions, providing details about the categories and frequency of codes that emerged from the data. Following this analysis, I share the results of the case study interviews by presenting profiles of the six interviewees and by examining the interview data through the lens of my three research questions. In addition to looking across the cases at themes that emerged from the interview data, I consider each bounded case in an effort to understand the context of each case study participant’s perception of preparedness to teach.

**Quantitative Phase 1: Likert Scale Survey Analysis and Results**

**Who took the survey.** Twenty-three preservice ELA teachers who had been enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate ELA methods course in the fall 2012 semester and who were student teaching in the spring 2013 semester completed the survey (n = 23). They were recruited via email from a potential pool of 37 (a 62% participation rate) at the end of February, 2013, about half-way through their student teaching internship. While 25 students agreed to participate by sending me an email, 23 students followed through with clicking on the link in the recruitment email and taking the survey. Students who didn’t respond to the first recruitment email were emailed twice more over the course of four weeks, and students who agreed to take the survey but hadn’t yet taken it after a week’s time were sent two
reminders over the course of three weeks. Of the students who took the survey, 9 (out of a possible cohort of 23) were undergraduates, and 14 (out of a possible cohort of 15) were graduate students. 17 participants were female, 6 were male.

**Likert scale analysis and results: snapshot of an overall sense of preparedness.**

In examining the results from the Likert scale survey, I was immediately interested in question 40, the last question on the survey, which asked participants, “Overall, how well prepared do you feel to begin teaching?” I was interested in this “snapshot” in part because I intended to use this question to help select a sample to interview (and wanted a mix of responses or experiences for the sample). Of the 23 participants who answered this question, 13 students (57%) answered “well prepared,” 10 students (43%) answered “adequately prepared,” and 0 students (0%) answered “poorly prepared.” Although this initially seemed like the most important or telling survey question, especially for the purposes of selecting a sample for the interviews, upon further examination of the data, it became clear that this question told a limited story of how prepared a preservice teacher felt. Indeed, as the data from the Likert scale questions, the open-ended questions, and the interviews show, an overall feeling of preparedness is a complex and nuanced phenomenon.

For starters, most participants, regardless of their response to question 40, put down a mix of “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well prepared” to teach for the Likert scale questions, so that an overall “well prepared” student’s survey may have looked very similar to an overall “adequately prepared” student’s survey. In addition, the open-ended questions shed more light on perceptions of preparedness; one participant who wrote, “I feel adequately prepared to teach” in response to the open-ended question that asked how prepared participants felt to teach...
teach, selected “well prepared” for question 40. Did the consideration of all of the task-specific Likert scale questions lead her to realize that overall she actually felt “well prepared” to teach? Or, perhaps, is there a thin line between feeling “adequately” and “well prepared” to teach? No definition of “adequately prepared” was provided to participants, and, indeed, it was left up to them to decide what the difference was between feeling “adequately prepared” or “well prepared.”

**Likert scale analysis and results: overview of all data.** After looking at the results to question 40, and before looking more closely at responses to individual questions, I wanted to get a sense of any trends in the data when it came to students marking “well prepared,” “adequately prepared,” or “poorly prepared.” In 25 of the 40 Likert scale questions, over 50% of students indicated feeling “well prepared.” The highest occurrence of “well prepared” responses came from question 38, “[How prepared do you feel to] use technology to communicate with others (in school, city, state, country, and world,” with 18 students (78%) marking “well prepared” for this task. Not far behind was question 5, “[How prepared do you feel to] develop curriculum that builds on students’ experiences, interests, and abilities?” and question 9, “[How prepared do you feel to] relate classroom learning to the real world?” For both questions, 17 students (74%) marked “well prepared.” The question with the fewest occurrences of students marking “well prepared” was question 13, “[How prepared do you feel to] identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties?” with only 4 students (17%) marking “well prepared” for this question.

Looking at the frequency of students marking “poorly prepared,” there were 13 questions in which no student marked “poorly prepared,” 12 questions where 1 student
indicated feeling “poorly prepared,” and 5 questions where 2 students felt “poorly prepared.” The highest occurrence of students marking “poorly prepared” came from question 14, “[How prepared do you feel to] teach in ways that support new English language learners?” where 10 students (43%) marked “poorly prepared.” The next highest occurrence of “poorly prepared” responses came from question 31, “[How prepared do you feel to] resolve interpersonal conflict in the classroom?” where 6 students (26%) indicated feeling “poorly prepared.” This data is examined in more detail in the sections that follow.

**Likert scale analysis and results: by factors.** To more closely examine the results of the Likert scale survey, and to consider what these results reveal, I organized the results according to the five factors determined by Silvernail (1998) in his factor analysis of the Likert scale survey questions. (There were six questions that were not categorized in a factor.) These five factors were: preparedness to promote student learning, preparedness to teach critical thinking and social development, preparedness to use technology, preparedness to understand learners, and preparedness to develop instructional leadership. After examining the results according to these five factors, I present the results from the six questions that were not in a factor.

**Preparedness to promote student learning.** Questions that inquired into participants’ perceptions of preparedness to promote student learning had the largest number of questions at 12 in this factor. As Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 show, the results were fairly consistent across questions in this factor, in that the majority of students indicated feeling “well prepared” for most questions, followed by “adequately prepared,” with few students indicating feeling “poorly prepared.” For every question except two, more students felt “well
prepared” than “adequately prepared.” The two questions where more students indicated feeling “adequately prepared” than “well prepared” were question 2, “[How prepared do you feel to] understand how different students in your classroom are learning?” (14 students, 61%, marked “adequately prepared,” while 8 students, 35%, marked “well prepared”), and question 7, “[How prepared do you feel to] create discipline-based and interdisciplinary curriculum,” which had an identical response of 14 students (61%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 8 students (35%) marking “well prepared.” At least 1 student indicated feeling “poorly prepared” in 9 of the 12 questions, with the highest frequency of “poorly prepared” responses occurring for question 3, “[How prepared do you feel to] set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for students?” where 3 students marked “poorly prepared.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1</th>
<th>Preparedness to Promote Student Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</td>
<td>Poorly Prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teach subject matter concepts, knowledge, and skills in ways that enable students to learn.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understand how different students in your classroom are learning.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (continued)

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for students.</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Help all students achieve high academic standards.</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Develop curriculum that builds on students’ experiences, interests, and abilities.</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>17 (74%)</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for your students.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Create discipline-based and interdisciplinary curriculum.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Identify and obtain materials and use community resources to create a multicultural curriculum.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>15 (65%)</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Choose teaching strategies to meet different student needs.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (30%)</td>
<td>16 (70%)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (continued)

| 25. Plan instruction by using knowledge of learning subject matter, curriculum, and student development. | 1 (4%) | 8 (35%) | 14 (61%) | 0.35 | 0.59 |
| 28. Use a variety of assessments to determine student strengths, needs, and programs. | 1 (4%) | 8 (35%) | 14 (61%) | 0.35 | 0.59 |

Figure 4.1 Preparedness to Promote Student Learning

Preparedness to teach critical thinking and social development. The second factor, “preparedness to teach critical thinking and social development,” had the second highest number of questions with eight. As seen in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2, more participants
indicated feeling “well prepared” than “adequately prepared” in six of the eight questions, while question 18, “[How prepared do you feel to] develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility?” had an equal number of respondents who marked “adequately prepared” and “well prepared” with 11 responses (48%) each. Question 20, “[How prepared do you feel to] engage students in cooperative group work as well as independent learning?” was the question where most students felt “well prepared” in this factor, with 16 participants (70%) marking “well prepared.” Question 17, “[How prepared do you feel to] help students become self-motivated and self-directed?” was the question where the fewest number of participants felt “well prepared” in this factor, with 7 students (30%) marking “well prepared,” 12 students (52%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 4 students (17%) marking “poorly prepared.”

Table 4.2
Preparedness to Teach Critical Thinking and Social Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</th>
<th>Poorly Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Help students become self-motivated and self-directed.</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>7 (30%)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Develop students’ questioning and discussion skills.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Engage students in cooperative group work as well as independent learning.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>16 (70%)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide student learning and behavior.</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>15 (65%)</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Help students learn to think critically and solve problems.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparedness to use technology. The third factor, “preparedness to use technology,” had five questions associated with it. As seen in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3, students indicated feeling the most prepared to use technology to “communicate with others (in school, city, state, country and world)” (question 13). This is not surprising, especially given that the survey was written in the late 1990’s, and the majority of the participants, being mostly in their 20’s, most likely grew up using technology for communication purposes. 18 students (78%) marked “well prepared” for question 13, while 5 students (22%) marked “adequately prepared,” and 0 students (0%) marked “poorly prepared.” Question 37, “[How prepared do you feel to] use technology to assess and track student achievement?” was the question in this factor with the fewest number of participants indicating feeling “well prepared,” with 8 participants (35%) marking “well prepared,” 13 participants (57%) marking “adequately
prepared,” and 2 participants (9%) marking “poorly prepared.” Otherwise, the trend in this factor echoed the trend of the survey overall, where more participants indicated feeling “well prepared” than “adequately prepared” on most questions, while just a handful indicated feeling “poorly prepared.”

Table 4.3
*Preparedness to Use Technology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</th>
<th>Poorly Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35. Increase student interest and learning</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Support research and analysis (i.e., accessing the internet).</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Assess and track student achievement.</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Communicate with others (in school, city, state, country and world).</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (22%)</td>
<td>18 (78%)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Enhance group collaboration and teamwork.</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>6 (25%)</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.3 Preparedness to Use Technology

**Preparedness to understand learners.** The fourth factor, “preparedness to understand learners,” also had five questions associated with it. As Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4 show, students were more evenly divided in feeling “well prepared” and “adequately prepared” in this factor, with more participants feeling “well prepared” on two questions. Question 26, “[How prepared do you feel to] understand how factors in the students’ environment outside of school may influence their life and learning?” was where the most students felt “well prepared,” with 13 participants (57%) marking “well prepared,” 9 participants (39%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 1 participant (4%) marking “poorly prepared.” Only 6 students (26%) indicated feeling “well prepared” on question 27, “[How prepared do you feel to] work with parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning?” with 13 students (57%) marking “adequately prepared” and 4 students (17%)
marking “poorly prepared.” The question where the fewest students felt “well prepared” in this factor was question 13, “[How prepared do you feel to] identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties?” with only 4 students (17%) marking “well prepared,” 15 students (65%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 4 students (17%) marking “poorly prepared.”

Table 4.4
Preparedness to Understand Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</th>
<th>Poorly Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Understand how students’ social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influences learning.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Understand how students’ family and cultural backgrounds may influence learning.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>15 (65%)</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Understand how factors in the students’ environment outside of school may influence their life and learning.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Work with parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparedness to develop instructional leadership. The fifth factor, “preparedness to develop leadership,” only had four questions associated with it. As seen in Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5, students were fairly even split between feeling “well prepared” and “adequately prepared” in response to these questions, with slightly more students marking “well prepared” for two questions and slightly more students marking “adequately prepared” for two questions. Students indicated feeling the least prepared in question 31, “[How prepared do you feel to] resolve interpersonal conflicts in the classroom?” with 7 students (37%) marking “well prepared,” 10 students (43%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 6 students (26%) marking “poorly prepared.” More students felt comfortable with question 33, “[How prepared do you feel to] plan and solve problems with colleagues?” with 12 students (52%) marking “well prepared,” 10 students (43%) marking “adequately prepared,” and 1 student...
(4%) marking “poorly prepared.”

### Table 4.5
**Preparedness to Develop Instructional Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</th>
<th>Poorly Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of student responses / percentage</td>
<td>Number of student responses / percentage</td>
<td>Number of student responses / percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Resolve interpersonal conflict in the classroom</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Maintain an orderly, purposeful learning environment.</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Plan and solve problems with colleagues.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>12 (52%)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Assume leadership responsibilities in your school.</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>11 (48%)</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions not in a factor. As Silvernail’s (1998) factor analysis, there were six questions that did not fall into one of the five factors. One of these questions was question 40, “Overall, how well prepared do you feel to begin teaching?” Again, and as seen in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.6, 13 participants (57%) indicated feeling “well prepared” overall, 10 participants (43%) indicated feeling “adequately prepared,” and 0 participants (0%) marked “poorly prepared.” Questions in this non-factor category were also noteworthy for having one of the highest percentages of students who indicated feeling “well prepared:” 16 students (70%) marked “well prepared” for question 15, “[How prepared do you feel to] choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes?” In addition, a non-factor question was where the most students indicated feeling “poorly prepared:” 10 students (43%) marked “poorly prepared” for question 14, “[How prepared do you feel to] teach in ways that support
new English language learners?"

Table 4.6
Questions Not in a Factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to:</th>
<th>Poorly Prepared</th>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Well Prepared</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Relate classroom learning to the real world</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
<td>17 (74%)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Teach in ways that support new English language learners.</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>8 (35%)</td>
<td>5 (22%)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (30%)</td>
<td>16 (70%)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Help students learn how to assess their own learning.</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Evaluate and reflect on your practice to improve instruction.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9 (39%)</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Overall, how well prepared do you feel to begin teaching?</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>13 (57%)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Likert scale data analysis findings.

- Students felt most prepared to [use technology to] “communicate with others (in school, city, country, and world” (question 38), to “relate classroom learning to the real world” (question 9), and to “develop curriculum that builds on students’ experiences, interests, and abilities” (question 5).

- Students felt least prepared to “teach in ways that support new English language learners” (question 14) and to “resolve interpersonal conflicts in the classroom” (question 31).

- Most survey participants marked a mix of “adequately” and “well prepared,” with a handful of “poorly prepared” responses. This evidence supports the idea that just as teacher efficacy is task specific, so, too, are perceptions of preparedness.
Preservice teachers may feel “well prepared” in one area, “adequately prepared” in another, and “poorly prepared” in another.

- Asking participants overall how prepared they feel to teach is a complex and nuanced endeavor, given that a preservice teacher who indicates feeling “adequately prepared” overall may have very similar responses to a preservice teacher who indicates feeling “well prepared” overall.

The implications of these findings, specifically in regards to the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, are considered more fully in Chapter 5. More light is shed on these findings when combined with the analysis and results from the qualitative portion of the survey, the four-open ended questions.

**Qualitative Phase 1: Open-Ended Survey Questions Analysis and Results**

The limitations of clicking boxes when it comes to self-assessing perceptions of preparedness to teach are partly mitigated by the survey participants’ responses to the four open-ended questions. Here, they had a chance to go into more depth with how prepared they felt to teach and why, and they were unprompted by the wording of the Likert scale questions and response choices, given that the open-ended questions came before the Likert scale questions on the survey (although they were free to answer the survey questions in any order). After filling in their name, program, and gender (questions 1 – 3), participants were presented with the four open-ended questions: 4) Please describe what the phrase “preparedness to teach means to you;” 5) How would you describe your current feelings of preparedness to enter your first year of teaching; 6) What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year; and, 7) Based on these factors, where
would you say your perception of preparedness comes from / on what is it based. I created a separate code book for each question, given how different in nature they were, and I present the results from each question below, providing specific detail about coding procedures and decisions where appropriate.

**Question 4 analysis and results: Please describe what the phrase “preparedness to teach” means to you.** To analyze question 4, I completed three rounds of coding, created a codebook, and then conducted three additional rounds of coding. After this analysis, I ended up with 12 codes for question 4. I highlight these codes, and the categories and codes that emerged from subsequent questions in the qualitative data, by presenting them in boldface: **pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, classroom management, feeling confident, mental state, personal qualities, big picture of teaching, performance aspect of teaching, teaching on one’s own, other, prepared to do what, and how prepared you need to be.**

Most responses to this question had several parts to them, and I coded each data segment on the level of meaning (which were words or phrases) accordingly. Because the code “how prepared you need to be” labeled data according to a qualifier, adjective, or adverb, data in this category was coded twice – once according to the definition of preparedness and then again in the “how prepared” code. Otherwise, each data segment was only coded once. If the same participant seemed to mention the same thing twice, I coded it only once; for example, one participant wrote down “classroom management” and “behavior management.” Had I been able to follow up with the participant to get further information on what she meant by “classroom management,” I might have coded “classroom management”
differently from “behavior management” (if, for example, the participant meant the logistics or operations of the classroom), but without a follow up opportunity, I coded this data once under “classroom management.”

In addition, I paid attention to the overall use of verbs and the wording participants used to describe what the phrase “preparedness to teach” meant to them. Looking at the sum of responses, participants described preparedness as having appropriate knowledge and skills; being in possession of strategies, tools and qualities; and having confidence in one’s ability to teach. The frequency of the 12 codes along with an example of each code is presented in Table 4.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical knowledge</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Deliver useful and engaging lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Understand the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Effectively manage students in a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling confident</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Having the confidence necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental state</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Being mentally prepared to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big picture of teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Being aware of what you can expect in other aspects of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance aspect of teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Public speaking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach on one’s own</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Successfully lead my own classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Preparedness is] a fantasy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 4.7 shows, there were 11 instances of preparedness involving pedagogical knowledge – the code with the highest occurrence. Some of these occurrences related specifically to planning and implementing lesson plans, while others referred to pedagogy or pedagogical knowledge in general. For example, pedagogical knowledge included simply “pedagogy” or “pedagogical knowledge,” as well as the ability to “deliver useful and engaging lessons,” “apply effective teaching strategies in the classroom,” and “be able to instruct students with some level of effectiveness.”

Content knowledge and classroom management followed occurrences of pedagogy with seven instances each. Content knowledge included data referring to “content” or “subject area,” with examples ranging from simply “content knowledge,” to “understand the content,” to “knowledgeable and ready to teach content.” Classroom management occurrences involved either “behavior management” or “classroom management,” with occurrences ranging from, “a robust repertoire of classroom management techniques,” to “effectively manage students in a classroom,” to “knowledgeable about classroom management.”

The code feeling confident followed content knowledge and classroom management in prevalence with four occurrences. These responses ranged from “feeling confident
enough in my teaching abilities,” to “full confidence in education provided to students,” to simply “having the confidence necessary.”

While it could be argued that feeling confident is a facet of the code mental state, I separated these two codes, as feeling confident seemed too specific to lump together with mental state. There were three occurrences of preparedness to teach involving a certain mental state, with responses including “being mentally prepared to teach,” “an ego-reduced state of mind,” and “knowledge of the appropriate dispositions of teachers.” I went back and forth on how to code “knowledge of the appropriate dispositions of teachers” and in the end decided that this response had to do with taking on the temperament and tendencies – part of one’s mental state – of a teacher. This decision was affirmed when the English education doctoral student who participated in the intercoder reliability exercise also placed “knowledge of the appropriate dispositions of teachers” in the mental state code.

The code personal qualities also had three occurrences in the data, with this code defined as qualities that teacher candidates most likely bring with them to their teaching, rather than having been “studied” during their teacher preparation program (although it could be argued that personal qualities can be learned or can shift through experience). Personal qualities necessary for preparedness, according to participants, require interpersonal communication skills, time management, and take the form of “a person ready to think and to act quickly in the best interests of all parties who are trying to learn together.”

Similar to the mental state and personal qualities codes, the big picture of teaching code also had three occurrences in the data, with participants referencing “all aspects of teaching” and “being aware of what you can expect in other aspects of teaching (parents,
meetings, school expectations).” I also used this code to apply to a broad definition of preparedness involving the “ability to be a successful educator” in general.

The codes **performance aspect of teaching** and **teach on one’s own / independently** both had two occurrences in the data. A couple of participants included the performance aspect of teaching in their definitions of preparedness, as evidenced in the responses “public speaking skills,” as well as one’s ability “to stand up in front of a classroom and make it happen.” Defining preparedness as one’s readiness to “teach on one’s own” also seemed deserving of its own code, as two participants defined preparedness as ready to “successfully lead my own classroom as a first-year teacher” and “to teach independently in one's own classroom.” A definition of preparedness involving independence seemed especially relevant given that these teacher candidates were teaching in their cooperating teachers’ classrooms at the time of the survey.

There were a few data segments from the same participant that didn’t fit into one of these codes and which I coded **other**. This participant defined preparedness to teach as “a fantasy.” He elaborated: “As hard as I work to be ‘ready,’ there are genuine surprises for any person every day as a teacher.” From this preservice teacher’s perspective, a “good night’s sleep” was just as important for preparedness as training or experience.

Several participants included in their definition of preparedness what the preparedness was for. Because four participants responded in this way, it seemed worthy of its own code, which I labeled **prepared to do what**. From this lens, preparedness to teach meant being ready to “prepare students for success in school and hopefully life,” “to successfully engage and promote student learning,” “to successfully educate students and
Another code arose after several rounds of coding interspersed with reading through the full data several times. Because 10 participants used qualifiers or adjectives and adverbs – and a range of them – how prepared you need to be emerged from the data as a code. These qualifiers, which I’ve italicized here for the sake of highlighting, included the following: “a robust repertoire of classroom management techniques,” “feeling confident enough in my teaching abilities,” “successfully lead my own classroom as a first-year teacher,” “competent in their subject area,” “effectively manage students in a classroom, “well-equipped with ideas and strategies,” “necessary confidence,” “a sound grasp of management skills,” and “be able to instruct students with some level of effectiveness.” Because these qualifiers ranged from “robust” to “confident enough,” this data begs the question of how prepared a teacher candidate needs to feel in order to feel prepared to teach. Is “some level of effectiveness” or “confident enough” satisfactory? Does it matter if a teacher candidate feels “well prepared” or “adequately prepared?” These questions are made more complex when considering that perceptions of preparedness, while related to teacher efficacy, haven’t been proven to be related to teacher effectiveness. And yet, it would be hard to argue that we do not want teacher candidates to feel as well prepared as possible, in light of the connection between teacher efficacy and student and teacher behavior (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Furthermore, because preparedness is a task specific and complex phenomenon, and because student teachers do not know what they’ve been prepared for until they get their first
teaching assignment, “preparedness” is a complicated phenomenon to measure. What does a “sound grasp of management skills” or to “successfully lead a classroom” look like? These questions point to the challenge of capturing the phenomenon of preparedness as well as the complexity in meaning when we talk about preparedness to teach.

**Summary of question 4 data analysis findings.**

- Preparedness to teach can vary in meaning quite a bit to preservice teachers, even those prepared in the same program.
- According to preservice teachers polled for this study, preparedness takes the form of having appropriate knowledge and skills; being in possession of strategies, tools and qualities; and having confidence in one’s ability to teach.
- While some definitions of preparedness lend themselves to topics that can be studied, skills that can be practiced, or situations that can be either experienced or observed within the confines of a teacher preparation program, other definitions pull in a preservice teacher’s background, personal qualities and dispositions. So while feeling confident, personal qualities, and mental state can certainly all be impacted by course work and field work, these facets of preparedness also derive from a preservice teacher’s personality, dispositions, and experience outside of a teacher preparation program.

**Question 5 analysis and results: How would you describe your current feelings of preparedness to enter your first year of teaching?** The process of coding question 5 was similar to question 4, in that I conducted three coding rounds to create a codebook and then coded the data according to the codebook three times. Just as the quantitative data from
the Likert scale survey showed how many different feelings about preparedness a preservice teacher can hold simultaneously – such as feeling “well prepared” in some areas and “adequately prepared” in others – question 5 yielded results that supported this finding. While some responses were straightforward, such as “I feel completely prepared and excited to teach,” or, “I am becoming more comfortable with the idea of running my own classroom,” other responses were much more complex. For example, one participant responded with the following: “I feel very prepared with the skills, strategies, and tools. Now as far as materials, I do not feel prepared.”

In an effort to honor the data and the complex nature of preparedness, I decided to let the codes represent this complexity by creating a code called mixed/cautious/qualified to label responses that were qualified with “but” or “except,” or that hinted at the complexity of perceptions of preparedness. I also decided to only code a segment twice if it was being coded for two “non-competing” categories. That is, if the data segment was about how prepared a preservice teacher felt, I coded it once. But if the data segment also provided attributions about why the preservice teacher felt that way about preparedness, or ways in which the student teacher didn’t feel prepared, I also coded it in the corresponding category.

With this approach, and as summarized in Table 4.8, I ended up with three big categories overall: feelings of preparedness, attributions of preparedness, and ways student teachers didn’t feel prepared. Within the category of feelings of preparedness, four codes emerged: nervous, mixed/cautious/qualified, comfortable, and very prepared. Within the category of attributions of preparedness, I also used four codes to label the data: student teaching, teacher preparation program, prior experience, and support systems.
Data within the category of ways student teachers didn’t feel prepared also yielded four codes: classroom management, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), materials, and amount of new things to master. While some of these codes in this last category ended up with only one occurrence, I thought it important to highlight any reason why a preservice teacher might not feel prepared, as this may provide valuable insight when it comes to implications for ELA teacher preparation.

Table 4.8
Question 5 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category: Feelings of Preparedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/cautious/qualified</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>I know I have more work to accomplish before I can really call myself prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel relatively well prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very prepared</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>More than ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trepidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category: Attributions of Preparedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>My internship, so far, has been the most beneficial in preparing me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher preparation program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My program offered me everything that I need to be a successful teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Having had former experience, I am more comfortable than the average first year teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 (continued)

| Support systems | 1 | I've been able to take away a new lesson in preparedness from each individual who has helped prepare me for my career |

**Category: Ways Student Teachers Didn’t Feel Prepared**

| Classroom management | 2 | I believe that I am prepared in all ways possible except possibly with behavior/classroom management |
| CCSS | 1 | Due to the switch to Common Core, I am not as confident as I once was about my ability to teach the subject matter |
| Materials | 1 | I do not know what books or supplements I will need to have for my first year of teaching |
| Amount of new things to master | 1 | I have felt overwhelmed at times during my student teaching because of the amount of new things I must master |

Beginning with the first category of **feelings of preparedness** and the four corresponding codes, the data for question 5 yielded the following results: Eight participants expressed feeling **mixed or cautious, or qualified** their response in some way. These responses ranged from, “On one level, I feel prepared to teach […] However, I have also felt overwhelmed at times during my student teaching,” to “I know I have more work to accomplish before I can really call myself prepared,” to “I am more comfortable than the
average first-year teacher, but I am gravely concerned about harnessing the time management skills beyond the 7-week teaching period.” One student teacher’s hesitation was about the work-life balance that the demanding job of teaching requires: “I have the right attitude and believe whole-heartedly that I will be able to do well, but I know also that I am forfeiting most of my non-school life for it.” A couple of student teachers indicated feeling prepared in some ways and not others. For one participant, this meant feeling prepared in “all ways possible except possibly with behavior/classroom management,” while another participant expressed, “I feel very prepared with the skills, strategies, and tools. Now as far as materials I do not feel prepared.”

Moving to the next code of comfortable within the category of feelings of preparedness, seven participants expressed feeling adequate or comfortable in their level of preparedness to enter their first year of teaching. These responses included, “I feel good,” and “I feel relatively well prepared,” as well as, “as far as content and classroom management goes, I feel like I have received all of the necessary information and tools necessary in order to practice them in the classroom in my own way,” and “I feel like I will be prepared at the end of this semester.” These “comfortable” responses were distinct from those coded very prepared; of the six participants who expressed feeling very prepared to teach, their responses described feeling “more than ready,” “completely,” “extremely,” “very,” or “fully” prepared to teach. Two participants expressed feeling nervous about their preparedness for teaching, with one participant expressing “trepidation,” and another responding, “I am not as confident as I once was about my ability to teach the subject matter.”
While question 5 didn’t ask preservice teachers *why* they felt the way they did about their preparedness to teach, many survey participants addressed this in their response. I labeled this category **attributions of preparedness** and found evidence of four codes in this category: **student teaching, teacher preparation program, prior experience, and support systems.** Six participants mentioned that **student teaching** impacted their perceptions of preparedness for teaching, with responses including, “My internship, so far, has been the most beneficial in preparing me,” “I have had a good deal of experience with challenges that teachers face while in my student-teaching semester,” and, “The hands-on classroom experience I'm getting now is incomparable to what I was getting through my grad school courses.” One student teacher ascribed a percentage to the extent to which student teaching helped prepare him, stating that, “50% of the ‘readiness’ I enjoy goes to actual practice during student teaching.”

After the frequency of the code student teaching, three participants attributed their feelings of preparedness to their **teacher preparation program.** The student who offered percentages described the MAT program as helping to prepare him, “to the tune of 35%,” while another participant credited, “the education classes I have taken,” and the third stated, “My program offered me everything that I need to be a successful teacher.” Three participants also attributed their perception of preparedness to **prior experience.** One participant commented, “I feel prepared to teach given my teaching experience,” while another wrote, “Having had former experience, I am more comfortable than the average first year teacher.” The participant who ascribed percentages attributed 15% of his “readiness” to “my general attitude and personal experience.”
While only one participant mentioned support systems as playing a role in her perceptions of preparedness, I thought it worth coding separately, especially given how emphatic this student was about the support she received. While she did say that her internship had been the most beneficial aspect of her preparation, she described feeling “extremely prepared” thanks, in part, to:

an amazing staff behind me at every step of the way; teaching is a unique, collaborative experience, and due to the tremendous support systems I’ve had, I’ve been able to take away a new lesson in preparedness from each individual who has helped prepare me for my career.

Fewer participants provided attributions as to why they didn’t feel prepared or described the ways they didn’t feel prepared in question 5, but, again I thought the five occurrences in this category worthy of coding. This coding broke down into four different labels: classroom management, CCSS, materials, and amount of new things to master.

Two participants mentioned classroom management: One stated, “I believe that I am prepared in all ways possible except possibly with behavior/classroom management,” and the other explained, “I do not feel prepared to effectively manage a classroom because we've learned very little about it in the [teacher preparation] program.” One student mentioned the challenges the new CCSS presented in feeling prepared to teach, explaining that,

Due to the switch to Common Core, I am not as confident as I once was about my ability to teach the subject matter. Our program focused on the old standards and for that reason Common Core is very difficult for me to implement in my classroom.”

Another participant, who had described feeling “very prepared with the skills, strategies, and tools,” stated,

Now as far as materials I do not feel prepared. I do not know what books or supplements I will need to have for my first year, probably because I don't know what
I will be teaching yet. It would be nice to have a list of all of the educational supplements a first-year teacher needs to have or purchase before starting their first year of teaching.

I labeled the fourth code in this category **amount of new things to master**, using the in vivo wording of the one occurrence of this code. Although this student described feeling prepared on “one level,” thanks to his prior teaching experience and teacher preparation program, he also added that he felt “overwhelmed at times during my student teaching because of the amount of new things I must master, such as different instructional strategies, different types of students, and the different procedures in the school.”

**Summary of question 5 data analysis findings.**

- While 8 participants (35%) expressed feeling mixed or cautious about their readiness to teach, 13 participants (57%) reported either feeling comfortable or very prepared to teach.
- While question 5 didn’t ask participants to explore why or in what ways they felt prepared (or not), 13 participants offered up attributions for their perceptions, with 5 participants giving insight into ways in which they didn’t feel prepared. While participants most likely had not yet seen the following two open-ended questions, in which they were asked to describe the factors influencing their perceptions of preparedness and where their perceptions came from, they, unprompted, were already linking their perceived level of preparedness to the reasons behind these feelings. This hints at just how impactful these factors are, as well as how perceptions of preparedness are linked to context and individual experiences.
Question 6 analysis and results: What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year? To code this question, I broke up responses into words and phrases on the level of meaning, and I didn’t worry about breaking up responses into multiple codes, as none were “competing” with each other as they might have in other questions. Furthermore, there were no issues with coding the same data segment in different categories, as the nature of the data didn’t lend itself to competing labels. My goal was to get all responses represented with codes, even if there were few occurrences. After six rounds of coding, including the creation of a codebook, I ended up with two large categories: factors impacting feeling prepared, and factors impacting not feeling prepared. Within the category of feeling prepared, I arrived at eight codes: student teaching (both in general or about a specific aspect of student teaching), cooperating teacher, teacher preparation program, support, family, feeling excited, university supervisor, and prior experience working with kids. Within the category of factors impacting not feeling prepared, I arrived at five codes: not knowing future teaching assignment, disconnect between theory and practice, lacking in specific areas of preparedness, feeling left to fend for oneself, and lack of money and resources that will be available. Again, while some codes only had a single occurrence, I wanted each response to be represented in the interest of considering all factors and experiences when it comes to feeling prepared to teach. An overview of the results with frequencies of occurrences and examples are presented in Table 4.9.
Table 4.9
Question 6 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category: Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impacting Feeling Prepared</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Reflecting on lessons that have gone well (or not well)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher preparation program</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Graduate classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>My cooperating teacher’s feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The school I am at is very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling excited</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unlike other jobs I have had, I am excited everyday (so far) to come in and teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>University supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior experience working with kids</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>My time working in the school system through workstudy and my time working at a daycare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category: Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impacting Not Feeling Prepared</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing future teaching assignment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>My lack of foreknowledge of where I'll be and what I'll be teaching is very intimidating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnect between theory and practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The major disconnect [...] seems to exist between the pedagogical methods we study in the MAT and the reality of how in-service teachers implement lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 (continued)

| Lacking in specific areas of preparedness | 1 | I wish I knew more about the political/bureaucratic side of teaching [and] the disparity between high and low performing students… |
| Feeling left to fend for oneself | 1 | The general left-to-fend-for-myself feeling I have (learning school policies on the fly, for example) |
| Lack of money and resources that will be available | 1 | The lack of money and resources that I will have available to me |

In looking at these factors, and beginning with codes that fell under the category of factors impacting feeling prepared, the largest occurrence of codes was student teaching. Fourteen participants mentioned student teaching in some form as a factor impacting their perception of preparedness for teaching. Six of these responses mentioned simply “student teaching” or “my great internship,” while the remaining eight responses included a specific facet of student teaching. These facets included “responses from students and parents,” “reflecting on lessons that have gone well (or not well),” as well as the opportunity to witness “all of the little in’s and out’s of a teacher’s day – particularly some of the surprises that happen in the middle of class (technology not working, fire drill, student disruption, child getting sick in the middle of class, etc.).” This participant described these situations as “things that you can’t really prepare for” but explained that experiencing them with her cooperating teacher nearby was very helpful. Several students also mentioned the challenges of student teaching as a specific factor impacting preparedness. One participant listed “a
chaotic section,” while another wrote, “a challenging group of students.” Another participant explained, “My student teaching experience has made me realize that classroom management can be a struggle for someone as soft-spoken as I am.”

After student teaching, 10 participants listed their **teacher preparation program** – or a facet of it – as a factor influencing their perception of preparedness to teach. These responses ranged from faculty, to courses, to books, research, and peers (I made the assumption that peers were a part of the teacher preparation program cohort). While the next code could be considered a facet of student teaching, I created a separate label for **cooperating teacher**, as four student teachers listed their cooperating teacher (without mentioning “student teaching” in their response) as a factor impacting preparedness. One participant simply stated, “cooperating teacher,” while another cited, “my cooperating teacher’s feedback.” This factor was also both positive and negative: One participant commented on her “really good cooperating teacher (role model),” while another cited, “the horridness of my CT.”

These responses highlight a limitation with both the wording of this question and with the format of an open-ended question on a survey (in terms of no opportunity for follow up). Since the question simply asked participants to list the factors influencing their current feelings of preparedness to teach next year, no distinction was made in the wording between factors that contributed to feeling prepared or not feeling prepared. While some survey participants were specific about whether a factor helped them to feel more or less prepared (“a challenging group of students […] has left me feeling prepared to face anything next year,” and “my lack of foreknowledge of where I'll be and what I'll be teaching is very
intimidating”), the response “the horridness of my CT” could be read either way: Did the negative experience with the cooperating teacher somehow contribute to feeling prepared (as this participant selected “well prepared” for how prepared she felt overall to teach next year) or was it in spite of the cooperating teacher that this participant felt prepared to teach? These are questions that the interviews allowed me to explore in further depth, and, indeed, I recruited the student who described her “horrid” cooperating teacher for an interview.

With the same number of occurrences as cooperating teacher, four participants cited support as a factor; these students listed support from cooperating teachers, professors, family, and the placement school or staff at that school. Two student teachers listed family as a factor in feeling prepared to teach, and two attributed their perceptions of preparedness to feeling excited about teaching. One participant described this feeling as, “Unlike other jobs I have had, I am excited everyday (so far) to come in and teach,” while the other wrote, “The actual joy I get from working with the kids.” One participant listed university supervisor as a factor in feeling prepared to teach, while another attributed feelings of preparedness to her time “working in the school system through work study and my time working at a daycare.” I coded this data segment as prior experience working with kids.

In the category of factors impacting not feeling prepared, five codes emerged from the data. Two students cited not knowing [their] future teaching assignment as a factor in not feeling prepared. One student teacher explained, “The constantly shifting school environment always gives me pause for thought. My lack of foreknowledge of where I'll be and what I'll be teaching is very intimidating.” The other occurrence of this code came from a participant who wrote, “I wish I knew now who and what I would be teaching; that sort of
foresight would contribute the most to my overall assessment of my preparedness.” She explained that she had worked with advanced placement (AP) and honors level students during her student teaching and expressed feeling unprepared for how ill-behaved and not-AP level the AP students would be and, by the same token, how eager to work and learn the honors students would be. This went against my expectations, which is something I worry about next year, particularly as most first-year teachers don't get handed honors classes, and I have no experience with academic or ‘repeater kids.’

Her response underscores another issue with investigating perceptions of preparedness of preservice teachers; until they are actually teaching, they do not know exactly what they feel prepared for.

In addition to the unknown teaching assignment impacting perceptions of preparedness, two participants listed the disconnect between theory and practice as impacting their sense of readiness to teach. One student responded, “The major disconnect […] seems to exist between the pedagogical methods we study in the MAT and the reality of how in-service teachers implement lessons.” The other occurrence of this code came from a student who described a similar frustration:

The [teacher preparation] program focused far too much on technical details such as the exact format for creating a lesson plan (which no practicing teacher that I've met actually does). I wish we could have focused more on the classroom management, working one-on-one with students, less theory, and all the other responsibilities that fall on a teacher.

Following disconnect between theory and practice, the other three codes in the category of factors impacting not feeling prepared to teach each had a single occurrence. I used the code lacking in specific areas of preparedness to label a big chunk of data in
which a participant was forthcoming about the specific ways in which she didn’t feel prepared to teach. She wrote:

I do wish I knew more about the political/bureaucratic side of teaching. I can prepare a lesson and teach just fine, but I feel that I'm weak when it comes to modifying those lessons and assignments. I could have used a little more conversation about the disparity between high and low performing students in the same classroom and how to tailor lessons to them. Also I feel less than prepared on how to multitask teaching and monitoring distracting behavior when its source is more than one or two students.

Because of this specificity, and because this participant also provided details about the ways in which she did feel prepared to teach, I recruited her for an interview.

As for the remaining codes and occurrences in the category of factors impacting not feeling prepared, I used the code feeling left to fend for oneself to label the response, “the general left-to-fend-for-myself feeling I have (learning school policies on the fly, for example).” In a similar use of in vivo coding, I used the code lack of money and resources to label the data segment, “the lack of money and resources that I will have available to me.” This data segment seemed to relate to the issue of the unknown first teaching assignment, as the money and resources available for teaching will certainly vary by district and school.

Summary of question 6 data analysis findings.

- While it is not surprising that student teaching was by far the most frequently cited factor influencing perceptions of preparedness to teach (14 students, 61%, listed it), what is interesting is that participants had different things to say about how or in what ways their internship contributed to their perceptions of preparedness. Included in these facets were the impact of reflection, feedback
from parents and students, as well as the impact of challenging student teaching situations.

• It is interesting to note that only one participant mentioned “university supervisor” as a factor influencing perceptions of preparedness to teach. Given that the university supervisor serves as the liaison between the teacher preparation program and the placement school, he or she plays an important role in terms of the partnership between the school and university. In addition, the university supervisor has the potential to serve as a bridge between the theories and strategies presented in coursework and the application and implementation of these strategies in student teaching. The absence of citing the university supervisor as a factor in perceptions of preparedness is noteworthy and prompts questions about why the university supervisor did not play more of a role in participants’ student teaching experiences and whether the role of the university supervisor can be better leveraged to help preservice teachers feel prepared to teach.

• While the wording of the question, “what are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year” may be biased in its solicitation of ways in which student teachers do feel prepared to teach, responses to this question showed the importance of learning ways in which preservice teachers do not feel prepared. While there were only seven occurrences in the category of factors impacting not feeling prepared, the implications of these factors are worth considering. Only two participants listed the disconnect between theory and
practice as a factor impacting preparedness, however, any mention of this issue may be something that a teacher preparation program would want to know about.

In addition, while only one participant mentioned not feeling prepared to address the challenges of teaching a group of students with diverse performance levels, this also seems to be an important facet of instruction to address. Thus, these responses hint at the importance of providing teacher candidates – at the end of their teacher preparation program – the opportunity to reflect on their perceptions of preparedness, as they may provide insight applicable to program evaluation and possible program adjustments.

**Question 7 analysis and results:** Based on these factors, where would you say your perception of preparedness comes from / on what is it based? The process of coding question 7 was similar to the other open-ended questions, and, like question 6, I did not run into issues with breaking up a participant’s response into multiple codes, as a student teacher could attribute their perceptions of preparedness to multiple factors. After six rounds of coding, including the creation of a codebook, my data analysis yielded 11 codes for question 7. These codes were distinct enough that larger categories didn’t emerge from my data analysis. As seen in Table 4.10, these codes were: **student teaching, cooperating teacher, teacher preparation program, student reactions / responses, pre-existing dispositions, feelings about teaching, responses / affirmation from others, seeing others teach, peers / support group, mentors, and limitations of feeling prepared to teach.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Being in the classroom in a school system makes all the difference in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Stories about teaching from my cooperating teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher preparation program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>My professors at college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student reactions/responses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The responses (good and bad!) I get from my students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-existing dispositions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My primary source of preparedness is my OCD (exaggeration) nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings about teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My own feelings about how effective my lessons are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses / affirmation from others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>An objective observer critically commenting on my practices gives me the best insight into what I'm really doing in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing others teach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aspects of teaching I have seen throughout my career at [the university] as well as in my own life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers / support group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Responses from my support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Help from mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of feeling prepared to teach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I feel a little bit like ‘prepared’ means we're given a bunch of great tools, and we have to have taken good notes so we can go back and figure out how to use them later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most frequently occurring codes for the basis of student teachers’ perceptions of preparedness were student teaching, cooperating teacher, and teacher preparation program, with five occurrences each. Similar to question 6, the codes for student teacher and cooperating teacher were distinct from each other, as participants mentioned one or the other. A couple of students simply listed “student teaching” or “what I am experiencing as a student teacher in the classroom” as the basis for their perceptions of preparedness. One participant estimated that 75% of his perception of preparedness came from student teaching, and he stated that, “Being in the classroom in a school system makes all the difference in the world.” For the two remaining data segments coded under student teaching, it is interesting to note that one student teacher cited lack of preparedness in the student teaching internship as a basis for preparedness (“The experiences that I've had in student teaching thus far. I've proven myself unprepared on many occasions”), while the other participant attributed her perception of preparedness to “my student teaching experience of actually having effectively [my emphasis] taught in a school setting.” This raises an issue that cuts across a variety of factors, which is that student teaching experiences perceived as positive or negative, successful or unsuccessful, impacted perceptions of preparedness to teach.

Just as five participants cited student teaching as the basis for their perception of preparedness, five listed their cooperating teacher specifically (with no participant citing both student teaching and cooperating teacher in response to this question). While three student teachers simply listed “my cooperating teacher,” one participant stated, “My CT [cooperating teacher] is phenomenally helpful!” while another cited “stories about teaching from my cooperating teacher.” Five student teachers also mentioned their teacher
preparation program or professors specifically in response to question 7. These responses ranged from “my professors at college,” to “the ongoing experience I got through my program,” to “stories about teaching from professors.” The student teacher who attributed 75% of his perception of preparedness to student teaching attributed the remaining 25% to his “grad school courses.”

The next most frequently cited basis for perceptions of preparedness was coded student reactions / responses. Four participants mentioned the impact of the responses from students they taught during student teaching, citing “student reactions,” “student interactions [and] student grades,” and “the responses (good and bad!) I get from my students.” Another student reported that he based his perception of preparedness on “my ability to make a difference in a student's view on education; to give them that 'aha' moment.”

Following the frequency of occurrences of student teaching, cooperating teacher, teacher preparation program, and student reactions / responses, there were a handful of codes that had three occurrences in the data. One of these codes was what I termed a pre-existing disposition – something that preservice teachers brought with them to their teacher preparation program. Three participants listed such a disposition as the basis for their perception of preparedness. One participant cited his lifetime of experience of “doing novel things frequently.” He explained, “My formal preparation is very important, but for me, knowing that I have become skilled at finding ways to come out on top is the source of my feelings of general preparedness at this point.” Another participant lightheartedly credited her “OCD” as influencing her perception of preparedness. She stated, “My primary source of
preparedness is my OCD (exaggeration) [participant’s parentheses] nature.” The third student who listed a pre-existing disposition cited her perfectionist sensibility: “My preparedness comes from the perfectionist that I am. I love to know what I am working with before I get out there so I make sure my lessons and teaching methods are as perfect as I can get them.”

The code **feelings about teaching** also had three occurrences in the data. Two participants stated that their basis for their perception of preparedness stemmed from “how I feel working in the classroom during student teaching,” and “my own feelings about how effective my lessons are.” Another participant, who acknowledged that she’s a confident person in general, described her eagerness to have her own classroom. “I feel like I've been in school forever (at this point),” she said, “and I'd like to put all of this knowledge to use – actually give it a shot!”

Another code with three occurrences in the data was **responses / affirmation from others**. This affirmation came in the form of “constant reinforcement,” “other people’s responses,” and “third party evaluations.” The participant who cited “third party evaluations” explained that an “objective observer critically commenting on my practices gives me the best insight into what I'm really doing in the classroom.”

Three student teachers also credited their experiences with **seeing others teach** as the origin of their perceptions of preparedness. One participant described his sense of preparedness as “based on the teaching of others,” while another explained, “It is based upon the aspects of teaching I have seen throughout my career at [the university] as well as in my
own life.” One participant wrote specifically about comparing the teaching of others to her own teaching. She explained:

I base my perception of how prepared I am by what I am doing with my students as compared to what experienced teachers in the field are doing. Particularly, I look for similarities regarding what we're doing right (so I know where I'm on the right track) and where, in my opinion, someone could be doing better or more than I already am.

Following the occurrences of seeing others teach, two participants listed their **peers** or **support group** as contributing to their perception of preparedness. One student teacher attributed his perception to “responses from my support group” while another credited “help from other MAT cohorts.” Rounding out the codes for student teachers’ basis for perceptions of preparedness were codes with one occurrence each. Coded under **mentors**, one participant cited “help from mentors,” although a mentor could mean a cooperating teacher, a professor, a university supervisor, a teacher or someone outside of the teacher preparation program. Finally, and what could be considered an outlier but is just as worthy of coding, is the response coded under **limitations of feeling prepared**. This student teacher wondered whether it was actually possible to be prepared, or whether the preparation phase is about collecting tools and strategies to be implemented later. He wrote:

I have to admit, I feel a little bit like ‘prepared’ means we're given a bunch of great tools, and we have to have taken good notes so we can go back and figure out how to use them later. ‘Here's a lesson. Get a good filing system so you can dig this out next year.’

This was an interesting response to consider, as it raised the issue of student teaching being a representation of “real” teaching experience.
Summary of question 7 data analysis findings.

- Similar to question 6 results, student teaching and cooperating teacher were distinct factors according to participants’ responses.
- While it is not surprising that student teaching, cooperating teacher, and teacher preparation program accounted for 15 occurrences total in the data, it is worth noting that the combination of pre-existing dispositions, feelings about teaching, affirmation from others, seeing others teach, and peers / support group accounted for 14 occurrences total. These factors are perhaps harder to control, measure, and assess than student teaching, cooperating teacher, and teacher preparation program, and yet they had a significant presence in the data.
- Dispositions, sensibilities, and personal qualities do play a role in preservice teachers’ perceptions of preparedness. How we account for these characteristics or what we make of them is discussed in the following chapter.

Considered together, the analysis and results from the Likert scale survey and the four open-ended questions provide a substantive foundation from which to consider “answers” to my research questions about how preservice ELA teachers define preparedness to teach, about the factors impacting their perceptions of preparedness, and about how prepared they feel to teach at the end of their student teaching. But where I could not follow up with all survey participants to seek clarification and further detail about their responses to the survey questions, I was able to go into more depth with the six student teachers recruited for case study interviews. Because I was able to consider each case study participant’s responses to the research questions within the context of his or her specific experience, and because I was
able to gather more data and details during the interviews, the data analysis and results of the six case studies provide the more dominant phase of the research study.

**Qualitative Phase 2: Case Study Interviews Analysis and Results**

**Introduction to analysis of the case studies.** In the following sections, I analyze the results of the more dominant qualitative phase of the research, the six case study interviews that were conducted at the end of the student teaching internship in April and May of 2013. I first present profiles of the six case study participants, including a rationale for why I recruited each student teacher. I then share the results of the interviews by examining the data and presenting the analysis through the lens of my three research questions.

**Selecting and profiling the interview sample.** Recruitment for this phase of the study involved maximum variation sampling, whereby “diverse individuals are chosen who are expected to hold different perspectives on the central phenomenon” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 174). In my pursuit of case study participants who represented a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach, I recruited student teachers for an interview who both selected a mix of “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well prepared” for the Likert scale questions and who also offered details in the open-ended questions that warranted further probing in an interview. After careful consideration, I recruited six participants for this qualitative phase of my study. Profiles of the six student teachers that I interviewed and why they were recruited follows. All names have been changed to pseudonyms, and I first present the three case study participants who represented feeling “adequately” prepared to teach overall followed by the three case study participants who represented feeling “well” prepared to teach overall.
Again, no survey participant indicated feeling “poorly prepared” to teach overall on the survey.

In addition to providing a rationale behind the recruitment of each case study participant, I seek to highlight through these profiles the most salient information to each case. Hence, after explaining my rationale for recruitment, I present the reader with information relevant to the case study participants’ backgrounds and dispositions, the nature of their student teaching experience, and a snapshot of how prepared they felt to teach and why.

**Case study #1: Profile of Jordan.**

**Recruitment rationale.** Jordan was an MAT middle grades preservice teacher in her early 20’s who indicated feeling “adequately prepared” on question 40 of the Likert scale survey. In addition to marking a mix of “poorly,” “adequately” and “well prepared” on the Likert scale questions, she elaborated in detail on the open-ended questions, specifically about ways in which she didn’t feel fully prepared to teach. In response to question 6, “What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year,” Jordan stated:

I do wish I knew more about the political/bureaucratic side of teaching. I can prepare a lesson and teach just fine, but I feel that I’m weak when it comes to modifying those lessons and assignments. I could have used a little more conversation about the disparity between high and low performing students in the classroom and how to tailor lessons to them. Also, I feel less than prepared on how to multitask teaching and monitoring distracting behavior when its source is more than or two students.

I wanted to know about these areas in which Jordan didn’t feel prepared and investigate why she felt the way she did.
Background and disposition. In her interview, Jordan described mistaking the “teaching bug” for a “counseling bug” as an undergraduate psychology major. It was partly through her experience of coaching girls’ gymnastics that she realized teaching was the better fit. She was passionate about ELA – writing poetry in 6th grade, she says, “changed the course of my life forever” – and she loved the idea of “passing on things that I think are important to the younger generation.” In addition to coaching and her passion for ELA, Jordan credited having three siblings with helping her to “learn how different people do things.” As an example, she mentioned how she sees her siblings in her students and tries to have empathy for her students from this perspective.

Indeed, Jordan cited her empathetic nature as a facet of her personality that helped her to connect with her students. “Iron fist, kid glove,” is how she described her cooperating teacher’s take on her approach to managing students. She also labeled her personality as one of “let’s jump in and figure this stuff out,” which, Jordan said, helped her to feel prepared to teach. Jordan also worked throughout school – coaching gymnastics as an undergraduate and working as a dental courier throughout graduate school. Jordan explained the challenges that working 25 – 30 hours a week on top of school posed during the MAT program. She was not able to spend as much time in the classroom as she would have liked, she said, and many of her classes required projects that involved classroom observations. She did not think it impacted her sense of preparedness, she explained, although she commented that, “I handled it fine, but I’m not sure everyone would have. I recall many of my peers being stressed out about school and they didn’t have a job.”
**Student teaching experience.** Jordan had a very positive student teaching experience. She described her middle school placement as “wonderful,” and her cooperating teacher as “phenomenal.” She also referred to the administration as “great,” and said that she benefited from being on a good team (she commented that she had become friends with some of the other teachers). Specifically, she said, her cooperating teacher allowed her to try things and learn the hard way from her mistakes. It was a cooperative, scaffolded experience, she expressed, which involved, “pulling away the planks until I could stand on my own, and I felt very confident when I did.”

In addition, Jordan benefited from having an MAT peer at the same placement school. They were able to provide support for each other, and she talked about the advantages of seeing her friend’s cooperating teacher teach in a very different style from her own cooperating teacher.

**How prepared she felt.** Jordan maintained in the interview that she felt “adequately prepared” to teach. “I wish I knew more about how to find out about the 6th grade or 7th grade curriculum,” she said, “so I can start building a unit or building a year over the summer and start having a skeleton of that.” She also mentioned, as she had in her responses to the open-ended questions, her apprehension of the “bureaucratic side” to teaching: “I wasn’t prepared – I wasn’t ready to come in and hear, ‘No really, your scores matter. That’s what matters more than anything else, and we’re not going to look at what your unit is.” In addition to feeling wary of the emphasis on testing, Jordan expanded on feeling unprepared to address the disparity between high and low performing students in the same classroom. She asked, “How do you teach in a way that the highest students get the breadth of
knowledge and the depth of knowledge and then at the same time not say something too scary for the lower student that just gives up?”

But while she listed areas in which she did not feel fully prepared, Jordan acknowledged how lucky she felt to have had the experience that she did in her student teaching internship. Not only was the school a good fit for her, but she felt that if she had had her friend’s cooperating teacher and she hers, they both would be “very miserable right now.”

**Case study #2: Profile of Josh.**

**Recruitment rationale.** Josh was also an MAT middle grades preservice teacher in his early 20’s. While he marked “adequately prepared” for question 40, in the open-ended survey, Josh described his current feelings of preparedness to enter his first year of teaching as “trepidation.” In addition, he responded with a mix of “poorly,” “adequately,” and “well prepared” to the Likert scale questions, which indicated to me that he had a nuanced perspective to share. In response to question 6, “What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year?” Josh wrote,

The major disconnect that seems to exist between the pedagogical methods we study in the MAT and the reality of how in-service teachers implement lessons, as well as student behavior, and the general left-to-fend-for-myself feeling I have.

I sought to know more about what this disconnect between the MAT program and the reality of classroom teaching felt like for him and the origins of and implications of his left-to-fend-for-himself feeling. Furthermore, in response to question 7, “Based on these factors, where would you say your perception of preparedness comes from / on what is it based?” Josh described feeling “a little bit like ‘prepared’ means we’re given a bunch of great tools, and
we have taken good notes so we can go back and figure out how to use them later.” Within the survey data, this was a unique response and one that raised the issue of how prepared a preservice teacher can feel before he knows what it is he has prepared for.

**Background and disposition.** Josh majored in sculpture with an English minor for his undergraduate degree. Upon graduation, he decided to teach for a year in South Korea, in part because of the depressed economy in the area where Josh grew up, and in part because he had friends who had done it and enjoyed it. It “made sense” to continue teaching when he came back to the U.S., Josh said, and he described having enough content area classes to enter the MAT program. “And so it just sort of was a fit after that,” he explained.

While Josh expressed his reluctance to say, “This is the teacher that led me down the path [to teaching],” he acknowledged the positive experiences he had throughout school, having had “more good teachers than bad.” He also described always feeling comfortable “helping people with stuff they didn’t understand.”

**Student teaching experience.** Josh student taught at a “rougher” school in terms of student behavior and student performance than most of his MAT peers. He described his typical class:

None of the kids are listening, and you have kids in the back who are texting, and you’re taking the phone and sending it to the office, and you’re doing that every single day, and every single day you have the same five kids who have no book, no pencil, no paper, and have no idea what we’ve been studying for the past week.

But while the principal’s approach was one of, “If all they’re doing is not doing work, that counts as good behavior,” Josh said he was still able to implement some of the strategies and approaches he learned in his teacher preparation program. This was due, in part, to his
cooperating teacher being open to letting him try anything, giving him advice about what she thought would or would not work with the students. At the same time, on a day when the students seemed especially uncooperative, his cooperating teacher would decide that it was a “worksheet day” — that it wasn’t worth fighting with the students to engage them. And while Josh’s response was that, “It was nice to have that reality check of ‘this happens,’” he also said, “It was a little bit of a letdown because we’re supposed to be spending every minute of every class teaching.”

**How prepared he felt.** Certainly, Josh’s sense of feeling adequately prepared to teach stemmed, in part, from his time teaching in South Korea. He described being the “floater” teacher on a regular basis in South Korea, frequently going to a school where he had never been, walking into a classroom, and asking the students what page they were on in the textbook. “And so now I am absolutely ready and comfortable to walk into any class at any point in time and just figure it out,” he said. He acknowledged, however, that that was where the applicability of his experience teaching in South Korea ended, especially as the social hierarchies in South Korea afforded him a lot more respect from students, he said.

And while Josh expressed that he did not want to teach at a school similar to his student teaching placement, he acknowledged his appreciation for the experience and for what he got out of it. Because of his student teaching placement, he felt ready to deal with and recognize “lesser behavior problems as lesser behavior problems.” As he explained:

I have a better idea for context, of how bad that behavior is and how bad it should be treated as. So, I definitely feel like it was valuable; I definitely feel like it provided a perspective that is going to serve me for the rest of my teaching career.
At the same time, because Josh expected his first teaching job to be “wildly different” from his student teaching experience, he lamented that, “I sort of have to approach my entire internship experience as something that has limited applicability.” And this unknown quantity about what his first teaching assignment would be like was what led Josh to write “trepidation” on the open-ended survey when asked to describe his current feelings of preparedness to teach next year. As he put it, “You really don’t know what the school is going to be like, what the students are going to be like, what the administration is going to be like, what the rest of your professional learning team (PLT) is going to be like.”

Still, Josh expressed feeling like he had “a wide repertoire of tools” with which to approach teaching. And he went into detail about how helpful it was to observe a class at another school (something that he had mentioned to his university supervisor and that she subsequently arranged), especially a class that the teacher he observed described as “the bad class.” What she perceived as her “bad class” was what Josh’s “good students” were doing on a good day. “And that made me feel prepared to teach,” he said. He expanded: “You could put me in [any] class today and I could have no idea what the lesson plan is, and I’m ready to go...So, in terms of preparedness, that was the point at which I was like, ‘I can handle this.’”

**Case study #3: Profile of Annie.**

**Recruitment rationale.** A preservice middle grades teacher, Annie was my third interviewee who selected “adequately prepared” for question 40 and was the only undergraduate student that I interviewed, again, in part because it proved challenging to recruit undergraduate students. In addition to selecting a mix of “poorly,” “adequately” and
“well prepared” on the Likert scale questions, Annie’s open-ended responses were detailed and candid. In describing her feelings of preparedness to teach, Annie responded, “I do not feel prepared to effectively manage a classroom because we’ve learned very little about it in the [teacher preparation] program.” In response to the question about the factors influencing her feelings of preparedness, Annie offered more insight into why she didn’t feel fully prepared, commenting that, “I wish we could have focused more on the classroom management, working one-on-one with students, less theory, and all the other responsibilities that fall on a teacher.” In response to question 7, which asked participants on what their perception of preparedness is based, Annie responded, “The experiences that I’ve had in student teaching thus far. I’ve proven myself unprepared on many occasions.” I wanted to follow up with this response – to know more about how and why Annie felt unprepared.

**Background and disposition.** In describing her decision to pursue teaching, Annie said that she “fought the urge to become a teacher.” When I asked her why, she talked about the negative stigma associated with teaching, which she described as “those who can’t, teach.” She continued:

> Anybody can do it…And a lot of that was actually seeing that in my education. All these teachers that did not care, and you could tell that they had settled for the career. And I didn’t want to be one of those.

After participating in the first-year college program, which allowed her to take a variety of introductory courses to see where her interests lay, Annie realized that she “didn’t want to do anything but teach.” She chose middle school, specifically, because she did not have any middle school teachers who stood out to her in her own education, and she remembered having a hard time in middle school. “So I just thought – we need better teachers in middle
school – so I chose that,” she said. Annie’s teacher preparation program is designed specifically for middle grades ELA and social studies preservice teachers, and Annie talked about how passionate she was about history in particular.

**Student teaching experience.** Annie had a unique student teaching experience – in part because of the challenges she faced with her placement school, and in part because she spent the last five weeks of her 15-week student teaching semester teaching in a small town in Russia. Her student teaching experience in the U.S., she said, “shot my feeling of being prepared to teach.” She explained: “There were so many situations that I had no idea what I was doing, no idea what to do, no idea how to handle it.” Annie described the challenges her students faced – she had three pregnant 8th graders in her class, for example – and how difficult it was to separate herself the educator from herself the nurturer. “I had a really hard time justifying, ‘Okay, how can I expect this student to write a paper and turn this in when he doesn’t know where he’s sleeping tonight?’” she explained.

Annie’s cooperating teacher was a huge help, she said, especially when it came to Annie’s desire to take care of her students. “She helped me to understand that the best thing I can do for those students is have the same expectations I have for the other students that are having all their needs met,” she said. Annie had less than enthusiastic feelings about her placement school, however, specifically the administration. This stemmed from her perception of how the administration handled a situation in which threats were written in blood on the girls’ bathroom walls over the course of a few weeks. Annie described how the school tried to “cover it up” – they simply blocked off the bathroom walls and neglected to inform the students and teachers whose names were being threatened. From her cooperating
teacher, Annie understood that her placement school was trying to change its negative reputation, but she described how, “Morally, that was just killing me because I did not think it needed to be that way…I had a really hard time with that – lack of leadership and administration.”

Witnessing this situation at her school left Annie unsure of whether she really wanted to be a teacher. “When I saw these administrators caring more about their school image than the well being of their students,” she said, “That just ate away at me, and it just made me so angry, and it made me not want to be a part of any of that.” Ironically, because she had a hard time in Russia (for different reasons), her experience student teaching abroad brought her back to teaching, as she realized, “Okay, we have our issues, we have our problems, but we’re a lot more blessed than people in other countries…we’ve got it a little more figured out.” The challenges she faced in Russia were both in the classroom and with the living conditions. Annie was surprised at how disrespectful her students in Russia were, at how closely the teachers there stuck to the textbook, and at the lack of technology available after all of the emphasis in her program on “being a global educator by using 21st century technologies.” Annie expounded: “I walked into that classroom in Russia, and I’m like, ‘Where are those technologies?’ That’s not being a global educator because they don’t use them.” These challenges, combined with the lack of amenities and conveniences in her living conditions (she was able to shower once a week, for example), left Annie unsure that she would make it through the five weeks in Russia.

How prepared she felt. Because she did stick it out in Russia, however, Annie came away from the experience feeling more confident. “It made me really really proud of
myself,” she explained, and went on to describe, “feeling so on the edge and not thinking that I could make it, and then making it in spite of it.” The end result was “a lot of confidence in teaching and in my own personal ability to deal with life.” In addition, Annie’s student teaching experience in the U.S. left her feeling “a little bit more prepared to handle a situation like that now,” especially in comparison to her peers, who regaled her with stories of “these amazing experiences, and every day is just light bulbs going off with their students.” Annie predicted that they would have a tougher time dealing with challenging situations when they faced them in their first teaching jobs.

However, Annie still expressed feeling “adequately prepared” to teach and feeling nervous about certain aspects of teaching. One of these areas was being an expert on the content. Without knowing what she would be teaching ahead of time, Annie worried that she would be cramming to learn the material ahead of the students:

When I teach something, I don’t want to have a surface understanding of it. Because there’s nothing like a student taking a really deep particular interest in something and wanting you to help them take that further. If I can’t do that, then I’ll feel ineffective as an educator.

So while Annie acknowledged that she didn’t feel “completely prepared to teach,” she also admitted that, “I feel completely prepared as far as being ready to get in there and figure it out and prepare myself as I go.” This sense of preparedness ultimately came down to her confidence “in my own ability to get myself where I need to be, and use the resources that I have, and figure things out.” Honing in on the limitations of feeling fully prepared to enter her first year of teaching, Annie summed it up, “I’m prepared to handle the unpreparedness.”
Case study #4: Profile of Brittney.

Recruitment rationale. An MAT middle grades preservice teacher in her early 20’s, Brittney indicated feeling “well prepared” on question 40 on the Likert scale survey. Interestingly, though, she wrote in response to open-ended question 5, “How would you describe your current feelings of preparedness to enter your first year of teaching?” that she felt “adequately confident in [her] preparedness.” She went on to select a mix of “adequately” and “well prepared” for the Likert scale questions, and her open-ended responses gave a bit more insight into her perceptions. In response to question 6, “What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year,” Brittney stated,

I’ve witnessed all of the little in’s and out’s of a teacher’s day – particularly some of the surprises that happen in the middle of class (technology not working, fire drill, student disruption, child getting sick in the middle of class, etc.). Those are the types of things that you can’t really prepare for, but going through them in student teaching with my CT nearby has really helped.

This idea that you can’t really prepare for certain aspects of teaching caught my attention, and I wanted to further investigate Brittney’s experience and perspective.

Background and disposition. Brittney began her undergraduate experience as an elementary education major and then switched to English. She had decided that she didn’t want to teach “the little little ones,” and English had always been her subject. But she described getting to her junior year and questioning, “What am I going to do with this English major?” Having babysat through high school, and nannied her way through college, Brittney had always loved kids. In addition, she gained experience through tutoring elementary school kids in a variety of subjects. After talking to a friend who had become a
middle school teacher and who loved it, Brittney decided, “Let’s try that.” With the timing of her decision, she was able to start her MAT classes during her senior year.

**Student teaching experience.** Brittney described a very positive student teaching experience, beginning with her placement school, which she really liked. She had much praise for her cooperating teacher: “The minute I got in there, I was her equal. She was my mentor... helping me, always encouraging me. And she had a way of giving criticism so that it was always constructive.” Brittney also talked about how helpful her PLT members were, including her, giving her responsibilities, and using her input. In addition, Brittney mentioned how invaluable her student teaching experience was when it came to learning that teaching involves more than classroom time in front of students: “Student teaching helped me realize it’s not just in the classroom with the kids. There’s all of the *Race to the Top* stuff, and time when you don’t have the kids, and you’re sitting through meetings all day.”

**How prepared she felt.** Brittney described her experiences nannying and tutoring as both contributing to her feeling “well prepared” to teach. With the nannying, she explained it as, “Knowing how to handle kids and have that persona and knowing how to relate to them.” Tutoring gave her a start in creating lesson plans and was her first experience “instructing students on a one-on-one basis.” Overall, Brittney expressed feeling like she was ready to have her own classroom. She acknowledged that it would be very different – that her cooperating teacher never fully let go of the reigns when it came to the myriad duties that teachers have on a daily basis. For example, Brittney described how it was usually her cooperating teacher who would talk during meetings with parents, even when Brittney had taken over all of the classes in the middle of her internship. In those ways, Brittney
acknowledged that “I know I’ll have to learn [those types of responsibilities],” but she still expressed feeling ready to start “July 1 and have my own classroom.”

**Case study #5: Profile of Lyra.**

**Recruitment rationale.** Lyra was an MAT secondary preservice teacher in her mid 20’s who indicated feeling “well prepared” to teach on question 40. In addition, she went into more detail in the open-ended questions than any other survey participant. While Lyra commented that, “I feel extremely prepared!” and mentioned the “amazing staff behind me at every step of the way,” she also shared ways in which she didn’t feel prepared to teach, namely “not knowing what grade or ability level I’ll be teaching.” She added, “I wish I knew more now who and what I would be teaching; that sort of foresight would contribute most to my overall assessment of my preparedness.” She also had an interesting response to question 7, “Based on these factors, where would you say your perception of preparedness comes from?” Lyra responded:

I base my perception of how prepared I am by what I am doing with my students as compared to what experienced teachers in the field are doing. Particularly, I look for similarities regarding what we’re doing right (so I know where I’m on the right track) and where, in my opinion, someone could be doing better or more than I already am.

Lyra’s detailed and thoughtful responses to the open-ended questions presented her as a good candidate for further discussion via an interview.

**Background and disposition.** Lyra came to the MAT program after getting her master’s of English – a first step, she had anticipated, towards getting her Ph.D. in English and teaching at the collegiate level. As part of her master’s program, she taught first-year writing to college freshmen and found that she really enjoyed teaching and enjoyed the
students. In considering the Ph.D. path, she said, “I started thinking about my life in terms of what did I want out of life, what type of lifestyle did I want, and how realistic was the job market for doctoral level candidates.” In addition to enjoying teaching her first-year students, she described “really want[ing] to be a part of a community where I know the students long-term, and I know their parents, and I see them out and about.” For these reasons, and in part because she liked the idea of summers off, she decided to pursue teaching at the secondary level.

Lyra, then, brought teaching experience with her to the MAT program; as she put it, the load she had for student teaching was similar – just half as long – as what she had experienced with her first-year writing students. Her teaching experience during her master’s of English program was also one where she was thrown into teaching after an intensive 40-hour workshop. Lyra says that to her credit, she sought out feedback early on in this teaching experience and learned where to go for helpful resources. She also completed a year-long certificate of accomplishment in teaching, which she credited with helping to prepare her for high school teaching.

**Student teaching experience.** Because of her prior teaching experience, Lyra said that she went into her student teaching internship feeling prepared to plan and implement lessons and learned how to do it “better” over the course of the internship. As she described it, her biggest takeaway from her student teaching was learning “how crucial it is to like the people you work with.” She expressed how critical her support system was at her placement school, and she described the close relationships she made with the other teachers: “I love them. I hang out with them, we go do things, I get home and we text for 45 minutes at a
time.” This was a surprise to Lyra, as she described herself as not much of a collaborator prior to her internship and had no idea just how important this would be for teaching.

In addition to forming close bonds with other teachers at her school, Lyra’s student teaching experience was notable for the challenges she faced. She explained: “I had a lot of crazy things happening this semester across the board…I probably dealt with more than every other student teacher had to deal with.” Lyra’s commute was one of these challenges – an hour each way – and she described how frustrating it was that she could not stay after school to go to students’ events or participate in other school activities: “I felt like in the eyes of other people, I was not as great a student teacher as I could have been,” she lamented. She had asked to transfer to another school before her internship began, but that did not work out.

Lyra also found herself taking over for her cooperating teacher when he was suddenly hospitalized for 3 weeks. This (non-paid opportunity) came after she had taken over for 7 weeks and was in the process of handing back the classes to her cooperating teacher. She got the call and had a day to plan for the next 3 weeks. And while Lyra got along well with her cooperating teacher and found him to be friendly, helpful, and personable, she described feeling like she did not learn much about teaching from him. In part, this was because he taught community college in the evenings, and Lyra felt that his high school students got the short end of his divided attention. In addition, she commented that, “He doesn’t really teach.” The upside, however, was that he gave Lyra full independence and let her try whatever she wanted. “Everything is a series of balances,” she acknowledged.

But even with the commute and the unexpected additional weeks of full-time teaching, the far greater challenge that Lyra faced during her student teaching semester was
coping with her stepmother’s battle with cancer. Once Lyra’s stepmother received her short life expectancy diagnosis during the Christmas before Lyra’s student teaching, Lyra was conflicted about completing the internship even before it began, in part because she lived several states away from her stepmother. But Lyra’s stepmother encouraged her to complete the student teaching, which Lyra did. Lyra’s stepmother passed away on the day of Lyra’s final observation by her university supervisor.

**How prepared she felt.** While Lyra had indicated feeling “well prepared” on the Likert scale survey and described feeling “really prepared” as well as “really happy and excited” during the interview, she also described feeling “mixed” about her preparedness to teach next year. “I feel like I know I can do the job and get the job done,” she said, “But I think it was just luck of the draw with what classes I got.” Lyra discussed having two senior honors sections and two AP sections as a student teacher and how “radically different” her classes would most likely be as a first-year teacher. While Lyra described understanding why she was given “a nice little course load” as a student teacher rather than “tougher” classes that she expressed might turn some people away from teaching, she also recognized the impact this might have had on her preparedness. “It’s going to take a lot more leg-work to find my footing,” she explained about her anticipation of having different preparations as a first-year teacher.

**Case study #6: Profile of Rachel.**

**Recruitment rationale.** Rachel was another MAT secondary preservice teacher in her early 20’s who indicated feeling “well prepared” on question 40. But while she mostly marked “well prepared” for the Likert scale questions, she offered an interesting response to
where her perceptions of preparedness came from: “The horridness of my CT,” she wrote, “the actual joy I get working with the kids. That I enjoy coming into school every day (minus my crazy CT).” I wanted to know more about this – about her experience with her “horrid” cooperating teacher and how this factored into her perceptions of preparedness (particularly because she indicated feeling “well prepared”). In the open-ended questions, she hinted at the impact of her disposition and personality on her feelings of preparedness, commenting that, “I’m a confident person in general.” I also wanted to further probe how this confidence may have contributed to her feelings of preparedness, especially in light of her experience with her cooperating teacher.

**Background and disposition.** Rachel’s decision to pursue teaching was influenced by a variety of factors, including the 5 years she spent as a camp counselor and swim coach at the YMCA, as well as being the oldest sibling and cousin, which helped her to “be responsible, be encouraging, be supportive.” Rachel was an avid athlete, having played sports all of her life. She illustrated parallels between sports and teaching, describing how in cycling and soccer, “you have to encourage everyone, you have to get the best out of everyone around you.” She saw this quality in teaching, too: “It doesn’t matter if you know the stuff, you have to help everyone else know it.”

In addition to the prominence of athletics in Rachel’s background, she explained that she remained in good touch with a few of her high school teachers. (She babysat for their children and said that they “tweet.”) She had many great high school teachers, she explained, and “saw what they did, and I knew I could do that, and I could be able to share with future kids what they shared with me.” Rachel acknowledged, however, that she had to decide
within herself that she wanted to teach, but that it helped having others around her who taught.

But while she always liked kids and considered becoming a teacher in her undergraduate experience, Rachel decided to go to college with “no strings attached.” Among career options, she considered pursuing library studies and environmental law before realizing that teaching would afford her summers off. “As terrible as that sounds,” she explained, “I want summers off because I have so many interests outside of my job.” She continued:

I’m not the type of person to define myself by my job, and so teaching works well for that because I get to do something I enjoy at the work day, I get to work with kids, I get to talk about literature, I get to help people grow, and then I also have time to myself to do other things.

**Student teaching experience.** Rachel’s description of her student teaching experience first stood out in the open-ended questions, where she described the “horridness” of her cooperating teacher. “She did nothing to prepare me for the classroom,” said Rachel. “Her goal everyday was just to make everyone around her miserable.” She went on to narrate how her cooperating teacher would give Rachel feedback “about me as a human, and not as a teacher,” how she was not supportive in any way, and how she would yell at her and tell her she did things wrong. Although Rachel had tried to switch her placement before the semester got under way, it did not work out.

However, Rachel described still having a very positive experience with her students. “I probably had some of the best students you could teach student-teaching-wise,” she said about her two honors classes and two AP classes. She got very positive feedback from her
students; one class gave her a standing ovation on her second day. Ultimately though, Rachel described her student teaching experience as “exceptional for really really bad reasons.” Because of this, she said that her takeaway was that “anyone else who wasn’t as sold on teaching as I was, who had my cooperating teacher – they wouldn’t be teaching, they’d walk away from it.” What saved her, and what kept Rachel wanting to teach was her self-described “internal fortitude.” She explained, “I really really wanted to be a teacher. It’s just like racing. If you really really want to win, you’re going to find a way to get up there, to weasel through all the little holes, to fight through the pain.”

**How prepared she felt.** After struggling through her relationship with her cooperating teacher, Rachel described her sense of preparedness: “Having walked through hell now, short of my students selling drugs in the classroom, I think I’m ready to handle anything.” But she also acknowledged her worry that she hadn’t had enough opportunity to plan and implement her own lessons during her student teaching. In addition, she described the “administrative hurdles” that she would not learn until she was actually teaching. Even with tasks such as taking attendance and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s), “You don’t really get a sense until you do it…I feel like I have a really good sense of where I’m going to have to go next year and after that with the job, but I still haven’t done the job.”

But Rachel’s sense of preparedness also came down to her feeling very excited to teach “still.” This, coupled with her feeling ready to be done with her own schooling prompted her declaration that, “Any hesitations I have on whether or not I’m ready to teach, I’m ready for an actual paycheck.”
Approach to case study interviews analysis and results. With a profile of each case study participant in mind, I turn to the analysis and results of the case study interviews. To analyze the data for the six interviews, I used the same approach initially as I did for the open-ended survey questions: I completed several rounds of coding to create one codebook for the interview transcripts before coding the data according to the codebook. This time, however, I used my research questions and the interview questions as a starting point for making sense of the data by using my three research questions as overarching categories. For RQ1 (How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?”), I used the category defining preparedness, and for RQ3 (Based on their definitions and the factors impacting their sense of preparedness, how prepared do preservice teachers feel to teach at the end of their student teaching internship?), I used the category perceptions of readiness to teach. I then coded within these categories. For RQ2 (What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach?), I used the factors embedded in the interview questions (Appendix D) to organize the data, and thus I coded using the following categories: personality/disposition, background, decision to teach, impact of K–12 schooling, impact of teacher preparation program, impact of student teaching, impact of cooperating teacher, and impact of other factors.

In sharing the findings from the interview data, I first present the cases collectively, looking across the cases at similarities, differences, and ultimately themes that shed light on my first and second research questions. Next I return to a bounded view of each case to answer my third research question, as RQ3 asks how the specific content and context of each case impact preservice teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach.
Results across cases RQ1: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?” To answer my first research question, I asked case study participants two sub-questions: “Prior to entering your teacher preparation program, what was your impression of what it meant to feel ‘prepared’ to teach?” After they answered this question, I asked interviewees, “At the end of your program, how would you now define what ‘preparedness’ to teach means or looks like?” The purpose of asking them to define preparedness before and after their program was to give them some context – by means of comparison – in which to think about the concept of preparedness. If I had just asked them to define preparedness, I might not have gotten a sense of the evolution of their definition, of why their current definition stood as it did. While one teacher candidate said that her definition had not changed, the other five case study participants did have a different sense of what preparedness meant upon completion of their teacher preparation program.

In response to the first question, soliciting an impression of what it meant to feel prepared to teach prior to their teacher preparation program, some interviewees had multi-layered responses, while others focused on one concept. For Rachel, this singular concept was the day-to-day paperwork of teaching, which she perceived as “hurdles” that needed to be cleared. As she explained to me, this definition was based, in part, on her close relationship with her former high school teachers, who had given her a sense of what she could expect to learn in her MAT program. Annie also had a singular concept of preparedness prior to her teacher preparation program. “Content knowledge,” she said, “Just up and down knowledge of the content area.” While Annie’s definition became broader after her program, she still mentioned content knowledge, or being a complete expert on what you
are teaching, as something she was nervous about when it came to her overall feelings of preparedness.

Separate from administrative hurdles and content knowledge, Lyra’s pre-program concept of preparedness was about planning and implementing a lesson. “I imagine[d] that you would make a lesson plan (based on your materials), you would show up, teach the lesson plan, and then you would move on,” she said. While Brittney’s definition prior to her teacher preparation program also included lesson planning, her definition broadened to include managing a classroom on a daily basis: “I would know what to do every day and make my own lesson plans and just…handle a classroom.” In a way, Josh’s definition combined Annie’s, Lyra’s, and Brittney’s definitions, as he stated that his idea of preparedness before the MAT program was knowing the content, being able to deliver the content, and being able to control behavior.

Jordan’s definition prior to her teacher preparation program was certainly the most multi-faceted definition. Her perception was that preparedness involved (in this order) knowing how to deal with parents, how to maintain a curriculum throughout the school year, knowing how to talk to kids, how to talk to adults, knowing how to deal with problems, and being able to say things in a variety of ways to a variety of people. Taken together, then, these definitions, indeed, get at the many facets of teaching and harken back to the definitions provided by participants in the open-ended surveys. Preparedness to teach involves content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, and spills over into relationships with parents and the paperwork required by the school administration.
In a way, there is nothing that particularly stands out in these definitions, and nothing surprising when taken as a whole. However, it was in the second question posed to case study participants about their definitions of preparedness after their teacher preparation program where things became a bit more interesting. Again, for Rachel, her definition did not change after her teacher preparation program, perhaps because her definition was influenced by talking to her former teachers about what her MAT program would prepare her for. She still defined preparedness as “navigating the administrative hurdles,” two of which she mentioned were taking attendance and working with IEP’s. Josh’s post-program definition, on the other hand, while still involving pedagogy, had to do with a new understanding of pedagogy that he was not previously aware of. As he put it, “the idea that the method of information delivery has to be intentional” was a new concept for Josh, and he expressed being surprised to learn there is an art and a science to pedagogy, and that strategies matter for best practices of instruction.

But while pedagogy is certainly prominent within teacher preparation coursework, navigating the political or bureaucratic sides of teaching may or may not be addressed, and it was this aspect of preparedness that two of the case study participants encountered during their student teaching internships and mentioned during their interviews. While Jordan didn’t throw out her earlier definition of preparedness – she still thought all of her previously mentioned elements factored into preparedness – being prepared to handle the “bureaucratic side of teaching” was what she emphasized in her post-program definition. She explained: “It’s that idea of how do you manage to give four tests that you don’t necessarily want to give because they don’t talk about anything you’re talking about but they’re the thing that the
6th graders are taking.” Essentially, Jordan described being frustrated at the heavy emphasis on testing and on the disconnect between testing material and the content she wanted to cover in her lesson plans. Annie, who had imagined preparedness to be solely about content knowledge before her teacher preparation program, also mentioned the political aspects of teaching in her post-program definition. While this definition included the ability to plan lessons and seek out “sources that you need to access to become more knowledgeable of the content area,” she expressed that her new understanding of preparedness involved “being able to handle all the legalities that are associated with teaching and covering your back.” This definition made sense within the context of Annie’s disheartening experience with the leadership at her school and with the unique needs that her students brought with them to the classroom.

Just as the political nature of teaching was a new facet that helped to define preparedness for some case study participants, the importance of collaboration was a key post-program element of preparedness for others. In fact, Brittney had a revised appreciation for preparedness after the MAT program in that she did not imagine preparedness to mean perfection or handling a classroom and implementing lessons like a veteran teacher. She stated, “I think that managing a classroom will always be kind of a learning curve as you go.” In addition, while she had imagined preparedness to involve herself as a solo teacher, she now understood that she wouldn’t be planning every lesson by herself. She mentioned the valuable role her PLT played in her student teaching internship, how these teachers included her and valued her input, and how this experience made her realize that preparedness for
teaching does not fall solely on one teacher’s shoulders; teaching is collaborative, and this realization made her feel less nervous about being prepared.

For Lyra, who had previously thought of preparedness as having to do with planning and implementing lessons, her post-program definition of preparedness also relied heavily on the notion of collaboration in teaching. In fact, Lyra’s definition probably changed the most from before the program to after the program, even with her experience teaching first-year writing during her master’s program. Lyra’s new definition of preparedness was, “Being open to constructive criticism, being willing to self-reflect, and being willing to collaborate.” She remarked on this shift herself, commenting that if she thought planning and implementing lessons was 80% of being prepared before her program, now she would only chalk it up to about 20% of being prepared. Lyra also talked specifically about how she was not big on collaboration prior to the MAT program. “I hated group projects and the whole nine yards,” she said, and she explained that, “Now I feel completely the opposite.” For Lyra, the importance of collaboration in teaching meant liking the people you work with, and this was one of the big lessons that she expressed learning during her student teaching.

**Summary of RQ1 data analysis findings: How do preservice ELA teachers define the concept “preparedness to teach?”**

- In looking at the results from the interviews that address the first research question, all but one of the case study participants had a new appreciation for what preparedness meant at the completion of their teacher preparation program. Revised definitions and new understandings of what it meant to feel prepared to teach had everything to do with their student teaching experiences.
• Post-program definitions of preparedness included handling administrative hurdles; a newfound appreciation of the art and science of pedagogy; navigating the political or bureaucratic elements of teaching, such as an emphasis on testing or the public relations of a school; and, the importance of collaboration in teaching, whether in the form of PLT’s or getting along well with colleagues.

• These post-program definitions raise questions to be further addressed in the following chapter: To what extent can you prepare candidates for the importance of collaboration or for navigating the political climate of schools when dynamics and policies will vary by school, district, etc.? Will these definitions continue to shift once teacher candidates become beginning teachers?

**Results across cases RQ2: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach?** After looking across the cases in consideration of my first research question, I apply the same approach to my second research question. RQ2, which investigates the factors influencing preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach, was certainly the most multi-faceted research question of the three, as there are, undoubtedly, a variety of factors to consider. I asked participants about specific factors during the interview – how they decided to become a teacher, what impact their K–12 education, their teacher preparation program, and their student teaching internship had on their perceptions of preparedness to teach, as well as what other factors might have played a role in their sense of readiness to teach. To analyze this data, I started with the categories
embedded in the interview questions (personality/disposition, background, decision to teach, impact of K–12 schooling, impact of teacher preparation program, impact of student teaching, impact of cooperating teacher, and impact of other factors), and then coded within each category. These codes are highlighted in boldface in the following section.

**Personality / disposition.** I began each interview by asking the case study participants how and why they decided to become a teacher. I asked this question because I thought it might make a difference in perceptions of preparedness if a preservice teacher had wanted to be a teacher his or her whole life or if he or she had “fallen” into the career in some way. I wondered if this background might have an impact on passion, enthusiasm, or dispositions that lend themselves to teaching. In addition, I thought this question might elicit details about a teacher candidate’s background as it relates to his or her preparation for teaching, such as whether a preservice teacher had had influential or relevant experiences that contributed to a sense of feeling ready to teach. There were three codes that emerged in the category of personality / disposition: qualities that lend themselves to teaching, passion for teaching or ELA, and appeal of summers off.

Indeed, Josh, Jordan, and Rachel mentioned possessing qualities that lend themselves to teaching. While Josh was not as forthcoming as other case study participants about how facets of his personality contributed to his decision to become a teacher, he mentioned that, “I have always felt comfortable helping people with stuff they didn’t understand.” Jordan was more emphatic about the connection between her disposition and readiness to teach, as she explained how her personality yielded an attitude of “jump in and
let’s figure this stuff out.” This came in handy during student teaching, she said, when she began the internship off the bat by standing at the front of the room, interacting with the students. This was in contrast to her cooperating teacher’s past student teachers, he said, who had sat in the back of the room and took notes until it was “time” for them to stand in front.

Rachel also mentioned several facets of her personality that put her in a good position to teach. “Deep down I know I have the guts to be a teacher,” she described. “I know I have the patience, I know I have the energy, and I know I have the enthusiasm,” she continued. Indeed, Rachel mentioned a couple of times during the interview that it was these qualities that helped her to get through the challenges she encountered with her cooperating teacher. In addition, Rachel perceived herself as being resilient enough to still be very excited about teaching, as she imagined that other teacher candidates might not want to enter the profession if they had endured what she had during her student teaching.

Rachel’s personality traits dovetailed with her enthusiasm for teaching, and, indeed, three other case study participants talked about having this passion for teaching. Jordan was perhaps the most direct about possessing an innate desire to teach. “I think I’ve always had the teaching bug,” she commented, before explaining how she “mistook it for a counseling bug” at first. Coupled with this teaching bug was Jordan’s self-described passion for ELA. Brittney also described having a passion for ELA and explained how this led her to pursue the teaching path: “I knew I loved language arts – English major is my thing. That’s really all I wanted to teach.”

Lyra also talked about having the excitement needed to teach, coupled with “the necessary naïveté.” When I asked her to explain what she meant, she expounded:
You have to have hope, and you have to not peek behind the curtain, because there’s so much negativity and bureaucracy and red tape that if you run headlong into that wall from the get-go and that gets washed upon you, you will just pull out immediately. So you have to learn all of the things that are great, fun, and wonderful [about teaching] before people start to introduce you to all of the muck.

This statement of Lyra’s is particularly thought provoking when considering that some case study participants mentioned that learning what to expect with the bureaucracy or the red tape of a school system factored into feeling prepared to teach (or was sometimes what kept them from feeling prepared).

In a way, Annie’s experience with feeling disheartened by her administration during student teaching supports Lyra’s perspective in that Annie felt disillusioned to the point where she was not sure that she wanted to teach. But Annie also started off her path to teaching without the “hope” that Lyra talked about, as Annie described how she fought the urge to become a teacher due to the “stigma” of teaching. Having had teachers who did not seem to care impacted Annie, as she did not want to end up like one of them and did not want to fall into the category of “those who can’t, teach.” Considered from a different angle, Annie’s perspective points to her understanding that passion is necessary for teaching, and while her own education and experiences with student teaching made her unsure of whether she possessed that passion, she finished her student teaching with the realization that she “had” to teach. Her path to discovering her enthusiasm may not have been as straightforward as the other case study participants, but, in the end, her passion for teaching still factored into her perception of readiness to teach.

In addition to a passion for teaching and ELA, as well as personality traits that drew them to teaching, two interviewees mentioned the summers off aspect of teaching as part of
what appealed to them about the profession. While Lyra admitted to wanting summers off at the tail end of her explanation about what drew her to teaching and the excitement she felt to enter the profession, Rachel described how the advantage of summers off was specific to who she is and what she enjoys doing. She explained, “As terrible as that sounds, I want summers off because I have so many interests outside of my job.” These interests that Rachel described include being an avid competitive cyclist, something that she explained requires a great deal of time and commitment.

**Background.** The interview question about how and why case study participants decided to go into teaching certainly elicited details about the connection between personalities and dispositions and the decision to pursue teaching, and in some cases shed light on how these characteristics impacted perceptions of readiness to teach. This question also led interviewees to talk about their backgrounds and experiences prior to entering their teacher preparation program, as well as the role these backgrounds played in perceptions of preparedness to teach. For Josh and Brittney, having friends who taught and enjoyed teaching was their “gateway” into teaching. For other case study participants, past experience working with kids, having siblings, and playing sports all factored into their decision to pursue teaching.

Certainly prior employment was the most common factor participants mentioned about their backgrounds and decisions to enter teaching. Five out of the six interviewees talked about their past experience working with kids – which, in some cases, included actual teaching experience – and how that played into their decision to pursue a teaching degree. For Jordan, this experience came in the form of coaching girls’ gymnastics as an
undergraduate student. Not only did she enjoy the teaching aspect of the job, but she found encouragement from a young gymnast’s mom. Jordan mentioned how meaningful this encouragement was, as the gymnast’s mom told her, “You have a gift with these girls and you should definitely work with kids – keep that in your mind.”

Rachel also had experience working with young kids as a YMCA counselor and swim coach during high school. She really enjoyed it, Rachel said, and even though she decided to work with an older age as a teacher, her YMCA experience gave her a positive first taste of teaching. Brittney, too, talked about how her experience as a babysitter, a nanny, and a tutor all factored into her decision to pursue teaching. Even more specific to their teacher preparation, Lyra and Josh both brought prior teaching experience to the MAT program. Josh described how “it just sort of made sense to continue [teaching],” after his year of teaching in South Korea, and Lyra was enthusiastic about how her experience teaching first-year writing to college students made her realize how important student relationships were to her, and how teaching high school would allow her to foster these relationships outside of the classroom.

Brittney, Lyra, and Josh all talked about how their prior experience teaching or working with kids contributed to their perceptions of preparedness for teaching. For Brittney, both nannying and tutoring provided her with a helpful foundation. She described how nannying “helped a lot with the classroom management, just knowing how to handle kids and have that persona and knowing how to relate to them,” while tutoring gave her her first stab at planning lessons, even though she expressed that she did not realize they were lesson plans at the time. While Josh acknowledged the limited applicability of his teaching
experience in South Korea, as he explained, he credited the experience with helping him to lose any anxiety about being in front of a group of kids. For Lyra, her teaching experience was perhaps more directly applicable, as her job teaching first-year writing gave her a foundation in designing and implementing a syllabus and lesson plans: “I had to design the whole syllabus and get all the course materials and projects and everything. So it was like the same load that I had to do for the student teaching […] but] for an entire semester with them.”

But while prior experience teaching or working with kids is not an unexpected factor in preservice teachers’ decisions to enter teaching or even in their perceptions of preparedness to lead their own classroom, the role of siblings and sports are a bit more surprising. Both Jordan and Rachel mentioned how having siblings related to their perceptions of readiness to teach. Jordan, who has three siblings, explained how this was helpful experience in “learning how different people do different things.” She talked specifically about the “school” personalities of her siblings, and how she was able to empathize with her students by seeing her siblings in them. Rachel also mentioned the influence of being the oldest sibling and cousin. She explained, “I’ve always been the big kid. And because of that, they say older children develop the responsible tendencies, which [contributes to my] ability to be responsible, to be encouraging, to be supportive.”

In addition to being the responsible “big kid” growing up, Rachel was passionate about how playing sports and being part of an athletic team contributed to her overall approach to teaching. As she put it:

Teaching is not a one-man game. Cycling is not a one-man game – you have to encourage everyone, you have to get the best out of everyone around you. It doesn’t matter if you know the stuff, you have to help everyone else know it. And you have
to be able to help the kids at the end of the day get some sort of worthwhile experience out of English.

While certainly not all “athletic” teacher candidates would see a connection between sports and teaching, Rachel’s comment is compelling in that it is a reminder of the myriad factors and experiences that contribute to a preservice teacher’s perception of preparedness to teach.

**K–12 education.** In addition to the prominent connection between case study participants’ backgrounds and their decisions to teach, all of the interviewees commented that they had either overall positive educational experiences in their K–12 education and/or were impacted positively by a specific teacher. This was prompted by the interview question that asked participants directly about the impact of their K–12 education on their perception of preparedness to teach. While Josh acknowledged that he had “more positive experiences with teachers than bad teachers,” he also admitted that he was reluctant to say, “This is the teacher that led me down the path [to becoming a teacher].” Brittney was more enthusiastic about the impact of her teachers: “I feel like I grew up with really good K-12 teachers…So that gave me a good view of what teachers should be like.” In fact, having “good” teachers growing up came full circle during her time in the MAT program when she watched a video of her 6th grade ELA teacher in one of her MAT classes. (The purpose of the video was to observe a model use of technology.) And it was this teacher, said Brittney, who “probably affected me the most.” Rachel, too, expressed having “really great high school teachers” and described how she kept up with a couple of them regularly. She acknowledged, however, that simply having good teachers was not enough to put her on the path to teaching. As she explained, “I had to decide within myself that I wanted to teach.”
Still, she said that it was helpful to have other people around her who teach, especially since her parents are not educators.

A few of the case study participants went into more detail about specific teachers and the positive impact they had on their educational experience and on their sense of preparedness to teach. For Jordan, this was her 10th grade ELA teacher, who made a great impression on her by “being himself when he was in front of the classroom.” Jordan remembered specific things that she learned from him about grammar (“you need to know the rules before you can appropriately break them”) and that his passion for literature was contagious. She also commented on how much time and care he took in writing in the margins of students’ papers. But while it was this specific teacher that stood out to Jordan, she also talked about the impact of a poetry writing assignment in 6th grade. She described how the assignment was what “changed the course of my life forever – it was a random assignment, and it struck my fancy more than the teacher making it, but it got me there.”

Lyra was also forthcoming about the impact of specific K–12 teachers on her current feelings of preparedness to teach. She described an elementary school teacher, a middle school teacher, and two high school teachers who “hugely impacted my life” and explained how she considered not only what they would do in particular teaching situations, but she wondered what they would think of her decision to teach and whether they would be proud of her. She commented, “I feel like they did such a fantastic job with me, and so if I can’t do half as good as that with my own students, then I really failed in their preparation somehow.” Lyra’s comment about the impact of these influential teachers suggests that preparation for teaching may begin during a preservice teacher’s K–12 education, during the “apprenticeship
of observation” (Lortie, 1975), when future teacher candidates may already be subconsciously taking notes on what they like and do not like about their own experiences in school, to be drawn upon later in their own classrooms.

In fact, Annie was the only interviewee who mentioned a negative educational experience in this context, and while she did not single out any teachers specifically, she described her experience with having teachers who did not seem to care. She mentioned middle school specifically in this regard, in that she did not have any teachers who stood out. Because she had a hard time personally in middle school, and because she lacked any influential middle school teachers, she decided that more good middle school teachers were needed, and that that was where she would put her efforts.

But Annie, too, could not stop gushing when it came to describing a specific influential teacher. For her it was her 3rd grade reading teacher, and she explained that she still gets emotional thinking back on her classroom. “That’s when it all changed for me,” Annie said, as she described how passionate this teacher was about content and how respectful she was towards her students. “She just instilled such a sense of confidence in all of the students and such a sense of wanting to know more,” Annie remembered. She continued, “And of all my teachers, she’s the one that I just try to channel in my classroom when I’m struggling.”

**Teacher preparation program.** If it is not surprising that case study participants’ K–12 educational experiences would play a role in their decisions to teach or in their perceptions of preparedness, it may seem obvious that a teacher candidate’s teacher preparation program would have an impact on perceptions of readiness to teach. Yet, I still
asked case study participants specifically about the role of their teacher preparation program, as I wanted to single out the pre-practicum portion of the program and to get a sense of how preservice teachers perceived of how the pre-student-teaching facets of their program (courses, professors, material, peers, etc.) contributed to their perceptions of preparedness to teach. Thus, I prompted interview participants that I would ask them next about their student teaching internship specifically after asking them about the impact of their teacher preparation program. While a couple of case study participants talked about the program giving them “the tools” they would need to teach, other participants focused on limitations of the program or ways in which their teacher preparation program did not contribute to feeling prepared to teach.

Lyra was perhaps the most positive and enthusiastic participant about the impact of her teacher preparation program on her perception of preparedness to teach, especially when it came to this idea of acquiring “the tools” to teach. “It basically gave me the tool shed to do it,” she said. She continued with this metaphor: “It was like walking into a wood shop and being like, ‘Yeah, I’m going to build a bird house,’ and then I had this group of people saying, ‘Here, let me show you how to make a bird house.’” Josh also expressed feeling like the MAT program gave him a wide repertoire of tools with which to approach his first year of teaching. However, he acknowledged that the real test would be learning how to apply them: “I feel like the first six months [of teaching] is just going to be me figuring out how to use [the tools]. So, I feel like I have them, but just putting them in real life now is going to be sort of tough.”
While Josh said part of the problem was not knowing what his future school, students, administration, or PLT would be like, he also felt that his teacher preparation program could do a better job of giving teacher candidates a sense of what the realities of a classroom would look like. He explained what this “heads up” might include if teacher candidates were told:

Okay, these things that you’re going to try to implement – you’re going to meet teachers who say, ‘That doesn’t work with these kids.’ You’re going to have administrators who say, ‘I don’t know if I want to do x, y, or z.’ You’re going to run into kids who are so far below grade level that you’re going to have to completely rearrange stuff. And so, the trepidation of that, I feel like is something that’s really hard to address, but if it could be addressed, it would lead to much greater feelings of preparation.

Jordan also expressed anxiety about being prepared for the realities of teaching when every school is different. She saw this manifested as a disconnect between the theories presented in her MAT program and the realities of the classroom. As she put it, the program told her, “You can teach this and do that,” but she worried and wondered, “But what if I can’t?” Annie also found her teacher preparation program to be too heavy on theory, and she lamented that, “It was hard to understand how that would actually work in the classroom and how it would be used.” Not surprisingly, she found the most helpful classes to be the ones with the most practical hands-on advice, classes that presented content specific strategies.

Both Jordan and Brittney also alluded to this disconnect between teacher preparation theory and the reality of what goes on in a classroom. For both of them, this disconnect was specific to behavior management, as they commented on the limitations of learning classroom management theories when it came to actually implementing strategies in the classroom. As Brittney explained, “I took the classroom management class, and it was good,
and it taught us how to make a behavior plan, and all of that, but, it doesn’t tell you what to do in specific situations.” She mentioned a specific incident she encountered in which one of her students spontaneously lay down in the classroom, but that given what she knew about this student, she just let him be. She acknowledged that knowing what to do in any given classroom management situation is something you have to learn the hard way: “I don’t necessarily think it’s something you can teach – it’s something that has to happen and you look back on it and then get better.” Jordan also wasn’t sure how helpful her behavior management class when it came to implementing specific strategies in her classroom. Her view of classroom management was that one’s approach has to be specific and authentic to that teacher:

I feel like I might be pulling from [my behavior management class]. But honestly, I think any teacher that succeeds past the second year or the fifth has their own discipline style ingrained in them and it’s a matter of being true to you – you can’t mimic someone else – that’s not yours and shows up as fake.

Whether classroom management requires learning the “hard way” or learning a discipline style that is authentic to the individual teacher, both Jordan and Brittney were skeptical of the applicability of the behavior management course in their teacher preparation program.

While Jordan, Brittney, Annie, and Josh answered the question about the impact of their teacher preparation program on their perceptions of preparedness in terms of the applicability of the program to the actual classroom, Rachel took a more bird’s eye approach in her response. Overall, she saw the teacher preparation program as a necessary hurdle, as something that had to be done. She described how her former high school teachers told her about any teacher preparation program, “You’re going to have some fluffy classes and you’re
going to have some good classes…but this is all just part of the path of becoming a teacher. Everyone has to do it.” Rachel, in turn, embraced this perspective herself, commenting that, “I understand some of the classes are designed to help us fill out the licensure stuff and to fulfill the portfolio, but it seems like just a lot of stuff for the sake of stuff.”

**Student teaching internship.** Just as the teacher preparation program played an instrumental role in how prepared the case study participants felt at the end of the their student teaching internship, their internship, itself, was a big, if not the biggest factor. After asking interviewees about the role they saw their teacher preparation program playing in their perceptions of readiness, I asked them, “What role do you see your student teaching internship playing in your sense of preparedness to teach?” I did not ask participants specifically about their cooperating teacher, as I did not want them to feel put in a position to evaluate. However, in almost all of the interviews, the cooperating teacher’s role came up as a topic. For the purposes of analysis, and because most case study participants had quite a bit to say about their cooperating teacher’s role, I separated out “cooperating teacher” from “student teaching internship” as categories in my coding. In terms of coding for “student teaching internship,” data either fell broadly under **positive experiences** or **challenging experiences**, although in some cases, the challenging experiences seemed to help teacher candidates feel even more prepared than the positive experiences.

By far the most commonly cited positive experience of the student teaching internship – in terms of contributing to perceptions of preparedness – was **working with other teachers at the placement school**. Four of the six case study participants talked about this specifically, and all were very enthusiastic about how helpful these relationships were. For
Brittney, this experience came in the form of working with her PLT. As she described it, “My PLT members always included me, gave me responsibilities from the very beginning – they took my input, they used it.” Jordan also talked about working with the other teachers at her school and expressed that, “They have the kind of atmosphere where cross-curricular learning can really occur.” She also talked about becoming good friends with a few of the other teachers on her floor. Rachel, too, described the other teachers at her school as “awesome” and explained how a young teacher had taken it upon himself to show her how to access the shared school drive that contained all of the school’s curricular materials.

But it was perhaps Lyra who had the most impactful experience working with other teachers at her school. She said, quite simply, about the other teachers, “I love them,” and she described how frequently she hung out with them and texted them after school hours. This collegiality was especially meaningful to Lyra, as she explained how she had not anticipated how important these friendships would be to her student teaching experience. Having perceived that teaching was more of an isolated endeavor, her internship hammered home for her just how valuable these collegial relationships are. She explained:

Because if you don’t [like the people you work with], the job is too difficult to – on top of having to meet a group of teenagers at 7:20 in the morning – to then step out into the hall and see people you don’t like. Because that support system is so important. It’s crucial.

There were two other instances where case study participants mentioned a positive or impactful student teaching experience that contributed to an overall feeling of preparedness (and that did not have to do with their cooperating teacher specifically). These came in the form of \textbf{getting a sense of the big picture of teaching} and \textbf{encouragement from student}
responses. For Brittney, her internship helped to acclimate her to the many facets of teaching outside of instruction time in the classroom. “There’s all the Race to the Top stuff, and time when you don’t have the kids, and you’re sitting through meetings all day,” she said. “It’s more than just being in the classroom and teaching lessons.” Knowing the bigger picture of what it means to be a teacher helped to give her a sense of what she would face during her first year of teaching.

The other instance of a positive element of the student teaching internship came from Rachel, who described how encouraging feedback from her students contributed to her sense of feeling prepared (echoing some responses from the open-ended questions on the survey). “My students instantly responded to me being there,” Rachel said, as she narrated how thrilled her students were to see her after Christmas break and how one of her classes gave her a standing ovation when they saw her at the front of the classroom. Regardless of her struggles with her cooperating teacher, then, this encouragement from Rachel’s students helped to boost her confidence and added to her excitement to teach.

And yet, Rachel was also one of the case study participants who mentioned how much more prepared she feels to teach after handling the challenges she faced during her student teaching. These challenges came solely from her cooperating teacher and contributed to her sense that she was ready to take on whatever was thrown at her during her first year. “Having walked through hell now,” Rachel said, “short of my students selling drugs in the classroom, I think I’m ready to handle anything.” Josh and Annie were the two other interviewees who experienced great challenges during their student teaching internships
and who talked about how weathering these difficulties made them feel more prepared to teach.

The challenges that Josh experienced during his student teaching stemmed from the behavior problems he faced in the classroom. These behavior issues, which ranged from students coming to class unprepared on a regular basis, to texting in class, to being disruptive and disrespectful, were commonplace at the school, to the point where Josh described the principal’s perspective as, “There is no reason for you to send [students] out or if they’re just sitting and choosing not to learn – that does not count as a problem.” It wasn’t until Josh went to observe a teacher at a different school, however, that he realized just how prepared he had become to handle behavior problems. He shared this experience of observing a teacher who, after watching her morning classes, offered to let him leave before her “bad class” in the afternoon. Upon hearing this, Josh was more than eager to stay and see what this “bad class” was like. After his observation, when the teacher asked what he thought of the class, Josh paraphrased his response:

The four kids that you’re calling the bad kids? We have 15 of those and we call them the ‘good’ kids. And then there are four kids who are really bad kids who will spend most of the day at best sleeping or texting through class.

Josh described this moment that, in his words, made him feel prepared to teach. He said it made him feel like, “You could put me in this class today and I could have no idea what the lesson plan is, and I’m ready to go.” In terms of preparedness, he identified this experience as the point where he felt, “I can handle this.”

Just as Josh’s experience with behavior management stood out among the case study participants and contributed to his perception of preparedness to teach, Annie’s unique
student teaching experience had a similar impact. She essentially faced two major challenges during her student teaching experience in the U.S. before experiencing difficulties teaching abroad in Russia: working with an “at risk” population and coping with her disappointment in how the administration handled an upsetting situation. Her initial response to the question of what role her student teaching internship played in her perception of preparedness to teach was, “It honestly shot my feeling of being prepared to teach. There were so many situations that I had no idea what I was doing, no idea what to do, no idea how to handle it.” As described in her profile, Annie talked about struggling with meeting the emotional needs of her 8th grade students while maintaining high academic expectations for them. Annie described how, “I wish I would have been more prepared to deal with that internally because every day I just got more and more down on myself because there was nothing I could do to help these students.”

Combined with her struggles to help her students – without feeling defeated emotionally or taking on a “savior” role – Annie dealt with an administration that she felt had non-student-centered priorities. Her self-described disillusionment came after the incident where students’ and teachers’ names were threateningly written in blood on the girls’ bathroom walls. Annie felt that the administration showed a lack of leadership by sweeping the incident under the rug, in an effort to downplay the publicity and ensuing fallout. In fact, she did not think that she wanted to continue teaching after the incident. She explained, “When I saw these administrators caring more about their school image than the wellbeing of their students…it just made me so angry, and it made me not want to be a part of any of that.”
Ironically, however, it was walking into a different tough situation that brought Annie back to teaching. After student teaching for 10 weeks at her U.S. school, Annie taught for 5 weeks in a small town in Russia. Among other things, she struggled with how disrespectful the students were:

The students did not listen to me…And they didn’t care about my teaching. And then that mixed in with the lack of conveniences, and not being comfortable, and not having my personal space. I just did not think I could do it.

And yet, Annie cited two reasons why these challenges ultimately made her feel more prepared to teach. While she considered dropping out of the Russia program after a week into her time there, that she was able to stay and finish the experience made Annie feel proud of herself. She expounded:

Feeling so on the edge and not thinking that I could make it, and then making it in spite of it. That gave me a lot of confidence in teaching and in my own personal ability to deal with life.

Furthermore, although she had been disillusioned by her 10-week U.S. student teaching experience, after witnessing the realities of the school system in Russia, Annie felt better about entering into the U.S. teaching system: “Going to Russia, I realized, okay, we have our issues, we have our problems, but…we’re a lot more blessed than people in other countries. We’ve got it a little more figured out.” And on top of everything, she realized how much she missed her students from her U.S. placement school. So, 15 weeks, two countries, and plenty of hardship after her student teaching internship began, Annie’s confidence and excitement about teaching were renewed.

Cooperating teacher. Within case study participants’ responses about the impact of their student teaching internship on their perceptions of preparedness to teach, the role of the
cooperating teacher invariably came up. Some participants were more forthcoming than others about discussing their cooperating teacher, and four of the six were very enthusiastic about the role their cooperating teacher played. One was lukewarm, while another had very negative experiences to relay.

For a couple of case study participants who had positive experiences with their cooperating teacher, this productiveness came down to having collaborative experiences. Jordan described this collaboration as very “scaffolded.” “It was pulling away the planks until I could stand on my own, and I felt very confident when I did,” she said. Brittney also talked about the collaborative nature of her relationship with her cooperating teacher, describing how, “The minute I got in there, I was her equal.” Brittney went on to say how encouraging her cooperating teacher was, and how beneficial she found her cooperating teacher’s constructive criticism. Other interviewees described how open their cooperating teachers were to whatever they wanted to try. Josh and Lyra both mentioned appreciating this freedom, while Jordan talked about how her cooperating teacher “wasn’t afraid to let me try things the hard way.” Jordan described how she wound up learning much more when she was able to try things and make her own mistakes.

Josh and Annie, both of whom described challenging student teaching assignments, relayed how their cooperating teachers guided them through the difficulties of working with their specific student populations. For Josh, this guidance came in the form of “reality checks” of what was and was not going to work with his students. For example, although Josh had wanted to try a fishbowl type of discussion in his classroom, a set up where one group of students is on the “inner” circle discussing, while another group of
students is on the “outer” circle observing the discussion, his cooperating teacher cautioned him that she did not think the students were ready for that kind of autonomy. In addition, when Josh assigned a multi-genre research paper, she supported him in the assignment and helped him to pare down the workload so that it was manageable for students.

Annie also described the guidance she got from her cooperating teacher, which took the form of emotional support as Annie struggled to not get down on herself in her effort to reach her students. Annie talked about the difficulties she had separating her teacher-self from her desire to nurture and care for her students, and how her cooperating teacher gave her helpful advice:

She helped me to understand that the best thing I can do for those students is have the same expectations I have for the other students that are having all their needs met. Because if they are going to succeed and they are going to do well and rise above whatever circumstances they’re faced with, then you have to push them and you have to have the same expectations.

Certainly this is a tough but important lesson for new teachers to learn, and it was because of her cooperating teacher’s guidance that Annie was able to learn it early on. This support and guidance led Annie to describe her cooperating teacher as “an amazing fit.” Jordan and Brittney also mentioned the good fit with their cooperating teachers, with Jordan speculating that she would have been miserable had she had a different cooperating teacher – even within her same school – and Brittney exclaiming that, “I think it would have been totally different if I was somewhere else.”

Even without a great fit, however, and even in a situation with a cooperating teacher that could be described as lukewarm, Lyra still saw the advantages of her situation. She described her cooperating teacher as one who “didn’t really teach” and expressed feeling that
he wasn’t “the best teacher” because he divided his time between teaching high school and community college; her impression was that the high school students got the “short end of the stick.” And yet Lyra did not lament this, as she felt it led to her having freedom to try whatever she wanted in his classroom. In addition, she commented how she got along well with him even if she didn’t learn much from him. “As an individual, he’s great,” she said, “We got along terrific.”

Moving along the spectrum to **negative experiences with cooperating teachers**, Rachel was perhaps at the extreme end of negativity. She was unequivocal in her description of her “horrid” cooperating teacher, and she stated that her cooperating teacher “did nothing to prepare me for the classroom.” When I asked her for examples of why her cooperating teacher was so bad, she talked about how unsupportive she was and how when she would give her feedback, “It’d be about me as a human, and not as me as a teacher.” Rachel had tried to switch her placement late in the fall, after experiencing a couple of frustrating months of observing her cooperating teacher. However, Rachel described how she was told by the student teaching placement officer at her university that they didn’t want to “irritate” the placement school by intervening with the cooperating teacher, mostly because the university places so many student teachers at that school. (She also mentioned how her cooperating teacher had had a student teacher every year for the past 10 years.)

But while Rachel’s challenges with her cooperating teacher contributed to her overall sense that she was ready to face anything as a teacher, she also described how she thought that the experience would have been a make or break one for other student teachers. She explained:
My student teaching experience was exceptional for really really bad reasons, and I hope no one else has to [go through that]. But my one takeaway is that anyone else who wasn’t as sold on teaching as I was, who had my cooperating teacher – they wouldn’t be teaching, they’d walk away from it.

Rachel made sure to emphasize that she wasn’t trying to “humblebrag,” and she stressed that her ability to make it through the experience and still be enthusiastic about teaching had everything to do with her complete dedication to becoming a teacher. Again, she illustrated her point with a cycling metaphor: “I really really wanted to be a teacher. It’s just like racing. If you really really want to win, you’re going to find a way to get up there, to weasel through all the little holes, to fight through the pain.”

**Other factors.** After asking the six case study participants about a handful of specific factors impacting their sense of preparedness to teach, and before asking them how prepared they ultimately felt, I asked each participant if there were any other factors that impacted their sense of readiness to enter their first year of teaching. Four of the six interviewees did not have anything else to add, while Rachel and Lyra both had more to say. Rachel said that her perception of feeling prepared to teach came down, in part, to feeling very ready to have a job. “Any hesitations I have on whether or not I’m ready to teach, I’m ready for an actual paycheck after schlepping for a semester unpaid,” she said, before adding, “And after being in school forever.”

Another factor that impacted Lyra’s perception of preparedness to teach came down to dealing with “more than every other student teacher had to deal with this semester.” While her challenging student teaching internship included a long commute and an additional 3 weeks of full-time teaching, her unique hardship was coping with the illness and death of
her stepmother. That her stepmother lived out of state made it even tougher for Lyra, who described coming home to Skype with her whenever she could. During the period leading up to and following her stepmother’s death, Lyra talked about how hard it was to cope with her personal situation while teaching: “I’d be putting up with sh** from teenagers, and just thinking [that] they don’t have any idea what’s going on in my life, and I can’t take it out on them.” This kind of challenge is a tough lesson for a teacher to learn at any point, but especially during the already intense period of student teaching.

Summary of RQ2 data analysis findings: What are the factors impacting preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach?

- While the six case study participants were chosen based on the richness of their survey responses, and while I purposely selected student teachers who represented a range of experiences, I was surprised at how extremely varied each student teaching experience was. This variation had much to do with the diverse cultures of the placement schools, with the range of dynamics with cooperating teachers, and with how these forces collided with the skills, experiences, dispositions, and perspectives that student teachers brought to their teacher preparation programs and internships.

- I did not anticipate just how impactful the interactions with teachers other than the cooperating teacher at a student teacher’s placement school would be. These relationships were overwhelmingly positive and played a meaningful role in helping some of the case study participants to feel prepared to teach.

- The RQ2 interview results also point to how impactful challenging experiences can be in helping preservice teachers feel prepared to teach. While Josh felt that the
challenges he faced during his student teaching narrowed the applicability of the experience, he was also grateful to have learned how to manage student behavior. Similarly, while Rachel certainly would not have chosen to work with her cooperating teacher, the experience left her feeling ready to handle anything. These perspectives raise the question of the value of facing challenging experiences during student teaching. Would other student teachers have fared as well coming out of such challenges? Or is it partially luck and circumstance in terms of how each student teacher copes with, thrives on, or benefits from the realities of his or her student teaching experience? It would be enlightening to follow up with these preservice teachers once they are beginning teachers and have a broader perspective on the extent to which their student teaching experience, as well as various other factors, impacted their readiness to teach.

- These results point to how prominent of a role preservice teachers’ backgrounds, experiences, dispositions, and commitment to teaching factor into their perceptions of preparedness to teach. For example, Rachel credited her “internal fortitude,” as well as the fact that she “really really” wanted to become a teacher in helping her to feel ready and excited to teach. In addition, Lyra’s experience coping with her stepmother’s passing, and Annie’s struggles to keep her “savior” inclination in check impacted their student teaching internships, and, in turn, their perceptions of preparedness to teach. These personal qualities and personal situations were varied and unpredictable, and yet undoubtedly played a role in these teacher candidates’ sense of readiness to teach.
• Even when a student teacher, like Jordan, brought the “teaching bug,” prior experiences working with students, and beneficial dispositions to her teacher preparation program, and even with a scaffolded experience with her cooperating teacher and positive relationships with other teachers at her placement school, there were still a variety of areas in which Jordan expressed not feeling fully prepared to teach. This case illustrates that feeling “fully” prepared to teach may well be “a fantasy,” as one survey participant put it, in that there are endless ways and areas in which to feel prepared when it comes to teaching. This need not be thought of as problematic, however, in that perceptions of preparedness – just like teacher efficacy – are task specific, and the goal may not be to feel 100% prepared in every single facet possible. Feeling “fully” prepared may be unrealistic as well as unnecessary, given that everything a preservice teacher experiences is a sort of dress rehearsal for the unpredictable and unknown quantity of a first teaching job. In addition, and as Annie put it, what might be more important may be the sense of feeling ready to take on whatever unknown challenges present themselves during the first year of teaching. Feeling “prepared to handle the unpreparedness” may go much further in the end than feeling “fully” prepared overall.

**Results across cases RQ3: Based on their definitions and the factors impacting their perceptions of preparedness, how prepared do preservice ELA teachers feel to teach at the end of their student teaching internship?** The last question that I asked case study participants was how prepared they felt to teach upon completion or near completion of their teacher preparation program. As per the interview protocol, if participants did not mention
any ways in which they did not feel prepared, I probed this topic. Rather than looking collectively across cases to analyze the data pertaining to this question, I returned to each bounded case as a way to examine each case study participant’s sense of preparedness within the context of his or her case. So, while the data from the final interview question could be coded according to two big categories – ways in which the interview participants felt prepared and ways in which they did not – I instead present the results from this question by case, in an effort to understand each case study participant’s perception of preparedness to teach through the relevant and bounded context.

“Adequately prepared:” Jordan. In response to the final interview question about how prepared she felt to teach, Jordan stuck to her response from the Likert scale survey, reiterating that she felt “adequately prepared.” Just as she had indicated in the open-ended responses on the survey, Jordan went through a list of specific areas in which she did not feel fully prepared. These areas ranged from not feeling comfortable teaching to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), to wishing she knew more about the 6th and 7th grade curriculum so that she could begin planning over the summer, to feeling regretful that her teacher preparation program did not offer her more help or guidance in navigating the job application process, and to wanting more preparation in how to handle the “disparity between the high students and the low students in one classroom.” Based on her student teaching experience, Jordan talked about how she had not been prepared to handle some of the political or bureaucratic aspects of teaching. This mostly came down to the limitations imposed by mandated standardized testing. Jordan explained:
You can see how much [certain teachers] love kids and how much they love what they’re doing and how much it hurts when they can’t do what they want to do. I don’t think I was prepared for that: [the notion that] ‘scores are what matter more than what you’re teaching them.’

Looking at Jordan’s case, she had many positive “preparedness” factors going for her when it came to her background and experience. Again, she talked about having the “teaching bug,” about her experience coaching kids, and she felt able to empathize with her students by considering her own siblings and their experiences in school. Her personality also seemed to be compatible with teaching, as she already possessed appropriate dispositions: Her classroom management style was one of “an iron fist, kid glove,” and she described her modus operandi as “let’s jump in and figure it out.” Furthermore, Jordan had positive memories of her own K–12 teachers and of a specific poetry assignment in 6th grade that she said had changed her life.

And yet Jordan had perhaps the longest list of ways in which she did not feel “fully” prepared to teach. In a way, this list was a good indication that Jordan was already a thoughtful and conscientious preservice teacher, as she wanted to get a head-start on her year-long curriculum before getting her first teaching job, as she wanted to make sure she could effectively teach according to the CCSS, as she didn’t want to be disillusioned or restricted by the limitations of standardized testing, and as she was already concerned about a challenging aspect of teaching – meeting the needs of a heterogeneous group of students in the same classroom. But while Jordan was consistent in her measure of feeling “adequately prepared,” she added that, “I do feel prepared to teach. First year is always going to be the hardest, but I’m not terrified going in.” The big picture of Jordan’s perception of
preparedness, then, was that her education, work experience, student teaching experience, and dispositions all served her well, but that she was going into her first year of teaching cognizant of the fact that it would be hard and that she did not – and perhaps could not – feel 100% prepared to handle everything. At the same time, she indicated that her confidence and enthusiasm towards teaching put her in a position to face the challenges of a first-year teacher head-on.

“Adequately prepared:” Josh. Josh’s response to the final interview question about how prepared he felt to teach had everything to do with his student teaching experience. Having faced a very challenging situation in terms of student behavior, Josh talked about having a better idea at the end of his student teaching of how to contextualize and address “bad” student behavior. “I definitely feel like [the experience] was valuable,” he said, “I definitely feel like it provided a perspective that is going to serve me for the rest of my teaching career.” Going into more detail, Josh described how he felt more able to “recognize lesser behavior problems as lesser behavior problems.” To illustrate this, he explained how, hypothetically, if a student was having a bad day, Josh was not going to get upset or get worked up about it; he explained that he would feel able to put it in context and start over with the student the next day.

And yet, Josh was sure that he did not want to work at a school like the one where he student taught. He elaborated:

I like English and books and learning so much that having a class full of students who just really couldn’t care less about it would be really draining to me. Kids who are at least moderately closer to grade level, closer to interested, closer to interested in performing is definitely something that I want to do.
Josh described this preference as not wanting to be a “Dangerous Minds” teacher (a reference to the 1995 movie where Michelle Pfeiffer teaches in an inner-city school), despite his complete respect for teachers who take on challenging teaching assignments. When I asked him if he wished he had had a different student teaching assignment, he responded:

In a perfect world, I would have observed there for a week. And not done my entire internship there. But the world not being perfect, I would rather do an internship there, I think, than [at] a school where behavior problems didn’t exist. Because when I get to a school where there is a behavior problem, I would be less prepared to deal with it.

Josh might not have known just how prepared he felt to handle behavior problems had he not been able to observe another teacher at another school. And after describing the moment of observing a “bad” class at another school as the instance in which he realized just how prepared he felt to handle behavior, Josh wanted to share this advice with future preservice teachers: Observing different teachers and different teaching situations – outside of the placement school – would be the “one concrete thing” that a teacher preparation program could do to help boost preservice teachers’ feelings of readiness to teach.

Although Josh said that he wouldn’t trade his student teaching experience for one where he did not learn as much about classroom management, he expressed regret that his internship did not match the experience that he hoped to find as a first-year teacher. He explained:

Just the fact that I know what I experienced during my internship may be wildly different from what I actually do means that I sort of have to approach my entire internship experience as something that has limited applicability. And the more broadly applicable my knowledge is, the better prepared I am or feel.
This feeling of having had a very specific student teaching experience that may prove limited in its transferability was part of what led Josh to stick to his assessment of feeling “adequately prepared” to teach.

The big picture of Josh’s perception of preparedness, then, included his longtime passion for ELA, his teaching experience in South Korea that helped him acclimate to taking over a classroom at the spur of the moment, and his challenging student teaching experience, the bulk of which was about managing student behavior. Perhaps Josh would have felt “adequately prepared” to teach regardless of his student teaching assignment, as the applicability of one’s internship is always an unknown until a preservice teacher gets his or her first teaching assignment. His case also raises the question of the match between the student teacher, the student teaching placement, and the first teaching assignment. To what extent can or should the fit between student teacher and student teaching placement be considered? To what extent can or should the type of school a preservice teacher ultimately wants to teach at factor into the student teaching assignment he or she is given? These questions are among the many that will be explored in the next chapter.

“Adequately prepared:” Annie. Annie had perhaps one of the more complex and interesting contexts surrounding her perceptions of preparedness to teach. In her interview, she talked about the negative stigma of teaching – that those who can’t teach – and how she had resisted the urge to teach because of this stigma and because of the memories of having had teachers who did not seem to care. Her student teaching internship was then made complex by the fact that she student taught in the U.S. and abroad and had challenging experiences during both phases. While her disillusionment with the administration at her
U.S. student teaching placement school left her unsure of whether she wanted to enter the teaching profession, the challenges she faced student teaching in Russia made her realize that the “system” in the U.S. might not be as bad as she thought. The sum of her student teaching experiences “reinstated that [teaching is] what I want to do, that’s where I’m supposed to be,” she said. “Yes,” she continued, “I’m going to have to deal with some stuff that I don’t believe in, I’m going to have to deal with some stuff that is really hard, but – I can’t do anything else.”

Furthermore, and like Josh, Annie recognized that the challenges she faced at her placement school were ultimately beneficial in terms of exposing her to those types of situations, specifically when it came to disagreeing with a school administration’s response to an incident. This challenge, combined with her struggles in the classroom to keep her academic expectations of her students high in spite of the adversity they faced, left Annie feeling that she might be more prepared to enter her first year of teaching than some of her peers. She relayed how some of them talked about having “dreamy” student teaching situations, and how ultimately she felt more prepared to handle situations after having felt stumped by them during her internship.

And yet part of Annie feeling “adequately prepared” to teach stemmed from the fact that she did not know what her first-year teaching assignment would be, and therefore, did not know what content on which she needed to be an expert. While Annie’s definition of preparedness had expanded from her pre-program definition of simply knowing content, she came back to content when describing her worry about going into her first, and at the time, unknown, teaching job. “When I teach something, I don’t want to have a surface
understanding of it,” Annie explained. “Because there’s nothing like a student taking a really deep particular interest in something and wanting you to help them take that further. If I can’t do that, then I’ll feel ineffective as an educator.” In a way, this worry or feeling of unpreparedness went back to Annie’s principle that she should only teach if she is 100% passionate about it and can be an effective educator. And it kept her believing in the “content” specific definition of preparedness, that being an effective educator meant knowing enough about the content to inspire her students.

Similar to Josh, Annie might have expressed feeling this way regardless of the challenges she experienced during her student teaching, as the specific content that a first-year teacher will teach is usually an unknown until he or she is hired. What is specific to Annie’s case, however, is the confidence she described gaining from her ability to “survive” her time in Russia. That she did not think she would last the entire 5 weeks but then did boosted her confidence to handle teaching and non-teaching situations, and it also gave her clarity that she should, in fact, become a teacher. Moreover, Annie’s description of how prepared she felt to teach gets at the heart of how complex perceptions of preparedness really are. Annie maintained that she did not feel completely prepared to teach. But, she also said,

I feel completely prepared as far as being ready to get in there and figure it out and prepare myself as I go. So, I probably won’t start my first teaching job being completely prepared, but, I’m completely confident in my own ability to get myself where I need to be, and use the resources that I have, and figure things out. So, in some ways that is feeling completely prepared. I’m prepared to handle the unpreparedness.

Annie’s confidence to “handle the unpreparedness” no doubt stems, in part, from her personality and dispositions that she brought with her to her teacher preparation program.
But these feelings of confidence were also buoyed by what she endured and achieved during her student teaching internship. Annie’s case highlights the importance of confidence and the benefits of facing challenging situations during student teaching, and it sheds light on the complexity of what we mean when we talk about preparedness to teach.

**“Well prepared:” Brittney.** Brittney was one of the three case study participants who indicated feeling “well prepared” on the Likert scale survey, and she stuck to this assessment during her interview. There were a number of factors that contributed to Brittney feeling well prepared, including her prior work babysitting, nannying, and tutoring, all of which helped Brittney gain experience working with kids, managing behavior, and creating lesson plans. Brittney explained how her nannying work, specifically, helped her to develop an initial teaching persona, as well as tap into the zeitgeist of middle school-aged kids. Brittney’s case also included her love of ELA, as well as having friends who shared with her how much they enjoyed teaching middle school.

Based on her background and experience, then, Brittney was in good shape going into her teacher preparation program and student teaching internship. And her path to feeling well prepared continued with positive experiences during her internship, where she found great support from her cooperating teacher, as well as inclusion and respect from her PLT. Brittney’s case is an example of how helpful prior experience working with kids can be, as well as how confidence-boosting it is to have a supportive cooperating teacher and a collaborative PLT experience.

But although Brittney never shied away from her assessment that she felt well prepared, she acknowledged how different it would be to teach on her own as a first-year
teacher. Although Brittney said, “I feel like I could start teaching and have my own classroom,” her next statement was, “I feel like there’s a lot – it’s going to be different.” She went on to explain how, although her cooperating teacher tried to give her as much responsibility as possible, “It didn’t always happen.” Her cooperating teacher still took attendance every day and attended to the “background” details while Brittney was teaching. In addition, her cooperating teacher took the lead in dealing with parents, even when Brittney was teaching full time, and Brittney admitted that she felt like she would have to learn how to handle these types of responsibilities as a beginning teacher. Brittney was understanding of this limitation, though, stating that, “It’s got to be hard to let everything totally go,” and she expressed her confusion about whether she was supposed to contact parents as a student teacher in the first place.

From this perspective, Brittney’s case draws attention to the issue that, even in the best case scenario of a positive, collaborative student teaching experience, student teaching remains a representation of teaching since everything is done within the context of the cooperating teacher’s classroom. This reality raises the question of whether there are inherent limitations to feeling prepared to teach, given that a preservice teacher perhaps can’t entirely know the responsibilities of a teacher until she becomes an autonomous teacher in charge of her own classroom.

“*Well prepared:*” Lyra. In some ways, Lyra was the most positive and enthusiastic case study participant when it came to feeling prepared to teach. She reiterated that she felt “well prepared,” and she added that, “I feel really happy and excited [about teaching].” Certainly Lyra’s passion, background, and experience served her well in feeling this
prepared. She was deeply passionate about ELA, having been on a path to pursue an English Ph.D., and she realized that she was equally passionate about working with young people. But she did not want her time with students to be limited to a college semester’s worth of classes; she expressed wanting to get to know her students and their families, to be a part of their community, and to see them out and about. This is partly why Lyra was so frustrated with her long commute to her student teaching placement school, as it prevented her from being able to stay after school and support students in their extracurricular activities.

In addition to her passion for ELA and working with young people, Lyra’s experience as a first-year writing instructor also contributed to her sense of feeling well prepared to teach. Not only was she working with a similar age group as an instructor of college freshmen, but she also was thrown into creating a syllabus and lesson plans for an entire semester. From this experience, she described knowing how to access resources, how to get feedback and revise plans, and how to handle the workload of teaching a college course. In addition, Lyra participated in a year-long professional development course geared towards learning how to teach, and she described all of this experience as very helpful background leading up to her student teaching internship.

But although Lyra was in great shape to feel prepared for teaching before her internship began, she could not have foreseen the challenges that she would face during her semester of student teaching. While the commute was taxing from the get-go, and while she was called upon at the last minute to take over for her cooperating teacher for an additional 3 weeks, the hardest part of her student teaching was coping with the illness and death of her stepmother. Lyra had to learn how to teach through this difficulty and how to keep her
emotions in check while dealing with teenagers. It undoubtedly colored her student teaching experience, as well as her sense of feeling prepared to handle challenging situations while teaching.

Lyra’s internship was also noteworthy for other reasons. She was emphatic about the necessity of collaboration and camaraderie among fellow teachers, the importance of which she learned during her student teaching. Lyra described how she had not been a fan of teamwork or collaboration prior to student teaching and had not imagined teaching to be a profession where it was vital. After her experience working with teachers at her placement school, Lyra could not have been more enthusiastic about bonding and collaborating with them, and she communicated how crucial this dynamic is to teaching.

And yet, even with feeling well prepared and feeling excited and ready to teach, Lyra expressed hesitation about the specific classes she would be assigned as a first-year teacher. Because she had taught two senior honors sections and two senior AP sections as a student teacher, Lyra was sure that her teaching assignment the following year would most likely be “radically different” and would most likely include academic freshmen. In terms of her feelings about being prepared to teach academic freshmen vs. AP seniors, Lyra commented, “It’s going to take a lot more leg work to find my footing.”

“Well prepared:” Rachel. Like Lyra, Rachel had a unique if challenging student teaching experience. But while Rachel’s internship revolved around her difficulties with her cooperating teacher, her case was about much more than this dynamic, even if it undoubtedly factored into her sense of preparedness to teach. Rachel’s sense of preparedness was also colored by her personality, her confidence, and by her athlete’s sensibility that pushed her to
work hard towards her goal – whether it was on the soccer field, on her bicycle, or in the classroom. Coupled with this was her experience working with kids as a coach and counselor at the YMCA, experiences that helped to solidify her desire to work with young people. Rachel also talked about being the oldest sibling and cousin, and how she had always taken on the “big kid” responsibilities.

But part of Rachel’s sense of readiness to teach also stemmed from her desire to transition from student to teacher and from her absolute certainty that she wanted to teach. While she did not talk about the “teaching bug,” and while she described her deliberations about what career path she should choose, she chose teaching in part by considering the big picture of her life. Not only would teaching allow her to engage her passion for ELA and to work with kids, but the teaching schedule would allow her to continue her commitment to cycling during the summer months. Rachel was adamant about her desire to become a teacher, and she described how this firm desire was what helped her to get through the challenging situation with her cooperating teacher. Again, she saw her “internal fortitude” as a personal asset, and she worried that another teacher candidate might decide against teaching had they had her experience with her cooperating teacher.

Because of this experience with her cooperating teacher, Rachel described not feeling as prepared as she would have liked when it came to getting experience creating and implementing lesson plans. She explained how she only got to design and implement roughly 8 days of her own plans; she had to stick to her cooperating teacher’s lessons for the remainder of the internship. “Which makes me a little bit nervous going into next year,” she admitted. And although Rachel talked about how helpful some of the other teachers at her
school were, Rachel said she would have liked to have seen more teachers teach. In her opinion, “I almost think student teaching should be more of a buffet system than a long–term partnership.” This sentiment echoed Josh’s to a certain extent, in his description of how helpful his observations at another school were. If Rachel had had a more positive experience with her cooperating teacher, would she still have the same recommendation for restructuring the student teaching experience? Or would an internship broken up into multiple cooperating teachers or even multiple schools be more of a safeguard for student teachers who are placed with less-than-stellar cooperating teachers?

And although Rachel’s experience with her cooperating teacher was quite challenging, she talked about how great her students were and how much she loved them. What added to her confidence was her students’ enthusiastic reception to her, and this dynamic helped to mitigate her struggles of working with her cooperating teacher. Rachel’s enjoyment of her students also helped to remind her of how much she wanted to teach and how ready she was to have students of her own.

Regardless of the specific details of her internship, though, Rachel, like Brittney, expressed her sense that student teaching is limited in its representation of what teaching would be like. As she put it, “At the end of the MAT process, I feel like I have a really good sense of where I’m going to have to go next year and after that with the job, but I still haven’t done the job.” But, again, Rachel’s perception of preparedness, in spite of the unknowns, came back to her confidence and eagerness to teach. She likened the experience to going off to college, something she remembered being nervous about because it was something she had never done before. Being nervous is not indicative of not feeling prepared, Rachel explained,
since “healthy nerves are a good thing – they keep you on your toes.” Ultimately, Rachel described her sense of preparedness in these terms: “I’m not petrified of teaching…There will be hiccups along the way, as there are in anything. But, I’m looking forward to it, and I think that helps, too.”

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I present the results from the survey and interviews, providing first the Likert scale survey results, followed by the results from the open-ended questions, and finally the results from the six case study interviews. I present summaries of each of the research phases and include details about how I coded each section and why. For the case study interviews, I organize and examine the data according to the three research questions. In presenting the results, I provide profiles of the six case study participants before looking collectively across cases to investigate how various factors, such as backgrounds, dispositions, and experiences play a role in defining and shaping a preservice teacher’s perception of preparedness to teach. Finally, I return to each individual bounded case to consider perceptions of preparedness within the context of each case study participant’s individual experience. The implications of these findings, specifically as they relate to preparing preservice ELA teachers, are considered in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: Implications, Limitations, and Areas for Future Research

Introduction

Based on the results of the survey and interviews, I turn to the implications that emerged from the data analysis detailed in Chapter Four. Specifically, I consider implications for selecting and supporting preservice ELA teachers; selecting, matching and evaluating cooperating teachers; the role of observations and other teachers in preparing preservice ELA teachers; the structure of the student teaching internship; as well as big questions about the concept of preparedness that the research raises. I then address the limitations of the study and suggest areas for future research. Before contextualizing my specific implications within the existing literature and guidelines on preparing preservice ELA teachers, I discuss my implications from a more macro perspective and situate them within the current trends of teacher preparation reform in general and ELA teacher preparation specifically.

Macro Discussion of Implications

Before honing in on specific recommendations and considerations when it comes to ELA teacher preparation, I begin with an overview of how my implications fit into the current conversations surrounding teacher preparation reform as well as historical trends in ELA teacher preparation. From a macro view of trends in teacher preparation, my findings and implications heed Cochran-Smith’s (2006) call to consider the readiness of preservice teachers “in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (p. 25). By focusing on the impact and importance of teacher candidates’ experiences and dispositions on perceptions of preparedness, my findings and implications push back against the current trend in teacher
preparation reform, which focuses on data-driven outcomes that narrowly measure preparedness based on K-12 student test scores. Findings from my study imply that the concept of preparedness is too nuanced, individualized, and task-specific to be solely captured by a value-added measurement, and my implications reflect how teacher preparation programs can address the complex phenomenon of feeling prepared to teach by considering the backgrounds and dispositions of teacher candidates throughout the teacher preparation program.

There are other areas, however, where my implications do align with current trends in teacher preparation reform, including the push to consider different practicum structures and models as well as the call for teacher preparation programs to be more selective of teacher candidates. Included in my implications is the suggestion to consider the current structure of the student teaching experience, the influence of this structure on teacher candidates’ perceptions of preparedness, and whether shifting the structure might positively impact teacher candidates’ sense of readiness to teach. While the student teaching structure can certainly vary from program to program and should be considered in conjunction with pre-practicum fieldwork, continuing the conversation on what pre-practicum and practicum models can look like aligns with CAEP’s recommendation that the practicum experience be reimagined to reflect a more hands-on clinical model (Kiley, 2012).

In addition to this recommendation surrounding continued discussion or reimagining of the structure of student teaching, current trends in teacher preparation reform call for teacher preparation programs to be more selective of teacher candidates. Teachers College President Susan Furhman is among those calling for the raising of admission standards as a
way to increase the quality of the teacher candidate pool (Keller, 2013). While this recommendation emerges, in part, from the zeitgeist that blames teacher preparation programs for producing ineffective teachers, my implications also consider the admissions process when it comes to preservice teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach. Because results from my study indicate that prior experiences and dispositions play a role in perceptions of preparedness, I recommend that teacher candidates’ backgrounds and personality traits be considerations in admitting applicants to teacher preparation programs, specifically by screening for these types of dispositions in an interview setting. So while the origin of my recommendation differs from the criticism that blames teacher preparation programs for not being selective enough of teacher candidates, my recommendation fits into the current trend of calling for higher selectivity in admitting preservice teachers to preparation programs.

Narrowing in from general trends in teacher preparation reform to trends in ELA teacher preparation specifically, the implications of my study can be situated with the ongoing lament of English educators when it comes to the lack of reform in how ELA gets taught and, by extension, how ELA teachers get prepared. Results from my study include implications for teacher preparation programs to be thoughtful and selective when it comes to admitting teacher candidates, to identifying cooperating teachers, and to matching student teachers and cooperating teachers. The data, however, also indicate a possible disconnect between recommendations for preparing ELA teachers and the reality of how preservice ELA teachers are prepared. For example, Rachel’s challenging experience with her cooperating teacher highlights that not enough care was taken in selecting her cooperating teacher; she
had been a cooperating teacher for 10 years but, at least in Rachel’s experience, had showed no interest or initiative in supporting her student teachers.

But if we know that programs should be thoughtful about identifying cooperating teachers as well as matching student teachers with cooperating teachers, why do cases like Rachel’s persist? Why is there a lack of reform when it comes to enacting best practices for preparing preservice ELA teachers? We could turn to Tremmel’s (2006) explanation of problematic “program thinking” that maintains the status quo or Mayher’s (1990) description of the “commonsense” approach to teaching that prevents real reform in the ELA classroom. And we could factor in the phenomenon of the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) that keeps teachers teaching as they were taught. Regardless of the myriad reasons why there is a lack of reform in how ELA gets taught and how ELA teachers get prepared, findings and implications from my study align with the trend of identified best practices of ELA teacher preparation not always being implemented in reality.

This lack of reform in ELA teacher preparation is only part of the story, however, and other data from my study and subsequent implications do align with recommendations for preparing preservice ELA teachers and, thus, can be situated within existing NCTE guidelines for teacher preparation. Specifically, and as I outline in detail in the sections that follow, my implications for careful consideration of dispositions and backgrounds in admitting teacher candidates, for thoughtful selection of cooperating teachers, for deliberate matches between student teachers and cooperating teachers, and for continued discussion of the structure of the student teaching internship all align with recommendations of the 2006 NCTE Guidelines. In addition to detailing these implications and grounding them in current
NCTE *Guidelines* in the sections that follow, I offer a potential new recommendation for considering the role of teachers outside of the cooperating teacher in preparing preservice ELA teachers. I then present big questions surrounding ELA teacher preparation that emerged from my data before turning to limitations of the study and areas rich for future research.

**Implications: Selection and Support of Preservice ELA Teachers**

My first specific implication involves the admissions process for an ELA teacher preparation program, specifically the importance of selecting candidates who possess backgrounds and dispositions conducive to teaching. When it came to personality traits and dispositions that impacted preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of readiness to teach, case study participants employed a range of phrasing to describe qualities that had to do with having the necessary confidence to teach, with possessing aspirations to work with young people at a formative time in their lives, and with wanting to do something that was both enjoyable and a good fit. Results from my study indicate that these types of dispositions positively impact how prepared preservice teachers feel to teach, and thus, should be considerations in teacher preparation program admissions. Duke (1980) also recommends that ELA teacher preparation programs conduct “rigorous screening in terms of personality,” (p. 226), seeing this type of selectivity as “a must if we are to upgrade the quality of classroom teaching” (p. 226).

But while personality traits and dispositions conducive to feeling prepared to teach may get mentioned in a preservice teacher’s application for a teacher preparation program, my research illuminated qualities and experiences that might be harder to capture in an
application. For example, in an application, would Rachel have been able to describe her athlete’s sensibility or would Jordan have cited her “jump in and figure this stuff out” attitude – both qualities which they ultimately credited with impacting their perceptions of preparedness to teach? These dispositions could potentially be detected in an interview setting, and, indeed, the 2006 NCTE Guidelines recommend that, “Faculty in the program from both English and education departments should commit their time to the admission process. Personal interviews with candidates, even videotaped interviews […] can help us make better choices as we admit students to our programs” (p. 53). While interviews and careful screening of potential teacher candidates requires time and resources, “Careful attention to this process becomes essential if we are to identify those able and committed candidates who will become the excellent teachers we need” (NCTE, 2006, p. 53). English educator Ruggles Gere (1977) also advocates for this careful screening of ELA teacher candidate applicants via the interview process, as “the interview creates a forum for active student-teacher discussion of what it means to teach English in secondary schools, the sort of discussion which should be, but rarely is, an integral part of teacher education” (p. 206). Passion for teaching ELA certainly contributed to perceptions of preparedness to teach in my study, and Ruggles Gere (1977) supports the efforts of admissions committees to “ascertain a candidate’s desire and ability to teach English “ (p. 206).

In addition to a passion for teaching ELA and dispositions being considerations in the admissions process for teacher candidates, as they positively relate to perceptions of preparedness of preservice teachers, they should also be taken into account when it comes to supporting teacher candidates during the teacher preparation program. A preservice teacher
with less prior experience working with kids or who doesn’t feel comfortable with public speaking, for example, might benefit from extra opportunities or assistance in these areas. Perhaps most importantly, what preservice ELA teachers bring with them to their teacher preparation program could be helpful information in placing them at appropriate school sites with cooperating teachers that are an effective match. While some preservice teachers may fare just fine with a number of cooperating teachers, other teacher candidates might need a more supportive or available cooperating teacher. Jordan and Rachel alluded to the “make or break” aspect of being matched with a cooperating teacher, and for those preservice teachers that might fall in this category, being careful about their placement – by considering their experiences and dispositions – might go far in helping them to feel prepared. Indeed, the relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher has historically been a critical factor impacting the student teaching experience, and English educators McCann, Johannessen, and Ritter (2009) lament that, “The matching of student teacher and cooperating teacher is seldom the result of the extended scrutiny of the attributes of the prospective teacher and the characteristics of the mentor” (p. 114). More common, the researchers say, is “the placement of the student teacher with any available experienced teacher who is willing to mentor” (McCann et al., 2009, p. 114).

In addition to supporting preservice ELA teachers through consideration of their specific experiences and characteristics when it comes to a student teaching placement, my research data imply that teacher preparation programs would serve their candidates well through facilitation of peer / support groups or cohorts. A couple of survey participants listed the importance of their peers or a “support group” as a factor in their perceptions of
preparedness, and one case study participant talked about how helpful it was to have a member of her cohort student teaching at the same school. While many teacher preparation programs may already do this, it is also possible that the support that preservice teachers find among their peers happens on an ad hoc basis. Fostering cohorts or facilitating time and space for teacher candidates to meet and talk may be a beneficial and worthwhile endeavor for teacher preparation programs to take on, given how this type of support factored positively into participants’ perceptions of readiness to teach. Indeed, researchers Beck and Kosnik (2001), in their study of teacher candidates grouped in a teacher education cohort, found that “placing student teachers in a program-long, program-wide cohort with a strong community emphasis will, given a number of other conditions, result in an effective form of teacher education (p. 943).

Lastly, in considering implications for supporting preservice ELA teachers, my data illustrate the importance of soliciting information from teacher candidates before they graduate from their teacher preparation programs – specifically about their perceptions of preparedness. While teacher preparation programs most likely solicit a program evaluation from their teacher candidates at the conclusion of the program, the results from my survey and interviews show how much information can be gleaned when preservice teachers are asked specifically about their perceptions of preparedness. For example, programs might be interested in knowing what their teacher candidates feel ill prepared for (which was supporting English language learners in my study), and this kind of information could be leveraged to make program adjustments and improvements. Duke (1980) supports the use of
student surveys by teacher preparation programs, as a way to identify areas of improvement in their programs.

In addition to an end-of-program evaluation that includes opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on their perceptions of preparedness, teacher preparation programs could follow up with finding out how and in what ways their graduates perceive of their preparedness when they are beginning teachers. This type of reflection could be solicited during the induction year of teaching, as well as several years into a beginning teacher’s career.

**Implications: Selecting, Matching, and Evaluating Cooperating Teachers**

In addition to the implications for selecting and supporting preservice ELA teachers, data from the surveys and interviews also yielded implications about selecting, matching, and evaluating cooperating teachers. While certainly a teacher preparation program would only want effective, supportive, and invested cooperating teachers, and while it is inevitable that some cooperating teachers are going to be more effective than others, Rachel’s case raised the issue of an ineffective cooperating teacher being tapped year after year despite her lack of support for or investment in her student teacher. Rachel’s understanding was that the placement officer at her university did not want to “ruffle the feathers” of the placement school by intervening with the placement once it was underway. But regardless of the history and potential politics behind the placement, it is clear from Rachel’s description of how unsupportive her cooperating teacher was that she should not have been in charge of helping to prepare a preservice teacher. As the 2006 NCTE *Guidelines* advise, “Cooperating teachers should be those who have a documented record of effective teaching and who are
able to foster with student teachers collegial, collaborative relationships that promote continued personal and professional growth” (p. 68). Although the task of placing sometimes hundreds of preservice teachers at placement schools is a big one, the cooperating teacher plays too critical of a role in a teacher candidate’s preparation to not be chosen very carefully each year. Duke (1980), too, calls on ELA teacher preparation programs to be more selective in identifying cooperating teachers, and writes that, “Too often student teachers are simply thrown into the classroom – the old sink or swim theory – and the scars remain for a long time, sometimes a lifetime” (p. 225).

Once cooperating teachers deemed invested and supported have signed on, care should be taken in matching the cooperating teacher to the preservice ELA teacher. The importance of this fit emerged as a theme in the data, with implications for teacher preparation programs to strive for appropriate matches between cooperating teachers and student teachers. Working to create effective matches requires time and resources, but as Annie, Jordan, and Brittney attested to, the fit with their cooperating teachers made a big difference in their perceptions of preparedness. Annie described her cooperating teacher as “an amazing fit,” while Jordan speculated that she would have been miserable had she had a different cooperating teacher – even within her same school. Brittney also expressed that her experience would have been totally different with a different cooperating teacher.

This idea of fit seems even more important when considering that an appropriate match might be more critical to some preservice teachers than others. Rachel could not have had a more negative experience with her cooperating teacher, and she speculated several times in her interview that if someone else had been placed with her cooperating teacher, he
or she might have decided to quit teaching. Lyra, too, expressed learning little from her cooperating teacher, but in her case, this was not a make or break factor. She appreciated the freedom her cooperating teacher gave her, and with her prior teaching experience and enthusiasm for teaching, she did not need him to be the mentor that other teacher candidates might benefit from.

Both Lyra’s and Rachel’s cooperating teachers had had student teachers the previous year (and, in the case of Rachel’s cooperating teacher, for the past 10 years). Their experiences point to the importance of evaluating cooperating teachers on more than an ad hoc basis, so that a teacher preparation program can make any necessary adjustments. If those responsible for placing student teachers with cooperating teachers had knowledge and information about prior student teachers’ experiences with their cooperating teachers, and if this history was combined with knowing preservice teachers’ experiences and needs, it is much more likely that more teacher candidates would have appropriate and effective matches with cooperating teachers.

Furthermore, this idea of the right fit should also be extended to the placement school as a whole. Although some preservice teachers have requests or needs in terms of school location that may trump other preferences, Josh’s case shows the value of placing a student teacher at a school where he or she could imagine teaching. While it does not seem necessary that the student teaching internship represent the exact school setting and culture that the preservice teacher would like to experience as a beginning teacher, and while there are certainly advantages to having diverse experiences with school settings, Josh expressed feeling that his internship had limited applicability because he did not plan to seek out a
teaching job at a similar type of school. He explained that he would have ideally observed at
that school for just a week. (And while the interview took place at the end of his internship,
he did not indicate that this sentiment was from hindsight only.) Thus, given that the right fit
between placement school and student teacher, as well as between cooperating teacher and
student teacher plays a big role in a preservice teacher’s perceptions of preparedness, it
seems worth the time and resources necessary to know the teacher candidates and the
cooperating teachers well enough to strive for effective matches.

**Implications: The Role of Observations and Other Teachers in Preparing Preservice
ELA Teachers**

After considering the implications concerning cooperating teachers, I turn to the role
of observations and other teachers (outside of the cooperating teacher) in preservice ELA
teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach. Although it is not a surprise that survey and
case study participants mentioned the importance of observations to their perceptions of
preparedness, these results are a reminder of the critical role that observations play in
preparing preservice teachers. The majority of teacher preparation programs most likely
have observations built into either the pre-practicum and/or practicum experience for their
teacher candidates. But what the data points to specifically is how helpful it can be to see a
range of teachers teach – especially at another school. For Josh, this was one of his biggest
takeaways from his internship; visiting another school and seeing a teacher teach her “bad”
class was eye-opening for him, as it helped to give him a sense that he was more prepared
than he thought. Indeed, this was his one piece of advice for future preservice ELA teachers:
to seek out these types of observations even if they are not formally offered through the teacher preparation program.

But while observing other teachers was not an unexpected factor in preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness, the important role that other teachers at the placement schools played in helping to prepare student teachers was. By far the most commonly cited positive experience of the student teaching internship—in terms of contributing to perceptions of preparedness—was working with other teachers at the placement school. Four of the six case study participants talked about this specifically, and all were very enthusiastic about how helpful these relationships were. This implies that it is not necessarily all about the cooperating teacher at the placement school; other teachers, whether through informal mentorship, through PLT’s, or through observations, can be important figures in helping teacher candidates feel prepared to teach. And yet in their guidelines outlining expectations for professional relationships, the 2006 NCTE Guidelines discuss these relationships only in regards to the cooperating teacher, the student teacher, and the teacher education supervisor. When it comes to helping preservice teachers feel prepared to teach, the importance of other teachers at the placement school should be recognized and their role should be fostered. Although it might be challenging to formally organize this kind of support, nurturing this support could begin by sharing its importance to administrators and teachers at the placement school, which could lead to facilitating a climate conducive to collectively supporting student teachers. Certainly if a teacher preparation program is aware of the importance of relationships between student teachers and other teachers at a placement school, university faculty and staff could reach out to the broader faculty at the placement school so that
supportive relationships are not left up to chance. Because “no one group or institution can provide all the support that new and experienced English language arts teachers need” (NCTE, 2006, p. 79), teacher preparation programs should cast a wide net in considering all of the professional relationships that factor into preservice teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach.

**Implications: The Structure of the Student Teaching Internship**

In addition to implications surrounding student teachers, cooperating teachers, as well as the collective staff at a placement school, the survey and interview data yielded questions surrounding the structure of the student teaching internship itself. While these questions might be considered more as food for thought than as direct implications, they nonetheless raise important issues concerning the student teaching internship and its centrality in preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to teach. These issues have to do with the structure of the student teaching internship as well as with the types of classes that student teachers are assigned to teach.

Both Rachel and Josh raised the issue of the structure of the student teaching internship in their interviews. Rachel thought that student teaching should be “more of a buffet system than a long–term partnership.” Her sentiment echoed Josh’s, who placed great value on his visit to another school, and who commented that a week at his placement school would have been the ideal amount of time there. If Rachel had had a more positive experience with her cooperating teacher, would she still have had the same recommendation for restructuring the student teaching experience? Or would an internship broken up into multiple cooperating teachers or even multiple schools be more of a safeguard for student
teachers who are placed with less-than-stellar cooperating teachers? Certainly this type of restructuring would take away from the model where student teachers “ramp up” in a scaffolded way to full-time teaching during their internship, build relationships with students and their cooperating teacher, and “ramp down” in a way that facilitates the cooperating teacher resuming control over his or her classes. This structure takes time, time that a 10 or 15-week model allows for. And yet it is hard to ignore Josh’s insistence that observing at another school was one of the most helpful experiences of his internship. While student teaching cannot necessarily be extended late into the spring semester due to the end-of-the-year testing schedule at K-12 schools, perhaps there could be flexibility to have a somewhat extended observation with another teacher or two, whether at the same school or a different school, whether before or after full-time student teaching. Regardless of what is possible, it may be important to keep the conversation going about the structure of the student teaching internship, so that the status quo of this structure does not remain in place just for historical sake. As the 2006 NCTE Guidelines call attention to:

Researchers continue to explore how field experiences may become more meaningful and more fully integrated into the preparation program. Better integration could mean, for example, less lengthy but more diverse observational periods, modeled on the concept of doctors’ rounds in hospitals, that help candidates see multiple ways of approaching a teaching act (p. 56).

Within the given structure of the student teaching internship, there is also the issue of what kinds of classes student teachers should be assigned to teach. While this is most likely a secondary consideration, if a consideration at all (and so the student teacher ends up teaching whatever course load the cooperating teacher has), it might be advantageous to be thoughtful and deliberate about the types of classes that student teachers are assigned. This
implication stems from Lyra’s experience, who, despite feeling well prepared and excited to teach, expressed hesitation about the specific classes that she would be assigned to teach as a first-year teacher. While she was partly grateful to have had senior AP and honors students during her student teaching, she was sure that she would be assigned to teach academic freshmen as a first-year teacher and that finding her footing would be more challenging due to her lack of experience with this course assignment. Lyra’s sentiment raises the question of how representative a student teacher’s teaching assignment should be in terms of mirroring what a first-year teacher will “most likely” be assigned. Of course, a first-year teacher’s teaching assignment will vary greatly and remains unknown until he or she is hired.

Furthermore, there are advantages to a preservice teacher being exposed to a variety of course preparations. The implication, then, is to continue the conversation (and research) on what types of classes student teachers should be assigned to teach in considering the impact of these assignments on their perceptions of preparedness to teach.

**Implications: Big Questions That Remain**

Finally, the results from the surveys and interviews led to questions that may not be implications per se, but that should be added to the conversation about perceptions of preparedness to teach, especially when considering the role of the teacher preparation program. These questions have to do with the alignment between teacher preparation programs and the teaching jobs for which they are preparing their teacher candidates, with the potential differences between undergraduate and graduate student experiences when it comes to perceptions of preparedness, with the issue of preparing preservice ELA teachers
for the “realities” of the classroom, and with the inherent limitations involved in feeling prepared to teach.

**Alignment between teacher preparation programs and future teaching jobs.**

One example of an alignment between the focus of a teacher preparation program and future teaching jobs is the urban education teacher preparation program. This type of teacher preparation program focuses coursework and fieldwork on issues specific to urban schools, as the expectation is that graduates will seek teaching jobs in urban school settings. But what about the majority of teacher preparation programs that do not have a specific focus? How broad is the scope of what they are preparing their teacher candidates for when considering the range of teaching jobs that their graduates will take on?

For this study, the issue of alignment between what a teacher preparation program is specifically preparing its preservice teachers for in terms of future teaching jobs arose from the survey question that asked participants how prepared they felt to teach in ways that support new English language learners (question 14). Ten participants (43%) reported feeling “poorly prepared,” eight participants (35%) reported feeling “adequately prepared,” and five students (22%) reported feeling “well prepared.” Again, this question had the highest occurrence of survey participants marking “poorly prepared” and the lowest occurrence of participants marking “well prepared.” I highlight this question as it focuses on teaching to a specific demographic of K–12 students. And while some beginning ELA teachers will have students who are English language learners, it is also possible that some ELA teacher candidates will not end up teaching English language learners. Again, this leads to questions about how broadly or specifically a teacher preparation program should be
preparing its preservice ELA teachers: How important is the consideration of where teacher candidates will be teaching and what skills these teaching assignments will call for? Is the goal to prepare preservice ELA teachers for a broad array of teaching assignments? While certainly the specific topic of supporting English language learners is outside the purview of this study, soliciting perceptions of preparedness around this issue leads to important questions about what teacher preparation programs are preparing their teacher candidates for, and whether (hypothetical) future teaching jobs should factor into how preservice ELA teachers are prepared.

**Differences between undergraduate and graduate student experiences.** Just as the topic of English language learners is outside the scope of this research, the issue of the differences in experiences between undergraduate and graduate students, specifically when it comes to perceptions of preparedness, is a topic that I did not focus on in this study. And yet because I included both undergraduate and graduate students in my research, the issue of potential differences in experiences between the two groups and what these differences might imply arose from my research. This topic emerged when considering the impact of prior experience on perceptions of preparedness to teach. Considering the graduate students’ experiences of Lyra having taught first-year college writing, Josh having experience teaching in South Korea, and Rachel having time to figure out what profession she wanted to pursue in terms of fit, it is possible to associate the advantages of being older and having more experience with being a graduate student. On the other hand, Brittney started the MAT program as an undergraduate and had lots of nannying, babysitting, and tutoring experience during high school and college. Annie, an undergraduate, also brought a lot of experience
with her, in part because she took 5 years to finish her undergraduate degree as she explored what the best career option would be for her. Although it remains impossible to draw any definitive conclusions from the data on this topic, and, again, while this issue was not within the parameters of my research questions, it was an issue that I could not ignore, especially when considering the potential of a “make or break” student teaching experience. Is it possible that graduate students might be more likely to fare just fine regardless of their cooperating teacher and student teaching experience due to the potential advantages that age and experience bring? Or is it entirely dependent on the specific experiences, attitudes and dispositions of each individual preservice teacher, regardless of age or student status? This may be an area rich for future research, as the answers to these questions would have implications for how to best support preservice ELA teachers – both graduate and undergraduate – in feeling prepared to teach.

**Preparing preservice ELA teachers for the “realities” of the classroom.**

Regardless of their age and student status, both undergraduate and graduate students raised the idea of feeling prepared to teach within the context of the “realities” of the classroom. Some preservice ELA teachers talked about this issue in the form of a “disconnect” between the theory they learned in their teacher preparation courses and the realities of what they witnessed and experienced during their observations and student teaching. Other teacher candidates expressed not feeling prepared when it came to the political realities of a school, whether in the form of a focus on testing or within the context of an administration handling school incidents with an eye on public relations. Both the survey and interview data led to big questions about the extent to which teacher preparation programs can or should prepare
preservice ELA teachers for the realities of the classroom, especially when a) “realities”
might be a euphemism for challenges or negativity, and b) the reality of a future teaching
situation is unknown and will certainly vary greatly for every teacher candidate turned
beginning teacher.

Put more broadly, to what extent is it possible to prepare preservice ELA teachers for
the challenges they may face as beginning teachers? Given that the reality of each teaching
assignment will vary, how much responsibility does a teacher preparation program have – or
how possible is it – to be forthcoming about the difficulties a beginning teacher may
encounter? These questions stem, in part, from the challenge of reconciling statements from
both Josh and Lyra. On the one hand, Josh put forth a statement about how he wished his
teacher preparation program had better prepared him for the realities of the classroom, as he
expressed his desire for someone to have told him:

Okay, these things that you’re going to try to implement – you’re going to meet
teachers who say, ‘That doesn’t work with these kids.’ You’re going to have
administrators who say, ‘I don’t know if I want to do x, y, or z.’ You’re going to run
into kids who are so far below grade level that you’re going to have to completely
rearrange stuff. And so, the trepidation of that, I feel like is something that’s really
hard to address, but if it could be addressed, it would lead to much greater feelings of
preparation.

On the other hand, Lyra offered up a statement about the “necessary naiveté” required for
teaching, which she described in the following way:

You have to have hope, and you have to not peek behind the curtain, because there’s
so much negativity and bureaucracy and red tape that if you run headlong into that
wall from the get-go and that gets washed upon you, you will just pull out
immediately. So you have to learn all of the things that are great, fun, and wonderful
[about teaching] before people start to introduce you to all of the muck.
The “reality” is that, depending on their personalities and dispositions and prior experience, some preservice ELA teachers might feel more prepared hearing stories or being shown examples of the kinds of challenges they may face as beginning teachers, while other teacher candidates might be turned off by them. There is no easy answer, or even an answer at all, but the issue of feeling prepared for the realities of the classroom is certainly one to add to the conversation about helping preservice ELA teachers feel prepared to teach.

**Inherent limitations in feeling prepared to teach.** As a final “big question” raised by the survey and interview data, I consider the extent to which there are inherent limitations in feeling prepared to teach. This idea emerged in a variety of forms from the data, whether from a survey participant’s comment that feeling prepared is a “fantasy,” to all of the qualifiers or hesitations participants expressed about feeling prepared. Highlighting for a moment the cases of Brittney and Jordan, who both had very positive student teaching internship experiences in terms of supportive cooperating teachers, fruitful relationships with other teachers, and meaningful learning experiences in their classrooms, they both expressed hesitations about feeling fully prepared to teach. For Jordan, this hesitation came in the form of a check-list of a number of ways in which she did not feel prepared, and for Brittney, this was expressed in her statement about student teaching remaining a representation of what the “real thing” would be like as a first-year teacher. The fact that feeling “fully” prepared to teach may well be a fantasy, in that there are myriad ways and areas in which to feel prepared, need not be thought of as problematic, however, especially when considering the task-specific nature of perceptions of preparedness and teacher efficacy. What may be more important than feeling prepared in as many areas as possible is an overall feeling of being up
to the challenges (both known and unknown) that a beginning teacher may face. Borrowing Annie’s phrase again, feeling “prepared to handle the unpreparedness” may go further in the end than feeling “fully” prepared overall.

The implication of these potential limitations in feeling prepared to teach and in the task-specific nature of perceptions of preparedness is that feeling prepared to teach is a complex, nuanced, and individually experienced phenomenon. And because perceptions of preparedness do matter, it is important to remember this complexity as we continue the conversation on how teacher preparation programs can best prepare and support preservice ELA teachers.

**Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study is the narrow scope from which it examines the phenomenon of ELA teacher preparation. This investigation focuses on a limited number of preservice ELA teachers’ experiences to shed light on the concept of preparedness. Indeed, the goal is not to generalize from the findings but to add new questions and insights to the conversation of how to best prepare preservice ELA teachers for the classroom. Stake (1995) and Yin (2012) are both forthcoming about the fact that case study, specifically, is a poor basis for generalization, and, as such, is not intended to represent a sampling point from a larger population. However, this does not mean that generalizations play no role in case study or qualitative research. For Stake (1995), this has to do with re-labeling generalizations, and he insists that such generalizations do hold a place in case study research:
Generalizations about a case or a few cases in a particular situation might not be thought of as generalizations and may need some label such as petite generalizations, but they are generalizations that regularly occur all along the way in case study. (p. 7)

As I encountered these “petite generalizations,” I considered them in terms of implications for preparing future ELA teachers, as there was inevitably convergence as well as divergence of preservice teachers’ experiences.

In addition to the limits of generalizations in my study, the questions I asked participants were, in a sense, limited; if I sought to know the extent to which a participant feels prepared to teach, what relationship does this have to that preservice teacher actually being prepared to teach? What is the relationship between feeling and being prepared to teach, and how do we measure either concept? While researchers have connected a sense of preparedness to teacher efficacy and connected teacher efficacy to student achievement and teacher behavior (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), we remain limited in being able to draw a direct line from perceptions of preparedness to teacher effectiveness. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) caution in their study, “Perceptions of preparedness may or may not be related to [...] actual teaching effectiveness” (p. 293). Therefore, rather than invoking a cause and effect relationship between perceptions of preparedness and teacher effectiveness in my study, my focus remained on providing an in-depth look at the phenomenon of preparedness, and on the implications that followed for preparing future ELA teachers.

Furthermore, the student teaching experience is only a representation of the realities of the classroom, and thus presents a limited experience for preservice ELA teachers. Student teachers might not yet know how prepared they are to enter their own classroom; these insights may not come until their first year of teaching or perhaps even several years
into their teaching. Thus, I consider this study as the first phase in a more longitudinal examination of the impact of perceptions of preparedness to teach, an examination that I hope to continue with the participants of this study during their first year of teaching, as well as three to five years into their teaching careers.

In addition to considering and accounting for these limitations, I recognize that preservice ELA teachers may feel prepared in some areas and not in others, and that this complicates the overarching phenomenon of feeling prepared to teach. Especially when considering the concept of efficacy, which is subject and task specific, as Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) remind us: “A teacher may feel very competent in one area of study or when working with one kind of student and feel less able in other subjects or with different students” (p. 215). Indeed, a perception of preparedness is hard to capture or measure. I accounted for this limitation by remaining cognizant of efficacy being task specific and keenly aware of the fact that I was not seeking to measure teacher efficacy, while still pursuing a “bigger picture” sense of what it means to feel prepared to teach.

**Areas for Future Research**

Based on these limitations, future research is needed to examine the factors influencing preservice ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness for teaching. Future research may examine a larger group of preservice ELA teachers to obtain a more generalizable sample, and a distinction may need to be made between the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. Moreover, future research is needed to follow these preservice ELA teachers into their teaching careers. What are these teachers’ perceptions of preparedness during their first year of teaching? Their third year and fifth year? A
longitudinal study is needed to examine beginning ELA teachers’ perceptions of preparedness as new ELA teachers settle into their schools and careers. This research should also look at the role of teaching assignment on perceptions of preparedness, as the details of a teaching placement will inevitably impact how prepared a teacher feels for that specific teaching assignment.

In addition, those involved in the preparation of teachers would benefit from more research into the connections between perceptions of preparedness and teacher effectiveness. While “sense of preparedness is by far the strongest predictor of teaching efficacy,” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 294) perceptions of preparedness may or may not be related to teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, p. 293). More research would provide insight into whether or not there is a correlation between how prepared a teacher feels and how effective that teacher is.

Furthermore, because teacher education matters for teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2006), and because researchers have called for more evidence and research into teacher preparation – specifically multifaceted research approaches that go beyond using test scores as metrics (Cochran-Smith, 2006) – there is room for further research on the role of perceptions of preparedness in teacher preparation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the implications that the survey and interview results yielded. Specifically, I consider implications for selecting and supporting preservice ELA teachers; selecting, matching and evaluating cooperating teachers; the role of observations and other teachers in preparing preservice ELA teachers; the structure of the student teaching
internship; as well as big questions about the concept of preparedness that the research raised. Finally in this chapter, I address the limitations of the study and how I accounted for these limitations, and I suggest areas for future research.

Ultimately, these implications can be brought to bear on the preparation of preservice ELA teachers, as we consider best practices of the curricular and experiential components of ELA teacher preparation, as well as the role of dispositions and backgrounds that preservice teachers bring with them to their teacher preparation program. Enriching our understanding of what it means to feel prepared to teach within the context of teacher education is a timely endeavor, given the current fever pitch of the criticism of university-based teacher preparation programs. This study responds to the call for more research into teacher preparation by focusing on teacher candidates’ experiences and by considering the readiness of preservice ELA teachers “in ways much broader and richer than test scores” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 25).
REFERENCES


database.


Hernandez, J.C. (2013, August 14). Seeking better teachers, city evaluates local colleges that


Ruggles Gere, A. (1977, Summer). One answer to one question: Selecting candidates for


University Press.


Appendix A: Recruitment Script for Student Teachers for Survey

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction department at NC State and am conducting my dissertation research project this semester under the guidance of my advisor, Dr. Carl Young, that examines perceptions of preparedness for student teaching. Specifically, I seek to investigate the extent to which preservice English language arts teachers, who are currently student teaching, feel prepared to teach, the factors influencing their sense of preparedness, and what being “prepared” to teach means to them. Upon completion of my dissertation, I hope to present this research at conferences and eventually publish the work in an academic research journal.

I'm contacting you because you were enrolled in the English Language Arts methods course in the NC State College of Education during the fall of 2012. I am asking students in both the English Language Arts MSL program and MAT program if they would be willing to complete a survey containing 40 Likert scale questions as well as a few open-ended questions. If you agree to participate in this portion of the study, I will send you a link to the survey, instructions for how to log on and complete the survey, and a time frame in which to complete the survey. The Likert scale portion of the survey was used by Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow (2002) in a study that examined data from a 1998 survey of approximately 3000 beginning teachers in New York regarding their views on preparation for teaching, their beliefs and practices and their intentions to stay in teaching.

Your participation in this portion of the study is completely voluntary; you have no obligation whatsoever to participate in this study, nor will your decision to participate impact your grades or evaluation during this semester and your student teaching internship. Your responses will not be associated with your name and careful precautions will be taken to ensure confidentiality. In addition, if you are an MSL student, please know that your name will not be associated with any of the data that are a part of my research process and research product while working with Dr. Young. In other words, you will not be identified with any of your responses to Dr. Young or any other faculty in the MSL program. Furthermore, Dr. Young will not know who participates in the survey. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the process at any point.

If you do agree to participate, I will send you a consent form outlining more details about your participation, as well as the link to the survey and further instructions. Based on my analysis of all of the survey data, I seek to conduct interviews with 5-6 students who represent a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach. Selecting this small sample is the only point at which your name will be linked to your survey responses, and after selecting students to interview, the link between your name and survey data will be destroyed. Completing the survey does not require that you participate further. If you are contacted for a possible interview, I will provide additional details and a second consent form. As with the
survey, you do not have to participate and you can opt out at any time. If you are an MAT student, please know that I will not seek to interview any student whom I’m currently supervising for student teaching.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions about the study. If you are willing to participate, I will send you the link to the survey by the end of the week and ask you to complete it by the end of next week.

I fully appreciate your busy schedule, and I greatly appreciate your consideration for participating in the study. Thanks so much.

Sincerely,
Naomi Kraut, Ed.M.
Doctoral Candidate, Curriculum and Instruction
North Carolina State University
Appendix B: Open-Ended Questions and Likert Scale Survey*

*The Likert scale survey was developed by New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit organization in New York City, and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future Urban Initiative and sent to New York City teachers in 1998 with four or fewer years of teaching experience. The original 40-item instrument was used by Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) in a study that examined data from a 1998 survey of approximately 3,000 beginning teachers in New York regarding their views on preparation for teaching, their beliefs and practices and their intentions to stay in teaching.

Open Ended Questions:

4. What does the phrase “prepared to teach” mean to you?

5. How would you describe your current feelings of preparedness to enter your first year of teaching?

6. What are the factors influencing your current feelings of preparedness to teach next year?

7. Based on these factors, where would you say your perception of preparedness come from / on what are they based?

At this point in your teacher preparation program, how prepared do you feel to do the following:

1 = Poorly prepared
2 = Adequately prepared
3 = Well prepared

Professional Knowledge and Skills

1. Teach subject matter concepts, knowledge, and skills in ways that enable students to learn.
2. Understand how different students in your classroom are learning.
3. Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for students.
4. Help all students achieve high academic standards.
5. Develop curriculum that builds on students’ experiences, interests, and abilities.
6. Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for your students.
7. Create discipline-based and interdisciplinary curriculum.
8. Identify and obtain materials and use community resources to create a multicultural curriculum.
9. Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning.
10. Relate classroom learning to the real world.
11. Understand how students’ social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influences learning.
12. Understand how students’ family and cultural backgrounds may influence learning.
13. Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.
14. Teach in ways that support new English language learners.
15. Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes.
16. Choose teaching strategies to meet different student needs.
18. Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility.
19. Develop students’ questioning and discussion skills.
20. Engage students in cooperative group work as well as independent learning.
21. Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide student learning and behavior.
22. Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning.
23. Help students learn to think critically and solve problems.
24. Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives.
25. Plan instruction by using knowledge of learning subject matter, curriculum, and student development.
26. Understand how factors in the students’ environment outside of school may influence their life and learning.
27. Work with parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.
28. Use a variety of assessments (e.g., observation, portfolios, tests, performance tasks, anecdotal records) to determine student strengths, needs, and programs.
29. Help students learn how to assess their own learning.
30. Evaluate and reflect on your practice to improve instruction.
31. Resolve interpersonal conflict in the classroom.
32. Maintain an orderly, purposeful learning environment.
33. Plan and solve problems with colleagues.
34. Assume leadership responsibilities in your school.

**How well prepared do you feel to use technology to do the following:**
35. Increase student interest and learning.
36. Support research and analysis (i.e., accessing the internet).
37. Assess and track student achievement.
38. Communicate with others (in school, city, state, country and world).
39. Enhance group collaboration and teamwork.
40. Overall, how well prepared do you feel to begin teaching?
Appendix C: Recruitment Script for Students Teachers for Interviews

Dear Student,

Thank you so much for your participation in my research study about preservice teacher preparedness for student teaching. I really appreciate the time and valuable insight that you provided in completing the survey.

I'm contacting you again because I’m interested in gaining further insight into your perceptions of preparedness to teach at this point in your student teaching experience. Participation in this phase of the study would consist of a 30-minute interview, to be conducted in a quiet and private space, at your school site or a place of your choice. In an effort to gain a better understanding of your perceptions of preparedness to student teach, I would ask you questions about the various factors that play into your experience with feeling prepared to student teach. I would tape and transcribe the interview, but your responses would remain confidential (you would choose a pseudonym).

Your participation in the study is voluntary, of course, and you are completely free to participate or not participate. Furthermore, should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the process at any point. As with the survey participation, please know that Dr. Young will not know who participates in the interviews.

Should you agree to participate, I will email you an additional consent form for your review. We would then set up the interview to take place at a time that is convenient for you. When we meet, I will go over the consent form with you and if you agree to participate we will begin our interview.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this portion of the research project, and thank you again for your very helpful and insightful feedback on the survey.
Appendix D: Student Teacher Interview Protocol

Location of Interview:
Day:
Start Time:
End Time:

1. When and how did you decide that you wanted to become a teacher?

2. Prior to entering your teacher preparation program, what was your impression of what it means to feel “prepared” to teach?

3. At the end of your program, how would you now define what “preparedness” to teach means or looks like?

4. What role do you see your own education and teachers playing in your sense of preparedness to teach?

5. What role do you see your teacher preparation program playing in your sense of preparedness to teach?

6. What role do you see your student teaching internship playing in your sense of preparedness to teach?

7. What other factors impact your sense of preparedness?

8. During your student teaching internship, what impact has your sense of preparedness had on your experience?

9. How prepared do you feel to teach upon near completion of your teacher preparation program and student teaching internship? (*If participants don’t mention anything about ways or areas in which they don’t feel prepared, probe the question: Are there ways or areas in which you don’t feel prepared?*)
Appendix E: Survey Consent Form

What it Means to Feel Prepared to Teach: An Examination of Preservice English Language Arts Teachers’ Sense of Teacher Preparedness

Principal Investigator: Naomi Kraut    Faculty Adviser: Dr. Carl Young

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of English teacher preparedness by examining the extent to which preservice English language arts teachers who are currently student teaching feel prepared to teach, the factors influencing their sense of preparedness, and what being “prepared” to teach means to them.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to electronically complete a survey containing 40 Likert scale questions as well as a few open-ended questions. A link to this survey as well as instructions for completing it will be emailed to you and should take roughly 20 minutes to complete. The Likert scale portion of the survey will ask you questions about your feelings of preparedness to teach and was used by Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow (2002) in a study that examined data from a 1998 survey of approximately 3000 beginning teachers in New York regarding their views on preparation for teaching, their beliefs and practices and their intentions to stay in teaching.

Based on my analysis of all of the survey data, I seek to conduct interviews with 5-6 students who represent a range of perceptions of preparedness to teach. Selecting this small sample is the only point at which your name will be linked to your survey responses, and after selecting students to interview, the link between your name and survey data will be destroyed. Otherwise, the data from the survey will be collected, integrated, and analyzed without identifiers (with the possible exception of making a distinction between graduate and undergraduate students); thus your responses will remain confidential outside of being identified by the principal investigator for selecting the interview sample.
I will use both individual responses and aggregate terms in writing up the results; however, I won’t use participants’ real names. Instead, I will use pseudonyms when mentioning study participants and also avoid any obvious details about them that might affect confidentiality.

After analyzing all of the data for this study, results will be presented at academic conferences and possibly published in an academic journal. In both contexts, your identity will remain confidential.

**Risks**

If you are an MAT student, I was most likely your instructor for the methods course in the fall of 2012. However, your participation will have no bearing on your evaluation for student teaching, nor will your responses serve to inform anything outside of the perceptions and experiences being solicited for this study. Throughout my work on this study, I will be upfront and transparent about my role as methods instructor and university supervisor, working to bracket any biases or experiences that may have shaped my interpretation and approach to the study.

If you are an MSL student, please know that your name will not be associated with any of the survey data that are a part of my research process and research product while working with Dr. Young. In other words, you will not be identified with any of your responses to Dr. Young or any other faculty in the MSL program. In addition, Dr. Young will not know who participates in the survey or in the interviews. If you are an MAT student whom I’m currently supervising for student teaching, you will not be asked to participate in an interview.

In addition, data collected from the surveys will be coded and presented in such a manner that any information collected about you will not be linked to you specifically. As previously stated, I will need to see students’ names in order to select the sample for the following phase of the study. Otherwise, the data from the survey will be collected, integrated, and analyzed without identifiers (with the possible exception of making a distinction between graduate and undergraduate students); thus your responses will remain confidential outside of being identified by the principal investigator.

In addition, I will use both individual responses and aggregate terms in writing up the results; however, I won’t use participants’ real names. Instead, I will use pseudonyms when mentioning study participants and also avoid any obvious details about them that might affect confidentiality.

**Benefits**

By participating in this study, you will be providing an important voice to the issue of what it means to prepare English language arts teachers for teaching. In this way, your participation will help to deepen the research about how preservice teachers experience the phenomenon of teacher preparedness. Furthermore, the reflection being asked of you in this study may
yield a heightened self-awareness and better understanding of your evolving role and development as a professional teacher.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data collected from the surveys will be coded and presented in such a manner that any information collected about you will not be linked to you specifically. As previously stated, I will need to see students’ names in order to select the sample for the following phase of the study, but after this selection is made, the link between student names and survey data will be destroyed. Otherwise, the data from surveys will be collected, integrated, and analyzed without identifiers (with the possible exception of making a distinction between graduate and undergraduate students); thus your responses will remain confidential outside of being identified by the principal investigator.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating.

What if you are a NCSU student?
Participation in this study is not a course requirement, and your participation or lack thereof will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me, the researcher, Naomi Kraut, at njkraut@ncsu.edu, or my doctoral advisor, Dr. Carl Young, at carl_young@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate
Your completion and submission of the survey confirms that you have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study.
Appendix F: Student Interview Consent Form

**What it Means to Feel Prepared to Teach: An Examination of Preservice English Language Arts Teachers’ Sense of Teacher Preparedness**

**Principal Investigator:** Naomi Kraut  
**Faculty Adviser:** Dr. Carl Young

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

**What is the purpose of this study?**
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of English teacher preparedness by examining the extent to which preservice English language arts teachers who are currently student teaching feel prepared to teach, the factors influencing their sense of preparedness, and what being “prepared” to teach means to them.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**
If you agree to participate in this portion of the study, you will be asked to participate in a 30-minute audio recorded interview, to take place in a quiet, private area at your school site or a place of your choice, where the interview will not be overhead. During the interview, you will be asked to reflect in more depth about your feelings of preparedness for teaching. The researcher will transcribe your interview for analysis.

While I can’t promise to keep the material confidential or anonymous, as the study will be read by people other than myself, I will work to protect your anonymity by avoiding listing the names of sites and people who could be later traced back to the school, by using pseudonyms, and by disguising participants’ identity if you so choose. In addition, only I will be doing the transcription.

I will employ member checking by providing you with a transcript of the interview and the opportunity to change comments as you see fit.

I will use both individual responses and aggregate terms in writing up the results; however, I won’t use participants’ real names. Instead, as stated previously, I will use pseudonyms when
mentioning study participants and also avoid any obvious details about them that might affect confidentiality.

After analyzing all of the data for this study, results will be presented at academic conferences and possibly published in an academic journal. In both contexts, your identity will remain confidential.

**Risks**

If you are an MAT student, I was most likely your instructor for the methods course in the fall of 2012. However, your participation will have no bearing on your evaluation for student teaching, nor will your responses serve to inform anything outside of the perceptions and experiences being solicited for this study. Throughout my work on this study, I will be upfront and transparent about my role as methods instructor and university supervisor, working to bracket any biases or experiences that may have shaped my interpretation and approach to the study.

If you are an MSL student, please know that your name will not be associated with any of the interview responses that are a part of my research process and research product while working with Dr. Young. In other words, you will not be identified with any of your responses to Dr. Young or any other faculty in the MSL program. Furthermore, Dr. Young will not know who participates in the interviews.

Additionally, data collected from the transcribed interviews will be coded and presented in such a manner that any information collected about you will not be linked to you specifically. Again, your responses will have no bearing on your evaluation as a student teacher.

As previously stated, while I can’t promise to keep the material confidential or anonymous, as the study will be read by people other than myself, I will work to protect your anonymity by avoiding listing the names of sites and people who could be later traced back to the school, by using pseudonyms, and by disguising participants’ identity if you so choose. In addition, only I will be doing the transcription.

**Benefits**

By participating in this study, you will be providing an important voice to the issue of what it means to prepare English language arts teachers for teaching. In this way, your participation will help to deepen the research about how preservice teachers experience the phenomenon of teacher preparedness. Furthermore, the reflection being asked of you in this study may yield a heightened self-awareness and better understanding of your evolving role and development as a professional teacher.

**Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Again, as previously stated, while I can’t promise to keep the material confidential or
anonymous, as the study will be read by people other than myself, I will work to protect your anonymity by avoiding listing the names of sites and people who could be later traced back to the school, by using pseudonyms, and by disguising participants’ identity if you so choose. In addition, only I will be doing the transcription.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating.

What if you are a NCSU student?
Participation in this study is not a course requirement, and your participation or lack thereof will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me, the researcher, Naomi Kraut, at njkraut@ncsu.edu, or my doctoral advisor, Dr. Carl Young, at carl_young@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate
Your signature on this form confirms that you have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _______________________________