PRESERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT INFLUENCES THEIR APPROPRIATION OF UNIVERSITY COURSEWORK, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DURING THE CLINICAL TEACHING INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

by

Christine B. McElwee
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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George Mason University
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Preservice Special Education Teachers’ Perceptions of What Influences Their Appropriation of University Coursework Knowledge and Skills during the Clinical Teaching Internship Experience

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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Dedication

First, this dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Madeline W. Roth, who was a special education teacher, retiring in 1976. She was a constant mentor and kindred spirit during my career as a Teacher of Students with Disabilities. I miss her every day.

Second, this dissertation is also dedicated to Carl Back, the person who got me started in the academia arena for special education. During my junior and senior year of high school, Carl was my advisor for an independent study that I completed in special education. He developed the coursework and assignments that challenged me to delve deeply into the field of special education. Thank you, Carl, from the bottom of my heart.

I owe my passion and commitment to working with students with disabilities to my grandmother and Carl.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank all of the time and energy that Kelley Regan, my dissertation chairperson, has put into working with me throughout this process. She was more than patient and validating of all my questions. I am so thankful that she was in my corner. I would also like to thank the other dissertation committee members, Peggy Weiss and Pam Baker, for giving me support and pushing me to continue to the end of this arduous process.

Second, I would like to thank all my family and friends for encouraging me to “keep going”, even when I was running out of steam. My family (Jonathan, Mark, Emma, Natalie, Stephanie, Kennedy, Mackenzie, and Madelyn) was forever saying “you can do it”. My friends continually asked how things were going.

Last, I want to thank my loving husband, Alex, of 36 years. Without his constant love, support, and encouragement, I don’t know how I would have ever finished this mountain of a task.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Special Education Teacher Preparation Landscape</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Preparation Program Research</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing Factors during Supervised Clinical Internship Experiences in Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Significance of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Search Procedures</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Studies Discussion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Special Education Specialization</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Retardation Specialization</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Behavior Specialist Specialization</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Specialization</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes from the Seven Studies</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Relationships</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Use Special Education Protocols</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Coursework</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Need</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Special Education Community</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific University Community</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of Findings ........................................................................................................ 188
How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework? .................. 188
How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework? ...... 195
How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences? ................................................................. 200
Overall Summary ........................................................................................................ 205
Limitations .................................................................................................................. 206
Educational Implications and Future Research ......................................................... 207
Recommendations ....................................................................................................... 211
Conclusions ............................................................................................................... 212
Appendix A ............................................................................................................... 214
Appendix B ............................................................................................................... 226
Appendix C ............................................................................................................... 228
Appendix D ............................................................................................................... 230
References ................................................................................................................. 253
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>CAEP Accreditations Standards (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013a)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Seven Studies Exploring Teacher Intern Perspectives</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Special Education plus Licensure Certificate General Curriculum Program Courses.</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Responsibilities of the University Internship Participants</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Participant Demographics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Participant Internship Placements</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Participant Data Sources</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

PRESERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT INFLUENCES THEIR APPROPRIATION OF UNIVERSITY COURSEWORK KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DURING THE CLINICAL TEACHING INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

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George Mason University, 2015

Dissertation Director: Dr. Kelley Regan

The clinical internship experience for preservice interns has been described as one of the most important components of teacher preparation programs. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE) *Blue Ribbon Panel Report on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning* suggests that teacher candidates need to blend practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge and learn their craft by *doing*. The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent contextual (i.e., school and classroom setting) and relationship (i.e., cooperating teacher, university supervisor, students) influences of clinical experiences have upon the appropriation of coursework and/or development of decision making strategies by preservice interns at one university. While there is a dearth of research regarding the clinical experience in teacher preparation programs, there are even fewer studies investigating special education
interns’ perspectives of their clinical teaching internship experience. A qualitative study of semi-structured interviews with observations and document reviews was implemented to extend the current research base. The researcher investigated six preservice special education interns’ perceptions of their clinical experiences at one teacher preparation program. Results from this investigation suggested that contextual and relationship factors influenced the participants’ decision making during their final clinical experiences. Future programmatic developments of clinical practice in teacher preparation programs were suggested.
Chapter One

The final clinical teaching experience (i.e., student teaching) for preservice special education interns is the culmination of theoretical training from the required coursework within a licensure or degreed teacher training program. Preservice special education interns enter into their clinical internship experiences with educational knowledge, gathered from their coursework and various background and personal experiences, in hopes of practicing and developing instructional/behavioral strategies that they could use in their own impending teaching experience. The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent contextual and relationship influences from the clinical internship experiences have upon the appropriation of coursework and/or the development of decision making strategies by preservice interns at one university. Since national, state, and local regulations impact the special education clinical internship programs, this introduction will briefly review the national, state, and local landscape of the university and clinical special education internship experience.

National Special Education Teacher Preparation Landscape

Special education teachers not only teach students with disabilities specific strategies to access the general education curriculum, but also facilitate content delivery. In addition, special education teachers of students with disabilities are required to have knowledge of various disabilities, collaborate with teachers and parents, provide
behavioral support to students within the classroom setting, and develop programming for each student individually. With such a variety of roles and responsibilities required by special education teachers, it is imperative that preservice special education interns acquire the knowledge and skills needed to transition into the classroom successfully. How teacher preparation is acquired has always been a focus within the higher education community of education scholars and leaders. However, there has been a recent shift to target the quality of teacher education preparation programs, including special education teacher preparation programs, throughout the nation.

With the proliferation of alternative route (AR) preparation programs, aspiring special education teachers have been given a variety of choices as to how to acquire their teaching degree. The U.S. Department of Education (2013, p. 3) reported data on 2,124 teacher preparation programs in 2011 (both general and special education preparation programs). Preparation programs were classified as three different types (AY 2009-10): (a) traditional, (b) alternative IHE (Institution of Higher Education)-based, and (c) alternative, not IHE-based. Sixty-nine percent of programs (1,466 programs) were classified as traditional teacher preparation programs, generally serving undergraduate students (who have no prior teaching or work experience) and leading to at least a bachelor’s degree. Some of the traditional programs may lead to a teaching credential but not a degree. Twenty-one percent (439 programs) were classified as alternative route preparation programs based at IHEs. These AR programs serve teacher candidates with subject-matter knowledge who are the teacher of record in a classroom, while participating in their teacher preparation program. The third type of teacher preparation
programs, AR teacher programs not based at IHEs, were in 219 programs or 10% of the reported programs.

When considering special education teacher preparation programs specifically, the choices of teacher preparation programs become even more varied when considering the types of special education (traditional) and AR programs offered at different IHEs. The US Department of Education (2013) described a “traditional” teacher preparation program as “four-year undergraduate programs … generally include courses on how to teach (pedagogy), as well as academic content, and sometimes include courses on working with special populations…” (p. 4). The majority of all prospective teachers (88%) are enrolled in traditional preparation programs. Within the special education teacher preparation terrain, traditional programs are varied and, due to the current push for highly qualified teachers, many of the special education teacher preparation programs have dual licensure programs or merged programs of some kind. Blanton and Pugach (2011) further described traditional programs as discrete, integrated, or merged special education programs. Discrete programs are described as separate general and special education programs. Integrated programs are described as traditional programs that engage in coordinated program-level curriculum efforts between the general and special education programs. The third category of merged special education preparation programs are described as single programs that completely integrate general and special education program courses and field experiences designed to address the needs of all students.
When considering the variety of special education teacher preparation programs offered to aspiring special education teachers, the federal government has implemented policy in hopes of promoting effective practices within all special education teacher preparation programs to include the culminating experience of the student teaching internship or final clinical internship experience. According to Kleinhammer-Tramill, Tramill, and Brace (2010), the goal of federal support is “to improve the quantity and quality of special education and related services personnel and to improve the national capacity for preparing future generations of special education personnel” (p. 196). The recent emphasis of high-stakes testing and accountability and the requirement of training “highly-qualified” personnel for the high-incidence population included in NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and 2004 IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) has energized the study and research of the quality of teacher preparation programs (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Coggshall, Bivona, & Reschly, 2012; Greenberg, Pomerance, & Walsh, 2011; Kleinhammer-Tramill, Tramill, & Brace, 2010; Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010), most importantly the clinical internship experience at the end of the teacher preparation program.

As a result of this priority of the quality of preparation programs and the culminating experience of the clinical internship or student teaching experience, which is a part of most preparation programs, national teacher education organizations (National Council on Teacher Quality, NCTQ; the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, NCATE; the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, AACTE; Association of Teacher Educators, ATE) have investigated approaches to
teacher preparation programs and the clinical internship process throughout the nation. To highlight this quality priority, NCTQ (Greenberg et al., 2011), a national research and policy group, implemented a comprehensive review of clinical practice experiences throughout the country. NCTQ used nineteen critical standards developed by the 2008 NCTQ advisory group to investigate how 134 institutions across the country with preservice clinical teaching programs for elementary teacher candidates incorporated the nineteen critical standards developed by the National Council on Teacher Quality. The nineteen standards for clinical teaching encompassed two goals: (a) “focus on the critical characteristics of the cooperating teacher”, and (b) “clearly identify policies and procedures that can maximize the potential for the achievement of the student teaching experience” (p. 12).

Results of this investigation indicated that 7% or 10 institutions were deemed “model programs.” According to Greenberg, Pomerance, and Walsh (2011), due to the low percentage of “model programs”, further investigation into “What features of the experience will make a teacher more effective?” (p. 6) became essential. That said, the report conducted by NCTQ (Greenberg et al., 2011) has been largely criticized since the report was disseminated noting that the methods used by NCTQ were questionable (Pearson & Goatley, 2013).

Yet, the Blue Ribbon Panel (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010) delineated this lack of cohesion further by stating that “clinical preparation is poorly defined and inadequately supported” (p. 4). The critical issue that seemed to be apparent when considering clinical teaching practices was the fact that
“most states…are silent on what this crucially important experience should look like, and how programs should be held accountable” (p. 4). In other words, the features that are important in the clinical teaching experience are elusive and have not been established through research. According to Coggshall, Bivona, and Reschly (2012), this dearth of research has limited the understanding of how teachers are best trained for the classroom experience (p. 11).

**Virginia Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs**

Within this national landscape of special education teacher preparation programs lies the state regulations, procedures, and process of special education teacher preparation programs, culminating in the clinical internship experience. As of July 2013, there were thirty-seven approved teacher preparation programs in the state of Virginia. Within these universities are a variety of undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs in a variety of content areas for Prekindergarten (PreK) through twelfth grade. In the area of special education, twenty-nine universities have at least one of the various special education licensure programs (i.e., Early Childhood Special Education [birth through age 5], Adapted Curriculum K-12 [or consortium], General curriculum K-12, Hearing Impairments Prek-12, Speech-Language Pathologist Prek-12, Visual Impairments PreK-12 [consortium only]). Specifically, with respect to the Special Education General Curriculum K-12 licensure programs, there are six universities with undergraduate programs only, thirteen graduate programs only, and ten undergraduate and graduate special education programs at Virginia universities (Virginia Department of Education, 2013).
According to the Licensure Regulations for School Personnel (Virginia Department of Education, 2013), candidates for special education licensure in their specific area are required to complete a state approved program. Additionally, “components of the licensure program include a degree from a regionally accredited college or university in the liberal arts and sciences (or equivalent), professional teacher’s assessment requirements prescribed by the Board of Education, specific endorsement requirements, and professional studies requirements” (p. 29). Licensure requirements include: (a) core coursework (12 credits) in the areas of foundations, assessment and management of instruction, and collaboration; (b) general curriculum coursework (15 credits) in the areas of characteristics (6 credits), Individualized Education Program implementation (6 credits), and transitioning (3 credits). Even though these are the current requirements, at the time of this study, the 2013 regulations are in flux and under review.

As noted from the statistics pertaining to Virginia special education teacher preparation programs, there are a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs requiring a variety of licensure requirements (i.e., courses). A logical conclusion is that each of these programs offer various programmatical experiences within the coursework. Therefore, how do you determine the effectiveness of a special education teacher preparation program?

Special Education Preparation Program Research

Brownell, Ross, Colon, and McCallum (2005) stated that the research pertaining to special education teacher preparation programs exclusively is elusive. There have been
large-scale reviews and policy briefs pertaining to general education teacher preparation programs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010; Coggshall et al., 2012; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). However, special education teacher preparation research is almost nonexistent. With this in mind, Brownell et al. (2005) conducted a review of special education preparation programs, both traditional and alternative route, to delineate the landscape of effective special education teacher preparation programs. The purpose of this review was to identify the common features of special education teacher preparation programs that were considered important by special education faculty. The researchers reviewed 64 special education program descriptions and evaluations described in refereed journals from 1990 to 2003. The programs consisted of 38 special education programs and 26 were unified or dual certification programs.

Results of this review indicated that these special education teacher preparation programs included three characteristics believed to be important to the context of effective programs: (a) collaboration, and (b) program evaluation, and (c) extensive field experiences (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). The manner in which the programs incorporated these three characteristics varied, however. For example, all programs incorporated collaboration, albeit with a different emphasis. The idea of working together or collaborating was emphasized in one of the following ways: (a) faculty-to-faculty collaboration, (b) school-to-faculty collaboration, (c) knowledge of collaborative skills, (d) use of student cohorts, or (e) a combination of these. Further, fifty-two (81%) of the universities described how their special education teacher
preparation programs evaluated the quality of their students or the effectiveness of their program through observation reports, ratings from supervisors, performance evaluations, or surveys from supervisory personnel comparing graduates to beginning teachers. Since Brownell et al. (2005) stated that collaboration was a sophisticated skill where individuals interact with others who may not share similar pedagogical philosophies as theirs, it was imperative to provide careful instruction in this area to preservice teaching candidates.

Further, fifty-two (81%) of the universities described how their special education teacher preparation programs evaluated the quality of their students or the effectiveness of their program. Programs typically used observation reports, ratings from supervisors, performance evaluations, or surveys from supervisory personnel comparing graduates to beginning teachers. Since teacher preparation programs are being increasingly pressured to be accountable for the teacher candidate performance (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), the importance of evaluation tools becomes critical to the overall effectiveness of a preparation program.

The final characteristic important to effective programs, extensive field experiences, is especially pertinent to the context of this dissertation study. In fifty-four (84%) of the reported programs, extensive field experiences were described as being well-crafted with extensive supervision and assessment of the preservice teachers. Extensive field experiences were characterized as programs with an early field experience, one or two practicum experiences, and a semester or yearlong student teaching experience (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010).
With this in mind, a closer look at the clinical internship experience in special education teacher preparation programs is warranted.

**Influencing Factors during Supervised Clinical Internship Experiences in Teacher Preparation**

According to Greenberg et al. (2011), student teaching is the final clinical internship experience of a teacher preparation program that has the potential to shape candidate expectations for their own performance as teachers. These researchers contend that the student teaching experience is so influential that a “uniformly strong student teaching experience has the power to dramatically improve the vision of teaching excellence” (p. 1). More importantly, a mediocre, let alone a disastrous experience can never be expunged from the candidate’s beginning career experiences. As such, the clinical internship experience (i.e., student teaching experience) is the culminating experience of most teacher preparation programs.

The supervised clinical internship experience has been touted to be one of the most significant and influential factors of teacher pedagogy and longevity (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). According to Greenberg et al. (2011) student teachers (i.e., interns) are expected to “synthesize everything they have learned about planning instruction: collecting or developing instructional materials, teaching lessons, guiding small group activities, and establishing and maintaining order – not to mention meetings with faculty and parents” (p. 1). In fact, according to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2013), “clinical preparation programs that are focused more on the work of the classroom and that allow teachers to
engage in the actual practices involved in teaching tend to produce first year teachers who are more likely to remain in the profession than those from less clinically-based programs” (p. 7).

In most traditional programs, the final clinical experience begins with the selection of the context, or school setting and a classroom by the university (for preservice interns). A University Supervisor (US), a liaison between the school and university, is assigned to observe, evaluate, and provide developmental feedback to the preservice intern while completing the clinical internship experience. A Cooperating Teacher (CT) is identified as an employed teacher at the school site. This individual is typically assigned by the school. The intern (i.e., student teacher) is required to engage in teaching practices under the tutelage of this Cooperating Teacher. The required number of hours or weeks of the supervised clinical experience is typically included in state licensure regulations, therefore varying from state to state and across traditional and AR programs. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2010) indicated that state regulatory policies of clinical preparation for teacher candidates vary widely.

To further emphasize the importance of the clinical internship or student teaching experience, Greenburg et al. (2011) undertook a study to investigate not only the length of the student teaching experience required by IHEs, but also other components of the student teaching experience deemed essential to teacher effectiveness. This study reviewed 134 IHEs with elementary undergraduate student teaching programs, through the use of a stratified random sampling designed to include three teacher preparation programs from each state and the District of Columbia. Within this research, the authors
reviewed the current state regulatory role impacting student teaching. Greenburg et al. stated that, “State regulations do provide some sensible, albeit limited, guidance on student teaching experiences, but no state has what could be termed a comprehensive set of regulations or even guidelines for student teaching programs” (p. 8). According to Greenburg et al., IHEs generally comply only with regulations that are easily measured, such as the teaching experience of the Cooperating Teacher, and not with regulations that are harder to monitor (i.e., the requirement that the Cooperating Teacher be effective as demonstrated by a positive impact on student learning). These findings suggest that IHEs have somewhat loose standards for teacher preparation, thus exacerbating the skepticism of quality in teacher preparation programs, in general.

To improve the rigor of clinical internship experiences (i.e., student teaching), the new accrediting body for teacher preparation as of August 2013, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), has developed new standards for clinical practice in teacher preparation. This organization merged the former accrediting bodies, NCATE and TEAC’s (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) previous standards with the intent to form a unified accrediting body “committed to excellence in educator preparation” (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013a). To heighten the rigor in preparation programs, CAEP has developed five standards to which programs must display evidence of performance for accreditation (See Table 1).
Table 1

*CAEP Accreditations Standards (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013a)*

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<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>The provider ensures that candidates develop a deep understanding of the critical concepts and principles of their discipline and, by completion, are able to use discipline-specific practices flexibly to advance the learning of all students toward attainment of college- and career-readiness standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice</strong></td>
<td>The provider ensures that effective partnerships and high-quality clinical practice are central to preparation so that candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to demonstrate positive impact on all P-12 students’ learning and development.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 3: Candidate Quality, Recruitment, and Selectivity</strong></td>
<td>The provider demonstrates that the quality of candidates is a continuing and purposeful part of its responsibility from recruitment, at admission, through the progression of courses and clinical experiences, and to decisions that completers are prepared to teach effectively and are recommended for certification. The provider demonstrates that development of candidate quality is the goal of educator preparation in all phases of the program. This process is ultimately determined by a program’s meeting of Standard 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 4: Program Impact</strong></td>
<td>The provider demonstrates the impact of its completers on P-12 student learning and development, classroom instruction, and schools, and the satisfaction of its completers with the relevance and effectiveness of their preparation.</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Standard 5: Provider Quality Assurance and Continuous</strong></td>
<td>The provider maintains a quality assurance system comprised of valid data from multiple measures,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13
Improvement including evidence of candidates’ and completers’ positive impact on P-12 student learning and development. The provider supports continuous improvement that is sustained and evidence-based, and that evaluates the effectiveness of its completers. The provider uses the results of inquiry and data collection to establish priorities, enhance program elements and capacity, and test innovations to improve completers’ impact on P-12 student learning and development.

The second standard (See Table 2), Clinical Partnerships and Practice, emphasizes “effective partnerships and high-quality clinical practice which are central to preparation so that candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to demonstrate positive impact on all P-12 students’ learning and development” (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b). Hopefully, CAEP will be a first step to clarity and more specificity with regard to the preparation of student candidates.

Table 2

*Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b)*

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<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strand 2.1: Partnerships for Clinical Preparation</td>
<td>Partners co-construct mutually beneficial P-12 school and community arrangements, including technology-based collaborations, for clinical preparation and share responsibility for continuous improvement of candidate preparation. Partnerships for clinical preparation can follow a range of forms, participants, and functions. They establish mutually agreeable expectations for candidate entry,</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
preparation, and exit; ensure that theory and practice are linked; maintain coherence across clinical and academic components of preparation; and share accountability for candidate outcomes.

Strand 2.2: Clinical Educators

Partners co-select, prepare, evaluate, support, and retain high-quality clinical educators, both provider- and school-based, who demonstrate a positive impact on candidates’ development and p-12 student earning and development. In collaboration with their partners, providers use multiple indicators and appropriate technology-based applications to establish, maintain, and refine criteria for selection, professional development, performance evaluation, continuous improvement, and retention of clinical educators in all clinical placement settings.

Strand 2.3: Clinical Experiences

The provider works with partners to design clinical experiences of sufficient depth, breadth, diversity, coherence, and duration to ensure that candidates demonstrate their developing effectiveness and positive impact on all students’ learning and development. Clinical experiences, including technology-enhanced learning opportunities, are structured to have multiple performance-based assessments at key points within the program to demonstrate candidates’ development of the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions as delineated in Standard 1, that are associated with a positive impact on the learning and development of all P-12 students.

Identifying components of effective teacher preparation programs is extremely complex. Even though the clinical teaching internship experience has been touted as perhaps the most critical component of teacher preparation programs (Greenberg et al., 2011), there are few studies contributing to our understanding of how this experience
influences the skills, personal development, and professional development of preservice interns.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this investigation is to deepen our understanding of the clinical internship experience within one university’s special education teacher education program. Specifically, this study is to investigate to what extent contextual (i.e., school and classroom setting) and relationship (i.e., cooperating teacher, university supervisor, students) influences of the clinical internship experiences have upon the appropriation of coursework and/or the development of decision making strategies by preservice interns at one university. Within this university, graduate students completing their clinical internship experience are preservice interns or inservice interns. Preservice interns are students not employed in the teaching profession. Inservice interns are students employed in the teaching profession. Prior to this investigation, the special education program (for teachers of students who access the general education curriculum) in this one university was developing and executing improvement plans for the clinical internship experience component of the 33-credit special education teacher preparation licensure program. Over approximately two years, the improvement plans involved collaborative coordination between faculty and the field placement office, the modification of internship documents, focus group sessions with University Supervisors, and interviews with faculty and University Supervisors. These efforts were driven by a 325T federally funded personnel preparation grant. However, the preservice intern perspective of the clinical internship experience in this teacher preparation program had yet to be represented. For this reason,
a literature review of research pertaining to the clinical internship experience (i.e., student teaching) of research was completed.

The following literature review contributed to the understanding of the clinical internship experience by delineating influences perceived by the preservice student intern participants during their clinical internship experiences. Results suggested that contextual and relationship factors influenced perceptions of the preservice interns. With these results in mind, understanding how the relationships and contextual factors of the clinical internship experience influence instructional decisions by special education student interns may support the reform efforts, and subsequent program improvements that teacher educators make in teacher preparation programs.

Further, the targeted teacher preparation program could utilize the information gathered from this study to improve the linkage between the university coursework and the culminating clinical teaching experience. By uncovering the perspectives expressed by special education student interns pertaining to the use of the coursework and other contextual and relationship factors of the clinical internship experience, the targeted university may be able to design clinical internship experiences that positively impact the development of preservice student interns. Therefore, as previously described, the purpose of this study is to extend our understanding of the factors during the clinical internship experiences (i.e., context, relationships) that influence special education interns’ appropriation of coursework and/or the instructional decisions they make during the clinical internship experience.

The research questions include:
1. How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

2. How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

3. How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences?

**Definition of Terms**

Due to a variety of terminology for the same aspects of the teacher preparation field, some of the following term definitions will be preceded by similar terms (in italics) found in the literature. For the purposes of this study, these italicized terms will be used interchangeably within the first two chapters. Chapters 3 through 5 will use the bold-faced terms. The bold-faced terms are the terminology used within the clinical internship program at the targeted university, George Mason University.

**Appropriation:** The process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments (e.g., schools, preservice programs) and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices (e.g., using phonics to teach reading) (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

**Context:** Social and cultural settings within the internship experience (i.e., schools, programs, roles of CT, US, intern, etc…)
Cooperating Teacher: an employed teacher at the internship school site mentoring the intern during the clinical internship experience

Preservice teacher, teacher candidate, student teacher, intern, preservice intern: Students who are not employed in the teaching profession and are engaged in the culminating internship experience of the teaching licensure program.

Field experience, student teaching, practicum, clinical internship, internship:

The internship is the final course and culminating experience in the state approved teacher licensure programs. It provides opportunities for extended practice teaching under the guidance of experienced professionals from the school and university. It is an integral part of a student’s coursework and provides the most significant opportunity to apply his/her new knowledge, skills and dispositions. (as per the Special Education Internship Handbook from George Mason University College of Education and Human Development Division of Special Education and disability Research - 2015-2016)

Field supervisor, practicum supervisor, University Supervisor: adjunct instructors hired by semester as a liaison between the university and the internship placement to supervise the interns in the internship setting.
Chapter Two

The clinical practice experience, or student teaching for pre-service interns, has been described as one of the most important components of teacher preparation programs (Conderman, Morin, & Stephens, 2005). This critical internship experience provides opportunities for applying knowledge garnered from coursework (Sindelar et al., 2010), and theoretically allows student teachers (i.e., interns) to apply this knowledge to instructional practice during their clinical internship experience. In fact, according to The Blue Ribbon Panel Report (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), a clinical student teaching experience should connect the coursework with the challenge of using it, “while under the expert tutelage of skilled clinical educators” (p. ii). Conderman, Morin, and Stephens (2005) further emphasized the importance of the clinical internship experience, suggesting that it “may also influence a teacher’s decision to remain in the field” (p. 6).

Given the significance of this culminating experience of a special educator’s teaching preparation, one would assume it to be a critical area of research for the special education community. However, special education researchers have indicated that there is a dearth of research in this area of teacher preparation (Coggshall et al., 2012; Conderman et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2010). Further, there is a paucity of research identifying the features of clinical internship experiences that are most critical for
successful teacher preparation (Coggshall et al., 2012). Additionally, according to Sindelar, Brownell, and Billingsley (2010), since the research base to inform teacher educators about critical elements of field (i.e., internship) experiences is “scattered and thin", it is difficult to ascertain what elements are necessary for our students’ development. With this research gap in mind, a literature search of special education clinical internship practices was developed, targeting the features and/or influencing factors of the clinical internship experience.

**Literature Search Procedures**

Several search strategies were used to locate relevant literature pertaining to the clinical internship experience. Initially, data bases were searched from the years 2004 to 2012: PsychINFO, Academic Search Complete, Digital Dissertations & Theses Full Text, Education Full Text, ERIC, Proquest Education Journals, and Teacher Reference Center. The descriptor keywords used in this data base search included special education, teacher preparation, student teaching, field experience, teacher preparation programs, teacher training programs, distance learning, federal policies, professional development schools, and school university partnerships. Following this initial data base search, hand-searches of the table of contents for the journals Teacher Education Special Education, Teacher Education Quarterly, and Journal of Teacher Education was undertaken from the years 2009 to 2012. One last step in this initial search process was undertaken through ancestry searches, which were conducted by using the articles identified from the data bases.

These initial aforementioned search procedures identified around 150 articles, which were relevant to the clinical internship process of preservice special education
interns. The second delimiting search strategy used was to target articles that included information about clinical internship programming and/or processes. With these parameters in mind, 27 articles were identified. Since the intern perspectives was the focus of the current study, one last delimiting search targeting only the intern perspectives during the clinical internship experience was performed.

Seven studies between 2006 and 2011 were identified (See Table 3) to inform this study. Even though there was a paucity of articles pertaining to interns’ perspectives of their clinical experience, the seven qualitative research studies (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon, Özen, & Batu, 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011) were reviewed. These seven articles were selected based on the inclusion of: (a) the perspectives of preservice special education interns, (b) the impact of their coursework, (c) the impact of various relationships within their clinical internship experience, and (d) interns’ perspective about special education teaching practices and strategies. All of the studies included preservice special education interns as the participants. However, each of the studies included interns from various specializations in a special education undergraduate or graduate program including: Early Childhood Special Education (Hanline, 2010; Recchia & Puig, 2011), Mental Retardation (Ergenekon et al., 2008), Learning Behavior Specialist (O’Brian et al., 2007), or simply Special Education (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Leko & Brownell, 2011).
Table 3

*Seven Studies Exploring Teacher Intern Perspectives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>N/Preparation Program</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Key Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanline (2010)</td>
<td>To understand the nature of the impact of field experiences on ECSE preservice teachers’ perceptions of ECSE practices.</td>
<td>15/Graduate Early Childhood</td>
<td>Weekly Reflective Journals, Observation Field Notes, Field Experience Evaluations</td>
<td>Using the direct and indirect services strands of the Division of early Childhood (DEC) recommended practices in early intervention/ECSE: Critical events coded into 3 key themes: 1. child-focused practices strand 2. assessment strand 3. family-based practices strand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recchia &amp; Puig (2011)</td>
<td>1) How do preservice students describe their experiences in segregated early childhood special education classrooms? 2) What are the implications of these experiences for teacher education in early</td>
<td>5/Graduate Early Childhood</td>
<td>Reflective Journals</td>
<td>1) Description of experiences into 5 themes: a) Initial Discomfort in the Self-contained Setting b) Levels of collaboration c) Implementation of Curricular Approaches d) Behavior Management Approaches e) Opportunities to experience the effects of “special education protocols” (i.e. labels and terminology, value on individual assessment through IEPS, appropriateness of the classroom settings) 2) Implications: a) the self-contained placements provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
childhood special education?

b) University Supervisors could help students with difficulties understanding discrepancies between university philosophy and the classroom emphasis on direct instruction and behavioral control.

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**Ergenekon, Ozen, Batu (2008)**

1) What were the opinions of teacher candidates about the practicum process?

2) What were the opinions of teacher candidates about the practicum lecturers?

3) What were the suggestions of practicum students regarding the practicum courses?

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1) How do preservice teachers describe their relationship with their cooperating teacher?

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1) Participants experienced teaching responsibilities, learned to communicate with students, and wanted more practical experiences.

2) Participants felt supported and were given sufficient feedback from the practicum lecturers, but wanted more positive feedback.

3) Participants suggested that the practicum lecturers (university supervisor) should have fewer students. Also, the lecturers should observe students more often and give more positive feedback.
teachers during their initial field experience?  

2) How do preservice teachers describe their roles with their cooperating teachers during their initial field experience?  

3) How do cooperating teachers describe their roles with their preservice teachers during the initial field experience?  

Cook (2007) On what do student teachers in special education rely when making instructional decisions during their student teaching?  

| Part 1: 6/Undergraduate Special Education | Part 1: Focus Group | 3 primary influences; 1) cooperating teacher, 2) previous work experience, 3) university coursework |
| Part 2: 51/Undergraduate Special Education | Part 2: Survey |  

2. The roles of the preservice teacher were described as observer, teacher assistant, teacher, and reflective practitioner  

3. Roles of the cooperating teacher: affective coaching, and cognitive coaching  

### Teachers Reflective Logs

2. The roles of the preservice teacher were described as observer, teacher assistant, teacher, and reflective practitioner  

3. Roles of the cooperating teacher: affective coaching, and cognitive coaching
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leko &amp; Brownell (2011)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What are the individual and contextual influences on special education preservice teachers’ appropriation of pedagogical tools in reading for students with disabilities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/Graduate Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Collaborating Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Reading methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Field Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1) 4 Core Concepts influenced the appropriation of pedagogical reading tools: |
| a) Opportunities to Appropriate Knowledge in Practice |
| b) Personal Qualities |
| c) Motivation for Knowledge Assimilation |
| d) Access to Knowledge |

| 2) 3 Activity Systems: |
| a) Individual |
| b) University |
| c) Practicum |

2) How do these influences impact the extent to which special education preservice teachers appropriate evidence-based practices in reading for students with disabilities?
The following discussion of each study is based on the student intern specialization area of licensure. Then, culminating themes gleaned from the studies will be discussed.

**Seven Studies Discussion**

**Early Childhood Special Education Specialization**

Hanline’s (2010) study involved preservice interns preparing for their Master’s and initial license in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). The participants included fifteen preservice ECSE teacher candidates (i.e., interns) participating in a special education initial teacher certification program from a state university. The purpose of the study was for the participants to identify events in their teacher preparation field experiences that influenced their thinking relative to Early Childhood Special Education practices. Each participant was completing a field experience placement in one of seven preschool settings with typically developing and at risk students, along with students with developmental delays. Three data sources were included in the study: (1) the preservice teachers’ weekly reflective journals, (2) the preservice teachers’ overall evaluations of the field experience, (3) and the observation notes by the University Supervisors of the preservice teachers’ performance. The experiences that were described in these three document data sources were coded by the researcher into one of the five direct services strands of the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) recommended practices in early intervention/ECSE (i.e., assessment, child-focused practices, family-based practices, interdisciplinary models, technology applications) or into one of the two
indirect supports strands (i.e., policies, procedures, system change, and personnel preparation).

Key results from this study suggested that preservice teachers were influenced by the opportunity to see children respond to their use of child-focused practices, to observe Cooperating Teachers use effective assessment procedures, and to engage with families. Specifically, preservice teachers experienced and observed the implementation of child-focused best practices, recognizing “when their behaviors positively affected a particular child” and “when cooperating teachers were using effective intervention techniques” (Hanline, 2010, p. 347). Thus, observing the positive effects of employing child-focused best practices may positively be reflected in their own teaching.

Another example noted from their field experiences was that preservice teachers were able to recognize “the application of best practice in conducting ongoing assessments of children within the typical activities of preschool” (Hanline, 2010, p. 247). The preservice teachers reportedly admired their Cooperating Teachers’ abilities to use effective assessment procedures and were, in turn, anxious to develop these within their own teaching practices.

Further, preservice teachers recognized that “best practice required services to be family centered and that early education would be most effective with family involvement” (Hanline, 2010, p. 348). Although their experiences with unresponsive parents were frustrating at times, they valued the importance of this relationship.

When considering the key results from this study (Hanline, 2010), one can surmise that when given the opportunity to observe their Cooperating Teachers model
effective practices with early childhood students with disabilities, the preservice intern will more likely incorporate these practices into their repertoire of instructional practices. Thus, opportunities to use effective practices and to see effective practices being modeled is an influential factor that can shape the learning and practice of special education interns.

The second study with teacher candidates (i.e., student interns) seeking licensure in early childhood teacher preparation programs was a study by Recchia and Puig (2011). This qualitative study explored the potential challenges and learning opportunities that field experiences in ECSE self-contained settings (i.e., students with intellectual disabilities, language delay, learning disabilities, pervasive developmental disorder, sensory impairment) provided for ECSE student interns. Using reflective journals as the primary data source, five preservice Masters’ level ECSE interns were encouraged to express their “authentic feelings about their experiences” in their weekly reflective journals. The course instructors responded to the student interns’ weekly journals and encouraged self-reflection. Data analysis was conducted using open-coding. The researchers’ primary purpose was to understand the challenges and inspirations that student interns gained from the self-contained field experiences.

According to the researchers (Recchia & Puig, 2011), the reflective journals presented challenges and insights experienced by the participants. They detailed their day-to-day experiences and their interactions and relationships with their students. Additionally, Recchia and Puig gleaned an understanding of how the participants made connections between their course content and the experiences during the field experience.
First, participants identified a strong initial discomfort for working with students with disabilities. Secondly, participants recognized the importance of collaboration in self-contained settings. Specifically, they identified the critical nature of collaboration. For example, a participant expressed her understanding of the value of collaboration by stating that “collaboration between the adults in the classroom is also an important component of a better learning environment for the children” (Recchia & Puig, 2011, p. 139). The participants also reflected on their role as a member of a team and learning from different perspectives. For example, during the field experience, they reported their desire to be part of the classroom team, as they had seen modeled by the various professionals who frequented the classrooms (i.e., speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist). Thirdly, results gleaned from the reflective journals was the idea that different curricular approaches to teaching students with disabilities were presented within the context of the self-contained settings.

Fourth, the choices that were made pertaining to behavior management strategies were reflected in the participants’ journal entries. Three subthemes were described: 1) being respected as “real teachers” and finding their own voices, 2) responding to complex and diverse behavioral needs, and 3) reflecting upon discomfort with the use of harsh interventions (Recchia & Puig, 2011). For example, participants reflected on how to “differentiate to address the students’ individual behavioral needs” and “how children’s groupings can affect their behavior” (p. 144).

Finally, Recchia and Puig (2011) recognized within their study of preservice ECSE student interns was the impact that the “special education protocols” had on the
mindsets of student interns. “Special education protocols” referred to the procedures of special education in a school/classroom setting, or the conventions, or code of special education. The “special education protocols” in this study included the use of labeling and terminology, the use of individual assessment information within the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), and the appropriateness of classroom settings. The authors explained that the participants “preparing to be special educators must be aware of and understand the implications of the diagnostic categories that are imposed on children with disabilities” (p. 147). Thus, the participants’ reflections seemed to indicate that the field experience was providing participants with the opportunity to gather foundational knowledge critical to their understanding of the students in their classrooms. Additionally, the participants’ use of the IEP (one of the special education protocols) as a planning document allowed the student interns to experience the IEP document as a learning tool.

Finally, Recchia and Puig (2011) explained that the participants in their study were given the opportunity to reflect on the appropriateness of the self-contained setting for some of their students with disabilities. According to the researchers, “as they [the participants] adopted the language and the culture embedded in their settings, they more firmly established their own identities within the field of early childhood special education examining observed practices” (p. 148). Thus, when given opportunities to collaborate and experience various instructional approaches, behavior management systems, and the relevant special education protocols prevalent in early childhood
education for students with disabilities, special education interns were able to merge their coursework and learning with practice during the field experience.

**Mental Retardation Specialization**

Ergenekon, Ozen, and Batu (2008) investigated the opinions and suggestions of twenty-eight teacher candidates enrolled in the Special Education Teacher Training Program for Children with Mental Retardation at Anadolu University about the practicum (teaching internship/field experience) process during their senior year. The participants shared their opinions through semi-structured interviews about the practicum process, the practicum lecturers (i.e. University Supervisors), and the aligned practicum courses.

The first key result of the qualitative analysis (Ergenekon et al., 2008) indicated that the participants in large part benefited from having an opportunity to develop an IEP and plan instructional programs for students with disabilities. The participants suggested that they preferred the content courses in their teacher preparation program during the first three years to be practical in nature, because they needed to use the behavior techniques and to develop programming in an authentic manner. The second key result suggested that the participants felt supported because they were given sufficient feedback from the practicum lecturers who, in this case, emulated University Supervisors. However, if the practicum lecturers had fewer students, they would be able to observe the student interns more often and, thus, provide more frequent feedback. The final key result indicated that longer practicum courses would be beneficial.

As suggested by Recchia and Pugh (2011) opportunities for the special education interns to use “special education protocols” such as IEPs during the field experience were
beneficial for those teacher candidates in Ergenekon et al.’s (2008) study, as well.
Likewise, collaboration and supportive relationships during the internship experience seemed to be key components for the learning of intern participants in this study.

**Learning Behavior Specialist Specialization**

O’Brien, Stoner, Appel, and House (2007) investigated the perspectives of preservice teachers and their cooperating school-based teachers during the initial field experience in a special education teacher preparation program at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study was to gather perspectives of preservice teachers and Cooperating Teachers with respect to their relationships during the initial field experience of the preservice teacher. Participants included nine pairs of preservice teachers and their Cooperating Teachers. Data included individual interviews with each participant, observations of conferences between the Cooperating Teachers and the preservice teachers, and document reviews of reflective journals completed by all participants.

O’Brian et al. (2007) uncovered three themes. Each of the themes strongly infused communication and trust between the teachers. The first theme was described as the “solid foundation” relationship built on communication and trust. According to the researchers, this relationship was “instrumental in affecting preservice teachers’ knowledge and performance development” (p. 269). According to the researchers, it was this connection between communication and trust that was interwoven throughout the positive relationships between the teachers. In fact, the lack of this “solid foundation” was suggested as being detrimental to the relationship between the participants.
The second theme described the developing roles of the preservice teacher as “observer, teacher assistant, teacher and reflective practitioner” (O’Brien, et al., 2007, p. 270). O’Brien et al. suggested that the reflective practitioner role was developed from the beginning of the field experience, due to the emphasis on reflective practice within the university special education curriculum. A primary emphasis was placed on reflective practice through the tools provided to the preservice teacher, such as the reflection logs. The other three roles were described as developing sequentially.

The final theme that surfaced through this investigation was the multi-faceted role of the Cooperating Teacher. Both affective and cognitive coaching roles were apparent to some degree with each of the nine pairs of preservice and Cooperating Teachers. Affective coaching was described as “collegiality, respect, and emotional support” that the Cooperating Teachers gave to the preservice teachers (O’Brien et al., 2007). Further, cognitive coaching included “direct instruction on teaching methods to the preservice teacher, feedback on preservice teacher performance, modeling of teaching, and explaining effective teaching practices” (p. 272). When these key elements of a solid foundation of communication and trust, a developing role of the preservice teacher, and affective and cognitive roles of the Cooperating Teacher were present, the results were the development of pedagogical knowledge and skillsets by the preservice teacher. This positive relationship influenced the knowledge and instructional practices acquired by the preservice intern during their clinical teaching experience.
Special Education Specialization

The last three studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Leko & Brownell, 2011) which were reviewed included teacher candidate participants who were enrolled in general special education programs at the undergraduate or graduate level. The study by Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, and Doone (2006) was developed to determine the extent to which teacher candidates linked their coursework with their field experiences. During the semester long study, University Supervisors taught courses for part of three days during the week, and then supervised the teacher candidates in the practicum setting for the second half of the day. Data was collected through group interviews at two times (beginning, middle) during the semester of the field experience, and individual questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the end of the semester. Results indicated that the participants made “concrete linkages between their course work and their field practicum experiences” (p. 30). In fact, 94% of the teacher candidates reported linkages between courses and their practicum experience. Even more importantly, the participants described linkages that evolved over the course of the semester. For example, the participant responses within the interviews indicated that “they made great strides in their ability to move from a passive to a more active role in making objective connections, appreciating positive aspects of their experience, and making constructive suggestions for the future” (p. 310). Results from this study suggest that for this teacher preparation program, special education interns could successfully link their coursework learning to their field experiences.
The second study involving participants in a general special education program was conducted by Cook in 2007. The purpose of this study was to answer the question, “On what do student teachers in special education rely when making instructional decisions during their student teaching?” (p. 121). Cook was investigating the sources of influence pertaining to the instructional decision making processes of student teachers. This researcher postulated that student teachers were influenced primarily by their Cooperating Teachers’ instructional practices, along with university coursework.

The study (Cook, 2007) was divided into two parts. The first part involved the reflections of a focus group of six student teachers pertaining to their instructional decision making practices. The participants for part one included six undergraduate seniors who were studying special education at a large university in the Midwestern United States. The results of the focus group revealed three primary influences of their decision making during the student teaching experience: the Cooperating Teacher, previous experience in the classroom, and university coursework. The first and foremost influential components of the student teaching experience was reportedly the Cooperating Teacher. Participants indicated the desire to emulate and defer to the practices of the Cooperating Teachers. Secondly, according to the participants, the previous work experience influenced their lesson planning and teaching style. Participants indicated that they referred to previous lessons that they had taught to guide them with their planning. Third, participants indicated their recall of learned coursework from a behavior management course in their preparation program. They relied on the coursework to
employ classroom management techniques and to make behavioral strategy decisions during their student teaching experience.

Using the factors that student teachers identified as influencing their practice during student teaching (i.e., cooperating teacher, university coursework, and previous experience), part two of this study was conducted. Part two of this study (Cook, 2007) was a participant survey targeting the five aspects of instructional decision making (i.e. planning, teaching style, teaching methods, behavior management, and handling of a difficult moment) and the three potential sources that influenced these types of decisions. The survey was given to 51 student teachers (not including the participants from the focus group) from the same university.

Survey results indicated consistency with the focus group results. The Cooperating Teacher was the most influential factor in the student teachers’ decision making practices. The researcher postulated that student teachers may “place significant value in the teaching experience that they lack and that is personified in their cooperating teacher” (p. 125). Further, previous work experience was rated as more influential than coursework in the instructional area of teaching style and handling of a difficult moment. Cook (2007) also surmised from the data that if a prior instructional strategy was successful for a student teacher, he or she was more likely to use this strategy in future planning. Additionally, in both the focus group and the survey, university coursework in the area of behavior management was cited as being most influential with respect to the decision making practices concerning classroom management and behavior strategies of the student teachers. Cook postulated that this area may be “a potential power of high
quality university instruction that incorporates application through field experiences” (p. 126). Results of this study support the findings by O’Brian et al. (2007) in that Cooperating Teachers are one of the most influential factors of the special education preservice teachers.

The final study with participants in special education specialization areas was a study by Leko and Brownell (2011). This study examined the various influences on special education preservice teachers’ appropriation of pedagogical tools for teaching reading. Recognizing the complexity of how preservice teachers learn pedagogy and educational practices, the authors used Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia’s (1999) activity theory framework, referring to appropriation as “adopting a pedagogical tool” (p. 231). Activity learning theory, more so used in general education teacher preparation (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009), considers the individual students’ experiences, student beliefs, interactions with the preparation program’s coursework, and the various contextual influences that come into play when teaching. Therefore, in order to determine the individual and contextual influences on the interns’ appropriation of pedagogical tools for reading in a semester long internship, data sources included not only interviews but video-taped observations of the preservice participants at the beginning, middle and end of the practicum semester, document reviews of field notes and artifacts, participant concept maps about reading instruction, an open-ended survey, and the reading methods course syllabi. Through interviews, Leko and Brownell gathered perspectives from six preservice teachers during their practicum working with students with high-incidence disabilities, the six
corresponding Cooperating Teachers, the five reading methods course instructors, and three field supervisors. The six preservice participants were paired with veteran Cooperating Teachers who were considered to engage in high quality instructional reading practices.

Results indicated that when given opportunities to acquire and apply knowledge of reading strategies, preservice special education teachers were able to access the knowledge and experiences necessary to appropriate reading strategies with success. For example, three of the participants described their negative reaction to learning phonics in one of their reading courses. However, during their practicum they drew upon this knowledge when teaching struggling readers (Leko & Brownell, 2011). Leko and Brownell (2011) concluded that when the preservice special education participants were provided with “access to knowledge and tools necessary for teaching reading to students with disabilities, the confidence in their abilities as special educators ….and the opportunities to apply the knowledge and tools” (p. 247) guided their appropriation of reading strategies. Further, results indicated that the Cooperating Teacher was the primary influencing factor reported by the preservice teachers for giving the opportunity and the access of reading skills. Participants commented about the multiple opportunities given to them by the Cooperating Teachers to observe and practice systematic reading instruction.

**Themes from the Seven Studies**

The described seven studies included how preservice special education interns in varying teacher preparation programs perceived the internship experience and how this
experience was influenced by the preparation program’s coursework, the relationships
during their clinical internship experience, and/or their opportunity to employ special
education practices and strategies. Three central themes emerged from a synthesis of the
results (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko &
Brownell, 2011; O’Brien et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011). The themes included three
sources that influenced the decision making of preservice special education interns during
the teaching internship: collaboration/relationships, opportunities to use special education
protocols, and university coursework. Woven throughout each of these studies in various
and dynamics ways was the idea that a special education intern’s perspective of their
internship experience is influenced by the relationships encountered, the opportunities
given to special education educators to use special education instructional strategies, and
the opportunities (or lack of) to apply strategies from the coursework.

Collaboration/Relationships

The first theme, collaboration/relationships, was cited as a major influential factor
in four (Cook, 2007; Hanline, 2010; O’Brien et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011) out of
the seven studies reviewed. Three subthemes surfaced within this first theme:
Collaborating Teacher’s (CT) influence, levels of collaboration, and the rapport with
families. Within the first subtheme, Cook (2007) and O’Brien et al. (2011) found that the
relationship between the Collaborating Teacher and the intern was the basis for the
personal development of the intern and his/her confidence when making decisions and
using instructional strategies. The results from Cook’s study indicated that the student
teacher participants rated the influence of the CT as the “primary basis for their decision
making regarding lesson plan content and format, teaching style, behavior management techniques, and handling difficult moments” (Cook, p. 125). In fact, the participants in Cook’s study emphasized the CT’s role most often in their decision making processes above and beyond the information that they may have learned from university coursework.

O’Brian et al. (2007) described the relationship between the CT and the special education intern in terms of a critical trust relationship. The participants in O’Brian, et al.’s study indicated that there was the need to feel a sense of trust in taking risks when trying out various aspects of their teacher role. If the student interns felt this support and collegiality from their CT, this relationship became foundational in their skill development as a special educator.

The second and third subthemes (levels of collaboration and rapport with families) under the collaboration/relationships theme were predominantly evident in the two studies (Hanline, 2010; Recchia & Puig, 2011) that investigated the perspectives of preservice preschool or early childhood special education interns within their internship experiences. Both studies investigated collaborative relationships, yet, looked at the relationships through different lenses. The participants in Recchia and Puig’s (2011) study wrote reflections about their collaborative relationships in the self-contained internship settings. These student teachers indicated that collaboration seemed to be present within different levels of association. For example, the special education participants indicated that the collaborative relationships allowed them to be a part of a team and to be able to experience learning from different perspectives. Additionally,
Recchia and Puig indicated that collaboration also uncovered “discrepancies between what they learned in their coursework and what they were experiencing” (p. 140) in their internship settings.

On the other hand, the third collaborative subtheme, the rapport with families, was evident in the results of the study conducted by Hanline (2010). Hanline discovered that the preservice student interns were impacted by the collaborative relationships experienced with the preschool families of their students. The participants stated that they had respect and concern for families, yet were exasperated when parents did not seem to be involved in their child’s education. Hanline specifically emphasized the frustration of the preservice interns by stating that, “Preservice teachers were torn between recognizing the difficulties of parenting a young child with disabilities and their desire for parents to be involved in their child’s education” (p. 348).

**Opportunities to Use Special Education Protocols**

The second theme that surfaced as influencing preservice interns during their internship experience was the opportunities to use special education protocols ensconced in the experiences of the preservice special education participants. Within these studies, special education protocols referred to the various key elements particular to special education (i.e., assessment, labeling, IEP use and development, adapting curriculum to meet student needs, etc.). The two studies pertaining to preschool or early childhood preservice interns’ perspectives of their internship experiences (Hanline, 2010; Recchia & Puig, 2011) addressed this theme specifically. Within the results of both studies, student interns addressed the ideas that they needed to pay particular attention to how
they adapted curriculum for student success, how what they learned in courses about
curriculum approaches matched their current setting, and how to use appropriate
assessment procedures for their specific students. Opportunities presented themselves
during their experiences that allowed the interns to practice adapting curriculum and
practice assessment processes that were integral in special education classroom
procedures.

Specific educational protocols were prevalent in the experiences shared by the
preservice participants in Recchia and Puig’s (2011) study. The participants reflected
upon their need to develop skills to balance the structure of the curriculum while being
flexible to adapt to the needs of diverse learners, through individual assessment
procedures. This knowledge base also led to participants feeling the need to learn as
much as they could about their students and using the IEP as a valuable resource.
Adapting curriculum, using assessment, and using the IEP as a resource tool were all
special education protocols that were integral skillsets within the special education
teachers’ practice.

**University Coursework**

A third influential factor on special education interns’ perspectives and
development during their internship experience was the interns’ coursework. Five
(Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko &
Brownell, 2011) of the seven studies discussed the impact of university coursework on
the perspectives of the preservice interns. In particular, the results of these studies
emphasized the importance of considering how the alignment of the theoretical aspects of
the courses were realized in the practical experiences of the interns in their internship experience. Hanline (2010) and Ergenekon et al. (2008) discovered through their investigations that special education interns not only learned more effectively through targeted experiences carefully developed to enhance their knowledge base of effective evidence-based strategies learned in preservice coursework, but also helped to enhance commitment when using these strategies. Cook (2007) capitalized on the idea of alignment of university coursework and the choice of effective CTs by stating that, “placement during student teaching with an effective cooperating teacher is aligned with and complements university coursework steeped in evidence-based practices, resulting in knowledge base that is founded on both theory and experience, on which new teachers can effectively draw throughout their careers” (p. 126).

Leko and Brownell (2011) further emphasized the critical aspect of alignment of coursework and the internship experience in their study, through the investigation of how and why preservice special education teachers acquired pedagogical tools for teaching reading. Through investigating the perspectives of the participants through interviews, Leko and Brownell’s results indicated that when the preservice interns were placed in an internship experience that aligned with university coursework, the interns shared that they were able to acquire pedagogical tools for teaching reading more effectively. Thus, “pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their university courses and course instructors interacted with opportunities to appropriate knowledge in their practicum, impacting the extent to which they appropriated conceptual and practical skills” (p. 246).
To specifically investigate the linkage or alignment between coursework and internship experiences, Allsopp et al. (2006) captured preservice teachers’ perspectives of how they made meaning of their experiences at three different points in time across the internship experience. Results suggested that interns linked their coursework knowledge to their internship in a developmental way. At the beginning of the experience, interns anticipated and expected experiences to be linked to their courses. In the middle of the experience, interns critiqued the linkage, either positively or negatively. Then, at the end of the experience, 94% of the interns indicated the noticeable linkages that existed between coursework and internship experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**

When preservice special education interns begin their teaching internship experience, they are influenced by the university-based supervisor assigned to them and the school-based Cooperating Teacher. Additionally, special education interns are influenced by their background knowledge including acquired pedagogical skills, coursework, and/or their own personal experiences or attributes. Each of these influences (i.e., University Supervisor, Cooperating Teacher, personal experiences or attributes, coursework) impact an interns’ teaching internship experience. Grossman et al. (1999) suggest that the activity theory can serve as a framework to capture how interns make instructional decisions in the classroom and practice their pedagogical tools during the clinical internship experience.

Activity theory is predicated upon the idea that a person’s decision making processes are developed by participating in various environments or settings (Grossman
et al, 1999; Valencia et al., 2009). Grossman et al. (1999) explained further that teacher preparation programs are composed of:

A number of distinct activity settings, including university coursework and the specific classes that make up the programs curriculum; field experiences, including initial observations as well as full–time student teaching; supervision; and the overall program, including the ways in which students are admitted and organized and the ways in which all participants relate to one another. (p. 11)

Within the clinical internship experience, Grossman et al. (1999) suggested that, in addition to the university settings, preservice teacher interns are simultaneously exposed to teaching practices within the school settings of their internship. These school settings and their accompanying social structures may or may not be congruent with the university practices and goals that have been promoted for the special education interns. Additionally, within the social structure of these settings are the relationships (i.e., Cooperating Teacher, school staff, University Supervisor) that contribute to the culture and values of each of the settings. If we consider the internship school settings, the university, and the interns’ personal backgrounds as the various “settings” that may impact or influence the experiences that interns may have throughout their internship, then activity theory is “useful for understanding the process of learning to teach” and for understanding “how teachers choose pedagogical tools to inform and conduct their teaching” (Grossman et al., 1999, p. 4). In other words, context affects a teacher’s learning of various pedagogical tools and knowledge (Leko & Brownell, 2011).
In addition to the influences of “settings”, one other key concept of activity theory is the notion of *appropriation* of pedagogical tools. According to Grossman et al. (1999), “appropriation refers to the process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments (e.g., schools, preservice programs), and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices (e.g., using phonics to teach reading)” (p. 15). Specifically, appropriation refers to how and to what extent preservice interns acquire the pedagogical tools they use in their teaching practices. Activity theorists posit that the social context of the learning experience and the individual characteristics of the learner are key factors influencing the process of appropriation of pedagogical tools.

Researchers (Grossman et al., 1999; Leko & Brownell, 2011; Valencia et al., 2009) have found that the social context of the learning environment may hinder or promote the opportunities to experience a pedagogical tool. Whether an intern does or does not have the opportunity to appropriate tools is many times dependent upon the school setting and/or the beliefs of the Cooperating Teacher or even the school culture. The social context of a setting includes how and by whom a tool is or is not used (Grossman et al., 1999).

Activity theory suggests that student teaching and the clinical internship process is a “collective” activity (Valencia et al., 2009). The social settings of the university (i.e., coursework) and participants (i.e., University Supervisor) and the school internship setting (i.e., school) and participants (i.e., Cooperating Teacher, other staff, and students) interact within a special education intern’s clinical internship experience to provide a
learning environment specific to the intern. How and why the intern appropriates various pedagogical tools for learning could be determined by a variety of converging settings within the clinical internship experience. The influencing factors within these social settings is the focus of this study.

**Research Need**

**General Special Education Community**

The clinical internship experience has been touted to be one of the most important components of teacher preparation programs (Conderman et al., 2005). This is usually the culminating activity of a preservice teacher’s preparation. However, how beneficial and efficacious this experience is seems to be a current concern for teacher training programs in the nation. With the shift in focus from emphasizing the development of an adequate supply of special education personnel to the need for training highly-qualified personnel for the high-incidence population of students with disabilities, there is a renewed interest for studying high quality teacher preparation programs (Brownell et al., 2010; Coggshall et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2011; Kleinhammer-Tramill et al., 2010; Sindelar et al., 2010). Specifically, researchers have indicated that the clinical internship experience is emphatically one of the most important experiences and could also “influence a teacher’s decision to remain in the field” (Conderman et al., 2005, p. 6).

Yet, researchers in the field of special education teacher preparation have indicated a paucity of research in this area of teacher preparation (Coggshall et al., 2012; Conderman et al., 2005; Sindelar et al., 2010). Not only is there a dearth of research, but as current research has uncovered, there is also a variety of national teacher education
organizations (i.e., NCTQ, NCATE, AACTE, ATE) who have developed standards for teacher preparation programs. This lack of cohesion was further emphasized by the Blue Ribbon Panel (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), indicating the elusiveness of the terrain of effective teacher preparation programs. Even with this scarcity of research, the previous literature review elucidated sources of influence within the clinical internship experience.

Central to the focus of this literature review were the themes culled from the synthesis of the results of seven research studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011), pertaining to sources of influence for the special education interns during their clinical teaching experiences. Collaboration/relationships, opportunities to use special education protocols, and university coursework were the three themes that served as the primary sources of influence for special education intern participants across the seven studies.

The third theme, university coursework, was reported the most frequently (5 out of 7 studies) as an influence on preservice interns’ learning and practices. Results of these studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011) emphasized the importance of aligning the coursework with the practical field-based experiences of preservice interns. Preservice interns reportedly perceived opportunities to observe and utilize the skillsets taught within teacher preparation programs as beneficial. As delineated, only five studies within this literature review of special education teacher preparation programs addressed the alignment of special
education teacher preparation coursework with the clinical internship experience of preservice interns. This research gap is the juncture at which future research needs to be targeted. Thus, this study begins to investigate the factors influencing the appropriation of coursework within the clinical internship setting.

**Specific University Community**

As with most professions, prior knowledge and experience influences learning and performance. In special education teacher education, research (Conderman et al., 2005; Cook, 2007; Hanline, 2010; O’Brien et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011) has suggested that having opportunities for collaboration and supportive relationships, and using special education protocols (Hanline, 2010; Recchia & Puig, 2011) in authentic environments, influence the learning of preservice interns during their clinical internship experience. Research (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011) has also recognized that coursework from teacher preparation programs contributes largely to teacher learning, as well. However, the relationship between coursework in a teacher preparation program and what preservice interns learn is not unidirectional (Leko & Brownell, 2011). In fact, preparing teachers to understand pedagogical concepts and to provide effective instructional practices is certainly complex. For example, individuals have set beliefs, competing philosophies, and varied experiences (Grossman et al., 1999). Then, these individual factors and the coursework in teacher preparation programs typically interact during the core component of teacher preparation programs – the culminating clinical internship experience (Grossman et al., 1999; Leko & Brownell, 2011; Valencia et al., 2009). Finally, the
contextual situation of the internship placement, including the individuals in that setting, plays another role in the interaction (Grossman et al., 1999; Valencia et al., 2009). In turn, the clinical internship experience is an exercise in experiential learning that is unique for every individual. Teacher preparation programs can design these experiences to maximize opportunities, but what do preservice special education interns learn from these situations and how do they perceive this experience influencing their own development as a special educator?

The seven studies describing the perspectives of special education interns were specific to a relatively small sample of individuals from varying teacher preparation programs. These teacher preparation programs had varying designs, provided a variety of teacher licensures, and were inclusive of courses largely regulated from state to state. Thus, clinical internship experiences, though conceptually similar across preparation programs, were unique to the contexts in which they were situated. Thus, examining particular teacher preparation programs individually is warranted.

Prior to this study at George Mason University, the University Supervisor’s perspective of the clinical internship experience was evaluated through a survey and focus group of University Supervisors (McElwee & Regan, 2013). Positive aspects highlighted by the University Supervisors of the internship experience included strong collaboration between the University Supervisors and the Cooperating Teachers, effective Cooperating Teachers, and high quality interns. However, one of the concerns by the researchers that surfaced through the investigations was a disconnect between what University Supervisors perceived were best practices within the special education
classroom setting and what special education interns were taught within the content of the university courses. This disconnect led to a question of the validity of supervision philosophies and practices at the university. To gain a better understanding of the linkage between coursework and the effectiveness of the culminating internship experiences, this study will turn to another voice that is critical to hear within the clinical internship process – the voice of the special education student interns. Since these individuals are the targeted population of the final clinical internship experience, it would seem that listening to and understanding their perspectives of *how*, *when*, or *why* they use or do not use coursework to improve their pedagogical skills during their final clinical experiences would be beneficial to the improvement of the special education teacher preparation program.

When developing the research questions for this investigation, the researcher wanted to highlight the perspectives of the intern participants so as to investigate the reasons behind *how*, *when* and *why* the participants did or did not use the pedagogical skills taught to them in their coursework. The contextual tenets of activity theory (Grossman et al., 1999; Valencia et al., 2009), the three themes (i.e., collaboration/relationships, opportunities to use special education protocols, and university coursework) gleaned from the aforementioned seven studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011), and the recent push to heighten the rigor of the clinical practice in teacher preparation programs (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013a) have all been considered in the development of the research
questions. As a result, the following research questions were developed to steer this investigation:

1. How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

2. How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

3. How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences?
Chapter Three

This chapter describes the methods to be used in this current study, including the design of the study, participants, setting, data sources, and procedures. In addition, data analysis procedures are described. This chapter concludes with a description of the methods used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness; i.e., peer debriefing, member checking, data triangulation, audit trail, researcher subjectivity and reactivity.

Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate our understanding of the factors during the clinical internship experience that influence special education preservice teachers to appropriate their coursework and/or to make instructional decisions during the clinical internship experience. Therefore, this study used qualitative methods to investigate the perspectives of preservice special education interns who have completed at least 5 classes (15 credits) in their graduate teacher preparation program and were enrolled and close to completing their clinical internship experiences at one university. Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson (2010) suggested that in order to investigate whether special education teachers have acquired the instructional strategies necessary to be highly qualified, it is important to recognize how such expertise is developed and experienced. Leko and Brownell (2011) further suggested that there are a myriad of personal and contextual factors that influence a teacher who is learning how to teach. Within this context, the use of qualitative methodology to investigate how special
education interns perceive their clinical teaching experience could lead to an understanding of how to improve the clinical internship process.

The following study involving university special education preservice interns had been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at George Mason University (See Appendix A). This qualitative investigation gathered data from the participants through semi-structured face-to-face interviews as primary data sources. In addition, secondary data sources included observations of three participants during their final clinical internship environments and document reviews of the final reflective papers and the final Clinical Evaluation Continuum (CEC) Rubric from all participants. The interviews focused primarily on the perspectives of the interns pertaining to how their coursework informed their teaching practices during their internship experiences. Additionally, the interviews investigated other factors that influenced or impacted their use of instructional strategies and the decisions they made during their internship experience. The information gathered during the observations focused on the planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and collaborative strategies observed and embedded in the coursework of the interns’ program of study. The researcher corroborated findings from the interviews by triangulating data drawn from the observations, student interns’ final paper reflections, and the comprehensive CEC evaluative rubric completed by the University Supervisor. These data sources will be further described in this chapter.
Setting and Site

University

This study took place at George Mason University, a public, northern Virginia university located fifteen miles from Washington, D.C. Within the 86 Master’s programs offered at George Mason University, the College of Education and Human Development includes the licensure programs for special education. The special education licensure is a graduate degree program, which includes the licensure for Students with Disabilities who Access the General Education Curriculum. The licensure program includes 33 credits and the master’s degree with licensure includes 39 credits. Table 4 describes the courses required in the Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum licensure program.

Table 4

Special Education plus Licensure Certificate General Curriculum Program Courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course No.</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 501</td>
<td>Introduction to Special Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Survey of current knowledge on individuals with disabilities within the context of human growth and development across the life span. Includes historical factors, legislation, etiology, characteristics, needs, educational strategies, assessment, and support services for individuals with disabilities ranging from mild and moderate to severe. Includes the impact of disabilities on academic, social, and emotional performances. Field experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Code</td>
<td>Course Title</td>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 540</td>
<td>Characteristics of Students w/ Disabilities who Access the General Education Curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Examines the characteristics of students with mild disabilities. Emphasis on etiology, contributing factors, conditions that affect learning, the challenges of identifying students with disabilities, and the need for academic, social, and emotional accommodations and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 502</td>
<td>Classroom Management and Applied Behavior Analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Explores how to identify, record, evaluate, and change social and academic behaviors of special and diverse populations. Explores theories of classroom management and various approaches to management including use of technological advances. Emphasizes developing classroom and individual behavior-management plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 503</td>
<td>Language Development and Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>In-depth coverage of reading instruction for students with special needs. Topics include language development and emergent literacy skills; reading subskills including auditory discrimination and phonemic awareness, decoding and word reading; reading comprehension; and use of technological advances in the teaching of reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 627</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Offers knowledge and experiential learning activities related to assessment of students with mild disabilities. Includes statistical and psychometric concepts in assessment. Addresses norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, curriculum-based, and informal assessment for instructional and placement decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSE 628</td>
<td>Elementary Reading, Curriculum &amp; Strategies for Students w/ Disabilities Who Access the General Education Curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Applies research on instructional approaches, in elementary curriculum for individuals with disabilities accessing general education curriculums. Includes curriculum/instructional strategies in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, cognitive strategies, study skills, attention/memory, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Secondary Curriculum & Strategies for Students w/Disabilities Who Access the General Education Curriculum

**Tok:** EDSE 629  
**Hours:** 3  
**Description:** Applies research on teacher effectiveness, accountability, and instructional approaches at the secondary level for individuals with mild disabilities. Includes instructional methods necessary for teaching reading, writing, math, and other content areas across the curriculum.

### Adapted Instructional Methods & Transition for Secondary Learners

**Tok:** EDSE 544  
**Hours:** 3  
**Description:** Provides strategies for teaching functional academics and social/life skills, facilitating the transition to postsecondary environments. Focuses on all aspects of transition and alternative assessments for secondary learners with disabilities. Provides professionals in special education, regular education, and related fields with knowledge and communications skills necessary for collaborative consultation and technical assistance to other educators and service providers.

### Consultation and Collaboration

**Tok:** EDSE 662  
**Hours:** 3  
**Description:** Supervised internships that apply university course work to instruction of children and their families in school and community settings.

### Internship in Special Education (2 experiences required)

**Tok:** EDSE 790  
**Hours:** Each are 3  
**Description:** Within the licensure program, there is a requirement for students to complete at least 150 hours (at least 75 direct hours and 75 indirect hours consulting/planning) of clinical internship for 3 credits. This 3-credit experience is a course referred to as EDSE 790, Internship in Special Education. There is a total of 6 credits required for traditional preservice teachers who typically enroll in two, 3-credit internships. One of these internships is a placement at the elementary level and the second internship is at the secondary level working with students with disabilities who access the general curriculum. Each of the 3-credit experiences is structured to last 8 weeks for a total of 16
weeks in the field. At the completion of each internship experience, the intern earns a pass or fail grade.

Overall at George Mason University, there are approximately 700 graduates annually within the program with 17 faculty and approximately 40 adjuncts. Specifically within the internship program, there are approximately 14-25 interns per semester placed in internships, and a University Supervisor (US) is assigned to 4-6 of these interns. Approximately 25% of the interns are preservice interns; however, this varies across semesters. The remainder of the interns are inservice interns placed in cohorts of students. Cohorts are groups of approximately 20 individuals in the teaching profession within a specific school district who are pursuing licensure. At the time of this study, there were approximately 4 full-time faculty who served as University Supervisors and approximately 15 adjunct instructors, who had supervised interns in recent semesters. Adjunct instructors refers to course instructors who are employed to teach courses on a part-time basis.

**EDSE 790**

EDSE 790 is the internship and culminating experience in the state approved teacher licensure programs. It provides opportunities for extended practice teaching under the guidance of Cooperating Teachers (from the internship school) and the University Supervisor (from the university). It is an integral part of an intern’s coursework and provides the most significant opportunity to apply his/her new knowledge, skills and dispositions. Interns are expected to demonstrate competencies in the areas of human relations, organization and preparation for instruction, assessment, self-monitoring,
communication skills, classroom management, content knowledge, and instruction for individuals and groups, as per the Special Education Internship Handbook (2015-16).

Within the context of the internship, there are specific roles and responsibilities for the intern, the Cooperating Teacher (CT), and the University Supervisor (US). Table 5 describes the roles and responsibilities of these players in the internship process.

Table 5

*Responsibilities of the University Internship Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Student Intern</td>
<td>1. Maintain an Internship Notebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Log of hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Internship evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Internship Checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Action Items: The intern should complete the following.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Attend an initial orientation session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Participate in internship meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Review the Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Review internship checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Maintain copies of weekly reports completed by CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Complete self-ratings of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Complete the evaluation forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Arrange conference with CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Assist with teacher duties such as lunch duty, bus duty, etc…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Assume individual, small group, and whole group responsibilities of the CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cooperating Teacher</td>
<td>1. Specifies overall goals and specific objectives of the school system or agency and how they relate to the intern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Reviews and helps intern complete Internship Planning Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Assists the intern in meeting school system, university, and classroom requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Provides an effective role model of research-based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teaching
5. Provides weekly written feedback to the intern
6. Conducts telephone or in-person conferences with the University Supervisor to review intern’s progress
7. Includes intern in most teaching duties (e.g., IEP conferences, parent conferences, phone calls, intervention team/child study team, staff meetings, professional development)
8. Supports intern through encouragement, guidance, and professionalism

The University Supervisor
1. Serves as a liaison between University and the school/agency
2. Provides intern with syllabus and assignments
3. Completes 3 observations with written summary
4. Maintains contact with intern throughout the internship
5. Maintains regular contact with the cooperating school, agency official and Cooperating Teacher
6. Delineates requirements in conjunction with Cooperating Teacher
7. Provides feedback to interns and the Cooperating Teacher
8. Reports unsatisfactory intern performance to the Clinical Practice Specialist
9. Completes the Clinical evaluation Continuum Rubric
10. Uploads scores of the Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric to TaskStream
11. Provides the intern with a copy of the Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric
12. Collects and returns all forms to the Clinical Practice Specialist

*Note.* Paraphrased from the Special Education Internship Handbook (2015-2016)

**Interviews and Observation Settings**

Interviews were held at mutually agreed upon locations between the participants and the researcher. These locations included a building on the university campus, the participant home, and the internship school site. Observations took place at the school site of the participants’ final internship experience. All documents were collected directly
from each participant through electronic mail (i.e., email) or personal exchange for the document reviews. Data sources are further described in this chapter.

**Participants and Internship Settings**

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants from the spring 2014 list of special education preservice interns, generated by the Clinical Practice Specialist in the College of Education and Human Development at the university. Special education inservice interns (i.e., graduate students employed in the teaching profession) were excluded from the participant sample. Students who currently had a teaching position working with students with disabilities accessing the general education curriculum were purposely excluded from the sample in order to minimize the influences that teachers experience in day-to-day classroom/school activities. Although valuable, the variability of individual classroom/teaching experiences and additional contextual settings to capture would be less comparable for individuals who were not actively in classroom settings.

After students completed an internal application for their internship and provided all of the necessary test scores (e.g., reading for Virginia Educators exam score; PRAXIS tests scores), they were listed and a placement was coordinated with a local school district by the Clinical Practice Specialist on campus. The spring 2014 list initially consisted of 25 students who enrolled in the EDSE 790 internship. Two recruitment emails were sent to 18 students who were considered preservice interns. From this list, 7 interns responded positively to the request to participate in this study. Personal phone calls were placed by the researcher to confirm participation. During the phone call, one of the seven interns declined to participate. Thus, 6 preservice interns positively confirmed
their participation in this study. In addition, at least two emails and a follow-up phone call were completed by the researcher to coordinate the interviews and observations.

More specifically, when considering possible participants, the criterion for the sampling of participants for this investigation included (a) preservice interns enrolled in the EDSE 790 course (Internship in Special Education) who (b) provided service to students with disabilities in the general education curriculum (i.e., learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, autism), (c) had at least 15 credits completed towards their license, and who (d) were completing the elementary and/or secondary final clinical internship placements during the spring or summer 2014 semesters. Additionally, all participants were completing the Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum license. Further, preservice interns were selected due to their lack of job experience in the field of special education public education. Tables 6 and 7 describe the participant demographics and their internship placements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Degrees Held/in Progress</th>
<th>Previous Job(s)</th>
<th>Current Employment</th>
<th>License in Progress</th>
<th>Classes Completed in Order Taken</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. in Psychology/M.Ed. in Special Education</td>
<td>ABA Therapist</td>
<td>ABA Therapist</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum K-12</td>
<td>EDSE 540, 503, 502, 501, 662, 517, 790, 628, 627, 590, 790</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. in Psychology/M.Ed in Special Education</td>
<td>Preschool Assistant Teacher</td>
<td>Preschool Assistant Teacher</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum K-12</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. in Anthropology and Sociology; M.Ed. in Special Education</td>
<td>Swim Coach</td>
<td>Swim Coach</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum K-12</td>
<td>EDSE 503, 502, 501, 627, 544, 540, 517, 790, 629, 590, 790</td>
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<td>No.</td>
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<td>Courses</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.S. in Health Systems/M.Ed. in Special Education</td>
<td>Volunteer with Mason Life Program</td>
<td>Employment Coordinator of the Mason Life Program at George Mason University</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum K-12</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>B.A. in English M.A. in English M.Ed. in Special Education</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor Instructional Assistant Tutor for students at risk Long-term substitute teacher</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities Accessing the General Curriculum K-12</td>
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<td>EDSE 501, 540, 502, 662, 544, 627, 503, 790, 629, 517, 790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EDSE 501, 502, 540, 504, 662, 544, 627, 503, 790, 629, 517, 790
Table 7

*Participant Internship Placements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Level</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Class Type</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Cooperating Teacher Type</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Level</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Class Type</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Internship Cooperating Teacher Type</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; grade inclusion / 2 classrooms</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Middle School (Secondary)</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade Math / 2 inclusion / 2 self-contained</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High School (Secondary)</td>
<td>Math self-Contained</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade inclusion</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School (Secondary)</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade inclusion English / 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade self-contained</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Post Secondary On-the-Job Mason Life Program Elementary</td>
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<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; grade Inclusion classroom</td>
<td>General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade inclusion</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Middle School (Secondary)</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade co-taught, all subjects</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Middle School (Secondary)</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Language Arts, self-contained</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Elementary Summer School</td>
<td>Mostly 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; graders, American History</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant 1

Participant 1 was a Caucasian twenty-six year old female student with a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work (See Table 6). She was previously employed as a social worker, an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapist, and had experience as a substitute teacher. At the time of this study, Participant 1 was a full-time student at George Mason enrolled in the Masters of Education program in the Special Education program. Participant 1 stated that she had a personal desire to work with students with learning disabilities in a co-taught situation as a co-teacher.

Her first internship was completed in the fall of 2013 in two first grade general education classrooms at an elementary school (See Table 7). She was the special education student intern servicing five students with disabilities in one general education classroom and six students with disabilities in the other first grade classroom. She stated that most of her students were students identified as developmentally delayed. Additionally, she worked with other students with various disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, autism, or emotional disabilities). During the internship, Participant 1 described her primary responsibility as teaching reading to the first grade students, including teaching a Response to Intervention Tier 3 intervention program twice a day.

During her second internship placement in the spring 2014 semester, Participant 1 was the special education intern on a seventh grade team at a middle school (See Table 7). Participant 1 taught students in two co-taught classrooms during two periods in the mornings. There were four students with learning disabilities in one of the co-taught classrooms and five students with learning disabilities in the second co-taught classroom.
Additionally, Participant 1 was the special education student intern in two seventh grade self-contained math classes in the afternoons. Participant 1 indicated that there were five students with disabilities in the one self-contained classroom, and eleven students with disabilities in the other. She also shared that fourteen of these students were students with learning disabilities and two were students with autism. During the eighth period of each day, Participant 1 was the student intern in a math lab. During this time period, she acted as a math tutor to students who needed math support.

Participant 1 indicated that she worked with two University Supervisors, a different one for each of the internships. Additionally, each of the Cooperating Teachers during both internship placements was a special education teacher.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 was a twenty-five year old Caucasian female with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology (See Table 6). At the time of this study, Participant 2 was substituting in general and special education classrooms, while she was enrolled in the Masters of Education program in Special Education at George Mason University. She shared that previously she was employed as a Preschool Assistant Teacher and a nanny. Participant 2 also shared that she was disabled with a medical condition that impacted her stamina during the day. Participant 2 indicated that she believed her health condition contributed to her understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. Participant 2 also indicated that her preference was to teach math and she had no interest in teaching reading.
The first internship placement for Participant 2 was in a high school setting (See Table 7) during the fall of 2013. She was the special education intern in Algebra 1 self-contained classrooms. All of the high school students that Participant 2 worked with came to the small self-contained classroom for their core math instruction. Participant 2 indicated that during each of the Algebra 1 self-contained classes, there were six to eleven students with disabilities in attendance.

During the second internship, Participant 2 was in an elementary school (See Table 7) where she was the resource special education intern for first and second graders in the area of math. During each day, Participant 2 went into a first grade and a second grade general education classroom as the special education student intern, one time a day for math and one time a day for reading. She further explained that when she pulled the students into the self-contained setting to work with them, she worked with the students on math skills. Her CT worked with the students on reading skills, while she observed.

Participant 2 shared that her Cooperating Teachers in each of the internship placements were special education teachers. Further, she worked with the same US during each internship.

**Participant 3**

Participant 3 was a twenty-four year old Caucasian female whose undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree was a double major in Anthropology and Sociology (See Table 6). She was currently working on her Masters of Education in Special Education at George Mason University. Concurrently with being a full-time graduate student, Participant 3 was a swim coach and a substitute teacher. Participant 3 shared that she was
a person with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder, which prompted her to advocate for herself. She indicated that living with these medical conditions has given her an underlying understanding for the students with whom she worked. Further, Participant 3 came from a family of teachers who were instrumental in providing her exposure to the educational field. Participant 3 also stated that she had a personal interest in reading, which was the focus of her instruction in some of the classes during her first internship.

During the fall of 2013 Participant 3 completed her first internship in both an inclusive and a self-contained classroom setting in a high school (See Table 7). She was the special education student intern in two sections of eleventh grade English in the morning. Within the inclusive classrooms she provided special education services for six to eight students with disabilities. In the afternoons, she was the special education student intern in two self-contained sections of ninth grade biology. Within the self-contained biology classes she provided special education services for seven students in one class and twelve students in the other classroom. Participant 3 stated that all of the high school students that she worked with were students with learning disabilities or emotional disabilities.

For her second internship during the spring of 2014, Participant 3 was a special education student intern in a third grade general education inclusion classroom (See Table 7). Within this classroom of twenty students were six students with varying disabilities (i.e., autism, learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, attention deficit disorder). Participant 3 stated that she was responsible to teach the entire class when she taught lessons.
Participant 3 shared that during her first internship she had a male special education teacher as her CT. The CT for her second internship was a general education teacher with special education background, yet, no teaching experience in special education. This dichotomy seemed to be a critical point for Participant 3. She indicated that the special education CT understood the role of the special educator within both the inclusion and self-contained setting and was able to support her within this role.

As a general education teacher, her CT in her second internship provided the experiences that were related to her role as a general education teacher. Since the general education CT was responsible for teaching all of her students, her role was different than a special education teacher. Thus, Participant 3 was expected to teach whole group lessons in the general education setting. Further, Participant 3 shared that she had two different University Supervisors for her two different internships.

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 was a twenty-seven year old Caucasian male who had earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Systems Management and a Masters of Education degree in Special Education at George Mason University (See Table 6). He was currently finishing his Students with Disabilities Who Access the General Curriculum Licensure. His current employment was as the Employment Coordinator of the Mason Life Program at George Mason University. The Mason Life Program is a post-secondary program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who desire a university experience. Since his job is post-secondary, Participant 4 was considered a preservice special education intern. Further, the Students with Disabilities Who Access the General
Curriculum Licensure was a certification to teach in the K-12 public school systems. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation study, Participant 4 only shared his experiences during his second internship in a second grade classroom.

During the beginning of the spring 2014 semester, the second internship experience for Participant 4 was in a second grade general education classroom with twenty-nine students, five of whom had IEPs (See Table 7). The students with IEPs within this classroom were students with various disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, ADHD [attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder], Asperger’s disorder). As with Participant 3, Participant 4 was expected to teach all of the students in the classroom, when he was required to teach a lesson. His CT was a general education teacher with experience working with special education students. During his second internship, Participant 4 stated that he was proactive with his instructional activities and created opportunities to practice instructional strategies. Further, Participant 4 shared that his US was a veteran supervisor.

**Participant 5**

Participant 5 was a forty-five year old Caucasian female career switcher (See Table 6). She previously received her Masters of Arts in English and, at the time of the study, was currently working on her Masters of Education in Special Education at George Mason University. Her previous job experiences included working at a university in international education and international legal education. Her roles included being an adjunct professor at the same university. Other job experiences included tutoring students, a long-term substitute, and a teaching assistant for students with severe
disabilities. Participant 5 also shared that she had a son with Asperger’s Syndrome, which impacted her decision to work with students with disabilities.

Participant 5 shared that her first internship experience, during the first half of the spring 2014 semester, was in a third grade co-taught classroom with a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and a teacher assistant (See Table 7). Included in the classroom of twenty students were nine students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and emotional disabilities). Participant 5 indicated that she was given many opportunities to use instructional practices that were taught in her university courses.

The second internship experience during the second half of the spring 2014 semester for Participant 5 was in an eighth grade middle school co-taught inclusion program. Participant 5 worked with ten students with disabilities (i.e., emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, other health impaired) within each class during the day. All of the students were instructed in the general education setting, with assessments administered in the resource special education setting. Participant 5 shared that her role was to support her students within each of the classroom settings.

The CTs for Participant 5 during both internship experiences were special education teachers. Within both settings, Participant 5 felt that she was able to observe and be a part of strong collaborative teams. She felt that she was given many opportunities to practice strategies learned in her coursework. Further, Participant 5 shared that her US was the same for both internship experiences.
Participant 6

Participant 6 was a forty-three year old Caucasian female career switcher, who was retired from the Air Force (See Table 6). She had a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a Masters of Science degree in International Relations. She was enrolled in the Masters of Education program in Special Education at George Mason University at the time of the study. Participant 6 also shared that she has a child with autism, which has impacted her relations with students.

The first internship for Participant 6 in the spring of 2014 was in a Middle School (See Table 7) working with sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, emotionally disturbed, ADHD, other health impaired, autism). She worked with seven to sixteen students in the self-contained special education classroom for language arts and reading content areas. According to Participant 6, the reading level of the students was between the first and sixth grade level. Participant 6 shared that she taught mostly language arts with two classes of reading every day.

The second internship experience for Participant 6 was in an elementary summer private school setting for students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, ADHD). The curriculum for the summer school was based on American History. The teachers worked on reading comprehension and math skills through the American History curriculum. As observed in the observation, Participant 6 worked with 12 students with varying needs.

Participant 6 stated that both of her CTs were special education teachers. She also shared that she had the same US for both internship experiences.
Data Sources

Data was collected through several sources: 1) semi-structured interviews with preservice intern participants; 2) observations of the participants in their final internship settings; 3) document reviews of the interns’ final reflective paper(s), and (4) the final Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric completed by the University Supervisor for each participant. As the primary data source, all six participants were interviewed. Secondary data sources included observations and document reviews of the final reflective papers and the CEC Rubrics of the participants. Due to various internship circumstances (e.g., weather related cancellations, internship completed), three of the participants declined to have observations. Three out of the six participants were observed. All six participants provided the researcher with the final reflective paper for their final internship. Additionally, two of the six participants gave the researcher a copy of the final reflective paper for the first internship experience.

Table 8

*Participant Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>CEC Final Rubric – 2nd Internship</th>
<th>Final reflective paper 1st Internship</th>
<th>Final reflective paper 2nd Internship</th>
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</table>
The four participants who gave the researcher only the final reflective paper chose not to give the first paper for various reasons (i.e., did not have the first reflection paper, chose not to give the first reflection paper to the researcher). Table 8 indicates the data sources collected from each participant.

**Interviews**

Interviews are characterized as providing a way of generating empirical data by asking people to talk about their lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 3). “When we empower the respondent [i.e., participant] … in the interview encounter, we establish a place for the respondent’s [i.e., participant’s] own story to be heard …” (p. 20). In so doing, interviews allowed the special education interns to voice their perceptions about the internship experience. One interview was held with each participant to gather perceptions of how the context of the experience, the coursework, the relationships in that setting, and any other factors influenced the instructional decisions made by the participants. The interviews took approximately one hour and were held at a mutually agreed upon location. An interview protocol was used to initiate and guide the interview conversation (see Appendix B). The interview protocol was initially developed by considering the pedagogical areas incorporated in the Clinical Evaluation Continuum (CEC) rubric for intern evaluation and the corresponding courses that included the teaching strategies. During the dissertation proposal meeting, the dissertation committee members suggested revisions for the interview questions. Using these suggestions, the researcher amended the protocol to have eleven questions. The researcher audio recorded the interviews and took anecdotal notes during the interview session. Following the
interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings. A written transcript of the interviews was emailed to the interviewees to peruse and verify comments.

**Observations**

One observation was completed with three of the six participants. The observations took place within the public or private school setting of the internship placement, during an agreed upon day and time. According to Patton (2002), the purpose of observation is “to take the reader into the setting that was observed” (p. 23). The observations provided the researcher with the opportunity to validate statements about instructional strategies that were stated during each of the interviews. In addition, the information gathered during the observations focused on the planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and collaborative strategies observed and embedded in the coursework of the interns’ program of study. The observation protocol was initially developed by considering the pedagogical and behavioral areas incorporated in the CEC rubric for intern evaluation and the corresponding courses that included the instructional and behavioral teaching strategies. During the dissertation proposal meeting, the dissertation committee members suggested revisions for the observation protocol. Using these suggestions, the researcher amended the protocol. The observations of the participants’ teaching skills and strategies lasted about one hour each. Field notes of each observation were completed, using the observation protocol (See Appendix C). Following the on-site observation of the three participants (See Table 8) during relevant teaching activities, a written account of the observations was offered to each interviewee to read over and verify any observational accounts.
Document Reviews

The final reflective paper(s) and the final Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric (See Appendix D) for each participant was reviewed for content reflective of each participants’ perspective as to how their use of instructional strategies and decision making during the internship were influenced by the context of the internship placement, the relevant relationships, the coursework, and any additional factors related to their internship experience. Table 8 reflects the documents gathered from each of the participants through email, postal mail, or personal exchange.

Final reflective paper. The final reflective paper was one of the assignments that was required to be completed by preservice special education interns, during their clinical internship experiences. Within this document, the special education interns were required to reflect on their teaching experience within the internship setting with regard to their decisions for using instructional strategies, their growth as a special educator, and the relationships that they had encountered during the eight week experience. The researcher asked for an electronic copy of the final reflective paper(s) from each participant at the conclusion of the final internship experience. Each of the six participants provided the final reflective paper for the final internship experience. Additionally, two participants voluntarily provided a final reflective paper for the first internship experience.

Clinical evaluation continuum rubric. The Clinical Evaluation Continuum (CEC) Rubric for students in the initial licensure program for students with disabilities accessing the general curriculum is a document designed to assess an intern’s growth during the internship experience. While closely aligned with the Council for Exceptional
Children standards (Standards 4,5,6,7,8,9,10), the CEC rubric provides the University Supervisor, Cooperating Teacher, and intern a document to reflect on the intern’s practices. The rubric is completed by the US after each observation so that feedback can be provided developmentally. The CEC rubric consists of the seven standards, each with a series of key elements. During the internship, the intern’s growth is assessed and documented using the following categories of evaluation: no opportunity to observe (N), does not meet expectations (1), meets expectations (2), and exceeds expectations (3). Brief anecdotal notes and/or explanations can be provided as well on the rubric. At the completion of the internship, the US and the CT collaborate on the final scoring on the rubric. The rubric is then shared and discussed with the intern at the end of the internship experience. This final evaluation tool is intended to be reflective of each interns’ capabilities as a beginning special educator (See Appendix D).

The researcher asked each participant for an electronic copy of the final CEC rubric with all notations from the US and CT included. Each participant provided his/her CEC rubric from the final internship experience.

**Data Analysis**

Table 9 provides how the research questions, data sources, and data collection measures used during this qualitative study are related to each other. Following each of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings. A written transcript of the interviews was sent through electronic mail to each of the interviewees to peruse and verify comments. In addition, following the three on-site observations, a written account
of the observation was completed and sent to the interviewees to peruse and verify the observational accounts.
Methods

Research Questions:

1. How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?
2. How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?
3. How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Anticipated Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Semi-structured interviews | Constant comparative analysis with open coding of interview transcripts | 1. The Cooperating Teacher will be the strongest influencing relationship factor for the special education intern.  
2. Behavior management strategies are anticipated to be the greatest appropriated skill that will be linked to coursework. |
| Observations           | Constant comparative analysis with open coding of the written documentation of field notes | The evidence-based strategies and classroom management techniques displayed by the participants are anticipated to be dependent upon how and if the Cooperating Teacher uses the strategies and classroom management techniques. |
| Final Reflective Papers | Constant comparative analysis with open coding of the reflective papers | It is anticipated that the majority of the reflections will be targeted toward the use of evidence-based strategies, instead of why or how the strategies were used. |
| Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric | Constant comparative analysis with open coding | It is anticipated that the results of the rubric could reflect a developmental rise in appropriating various evidence-based strategies |

Data analysis was conducted through two qualitative analysis techniques; open-coding and comparative analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) described the process of
open coding as “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (p. 195). With each of the interview transcriptions, observation written documentation, and final reflective papers, open coding analysis was used to delineate codes that could be used to compare blocks of data. Blocks of raw data from each of the data sources was then placed into a table divided by research questions and participants. Specifically, a chart titled “Analysis by Question” was developed for each participant. The chart included three columns, each headed with one of the research questions, and three rows headed with “interview”, “observation”, and “final reflective paper(s).” Interview data transcript phrases (e.g., “They would bring and open up their binders and reteaching basically” or “Here, they don’t have a behavior management plan in place.”), observation field note phrases (e.g., “Rules of Civility on the wall, developed by intern” or “listened to student and validated what he needed”), and final reflective paper phrases (e.g., “The mornings went very quickly and the CT allowed me a lot of leeway to introduce new technologies”) were placed into the chart according to the corresponding research question. A continual iterative process of reviewing the data was used to identify data that informed each research question.

After open coding of the phrases was completed, comparative analysis was conducted between and among the transcriptions and documents, using the model provided by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Constant comparative analysis was described by these authors as a comparison of incidents for similarities and differences. Creswell (2008) further indicated that this method of analysis allows the researcher to make connections between all raw data that is collected through the investigative process. With
these ideas in mind, all data was coded, categorized, and compared according to emerging themes, which informed the guiding research questions.

Because there were minimal to no comments notated on the final CEC rubrics of the participants, an overall numerical average of each of the key elements was notated for each of the seven standards on the final CEC rubric. This numerical average was recorded for each participant. A statement pertaining to the average was reported for each of the participants to compare to other collected data.

**Procedures**

After acquiring exempt status from the Human Subjects Review Board (See Appendix A), the researcher gathered a list of spring 2014 preservice special education interns from the Clinical Practice Specialist of the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. From this list, only preservice interns servicing students in the general education curriculum were selected as possible participants.

Recruitment emails were sent to the preservice interns requesting their participation in the study. Seven preservice interns responded positively to the recruitment emails. A follow-up email and/or phone call was completed by the researcher to schedule the interview during the final internship experience for each intern. At this juncture, the researcher confirmed that six special education preservice interns would like to be participants. The seventh intern did not confirm a willingness to be a participant.

After securing informed consent from the six participants, arrangements were made for the researcher to meet with each participant at a convenient time and location
for each interview. The one-on-one semi-structured audio-taped interviews were conducted, through the use of an interview protocol (See Appendix B). Each interview took about one hour to complete. Field notes were completed by the researcher during the interview process. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings. Each transcription was open-coded and placed into a chart (i.e., Analysis by Question) according to the relevancy to each of the three research questions for comparative purposes. A comparative analysis was completed and used to elicit categories and themes from the interview data.

After three of the interviews, observations of the participants during the final internship experiences were conducted on-site. Therefore, one of the observations was conducted at a public elementary school, one at a public high school, and one at a private elementary summer school site (See Table 7). The observation was conducted by following an observation protocol (See Appendix C). Each observation was about one hour in length. The intent of the observations was to corroborate data shared during the interviews. A written account of each of the observations was completed by the researcher, placed in the “Analysis by Question” chart, and then shared with the participants for validation. Each written account of the observations was open-coded. A comparison was used in a comparative analysis with the codes and categories from the interviews to elicit themes from the data.

Next, upon completion of the final reflective paper(s) by the participants, the researcher requested a copy of the documents from each of the participants through electronic mail. Once the documents were acquired, the reflective papers were analyzed.
by the researcher using open-coding and constant comparative analysis. As secondary data sources, the reflective papers were used to validate statements from interviews and data collected from observations to support categories and themes, which were derived from the data sources.

After the participants acquired the final version of the CEC rubrics from the University Supervisors, a copy of the completed CEC rubrics were requested by the researcher from the participants through electronic mail. Once the documents were acquired, the CEC rubrics were reviewed by the researcher and average scores were tallied. Then, for the purposes of this study, the data was reported under the category areas as “met expectations” or “exceeds expectations.” The areas that were scored as “no opportunity” to experience were reported last.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

According to Bratlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005), qualitative researchers have the task of ensuring that their studies are trustworthy and sound. In order to suggest that this study embodies credibility and trustworthiness of the results, the researcher implemented credibility measures to enhance these traits: member checking, data triangulation, peer debriefing, and audit trail. First, member checking of the interview transcriptions and the observational written accounts (i.e. field notes) was implemented to confirm the accuracy and interpretation of observational events and participant perceptions during the interviews. Bratlinger et al. (2005) described member checking as “having participants review and confirm the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of interview transcriptions or observational field notes” (p. 201). After completion of each
of the interview transcriptions and observational written accounts, the researcher electronically sent the written documentation to each participant. A response was requested to verify the written documentation. All participants verified the accuracy of the written transcripts and accounts.

Second, data triangulation among the various data sources (i.e., interviews, observations, final reflective papers, results of the CEC rubric) was implemented to verify and study the perspectives of the special education student intern participants. Bratlinger et al. (2005) described data triangulation as using “varied data sources in a study” (p. 201). In this study, the use of interviews as primary sources and the observations, reflective papers, and results of the CEC rubric as secondary sources to validate data gleaned from the interview statements gave credence to the perspectives and voices of the special education interns.

Third, peer debriefing was continuously used throughout the data collection and analysis process to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the results. Bratlinger et al. (2005) described peer debriefing as “having a colleague or someone familiar with phenomena being studied [to] review and provide critical feedback on descriptions, analyses, and interpretations or a study’s results” (p. 201). Through each step of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation, the researcher shared her written descriptions with the chair of her dissertation committee to validate and lend credibility to the interpretation of results. A continual dialogue and feedback after each chapter draft throughout the dissertation procedures was elicited and established. Specifically, the researcher drafted each chapter and then sent the draft to the dissertation chairperson for
reflection and critical comments about the data and analysis within the chapter
discussion. The researcher asked for and received either a phone conference or personal
conference with the chairperson to discuss comments and revisions of the analysis and
discussion of data.

Two examples highlight this continuous peer debriefing used throughout the data
analysis process. First, after writing the draft of Chapter Four, the researcher sent the
draft to the dissertation chairperson for revisions. One of the dissertation chairperson’s
responses to the data suggested that the researcher should reflect on the language used by
the participants when describing their perceptions of their internship experiences. The
researcher responded by only paying attention to the actual words of the participants, not
necessarily the choice of words or meaning behind the words. A discussion ensued where
the dissertation chairperson suggested that the researcher think about what the words
were saying about the appropriation of the coursework by the participants. A second
eexample of the peer debriefing between the researcher and the dissertation chairperson
was noted with the data that was entered into the “Analysis by Question” chart,
developed by the researcher for each of the participants’ raw data. Within the interview
transcripts, statements by the participants about the university placement office were
prevalent. The researcher suggested that the comments needed to be included in the data
collection and analysis. The dissertation chairperson urged the researcher to reflect upon
how the placement process informed the research questions of the study. She encouraged
the researcher to separate the process of the field office from the findings by reflecting
upon the perceptions of the participants and how these perceptions related to the research questions.

The fourth credibility measure used in this study from the list of measures cited by Bratlinger et al. (2005) was an audit trail. Bratlinger et al. described an audit trail as a way of “keeping track of interviews conducted and/or specific times and dates spent observing as well as who was observed on each occasion” (p. 201). The researcher documented the date and setting of each interview and observation in a log, which also documented the dates and description of each step of the dissertation study process. This audit trail became a valuable resource when the researcher needed verification of the chronology and documentation of each step of the study process.

To add to the credibility of the study process, the transparency of the researcher’s subjectivity was essential through the collection of evidence. This researcher has had experience as a University Supervisor and has been instrumental in developing a webinar about the scope and sequence of the course content in the Special Education Licensure program for Students with Disabilities in the General Curriculum. She has also been a special educator in the public schools for 35 years, at the time of the study. With this experience, transparency of the researcher’s subjectivity was critical to assuage any question of bias, when collecting and deciding which pieces of evidence were critical during this study.

Luttrell (2010) described subjectivity as “the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that stand out to the researcher” (p. 160). She further delineated that qualitative research is primarily concerned with “understanding
how a particular researcher’s values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 160). With this in mind, the researcher considered her own identity when completing all data collection and analysis throughout this study. Memos were written to identify how the researcher’s perception influenced the data. For example, the researcher believed that the relationship between the CT and the intern was critical in influencing how the student interns perceived their role as a special educator. The researcher was careful to listen during the interview and not interject her viewpoint.

Finally, the idea of reactivity was critical when completing the interview and observation processes. Luttrell (2010) described reactivity as the “influence of the researcher on the setting or the individuals in the study” (p. 282). Luttrell further stated that the importance to a qualitative researcher is not in trying to minimize this influence, but in understanding how this influence affects what the participant says, and how this affects the quality of the inferences the researcher draws from the data sources. In essence, this researcher specifically considered any influence she had or did not have upon the participants’ responses. Being transparent about these dynamics within the data analysis and memos was critical to the trustworthiness of the evidence gathered. For example, one of the participants indicated during the interview that she wanted to honestly explain her perceptions about her general education CT. She wanted to tell the researcher in the interview, but she “did not want to get anyone in trouble” (Participant 3). The researcher assured the participant that nothing would be in the transcript that she did not want to divulge.
Chapter Four

This chapter presents an in depth description of the data results gathered from each participant through interviews, observations, reflection papers, and the Clinical Evaluation Continuum (CEC) Rubric. Since the interviews were the primary source of data, the interview transcripts were first analyzed through an open coding and iterative comparative analysis process. As previously described, for each participant’s interview, open coding of the interview transcripts was initially completed and then reviewed to gather an overview of possible categories and emerging themes that were evident from the participant responses in the interviews. Next, the interview responses were organized in a chart, titled “Analysis by Question”, with respect to how they informed each of the three research questions. Open coding was then completed again and then compared to the initial open coding activity to glean possible categories of results. As each participant’s interview was coded, an iterative comparative analysis process between and among the interviews was completed to develop categories under the topical areas relevant to each research question: context, relationships, and instructional and behavioral decision making.

For validation, the final reflective papers, and observational transcripts were also open coded. Through an iterative comparative analysis process, these codes were then compared to the interview codes to glean categories and then themes. The CEC rubrics
from each participant were used to validate comments within the interviews and were used to support the developing themes when relevant.

The iterative analysis process continued within and across the data sources for each of the participants. As a result of this process, themes and subthemes were identified for each topical area relevant to each research question. The topical areas that have been gleaned from the data analysis are presented in correlation with the three research questions: *contextual influence on the appropriation of university coursework, the relationship influences on the appropriation of coursework, and the influences on decision making due to the reported context and relationships*. Each topical area and the overarching themes that emerged within that area across participants are described first. Then, findings for each of the six participants are detailed. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings across participants.

Under the topical area of *contextual influences* on the appropriation of university coursework, the following three themes were generated: (a) infrastructure of the school internship placement, (b) the role of the Cooperating Teacher, and (c) key opportunities to experience the coursework due to the context of the internship. Under the first theme, the *infrastructure of the school internship placement*, the impact of instructional grade level and the content taught during each participant’s internship experiences were discussed by several of the participants. Within this theme, participants described their participation, or lack of participation, in school wide initiatives (e.g., Positive Behavior Support systems), which allowed them to incorporate coursework (or not). It was also
noted that the service delivery model used at their school site/district (e.g., self-contained vs. inclusion) had an influence on the use of learned coursework.

The second theme generated under contextual influence was the role of the Cooperating Teacher (CT). Various participants noted that their experience was influenced by whether the CT was a special education teacher or a general education teacher. The role of the CT was extremely influential as to the expectations and opportunities provided during the participants’ internship experience. Further, the CT’s role, supportive or instructional, in the classroom settings were also influential. In addition, how the CT interacted with students with disabilities, at times, impacted the instructional or behavioral choices that were made by the participants.

The third theme generated under this topic of contextual influences was referred to as key opportunities to experience the coursework during the internship. Participants were given opportunities to use instructional practices, assessment procedures, and/or to develop lessons based on the directives afforded them, or not, within the context of the internship. For example, one participant indicated that at the high school level, she was unable to engage in the assessment process because this process was already set up through the grading system at the school. She was not given access to the grades and, therefore, had no opportunity to engage in the assessment process. Further, opportunities related to the service delivery context, and/or the school level (secondary vs. elementary) were discussed, as well.

Under the topical area of relationship influences, the following three themes surfaced from the key data: (a) the relationship with the Cooperating Teacher, (b) the
relationship with students, and (c) the relationship with the University Supervisor. Within
the first theme area, relationships with the Cooperating Teacher, participant relationships
with the CT seemed to impact the appropriation of skillsets learned from the university
coursework. For example, some of the participants experienced positive CT relationships.
These Cooperating Teachers were instrumental in providing opportunities for the
participants to use and, thus, begin to appropriate coursework. Conversely, participants
who did not experience positive and supportive relationships with the CT, were not given
opportunities to implement instructional and/or behavioral strategies learned in the
coursework. The second theme under this topic area was student relationships.
Participants reflected about how they were able to develop relationships with their
students. Within the third theme area, participants highlighted the relationship each of the
participants had with their University Supervisors. Some of the participants felt that the
University Supervisor relationship was influential in supporting them during their
internship experiences. Other participants were not as decisive with their statements
about their University Supervisor’s support.

The third topical area, decision making influences, incorporated the following
three theme areas: (a) individual background or experiences, (b) the influence of seeing
instruction modeled, and (c) implementation of instruction. Within the first theme,
individual backgrounds or experiences, each of the participants described his/her
background knowledge or experiences that either reinforced the appropriation of
coursework during their internship experiences or was a driving force as to why the intern
did not use their coursework to guide them during their internship experience. As the
participants were describing how, when, and why they used or did not use research-based/evidence-based strategies, behavioral strategies, and/or instructional strategies during their internship experiences, most of the participants described situational experiences that impacted their use of or lack of use of coursework. The second theme included instructional decisions derived from opportunities to see or observe the modeling of various instructional practices. The third theme included instructional decisions is derived from ‘doing’ or implementing instruction.

**Participant Findings**

In the following sections, the data from each of the six participants will be presented. Due to the diversity of the interns’ responses, each participant’s data will be presented corresponding to the three topical areas (i.e., contextual influences, relationship influences, decision making influences). A brief contextual overview of the internship experiences is first presented for each participant. Then, findings that inform each of the three topical areas (contextual influences, relationship influences, and decision making influences) follow. Within each of the topical areas, the data that supports each of the themes will be discussed.

**Participant 1**

Participant 1 was a twenty-six year old Caucasian female student who had experience as a social worker, an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapist, and a substitute teacher. She had successfully completed twenty-seven credits towards licensure including the two internships at the time of the interview. The intern was evaluated by the University Supervisor with a total score on the CEC rubric of a 2.26, indicating that she
met all standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e., score of 2) were included in the standards of instructional strategies, learning environments and social interactions, language, instructional planning, assessment, professional and ethical practice, and collaboration. Elements which the intern had no opportunity to be observed (indicated with a N/A) included guiding student behavior and moral development, demonstrating concept of oneself as a lifelong learner, communicating regularly with parents, and modeling techniques and coaching others.

The data sources for Participant 1 included an interview, one final reflective paper, and the CEC rubric for her final internship experience. The interview was conducted in a building on the campus of George Mason University. However, the researcher was unable to complete an observation. Even though an observation was scheduled three times, weather related school cancellations forced the researcher to cancel each of the scheduled appointments.

**Contextual influences.** An elementary school was the first internship site for Participant 1. As noted previously, she was the special education intern in two, first grade general education classrooms. Within one of the classrooms she worked with six students with disabilities, and within the second classroom she worked with five students with disabilities. These students with IEPs were students with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and autism. In these first grade classrooms, Participant 1 was mainly responsible for teaching an intervention reading program (i.e., Read Well) to four of the students with disabilities and teaching a social skills group of students with disabilities once a week. She taught the intervention reading program to students in the special
education classroom two times per day. Participant 1 indicated that she felt confident in this internship experience because teaching reading was an interest of hers and a self-identified strength of her skills.

During the second internship placement, Participant 1 was teaching students in a middle school setting. She worked with seventh grade students in two general education math classes in the morning and two self-contained special education classrooms in the afternoon. Within the two morning team taught math classrooms, Participant 1 shared that she provided services for four students with learning disabilities in one general education classroom and five students with learning disabilities in the other general education classroom. In the afternoon, Participant 1 worked within the self-contained special education classroom setting teaching math to five students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, autism) during one period and to eleven students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, autism) during another math period. Participant 1 also supported students in an eighth period math lab, which was a place where students who did not understand the math concepts being taught would come to be tutored. These students did not receive special education services through an IEP. Participant 1 shared that this experience, although valuable, was initially uncomfortable. She admitted that “math was not my background.”

**Infrastructure of the school internship placement.** Participant 1 shared that there were elements of the contextual setting of her internships that influenced whether she used or did not use instructional skills and strategies from her coursework at George Mason University. First, the content area taught within the internship experiences were
critical for Participant 1. Participant 1 shared that, “math wasn’t my background so I was shocked when I was placed there. Math was never my strong suit.” She shared that she was very uncomfortable with the math content. She stated that this anxiety of teaching the math content was at its greatest when she was expected to tutor students within the math lab. She explained that, “There were times when I just didn’t know what to do.” In her final reflective paper for her secondary placement, Participant 1 emphasized her anxiety over teaching math in the following statement: “…when I first found out that I was going to be teaching math in the secondary level, I was pretty worried.” Conversely, Participant 1 was more comfortable with the reading content that she taught during her first internship experience. In addition, Participant 1 indicated that since there was a reading course within the curriculum at the university, she was able to pull from this knowledge to a greater degree.

Further, when asked in the interview how the assigned placement of her internships impacted her use of coursework, Participant 1 described the use of the reading/language course, Language Development and Reading, as follows: “503, the reading course, that came into play in a big way just because I was teaching early readers how to read. And that [course] hits a lot of those strategies. 503 was definitely a good one.”

Participant 1 indicated that the instructional level, that is elementary versus secondary, influenced which special education practices taught within her coursework she was able to model and practice. For example, in the following excerpt from Participant 1’s interview, she indicated that the curriculum of the school dictated who and
how an IEP was written. Therefore, her observation of the IEP process was very different from what she expected from coursework. She described her experiences at IEP meetings as follows:

I went to both kinds of meetings and it was very different again. In the middle school, they just take all IEP kids and deal, you get this 5 [students] and you get this 5 [students]. And you might not even have that student in a class. More case manager there. And then where she had a student she would write their math goals and that was it. You would just do math goals. And all the other teachers would work together.

Where in the elementary, you wrote the whole everything. It was neat to see. I got to see one [IEP] from start to finish.

And then I got to see how they do it in the secondary level. It was the case manager and then everyone puts in their info, and everyone kind of leads it. ‘Cause those meetings are different.

In the elementary, they had a better connection because in the first grade you are that student’s everything. In the middle school, if they had a question about English, we couldn’t answer because we’re not the English teacher. We could put you in touch with the English teacher.

One other contextual influence that was noted by Participant 1, which referenced the infrastructure of the school, pertained to the service delivery model within the school setting. In her secondary internship, Participant 1 described the co-teaching scenario that she observed within the seventh grade math team taught general education classroom.
She described the setting as “awesome” and a “great experience.” In her interview, 
Participant 1 depicted this co-teaching model in the following way:

You could not tell who was the special ed teacher and who was the [general 
education teacher], so that was a great experience. I had never been in a situation 
where it was very seamless. They had a close relationship. And she [general 
education teacher] was so open to working with other people so it was easy for 
me to slide in, so that was really nice.

They would feed off each other in such a way… One would do the warm up and 
one would do the homework. Someone would teach the lesson, and when the one 
was teaching the lesson the other one wasn’t quiet. She would walk around the 
room pointing out things that she saw. So they have the dual approach. So what 
works for one works for the other so the kids got different ways to do it.

**Role of the cooperating teacher.** As noted previously, the Cooperating Teachers 
within both internship experiences for Participant 1 were special education teachers. The 
roles of the special education CTs gave Participant 1 opportunities to either practice or 
not practice learned coursework. For example, Participant 1 stated that in the secondary 
co-taught classroom, the special education teacher’s role, and thus her role as the intern, 
was to lead the warm-up activity every day. The general education teacher always taught 
the lesson. Therefore, Participant 1’s role in the secondary placement for the co-taught 
classrooms was to support instruction, and not to provide direct instruction. Participant 1 
indicated that due to this supportive role, she was not able to experience lesson planning 
within the context of the co-taught general education setting.
However, when she serviced students in the seventh grade self-contained special education classroom in the afternoons during her internship, she took on the role of the students’ math teacher. Consequently, Participant 1 was able to develop and implement her own lesson plans within the self-contained setting. She explained that she observed the co-taught general education teacher’s math lessons in the morning classes, and then used this information to guide her lessons in the afternoon. Her excitement over lesson planning was evident in the following interview excerpt:

For the self-contained, I would take the [morning math] lesson and not do it that way, I usually didn’t do it the same way. I start[ed] with like notes [from] the inclusion setting. With the notes in the self-contained setting, I would take them and break them down, refreshing all that. Then we would do guided practice, together. Within the team [co-] taught she would say something quickly, throw up an example, and move on. Then in the self-contained, I would break it down like cutting the problems apart. It was adding the extensions, and the accommodations so it was really a different lesson. Same concept just different lesson. So I got to lesson plan there. The curriculum was set. Every seventh grade math teacher was doing [it], because of SOLs. It was very preset. But how I taught the lesson was up to me, which was nice because I got to lesson plan.

**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** Participant 1 shared that during both of her internships, she was given opportunities to use coursework content. For example, Participant 1 stated that because she was teaching reading in the general education setting during her second internship experience, she was able to observe and
experience a lot of the reading strategies, reading assessment procedures, and evidence-based practices presented in the reading course (i.e., EDSE 503). She suggested that the opportunities provided to her, simply because she had the responsibility of teaching reading, gave her a key opportunity to appropriate the coursework. The following is her description of why she thought this opportunity was very positive:

When you talk about running records then I got to see it. Because I took 503 before my internship. When I was taking the course, it didn’t make much sense because I wasn’t a teacher. But once I was in my internship it was like, oh that’s what they were talking about. To have that background knowledge and I’d be like, [I] know what they are talking about and to see it in action. It wasn’t like a first shot kind of thing. So it helped later on rather than in the class I guess. Because in the class I wasn’t a teacher. It’s a lot of information that doesn’t make much sense until you actually see it. Like the informal assessments, like the DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] was. I got a chance to watch. There was guided reading and a lot of that stuff that they talk about in the book. I could see it come to life.

Another contextual influence that gave Participant 1 the opportunity to experience practices taught in coursework was the opportunity to teach in a self-contained setting, especially in the middle school setting. In the following excerpt from her interview, Participant 1 described how she had the opportunity to use the instructional practices taught in the elementary reading and curriculum methods course (EDSE 628) in the self-contained middle school setting:
It was really just hitting the different senses, like the differentiated instruction. Some are auditory, some are visual, or tactile. Just really, trying to hit as much as you can during a lesson and not being afraid to do a lesson again a different way. I learned that a lot in the strategy courses.

Another opportunity to experience strategies provided in coursework (EDSE 627, assessment) was described by Participant 1 in her interview. She explained that because she was in a middle school during her second internship, her experience with using assessment strategies was different from her first internship, where she was in an elementary school setting. The following is an excerpt from Participant 1’s interview describing this difference and how assessment data was used to inform instruction:

In the middle school, they have a unit test or a quiz. But I think it was just unit tests, if they got below a ‘C’, a 70ish, then you had to give them a retake. So seeing what happened on the unit test, then we had to do a review. They had to take a retake within 2 weeks or something. So the test would tell me what I needed to do in the review, then what I really needed to focus on so they could do better on the retakes. So that helped that way.

The use of assessment data at the elementary level placement was depicted in the following excerpt from her interview:

Then [at] the elementary level, we used the DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] a lot to really plan our intervention groups. The first grade all got together as a team. Whoever was in Tier 3, the number would change as the year went on. But whoever was in Tier 3 would pick the kids up. And keep the DRA
levels together. I had the really low ones. The ones that were at the 2s and 3s and 4s [DRA levels] and they should be at like 12s at that point. So we would use the DRA to guide who to keep together. When kids started taking off, their DRAs went up. We would reshuffle the groups and try to keep the same learners together.

One other opportunity for Participant 1 to use coursework was presented as a result of the service delivery structure (i.e., special education self-contained setting, general education setting). As noted earlier, Participant 1 described that the opportunity to practice lesson planning was in part due to the role of the cooperating teacher. Participant 1 further explained in her interview that whether she was given the opportunity to write and implement lesson plans was also due to the type of special education setting of her internship. In other words, her opportunities to practice lesson planning (a practice taught in both methods courses, 628 and 629) were based on whether she was working with students in a self-contained setting or a general education classroom. She explained that in the middle school setting, she was not given the opportunity to lesson plan because she was working with students within the general education setting. However, when she was in the self-contained setting with the middle school students, she was the primary teacher and was responsible for lesson planning. As previously described, this was perceived as a key opportunity for Participant 1.

**Relationship influences.** There were various relationships that seemed to influence when or if Participant 1 was able to employ any instructional practice and/or behavioral strategy within her internship experience. Participant 1 indicated that one of
the top contributing factors to having an opportunity to gain practice with instructional and behavioral strategies were the relationships she had with her Cooperating Teachers and the students during each of her internship settings. She described both relationships as positive and nurturing. Her relationship with the CT is described first and followed by her relationship with her students and finally with the US.

**Cooperating teachers.** Participant 1 described her relationship with both of her Cooperating Teachers as positive and very supportive. She stated that both were “mentors” to her and she felt comfortable asking questions and receiving advice from them.

Participant 1 felt that she was able to gain a great deal of experience working in a collaborative co-taught classroom setting during her second internship experience at a middle school. Since she had taken the collaboration and consultation course, EDSE 662, prior to the internship experience, she was able to observe and use some of the strategies taught in the course. She stated that this collaborative internship setting was an “awesome” experience. Her CT was a role model for her in a collaborative co-teaching experience. In her final reflective paper, Participant 1 stated,

My team helped me gain the confidence I needed. I was not really comfortable, at first, teaching secondary math. But my team helped me gain the confidence I needed. I was also able to team [i.e., co-] teach … which is an excellent way to learn collaboration.
Participant 1 went further by stating that “there were times when I just didn’t know what to do. So, I would ask her (CT). It was just my own confidence. And she (CT) was always supportive.”

In her elementary internship, Participant 1 explained that her CT “was very open to letting her try” different things. Her CT allowed her to experiment by using some behavioral strategies from the behavior management course (EDSE 502, Classroom Management and Applied Behavior Analysis). She described:

I tried a token economy definitely. During my intervention, they [students] each had a little cup and they would collect like little gems. Every time that they were sitting nice or they were listening to their friends, I would throw a gem in. They had a goal together. 100 gems they got lunch in the classroom or a video. They picked what they wanted. I have used them [token economies] before, but we learned a lot more about them in 502. So I got to take that knowledge and use it well.

Another positive experience in her first internship was when she collaborated with her CT in developing an FBA/BIP (i.e., Functional Behavior Assessment/Behavior Intervention Plan) for a first grade student. She stated that her CT was influential in giving her opportunities to practice various behavioral strategies that she had learned in the coursework. She described this situation as follows:

So I got to go through the whole FBA/ BIP process. I do have the behavior background. So it was really, it was actually a lot of fun to use it in a different
way. I got to collaborate with my Cooperating Teacher and then we got to work with the behavior person with the county, the social worker, and the psychologist.

**Students.** Participant 1 described her relationship with the students in her classrooms as positive. She stated that since the classroom management procedures and behavior systems were already established in the classrooms, she formed her relationships with the students through these set routines. Participant 1 stated that she was able to encourage students through the use of a token economy system that, as previously noted, was a component she learned from the behavior management coursework.

Even though Participant 1 described relationships with her students as positive, she also stated that the relationships were somewhat dependent upon the school setting. For example, within the middle school setting, she interacted with her students for forty minutes at a time, and then the students moved to the next class. Yet, in the elementary setting, Participant 1 was with the students for much of the day. These variations in instructional time impacted how she was able to connect with the students. Participant 1 described her connection with the students in the following excerpt from her interview:

I definitely get the connection because I am with those kids all day [elementary]. In the middle school I saw them for forty minutes and that was it. Then they’re out of it. Which it has its perks because some days it’s nice to send them off after forty minutes. But you don’t get that connection as much. I guess I prefer the elementary. I knew my students better. Just being with them all day. They’re more open too, I think.
University supervisors. Participant 1 had a different University Supervisor for each internship experience. She described her relationships with her USs as positive and encouraging. They provided different perspectives, yet, made her feel comfortable during all of the observations. Participant 1 shared that she “never felt like they were judging me. They were helpful and they both made it comfortable.” Participant 1 felt that she could try various instructional strategies and the US would provide advice in an encouraging way.

Decision making influences. Participant 1 explained that she had two positive internship experiences. As she described her educational and work background and experiences, it was evident that these experiences strongly influenced how she made instructional decisions during the internships. The assigned settings for her internship provided situational opportunities, which contributed to how she made decisions and appropriated various educational practices. As Participant 1 described her experiences within the elementary and secondary internship settings, she felt that her internships gave her many opportunities to observe the modeling of various instructional practices. In addition, Participant 1 described opportunities to implement instructional and behavioral strategies.

Background/ experiences. As previously described, Participant 1 shared that her former work experiences as a social worker and an ABA therapist were critical influences on her decision making within both of her internship experiences. Within her final reflective paper for her second internship experience at the middle school, Participant 1 stated that she was influenced by a skillset she felt very comfortable with and
knowledgeable about – Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The following excerpt from her final reflective paper in her second internship reflects how she referenced her ABA background experience:

I can take a look at several things I have done over the past semester. The number one thing I made sure of was to be a motivational teacher and to keep my students engaged. Math tends to be an unfavorable subject, so I wanted to make sure my students wanted to be there and were excited to learn. I created a learning environment that was both educational and engaging by relating every day experiences to the material. I would also implement several activities within one lesson in ‘student centers’ where my students had several tasks to complete that day. I also felt that I excel in classroom behavioral management, as my background is in applied behavioral analysis.

**Seeing instruction modeled.** Participant 1 described opportunities to observe the modeling of co-taught practices and assessment procedures. Participant 1 expressed gratitude for the experience of being a part of a co-taught collaborative model during her second internship at a middle school. Participant 1 stated that even though she was unable to actually teach lessons within these co-taught classes, the experience of watching the seamless interaction between the general education seventh grade math teacher and the special education teacher was invaluable.

More specifically, Participant 1 was grateful for the opportunity to observe collaborative co-teaching. She indicated that she was able to learn from the modeling of the math lessons within the co-taught classes, and then apply the instructional strategies
to her own teaching in the self-contained math classes in the afternoon. The following is Participant 1’s description of how she would watch the modeling in her morning co-taught classrooms, and then use this knowledge and turn it into her own practice experience in the afternoon when she taught the self-contained math students.

The gen ed teacher [taught]. She always taught the lesson. And then it was nice for me because then in the self-contained it was the same lesson but we would just go at a slower pace. So it was always nice to see how she did it and then I could tweak for our learners for later. We set it up that way because I didn’t have a strong math background. So it was really nice. That would be my refresher course. Then it was nice to see what wasn’t going right in the gen ed to really focus on in the self-contained. So it was really nice.

When describing any assessment or progress monitoring strategies that Participant 1 used during her internship experiences, she indicated that in both the secondary and the elementary internships the assessment process was already established. Participant 1 stated that she simply modeled what was already part of the school structure and routine for progress monitoring. As quoted earlier, her personal experiences with the established routines of progress monitoring during each internship were excellent opportunities for her to observe the established routines in place within the middle and secondary settings.

Within the middle school setting, she was able to experience the concept of using unit test results as the main source of data from which to determine who needed remediation with the math content. Within the elementary setting, Participant 1 was able to observe and
then participate in the progress monitoring of using formal test results to determine the grouping for instruction of at risk reading students.

**Implementing instruction.** Participant 1 described opportunities within her internship experiences in which she actually used and implemented strategies that she learned in her coursework. In the following excerpt from her interview, Participant 1 described the opportunity to use instructional strategies taught to her in the elementary curriculum and reading methods course, EDSE 628:

> In the self-contained [math class], I would build the lessons to have different aspects … Especially cause math is hard and it was hard for a lot of them. It was usually their weakest subject. That’s a tough one, and they really didn’t want to be there. So, to keep them engaged by really approaching their senses. I tried to do a lot of tactile stuff, cause it’s hard in math. But we used manipulatives and getting them up out of their seats.

One other experiential opportunity that Participant 1 described was during her elementary internship experience. She described a situation involving a first grade boy who was having difficulty controlling his behavior within the general education setting. Participant 1 described how she was able to collaborate with her CT in developing an FBA/BIP. This process was described in her coursework and she felt fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of the development process.

> We did have one little guy in the first grade who was on his way to an ED center. Because it was at the beginning of the school year and he was in his home school. It wasn’t the place for him so just keeping him kind of contained. More so it
didn’t disrupt everyone else’s learning. Just cause he would rip stuff off the walls and throw chairs and definitely behavioral. …It was really neat to see that whole process [FBA/BIP]. Because you read about it in the textbook and we just used the positive reinforcement and a lot of the different kind of token economy. Like one where he would collect little stones and one where he would get these tallies on his hand when he was doing good. Nothing would work very long with him. It would go about a week and then he wouldn’t care after the weekend we had to vary the strategy.

**Summary.** In summary, Participant 1 experienced two positive internship experiences that provided opportunities for her to practice and begin to appropriate instructional behavioral strategies, which were addressed throughout her coursework. First, Participant 1 perceived that the contextual structure of her internship placements were very influential for providing her with opportunities to practice her strategies. Specifically, the content of the curriculum (i.e., reading or math) being taught, the special education setting (i.e., special education self-contained classroom or general education classroom), and the service delivery model (i.e., co-taught collaborative model), were influential in providing opportunities to practice strategies from her coursework. Further, the role of the CT was influenced by these contextual structures, impacting whether or not Participant 1 was given opportunities to appropriate skillsets (e.g., lesson plans, assessment strategies).

Second, the positive and supportive relationships with the CTs, students, and USs provided Participant 1 with opportunities to appropriate coursework content. More
specifically, Participant 1 described her CTs as mentors with whom she could ask questions and gain insight as to effective teaching strategies. Participant 1 explained further that her CTs gave her opportunities to model and experience behavioral strategies, such as classroom management techniques and FBA/BIP planning. Further, even though student relationships were in part determined by established behavior routines within the internship schools, Participant 1 stated that she was able to implement behavior strategies (i.e., token economy) learned from her coursework to develop relationships with the students. In addition, both of her USs were encouraging and provided influential advice.

Third, Participant 1 stated that her decisions were influenced by her background as an ABA therapist. She stated that her past experience influenced how she interacted with students during her internship experiences. Participant 1 further indicated that her instructional decisions were influenced by the opportunities to observe the modeling of instruction, especially in the collaborative co-taught math classrooms in her middle school internship experience. By observing the modeling of the math lessons, Participant 1 stated that she used these instructional strategies to teach similar lessons in her self-contained math class. In addition, the opportunities to observe modeled instructional strategies influenced Participant 1’s instructional and behavioral decision-making when she was given opportunities to directly implement strategies, such as her experience with developing an FBA/BIP with her CT during her elementary internship experience.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 was a twenty-five year old Caucasian female who had experience as a substitute teacher in general and special education classrooms, as a preschool assistant
teacher, and as a nanny. In addition, Participant 2 described herself as a person with a
disability due to a health condition that caused her to become ill frequently. When she
was ill, she was unable to attend classes or work. She had successfully completed thirty
credits and was completing her second internship at the time of the interview. The intern
was evaluated by the University Supervisor with a total score on the CEC rubric of a 2.30
indicating that she met all standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e.,
score of 2) were included in the standards of instructional strategies, learning
environments and social interactions, language, instructional planning, assessment,
professional ethical practice, and collaboration. Elements which the intern had no
opportunity to be observed (indicated with a N/A) included demonstrating competence in
using technology, integrating materials, and activities, using assessment data from
informal reading inventories, using functional assessments, involving and guiding all
students with mild to moderate exceptionalities, keeping records of students’ progress,
and communicating regularly with parents.

The data sources for Participant 2 included an interview, one final reflective
paper, the CEC rubric for her final internship experience, and an observation. The
interview was completed at the home of Participant 2. An observation of Participant 2
was completed by the researcher during the second internship experience, before the
interview. The observation setting was at the elementary internship school site in the
special education resource classroom. Participant 2 was reviewing and teaching a math
lesson to first graders.
Contextual influences. During her first internship placement, Participant 2 was placed in a high school self-contained algebra classroom as the special education intern. Participant 2 described the environment as a very small classroom where the students came for their special education algebra math instruction. Participant 2 stated that she taught between six to eleven high school students of varying ages (i.e., sophomores, juniors, seniors) during each class period. Participant 2 indicated that math was her preferred content area, so she felt comfortable within this setting. Her Cooperating Teacher was a male special education teacher, with whom Participant 2 felt very comfortable. She stated that during the internship, she and the CT would share responsibility for teaching the students.

Her second internship placement was within an elementary school setting. According to Participant 2, she worked with students in two general education classrooms, a first grade and a second grade classroom. Part of her teaching responsibilities as the special education intern was to provide support to the students on her caseload within the first and second grade general education setting. Participant 2 indicated that she also provided her first and second grade students with disabilities direct instruction for math within the special education setting, once a day, for each group of students.

It was during one of the first grade small group, pull-out math sessions in the special education classroom that the researcher observed Participant 2 teach a math lesson to five students with disabilities. During the observation within the small group
special education classroom, Participant 2 directly taught a group of five first grade students with disabilities a lesson pertaining to the weight of objects.

**Infrastructure of the school internship placement.** During the interview with the researcher, Participant 2 shared that she was able to teach math in both of her internship experiences. Since math was her area of interest, this facet of her internship played a big part in her being able to effectively teach her students. In addition, she stated that she would have needed to be trained in the reading program provided at the elementary school in order to take over the teaching responsibility. The following excerpt from her interview provides her perspective as to why she taught math and why she was unable to teach reading during the elementary internship experience.

I couldn’t run the reading [in the elementary] one because you have to be certified in the program, the Read Well [program]. And I haven’t been. And honestly I have zero interest in teaching reading. I do not like teaching reading. It’s like how some people look at algebra, this is not my language. That [reading] is not. But she [elementary CT] let me take over all the math ones. So, unless I had to go home early, I ran the math classes.

**Role of the cooperating teacher.** As previously noted, the Cooperating Teachers within both internship experiences for Participant 2 were special education teachers. Participant 2 indicated that the Cooperating Teacher within each placement influenced the opportunities she was able to experience during the internship. An example was provided from the elementary school experience. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, the Cooperating Teacher at the elementary school was the chairperson of
the local screening committee. Therefore, part of the CT’s responsibilities were to chair the corresponding meetings for the committee. As a result, she spent time out of the classroom every Thursday. At this time, Participant 2 was able to be a part of the meetings and observed the structure and process. According to Participant 2, this was influential for her because “that was my first time at an IEP [Individual Education Plan] meeting. That is probably my weakest area, the IEP meeting. The only experience I had with that is in my classroom at Mason.” Participant 2 felt that she was not skillful in developing goals and objectives for an IEP, which were discussed in many of the meetings. Participant 2 indicated that the only prior experience she had with IEPs was in her coursework at George Mason. Participant 2 described this experience during the interview.

What was really nice this time [elementary internship], I got a lot of time in meetings. Because she [CT] was in charge of the local screening. The head of local screening. So every Thursday, for the first half of the day, she was in meetings. She had me sit in on several of them [including] on a special education department meeting. I sat in on a reading meeting. So they do reading for first, reading for second, reading for third. She goes to either the second or first grade one [department meeting]. I went to one of these at the beginning of the internship. And I was able to sit in on one IEP meeting.

Participant 2 further emphasized the advantage of having her elementary CT be in a leadership role. She wrote the following in her final reflective paper:
In this internship [elementary], because my CT was the department chair for local screening, I was able to sit in a lot of those meetings along with a couple IEP meetings and department meetings which was really wonderful. Meetings and the IEP process are the areas I didn’t have a lot of experience in, along with testing, so it was really nice to be able to observe several of these meetings and see what really goes on in them.

**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** According to Participant 2, she was not provided opportunities to implement many of the instructional strategies that were suggested in her coursework at the university. Participant 2 did not verbally mention any specific instructional strategies from the coursework that she felt would have supported her math instruction. However, Participant 2 reported that the individual school’s regulations and policies limited the opportunities to experience coursework. For example, during the interview with the researcher, when asked if she implemented assessment or progress monitoring procedures, Participant 2 indicated that “I just did not have access to the grading book or anything like that and I wasn’t composing the test. So, there’s obviously things that I’m not going to be doing until I go into the classroom.”

Yet, Participant 2 shared that she did have plenty of opportunities to engage in math remediation, since her secondary placement was in a self-contained math setting. Participant 2 shared that she was able to work with students 1:1 and she experienced many opportunities to practice instructional strategies. She responded:

In the high school, I graded the test and that’s how I knew [what was needed]. And I was big on calling on kids and answering questions on the board, and
giving extra help to the ones who needed [it]. There were several students who I worked with one-on-one multiple times.

Participant 2 indicated that she had minimal opportunities to plan lessons. Participant 2 stated that within the elementary internship experience, the CT did not lesson plan. She described the CT’s teaching plans as “on the spot.” Participant 2 also stated that she decided what to review with her students by going into the first or second grade classrooms each day about ten minutes prior to her pull-out time in order to gather the instructional information she would need to provide students. This was the strategy the CT used, so Participant 2 followed her lead. Participant 2 detailed this situation:

But they weren’t plans, they were just, ‘I see you need this’. ‘I’m going to give them that’. ‘I see you need that’. ‘I’m going to give them this’. Because I mean, that is one thing that I have trouble with, all the lesson plan materials. I’ve spoken to many teachers in special ed areas that [state] you don’t wind up doing lesson plans. We do for the school projects and stuff. Because our kids - it’s got to be so differentiated and is so specifically tailored to each student and each day and each minute, their attitudes and their needs will change on the minute. So it doesn’t make sense to write up twenty different plans because you might have to use twenty different plans. You know you have a general guideline, and then you use your background knowledge to do it on the spot. I’m a very on the spot type person. So that’s really what it was, it was really on the spot.

Relationship influences. Participant 2 described her relationships during the internship experiences as positive overall. As previously indicated, both of her CTs were
special education teachers. Also, she had the same US for both of her internship placements. She indicated that, at times, the positive relationships influenced her ability to practice instructional and behavioral strategies during her internship experiences.

Cooperating teachers. Participant 2 described the relationship with the CT during the high school internship as collaborative in nature. Participant 2 shared that because the CT felt comfortable with her as a co-teacher, she was able to share the teaching responsibilities on a daily basis. Participant 2 described this rapport as:

I was very happy. From the time that I came in, the teacher [CT] treated me like a co-teacher not like a student teacher. He introduced me at back to school night as the co-teacher to the parents, and had me speak with them just as much as he spoke with them. We kind of did a trade off with each period. Some periods I ran, some periods he’d run. Basically every day I’d run 7th period, which was our big group. Whenever he was running it, I was helping with the students with questions.

Participant 2 also felt very positive about her relationship with the CT in her elementary internship placement. Participant 2’s positive relationship was validated before the observation when the CT approached the researcher to state that she was impressed with Participant 2. The CT shared that she felt that Participant 2 was very positive with the students and seemed to “know what she was doing.” Participant 2 further characterized her relationship with the elementary CT as “amazing.”

Students. During the interview, Participant 2 indicated that she had a good relationship with students, especially within the elementary setting. She described one
situation where a student said to her, “I really liked you because you were the first one that really listened to me, and talked to me”. When asked to describe how she built rapport with her students, Participant 2 explained, “I prefer to use reinforcement … it’s very important to me that it makes sense and fit the crime.”

**University supervisors.** Participant 2 stated that she had a positive relationship with her US, who helped to support her during her internships. One example of this support was related to her personal health. Participant 2 stated that she had a health condition that caused her to feel ill frequently. Participant 2 shared that her US provided support by telling her, ‘If you’re sick, you need to take care of yourself first. So, if you ever need to take off, you can make up the hours whenever you need to’. Participant 2 stated that the “US has been excellent. She’s been accommodating to my specific needs, and me being able to get my hours in when I can. And she’s been very nice and helpful and that’s taken the stress off.”

**Decision making influences.** Regarding how the coursework influenced her ability to make decisions during the internship experiences, Participant 2 frequently stated that her background experiences were extremely influential when determining the instructional and behavioral strategies to use during the internship. Participant 2 did not describe specific situations of seeing instruction modeled, yet, did explain other teaching situations where she was given the opportunity to *implement instruction*. Further, the structure and routines of the school settings also influenced her ability to appropriate various educational practices during the internship.
**Background/experiences.** Throughout the interview, Participant 2 stated that she did not feel that the coursework from George Mason influenced her decision making process when teaching in her internship placements. Participant 2 claimed that her background experiences and “gut instincts” guided her decisions in the classroom setting. Her confidence with her own abilities were evident in the following excerpt from her interview:

The classes have been great. And it’s not that I haven’t learned stuff from them, but I started [teaching] in the classroom around the time that I started [classes]. Well, you know, I grew up working with kids, since I was in 5th grade. I moved up to babysitter, nanny, preschool teacher. So, I had the general understanding and general knowledge of a lot of it.

Participant 2 went further to explain that:

Yeah, there are definitely things that I’ve learned that I didn’t know before. But for the most part the classes for me have been expanding on what is common sense to me. And the parts that are new, all the reports and stuff like that, that’s what’s new to me, and the meetings. But I can’t say that the classes changed how I worked in there, there are certainly things that I learned. But for me it’s just a natural reaction. So I can’t really trace that to where it’s coming from. I was also raised really well with a really good moral ground.

When asked about her use of any evidence-based practices she learned in the coursework, Participant 2 explained that even though she learned a lot from the classes, she felt that her choice of strategies were more related to thinking through the situation
Participant 2 described her decision making process as follows:

A lot of them [evidence-based practices] were through me thinking. Well, me having to come up with my own accommodations, think it through for myself. Then I look at it and go with my head the way it is, what I would want. And I try and do that. Granted every kid doesn’t learn the same way I do. I learn through exchange, I don’t learn just through visual. I learn through the verbal exchange and the tactile kinesthetic factor. And a lot of our kids do. But you have some kids are purely audio learners and don’t want the interaction and are purely visual learners.

Implementing instruction. Participant 2 perceived that the self-contained settings within each of the internships allowed her to practice various evidence-based practices. She described a situation in the high school self-contained setting:

In the high school one, the biggest thing I always did in the algebra one was breaking down each step. Because that is something I didn’t teach myself. Someone taught it to me that you look at it and you break it down into easy manageable steps and it’s not so messy any more.

The internship experience in the elementary self-contained special education setting provided her with an opportunity to remediate instruction for students with disabilities. She described this as follows:

When we were counting coins, on the first half [of the worksheet], we had the bag of coins and I had them each draw one [problem] out. We’d put it on the table and
we’d count how much money there was. And we’d do that for a while and then
I’d hand them their worksheets to do it.

Participant 2 was observed during a direct instruction lesson about weight.
Participant 2 instructed five students, who sat around a half-moon table. Students took
turns weighing objects in the classroom on a balance scale. The object was placed on one
side of the scale, while students placed unifix cubes on the other side of the scale until
balanced. The students took turns counting how many cubes were placed on the balanced
scale. The students were required to record the number of cubes on their paper. The
objective of the lesson was to determine which object was heavier.

Participant 2 facilitated the activity with positive reinforcement statements, such
as “good job” or “great counting.” Participant 2 was seen using the practice of
questioning frequently with the students. Through this strategy, Participant 2 encouraged
engagement of the students in their learning process.

**Summary.** As indicated from the data, Participant 2 indicated that she had two
positive internship experiences. First, Participant 2 perceived that the contextual structure
of her internship placements influenced opportunities for her to appropriate instructional
and behavioral strategies. The content of the curriculum (i.e., math) and the roles and
responsibilities of each of the CTs gave her opportunities to practice strategies and skill
subsets (i.e., IEP meetings) required of a special educator.

Secondly, Participant 2 shared that she experienced positive relationships with
both of her CTs, her US, and the students. The CTs provided her opportunities for direct
teaching in the math area, which in turn gave her opportunities to implement instructional
strategies (i.e., use of math manipulatives). Participant 2 perceived her relationship with her US as supportive to her personal medical needs. Further, Participant 2 described her relationships with students as positive, due to her belief in reinforcing behaviors.

Finally, Participant 2 perceived that due to the structure and routines within the school setting, she was not given opportunities to practice some key practices such as lesson planning and assessment practices. Therefore, Participant 2 did not specifically describe observing instruction modeled. Further, Participant 2 also stated that her own background and experiences were the most influential when she made decisions during her internship experiences. Coursework content minimally influenced her ability to appropriate instructional and behavioral strategies.

**Participant 3**

Participant 3 was a twenty-four year old Caucasian female with a BA in anthropology and sociology. She was formally a swim coach and substitute teacher. She had successfully completed 33 credits toward licensure including the two internships at the time of the interview. The intern was evaluated by the US with a total score on the CEC rubric of 2.81 indicating that she met all standards and nearly exceeded expectations on all standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e., score of 2) included selecting, adapting, and implementing a variety of evidence-based practices, adapting pacing, methods and materials, integrating materials and activities, modifying the learning environment, demonstrating the ability to manage two or more classroom activities, and using effective and varied behavior management strategies. Elements which the intern had no opportunity to be observed (indicated with a N/A) included using
assessment data from informal reading inventories, incorporating and implementing instructional and assistive technology, using functional assessments, developing or modifying individualized assessment strategies, and communicating regularly with parents.

The data sources for Participant 3 included an interview, one final reflective paper, and the CEC rubric for her final internship experience. The interview was held in one of the buildings on the campus of George Mason University. However, the researcher was unable to complete an observation. Weather related school cancellations forced the researcher to cancel the scheduled observation twice.

**Contextual influences.** Participant 3 was very forthcoming with her perceptions of the internship experiences. In her first internship experience, she was the special education intern for a male special education teacher in a high school. Her CT was a special education teacher who had been teaching for five years in the high school setting. Within this high school, Participant 3 taught two sections of eleventh grade English in the morning in the inclusive general education setting. In addition, she taught two sections of ninth grade biology in a self-contained special education classroom in the afternoon. Within the two inclusive English 11 classes, Participant 3 worked with six to eight students with disabilities (i.e., emotional disabilities/learning disabilities). Participant 3 described the two ninth grade self-contained biology classes as follows:

The self-contained [biology] was very eye opening in terms of it was in the high school setting. It was drastic in terms of the intelligent level, the social skills level. It was just like … one smaller class of seven, and a larger class of like
twelve [students with ED/LD]. One class was like the intellectual cluster, ranging in ability. And then there was a behavior class basically. Straight up really low readers and really not interested in learning, like barriers culturally, not appreciating education.

Participant 3 shared in her final reflective paper that her second internship setting was in a third grade inclusive classroom. Six (i.e., students with emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder) of the twenty students had IEPs. She was directed by her CT to teach the entire class. Her CT was the general education teacher in this classroom. Her responsibilities included teaching a social studies unit, word study, and a reading and language arts program called *Power Up*. She was also requested by her CT to grade all tests and assignments, vocabulary tests, daily homework and grammar quizzes. Participant 3 shared that both of her internship schools were Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) schools. The first high school internship school believed that PBIS was a team-based process for systemic problem solving, planning, and evaluation. It was an approach for creating an environment within which school-based teams of educators were trained. Within the second elementary internship school, the philosophy was that a PBIS school followed a research and evidenced-based practice for creating a common vision of behavioral expectations through consistent language and practices among staff and students.

*Infrastructure of the school internship placement.* When considering the contextual influence of the placement, Participant 3 expressed varying experiences across her two internships. Even though Participant 3 was not as explicit as to how the settings
impacted her use of coursework, she did allude to the fact that the content of the curriculum (i.e., biology, English, reading, social studies), the service delivery model (i.e., self-contained special education setting, general education inclusive setting), and a unique school wide initiative (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support school) influenced whether she was able to practice specific instructional and behavioral strategies. Evidence of this will be shared below.

Participant 3 shared in her interview that she was glad that she had taken the reading course (i.e., EDSE 503, Language Development and Reading) prior to the elementary internship, because she was able to use the course knowledge to better understand and use the computer reading program called Power Up. Participant 3 was tasked with teaching reading to one elementary student using this program. She claimed that the reading course gave her the background knowledge necessary to teach reading to this student.

In addition, the structure of the PBIS program in her first high school internship experience influenced her use of alternative behavioral strategies within the self-contained biology class. According to Participant 3, managing inappropriate behavior (i.e., shouting out, off task behavior) was a key aspect within this setting. Participant 3 stated that, since this was a PBIS school, specific behavioral routines and systems were already in place. Thus, many of the behavioral suggestions or ideas that Participant 3 considered or suggested to her CT, were not permitted. Participant 3 shared,
[I] tried to suggest a change in a Behavior Intervention Plan for a student who had ripped up his worksheet, but was told that I needed to stick to the current plan of a token reward system and the use of a prize box.

Participant 3 indicated that there were specific steps that were to be followed, and “she was not supposed to deviate from these steps.”

A third influencing factor impacting the appropriation of coursework for Participant 3 was the fact that she was a special education intern who was expected to teach the entire inclusive class during her second internship placement. Participant 3 indicated that she was the intern for a general education Cooperating Teacher who had no special education teaching background. Her CT requested that she teach the whole class a history lesson about ancient Mali. Participant 3 indicated that her expectations for the internship was to provide support only and/or to provide small group instruction. Yet, Participant 3’s frustration was evident during her interview, when she described how she attempted to explain her perceived role to her CT:

I told her [CT] my masters is in special education. So going to the IEP meetings is important to me. Learning how to make the accommodations and following through with students’ work [is important].

Participant 3’s explanation did not alter the expectations of her CT.

**Role of the cooperating teacher.** Participant 3 shared in her interview that the role of the CTs within each of her internship placements was critical to her appropriation of coursework. Within her first internship setting in the high school, Participant 3 stated that her CT was a special education teacher, who supported the students with disabilities in an
inclusive setting (i.e., English general education setting) in the morning. In the afternoon, the special education CT taught in the self-contained Biology setting. In the inclusive general education setting, Participant 3 was given the opportunity to be a part of the collaborative team of teachers (i.e., the CT and the general education teacher). She stated that “They did a really good job being an example of a pair of cooperating teachers…They had their roles in the classroom down. That was very seamless.”

Participant 3’s second internship experience was perceived differently. She explained that she had a CT who was a general education teacher, creating a situation where Participant 3 felt uncomfortable:

She [CT] had a really hard time grasping the idea of my internship. [According to the CT] I wasn’t doing enough. What she did was so much harder and I was slacking…it was very hard.

As previously noted, Participant 3 expressed that she felt that her general education CT did not understand the role of a special education intern. As such, Participant 3 felt that she struggled to use knowledge and skills from her coursework because her responsibilities were perceived to be that of a general education teacher. She expressed her discomfort as follows:

But it was very hard, I mean I’m young. I am subordinate, just in my role in the classroom. My relationship in the job, my relationship as a student teacher, but it was very hard to get across to her [CT] even in the very beginning what my role [special education] was.
**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** Even though Participant 3 indicated that she was uncomfortable with her described general education teacher role during her second internship experience, she also admitted that this contextual setting gave her the opportunity to experience the use of evidence-based practices. Specifically, Participant 3 felt that because she was teaching the Mali history unit, she had the opportunity to use an advanced organizer, KWL strategy (i.e., what do you KNOW, what do you WANT to learn, what did you LEARN). She recalled this strategy from her coursework. She described her use of the strategy:

> We did the KWL so I used that a lot and that helped me structure my history unit. So every new civilization that we learned about, we got a folder with all. Our entry into the new civilization was a KWL and then we would do the Learn at the end of the closure. They got to write on their folders and decorate the front. And the back they wrote. And then they got to share it. They made sure what they wanted to learn got answered that last day where we did the Learn … We would go and do a web walk of images. So that was structured. That was very cool and that helped me structure the whole unit.

**Relationship influences.** As with the previous participants, the relationships that Participant 3 engaged in during her internship experiences were influential to her appropriation of instructional and behavioral practices during her internship. This second topic area, relationship influences, included the relationships formed with the Cooperating Teachers, students, and University Supervisors. Participant 3 indicated during her interview and in her final reflective paper that the relationships established
with her CTs from both internships were critical to gain practice opportunities with instructional and behavioral strategies. The relationships, however, varied across the two internships.

**Cooperating teachers.** Participant 3 felt very positive about her relationship with the CT within her first internship experience in the high school setting. In the following excerpt from her interview, she described the relationship as positive.

I was included in everything from the beginning. He [the CT] was very inclusive of me. So was the teacher [general education teacher] in the inclusive classroom that I was in. From day one, they had me setting up and arranging their classrooms to benefit the students. We talked and exchanged emails every week. They were texting. It was very casual but business. So we got everything done. I was on the syllabus. I went to back to school night. People could contact me if they had questions like I was there. I got a picture in the year book. They loved me and it was fun.

This positive relationship allowed Participant 3 to gain experience within a high school special education program. For example, Participant 3 shared that the CT was more than accommodating to share lesson plans by giving her “a flash drive and [then] I had all the material and it was very organized … We just put in the powerpoint and go.” Participant 3 also indicated that the CT gave her the opportunity “in the second week to full on teach. I took his role and he [CT] sat in the back of the [self-contained biology] classroom”.
Her relationship with her second Cooperating Teacher was a “tough situation.” Participant 3 shared that “I was doing everything that I could and it was like I was never doing enough. That was hard. It was just very, I always felt on edge.” Participant 3 perceived that the CT’s expectations of her were very different from the tasks that Participant 3 was required to complete during the first internship. Despite the contrast, she described in her final reflective paper that as long as she followed the routines and requirements established by the CT within the general education setting, Participant 3 found that the CT did provide guidance with teaching the lessons that the CT had designed.

While I took the “teacher role”, [the CT] was willing to work with me to create lessons and assessments that met the needs of [all] our [general education] students and adequately covered the material from class, then [would] answer any questions that I had. She made the requirements in terms of ways of handling behaviors and assignments, which I did the best to respect.

Participant 3 expressed that she did not feel supported or validated by the general education CT during her second internship. She felt that the CT just did not understand what she was required to accomplish as a special education intern. When asked to clarify her relationship with the elementary CT, Participant 3 explained the following:

The elementary was tough. There was a misunderstanding. She [CT] didn’t attend the Cooperating Teacher [training] that George Mason had. I think there was one, I am hoping there was one. At least any kind of information given to her. I gave her the handbook. I doubt she read it. I explained it [my role and responsibilities].
She didn’t get it or something. So from the very beginning, she couldn’t understand why I left at 3:00 and she stayed until 8:00 … I finished all my work. I went to all the meetings. I stayed after three days a week … so that was hard. I was like, ‘I’m here to support you in any way you need me to do something, I will do it’.

Participant 3 said, “It was stressful for me and it was not a very good experience.” Further misunderstanding was evident when Participant 3 shared what her elementary CT said to her after looking at the CEC rubric:

Before she [CT] did the CEC for me, she came to me and she said, ‘it’s no reflection on you but I’m just really losing my mind that this is all you have to do’.

Students. Participant 3 described her relationship with all of her students as positive. It was also quite evident through her descriptions during the interview that her relationships with the students were directed by the PBIS structure of the schools. As stated earlier, both the high school and the elementary school during her internship experiences were PBIS schools. The behavioral management systems in place for each of these schools impacted how Participant 3 interacted with the students, especially during confrontational situations. Participant 3 shared that she was required to follow not only the established routines and behavior systems within both of the schools, she was also required to follow any established Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) for any of the children. Participant 3 stated that she was able to use her previous knowledge of how to develop BIPs from her coursework.
During her first internship experience, Participant 3 described this appropriation of coursework. Participant 3 stated that in the self-contained biology class in the high school setting, much of her interactions with students involved managing inappropriate behaviors. For example, one student had ripped and thrown a piece of paper because he did not want to complete his work. The student’s BIP included a reward system with a prize box. Participant 3 shared that she understood the intent of a BIP and wanted to slightly change the plan by adding the use of games as an incentive for the student. The following is her description of this incident.

Specifically in the high school setting, I proposed a change, in a BIP plan with the kid that ripped a piece of paper and then went to the computer. What they were doing for him was totally not working and a disaster. He works on a reward system - three pieces on his desk. We’re going to take one away if you do that and if you have no more left then you don’t get ‘xyz’. He doesn’t work that way... you get a token, you get a token, at the end of the day if you have 5 tokens, you get a blah, blah, blah. After you have 400 of these you know, you get to go to the prize box. Because they are a PBIS school, they had a prize box. They have a sticker token system. I talked with him individually and I don’t think they liked that I did. But I said ‘listen you are so capable, why don’t you do stuff’. [He said] there’s no point. And I was like, ‘but you play baseball. You follow the rules. You follow the directions in baseball. Why can’t you follow the directions in school? It’s the same thing. There’s an end game’. He talked to me how his sister’s in college and
it’s so cool because she gets to study what she wants. ‘You have to play the game in school. You have to follow the directions. And then you get to choose what you want. You love history. Awesome. You can study just history when you go off to college. You got to get there’. [He said] yeah I understand but I have nothing right here in front of me. There’s no game.

Ok, we need to put games in his BIP. Well he needs that. Granted I don’t really like that you do the basic – ‘follow the directions and you get a prize.’ That’s where he was. He was not following directions because he was like “so.”

**University supervisors.** Participant 3 shared that she had a different University Supervisor for each internship placement. Even though Participant 3 stated that both University Supervisors were supportive during the internship placements, the US for the elementary placement influenced her ability to have a successful internship experience. Participant 3 shared a particular situation, which was descriptive of the positive support from her second US.

According to Participant 3, the transitions between subject areas in the third grade classroom were problematic for her students. Participant 3 indicated that there was no separation of subject periods in the elementary setting. She did not feel comfortable with the transitions between instructional content areas. She shared that this was not covered in her coursework. Even though Participant 3 was not specific in detailing the activities, she did allude to the fact that her second US suggested some activities to incorporate into the transitions between subjects. Participant 3’s description of this situation was as follows:
So she (US) was saying you’re doing what you are expected to do. I got great feedback on my lessons. I was able to adapt the problem space with the transitions. Because in that classroom, you would go from math right into social studies, no break in elementary school, and she helped me.

**Decision making influences.** During the interview, Participant 3 expressed that her background experiences influenced the instructional and behavioral decisions made during the internship. The situational opportunities during the internships contributed to her decision making and the appropriation of various educational practices.

**Background/experiences.** As previously mentioned, Participant 3 shared that her undergraduate degree was in anthropology and sociology. As she related her internship experiences, she indicated that her background and knowledge of cultural awareness influenced how she thought about and selected decisions.

During her interview, Participant 3 gave an example from her first high school internship experience. When Participant 3 was asked how she gathered assessment data during her internship experiences, she described how she reformatted vocabulary tests for the students. Participant 3 stated that part of her responsibility in the inclusive English class was to give vocabulary tests. The vocabulary tests had been written by her CT and his general education counterpart. Participant 3 stated that the references within the vocabulary tests were culturally inappropriate for the age of the students. Specifically, Participant 3 stated that the tests were referencing television shows such as “The Simpsons” and “How I Met Your Mother,” of which the students had no knowledge.
There were also sports references in the vocabulary tests about the Redskins from twenty-three years ago.

Participant 3 also observed that the students were not doing very well on the vocabulary tests. So, Participant 3 asked permission to reformat and change the wording so that the references were relevant and meaningful for the students. Participant 3 indicated that her cultural sensitivity became the impetus for this instructional experience during the internship. The following excerpt from her interview was Participant 3’s description of this instructional experience.

Their [the CT and the English general education teacher’s] tests were very outdated, the vocab tests. They made them. I remade them all. But they were like referencing things from years ago. They didn’t have any cultural awareness … people from diplomat families had no idea who “Simpsons” were. I wouldn’t know how to use that vocab word either. It’s like taking questions that imply you know “How I Met Your Mother” [television show], like TV shows and music. Sports references, Redskins games twenty-three years ago, so I changed that. I created the vocab tests using the format that I modified after the first two [tests], because the kids weren’t doing well. There was no reason why they weren’t doing well on the vocab tests. Like they’re capable, most of them. So I changed the format and modified it so that it was an easier format. The content didn’t change, just the visual format. I changed all the sentences. So I changed that. And then tracked the grades and showed them that this format was really working. I would really stick with this one I made. So I did that in high school.
Seeing instruction modeled. Participant 3 described the opportunities she had within her elementary and secondary internship experiences to use some instructional strategies, which she learned in her coursework. Participant 3 also had opportunities to observe models of various instructional strategies. Participant 3 described an incident where she was able to use and see course content knowledge modeled within her internship experiences. One was during her elementary internship experience.

When describing her elementary internship experience, Participant 3 stated that she became part of the third grade team, when they were implementing a computerized reading program called *Power Up*. Participant 3 stated that her participation in the instruction of this reading remediation program gave her experience with reading assessments and tracking reading progress over time, differentiating the needs of learners in the classroom, and monitoring student progress. Participant 3 stated that she observed the third grade teachers implement this program. She described this experience in the following excerpt from her interview.

It was progress monitoring. It was a whole program. I don’t remember what it was called. But they called it *Power Up*. They just used a book and it was leveled and then it was grouped to kids, their weaknesses. And certain kids would go in the third grade during this *Power Up* time while all the other regular students would just do reading or *Power Up* groups on the computer. They would use like a computer program. Students would go to certain teachers who needed a little extra reading help and go. They had trouble with their vowel sounds, so they would go to this person and work moving up the levels. They needed to go to the beginning
fluency person. They [went] through hot, cold readings. Specific key words that they were skipping over or avoiding or not understanding, vocab and then a hot read.

**Implementing instruction.** A second internship experience at the high school depicted an opportunity for Participant 3 to use instructional practices. Participant 3 indicated that writing lesson plans was very easy within her first internship experience. Even though Participant 3 was well aware of the specific lesson plan template that was described in her coursework and provided in her internship manual, she was required in her high school self-contained biology class to implement specific lesson plans that were already developed by the CT. The lessons were on a flash drive. Participant 3 indicated that she was to follow the lesson plans, with little flexibility for modifications. Participant 3 described her lesson plan experience in her high school internship placement in the following excerpt from her interview.

I was given [it] in the high school. I was given a flash drive and I had all the material and it was very organized. He was very like plug it in and go kind of teacher. We just put the powerpoint in and everything is in a file for every single day. Checklist kind of teacher. That was extremely easy because that was already planned. He wanted me to stick with that plan, which was kind of nice in a high school setting because you had less time creating that structure and more time to think about how to make it fun or how to change it up. So that was what I did.

**Summary.** An analysis of the data sources from Participant 3 revealed that her appropriation of coursework was influenced by various factors within her internship
experiences. First, Participant 3 shared that opportunities to appropriate coursework were influenced by the contextual setting of the internships. Specifically, the content of the curriculum (i.e., biology, English, reading, social studies), the service delivery model (i.e., self-contained special education setting, general education inclusive setting), and a unique school wide initiative (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support school) influenced whether she was able to practice specific instructional strategies. Secondly, one of the most influential factors contributing to her appropriation of coursework was the role and relationship of the CTs during her internship experiences. Within her first internship at the high school, her CT was a special education teacher in an inclusive and self-contained special education setting. Participant 3 suggested that her special education CT gave her many opportunities to appropriate coursework and to experience the role of a special education teacher. However, during the second internship in the elementary setting, her CT was a general education teacher. Due to this fact, Participant 3 perceived that her roles and responsibilities mimicked a general education teacher more so, and she was erroneously expected to teach the entire general education classroom of students.

In addition, positive relationships with both the USs and the students influenced her internship experiences. Participant 3 indicated that her relationship with both of her USs were positive. The US during her elementary internship was especially supportive with providing her ideas (i.e., transition strategies) to successfully implement classroom management strategies. Further, Participant 3 perceived that the student relationships were also influenced by the behavioral routines established by the PBIS systems in the internship schools.
Finally, Participant 3 suggested that her background in anthropology and sociology influenced how she thought about and selected decisions within her internship experiences (i.e., reformatting vocabulary tests). Some opportunities provided to her during the elementary internship experiences were situations in which she was able to observe the modelling of instructional strategies (i.e., elementary intervention program, *Power Up*). Further, opportunities during her secondary internship experience were situations where she was given opportunities to implement instruction (i.e., lesson plan implementation).

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 was a twenty seven year old Caucasian male who was working at a post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. He had finished his thirty-two credit licensure program and two internships at the time of the interview. His first internship was on-the-job at the post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. Since this program was a post-secondary program, Participant 4 stated that he preferred to speak during the interview only about his second internship placement, an elementary classroom. The intern was evaluated by the University Supervisor with a total score on the CEC rubric of a 2.16 indicating that he met standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e., score of 2) were included in the standards of instructional strategies, learning environments and social interactions, language, instructional planning, assessment, professional ethical practice, and collaboration. Elements which the intern had no opportunity to be observed (indicated by a N/A) included using communication strategies and resources with students whose
primary language is not the dominant language, incorporating and implementing instructional and assistive technology, evaluating and modifying instructional practices, creating and explaining criteria for assessing student work, monitoring student progress, conducting formal and informal assessments, and developing individualized assessment strategies. Other elements which the intern had no opportunity to be observed included practicing within one’s skill limits, observing school policies, demonstrating effective oral communication, demonstrating effective written communication, communicating regularly with parents, fostering relationships with parents, collaborating with school personnel, and modeling techniques and coaching others in using evidence-based practices.

The data sources for Participant 4 included an interview, one final reflective paper, and the CEC rubric for his final internship experience. The interview was conducted in a room on the campus of George Mason University, where Participant 4 was employed. Since Participant 4 consented to participate in this study after his final internship experience, the researcher was unable to complete an observation.

**Contextual influences.** The setting of the second internship placement for Participant 4 was an elementary school. Participant 4 was a special education intern in a second grade general education classroom. There were twenty-nine students in this second grade classroom including five students with IEPs. Participant 4 stated that his CT was the general education teacher of this classroom. During the interview, he described the students with disabilities as:
[There was] a young lady with a diagnosis of ASD, autism spectrum disorder. There was one young lady with LD, learning disabilities primarily, and two kids with ADHD and LD, so comorbid. A student who I think was ED [emotional disabilities] had problems that could have kept him from participating in all aspects of the classroom.

Participant 4 explained that the students with disabilities were in and out of the general education classroom, as they would go to the resource room with a special education teacher throughout the day. Participant 4 would go with the special education teacher sometimes to work with the students with disabilities in the resource room. Within the resource room setting, Participant 4 collaborated with the teacher of students with disabilities and taught the students 1:1 and/or in a small group setting. Participant 4 taught reading and math remedial skills at this time. Participant 4 stated that he was also responsible for teaching the whole class within the general education setting. At these times, Participant 4 taught social studies and science lessons.

**Infrastructure of the school internship placement.** Participant 4, as with the prior participants, indicated that there were elements of the contextual setting of his second internship that influenced whether he used or did not use instructional skills and strategies from his coursework at George Mason University. One of these elements was his placement. Participant 4 was placed in a general education setting as a special education intern. He was responsible for teaching, not only the students with disabilities within this inclusive setting, but was also required to teach all of the students in this general education setting. Participant 4 indicated that this duality of teaching to the whole
group and to a small group in the resource setting allowed him to experience the
differences in teaching techniques and skill sets required across the different settings.
However, Participant 4 stated that he was able to better use various skillsets learned
within his special education coursework when he was in the small group setting of the
resource room. Participant 4 stated that “I felt I was able to better use my creativity and
best practices [for special education] in a small group. Teaching to thirty is a little more
difficult than teaching to three or four.”

In addition, due to the fact that the elementary school in which he was placed for
his second internship experience subscribed to a school wide behavior system, the
Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system, Participant 4 indicated that
he was able to practice some of the behavior strategies that he had also learned in the
behavior management class (EDSE 502, Classroom Management and Applied Behavior
Analysis). Participant 4 described his unique opportunity in his final reflective paper in
the following way:

A classroom full of 25-30 students can either be chaos or organized chaos
depending on your level of classroom management. Using a Positive Behavior
Intervention Supports (PBIS) system school-wide is an ideal way to ensure
successful classroom management. Usually, a PBIS system will work for about
85-90% of the students in the school/classroom. However, it is essential that we
not forget the other 10-15% of students who may require secondary and tertiary
reinforcements and interventions, [and] find unique and interesting way to reward,
reinforce, and transition the students. In this experience I have learned many call
and response systems to grab the students’ attention, for example ‘Hocus pocus (everybody focus!).’ In addition, rewarding students with a ‘star punch’ as a chance for rewards like ‘sitting at the teacher’s desk’ and having the students ‘move their stick’ to ensure they are staying on track throughout the day.

**Role of the cooperating teacher.** Similar to Participant 3’s elementary internship experience, Participant 4 shared that his Cooperating Teacher was a general education teacher. Thus, he was required to teach students with disabilities to the whole class in the social studies and science content areas. However, in order for him to get his hours for his special education internship requirements, Participant 4 created opportunities for himself to teach. Participant 4 stated in his interview, “So at different times, say there were different students that didn’t need to be pulled for math, I would pull them as a resource teacher because I needed the hours.” His CT permitted him to do so, but Participant 4 initiated his opportunity. In turn, he had two CTs to observe, consult with, and be mentored by.

**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** During his interview, Participant 4 was asked to describe how the setting or the context of his internship allowed him to use or experience various instructional practices taught in his coursework. Participant 4 voiced a positive response by stating that he used strategies from the course EDSE 628 (i.e., Elementary Reading, Curriculum, and Strategies for Students with Disabilities Who Access the General Education Curriculum). He shared that he “remember[ed] using different strategies and competencies, best practices, evidence-based. I did a lot with manipulatives. I did a lot of ‘what do you know about this’, lots of
flashcards and think cards.” Participant 4 further explained, “I thought it was great. A lot easier to put in the strategies and practices when I was with the small group of three to four because you know it’s a lot to be a teacher to come [up] with these manipulatives to create them.”

**Relationship influences.** The relationships that Participant 4 encountered during his second internship experience influenced his appropriation of instructional strategies. According to Participant 4, his relationships influenced his use of or lack of use of instructional practices. Participant 4 described his relationships with the adults in his internship experience as “neutral.” He said, “Actually, I wouldn’t say highly positive or negative. I never felt overly welcomed, which was ok.” Participant 4 further explained that, “I had to get out of my comfort zone and ask questions. I didn’t really feel guided by anyone.” Conversely, Participant 4 indicated that the students “were the best part” of his internship experience.

**Cooperating teachers.** The Cooperating Teacher during his second internship experience was a second grade general education teacher. Participant 4 was told that his CT had some experience working with students with disabilities. Participant 4 stated that he felt his CT was an “incredible teacher.” However, he just “didn’t feel like she was imparting [of information].” Participant 4 stated that “we never really got that rapport.” Consequently, Participant 4 shared that he created opportunities to use instructional strategies and to gain experiences with the use of materials and strategies. He stated that his CT was not negative during his internship experience, but she just did not offer opportunities. Therefore, Participant 4 created opportunities. For example, Participant 4
noticed that some of the students were not learning their basic addition and subtraction math facts. He wanted to use the TouchMath® materials to support the students in learning their facts. Participant 4 stated that he did not pull the students into the resource room. He stated that the CT gave him the materials and he just started using them for the students who were struggling with math.

**Students.** Participant 4 was positive about his relationship with the students he worked with during his second internship experience. He felt that the PBIS system that was implemented at the school gave him a great opportunity to use many of the behavioral strategies that were taught in his behavior management course (i.e., EDSE 502). In addition, Participant 4 indicated that “by not taking an inactive role but an active role [with rapport building]” he was able to build positive relationships with the students. He felt fortunate to be in a situation where he could practice the behavioral strategies by “rewarding them” and “catching them in the act of” positive behavior.

**University supervisors.** As previously noted, Participant 4 indicated that he did not feel “necessarily guided” by anyone, not even the US. He described this lack of guidance in the following excerpt from his interview:

[Nothing was] overly clear. We had one meeting for like 45 minutes, with the three of us [CT, US, and student teacher] and then it was just like go. Thank God I had had a previous one [internship] and had some idea. If this was my first one and [I] had not had the on-the-job one, I would have been a deer in the headlights. Besides the biweekly reflections, nothing else was super cut and dry. I didn’t know whether I needed to reinvent the wheel on my own lesson plans based on
the sequence of learning. I didn’t know whether I was supposed to borrow and adapt.

Even though Participant 4 was “neutral” about his relationship with his US, the US did indicate through the CEC rubric that he met expectations of his internship.

**Decision making influences.** As Participant 4 was describing his background experiences, he indicated that he did not have prior experience working in K-12 public schools. Consequently, his coursework provided the core background knowledge that helped to guide his instructional and behavioral decisions during the second internship experience. Therefore, the subtheme *background/experiences* was omitted from this section. Yet, during his interview, Participant 4 described various situational experiences in which he was able to observe and/or implement instructional strategies.

**Seeing instruction modeled.** During his interview, Participant 4 described one particular opportunity to observe and practice assessment strategies. Participant 4 shared that students in the second grade classroom were evaluated with summative assessments in a lab. At this time, he indicated that he was able to observe the CT and other teachers implement the assessment procedures. Participant 4 described this observation by stating, “So we did like a lab with the summative assessments. By [observing the teachers in] the lab, I could see ‘well yes they do know’, or ‘they can tell the picture of a solid’.”

**Implementing instruction.** When asked how the coursework influenced any instructional decisions that he made during his elementary internship experience, Participant 4 explained that he created opportunities to practice instructional strategies, especially from course EDSE 628 (i.e., Elementary, Reading, Curriculum, and Strategies
for Students who Access the General Curriculum). He stated that he would sometimes ask his CT if he could pull one or two students to practice “peer-assisted strategies.” He also wanted to do “some trial and error” with types of responses. For example, Participant 4 stated that he taught students to show nonverbal responses by “a thumbs up, a thumbs down, a clap, fist pump.” Participant 4 explained further that he used “a lot of charts, trying to get the students to think in an organized sequential way.”

**Summary.** An analysis of the data sources from Participant 4 revealed that his appropriation of coursework was influenced by various factors within his internship experience. First, Participant 4 shared that opportunities to appropriate coursework were influenced by the contextual setting of his internship. Specifically, Participant 4 stated that since his CT was a general education teacher, he was responsible for teaching the whole class for social studies and science, giving him experiences with whole group instruction. Consequently, Participant 4 created opportunities to work with the students with disabilities in the special education setting, giving him opportunities to work with students in a small group setting. Additionally, Participant 4 indicated that, due to the fact that his elementary internship was a PBIS school, he was able to observe and practice behavioral strategies learned from his coursework (i.e., reward system).

Secondly, Participant 4 stated that his relationships with his CT and US were “neutral.” However, Participant 4 indicated that he had positive relationships with the students. He stated that he was able to use behavioral strategies from his coursework (i.e., EDSE 502) to develop his relationships with his students.
Finally, Participant 4 suggested that his coursework was the core background of his educational decision making. Due to the fact that his CT was a general education teacher, many of his responsibilities were centered on teaching to a whole classroom. Consequently, Participant 4 created opportunities to implement instructional strategies with the students with disabilities in the classroom. For example, Participant 4 described opportunities to use evidence-based strategies such as peer-assisted strategies and non-verbal opportunities to respond.

**Participant 5**

Participant 5 was a forty-five year old Caucasian female who was a career switcher. She had experience as an adjunct professor in international education at American University. Additionally, she had experience as an instructional assistant in a special education self-contained classroom for students with disabilities needing significant support. She successfully completed 30 credits of the licensure program and was completing her second internship at the time of the interview. The intern was evaluated by the University Supervisor with a total score on the CEC rubric of 2.76 indicating that she met all standards and nearly exceeded expectations on all standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e., score of 2) included exhibiting a commitment to professional standards, guiding student behavior and moral development, presenting content, demonstrating growth and dissemination of professional knowledge, practicing within one’s skills limits, demonstrating responsibility, observing school policies, demonstrating high expectations for all students, demonstrating commitment to developing high education, demonstrating concept of oneself as a lifelong learner,
engaging in productive relationships with educators, maintaining confidential communication, and fostering respectful and beneficial relationships. Elements which the intern was not observed (indicated with a N/A) included using functional assessments, communicating regularly with parents, collaborating with school personnel, observing, evaluating, and providing feedback to paraeducators, and modeling techniques and coaching others in the use of evidence-based instructional methods.

The data sources for Participant 5 included an interview, two final reflective papers, the CEC rubric for her final internship experience, and an observation. The interview was completed before the observation in a room on the site of the final middle school internship experience. The researcher completed the observation on the site of her middle school internship experience after the interview. The observation began within the inclusive science classroom and ended in the special education resource room. Within the resource room the intern was administering a quiz.

**Contextual influences.** During her first internship experience, Participant 5 was placed in a third grade classroom in an elementary school. Students from this elementary school matriculated into the middle school, which was the setting for Participant 5’s second internship experience. The third grade classroom was an inclusive setting with a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an instructional assistant in the classroom for the entire day. There were nine students with disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, ADHD, emotional disabilities) in the classroom of twenty students. During the interview, Participant 5 described her responsibilities in this inclusive placement in the following way:
We worked to support our students with IEPs, but we were there to support all of the students in that class. There were some other students who were in the process of being identified through child find and they needed the support. So, I had the opportunity to work with all those students, not just the ones on our caseload.

During her second internship experience, Participant 5 was placed in a middle school eighth grade inclusive setting. She was the special education intern for a special education teacher who worked with ten students with disabilities accessing the general education curriculum. Participant 5 stated that her responsibilities were to support the students with disabilities in each of the students’ class periods, including English, science, civics, and math. The only time that Participant 5 worked with students in the special education classroom was when an assessment was to be administered.

**Infrastructure of the school internship placement.** Participant 5 shared that there were elements of the contextual setting of both internship experiences that influenced her use of instructional and behavioral strategies from her coursework at George Mason University. Participant 5 indicated that the inclusion setting in both internship experiences provided her with the opportunity to work in a co-teaching environment. She stated that the general and special education teacher teams in both settings had experience working together. Participant 5 shared that she was able to collaboratively participate in co-teaching models that allowed her to be in a collaborative setting. Participant 5 described her elementary experience as, “just a great experience because the team that I was working with allowed me to do a lot with the hands on … planning together and
making lesson plans [together].” Participant 5 further explained that her secondary middle school experience was “another great model of co-teaching.”

**Role of the cooperating teacher.** Participant 5 claimed that both of her Cooperating Teachers were special education teachers. According to Participant 5, during her first internship experience in the elementary school, the co-teaching role of her CT allowed her to see co-teaching modeled within the general classroom setting. She described this experience as a “model co-teaching experience … Because their relationship [general education teacher and special education teacher] was working so well, we were all just kind of on the same page.” Because of this dynamic, Participant 5 indicated that the CT welcomed her to try various instructional strategies within the general education setting.

In contrast, Participant 5 described the co-teaching role of the special education teacher in her secondary placement as “a supporter” to the students. That is, the CT did not provide direct instruction to students and completed a lot of IEPs throughout the internship period. Participant 5 stated that as an intern under the CT, she was not really teaching. So, this role of supporter became Participant 5’s role as an intern. She described this “supporting role” in the following excerpt from her interview:

So really, I’ve been seeing more of the content teachers delivering the material. So, I am supporting the kids in the classroom, depending what their different goals are. Some students you just have to work to keep on task. Working to produce some clarification of materials. … And we do a lot of work, of course, to support them. It’s a lot of following up, making sure assignments are being done.
... we’re not doing a lot of reteaching. And things like that, it’s just more keeping them moving forward.

Because of this supportive role, Participant 5 indicated that she had to ask to practice various instructional strategies within this internship placement.

**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** As Participant 5 shared her experiences during her interview and within her final reflective papers, it was evident that Participant 5 had key opportunities to practice the instructional and behavioral strategies she had learned from her coursework. Participant 5 specifically shared three key opportunities that she was given, due to the context of her internships: (a) use of technology in the internship settings, (b) behavioral strategies used within the behavioral system adopted by the school, and (c) the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies.

First, Participant 5 shared that she had many opportunities to practice her skills using technology in her teaching, due to the fact that technology was prevalent in the classrooms. Within her final reflective paper for her elementary internship placement, Participant 5 stated,

I also was able to increase my use of technology in the classroom, and used the Promethean Board to present several lessons and activities. During this time, I also learned to support students using technology during testing, as our school had recently begun to implement the use of Interactive Achievement software.
Participant 5 further described how the contextual factor of having technology prevalent in the elementary setting allowed her to practice technology strategies that were introduced to her in her coursework. During her interview, Participant 5 shared that

Here in this county we’re blessed with a lot of technology. Every classroom that I’m going to has a Smartboard, or an Elmo, which the kids loved. So, obviously I added technology to my lessons, more for the elementary students.

The second contextual factor that Participant 5 described in her interview that influenced any opportunity to use behavioral strategies within her internships were the established behavioral systems at both of her internship sites. Participant 5 stated that due to these established practices, she was able to practice or follow the behavioral strategies embedded already such as Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). Participant 5 described this opportunity in the following excerpt from her interview with the researcher:

I think, I mean it [behavior system] was already embedded. I didn’t have to come up with anything on my own. Just following what was in place. Behaviorally, I think the structure was already in place in all of these classrooms. But some of our students do have FBAs and BIPs. The cooperating teachers were great in sharing those from the very beginning and let me read through all the paperwork the first week of school. So, I had an understanding of what was going on.

The third contextual factor that provided key opportunities for Participant 5 to practice instructional strategies was the Response to Intervention model that had been established within the elementary internship setting. Within this elementary school, the
RTI model was in place and served as the school model of providing support to all students. This inclusive model provided an opportunity for Participant 5 to experience the RTI model. The model was discussed in her coursework. She also shared that the direct reading strategies she observed were also addressed in the reading course (i.e., EDSE 503). She described this key opportunity in the following excerpt from her interview.

They [elementary staff] really work to keep the students supported in the classroom. I also have gotten to see how the RTI model is [implemented]. That’s really where the pull out would occur. We had several students who were quadruple dipped for reading. We had different reading supports going on. They [students] would get pulled out with the reading and also with the special education teacher at two different times.

**Relationship influences.** Participant 5 shared that the relationships established within her internship experiences were key to providing her opportunities to employ instructional and/or behavioral strategies. Participant 5 indicated that her relationships with the school personnel and her University Supervisor impacted her internship experiences. Participant 5 also shared that relationships in both internship settings with her CTs and students were one of the leading factors that allowed her to appropriate instructional/behavioral strategies learned from her coursework. Participant 5 described all relationships as positive and nurturing.

**Cooperating teachers.** Within her interview and final reflective papers, Participant 5 indicated that she received “expert guidance” from her elementary CT. Participant 5 also described her secondary CT as “especially gracious in answering my
never-ending questions about the special education process in her school and district.”
Since both CTs were special education teachers, Participant 5 indicated that she benefited
from their expertise with teaching in the various collaborative settings. Participant 5
alluded to the fact that her CT gave her many opportunities to practice and apply various
strategies from her coursework by expertly guiding her within the middle school
inclusive setting. This guidance was described in the following way in her secondary
final reflective paper.

I was able to benefit from the expert guidance of … [my] Cooperating Teacher…
and to observe and apply different teaching styles, instructional methods,
strategies and differentiated instruction across the academic content areas. I was
also able to benefit from observing several different models of collaboration and
team-teaching [co-teaching].

During the observation that the researcher completed during the secondary
internship, a positive and supportive rapport between the CT and Participant 5 was
evident. For example, during the physical science quiz that was proctored in the special
education resource room by Participant 5, the CT was also present in the room during this
time. The researcher observed that Participant 5 was not sure how to answer one of the
questions posed by one of the students with disabilities. Participant 5 then very discretely
went over to the CT and asked for guidance. The CT addressed the student by clarifying
vocabulary, and reminding him of the clues given previously by the general education
teacher. As the CT was modeling how to respond to the student, Participant 5 was
observing the scenario. A brief head nod between the CT and intern was noticed at the
deck of this encounter, validating the exchange.

During the interview, Participant 5 described her relationship with her CT in her
elementary setting as “welcoming just from the first day.” She indicated that “they really
just brought me in, they really let me start.” Participant 5 further explained within her
final reflective paper that during her elementary internship experience, her CT and
general education collaborative teacher guided her to practice instructional strategies. For
example, Participant 5 explained that she used “a variety of evidence-based practices
(EBPs), such as teaching students to focus on active reading using WH questions” during
her elementary internship.

Participant 5 further explained that her elementary CT validated and encouraged
her learning. Participant 5 depicted the relationship in the following excerpt from her
interview.

And my Cooperating Teacher was absolutely fantastic. I had a million questions
every day and she was so patient and explaining to me what was behind the
scenes with all the paperwork. There were all these different pieces. Some things
were coming from the state that was required and some things were county
specific, I learned a lot about all those different processes from her. The rationale
behind all the testing we do. The data collection, how to collect the data, how to
analyze the data, how to present it to the parents, the colleagues.

Students. Participant 5 stated that her relationships with the students in both
internships were positive. She indicated that both environments and staff were positive
and nurturing toward the students. When asked in her interview how the coursework influenced her interactions with the students, Participant 5 responded that her coursework in classroom management was not very strong. Rather, she commented that she had to rely on her daily experiences with her students, using trial and error to determine positive behavior supports. Because of the positive environments, however, she stated that she was given the opportunity “to become more adept in using various classroom management techniques, such as modifying the environment or presenting tasks and materials [differently], rather than trying to control individual behaviors.” Within both of her final reflective papers for each of her internships, Participant 5 stated that “classroom management is an area that demands continued self-reflection and a trial and error type of learning until you have gained a lot of experience in different classroom scenarios.” For example, during the observation, the researcher witnessed Participant 5 giving positive tickets to students as they were entering the special education classroom prior to taking a science quiz. Participant 5 stated to each student that they had earned the tickets for completing the science notecard homework assignment, validating Participant 5’s “experience” of classroom management procedures.

_University supervisors._ During her interview, Participant 5 was asked to describe her relationship with the University Supervisor. Participant 5 stated that she had the same University Supervisor for each of her special education internship placements. She felt that she had a positive relationship with her US. However, she did not have a lot of interaction with her. Participant 5 explained,
She [US] is responsive and easy to work with. I think she is very hands off because I think she realized that I came into this with a lot of experience. She said ‘I can see that you are competent’.

**Decision making influences.** In the interview, observation, and in the final reflective papers, Participant 5 shared that both of her internships were positive experiences. As she described her own personal background, education and work experiences, it was obvious that these experiences influenced how Participant 5 made instructional and behavioral decisions during her internship. In addition, the instructional and behavioral routines of the classrooms and school settings influenced how she made decisions and appropriated various educational practices.

**Background/experiences.** As previously described, Participant 5 shared that she had a son with Asperger’s Syndrome. During her interview, Participant 5 indicated that given her son’s needs, she was introduced to the world of special education. Coupled with her tutoring of at-risk students in D.C., and her job as an instructional assistant in a classroom of students with significant disabilities, she felt that these experiences gave her knowledge of working with students with disabilities. As such, she indicated that her background experiential knowledge influenced the instructional and behavioral decisions made during her internship experiences.

In addition, Participant 5 described her internship experiences during the interview and within her final reflective paper as having opportunities to observe and practice instructional and behavioral practices, which she learned from her coursework. When asked how her experiences within her internships allowed her to use her
coursework, she stated that she learned a lot from her coursework. She said, “So I was able to apply what I knew from my coursework.” Even though Participant 5 did not name courses specifically during her interview or within her reflective papers, she specifically described instructional and behavioral techniques that she had learned throughout her coursework in general. Her descriptions fell into two categories: opportunities to observe teachers model various instructional practices and opportunities to implement various instructional and behavioral strategies and or skillsets.

Seeing instruction modeled. Participant 5 specifically described four opportunities to observe instruction modeled: (a) assessment procedures, (b) progress monitoring of student performance, (c) the IEP process, and (d) RTI groupings.

The first opportunity to observe instructional practices described by Participant 5 were assessment procedures. Within both of her final reflective papers, Participant 5 stated that she was given the opportunity to observe and to experience “a variety of assessments: benchmarks, computer testing, unit tests, and formative assessments and the types of modifications and accommodations that are in common practice.” Participant 5 further explained that, “It was very important to see how assessment guides instruction, both for individual students and the whole class, over the short term and long term.”

The second opportunity described by Participant 5 to see instruction modeled was the progress monitoring procedures used by teachers within the elementary and secondary internship experiences. Participant 5 indicated that she observed and followed all progress monitoring procedures that were in place both in the elementary and in the
secondary placements. Participant 5 described these procedures in the following excerpt from her interview.

Actually both placements in [this] county were using *Interactive Achievement*, which is the online testing. And that’s great. You can get instant data. It really crunches it down. You can see class level and the individual level [data]. You can go right in after the test and what questions are they missing. What’s the pattern of the questions the class is missing? Or you can go back that day or the next to go do reteaching on that material.

The third opportunity that Participant 5 described as influential in giving her experience with instructional decision making was the opportunity to see IEP meetings. She stated that she was not able to write IEPs, yet, was able to participate in the discussions about the students’ needs. Participant 5 described this opportunity in an excerpt from her interview.

I was able to be in four IEPs. Across the settings, I worked with my Cooperating Teachers to help. I didn’t actually do the writing of the IEPs, but they would share with me when they were writing and developing them. They would ask my opinion about the students. I was able to read all the graphs.

The final area of opportunity that Participant 5 described as providing a model of instruction was her description of the RTI Tier 3 reading group, which she also taught. Participant 5 stated that she worked with a Tier 3 reading group in the elementary internship setting every day. She indicated that there was a specific program in place (i.e.,
Read Naturally) that she was able to observe. However, she was unable to specifically teach the program.

Implementing instruction. Participant 5 described two specific opportunities within her internship experiences in which she actually implemented strategies that she had learned in her coursework. First, even though she had indicated that behavior systems were established in the schools, she stated that she was able to use some behavioral strategies from her coursework. Participant 5 indicated that, “I think I put some of the behavioral practices [from the coursework] into place. Definitely some de-escalation techniques. And just breaking down different ways of presenting material.” Adding validation to these statements, during the observation, Participant 5 was observed suggesting to a student “if you break it down, I know you [can do it].”

One other opportunity was described in Participant 5’s final reflective paper. Within the following excerpt from the paper, Participant 5 described how she was able to use evidence-based practices when teaching students.

I successfully led both small and large group instruction across the curriculum, using a variety of evidence-based practices, such as teaching students to focus on active reading using ‘wh’ questions. I feel that I definitely improved my skills in instructional design, being able to blend EPBs [evidence-based practices] with engaging curriculum materials to keep students motivated and making progress.

Summary. Data analysis of the data sources for Participant 5 indicated that this special education student intern was given opportunities to appropriate coursework first through contextual factors of the internship placements. Participant 5 indicated that the
influential contextual factors included the collaborative co-taught model in both internship settings and the role of the CTs (i.e., direct teaching and supportive role). Additionally, the contextual factors that provided opportunities to experience coursework included the accessibility and use of technology in the internship settings, behavioral strategies used within the behavioral systems, and the use of RTI strategies.

Secondly, Participant 5 perceived her relationships with the CTs, US, and the students as positive and supportive. She described the CT during the elementary internship as “welcoming just from the first day.” Further, during the observation in the secondary internship setting, the researcher observed a positive and supportive rapport between the CT and Participant 5. Although Participant 5 described the US relationship as positive, she perceived that the US was “hands off” with her interaction with Participant 5. Thus, the US was not influential in her internship experience. In contrast, Participant 5 perceived that she relied on “daily experiences” and “trial and error” to build positive relationships with her students.

Finally, Participant 5 stated that her background experiences with her son with autism and previous job experiences (i.e., tutoring of at-risk students, instructional assistant in a classroom of students with disabilities) impacted her decision making during both internships. Additionally, Participant 5 stated that she was able to observe instructional practices modeled (i.e., assessment procedures, progress monitoring of student performance, the IEP process, RTI groupings). Participant 5 further described opportunities to implement instruction (i.e., behavioral strategies, evidence-based strategies) learned from coursework as influencing her instructional decision making.
**Participant 6**

Participant 6 was a forty-three year old career switcher who had a child with autism. She successfully completed 30 credits and one internship towards licensure at the time of the interview. The intern was evaluated by the University Supervisor with a total score on the CEC rubric of a 2.79 indicating that she met all standards and nearly exceeded expectations on all standards. Elements which the intern met expectations (i.e., score of 2) included modifying the learning environment, demonstrating the ability to manage two or more classroom activities, facilitating learning experiences that incorporate self-direction, regularly monitoring student progress, and demonstrating high expectations for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities. Elements which the intern had no opportunity (indicated with a N/A) included using effective varied behavior management strategies, using communication strategies, using assessment data from informal reading inventories, incorporating and implementing instructional and assistive technology, evaluating and modifying instructional practices, using functional assessments, creating and explaining criteria for assessing student work, planning for using various methods to assess student learning, conducting formal and informal assessments, and involving and guiding all students with mild and moderate exceptionalities. Other elements which the intern had no opportunity to be observed included keeping records of students’ progress, developing or modifying individualized assessment strategies, analyzing, evaluating and reflecting on student assessment data, using assessment data to profile student learning, communicating regularly with parents,
fostering respectful and beneficial relationships with families, observing, and evaluating and providing feedback to paraeducators.

The data sources for Participant 6 included an interview, two final reflective papers, the CEC rubric for her final internship experience, and an observation. The interview was held in one of the rooms at the site of the final elementary internship. The researcher completed the observation on the site of her elementary internship experience after the interview. The observation began in the classroom of the elementary internship experience. The observation ended in a different classroom setting with two students. Participant 6 was reviewing comprehension skills while using a software program to engage the students.

**Contextual influences.** During her first internship, Participant 6 was a special education intern at a middle school setting. She taught reading and language arts to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in a self-contained special education classroom. The students had varying disabilities (i.e., emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, ADHD, autism). Participant 6 shared that she taught two self-contained reading classes with four to fourteen students in each class. She was also in two class periods where students with IEPs were tutored in various subjects. Participant 6 described her responsibilities within this internship in the following excerpt from her interview.

So, we followed her [CT] routine, exactly. So, the students came in there for self-contained language arts. Then they go to other classes. Then some of them came back in and that was where you would get 6th to 8th graders for the two different sessions of reading because it was two different levels. Then there was two
sessions a day, maybe one, can’t remember, where it was a catch all. So students were in inclusion classes and then come for some of this tutoring kind of period with the special education teacher, where they bring all their materials that they hadn’t worked on in the classes. Anything they hadn’t finished. Anything they didn’t understand in the general education setting. Even with special ed teachers in there because they were co-taught. They would bring and open up their binders and reteaching basically. Anything from math, English, science. So I never really knew what was coming in.

Participant 6 described her second internship placement as an elementary summer school program. She stated that she taught mostly 6th graders, who were students with varying disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, other health impaired, ADHD). She shared that during the morning class time, American History was taught. Participant 6 indicated that “we incorporated reading comprehension and math into the history [lessons], but not make it feel like school. So essentially it was an extension of the school year, supposed to be no assessments, but to keep their skills up”. In the afternoons, Participant 6 stated that she was given permission to work with students within their club activities, pool, or field trips.

Participant 6 talked about her CT relationships, yet did not allude to any specific contextual influences of the Role of the CT in her data sources. Therefore, the Role of the CT was omitted as a theme.

Infrastructure of the school internship placement. Participant 6 shared that due to the type of program (i.e., summer school), she was not able to gain experience or
appropriate many of the instructional and/or behavioral strategies from courses. For example, Participant 6 indicated that there were no assessments completed within the second internship in the summer school setting. She stated in her interview, “There aren’t assessments going on. We’re not tracking any progress.” Therefore, there were no opportunities for Participant 6 to practice any assessment procedures or strategies. Additionally, within her first internship placement, she stated that all assessment procedures were SOL driven and the assessment process was already established. Thus, Participant 6 shared that she was unable to experience the process of assessment in her internships.

**Key opportunities to experience the coursework.** When asked during her interview whether the setting of her internships had given her opportunities to use instructional strategies from her coursework, Participant 6 highlighted her second internship experience. She indicated that she had been given many opportunities to practice instructional strategies from the coursework. For example, Participant 6 described one opportunity of using *Voki*, an educational software tool that allows students to create their own talking characters online. She stated that there were computers in the classroom and the teachers wanted them to be used for instruction. Additionally, the CT was required to develop lessons for specific students in order to demonstrate their academic progress.

Since she had just finished her technology course, Participant 6 decided to use *Voki* with two students. This software program used *avatars* (i.e., characters) to engage students in the learning process. Participant 6 used *Voki* to practice reading
comprehension and writing skills, during the observation by the researcher. During the second half of the observation, Participant 6 took two students into a separate room to practice reading comprehension skills. She used the software program, *Voki,* to engage the students. Participant 6 instructed the students to create their own *avatar* on the computer. The students took turns creating the *avatars* and adding scripts that coincided with the text of the passage that they had previously read, practicing paraphrasing and summarizing.

**Relationship influences.** Participant 6 indicated that one of the factors that influenced her ability to gain practice with instructional and behavioral strategies, were the relationships she had with her Cooperating Teachers, the students, and the US during each of her internship settings.

**Cooperating teachers.** Participant 6 stated that both of her CTs were special education teachers. However, it was the atmosphere that each of the CTs created within their classrooms that influenced whether Participant 6 was able to appropriate instructional and behavioral skills from her coursework.

During her interview, Participant 6 shared that the relationship with her CT in her first internship was challenging. She stated that, “I liked the teacher. I think she was a good teacher in terms of she knew her content.” However, the CT’s relationship with the students and the staff at the building was very negative. Participant 6 indicated that, “she [CT] is screaming at these kids all day long … [the students are] getting reamed for every little thing. Every boy getting yelled at because they are not in their seat.” Participant 6
indicated that the CT’s reaction towards the students created a negative atmosphere within the classroom setting.

Additionally, Participant 6 stated that the CT in the first internship had negative interactions with the staff with which she collaborated. Participant 6 described one interaction that she witnessed between her CT and a male special education teacher. She stated that she walked into the classroom one day and witnessed her CT screaming at the other teacher about a student. Participant 6 described the incident in the following excerpt from her interview.

I walked in one day and she [CT] was screaming at a colleague. So I walked back out in the hallway and started working. This went on for forty-five minutes. The teacher came out in tears. I mean it was a male. He said good morning…I really wasn’t interested at what the situation was. I thought it was inappropriate.

Participant 6 further stated that the same CT was extremely reluctant to give her opportunities to practice instructional strategies. Participant 6 shared that, “it was like pulling teeth to let me teach. She’d let me teach then take over. It was very difficult to take over the classroom. She would not let go of the classroom.” When asked in her interview whether she had opportunities to practice instructional strategies, Participant 6 stated that she was not given permission to do anything but watch. She described her observations of the progress monitoring process by the CT in her first placement in the following excerpt.

She didn’t let me touch them [assessments] at all. I would sit there and watch. But she wouldn’t let me do any of the testing. It was very very simple. It was literally
just marking how many words they had wrong as they read a passage. I asked her how she tracked the data and what she did with it. She did tell me that. But nothing else that was very useful, no.

Participant 6 continued to explain that her CT did not give her opportunities to develop lesson plans on a frequent basis either. She indicated that the only time she was able to write lesson plans on her own was when her US came to observe her. At any other time, “I had to just use what she [CT] had. [She said] ‘Here is what I want done and this is how I want it done’. I would deliver it.”

In contrast, Participant 6 stated that her relationship with the CT in her second internship placement was positive and validating. She indicated that her second CT allowed her to “try anything.” Participant 6 also stated that not only was her CT positive, the entire staff was positive within her second internship placement. She described the positive atmosphere as being very welcoming. Participant 6 described the atmosphere in the following excerpt from her interview.

The teachers all get along. The atmosphere is right. They like each other. It’s very pleasant…they all work really well together. They’ve been great to us...I think it was yesterday that one of the teachers said, ‘you know it’s really great that you are here. You guys are a huge help. And we like your perspective.’

Due to this positive atmosphere, Participant 6 stated that the CT validated and/or was supportive of any instructional ideas that she had. Therefore, the opportunities to practice and appropriate her skillsets from her coursework were welcomed.
**Students.** Participant 6 stated that her relationship with the students in both of her internship experiences was positive and easy to develop. She indicated that her experience when dealing with her own five boys and her daughter with autism gave her a lot of patience. Because of her patience Participant 6 stated, “Anything the boys are throwing out in the classroom just doesn’t rattle me.”

During the observation, the researcher observed Participant 6 interacting with students in a calm positive demeanor. For example, when talking with one of the students during independent work time, Participant 6 knelt down beside the student and validated his work by stating, “great job” or “good work.” Another example of positive student interactions by Participant 6 was seen near the end of the observation. As Participant 6 was working on the computer with two students, Participant 6 acknowledged how well they were working together by stating, “You guys are really working well together.”

**University supervisors.** During her interview and within her elementary final reflective paper, Participant 6 stated that her relationship with her US was positive. She described her US as a mentor with “a wealth of knowledge.” She further stated that she “appreciate[d] her [US’s] willingness to share her experiences and advice on challenges I have faced in both internships.” Participant 6 also indicated that she was fortunate to have the same US for both internships. She explained:

I lucked out with getting her [US] twice … the university should do that. I had the same one for both, for that consistency. She’s been great. She came in here last week with a huge bag of stuff for me … I think they [the university] should do
that deliberately. They should try to pair University Supervisors so that you can use them for years to come.

**Decision making influences.** Participant 6 explained that she had two very different internship experiences. As she described her educational and personal family experiences, it was evident that these experiences strongly influenced how she made instructional and behavioral decisions during her internships.

**Background/experiences.** As previously mentioned, Participant 6 had a daughter diagnosed with autism. Participant 6 shared that she had been involved with ABA home therapy with her daughter. These were the experiences that Participant 6 identified as valuable when working with students with difficult behaviors. As noted in the following excerpt from her secondary final reflective paper, her personal experiences influenced how she interacted with students.

The SPED classes I took prior to starting my internship are helpful, but my life experience with raising children, practicing ABA therapies with my daughter, and my experience with leading troops is just as helpful in my internship. If I became a teacher at age 22, I think I would have failed miserably. I think I am coming into this profession at the right time for me. Life experience has made it easier for me to understand the various behaviors and plights of the students I have worked with over the past five weeks. Patience is something all students need, but especially SPED students.

Within her interview, Participant 6 also stated, “I’ve used a lot of ABA that I’ve used and learned from my own background.”
**Seeing instruction modeled.** As Participant 6 described the instructional and behavioral decisions that she implemented within her internship experiences, she stated that she had opportunities to observe her CTs model instructional and behavioral strategies that she learned from her coursework. Further, Participant 6 indicated that she was also given many opportunities to practice coursework knowledge through her own initiative. For example, Participant 6 shared that the reading course (i.e., EDSE 503) that she took as part of her coursework gave her the knowledge to understand the reading instruction in the classroom setting. Participant 6 stated that she was taught how to use reading assessment results to make instructional decisions for the classroom setting. Even though she was not given the opportunity to actually practice the instructional strategies herself, she had the opportunity to observe the assessment and instructional process within both of her internships. She used the observations to reflect on the reading challenges that were present with many of the students within both of her internship settings. The following is an excerpt from her interview describing her opportunity to observe the instructional reading process.

> From the [reading] course, we were taught how to use that [Jennings assessments]. We were taught how to use that and we used that for our assessments, reading inventories. We used those throughout the entire course and then I used a lot of either those actual tests or things within those tests or things from that reading course to kind of figure out what’s going on with some of the reading issues with some of the students here [elementary internship] and at the
last one [secondary internship]. So kind of watching when they are reading. Ok, what that is. Why are they having that issue with that word, etc…

**Implementing instruction.** Within her interview and her observation, Participant 6 described two experiences that depicted how she was given the opportunity to implement her coursework voluntarily. The following two descriptions depict the use of behavior management strategies and differentiation strategies gleaned from her coursework knowledge.

During her second internship experience within the elementary summer school placement, Participant 6 explained that there really was not a specific behavior management system in place. She indicated that the staff had a philosophy of being respectful. So, Participant 6 wanted to infuse some of her background and coursework knowledge of classroom and behavior management strategies. She stated that she was “given free rein” to implement whatever she wanted. Consequently, she described how she used the “rules of civility” from the history lesson that she had taught during the second day that she was there. The students earned points for getting “caught being good.” These translated into tickets earned for a bag of chips. The visual chart of the system she had developed was observed on the wall in the classroom during her observation by the researcher. Participant 6 described her experiences of implementing a classroom and behavioral management system in the following excerpt from her interview.

Here, they really don’t have a behavior management plan in place. They kind of have an open philosophy of being respectful. It’s their approach. However, the
first week here, they’re studying the colonists. And the lesson I gave on the second day was on Washington, because we were going to Mount Vernon, and we went over his rules of civility. You’ll see it when you walk into the room. I had the kids make up their own rules of civility, which was not the school’s. They chose four things they thought were important. And then I made up little owl tickets that said “who’s an awesome kid” and then it says “this kid.” So they can earn those by getting caught doing something good off the rules of civility. And then I treat them with Fritos or something. So they let me, that has nothing to do with the school, but they let me implement that for the entire summer. And those kids are lined up at 2:55 every Friday for their bag of chips. And they’ll tell me on Thursday, ‘Mrs. Crowe I haven’t earned my ticket’. ‘Oh, I guess you better try harder.’

Her second opportunity to practice and appropriate instructional strategies during her internship experiences was within her second internship. Participant 6 explained that dividing students into groups by ability levels has been taught in every course at George Mason. She explained that she and her CT would split the students into groups and work with the different groups on the history topic. Participant 6 described this differentiation structure in the following excerpt from her interview.

Every morning, morning warm up, which comes from almost every Mason course. They bring up having warm up activities for them. Differentiating activities, so those activities that some of the students are going to get done with very quickly. So we’ll have back up activities for them to do to keep them busy or
that might be a bit more difficult. Or we split them up. So we have ability groups. It’s just not one Mason course, it’s a lot of the courses will teach you how to split the students up by ability level. So the CT here will take some kids and I’ll take some lower level ones. Cause we know they need it. Like you’ll see that today, the two that I’m taking in for the Avatar. It will probably go pretty slow. Whereas some of the students whiz through independently.

**Summary.** The data sources indicated that Participant 6 was able to begin to appropriate various instructional and behavioral strategies from her coursework. First, Participant 6 indicated that the contextual factors of the internship placements (i.e., a summer school placement vs. a middle school K-12 setting) influenced whether she was or was not able to appropriate coursework. For example, Participant 6 described how she was able to use a software program (i.e., Voki) in her elementary internship because of the access to computers. However, Participant 6 also indicated that she was unable to practice assessment procedures in her elementary internship due to the lack of assessment procedures within this setting.

Secondly, Participant 6 perceived her relationships with her US, the students, and CTs during her internship as influential. Participant 6 described her US as a positive and supportive mentor. Participant 6 perceived her relationship with the students as a direct result of the patience she had garnered from raising five boys and a daughter with autism. Yet, Participant 6 stated that the most influential factor for practicing or not practicing instructional and/or behavioral strategies learned in her coursework was her contrasting relationship with the CTs and how they modeled instructional skills. Specifically, the CT
in her first internship setting was described as providing a negative environment in which to work with students and staff. In addition, Participant 6 was challenged by the negative environment and by the CTs refusal to give her opportunities to practice strategies with this internship. Conversely, Participant 6 shared that her relationship with her second CT was positive and supportive of her practicing instructional/behavioral strategies.

Finally, Participant 6 stated that her background and prior experiences (i.e., ABA practices used with her own child) were influential when appropriating behavioral strategies with students in both of the internship settings. Further, Participant 6 stated that appropriation of coursework was influenced by the opportunities provided to observe modeled instructional practices (i.e., administration of reading inventories during her middle school internship). Other opportunities to practice coursework strategies were provided through direct implementation of practices (i.e., behavior management system and differentiating groups in the elementary internship).

**Final Summary**

Overall the data analysis indicated that the six preservice participants perceived that the appropriation of university coursework was influenced by the context of their internship settings, the relationships during their internship experiences, and the decisions made during the internships. This summary will be organized by the topical areas that align with the research questions and the data analysis: (a) contextual influences, (b) relationship influences, and (c) decision making influences. In addition, since coursework appropriation is an integral part of the research questions, a final summary of the actual
coursework that was mentioned during the interviews will be presented at the end of the decision making influences.

**Contextual Influences**

Three themes emerged as contextual factors influencing the participants’ appropriation of coursework: (1) infrastructure of the school internship placement, (2) role of the Cooperating Teacher, and (3) key opportunities to experience the coursework.

First, three out of six participants perceived that the content of the curriculum (i.e., reading, math, social studies, biology, English) taught during the internship experiences influenced whether they were able to practice instructional/behavioral strategies. Service delivery models (i.e., co-taught, self-contained special education vs. general education) of special education services were mentioned by three of the six participants as being influential to the internship settings.

Secondly, the role of the Cooperating Teachers (i.e., supportive, direct teaching) was perceived by five out of six participants as being significantly influential as to whether or not they were afforded opportunities to appropriate coursework. Two of the five participants, who indicated that the role of the CT was influential to coursework appropriation, suggested that this role determined whether the participant was able to practice instructional strategies (e.g., lesson planning). For example, for one of the internship experiences for two of the participants, an elementary classroom placement was with a general education cooperating teacher. Both of these participants perceived that the roles and responsibilities of the general education CT influenced whether they were provided with opportunities to appropriate coursework.
Third, having key opportunities to experience the coursework were positively influenced by initiatives or factors within the internship setting. Two of the six participants stated that the implementation of a PBIS behavior initiative in the internship school affected whether opportunities were available to practice coursework. One of the six participants stated that the presence of RTI practices within the elementary internship experience provided opportunities for this participant to practice instructional strategies. Additionally, due to access to computers, two of the six participants stated that they were able to appropriate technology instructional strategies from the coursework.

**Relationship Influences**

Under the topical area of relationship influences, three themes emerged as influential in providing the participants opportunities to appropriate coursework: (1) Cooperating Teachers, (2) students, and (3) University Supervisors. When describing the relationships with Cooperating Teachers during the interviews, five of the six participants shared their perceptions of the Cooperating Teacher relationships from both internship placements. One participant described a neutral relationship from one internship placement. Five out of six participants perceived that they had positive relationships with one or both of the CTs. Five participants stated that their CTs provided many opportunities to practice instructional/behavioral strategies learned from the coursework. Conversely, three out of six of the participants perceived that one of the CT relationships was neutral or negative. Two participants perceived the negative relationships to be a negative influence on the internship experience, impacting whether they were able to experience instructional/behavioral strategies from the coursework or not. One of the six
participants described one of her CT relationships as negative due to the negative environment that the CT promoted.

Five out of six participants had special education teachers as one or more of their CTs, providing opportunities to experience or shadow the roles and responsibilities of a special education teacher. Further, one of the six participants described one of her CT relationships as negative due to the negative environment that the CT promoted. Two out of six of the participants stated that one of their CTs in at least one internship experience was a general education teacher. One of these two participants stated that he had to create his own opportunities to practice instructional/behavioral strategies. The other participant who was an intern for a general education teacher perceived her relationship with the CT as negative, with few opportunities to implement strategies from coursework.

All six participants perceived their relationships with students, the second theme, as positive. Three of the six participants perceived that opportunities to build student relationships and to appropriate behavioral strategies from coursework were directly dependent upon the established behavior systems in the internship settings. Three out of six of the participants stated that they used their own background experiences to guide how they interacted with students, and not strategies learned in the coursework.

University Supervisor relationships surfaced as the third theme within the topical area of relationship influences. Five of the six participants perceived the relationship with their University Supervisors as positive (i.e., mentor relationship, supportive of personal needs). Even though the relationship with the US was positive, one of the participants who had the same US for both internship experiences, felt the relationship was not
influential to appropriating coursework. Further, one out of six of the participants stated that the US relationship was neutral and was not influential to the appropriation of coursework.

Decision Making Influences

Within the topical area of decision making influence, three themes surfaced as influencing the appropriation of coursework: (1) background/experiences, (2) seeing instruction modeled, and (3) implementing instruction. First, five out of six participants perceived that their background and/or experiences influenced instructional and/or behavioral decisions made during their internship experiences. Specifically, two of the five participants perceived that their prior job experiences (i.e., ABA therapist, substitute teacher, nanny) influenced how they made instructional/behavioral decisions. Two of the five participants perceived that the experience working with their children with disabilities influenced how they interacted with students in their internship settings. Further, one of the five participants stated that the background knowledge she garnered from her degree in anthropology/sociology was instrumental in guiding her decisions in her internship. Finally, one of the six participants perceived that his core background knowledge of instruction in special education came from his coursework within the special education licensure program that he had just completed. Conversely, one other participant perceived that her coursework minimally influenced her instructional decisions.

The second theme that surfaced in the decision making process of the participants in this study was seeing instruction modeled during the internship experiences.
Specifically, five of the six participants noted that they observed instructional practices learned in their coursework modeled (e.g., co-teaching, RTI procedures, reading inventories, intervention reading programs, IEP procedures) in at least one of their internship experiences. Three of the participants stated that observing modeled lessons and lesson planning was influential to them in at least one of their internship experiences. Conversely, two participants stated that there was no lesson planning observed in either one or both of the internship experiences. Further, three of the six participants stated that they were able to observe the modeling of assessment procedures in at least one of the internship experiences. Yet, one participant stated that since one of the internship experiences was in a summer school setting, no assessment procedures were implemented in this placement, and, thus, she was unable to observe any assessment procedures.

The third theme, implementing instruction, surfaced as an influential factor in the decision making process of the participants. All of the participants had opportunities to implement instruction or behavior strategies during their internship experiences. For example, two participants described opportunities to implement their own lesson plans. Even though the opportunities were varied, participants described opportunities to implement differentiation, evidence-based practices (e.g., peer-assisted instruction), and a math intervention program. In addition, various participants described implementing behavioral strategies (e.g., FBA/BIP, de-escalation strategies, and behavior management procedures).

In addition, four of the six participants (i.e., Participant 1, 3, 4, and 6) made specific comments during their interviews pertaining to how and why they used the
coursework to influence their decisions made during their internship experiences. Conversely, two of the six participants (i.e., Participant 2 and 5) did not make any comments during their interviews about influences from coursework. Four of the six participants (i.e., Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6) made comments about EDSE 502, Classroom Management and Applied Behavior Analysis. Three of the six participants (i.e., Participant 1, 3, and 6) indicated that the Language Development and Reading (EDSE 503) coursework was influential when making pedagogical decisions. Three of the six participants (i.e., Participant 1, 4, and 6) commented that EDSE 628, Elementary Reading, Curriculum and Strategies for Students with Disabilities Who Access the General Education Curriculum influenced educational decisions that they made during their internships. Two of the six participants (i.e., Participants 1 and 3) indicated that EDSE 629 (i.e., Secondary Curriculum and Strategies for Students with Disabilities who Access the General Education Curriculum) influenced pedagogical decisions. Participant 1 and 4 commented that EDSE 662 (i.e., Consultation and Collaboration) influenced decisions that they made during the internship. Participant 1 also specifically commented that EDSE 627 (i.e., Assessment) influenced decisions.
Chapter Five

Since the purpose of this investigation was to deepen our understanding of the clinical internship experience within one university’s special education teacher education program, this chapter discusses how the results from the study inform this understanding and provide implications for future developments of the internship experience. The study involved six participants from one special education teacher preparation program, during or after the final clinical internship experience. A qualitative approach was taken in order to determine factors that influence how and in what way the participants used coursework during their clinical internship experience.

The study was guided by the following research questions: How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework? How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework? How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences? The primary data source used to inform the study was individual interviews with observations, the Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric, and final reflective papers as secondary data sources.
Prior research in the area of clinical preparation for prospective special educators has been scarce. Yet, the seven studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011) previously reviewed suggest that influencing factors on decisions made by interns during the clinical internship experience include collaboration/relationships, opportunities to use special education protocols (i.e., competencies), and university coursework. Each of the seven studies approached the investigation of identifying the influencing factors from varying viewpoints. Hanline (2010), Recchia and Puig (2011), Ergenekon et al. (2008) and Leko and Brownell (2011) emphasized that it was the *opportunities* provided to the special education intern during the internship that greatly influenced the decision making of the interns. Cook (2007) and O’Brian et al. (2007) investigated relationships and determined that the *Cooperating Teacher* was the most influential factor in making decisions during the clinical experience. Further, five of the studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011) investigated and determined that the interns’ *coursework* had an influencing effect during the internship experience. The current study combines and extends the previous studies by considering the various physical contexts (i.e., school, classroom, infrastructure of the internship placement) of the clinical placement for prospective teachers at one special education teacher preparation program and the perceived relationships formed during the clinical internship experience. The investigation sought to understand how these contexts and perceptions of relationships influenced the interns’ decision making and appropriation of coursework.
Discussion of Findings

As activity theory suggests, the clinical internship process is a “collective” activity (Valencia et al., 2009), bringing together a variety of social settings (i.e., university, school), participants (i.e., Cooperative Teacher, University Supervisor, students, other staff), and the influence of the intern’s background experiences. Results from this study indicated that the influences of the various settings were reflected within the context, the relationships formed, and in the decisions made by the intern during the internship. Since the three research questions targeted how these aspects influenced the interns’ appropriation of coursework and decision making, the discussion of the findings in this section will be organized by research question.

How does the context of the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

Considering that each of the participants experienced two internship placements, albeit one participant only talked about one experience (i.e., Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 discussed two internship experiences, Participant 4 discussed one internship experience), the variety of experiences were prevalent. When analyzing the data, it was evident that the context of the internship experiences influenced the participants’ ability to appropriate (or not) their university coursework. Even though each of the participants perceived their internship experiences through their own individual lenses, three themes pertaining to contextual influences were evident across the participants: 1) infrastructure of the school internship placement, 2) role of the cooperating teacher, and 3) key opportunities to experience coursework.
Infrastructure of the school internship placement. The first theme, infrastructure of the school internship placement, was perceived in some way by all of the participants as influencing the appropriation of coursework. Specifically, the content taught in the classrooms where participants were placed (i.e., math, reading, social studies) and the service delivery models (i.e., co-taught, special education self-contained classroom, general education classroom) were influencing factors.

First, data sources revealed that three participants felt that due to the fact that they were tasked with teaching a specific content area (i.e., reading, math, English), they were given opportunities to practice instructional strategies specific to the coursework. For example, Participant 1 shared that she was able to practice many of the instructional reading strategies from EDSE 503 (Language Development and Reading) merely from the fact that she taught reading. Participant 3 also felt that since one of her responsibilities was to teach reading to one of the students with disabilities, this gave her the opportunity to better understand and use the knowledge taught in EDSE 503. Yet, in contrast, Participant 2 indicated that she was unable to practice reading strategies because she was not trained in the specific program that her CT was using with the elementary students, negating any practice opportunity. Since these participants were placed in particular internship settings, it can be assumed that whether they were or were not practicing instructional strategies was due in part to the content being taught in the internship.

Furthermore, Participant 2, who commented that “I have zero interest in teaching reading. I do not like teaching reading” was, in fact, not required in either internship to provide any direct reading instruction. She, incidentally, taught math in both experiences, yet,
will receive state licensure indicating readiness to provide reading instruction as a special educator.

Secondly, three of the participants perceived that the service delivery model of the internship (i.e., co-teaching, general education setting, special education self-contained setting) afforded them opportunities to appropriate instructional strategies. Specifically, Participant 1 and Participant 5 shared that one of their internship experiences was in a co-teaching setting. Both participants perceived these experiences as positive. Even though each of these participants did not specifically state the coursework that was influential when working in these settings, it can be assumed that information taught in EDSE 662, Consultation and Collaboration, provided these participants with the knowledge of collaborative working environments. Participant 1 and 5 described the roles and responsibilities that were assigned to the general education and special education teachers, suggesting an understanding of the collaborative nature of the relationships. The fact that the participants were in settings with a specific teaching model naturally provided opportunities for them to appropriate knowledge of coursework.

Participant 3 perceived that the service delivery model (i.e., general education setting vs. special education self-contained setting) of her internship experiences was particularly influential to whether she did or did not practice instructional strategies. During the secondary internship experience, Participant 3 was a special education intern in a special education self-contained secondary biology class. Participant 3 perceived to have a positive experience with opportunities to experience various instructional strategies. Conversely, during the elementary internship experience, Participant 3 was a
special education intern in a general education classroom with a general education CT. According to Participant 3, the fact that she assumed the role of the teacher in the general education classroom negatively influenced her experience to practice the roles and responsibilities of a special educator. According to Participant 3, she was given responsibilities (i.e., teaching a social studies unit on Mali) for which she was not trained. It can be assumed that Participant 3 did not feel prepared to teach a class-wide, whole group general education classroom.

Since the content of the curriculum and the service delivery models of the internship experiences have been suggested by some of the participants as limiting or encouraging their appropriation of coursework, the infrastructure of the school setting, or placement of these experiences, largely influenced the practices of the interns. This finding is also suggested by the tenets of the activity theory (Grossman et al., 1999). As stated earlier, Grossman et al. (1999) suggested that the school settings and their accompanying social structures may or may not be congruent with the university setting (i.e., coursework). When both “settings” are congruent as perceived by Participant 1 and 5, appropriation of coursework is perceived to be promoted. However, when the “settings” are not congruent, as perceived by Participant 3 (in the general education setting), appropriation of coursework may be interrupted, jeopardizing the link between theory and practice that has been deemed critical to high-quality clinical practice (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b).

Role of the cooperating teacher. The second theme, role of the Cooperating Teacher, was perceived to be influential by five of the participants in affording
opportunities, albeit for different reasons. Two of the five participants (Participant 1 and 5) suggested that there was a dichotomy among the internship placements pertaining to whether the CT provided direct instruction to students, as in the special education self-contained placements, or provided instructional support, as in the inclusive general education settings. Both participants shared that within at least one of the internship settings the role of the CT was as a supporter of instruction, not providing direct instruction. Thus, Participant 1 and 5 shared that they were not given opportunities to implement direct instruction in the inclusive settings. Consequently, these participants lacked opportunities to develop and implement lesson plans within at least one of the collaborative general education teaching settings. Conversely, Participant 1 shared that within the secondary special education self-contained internship setting, she provided direct math instruction to the students with disabilities. Thus, Participant 1 was given the opportunity to develop and implement lesson plans. Again, the role of the special education teacher is complex and varied. Providing prospective teachers with authentic experiences across these variations is challenging.

Two participants (i.e., Participant 3 and 4) were placed in a general education setting with a general education CT as one of their internship placements. Participant 3 and 4 perceived that because of the fact that the CT was a general education teacher, their internship experience was negatively influenced. As the intern of an elementary level, general education CT, Participant 3 was tasked with teaching the entire general education classroom and was not afforded opportunities to experience various instructional strategies from her special education coursework. She was expected to deliver content to
the entire group rather than provide scaffolded instruction for individual learners or small groups of learners with disabilities. Whereas, this task may have been less daunting for a teacher who had some experience teaching a whole group, Participant 3 did not. Participant 3 felt that the general education CT did not understand her special education intern responsibilities. She was hesitant in the environment, given the negative interactions with her CT. Yet, although overwhelmed with the task, she proceeded as requested. Conversely, even though Participant 4 was also the intern for an elementary general education CT, he took it upon himself to create opportunities in the setting in order to employ learned instructional and behavioral strategies from his special education coursework. Even though he was responsible to teach an entire elementary general education classroom, he created opportunities for himself to work with a small group in the special education classroom. He perceived that he was able to experience his coursework through the opportunities that he created in the special education self-contained classroom. Advocating for the experiences one needs to appropriate coursework is a tenuous ground given the sometimes fragile relationships between school-university partnerships often used for clinical experiences. Although it was presented as an efficient way for Participant 4 to gain the desired experiences, the repercussions of doing so, if any, were not revealed in the current investigation.

Consistent with previous literature (Cook, 2007; O’Brian et al., 2007), the role of the Cooperating Teacher was a prominent factor influencing the perceptions of the participants in this study. As a special education intern prepares for the internship experience, the tenets of Activity Theory (Grossman et al., 1999) suggest that special
education interns bring expectations of the roles and responsibilities of a special educator from the coursework knowledge and their own background experiences. Since the roles and responsibilities of the Cooperating Teacher are established within the context of the internship setting, an intern’s perception of what they should be experiencing as a special education intern and what they perceive they are actually experiencing could be in discord. This disconnect can influence whether or not interns are provided with the opportunities to appropriate coursework.

**Key opportunities to experience coursework.** The third theme, *key opportunities to experience coursework*, was perceived by the participants as a factor that either promoted or discouraged the appropriation of instructional and/or behavioral strategies from coursework. Five of the six participants perceived that due to various contextual factors within at least one of their internship experiences, they had opportunities to experience appropriation of coursework. For example, two of the participants (i.e., Participant 4 and 5) shared that because the internship schools were PBIS schools, the interns perceived that the PBIS initiative provided opportunities to experience behavioral strategies. Further, two of the participants (i.e., Participant 5 and 6) perceived that the access to computers in the internship placements afforded them opportunities to implement instructional strategies with technology. Participant 5 also perceived that because the elementary school of her internship implemented RTI strategies, she was afforded the opportunity to observe and participate in the RTI instructional framework.
Implications for teacher preparation programs. As previously cited, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010), and now Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2013a), have legitimized the importance of strategic school-university partnerships to promote powerful clinical preparation of prospective educators. If, as the participants in this study have perceived, the contextual factors (i.e., the infrastructure of the school internship placement, the role of the cooperating teacher, and key opportunities to experience the coursework) of an internship placement influence whether or not an intern is afforded opportunities to appropriate university coursework, then it would behoove teacher preparation programs to consider school-university partners that best align with the theory and practices embedded in coursework. Thus, teacher preparation programs should consider the contextual factors when choosing internship placements for special education interns.

How do the relationships during the clinical internship experiences influence the special education preservice interns’ appropriation of university coursework?

Results from prior research (Cook, 2007; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007) have indicated that the relationships formed during the internship experience are influential to having positive internship experiences. The current study also revealed that relationships formed within the internship experiences were influential in promoting the appropriation of learned coursework by special education interns. Results of this study suggested that the relationships with CTs, students, and USs were perceived by the participants as particularly influential to them.
Cooperating teachers. Data analysis indicated that the participants seemed to perceive the relationship with the CTs as one of the most influential factors of the experience. Five out of six of the participants perceived that they had positive relationships with at least one of the CTs during the internship experiences. According to these five participants (i.e., Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6), the CTs who were the most influential were the ones who provided opportunities for the interns to observe and experience various instructional/behavioral strategies (i.e., direct teaching, co-teaching, lesson plan development, assessment, classroom management strategies, FBA/BIP, etc.), which were linked to their coursework. Additionally, five out of six participants (i.e., Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6) perceived that at least one of their CTs were special education teachers and, thus, provided opportunities for the interns to experience the roles and responsibilities of a special educator. As previous research (Cook, 2007; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007) has indicated, positive CT relationships are those in which the CT provides the intern with the opportunity and the access to experience specific instructional/behavioral strategies embedded in the responsibilities (e.g., assessment, IEPs) of the special educator and learned in the coursework. Allsopp et al. (2006) further suggested from their investigation of clinical experiences that when interns were given purposeful opportunities to practice coursework within their internship experiences, appropriation of the various strategies was heightened. Consequently, the positive relationships with CTs perceived by the participants could be assumed to have promoted appropriation of coursework.
Conversely, results of this study also suggested that when the relationship with the CT was perceived to be negative or neutral, the interns perceived that opportunities were not given to them to practice coursework. Specifically, three out of the six participants (i.e., Participants 3, 4, and 6) perceived at least one of the CT relationships as negative (neutral for Participant 4) in nature, albeit for different reasons. Data analysis revealed that one of the CTs for Participant 3 and 4 were general education teachers. Both Participant 3 and 4 perceived that having general education CTs hindered their relationships in that they were not given opportunities to appropriate special education coursework. Further, Participant 6 experienced a negative relationship with one of her CTs, due to the fact that the CT promoted a negative environment in the special education setting by yelling at students and staff alike. Participant 6 seemed to avoid interaction with the CT when the situation was hostile. Thus, she felt that her opportunities to experience coursework were limited. Just as O’Brien et al. (2007) suggested that the lack of a “solid foundation” between the intern and CT hindered “knowledge and performance development” of the interns, so did the perceived negative relationships for Participants 3, 4, and 6. The negative (or neutral) relationships perceived by the three participants seemed to hinder the developing appropriation of learned coursework.

**Students.** Even though all six participants perceived that they had positive relationships with students, the reasons were varied and less influential than the CT relationships. Three of the six participants (i.e., Participants 1, 3, 4) perceived that the student relationships were directly dependent upon established behavioral systems within the internship settings (e.g., PBIS schools). The behavior systems provided the interns
opportunities to model behavior strategies that were embedded in the coursework. Further, three out of six participants (i.e., Participants 2, 5, 6) perceived that the relationships with students were influenced by their own background experiences, not necessarily any specific coursework, especially for the two interns with children with disabilities (i.e., Participants 5 & 6). These three participants particularly emphasized that their background experiences gave them knowledge and an intuitive sense as to how to interact with students in the classroom setting. This finding is consistent with the pattern of perceptions revealed by the special education teacher interns from Grossman et al.’s work (1999). As in Grossman et al.’s (1999) results, personal experience was one of the contributing factors that facilitated an intern’s appropriation of pedagogical skills and positive instructional decisions in the internship experience.

University supervisors. Since the role of the US is to be the liaison between the university, the intern, and the CT, it was assumed that the relationship with the University Supervisor would play a role in the internship experiences. When asked in the interviews about the influence and/or relationship of the USs, five of the six participants perceived that they had positive relationships, albeit minimally influential. One participant (i.e., Participant 6) felt that the US was a mentor to her. One participant (i.e., Participant 4) had a neutral relationship with the US. Also, one participant (i.e., Participant 5) perceived that even though the relationship was positive, she felt that the US had no influential impact on her appropriation of skills. Even though the results from this study suggested that there was minimal influence from the US, participants did allude to the fact that the US was helpful when explaining the interns’ responsibilities during the internship. It can be
assumed that the participants relied more on guidance from the US for fulfilling internship responsibilities, rather than for pedagogical suggestions.

**Implications for teacher preparation programs.** Results from this study have suggested that the relationship with the CT is the most influential for an intern. Since prior research (Cook, 2007; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007) and results from this study have suggested that positive CT relationships influence an intern’s perceptions of appropriation of coursework, it would seem that the CT/intern relationship would be a factor to consider when making internship placements during the internship process. Thus, the impact of the perceived negative relationships have implications for teacher preparation programs. First, the placement of a special education intern with a general education teacher as the CT seems problematic, at best. Two interns (i.e., Participant 3 and 4) were placed in one of their internship experiences with general education CTs whose responsibilities were targeted for the entire classroom and for the general education curriculum. Within the special education intern’s certification program at this university, special education interns do learn about providing access to the general education curriculum. However, the focus of the program is to prepare interns to work with students with disabilities within the general education setting. Thus, the placement of a special education intern with a general education CT seems to be contrary to the purpose of the special education internship (i.e., appropriating strategies to support students with disabilities in the general education setting). Participant 3 perceived that the dichotomy of her requirements as a special education intern and the requirements that the general education CT gave her impeded her relationship with her CT. Consequently,
Participant 3 perceived that the general education CT did not fully understand Participant 3’s responsibilities as a special education intern. Participant 4 was also concerned about his placement with a general education CT. He described this relationship as neutral, because he did not feel that the CT fully understood what he needed to experience as a special education intern. Both of these experiences seem to suggest that purposeful internship placement with a highly qualified special education CT should be paramount to placement decisions.

The second implication for teacher preparation programs is that CT preparation may be beneficial for promoting positive internship experiences for special education interns. Participant 6 perceived a negative relationship with one of her CTs due to the negative environment that the CT promoted. Additionally, Participant 6 suggested that she was not given the opportunity to teach or to implement instructional practices and was reluctant to try strategies due to her relationship with the CT. The experiences of Participant 3, 4, and 6 suggested that CT preparation or orientation may provide knowledge for the CTs, which in turn may build more positive, supportive relationships between the intern and the CT, and, therefore, promote skill appropriation.

**How do these self-reported perceptions of context and relationships influence the instructional decisions that the special education preservice interns make during their clinical internship experiences?**

As the participants relayed how they perceived what influenced the instructional decisions they made during their clinical internship experiences, it was evident that each participant was influenced by various contextual and relationship factors. Data analysis
revealed three themes depicting these influential factors (i.e., background/experiences, seeing instruction modeled, implementing instruction). In addition, the discussion of which coursework was influential during the internship experience will be discussed during this section.

**Background/experiences.** The first theme, background/experiences, suggested that participants relied on their prior work experiences and/or family experiences when making instructional decisions and when interacting with staff and students throughout their internship experiences. Two participants (i.e., Participants 1 & 2) perceived that their prior job experiences (e.g., substitute teacher, nanny, ABA Specialist) gave them the background knowledge and experience that influenced their instructional decisions. Two other participants (i.e., Participants 5 & 6) were influenced by their experiences raising children with disabilities. These two participants perceived that they were more patient and knowledgeable with the students with disabilities with which they worked during their internships, as a result. Further, one participant (i.e., Participant 3) perceived that her degree in anthropology and sociology heightened her sense of cultural sensitivity, the knowledge of which she used to influence some instructional decisions during one of the internship experiences (i.e., vocabulary test development).

In addition, one of the participants (i.e., Participant 2) perceived that all of her instructional knowledge and decision making was derived from her background and prior experiences working with children. Participant 2 perceived that the coursework was not useful in her decision making process. In contrast, Participant 4 perceived that, due to his lack of background with working with students with disabilities, his coursework was
particularly influential for him when making instructional decisions. The perceptions of
the use of coursework (i.e., background pedagogical knowledge) by Participants 2 and 5
depicted the range of perceptions about how the coursework was used during the
internships. For example, Participant 2 and 5 did not comment about specific coursework
during their interviews. However, Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 specifically mentioned using
coursework from six of the courses. How and why the participants in this study perceived
their use and appropriation of coursework seemed to be due in part by the influence of
prior background experiences.

As previously noted, Grossman et al. (1999) suggested that special education
interns are influenced by their background knowledge including learned pedagogical
skills from their personal experiences. Cook (2007) also suggested that previous
experiences of an instructional or behavioral strategy added credence to the use of the
strategy when the same situation occurred within the instructional internship setting. In the
same way, results from this study suggested that special education interns brought their
background/experiences to the forefront when they were presented with similar
instructional decisions within their internship experiences.

**Seeing instruction modeled.** Hanline (2010) suggested that preservice interns
were influenced by their observations of the Cooperating Teacher using effective
assessment procedures and employing child-focused best practices. Results from the
Hanline study also suggested that observing the use of best practices was positively
reflected in the preservice interns employing best teaching practices themselves. The
second theme, *seeing instruction modeled*, encompassed this same perspective.
Observing quality instructional practices seemed to positively influence the decisions and instructional behaviors of most of the participants. As noted in the data analysis, five out of six of the participants perceived that they observed instructional practices modeled from the coursework (i.e., co-teaching, RTI procedures, reading procedures, intervention reading programs, IEP procedures). In addition, three participants (i.e., Participant 1, 3, 4) observed lessons and/or lesson planning, and three participants (i.e., Participant 1, 4, 5) observed assessment procedures. The participants perceived that the opportunities to observe such modeling of instructional practices influenced their own teaching practices.

On the other hand, the lack of opportunity to observe instructional practices also influenced participants. For example, Participant 2 and 5 shared that within at least one of their internship experiences, lesson planning was not a part of their instructional practices. Additionally, one of the participants (i.e., Participant 6) shared that one of the internship placements (i.e., elementary) did not implement assessment procedures, because assessment was not part of the instructional practices of the school. Hanline (2010) has suggested that opportunities to observe the CT model effective practices is influential and enables the preservice intern to incorporate pedagogical skills into the repertoire of instructional practices. Therefore, not having such opportunities for application could stifle the development of an intern’s pedagogical knowledge and practice.

**Implementing instruction.** Prior research (Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; Recchia & Puig, 2011) has suggested that when given opportunities to practice implementing various instructional/behavioral strategies, the special education intern is
able to merge coursework with practice during the internship experience. All participants in this study described opportunities to implement instruction during the internship experiences, thus supporting prior research. Although each participant may or may not have explicitly stated the link between experience and coursework, the implication was evident through the description in the data. For example, Participant 1 and 3 described opportunities to develop and implement lesson plans. Other participants described opportunities to implement instructional strategies such as differentiation, various evidence-based practices (i.e., peer-assisted instruction, math or reading intervention strategies), and behavioral strategies (i.e., FBA/BIP, de-escalation strategies, behavior management procedures). Although the participants had varied degrees of opportunity, each of the participants exuded a thankfulness for each opportunity to experience instructional/behavioral strategies within the internship experiences.

It was also evident that the lack of opportunities to implement strategies or procedures during the internship experience was of concern. This was never more evident than with Participant 4. Due to his placement with a general education CT, Participant 4 indicated that the CT’s responsibilities were largely with the whole class. Therefore, he felt the need to create his own opportunities to experience coursework and to employ evidence-base practices (e.g., peer-assisted strategies, trial and error) that were kindred to the special educator’s responsibilities. Since Participant 4 had no prior experience teaching within the PK-12 school setting prior to his elementary internship experience, this clinical experience was a crucial training ground for him to practice instructional/behavioral strategies learned within the coursework.
Implications for teacher preparation programs. As previously noted, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010) suggested that one of the key elements to teacher preparation is providing the teacher candidates (i.e., interns) an interactive professional community in which to practice their craft. Research (Allsopp et al., 2006) has also suggested that when given opportunities to implement and experience instructional/behavioral strategies from the coursework, the special education intern begins to appropriate the learning into a skillset for future practice. As the participants of this study indicated, the opportunities (or lack of) to observe and to practice various instructional/behavioral strategies guided them when making instructional decisions during the internship experience. One can then assume that, coupled with individual background/experience, the opportunities to observe and/or implement instructional/behavioral skills afforded the special education interns during their internship experiences could be pivotal in the appropriation of skillsets. Hence, special education teacher preparation programs may want to consider internship placements based on opportunities within an internship setting that support appropriation of instructional/behavioral skillsets by the interns.

Overall Summary

As the special education interns began their internship experiences, all six participants had completed most of their coursework at the university. Each of the participants came to their internship experiences with varied backgrounds and experiences pertaining to teaching and working with students with disabilities. Since
special education interns were completing the *Students with Disabilities who Access the General Curriculum* license, it can be assumed that the interns were expecting to work within special education and teach students with disabilities in a variety of settings.

The purpose of this study was to deepen our understanding of the clinical internship experience within one university’s special education teacher education program. Specifically, this study investigated to what extent contextual and relationship factors from the clinical internship experience of preservice interns have on the appropriation of coursework. The findings of the study were organized under the themes of contextual factors, relationships, and decision making factors. First, the contextual factors of the school internship placement influenced the appropriation of coursework. These factors included the infrastructure of the school internship placement, the role and the responsibilities of the CT, and the key opportunities which were or were not afforded to the special education interns. Under the umbrella of the second theme, relationships, the findings revealed that the majority of special education interns perceived that the relationship with the CT greatly influenced their ability to appropriate coursework. Finally, the following factors influenced how participants made decisions during the internship: their background/experiences, the opportunities (or lack of) to observe modeled instruction, and whether or not they were afforded opportunities to experience or implement instructional/behavioral strategies.

**Limitations**

Generalization of this study should be realized with caution. First, the participant sample was very small, only six participants, limiting the quantity and quality of
perceptions gathered. Second, even though participants were from the same university and, thus, the same course of study, the participants were from various backgrounds and work experiences, influencing the fund of special education knowledge they may or may not have brought to the internship experience. Third, the perceptions of the participants were self-reporting of their experiences. Even though other documents (i.e., Clinical Evaluation Continuum Rubric, final reflective papers, and observation transcriptions) were used to validate the reported perceptions of the participants from the interviews, self-reported perceptions are biased of their own perspectives of the experiences. Additionally, self-reporting is limiting, in this instance, in that participants relied on the self-reported knowledge from their own background, at times, to the exclusion of knowledge gained from coursework. Fourth, this study included only preservice interns, excluding inservice interns. Including inservice interns in the participant pool may vastly change the findings of this study. Finally, in order to suggest a larger generalization of findings to other internship programs, the participant sample should be drawn from more than one university.

**Educational Implications and Future Research**

As noted previously, research in the area of special education teacher preparation is scarce. However, results of seven studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011; O’Brian et al., 2007; Recchia & Puig, 2011) previously reviewed, indicated that the perspectives of special education interns about their internship experience were influenced by relationships, the opportunities afforded the intern to implement instructional strategies, and the
opportunities (or lack of) to apply strategies from the coursework. Specifically correlated with this study, Cook (2007) and O’Brian et al. (2007) found that the relationship between the CT and the intern was influential to the intern’s use of instructional strategies and impacted the decision making of the interns. Additionally, results of Hanline (2010) and Recchia and Puig’s (2011) studies suggested that opportunities for interns to use instructional strategies and processes (i.e., assessment strategies, IEP processes) were influential to the special education interns. Finally, results of five of the studies (Allsopp et al., 2006; Cook, 2007; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hanline, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2011) indicated that special education interns perceived the coursework as an influential factor during their internship experience.

Results from this study validated all three themes of the findings from the previous studies (i.e., (1) the relationship with the CT influenced the use of strategies and the decisions made by the intern; (2) opportunities provided to the intern to use instructional strategies influenced the interns; and (3) the influence of coursework was evident). This study also extended these results by suggesting that along with the CT relationship, the context of the internship setting and key opportunities to practice coursework were influential in appropriating instructional strategies. So, what do these findings suggest for special education teacher preparation programs and future research?

*Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice* (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b) of the new CAEP Standards (See Table 1 and 2) not only aligns with the findings of this study but provides validity to implications for future research. As with the three research questions in this study, *Standard 2* suggests that the
context (i.e., 2.1: Partnerships for Clinical Preparation), the relationships (i.e., 2.2: Clinical Educators), and influences on decision making practices (i.e., 2.3: Clinical Experiences) are all influencing factors upon the appropriation of instructional/behavioral skillsets of the special education interns. First, the findings in this study suggest that the context of the internship setting (i.e., infrastructure of the school internship setting, role of the CT, and key opportunities to experience coursework) influence the appropriation of coursework by the special education intern. This implies that quality placement is key to the continued training of the interns. The first strand in Standard 2 (i.e., Partnerships for Clinical Preparations) suggests that there should be strong school-university partnerships to enhance the quality of the context of the internship placement. In so doing, the link between theory and practice could be enhanced benefitting the preparation of the special education intern. As suggested by Leko and Brownell (2011), aligning the internship experience with the university coursework promotes appropriation. Thus, investigating how the internship placement supports the skillsets promoted by the university coursework may be an area of research within school-university partnerships.

Second, findings in the area of relationships (i.e., CT, students, US) validated prior research (Cook, 2007; O’Brian et al., 2007) by suggesting that the relationship with the CT was perceived as a significant influence for the special education interns in this study. Strand 2.2 of CAEP (i.e., Clinical Educators) supports these current findings by suggesting that clinical educators (i.e., CT, US) should provide a “positive impact on candidates’ development” (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b, p. 6). Therefore, high quality CTs would seem to be critical to the enhancement of
coursework appropriation. Even though the CT was perceived to be highly influential by the participants in this study, the US, as the liaison between the university and the internship setting, should also be of high quality. One avenue to ensure high-quality clinical educators is to establish training protocols for the CT and US in the use of evidence-based teaching practices and other various instructional/behavioral strategies as delineated by the university coursework. Research in the area of professional development for CT and US could lead to delineating qualities of highly effective clinical educators.

Finally, findings related to the final research question in this study (i.e., decision making influences) suggest that observing and implementing instruction during the clinical internship experience was beneficial for the special education intern participants. Similarly, the third strand (i.e., 2.3: Clinical Experiences) of Standard 2 (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b) suggests that a quality school-partner relationship should “design clinical experiences of sufficient depth, breadth, diversity, coherence, and duration” (p.6). It can be assumed that the quality experiences should include sufficient modeling, observing, and experiencing of a variety of instructional/behavioral strategies to allow the special education interns to begin to establish decision making practices and to demonstrate the “knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions” (p. 6) deemed essential for a quality special educator. How and what opportunities are provided by the personnel (i.e., CT, US) within the clinical internship experience could be an area of future research beneficial to special education teacher preparation programs.
Recommendations

To maximize the individual growth for special education interns during the clinical internship experience, a few recommendations have been formulated for quality internship placements. As suggested in *Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice* (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b) of the new CAEP Standards, school/university partnerships are critical for quality clinical internship placements. Embedded in this notion of school/university partnerships is the idea of practicing pedagogical skills learned from the licensure coursework in hopes of interns appropriating skillsets deemed essential for quality special educators. One way the school/partnership is strengthened is targeting specific clinical internship settings that are congruent with what is learned in the coursework. It is recommended that the person (i.e., liaison) who makes the placements for special education interns be a special educator or one who is intimately knowledgeable about what needs to be in place at a given internship setting in order to enhance the opportunities that could be provided for the intern in the setting. This person should be able to track interns across settings in order to assess the link between coursework and practice. In addition, a yearlong internship is suggested to promote a longer practice time to promote appropriation of pedagogical tools.

Also included in this school/university partnership is the idea of quality clinical educators (i.e., Cooperating Teachers, University Supervisors), as suggested by the second strand (i.e. 2.1: Clinical Educators) of *Standard 2* from the CAEP standards (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013b). As noted in the findings
of this study, the CT was regarded as one of the most influential factors contributing to a positive internship experience. Therefore, it is recommended that both the placement school and the university provide professional development for the CT pertaining to the role of the CT during the internship experience. Coaching and/or observations of the CT prior to the internship experience could enhance the capabilities of the CT to provide a quality clinical internship experience. Since the University Supervisors in this study were perceived to have a minimal influencing role (i.e., not influential with coursework appropriation), it can be assumed that the link between coursework appropriation and the role of the US was minimal. Just like CTs, it is recommended that USs develop professionally through coaching from the university. Targeted skills and pedagogical tools deemed essential as a special educator by the university could be highlighted for the USs within professional development sessions. This professional development could promote the skillsets that the university deems essential.

Conclusions

As suggested by the new CAEP Standards (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013a), the quality of the clinical internship experience is critical to producing high-quality candidates (i.e., interns). Thus, the clinical internship experience for special education interns is important in the teacher preparation landscape. Results of this study suggest that there are a variety of influencing factors (i.e., context, relationships, opportunities to experience) affecting the appropriation of coursework and the development of instructional and behavioral decisions made by the preservice interns during the clinical internship experience. Regardless of the limitations, the findings of
this study suggest that high quality internship settings, quality cooperating teachers, and opportunities to model and experience the evidence-based practices embedded in university coursework are influencing factors to developing high-quality special education teachers.
Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB)

New Submission Checklist
To avoid delay in the processing of HSRB applications, please ensure that the following are included in your application. Applications cannot be reviewed until all of the following checklist items are submitted.

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<td>Application with ALL sections completed (including check boxes on first page)</td>
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<td>Proposed Consent Form (See Template Consent and Consent Guidelines) – All instructional language removed, written at the appropriate reading level for participants</td>
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<td>Proposed Assent Form (If minors are involved) – Written at the appropriate reading level for the age group (Contact ORSP for a sample of a 6th grade Assent Form)</td>
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<td>Instrumentation – All surveys, questionnaires, standardized assessment tools, interview questions, focus group questions/prompts or other instruments of data collection</td>
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<td>Recruitment Materials – Letters to potential participants, advertisements, flyers, listserv postings, emails, brochures, SONA postings, telephone scripts, presentation scripts, etc.</td>
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<td>Grant Applications – If the research is funded, include the grant application as submitted to the funding agency (Please note that the HSRB application title must match the grant application title.)</td>
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<td>Debriefing Form – If the study proposes to use deception or incomplete information to participants</td>
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<td>Cultural Contact Information – If the study is being conducted outside the US, the HSRB must inquire about the conduct of research in that country. Submit the name and contact information of an individual who can provide that information.</td>
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Applications can be reviewed without the following items, but if they are applicable to the study, they must be submitted before approval can be given.
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | Research in Mason Classrooms – Submit permission from the instructors when course credit is given |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Research in School Systems – Submit approval letter from the school district Human Subjects Review Board |
| ☒ | ☐ | ☐ | Research in Universities – Submit approval letter from the University Human Subjects Review Board |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | Research in Hospitals – Submit approval letter and approved consent document from the hospital Human Subjects Review Board |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | Research in Institutions/Organizations without Human Subject Review Boards – Submit permission letter from the institution/organization |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | If George Mason is the primary recipient of funding, submit Human Subjects Review Board approval from subcontractors conducting human subjects research |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | Psychology Department – Sign off by the Chair of the Department |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | School of Management (SOM) – Submit SOM routing form with all approval signatures |
| ☐ | ☐ | ☒ | Other Mason Committee Oversight – If your study involves the use of blood or other human biological specimens, submit Institutional Biosafety Committee approval. If your study involves sources of ionizing radiation or X-ray producing devices, submit Radiation Safety Committee approval. |

George Mason University
Human Subjects Review Board
Application for Human Subjects Research Review

Federal Regulations and George Mason University policy require that all research involving humans as subjects be reviewed and approved by the University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). Any person, (GMU faculty member, staff member, student, or other person) wanting to engage in human subject research at or through George Mason University must receive written approval from the HSRB before conducting research. Approval of this project by the HSRB only signifies that the procedures adequately protect the rights and welfare of the subjects and should not be taken to indicate University approval to conduct the research.

For ORSP Use Only

GMU

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Signature __________________________ Date __________
Please complete this cover page AND provide the Protocol information requested on the back of this form. Forward this form and all supporting documents to the Office of Research Subject Protections, MS 6D5. If you have any questions please feel free to contact ORSP at 703-993-4121.

<table>
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<th>Project Title:</th>
<th>Special Education Intern Perspectives of Clinical Experience: A Pilot Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator (Must be Faculty)</td>
<td>Co-Investigator / Student Researcher*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Kelley Regan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>College of Education and Human Development</td>
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<td>Mail Stop</td>
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<td>Phone</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:kregan@gmu.edu">kregan@gmu.edu</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christine McElwee</td>
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<td>College of Education and Human Development</td>
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*Student researchers should provide a mailing address rather than campus address. Additional researchers should be listed on a separate page.

**Type of Project:**
- □ Faculty/Staff Research
- □ Doctoral Dissertation
- □ Masters Thesis
- □ Student Project (Specify Grad or Undergrad): Pilot Study
- □ Other (Specify):

**VULNERABLE POPULATION:**
- □ Fetuses/Abortuses/Embryos
- □ Pregnant women
- □ Prisoners
- □ Minors
- □ Mentally disabled

**PERSON IDENTIFIABLE DATA:**
- □ Audio taping
- □ Video taping
- □ Data collected via email
- □ Data collected via Internet
- □ Confidential electronic records

**RESEARCH DESIGN:**
- □ Questions on harm to self or others
- □ Questions on illegal behavior
- □ Deception
- □ Human/computer interaction
- □ Collection/analysis of secondary data
☐ Emotionally disabled  ☑ Coded data linked to individuals  Funding: ☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ Physically disabled  ☐ Human biological materials  Source: 
☐ Undergrad student pool (Psych/SOM)  Biosafety Project #:  OSP Proposal #: 
☐ Other:  (If yes, please attach a copy of the grant application)

I certify that the information provided for this project is correct and that no other procedures will be used in this protocol. I agree to conduct this research as described in the attached supporting documents. I will request and receive approval from the HSRB for changes prior to implementing these changes. I will comply with the HSRB policy for the conduct of ethical research. I will be responsible for ensuring that the work of my co-investigator(s)/student researcher(s) complies with this protocol.

_________________________________________                 ________________________
Principal Investigator Signature                                                                            Date
ABSTRACT

1. Describe the aims and specific purposes of the research project and the proposed involvement of human participants.

The purpose of this pilot study is to investigate pre-service special education interns' perspectives relating to how their program of study has impacted their experiences during their internship in ED 790.

The NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning has suggested that teacher candidates need to blend practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge and learn their craft by doing. The EDSE 790 internship experience is the venue that George Mason University has established to support special education pre-service interns, while they begin to practice the teaching strategies and techniques that they have been taught through their coursework. There is minimal research investigating special education interns' perspectives of their clinical internship experiences.

Guided by the following research questions: "How does a special education pre-service interns' program of study inform their internship and/or future practices?", "WHAT ARE THE FACTORS INFLUENCING A SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERN'S PERSPECTIVES OF HIS/HER CLINICAL EXPERIENCE?" the internship experiences of 10 TO 12 PRESERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION interns from George Mason University will be investigated through interviews, classroom observations, AND DOCUMENT REVIEWS (FINAL REFLECTION PAPERS, CLINICAL EVALUATION CONTINUUM RUBRIC).

2. Describe the characteristics of the intended sample (number of participants, age, sex, ethnic background, health status, etc.).

This pilot study will include interviews and observations of TEN TO TWELVE pre-service special education interns selected from the Spring 2014 semester of the EDUC 790 course at George Mason University. The special education interns will be servicing high incidence special education students within the general and special education settings in various locations around the university, as determined by the placement coordinator.

3. Identify the criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Explain the rationale for the involvement of special classes of participants (children, prisoners, pregnant women, or any other vulnerable population).

The criterion for the intended sample of this investigation includes pre-service special education interns who are enrolled in the Spring 2014 EDSE 790 course (Internship in Special Education). Individuals who are working with high incidence (i.e. learning
disabled, emotionally disturbed) students with disabilities in the general education curriculum will be considered. Through purposeful sampling, only pre-service interns will be selected because of their lack of job experience. It is assumed that pre-service interns will have a higher use of coursework information as the primary impact of their teaching choices and practices, not the job experience. Additionally, to provide sufficient time to complete the interviews and observations, interns completing both the elementary and the secondary internship assignment during the semester will be considered. There is no exclusion regarding gender, age, race, ethnicity, health, or any other demographical type of information for the targeted sample. The CEHD field experience office will be a source of contact to identify potential participants.

4. Describe your relationship to the participants if any.

The participants will have no direct relationship with the researcher.

PROTOCOL – Involving Human Participation

1. If there are direct benefits to the participants, describe the direct benefits and also describe the general knowledge that the study is likely to yield. If there are no direct benefits to the participants, state that there are no direct benefits to the participants and describe the general knowledge that the study is likely to yield.

This study will enable the researcher to gather information through first person perspectives pertaining to the effectiveness of the special education teaching coursework and its effect on the teaching practices of pre-service special education interns. There are no direct benefits to the participants. The knowledge yielded from the study will help to inform the special education department at George Mason University about the possible impact of coursework information on the teaching practices of the student interns. The data may also inform possible revisions to the internship program.

2. Describe how participants will be identified and recruited. Note that all recruitment materials (including ads, flyers, letters to participants, emails, telephone/presentation scripts, SONA postings) for participants must be submitted for review for both exempt and non-exempt projects.

The selection of participants will be initiated from the list of special education interns generated by the Field Placement Specialist in the College of Education and Human Development. From this list, only pre-service interns servicing students in the general education curriculum will be selected. Additionally, the pre-service interns will be completing both the elementary and secondary internship placements during the Spring 2014 semester. Recruitment emails will be sent to the interns requesting their
participation in the pilot study. The recruitment email is attached to this document. From the list of participants who would like to participate, three to five interns will be selected as possible participants who are willing to share their perspectives and be interviewed and observed during their internship. For those individuals indicating a willingness to participate, a follow-up phone call will be completed by the researcher to coordinate the interviews.

3. Describe your procedures for obtaining informed consent. Who will obtain consent and how will it be obtained. Describe how the researchers will ensure that subjects receive a copy of the consent document.

The informed consent forms will be disseminated to the participants at the time of the first face-to-face meeting. The participant will be provided with a copy of the consent document at this time.

4. State whether subjects will be compensated for their participation, describe the form of compensation and the procedures for distribution, and explain why compensation is necessary. State whether the subjects will receive course credit for participating in the research. If yes, describe the non-research option for course credit for the students who decide not to participate in the research. The non-research option for course credit must not be more difficult than participation in the research. Information regarding compensation or course credit should be outlined in the Participation section of the consent document.

Participants will be voluntarily participating in this study. HOWEVER, THE PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A GIFT CARD IN THE AMOUNT OF $10 AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY. Participation in the study is in no way a part of course credit. The voluntary conditions of participation are outlined for the participants in the informed consent form.

5. If minors are involved, their active assent to the research activity is required as well as active consent from their parents/guardians. This includes minors from the Psychology Department Undergraduate Subject Pool. Your procedures should be appropriate to the age of the child and his/her level of maturity and judgment. Describe your procedures for obtaining active assent from minors and active consent from parents/guardians. Refer to the Guidelines for Informed Consent for additional requirements if minors from the Psychology Subject Pool are involved.

No minors will be involved in the research.

6. Describe the research design and methods. What will be done to participants during the study? Describe all tests and procedures that will be performed. Include an estimate of the time required to complete the tests and procedures.
This study will be a qualitative research design. Data will be collected from the participants through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, one or two observations, AND DOCUMENT REVIEWS OF THE FINAL REFLECTION PAPER AND THE FINAL REPORT OF THE CLINICAL EVALUATION CONTINUUM RUBRIC of the participants in their internship environments. The interviews will focus mainly on the perspectives of the interns pertaining to how their coursework has informed their teaching practices during their internship experiences, AND THE INFLUENCES THAT IMPACT THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS. The information gathered from the observations will focus on the instructional, classroom management, and collaborative strategies taught in the coursework of the interns' program of studies. Each of the interviews and observations are expected to last no more than one hour. THE DOCUMENTS WILL BE GATHERED FROM EACH OF THE PARTICIPANTS TO GLEAN HIS/HER PERSPECTIVES OF INFLUENCING FACTORS DURING THEIR INTERNSHIP.

The participants will first be contacted via email in order to be asked to participate. After acquiring informed consent, arrangements will be made for the student researcher (interviewer) to meet with the participant (interviewee) at a convenient time and location for each interview. It is expected that the interviews will take place at an agreed upon location (possibly the school) before or after the school day. The interviews will be conducted 1:1 in a quiet place. The researcher will audio record the interviews and take anecdotal notes during the interview sessions.

Following the interviews, the researcher will transcribe the recordings. A written transcript of the interviews will be offered for each of the interviewees to read over and verify comments, etc. Open coding will be utilized with constant comparisons across the interview transcriptions. All notes and transcripts will be compared, categorized, and coded according to emerging themes, which inform the guiding research question. The final themes which emerge from the analysis will be offered to the interviewees as requested, in a summary format. An interview protocol is attached to this document.

The participants will be observed once or twice at the public or private school where the internship is taking place, during an agreed upon day and time. It is expected that the observations of the participants' teaching skills and strategies will last about one hour each. A written account of each observation will be completed using the observation protocol attached to this document. Following the on-site observation of the participants during actual teaching activities, a written account of the observation will be offered to each interviewee to read over and verify any observational accounts. Open coding will be utilized with constant comparisons across observation written accounts. All observations will be compared, categorized, and coded according to emerging themes which inform the guiding research questions. The final themes which emerge from the analysis will be compared and contrasted to the interview final themes.

7. Describe how confidentiality will be maintained. If data will be collected electronically (e.g. by email or an internet web site), describe your procedures for limiting identifiers. Note that confidentiality may have to be limited if participants are asked questions on violence toward self or others or illegal behavior. Contact the Office of Research Subject Protections for assistance.

Confidentiality will be maintained. The student names and school names will be referred to by fictitious names for the purpose of sharing results. In addition, the audio recordings of the interviews will only be observed by the researchers. During data collection, all audio recordings will be maintained in a locked cabinet and the audio tapes will be destroyed approximately 6 weeks after the completion of the study.

ANY DOCUMENT (FINAL REFLECTION PAPER, CLINICAL EVALUATION CONTINUUM RUBRIC) THAT IDENTIFIES PARTICIPANTS WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL BY THE RESEARCHERS. ALSO, PARTICIPANT NAMES ARE REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPANT CONTACT, BUT ONCE THE NAMES ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED, PARTICIPANTS' DOCUMENTS WILL BE REPLACED BY PSEUDONYMS, LETTERS, OR NUMBERS.

8. Describe in detail any potential physical, psychological, social, or legal risks to participants, why they are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits and what will be done to minimize the risks. Where appropriate, discuss provisions for ensuring medical or professional intervention in case participants experience adverse effects. Where appropriate, discuss provisions for monitoring data collection when participants' safety is at risk.

There are no foreseeable risks (physical, psychological, social or legal) for participating in this research. Individuals will complete the study voluntarily and they may choose to not participate in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time.
9. If participants will be audio-or video-taped, discuss provisions for the security and final disposition of the tapes. Refer to Guidelines for Informed Consent.

Consent forms include permission to audio record the interviews. After the day’s session, the audio recordings will only be observed by the researchers. During data collection, all audio recordings will be maintained in a locked secure cabinet. The audio recordings will also be destroyed at least 6 weeks following the study.

10. If participants will be misinformed and/or uninformed about the true nature of the project, provide justification. Note that projects involving deception must not exceed minimal risk, cannot violate the rights and welfare of participants, must require the deception to accomplish the aims of the project, and must include a full debriefing. Refer to Guidelines for Informed Consent.

Participants are clearly informed in the Informed Consent Form about the true nature of the pilot study. There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research. The true nature of the project will be shared with the participants. A full debriefing of the interview and observation outcomes will be provided to the participants if desired.

11. Submit a copy of each data collection instrument/tool (including questionnaires, surveys, standardized assessment tools, etc.) you will use and provide a brief description of its characteristics and development. Submit scripts if information and/or questions are conveyed verbally.

See attached interview and observation protocols. The interview protocol will be targeted at gaining insight into the perspectives of the interns as to the use of course information in their internship placements and future career decisions (e.g., evidence-based practices, classroom management strategies, instructional strategies, collaboration strategies). The observation protocol will be targeted at observing the use of classroom management techniques, instructional strategies, evidence-based practices, etc. being implemented by the interns.


13. APPROVAL FROM COOPERATING INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION: If a cooperating institution/organization provides access to its patients/students/clients/ employees/etc. for participant recruitment or provides access to their records, Attach written evidence of the institution/organization human subjects approval of the project.

PROTOCOL - Involving Existing Records
For the study of existing data sets, documents, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

1. Describe your data set.
2. Provide written permission from the owner of the data giving you access for research purposes at George Mason University if the data set is not publicly available.

3. Describe how you will maintain confidentiality if the data set contains person identifiable data.

4. Describe what variables you are extracting from the data set.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What behavior management techniques learned in EDSE 402/405 have you observed in your internship? Which of these techniques, if any, have you demonstrated? Please give me an example.

2. What types of assessments (summative and/or formative, curriculum-based), which you learned in EDSE 627, have you observed? How have you been a part of administering these during your internship?

3. What types of diagnostic decision making situations have you observed based on various assessments which you learned in EDSE 403/503? Which of these assessments have you used during your internship? What type of decision making have you been involved with to plan student instruction? Please explain the situation in which you used the assessments.

4. What accommodations and/or modifications have you observed being made for students with various disabilities that you learned about in EDSE 440/540? What types of accommodations have you been involved with for students with disabilities? Please explain the situation.

5. What self-determination strategies that you learned in EDSE 544 did you observe in your internship? What evidence-based strategies for facilitating transitions have you been able to demonstrate? Please describe.
6. What evidence-based strategies that you learned about in EDSE428/628 have you observed or used during your internship? Please describe the situation.

7. What differentiation strategies that you learned in EDSE 629 have you used and/or observed during your internship? Please explain the situation.

8. Describe your involvement in the development of an IEP.

9. Describe your involvement, if any, with professional collaborations (i.e., parents, administration, and teachers).

10. What skills(s) do you think you have acquired from the internship experience which you feel was not addressed in the program of studies you completed? What skill(s) did your program of studies emphasize that you did not have the opportunity to experience?

11. What other influences do you feel have contributed to your perspectives of teaching students with disabilities? Cooperating teacher? University Supervisor? Prior experiences?
Appendix C

Observation Protocol

1. Classroom management strategies (routines, strategies, environment, etc.)
2. Assessments/Accommodations/Modifications
3. Evidence of Planning and Preparation
4. Instruction (evidence-based strategies: Content area: ____________
5. Professionalism/Collaboration
Appendix D

George Mason University Clinical Evaluation Continuum for Candidates in Initial Licensure Programs
Candidates in Special Education Programs

Candidate’s Name
________________________________________________________________________
____

Cooperating Teacher
________________________________________________________________________
____

University Supervisor
________________________________________________________________________
____

School ___________________________ School Division ___________________________

Subject Area ___________________________ Grade Level ___________________________

Primary disability of students in classroom: ED LD ID SD VI Other: ______

Year _________ Semester _____ Fall _____ Spring _____ Summer _________

Dates of Observation(s):

_________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________

Date of Final Review/Conference: _____________________________

Signature Indicating Participation in Review/Conference Process:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intern</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Clinical Evaluation Continuum for Candidates in Initial Licensure Programs

Purpose and Instructions

Consistent with the School of Education’s conceptual framework, the purpose of the Clinical Evaluation Continuum is to prepare candidates to reflect on their practice and to provide a system for candidates, cooperating teachers, and supervisors to assess an intern’s growth over time. The supervisor’s and cooperating teacher’s completed Clinical Evaluation Continuum is submitted to the University at the conclusion of the clinical experience.

The Continuum is designed to assess a candidate’s growth during the internship. The Continuum consists of seven standards, each with a series of key elements. The candidate is assessed on each element across the continuum. For the “meets expectations” level, the candidate, while not yet reaching the level of an accomplished teacher, shows characteristics of an accomplished teacher for the appropriate key element. At the “exceeds expectations” level, a candidate is expected to have experimented with a variety of procedures and routines and made successful adjustments consistently and confidently with routine and procedures as necessary. The importance of each key element may vary from program to program, but all elements should be discussed and evaluated, even if not observed.

A rating of “No opportunity to observe” (N) is permissible if the intern was not given the opportunity to demonstrate the skill.

University supervisors and cooperating teachers should complete the Continuum by the end of the internship,
## CLINICAL EVALUATION CONTINUUM FOR CANDIDATES IN INITIAL LICENSURE PROGRAMS

### CEC/IGC Standard 4: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Selects, adapts, and implements a variety of evidence-based practices validated for specific characteristics of learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities and settings.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate selects and implements a variety of evidence-based practices but fails to make differentiate instruction on an individual level to promote student understanding of academic learning for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate selects, adapts, and implements a variety of evidence-based practices validated for specific characteristics of learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities and settings.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate implements multiple evidence-based practices, resources, and technologies in units of instruction that promote student understanding of academic learning for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Selects a variety of learning experiences, media and materials to accommodate different styles and levels of learning.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate selects only one type of learning experiences, media and materials including technology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate selects a variety of learning experiences, media and materials (including technology) to accommodate different styles and levels of learning.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate selects, adapts, and implements a variety of learning experiences, media and materials (including technology) to accommodate different styles and levels of learning.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Adapts pacing, methods, and materials utilizing feedback from students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate provides inappropriate or poor adaptations of pacing, methods and materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate adapts pacing, methods, and materials utilizing feedback (including data) from students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate adapts pacing, methods, and materials utilizing feedback from students with mild to moderate exceptionalities and uses clinical judgment on the</td>
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<td>efficacy of these instructional decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> Provides opportunities for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to work independently and in cooperative groups.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to provide adequately structured opportunities for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to work independently and in cooperative groups.</td>
<td>Candidate provides opportunities for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to work independently and in cooperative groups.</td>
<td>Candidate provides structured opportunities and formative feedback to learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to teach them how to work independently and in cooperative groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e.</strong> Encourages critical thinking and problem solving through prompts, questioning, and application.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to teach critical thinking and problem solving due to poor quality presentation of prompts, questions and application opportunities.</td>
<td>Candidate teaches critical thinking and problem solving through prompts, questioning, and application.</td>
<td>Candidate teaches critical thinking and problem solving on a daily basis through prompts, questioning, and application.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>f.</strong> Demonstrates competence in using technology to achieve instructional objectives.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to demonstrate competence in using technology to teach students to learn instructional objectives.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates competence in using technology to teach students to learn instructional objectives.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates high levels of skill in using technology to teach students to learn instructional objectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>g.</strong> Integrates materials and activities, which promote gender and multicultural equity in lessons.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to use materials and activities which promote gender and multicultural equity in lessons.</td>
<td>Candidate uses materials and activities, which promote gender and multicultural equity in lessons.</td>
<td>Candidate uses materials and activities, which promote gender and multicultural equity in lessons on a consistent basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CEC/IGC Standard 5: LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Creates an orderly and supportive environment by designing and managing routines.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to design and manage classroom routines thereby fails to create an orderly and supportive environment.</td>
<td>Candidate creates an orderly and supportive environment by designing and managing classroom routines.</td>
<td>Candidate actively analyzes the needs of the learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities in order to create an orderly and supportive environment. Candidate manages classroom routines and is responsive to the changing needs of the students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Motivates students with mild to moderate exceptionalities through interesting and challenging activities.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to develop interesting and challenging activities to motivate students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>Candidate motivates students with mild to moderate exceptionalities through interesting and challenging activities.</td>
<td>Candidate takes student interests and abilities into consideration and designs a variety of learning activities, which motivate and challenge students with mild to moderate exceptionalities. Candidate uses evidence-based practices to motivate students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Organizes, develops, and sustains a safe, equitable, positive learning environment</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate organizes, develops, and sustains a safe, equitable, positive and supportive learning</td>
<td>Candidate organizes, develops, and sustains a safe, equitable, positive and supportive learning</td>
<td>Candidate solicits student input and provides opportunities for choice making in order to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued.</th>
<th>environment but fails to demonstrate that diversities are valued.</th>
<th>environment in which diversities are valued.</th>
<th>organize, develop and sustain a safe, equitable, positive and supportive learning environment. Candidate analyzes students’ linguistic and cultural background and considers the class diversity while establishing the learning environment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Designs learning environments that encourage active participation in individual and group activities and encourage student independence.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to design learning environments that encourage active participation in individual and group activities or to encourage student independence.</td>
<td>Candidate designs learning environments that encourage active participation in individual and group activities and encourage student independence. Candidate integrates social skills instruction and strategies for enhancing motivation for each individual student and the group as a whole as they design learning environments that encourage active participation in individual and group activities and encourage student independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Modifies the learning environment to manage behaviors, time, space, and materials to keep students with mild to moderate exceptionalities productively involved in learning.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to modify the learning environment to manage behaviors, time, space, and materials to keep students with mild to moderate exceptionalities productively involved in learning.</td>
<td>Candidate modifies the learning environment to manage behaviors, time, space, and materials to keep students with mild to moderate exceptionalities productively involved in learning. Candidate establishes clear classroom procedures, discourages disruptions, and promotes interaction with students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Demonstrates the ability to manage two or more classroom activities simultaneously, with evidence of attention to each.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates the ability to manage two or more classroom activities simultaneously but fails to provide attention to each.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Uses effective and varied behavior management strategies and handles disruptive or destructive behavior firmly and fairly.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate is ineffective in using behavior management strategies to handle disruptive or destructive behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h. Communicates high expectations while respecting and valuing individual differences and cultural diversity.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to communicate high expectations for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Uses the least intensive behavior management strategy consistent with the needs of the individual with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate uses behavior management strategies which do not meet the needs of the individual with exceptional learning needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Establishes and maintains rapport with individuals with and without exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to establish caring, friendly interactions or a rapport with students with and without exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>Candidate establishes and maintains rapport with individuals with and without exceptional learning needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CEC/IGC Standard 6: LANGUAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Uses strategies to support and enhance communication skills of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate uses limited strategies to support and enhance communication skills of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>Candidate uses strategies to support and enhance communication skills of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>Candidate uses evidence based practices, appropriate technology, and modeling to support and enhance communication skills of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Uses communication strategies and resources to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with exceptional learning needs whose primary language is not the dominant language.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate uses limited strategies to individualize the curriculum to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with exceptional learning needs whose primary language is not the dominant language.</td>
<td>Candidate uses communication strategies and resources to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with exceptional learning needs whose primary language is not the dominant language.</td>
<td>Candidate uses evidence based communication strategies, appropriate technology, collaboration with ELL teachers, and resources to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with exceptional learning needs whose primary language is not the dominant language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Uses assessment data from informal reading inventories to develop instructional plans for</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate develops instructional plans for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities without taking</td>
<td>Candidate uses assessment data from informal reading inventories to develop instructional plans for learners</td>
<td>Candidate uses assessment data from informal reading inventories and curriculum based assessments to develop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Uses a variety of research-based educational practices and curriculum guidelines to develop units and lesson plans that meet the developmental and academic needs of diverse learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate employs educational practices that are not research-based and develops units and lesson plans that fail to meet the needs of the diverse learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>Candidate uses a variety of research-based educational practices and curriculum guidelines to develop units and lesson plans that meet the developmental and academic needs of diverse learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>Candidate uses a wide variety of research-based educational practices and curriculum guidelines to develop units and lesson plans that meet the developmental and academic needs of diverse learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Plans a sequence of activities, which are focused on achievement of the instructional objective(s).</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate plans a sequence of activities which is not focused on the achievement of the instructional objective(s).</td>
<td>Candidate plans a sequence of activities, which are focused on achievement of the instructional objective(s).</td>
<td>Candidate plans a sequence of activities which is focused on achievement of the instructional objective(s) and builds off of students' prior knowledge, life experiences and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Facilitates learning experiences that incorporate self-direction, interaction, choice, and consideration of multiple perspectives</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate is overly directive in class, misses most opportunities for students with mild to moderate exceptionalities to learn self-direction, make choice, and share their perspectives.</td>
<td>Candidate analyzes the effectiveness of student interactions during learning experiences and incorporates self-directed activities appropriate for the cognitive and social development and skill set of students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Gathers, creates, and organizes materials and equipment in advance.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate uses class time to gather and organize materials due to their inability to prepare in advance.</td>
<td>Candidate gathers a variety of materials and equipment in advance of class and uses instructional assessments to make decisions about which materials are most appropriate for each individual with exceptional learning needs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Incorporates and implements instructional and assistive technology into the educational program.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to incorporate instructional and assistive technology into the educational program.</td>
<td>Candidate incorporates and implements a variety of instructional and assistive technology into the educational program on a daily basis to meet the needs of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Evaluates and modifies instructional practices in response to</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to use assessment data to make instructional</td>
<td>Candidate evaluates individual’s learning progress and assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

241
ongoing assessment data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>g. Provides opportunities for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to participate actively and successfully at different levels.</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Candidate provides only one level of instruction for the entire class.</th>
<th>Candidate provides opportunities for learners with mild to moderate exceptionalities to participate actively and successfully at different levels.</th>
<th>Candidate evaluates assessment data to develop individual and group profiles that reflect progress of all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities and addresses levels of need and learning accomplishments.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>h. Use functional assessments to develop intervention plans.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate develops intervention plans without the use of data from functional assessments.</td>
<td>Candidate uses functional assessments to develop intervention plans.</td>
<td>Candidate uses multiple data points including functional assessment to develop intervention plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CEC/IGC Standard 8: ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Creates and explains criteria</td>
<td>No Opportunity</td>
<td>Candidate does not explain</td>
<td>Candidate creates and</td>
<td>Candidate chooses appropriate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>for assessing student work.</td>
<td>to Observe criteria for assessing student work. Criteria for grading are non-existent or inappropriate for the lesson/task.</td>
<td>explains criteria for assessing student work.</td>
<td>assessment tools, communicates criteria to students with mild to moderate exceptionalities, confirms their understanding, and applies criteria consistently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Regularly monitors student progress and assesses for understanding and mastery through observation of students’ performance and evaluation of their work.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe Candidate fails to monitor student progress and assesses for understanding and mastery through observation of students’ performance and evaluation of their work.</td>
<td>Candidate regularly monitors student progress and assesses for understanding and mastery through observation of students’ performance and evaluation of their work.</td>
<td>Candidate plans and implements ongoing assessments to check for understanding and mastery of concepts through observation of students’ performance and evaluation of their work and clearly communicates their assessment findings to the students with mild to moderate exceptionalities and other key stakeholders.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| d. Conducts formal and informal assessments using appropriate technologies as supports. | No Opportunity to Observe Candidate fails to conduct formal and informal assessments using appropriate technologies as supports. | Candidate conducts formal and informal assessments using appropriate technologies as supports. | Candidate conducts formal and informal assessments using appropriate technologies as supports. Candidate demonstrates understanding of measurement theory and practices for addressing issues of validity,
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reliability, norms, bias, and interpretation of assessment results. Candidate demonstrates understanding of the appropriate use and limitations of various types of assessments.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e. Involves and guides all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities in assessing and reflecting on their own learning.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Keeps records of students’ progress and problems and uses data from multiple sources to assess student learning.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Develops or modifies individualized assessment strategies.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate reviews assessment data and identifies links to current instructional plans but fails to analyze student assessment data or use the data to improve instructional practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate does not use student assessment data to make instructional decisions (formative).</td>
<td>Candidate uses assessment data to profile student learning and guide instruction (formative).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Exhibits a commitment to professional standards associated with their areas of expertise.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**CEC/IGC Standard 9: PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL PRACTICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Exhibits a commitment to professional standards associated with their areas of expertise.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to provide evidence that professional standards have been integrated into work with</td>
<td>Candidate exhibits a commitment to professional standards associated with their areas of</td>
<td>Candidate extends own professional practice by reading professional literature or by</td>
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<td></td>
<td>students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>expertise.</td>
<td>being a member of a professional organization or by attending professional workshops, seminars, and/or conferences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Demonstrates courtesy and caring in relationships with students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to build relationships with the students with mild to moderate exceptionalities, maintaining too much distance or demonstrating a lack of courtesy and caring.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates courtesy and caring in relationships with students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Supports learning environments that encourage the academic, social, and professional growth of all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to provide evidence that they have considered the different abilities, needs, learning styles, and cultures of students with mild to moderate exceptionalities in classroom work.</td>
<td>Candidate supports learning environments that encourage the academic, social, and professional growth of all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities. Candidate analyzes work with students to determine how well a positive learning environment was created and considers different approaches to meeting the needs of students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Guides student behavior and moral development through an emphasis on personal</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate does not emphasize personal responsibility and fails to guide student behavior and moral</td>
<td>Candidate guides student behavior and moral development through an emphasis on personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Presents content accurately and instructions clearly.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate presents content inaccurately and instructions in an unclear manner.</td>
<td>Candidate presents content accurately and instructions clearly.</td>
<td>Candidate presents content accurately and instructions clearly using a variety of presentation modalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Demonstrates growth and dissemination of professional knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to demonstrate growth of professional knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates growth and dissemination of professional knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>Candidate accepts constructive criticism, and demonstrates growth and dissemination of professional knowledge and skills.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Reflects on his/her professional practice, including personal teaching and learning style and practices.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate displays no evidence of the ability or willingness to reflect on effectiveness, is unaware of effectiveness or student learning.</td>
<td>Candidate reflects on his/her professional practice, including personal teaching and learning style.</td>
<td>Candidate reflects upon, interprets, and communicates evidence of one's own effectiveness as a teacher, including evidence of success in fostering student progress in learning. Candidate uses evidence of effectiveness in planning for further instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Practices within one’s skill limits and obtains assistance as needed.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate refuses to obtain assistance when needed and practices beyond his or her skill limit.</td>
<td>Candidate engages in reflective practice (practices within one’s skill limits and obtains assistance as needed).</td>
<td>Candidate actively seeks feedback and constructive criticism in the classroom and engages in reflective practice (practices within</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Task Description</td>
<td>Candidate's Assessment</td>
<td>Candidate's Rating</td>
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<td>i.</td>
<td>Demonstrates responsibility, dependability, flexibility, and a positive attitude.</td>
<td>Candidate is late to meetings, misses deadlines or needs to be reminded often of obligations. Candidate demonstrates a negative attitude.</td>
<td>Candidate uses clinical judgement of ability to meet expectations, plans and carries out tasks associated with role promptly, and consistently displays a positive attitude.</td>
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<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>Observes school policies and procedures.</td>
<td>Candidate violates school policies and procedures.</td>
<td>Candidate consistently observes and enforces school policies and procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>Projects a professional image in terms of demeanor and appearance.</td>
<td>Candidate dresses or behaves in an unprofessional manner.</td>
<td>Candidate projects a professional image in terms of demeanor and appearance.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>Demonstrates effective oral communication skills.</td>
<td>Candidate’s oral communication is difficult to understand or follow, making it ineffective. Candidate demonstrates effective oral communication skills.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates highly effective oral communication skills making material presented verbally easy to understand and follow.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>Demonstrates effective written communication skills.</td>
<td>Candidate’s written communication is difficult to understand or follow, making it ineffective. Candidate demonstrates effective written communication skills.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates highly effective written communication skills making material presented in</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Demonstrates high expectations for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities to develop the highest possible learning outcomes and quality of life.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to support student learning and displays evidence of low expectations for at least some students with mild to moderate exceptionalities.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates high expectations for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities to develop the highest possible learning outcomes and quality of life.</td>
<td>Candidate provides emotional and academic support to students with mild to moderate exceptionalities and communicates confidence in their ability to complete assigned work and modifies plans to provide opportunities for all students with mild to moderate exceptionalities to meet or exceed objectives through supportive critique of student learning that takes into account challenging ideas and suggestions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o. Demonstrates commitment to developing the highest education and quality-of-life potential of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to demonstrate a commitment to developing the highest education and quality of life potential of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates commitment to developing the highest education and quality-of-life potential of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates high levels of commitment to developing the highest education and quality of life potential of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Demonstrates concept of oneself as a lifelong learner by actively planning and engaging in professional activities that foster</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to demonstrate concept of oneself as a lifelong learner; does not actively plan and engage in professional activities that foster</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates concept of oneself as a lifelong learner by actively planning and engaging in professional activities that foster</td>
<td>Candidate demonstrates concept of oneself as a lifelong learner by actively planning and engaging in professional activities that foster</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
professional growth and keeps current with evidence-based best practices.

professional growth or keep current with evidence-based best practices.
foster professional growth and keeping current with evidence-based best practices.
foster professional growth, keeping current with evidence-based best practices, and shares new information with colleagues in a collaborative manner.

### CEC/IGC Standard 10: COLLABORATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Rating Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Communicates regularly with parents and involves them in problem solving and learning activities.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to provide evidence of planning to collaborate with parents.</td>
<td>Candidate communicates regularly with parents and involves them in problem solving and learning activities.</td>
<td>Candidate communicates regularly with family members and collaborates in order to increase student learning through and to engage additional support when needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Engages in productive relationships with other educators, service providers, and personnel from community agencies.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate fails to provide evidence of engaging in productive relationships with other educators, service providers, and personnel from community agencies.</td>
<td>Candidate engages in productive relationships with other educators, service providers, and personnel from community agencies.</td>
<td>Candidate examines, interprets, and communicates evidence of one’s own effectiveness as a collaborator. Candidate demonstrates an ability to work with others as equals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Maintains confidential communication about students with mild to moderate exceptional learning needs.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate shares confidential information about students with mild to moderate exceptional learning needs with outside</td>
<td>Candidate maintains confidential communication about students with mild to moderate exceptional</td>
<td>Candidate maintains confidential communication about students with mild to moderate exceptional</td>
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<td></td>
<td>parties.</td>
<td>learning needs.</td>
<td>learning needs and is observed stressing the importance of confidentiality with other stakeholders including paraprofessionals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Fosters respectful and beneficial relationships between families and professionals.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate is disrespectful when dealing with families and professionals.</td>
<td>Candidate fosters respectful and beneficial relationships between families and professionals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Collaborates with school personnel and community members in integrating individuals with exceptional learning needs into various settings.</td>
<td>No Opportunity to Observe</td>
<td>Candidate shows no evidence of collaborating with school personnel and community members in integrating individuals with exceptional learning needs into various settings.</td>
<td>Candidate collaborates with school personnel and community members in integrating individuals with exceptional learning needs into various settings.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| f. Observes, evaluates, and provides feedback to paraeducators. | No Opportunity to Observe | Candidate fails to observe, evaluate and provide feedback to paraeducators. | Candidate observes, evaluates, and provides feedback to paraeducators in a proactive manner, and works actively for the betterment of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>g. Models techniques and coaches others in the use of evidence-based instructional methods and accommodations.</th>
<th>No Opportunity to Observe</th>
<th>Candidate incorrectly models techniques and fails to coach others in the use of evidence-based instructional methods and accommodations.</th>
<th>Candidate models techniques and coaches others in the use of evidence-based instructional methods and accommodations.</th>
<th>Candidate models a wide variety of evidence-based practices to enhance instruction and strengthen accommodations. Candidate coaches others in the effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of these strategies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


References


256


Biography

Christine B. McElwee graduated from Hershey High School, Hershey, Pennsylvania in 1976. She received her Bachelor of Science in Special Education from Bloomsburg University in 1980. She was employed as a teacher of students with disabilities in Prince William County for 33 years. She received her Master in Education in Special Education from George Mason University in 1989. In addition, she received her Administrative/Supervisory Licensure from George Mason University in 2006, which allowed her to work as a Special Education Assistant Principal in Fairfax County, Virginia for 2 years. Christine has completed her Ph.D. in Special Education Leadership with the completion of her dissertation study in 2015.