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Perceptions of Online Teaching Endorsement Program Effectiveness in Georgia: A Case Study

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PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE TEACHING ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

EFFECTIVENESS IN GEORGIA: A CASE STUDY

by

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A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the beliefs and perceptions of professional educators about online teaching endorsement practices in the state of Georgia. The participants in this study included three University System of Georgia teacher educators, one Georgia K-12 virtual school administrator, and two Georgia K-12 virtual school educators. The data collected came from six one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the researcher's personal narrative, and the analysis of Online Teaching Endorsement Program standards (505-3-.95) as set forth by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Using a constructivist lens, data from all three sources was coded thematically and then analyzed using inductive and deductive approaches to constant comparison analysis. Analysis results showed that perceived issues and concerns held by teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia about current K-12 (Online Teaching Endorsement) OTE preparation practices reflect real problems and challenges related to a lack of customization in virtual educator training, K-12 educator perceptions and misconceptions about online instruction and technology knowledge, and imperfections in the K-12 virtual setting. Findings showed that these problems and challenges can and do impacting a K-12 virtual educator's success in the virtual classroom.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Evaluating the validity, relevance, and effectiveness of K-12 teacher preparation in the United States is a challenge given that no two states within the United States utilize the same sets of curricula, standards, or measures to assess teacher candidates for competencies with course content and teacher practicum performance. The implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the early 2000s changed the face of traditional face-to-face (f2f) education, requiring educators at the local, district, and state levels across the nation to implement changes in how they educate students (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). These required changes in K-12 instructional practices meant changing how educators are trained, such that educational professionals in institutions of higher education began revisiting how they prepare K-12 teacher candidates for successful entry into the teaching field (Everhart & Hogarty, 2009). K-12 instructional practices began changing again in recent years with the ubiquitous presence of online learning (Jorrín-Abellán & Stake, 2009; Hathaway & Norton, 2012; Travis & Rutherford, 2012-2013). The number of online programs and course offerings has increased exponentially in the last decade, spurring initiatives backed by the U.S. Department of Education to create a model that would incorporate virtual school preparation into preservice teacher education programs, including movements to have more faculty and support staff for online teaching endeavors (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011; Baran & Correia, 2014; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bennett & Lockyer,

2004; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Downing & Dyment, 2013). Current standards and

requirements for effective K-12 teacher preparation include preparing candidates to teach

online, which has its own challenges in terms of evaluating the validity, relevance, and

effectiveness of its teacher preparation practices (Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Everhart &

Hogarty, 2009; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012a; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b).

There are instances where universities belonging to the same system in a single state

differ in the types of courses and the number of credit hours required for teaching

candidates to be deemed properly and effectively certified or prepared to engage in online

teaching practices. While online K-12 education has become an accepted form of 21st

century schooling in many states, little is known about the educators who teach online in

terms of their characteristics, the types of professional preparation they receive, the

effectiveness of different types of professional development, and how these educators

may or may not differ from the general population of those teaching in traditional settings

(Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Hathaway & Norton, 2012).

Schlager and Fusco (2003) stressed the importance of building communities of

practice that bring together and strengthen relationships among educational practitioners,

researchers, and providers. An extensive review of the literature yielded research and

articles that addressed or examined the importance of quality in education certification

programs and quality markers of successful online courses in secondary and higher

education settings and in university degree programs (Baran & Correia, 2014; Bollinger,

Inan, & Wasilik, 2014; Compton, 2009; Corry & Stella, 2012; Kennedy & Archambault,

2012a; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b; Lorenzo & Moore, 2002; Paul & Cochran,

2013; Shelton, 2011; Wang, 2006). Other researchers noted that the majority of K-12

online instructors at the secondary level are traditional f2f teachers. Upon becoming

certified K-12 online instructors, they have experienced a shift in their roles from that of

the educator as a disseminator of knowledge to that of the online instructor. In most

cases, they serve more as a coach or facilitator for students who obtain their answers in a

ubiquitous environment where online research and collaboration are the norm (Diamond-

Hicks, 2011; Jorrín-Abellán & Stake, 2009; Mehta & Fine, 2010; Taylor, 2014).

Organizations such as the International Association of K-12 Learning (iNACOL), the

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and Quality Matters (QM) include

standards for quality online teaching in their standards sets based on their common

beliefs that online teaching requires special skill sets and considerations (Hathaway &

Norton, 2012; iNACOL, 2011; QM, 2011; SREB, 2006). Adoniou (2013) has stressed the

importance of connectedness and context in traditional teacher preparation, and

Blackinton (2013), based on first-hand experience, has dispelled myths and

misconceptions about hybrid or blended instruction—particularly the notions that it is

easier than traditional instruction, that it is the same as an independent study, and that it is

technology-driven by nature—by stating that intended student outcomes in the form of

what they should be able to think, do, say or demonstrate at the end of a course are what

drive curricula and courses. All of these findings seem to indicate that, in general, K-12

online instruction candidate preparation begins with many of the basic tenets that have

driven traditional instruction, including the need for professional support through

communities of practice (Davis & Roblyer, 2005). But how does that translate to

preparing post-graduate K-12 online teaching endorsement (OTE) candidates?

Problem Statement

The United States does not have a nationalized, top-down educational system with parity across all 50 states and districts; conversely, the nation does not have a singular, common, official national certification program for traditional K-12 candidates that cohesively defines an ideal K-12 OTE candidate preparation program. Begun in the 1980s following the report <u>A Nation at Risk</u> that coined the phrase "the rise of mediocrity", the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards set about establishing the standards-based National Board Certification program as a means of defining and recognizing accomplished teaching among teachers with three or more documented successful years of teaching (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2015). The organization offers National Board Certification in thirteen different academic discipline areas but has no provisions or even information on its website indicating research towards or development of a national endorsement or certification for K-12 online instruction. While National Board Certification is considered desirable by many, it is not required by law in any state or at the national level as a part of K-12 teaching licensure; approximately 3% of all traditional K-12 teachers hold national certification (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2015).

The Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is a national accreditation organization that formed on July 1, 2013, as a result of the *de facto* unification of two accreditation organizations, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). The U. S. Department of Education used to recognize NCATE as the official accrediting body for institutions that prepared teachers and other professional personnel

for work in traditional preschool, elementary, and secondary school settings, and it recognized TEAC as another source of accreditation for teacher education based on audits evidencing student achievement (NCATE, 2008; TEAC, 2015). Since supplanting NCATE and TEAC, CAEP has become a major source of accreditation for teacher colleges across the nation and is responsible for advancing excellence in educator preparation through evidence-based accreditation designed to assure quality and support continuous improvement that strengthens P-12 student learning (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2014a). CAEP has adopted three areas of traditional teacher preparation that the National Academy of Sciences identified in its 2010 report as those most likely to have the strongest impact on student outcomes: content knowledge, clinical experiences, and teacher candidate quality (CAEP Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting, 2013).

Most teacher colleges in the nation must address both CAEP standards and their individual state standards for traditional teacher preparation. CAEP standards as currently written acknowledge that technology is a critical area of teacher preparation and reference InTASC, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, ISTE, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' Five Core Propositions, and the Harvard Family Research Project as influencers in how CAEP developed its current set of traditional teacher preparation standards; a set of CAEP standards for OTE has yet to be established. For now, CAEP standards charge educator preparation programs with ensuring that teaching candidates model and apply technology standards in all areas of pedagogical design, application, and student assessment. This presents a challenge at the state level in all fifty states. Each state has its own cohesive set of laws, codes, and

standards for traditional K-12 candidate preparation practices that align with federal guidelines and mandates such as NCLB. Different types of K-12 online or virtual schools and programs exist in each state, and the state laws, codes, and standards governing teaching and hiring requirements in these settings depends on whether a virtual program is a fully operational virtual school or a program that offers virtual instruction as an alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar class settings. Many states now have legislation and standards that govern K-12 OTE candidate preparation practices in kind, but it is very difficult to establish parity among states given that differences exist state-to-state in OTE candidate preparation as well. Given this diversity in K-12 OTE preparation practices, the best way to begin establishing any typification of what constitutes the ideal preparation program is to focus on these practices within the confines of a single state in the nation, specifically in my home state of Georgia. Doing so would first require an examination of several factors, including:

- The standards that University System of Georgia (USG) institutions currently use in designing their graduate-level K-12 OTE programs;
- The requirements USG institutions must meet regarding OTE programs and course offerings to remain in accordance with Georgia state law and Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) standards governing K-12 OTE;
- The similarities and differences among graduate-level K-12 OTE programs at different USG systems in terms of curriculum design and course requirements leading to K-12 OTE;

- The skills and preparations virtual school leaders believe that K-12 OTE candidates need to possess to be ideal OTE candidates for hire in virtual school settings;

- The types of K-12 virtual schools that exist in the state of Georgia and how Georgia state laws and GPSC standards govern their hiring requirements and practices.

Feedback from university administrators, university faculty, and virtual school administrators also would provide invaluable insight into current trends and practices related to K-12 OTE candidate preparation and hiring. Backing from expert research in the fields of educational technology and K-12 leadership coupled with state laws, codes, and standards governing K-12 OTE candidate preparation would provide the theoretical framework for examining this corpus of trends and practices and drive inquiry aimed at achieving a better understanding of what already is in place and what is needed to create a K-12 OTE program that prepares K-12 OTE candidates thoroughly for a virtual teaching position in the state of Georgia. The problem this study seeks to address is the gap in the literature related to how institutions of higher education design their OTE programs and prepare their candidates for careers as K-12 virtual educators by what examining teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators believe or perceive as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that K-12 virtual educators need to be effective in online instructional environments.

Statement of Purpose

The context for this study stems from three areas that drive K-12 OTE candidate preparation in the state of Georgia: state standards for teacher preparation, state regulations for K-12 virtual school hiring practices, and the preparation programs designed and operated by USG teacher educators. In accordance with state law and the GaPSC, all public institutions of higher learning in the state of Georgia adhere to the standards set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in preparing teacher candidates for accreditation, and their preparation programs incorporate the most recent version of the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards as developed by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (GaPSC, 2014a). Alignment with these standards works to ensure that graduates of all educator preparation programs are trained in and possess the skills necessary for success in Georgia K-12 classrooms (GaPSC, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2015). While it stands to reason that teachers who have a solid foundation in their content and pedagogical knowledge may transition better to teaching in a virtual environment, several researchers have acknowledged that more research needs to be conducted that examines how researchers and practitioners develop the programs that train educators for teaching in virtual environments (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 20011; Cavanaugh et al., 2009; Corry & Stella, 2012). It is essential that educator programs offer quality courses of study that include courses vital to preparing teacher candidates for jobs in all fields, including the growing field of K-12 virtual instruction. Taking steps to equip K-12 virtual educators with appropriate knowledge, tools, and training experiences is essential to helping them achieve success as virtual classroom instructors and leaders. This study is not an analysis

of the GaPSC OTE Standards; its purpose is to examine the perceptions and beliefs held by USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia about the effectiveness of current K-12 OTE candidate preparation practices.

Research Questions

The identified nation-wide disparities in traditional and online teacher preparation practices also exist at the state level in each state. In Georgia alone, different USG institutions of higher education offer K-12 OTE programs to postgraduates. Each of these institutions is bound by law to uphold Georgia codes, mandates, and standards for certification, but variation exists from one USG institution to the next in term of program design and the number and specific types of courses required for postgraduate K-12 OTE candidates. This study explored these differences and issues by addressing the following research questions:

1. What do teacher educators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

2. What do K-12 virtual school administrators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

3. What do K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

These questions were answered by analyzing data from three different sources:

- Publicly available documents on the GaPSC website that pertain to the requirements and standards for educator preparation under OTE;

- Interviews with USG teacher educators who coordinate K-12 OTE courses and programs of study, Georgia K-12 virtual school administrators in the state of Georgia, and Georgia K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia;

- My personal narrative from May 16, 2016, that includes my professional beliefs and perceptions about online instruction.

I employed inductive and deductive approaches to thematic coding to analyze the documents, the interviews, and my personal narrative. The results of the interview analyses were compared to each other for commonalities and differences in professional beliefs and perceptions regarding necessary or desired knowledge, skill, and dispositions for K-12 virtual instructors. I then compared the interview analyses to those of the personal narrative and the GaPSC documents to identify current OTE candidate preparation practices in the state of Georgia that reflect the beliefs and perceptions of the study participants and discussed ways they can be used to generate new design ideas for future OTE preparation programs.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Graduate programs nation-wide offer OTE to experienced traditional K-12 teachers who hold initial certification in a given content field and opt to complete the requisite OTE coursework while pursuing an advanced degree. These candidates go on to teach in a variety of hybrid and fully-online K-12 virtual programs in all 50 states across

the United States, but research has yet to examine what constitutes the ideal OTE candidate preparation program in terms of how state standards, technology standards, and the expectations of teacher preparers and virtual school administrators work together to define the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that contribute to this particular type of licensure. This held true in the late 1990s for traditional teacher education programs. Kennedy (1997) noted that standards for these programs existed in many forms as members of the same field tended to disagree about what constitutes essential minimums and/or ideal maximums. I suspected that the same holds true today for postgraduate K-12 OTE programs in the state of Georgia and chose to conduct this case study to examine this further. This case study echoes elements of phenomenology (Creswell, 2006; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994) while seeking to build on existing emerging literature about educational practices and identity as related to K-12 OTE candidate preparation.

Phenomenology has its roots in pre-World War I German philosophy in the writings of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegal, and Franz Brentano, but Edmund Husserl is credited by many with having developed it and conceived it as a methodology (Dowling, 2007; Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Moran, 2000; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Phenomenology focuses on describing what participants have in common as a part of any lived experience or phenomenon. Its purpose is to reduce the participants' individual experiences with the phenomenon, identify it as an object of human experience, and develop a composite description of the essence of that experience for all of the individuals that consist of what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Moran (2000) noted that we first must

understand the phenomena from within before imposing explanations, a notion which lies at the very heart of this study.

I had envisioned for this dissertation a study that examines educator beliefs and perception about the pedagogy, instructional design, professional development, and professional skills needed for K-12 online instruction and compares them to components currently mandated by the state of Georgia for designing and developing a postgraduate K-12 OTE program design while also comparing them to what actually goes into the design and development of a K-12 OTE program. I maintained that a critical component of K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia has to stem from how USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual principals, and K-12 virtual educators understand them based on the laws, codes and professional standards used to design them.

Conducting this study allowed me to examine the individual experiences of these professional educators and develop a composite description of the essence of their experiences as a phenomenon that I used to generate an understanding of their beliefs and perceptions about K-12 OTE preparation practices in the state of Georgia. This type of examination has the potential to establish criteria for qualifying OTE program criteria and traits and identifying new ones that defines, locates, and differentiates this type of teacher preparation program from other types of post-graduate teacher preparation programs (Hewitt, 1992). I intended for existing K-12 OTE program criteria and traits to combine with interviewee ideologies about K-12 OTE preparation practices as a means of generating new ideas for use in future K-12 OTE program design endeavors. I also intended for this study to highlight the need for research on K-12 OTE preparation

program that incorporates and reflects the needs of newly-hired K-12 virtual educators and the performance expectations of the K-12 virtual administrators who hire them.

Introduction to Participants

This study consisted of interviews with USG teacher educators, Georgia K-12 virtual school administrators, and Georgia K-12 virtual educators. The USG teacher educators in this study came from different USG institutions across the state who offer OTE as a part of their post-graduate certification programs. The K-12 virtual school administrators and virtual educators came from K-12 virtual schools based in the state of Georgia. I questioned participants in all three groups about their beliefs and perceptions of how K-12 virtual instruction candidates are prepared in terms of the knowledge, disposition, and types of OTE skills that each deems necessary for K-12 virtual educators to perform their jobs successfully. It is important to note that the programs that prepare OTE candidates are not limited to USG institutions and include Georgia Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), local school systems, and other organizations in the state that operate under the auspices of the GaPSC. These programs were not included in this study given that these agencies are not USG institutions and their programs, which must be based on the most recent version of CAEP standards, are not designed by USG faculty operating directly under the auspices of CAEP (GaPSC, 2014a).

Definitions of Key Terminology

Online Teaching Endorsement. Online Teaching Endorsement, or OTE, refers to the educator preparation pathways a certified K-12 educator must follow to become endorsed to teach in a virtual K-12 setting. These pathways refer to the practical ways of knowing

the subject matter, the curricular texts, and teacher education contexts unique to K-12 instruction and within which educators practice their teaching.

Blended Learning or Hybrid Learning. This is a course or an educational program in which at least part of what the student learns consists of delivery of content and instruction via virtual or online means. The student has some control over time, place and pacing for this portion of a course.

Brick-and mortar or Face-to-face (f2f). These two terms are used interchangeably in the field of education and refers to K-12 instruction that occurs in a traditional classroom in a school where teachers and students interact in person and in real time.

Credit recovery. Credit recovery consists of opportunities for high school students who have failed a course to redo a portion of the coursework or retake courses through alternate means. Within the context of this study, credit recovery refers to online courses that provide these opportunities.

Online Teaching Endorsement (OTE) Candidate. In this study, OTE candidates are K-12 teachers actively enrolled in a post-graduate education program at a USG institution and are adding OTE to their professional certificates in the state of Georgia.

University System of Georgia. The University System of Georgia, or USG, is the organizational system for all public institutions of higher education in the state of Georgia.

Teacher educator(s). Teacher educators are the USG faculty members who coordinate and/or supervise the OTE courses and curricula at different USG institutions across the state of Georgia They also are the USG faculty members who teach these courses and thereby train the K-12 educators enrolled as students in these courses.

K-12 virtual school. A K-12 institution whose courses are taught mostly or entirely through online methods.

K-12 virtual educator. A certified K-12 educator who teaches at a K-12 virtual school.

K-12 virtual school administrator. A K-12 educator certified in educational leadership who works in an administrative capacity at a K-12 virtual school.

Fully online programs. These are programs in which students work entirely online without having to report to a physical facility to complete assignments, including tests and other forms of assessment. Orientations, f2f class meetings, and synchronous (online meetings in real time) are optional, but students may be required to view archived synchronous events.

Supplemental online programs. Supplemental online programs are online courses that students take to supplement their current full-time educational program; the full-time program may be f2f, hybrid or fully online. Students also may use supplemental online programs for credit recovery, curriculum advancement, curriculum enhancement, and/or to resolve scheduling conflicts as they arise.

Role of the Researcher

I am a public educator with over twenty years of experience in the K-12 traditional classroom, and my interests in using technology to support teaching endeavors began to emerge about half-way through my career with the introduction of instructional technologies into the traditional f2f setting starting with electronic boards and digitized student response systems. I also am an adjunct faculty member at my degree-granting institution, and I embraced the opportunity to receive training that allowed me to begin teaching online courses in the higher education setting. Working in these two environments has positioned me to view teacher preparation from the candidate perspective and the instructor perspective. It also has sparked my interest in moving to a career in higher education as a teacher educator who trains K-12 teacher candidates for both f2f and virtual instruction environments and helps them develop skills and talents to perform successfully in both contexts. Through these professional experiences and the academic ones in my graduate program, I have encountered research and discussion with professors and colleagues related to different issues surrounding OTE candidate preparation. I have developed an interest in identifying emerging and ongoing issues and challenges that OTE candidates face related to their preparation for transitioning from traditional f2f instructional settings to virtual instruction environments. My layered

interests as a K-12 educator, a graduate student, and an emerging scholar provide the bias that could lead me to incorrect understandings or conclusions about OTE candidate training practices. While my personal belief is that more needs to be done to adequately prepare OTEs for their pending positions in K-12 virtual learning environments, I must remain cognizant of this and not let it frame my findings in ways that align others beliefs and understandings with my own about OTE preparation practices.

Researcher Assumptions vs. Positionality

The primary assumptions of this study were that (a) the OTE training Georgia K-12 educators receive as a part of their post-graduate educator preparation programs may fall short of adequately preparing them to assume virtual classroom responsibilities and roles, and (b) the Georgia K-12 virtual schools who hire them must provide additional post-hire training to ensure a more comprehensive candidate preparation. These assumptions were based on differences in OTE course offerings and programs of study that vary among the different USG institutions who offer OTE and despite the laws and educator standards in Georgia that govern all of them. There also were assumptions that the differences in program offerings at each USG institution may be driven by candidate qualifications, i.e., admissions criteria used by each USG institution in this study may differ in rigor from one institution to the other given that some are Tier 1 or research-oriented institutions and others are classified as Tier 2 or teaching-oriented institutions.

Limitations

As with all case studies, one of the most prominent concerns is the generalizability of findings. Generalizing case study findings focuses on using single or

multiple cases to illustrate, represent, or generalize to a theory (Yin, 2011). This case study was based on and limited to the K-12 OTE preparation practices implemented by USG institutions in the state of Georgia as related to the needs of Georgia K-12 virtual school leaders and the social, cultural, and educational contexts surrounding the virtual educators they seek to hire. The findings of this study were limited to the teacher education program practices in the state of Georgia only; its purposes were not to generalize to all cases given the size, scope, and time requirements that this type of research agenda would require.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE CONTEXTUAL AND EDUCATIONAL

POLICY LITERATURE

Overview

Like public education, teacher preparation procedures across the United States have experienced many changes since the inception of NCLB in the 1990s followed by the addition of Common Core Standards in the 2000s. The advent of online (or virtual) schooling options also has made a strong entrance on the K-12 public education scene, bringing with it instructional and learning opportunities that continue to shift the paradigm for teachers and students alike. An important part of rising to face these new paradigm shifts is the issue of how to best identify and address the different types of instructional preparation that OTE candidates will need to position themselves as viable, if not ideal, candidates for hire in K-12 virtual settings (Afshari, Abu Bakar, Su Luan, Abu Samah, & Say Fooi, 2009; Alonso Díaz & Blázquez Entonado, 2009; Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Compton, 2009; Corry & Stella, 2012; Cyrs, 1997; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; DiPietro, 2010; Dykman & Davis, 2008; Harms, Niederhauser, Davis, Roblyer, & Gilbert, 2006; Kennedy, Cavanaugh, & Dawson, 2013; Schrum, Burbank, & Capps, 2007). The following review will provide an overview of traditional and OTE teacher candidate preparation offered by USG institutions of higher education in the state of Georgia based on state codes, laws, and standards. The review also will examine literature by educational theorists and experts on teacher preparation content with a specific focus on what constitutes the ideal preparation practices and

methods for preparing K-12 OTE virtual educators. The findings from both of these review sections will be compared for common trends, inconsistencies, and implications for further study. These findings will be used to demonstrate the need for establishing ideals in the preparation of postgraduate K-12 OTE candidates based on gaps in the literature coupled with identified recommendations from the experts and theorists.

Context of the Problem

Overview of virtual school programs in the United States.

Several authors have studied, analyzed, and substantiated virtual school growth trends in the United States (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; DiPietro, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2013; Natale & Cook, 2012; Oliver, Osborne, & Brady, 2009; Schrum et al., 2007; Watson & Kalmon, 2005; Watson, Pape, Murin, Gemin, & Vashaw, 2014). In 2005, twenty-one statewide online or virtual school programs existed across the nation and shared many common features ranging from being partially or entirely supplemental and operating almost exclusively on the high school level to relying in whole or in part on local school districts; they also shared the common trait of rapid growth (Watson & Kalmon, 2005). In their 2005 study, Watson and Kalmon identified four common mechanisms in the establishment of statewide programs:

1. Established by the state department of education or other state entity.
2. Established by state legislation.
3. Created by a local education agency (LEA)—a school district or legal agency, or a consortium of LEAs.

4. Evolved out of distance-education programs that originally used channels other than the Internet.

Missing from these common criteria were requirements for teacher licensure related to virtual instruction. Specifically, each state based its licensure standards on its own f2f teaching criteria and charged its online learning lead or supervisor with making determinations for online education quality assurance, which resulted in inconsistencies in virtual teacher roles from program to program within and among different states (Natale & Cook, 2012; Watson & Kalmon, 2005). Barbour and Reeves (2009) noted that by 2006, twenty-four states were operating at least one of the five types of online or virtual programs (statewide supplemental, district-level supplemental, single-district cyber schools, multi-district cyber schools, or cyber charters) as identified by Rice (2006) and Watson, Winograd, and Kalmon (2004), with Florida and Utah boasting the highest figures for student enrollment (Oliver et al., 2009). Natale and Cook (2012) identified five main categories of virtual programs in their study: state virtual schools, multidistrict online schools, single district programs, consortium programs, and post-secondary programs, which suggests that the contextual dynamics for virtual programs likely has changed as the number of states and different virtual programs increased in the time between 2006 and the time of their study. According to DiPietro (2010), the number of states offering courses through online learning programs had increased to forty-two by the year 2007. Regardless of the type of program in use, no single state required certification or training specific to online or virtual instruction, and many of the programs examined had created their own teacher training programs (Watson et al., 2004). The state of Georgia was not a part of either set of schools examined; at the time of both

studies, Georgia lacked in clear presence in state laws and regulations governing online activity and a statewide online education program (Watson et al., 2004; Watson & Kalmon, 2005).

Variety in the virtual school environment also extends to the actual delivery of virtual instruction. Course structure varies greatly, ranging from a correspondence-only setting to one where students interact with their teachers and their classmates via email, discussion or chat rooms, instant messaging, or real-time communication in the form of audio conversations or video conferencing, all of which are deemed valuable skills in preparing students to join the ever-evolving global technological workforce (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). This means that institutions of higher learning increasingly face the issue of how to accommodate these instructional varietals when preparing educators to become K-12 virtual educators, beginning with the basic tenets of teacher candidate preparation. Research has documented widespread agreement among researchers regarding the skills needed to define key competencies for effective virtual instruction. Good communication and good classroom organization skills are essential to instructor success in both f2f and virtual environments (Bawane & Spector, 2009; Compton, 2009; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; DiPietro, 2010; Dykman & Davis, 2008; McIntosh, 2010; Pourreau, 2015; Roblyer & McKenzie, 2000), but there are additional instructional competencies that are key to a successful instructor experience in the virtual environment. Cyrs (1997) identified the following competencies: course planning and organization that capitalize on distance learning strengths and minimize constraints; distance learning-specific verbal and nonverbal presentation skills, collaborative efforts with others to produce effective courses, the ability to use

questioning strategies, and the ability to involve and coordinate student activities among several sites. Ferdig, Cavanaugh, DiPietro, Black, and Dawson (2009) identified no less than eight educator roles found in K-12 online schools: administrator, course facilitator, guidance counselor, instructional designer, local contact, mentor, teacher, and technology coordinator. Additionally, teacher responsibilities vary among virtual schools such that a teacher might also assume one or more additional roles from the list above (Ferdig et al., 2009). As such, virtual educators need training that prepares them for far more than teaching in virtual settings (Ferdig et al., 2009; Shepherd, Bollinger, Dousay, & Persichitte, 2016).

Communication in virtual environments and the unique requirements it places on virtual teachers' instructional needs is another factor that distinguishes virtual learning environments from f2f educational models (Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Harms et al., 2006; McIntosh, 2010). Virtual educators must understand how virtual school environment time and place issues enable and constrain pedagogical practices; they must demonstrate awareness of the opportunities and limitations that virtual school communication tools present for students, and they also must address the unique challenges of managing classroom issues across vast geographical distances (Harms et al., 2006; McIntosh, 2010; Pourreau, 2015). As in traditional f2f educational settings, however, the student-teacher relationship continues to be at the heart of the educational process, and the teacher carries the responsibilities for designing and preparing course content and context, managing the learning environment, initiating activities, establishing and facilitating communication, and assessment (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Harms et al., 2006; Keegan, 2002; Oliver et al., 2009).

Keegan (2002) defined virtual education as "teaching and learning in which learning normally occurs in a different place from teaching" (p. 20), whereby the virtual educators used technical media to unite the teacher, the learner and the content. This quasi-permanent separation between teacher and learner and quasi-absence of a learning group supports arguments that instructor competencies differ significantly between f2f and the virtual learning environment (Aubteen Darabi, Sikorski, & Harvey, 2006; Holmberg, 1995; Keegan, 2002; Perraton, Creed, & Robinson, 2002). Interest in quality online teaching and in preparing virtual educators to manage the pedagogical and logistical elements of the virtual environment has risen, prompting states across the nation to incorporate virtual schooling competencies ranging from select professional development sessions to coursework leading to OTE into their preservice teacher education practices (Aubsteen Darabi et al., 2002; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Davis & Rose, 2007; Harms et al., 2006). According to Ferdig et al. (2009), most educators receive their online instruction training from virtual schools owing to a lack of online pre-service preparation programs.

Public school districts have been using a variety of digital content and instructional software for many years in school districts of all sizes to serve students in all grades K-12. (Watson et al., 2014). K-12 virtual education has expanded at a rapid rate across the nation since the early 2000s and now serves millions of students annually from diverse academic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; González Moncada & Quinchía Ortiz, 2003; Kennedy, 1997; Schrum et al., 2007). The term "digital native" often appears to describe the current generation of learners, but the teachers who serve them are "digital immigrants"; there is a disconnect between the way

they were taught to teach and the expectations awaiting them as virtual educators charged with providing active and engaged online learning roles for diverse populations across a variety of K-12 virtual settings (Archambault, 2011; Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Aubsteen Darabi et al., 2006; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Kennedy et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 2009; Perraton et al., 2002).

K-12 virtual instruction places high demands on its educators. It requires them to incorporate a highly dynamic instructional repertoire grounded in traditional f2f values and foundational practices whose implementation varies by model (i.e., online, blended/hybrid, or web-facilitated) and according to the academic needs and ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of its learners (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Natale & Cook, 2012; Oliver et al., 2009; Schrum et al., 2007). A national survey conducted by Kennedy and Archambault (2012a) found that fewer than 2% of teacher education systems in the nation offer preservice field experience in K-12 virtual settings despite recommendations stressing the need for teachers to be prepared for online teaching (Archambault, 2011; Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Aubsteen Darabi et al., 2006; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Kennedy et al., 2003; Oliver et al., 2009; Perraton et al., 2002). In light of this, virtual educators and the teacher educators who train them need to make great investments in terms of time, effort and commitment when providing teacher training toward ensuring high levels of competence, pedagogical understanding, and overall teaching effectiveness (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Luterbach, 2012).

Overview of virtual school programs in the state of Georgia.

All of the K-12 virtual school types identified by Watson et al. (2004) and Natale and Cook (2012) exist in the state of Georgia: statewide supplemental, district-level supplemental, single-district, multi-district, cyber charters, and consortium programs. One of these, the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS), is an internet-based public school housed in the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). GAVS institutions serve public, private, and home-schooled students throughout the state, and students receive instruction from Georgia certified teachers. Students may take courses as a part of their actual school day or to supplement their course of study (Georgia Department of Education, 2015), which determines whether students take their courses for free or pay tuition. All GAVS institutions are supported financially by state and/or district supplements and serve one or multiple districts within the state of Georgia. Out-of-state students may enroll in GAVS courses for a charge. The state of Georgia maintains a list of elementary and high school virtual schools that allow students to take courses at no-cost for required credits; otherwise, students pay to take courses during the summer or for credit recovery. GAVS is a part of this list, and schools qualify for inclusion on the list based on the following criteria: their classes are available completely online, they offer services to state students, and they are funded by the government (GaDOE, 2015). Georgia also is a state with a course-choice policy (GaDOE, 2015). GAVS is one of the larger virtual schools in the nation and is one of five statewide virtual programs in the nation whose enrollment nearly has doubled in the last few years (Watson et al., 2014). This growth may be attributed in part to the passing of Georgia State Bill 289 (SB289) in 2012 (Georgia General Assembly, 2012), which stated that all students in grades 9-12

may enroll in online GAVS courses without their home school district's approval and regardless of whether the school in which they are enrolled offers the same course (Watson et al., 2014). Although it eliminated a one-GAVS-course-per-semester enrollment requirement for students, it required all districts to provide information to parents on all part- and full-time online learning options for students in grades 3-12 (Watson et al., 2014). This legislation also provides GAVS with $250 per student per course and no requirements for performance or completion (Watson et al., 2014). Since the passing of SB289 (Georgia General Assembly, 2012), the state of Georgia has enacted new legislation requiring the state board of education to establish rules that maximize the number of students who complete one online class prior to graduation, beginning with students who enter the 9th grade during the 2014-2015 school year.

Charter school virtual programs also exist in the state. According to Watson et al. (2014), nine different charter school associations were operating in different parts of the nation during the 2013-2014 school year: Connections Learning (known formerly as Nexus Academy), Georgia Connections Academy, K12 Inc., Edison Learning, Summit Public Schools, Aspire Public Schools, Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Firstline Schools, Alliance College-Ready Public Schools, Rocket Education, and Carpe Diem. Of these, Georgia Connections Academy, Edison Learning, and K12 Inc. have a presence in the state of Georgia. K12 Inc. is an AdvancED-accredited charter corporation. AdvancED is the parent organization for the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) (K12, 2015a; 2015b).

A report by Watson et al. (2014) contains highly detailed information regarding charter school regulations and funding in the state of Georgia. Virtual charter schools in Georgia sprang from a tumultuous beginning seated in low state-imposed funding limits that limited the number of charter school providers willing and able to operate in Georgia. Repeated attempts to redefine funding allocations and virtual charter operational practices failed and were ruled unconstitutional following a series of lawsuits filed by seven different school systems in the state. This outcome resulted in the passing of two other bills in 2012 that significantly impacted virtual learning policies, particularly where charter schools are concerned. Georgia House Bill 797 (HB797) established a State Charter Schools Commission (SCSC) attached administratively to the state board of education. The SCSC has specific duties and powers regarding charter schools, including the development and dissemination of best practices and accountability standards, the presentation of an annual report to the state board of education on academic and financial performance, and provisions for making information about charter schools available to parents. This bill also established a new funding formula allowing virtual charter schools in the state to receive identical per-pupil base funding as received by brick-and-mortar (or traditional f2f) schools under the Quality Basic Education funding formula as well as supplemental funding at two-thirds the level available to brick-and-mortar charter schools. According to Watson et al. (2014), fully online students during the 2014-2015 school year were funded at a rate of $4,779 per pupil.

State mandates for equitable funding, equitable access, and minimum virtual course enrollment requirements for high school graduation coupled with the ability to take virtual courses at little or no cost to families are increasing the need in Georgia for

virtual educators. The next two sections will examine the measures that the state of Georgia and USG institutions are taking to prepare teachers to become virtual educators.

Teacher Candidate Preparation in Georgia

Traditional/f2f K-12 teacher candidate preparation in Georgia.

The literature examined so far attests to large amount of research that has examined best practices for candidates entering traditional or f2f K-12 instructional settings, particularly scholarly, peer-reviewed works that examine pre-service candidates within the contexts of teacher training, teaching techniques, beliefs about teaching, pedagogical strategies, and classroom management. The following subsections present an overview of the laws and standards that govern traditional or f2f teacher candidate preparation in the state of Georgia together.

Georgia codes and laws.

Teacher education providers in the state of Georgia are institutions of higher education, any local education agency with a student enrollment over 30,000, Georgia Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), and other education service organizations including national or Georgia-based non-profit associations that meet eligibility requirements to seek GaPSC approval as an education preparation provider. The GaPSC approval standards for educator providers and their programs are based on the most recent version of CAEP standards. As a GaPSC-approved education provider, an institution or organization must provide program content and curriculum that correspond to the appropriate level of accreditation and in a certification field recognized by the GaPSC and incorporate the latest version of the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards

as developed by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium. The next two sections examine the GaPSC and USG teacher preparation programs in more detail.

Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC).

The GaPSC sets and applies the standards for the preparation, certification, and continued licensing of public educators in the state of Georgia (GeorgiaGov, 2015). Its Educator Preparation Division serves as the binding force among the GaPSC, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the USG, and the many private and public colleges and universities, RESAs, local school systems, and other organizations in the state that prepare educators (GaPSC, 2015a). The GaPSC requires each of these institutions and organizations to base its education preparation programs on the most recent version of the CAEP standards. An educator preparation provider must receive GaPSC approval prior to formally admitting candidates to its education preparation programs. Basic educator provider approval is granted for an initial three years followed by an Initial Performance Review to determine if the provider has evidence of meeting state standards. A successful Initial Performance Review allows continued approval valid for seven years followed a Continuing Review of the educator provider and all of its education preparation programs at seven year intervals. The GaPSC and state and national CAEP examiners conduct the Continuing Review for all institutions of higher learning seeking to maintain CAEP accreditation (GaPSC, 2014a). Additionally, each education preparer must comply with federal and state annual reporting requirements related to its provider performance and its education programs, including submitting data from its Traditional Program Management System and data related to Preparation Program Effectiveness Measures (GaPSC, 2014a; 2014b).

USG traditional teacher candidate preparation programs.

The previous section discussed how accreditation programs in the state of Georgia fall under the auspices of CAEP. It also discussed the requirements that USG institutions must meet for initial and continued approval of their accreditation programs. In addition to these requirements, USG institutions as education preparers must comply with federal and state annual reporting requirements related to their provider performance and their education preparation programs. This includes submitting data from their Traditional Program Management System and their Non-traditional Reporting System as well as data related to Preparation Program Effectiveness Measures (GaPSC, 2014a; 2014b).

Online K-12 teacher candidate preparation in Georgia.

The preparation requirements for virtual educators stipulate that they first complete courses and experiences in an accredited teacher preparation program leading to clear, renewable certification in a content area in the state of Georgia. Once they hold a clear, renewable teaching certificate in the state of Georgia, K-12 educators desiring to become virtual educators may do so by completing a series of courses with any GaPSC-approved K-12 teacher preparation provider leading to online instruction endorsement. The GaPSC defines an endorsement program as a planned sequence of courses and experiences that typically consists of four courses in length and aimed at providing certified educators with additional, specific sets of knowledge and skills (GaPSC, 2014a). In 2012, the state of Georgia began offering Instructional Technology as one of its certification fields, but this program of study is not intended to prepare K-12 teachers to become virtual educators; instead, it allows certificate holders to provide support and service to all levels of a P-12 educational system, either as teachers integrating

technology into their own teaching practice or as educators assisting other teachers with

utilizing technology to improve teaching and learning processes (GaPSC, 2012). The

online teaching endorsement (OTE) offered by the state of Georgia is governed by the

GaPSC OTE Standards (GaPSC, 2015b; Appendix F). A passage in these standards

reads:

> "The program shall insure that the candidate possesses knowledge, skills,
> and understanding of concepts related to technology (as described in the
> ISTE National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers) as well
> as competency in technology specific to an online learning environment."

In other words, the state of Georgia based its standards on the ISTE standards, which are

not a set of online learning standards, as opposed to using an existing set of standards

such as iNACOL, QM or SREB. Ferdig et al. (2009) cited this type of practice as a

concern; the lack of research from which to inform general online pedagogical practices

means that that many standards are based on existing practice that may not be support in

research literature. The USG website provides a list of its academic programs by

institution (University System of Georgia, 2015). As of mid-summer 2016, only a

handful of USG institutions across the state offered a certificate or endorsement in online

teaching (See Appendix A).

USG virtual educator preparation programs.

Each USG institution that offers a certificate or endorsement in online teaching

holds accreditation as a certified educator preparer in accordance with Georgia law and

the GaPSC. These institutions also are bound by the GaPSC to admit only candidates

who hold a clear, renewable teaching certificate in the state of Georgia and to adhere

strictly to the endorsement course and guideline requirements stated earlier. As educator

preparers in the state of Georgia, USG institutions must comply with federal and state

annual reporting requirements related to their provider performance and their education programs, including submitting data from their Traditional Program Management System and their Non-traditional Reporting System as well as data related to Preparation Program Effectiveness Measures (GaPSC, 2014a; 2014b).

Review of the Literature

Research on the ideal teacher candidate: Traditional versus online.

Traditional educator preparation programs have experienced dramatic change over the last 50 years. Twentieth-century models focused almost exclusively on a one-size-fits-all approach to what students needed to know to (Conant, 1963; Koerner, 1963; Taylor, 2014; Wideen, 1995). Current 21st-century post-NCLB models emphasize experience-based educator preparation programs aimed at the ideal of candidates assimilating best practices for effective knowledge transfer via differentiated instruction across diverse student populations and diverse settings (NCATE, 2008; Taylor, 2014; Zimpher & Howey, 2013). According to Kennedy (1997), the problem with attempting to define ideals for a teacher education program stems from many issues, such as standards intended to guarantee minimum safeguards, members of the field disagreeing among themselves about what to employ as essential minimums or ideal maximums, and skepticism from outside the field of education about all aspects of teacher preparation. The overarching consensus is that today's high quality teachers—both traditional and virtual teachers—come from participation in training that requires new approaches, new ways of thinking, and affords them access to experiences, practice, and tools in a variety of contexts (Kereluik, Mishra, Fahnoe, & Terry, 2014; NCATE, 2008; Zimpher & Howey, 2013)

For decades in the United States, teacher educators at accredited institutions of higher education and other accredited local, regional, or state institutions have held the primary responsibility of preparing teacher candidates for the workforce. Cherland (1989) noted that traditional teacher candidates often receive conflicting information as a part of their training, with their university advisors and cooperating teachers rarely seeing eye-to-eye on the correct way to approach instructional planning, implementation, and management. Too often this is the result of the advisors and cooperating teachers advising students based on the type of instruction they received as students, the training they received from others on best teaching practices, and the practices that they have developed over the years that have yielded positive and consistent results (Cherland, 1989). The 2000s marked significant changes to traditional f2f teaching, first with the introduction of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) followed by sweeping changes in educator preparation intended to prepare teachers for a successful entry into all teaching fields. The introduction of technology into traditional K-12 candidate preparation began as a suggested set of supplemental tools for instruction, but the presence of technology tools has increased, bringing with it an increase in technology use in K-12 classrooms. Teacher educators who prepare candidates for successful entry into all teaching fields now have to include instructional technology components in their candidate preparation practices, which is unchartered territory for many of them since their training remains grounded in traditional pedagogical preparation practices. Kereluik et al. (2014) and Larson and Archambault (2015) wrote that education today requires new ways of thinking and learning based on 21st-century knowledge frameworks. Most states continue to deliver instruction using traditional f2f methods (Larson & Archambault,

2015), but today's learners must possess skills that enable them to transcend basic 20th century skills such as repetition, basic applied knowledge, and limited literacy in order to meet the demands of the labor force in an ever-increasingly globalized economy (Gardner, 2008; Kereluik et al., 2014; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007; Pink, 2005). As such, 21st-century K-12 educators need to receive training that helps them learn specific ways of teaching and structuring 21st-century content that is not bound by the use of any one specific technology or tool (Kereluik et al., 2014).

Empirical research on the effectiveness of virtual educator preparation programs.

One area that is rising to the forefront of research deals with the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Archambault, 2011; Archambault, DeBruler, & Freidhoff, 2014; Barbour, 2009; Barbour, 2012a; Barbour 2012b; Frazier & Palmer, 2015). According to Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, and Rapp (2010), online education has experienced growth at such a rapid rate that the educational policies governing it generally are the same rules and regulations used for traditional school settings. Several authors (iNACOL, 2011; Kumi-Yeboah, 2015; Watson et al., 2010; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2012) have noted that despite rapid growth rates in online learning only a small percentage of students actually take an online class during their K-12 academic career, which has left many believing that digital classrooms will not replace traditional brick-and-mortar schools anytime soon (Kumi-Yeboah, 2015).

To date, different empirical studies have attempted to shed light on the conditions surrounding the effectiveness of K-12 virtual learning programs and the training that K-12 educators receive to prepare for teaching in virtual environments. Larson and

Archambault (2015) noted that while many studies have focused on students' experiences

with online coursework or K-12 online program quality, little research exists about the

level of experience held by K-12 online teachers or the preparation they received for

teaching in a virtual domain despite a continued increase in the number of online courses

offered in K-12 virtual environments. Many educators who teach online today have

transitioned from traditional f2f instructional settings to virtual ones (Boboc, 2015;

Cherland, 1989; Frazier & Palmer, 2015; Harms et al., 2006; Linton & Journell, 2015;

Mawn & Davis, 2015; Oliver et al., 2009; Picciano, Seaman & Day, 2015; Waring,

2015), and in most instances of online instruction, they are assigned to teach material that

they did not create themselves (Larson & Archambault, 2015). A 2009 study by

Archambault and Crippen showed that 42% of educators teaching online at that time used

texts and course materials created by content providers. Waring's empirical study (2015)

addressed the notion that today's students are different from past generations such that

current instructional methods must be adapted to provide appropriate and effective

learning experiences for them for traditional curriculum subject areas such as history.

According to Waring, the increase in online learning opportunities means that educators

and learners both need sound technology-mediated strategies and approaches that aid

with transitioning from traditional f2f environments to virtual environments. Both

students and educators must become adept at gathering and evaluating resources from

virtual environments, and educators need to be able to guide students in using these

resources for performing traditional history skill tasks (e.g., developing questions,

planning inquiries, communicating conclusions, and taking informed action) in blended

or fully online learning environments (Waring, 2015). Mawn and Davis (2015) and

Frazier and Palmer (2015) conducted empirical studies on the use of online professional development in virtual educator preparation practices and drew conclusions that were similar to each other. Mawn and Davis (2015) examined an online in-field professional development program for elementary and middle school science teachers, and Frazier and Palmer (2015) analyzed four professional development models for online instruction. Both studies favored the application of online professional development for K-12 educators, with Mawn and Davis (2015) finding that online professional development needs to be used in K-12 school districts so that teachers have the opportunity to participate in online environments similar to those that their students might experience, and Frazier and Palmer (2015) finding that that any model for professional development should include online learning experiences for the teachers as learners. Put simply, educators are better positioned to teach in virtual settings when the environments in which they were trained and prepared mirror those that they will use with their own students.

The concept of training K-12 educators via virtual settings began in the late 1980s, and educator trainers continue to grapple with it. Cherland (1989) noted that many of the educator trainers at that time typically trained K-12 educators for f2f instruction and had spent a large portion of their career developing routines and instructional practices that worked well in f2f environments. They found it difficult to accept suggestions for changing their instructional approaches, which often led to them resist changes related to how they trained and prepared K-12 educators (Cherland, 1989). Harms et al. (2006) reminded us that virtual school students, teachers and facilitators

must be willing to assume new and untraditional roles to make the most of learning opportunities in technology-mediated virtual school environments.

In an effort to shed light on educator preparation practices, Frazier and Palmer (2015) presented four models of professional development for online instruction: Teacher Learner as Student Model, Learning and Co-Teach Model, Collaborative Model, and the Facilitated Leadership Model. Their analysis of all four models showed that any model for professional development should include online learning experiences for the teachers as learners. The authors also found that connections between f2f preparation at K-12 levels and higher education levels that provided initial faculty development sessions and introduction of the expectations of institutions. Effective online learning demands a teaching force prepared to teach using online delivery modes must have appropriate online learning instruction professional development.

Linton and Journell (2015) conducted a similar study aimed at shedding light on virtual educator preparation practices. The authors analyzed an induction program for prospective K-12 virtual teachers to examine how teacher candidates are prepared to become K-12 virtual educators. They found that few teacher education programs include online pedagogy in their training programs, which leaves states to find alternative ways to prepare educators for virtual instruction settings. The authors also found that there is limited understanding of how K-12 teachers are prepared to become virtual educators. According to Linton and Journell (2015) and others (Journell, Beeson, Crave, Gomez, Linton, & Taylor, 2013; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b), most states and school districts in the United States allow licensed K-12 educators to teach online based on the belief that being well-versed in pedagogy and content are sufficient for adaption

classroom instruction techniques to virtual environments. The authors stated that the program evaluated by their study is one whose design structure merits mimicking. They found that this program prioritizes communication, relationships and feedback as foundation and backbone of good virtual teaching practices and supports the development of its candidates through modeling effective teaching practices, permitting and promoting candidate collaboration, providing candidates with opportunities to apply what they have learned, and providing candidates with substantive feedback on their assignments (Linton & Journell, 2015).

Picciano et al. (2015) sought to address an issue mention by Linton and Journell via a study related to the challenges K-12 schools face when they incorporate virtual courses into their curriculum offerings. Their empirical study examined how online learning in K-12 settings serves to address the thoughts, issues, and concerns faced by Illinois high school principals. The authors compared their results with those from a national sample and found that online learning and blended learning are becoming an integral part of high school reform efforts with regards to improving graduate rates, credit recovery, building connections for students to future careers, and differentiating instruction, but that this integration comes with a price: the potential for issues related to quality of instruction. According to Picciano et al. (2015), the administrators in their study expressed concerns about the quality of online instruction when it came to virtual educators' abilities to differentiate instruction. One administrator in the study stated that all research to date indicated that the teacher is the greatest factor in determining a child's educational success, and another administrator stated that they had concerns about the rigor of online and hybrid courses (Picciano et al., 2015).

The research presented thus far in this section of the literature review has raised questions as to what constitutes effective K-12 virtual educator preparation, but it must be noted that virtual instruction, like traditional or f2f instruction, is not a one-size-fits all (Bullock, 2015; Harms et al., 2006; Nash, 2015; Oliver et al., 2009). We have seen from the literature presented thus far that effective communication in the virtual environment is crucial, yet many educators who work in virtual environments receive little or no foundation for effectively communicating with students at a distance despite the rapid expansion of K-12 virtual school environments in the United States (Harms et al., 2006). Just as in traditional or f2f environments, communication and instructional efforts in virtual environments also must take into account the diversity of their student populations. Nash (2015) noted that with increasing diversity in learner populations, teachers need to reflect on their practices as well as the intentionality behind those practices. According to Nash, teachers need to create opportunities for students to apply life experiences to the content they are learning. Additionally, teachers who build on student diversity help students feel empowered and more confident in their work, which in turn makes teachers more likely to take risks necessary for appreciating and understanding differences among their learners (Nash, 2015). This opens the door for what Bullock (2015) called authentic instruction, which incorporates facets of culture, constructivism, and inquiry is critical to the diversification of social studies content and instructional models, which allowed students in his study who were from urban or low SES backgrounds to demonstrate significant academic gains as a result of participating in project-based learning that was both culturally relevant and engaging.

The discussion of learners' needs within virtual contexts also gives reason to include a brief discussion of learners' expectations for their virtual education experiences. The empirical study conducted by Oliver et al. (2009) within the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) shed light on students' expectation for their virtual teachers. The study showed that NCVPS students expect teachers to teach instead of facilitate course content, to supplement course content as necessary, to incorporate content that promotes relevance, to incorporate content discussions, to incorporate content interaction, to assign work that is relevant, to quickly respond to question, to quickly grade assignments, and to provide individualized attention for students regarding course progress. The study also showed that the degree to which virtual teachers perform any or all of these tasks often relies on the instructional guidelines that they are required to follow. Oliver et al. (2009) recommended future studies that investigate the value students and teachers place on different teaching strategies. The authors also noted that determining how preferences align and the potential implications of any misalignments could be used to drive virtual teacher training and how training programs are designed (Oliver et al., 2009). Bolbec (2015) also conducted a study concerned with K-12 students' learning opportunities in virtual environments. The author found that virtual learning promotes greater access to equitable, high-quality, cost-efficient learning opportunities for students that otherwise may not benefit from a wider range of formal education options. He also found that there was no theoretical framework for evaluating virtual learning opportunities and used his findings to create such a framework. This resulted in the creation of a theoretical framework specifically aimed at identifying and addressing different K-12 online learning dimensions with the aim of promoting more accessible and effective virtual

learning opportunities for all students. Bolbec's findings and resulting theoretical framework proved to align with iNACOL's standards for quality online teaching (iNACOL, 2011) and reinforced a call for research aimed at examining the needs of virtual educators as they train for transitioning from traditional or f2f instructional environments to virtual ones that require knowledge and experiences unique to virtual settings (Bolbec, 2015).

Research on the effectiveness of virtual teacher education programs.

Educator preparation programs must offer a program of study and courses that teach candidates how to apply pedagogical principles unique to virtual instruction so that candidates perform effectively the moment they enter the K-12 virtual environment. The problem appears to have its origins in a trickle-down effect. Research conducted in the mid-2000s showed that neither states nor institutions of higher learning had definitive policies in place that addressed pedagogical approaches to virtual instruction. Rice (2006) and Watson et al. (2004) noted that few states had policies in place attuning to the development of K-12 virtual learning programs because policymakers lacked a clear understanding of virtual learning parameters and needs. Watson et al. (2004) called for states to "develop appropriate mechanisms" that would provide a valuable and sustainable framework that will allow online education to flourish and meet students' diverse needs (p. 7), yet even states with mature K-12 virtual programs at that time such as Florida failed to provide guidance in terms of standardized policy development (Rice, 2006). Rice's study (2006), which was a meta-analysis of the literature on K-12 distance education, highlighted significant shortcomings in the approach to designing virtual education programs and called for the creation of a central body to facilitate the

standardization of online education through the sharing of information related to virtual education policies and practices. Vrasidas (2004) made similar observations about virtual instruction practices in higher education. Faculty learned how to use learning management systems and put content online but did not receive training for applying pedagogical principles in virtual learning environments. Faculty therefore approached virtual instruction using models that were consistent with traditional f2f teaching. These findings from Rice (2006), Vrasidas (2004), and Watson et al. (2004) show that no effort was being made to revolutionize pedagogical design geared specifically for instruction in virtual environments.

Most of the research that has examined K-12 online teacher preparation practices as a field began emerging in 2009 with researchers such as Archambault, Barbour, Kennedy, and Watson leading the field as sole or first authors. Works sponsored, associated, or led by iNACOL also have left their mark on the field, and works from other researchers have begun to emerge. Much of the research in the field has examined the differences in instructional dynamics between f2f and hybrid or online delivery (Archambault 2010; Barbour & Unger, 2009), the challenges of teaching in a K-12 online environment (Archambault, 2010, 2011), K-12 online teaching preparation practices and licensure (Archambault, 2011; Archambault et al., 2014; Barbour, 2012a, 2012b; Barbour, 2013), pre-service teachers' perceptions of their own online instruction field experiences (Kennedy, 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b; Kennedy et al., 2013), teacher and preservice candidate perceptions and concerns about virtual instruction (Barbour & Unger, 2009; Compton, Davis, & Correia, 2010), online teacher preparation models (Barbour, 2012a; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012a; 2012b; 2013), and online

learning policy and practice (iNACOL, 2011; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2012). These works have helped to lay a foundation for preparing K-12 OTE candidates, but a gap in the literature still remains regarding exactly how candidates are prepared and research leading to recommendations for the best way to prepare them for careers as virtual educators. Barbour, Siko, Gross, & Waddell (2012) mentioned this gap, noting that less than 40% of all online K-12 teachers in the United States had received any kind of professional development prior to beginning their online teaching experiences; the authors also noted that few examples of the teacher education preparation for online environments exist. Barbour and Harrison (2016) noted in a more recent and similar study that teacher education programs still lack the ability to sufficiently prepare teachers for instructional design, instructional delivery, and student support endeavors in virtual settings. Barbour and Harrison also noted that teachers frequently have misconceptions about K-12 online learning. Recent research conducted by Shepherd et al. (2016) on preservice K-12 virtual teachers in the state of Wyoming identified weaknesses in courses related to K-12 virtual instruction preparation practices at one of the state's institutions of higher education. Shepherd's team discovered a need for additional courses in the state's current teacher preparation practices that help K-12 virtual teacher candidates learn more about underlying foundations, theories, and principles of online learning that would better guide their instructional decision-making in virtual environments and assist them in applying their instruction skills more meaningfully in online settings. Shepherd et al. (2016) conducted this research based on in-state needs and anticipated growth in K-12 distance learning in the state of Wyoming. While this study could carry with it implications for the state of

Georgia and other states across the nation, it still is but one study and appears to be the only one to date that has made any progress towards examining K-12 OTE preparation practices.

This gap in the literature together with research discussed previously in this literature review reiterates the calls for change in online teacher preparation practices made a decade ago by Rice (2006), Vrasidas (2004), and Watson et al. (2004). This gap also opens the door for considering many scenarios within the context of this study: Is Georgia a state where the policies and procedures governing K-12 virtual educator training simply cannot keep pace with the changing pedagogical needs? Are the policies and procedures governing K-12 virtual educator training programs at USG institutions ineffective? Are K-12 virtual educator training programs at USG institutions failing to produce quality candidates? Does the ineffectiveness lie in the institutional interpretation of otherwise effective policies and procedures governing K-12 virtual educator training programs? How do we know if the K-12 OTE preparation programs offered by USG institutions truly are effective in their training endeavors? Are K-12 OTE candidates in USG institutions truly meeting program requirements and can demonstrate the skills needed to perform well as K-12 educators in a virtual environment, or is it a smokescreen effect seated in the institutions' desires to graduate "successful" or "well-trained" candidates in the interest of cementing and maintaining their reputations as preparers of K-12 virtual educators? Is it that USG faculty themselves lack training in and an understanding of virtual pedagogy, such that they are unable to accurately assess K-12 OTE candidate preparation and performance? Or is it a question of the quality or caliber of K-12 OTE candidates admitted to USG teacher preparation programs and, within that,

an inconsistency in the quality or caliber of candidate from institution to institution across the state within the USG system? Or does virtual education simply have the wrong horse pulling the wagon? K-12 OTE trains adults to demonstrate technology mastery and to implement technology in K-12 settings, but it does so using instructional design methods to teach its target audience: OTE candidates, who are adult learners. Is it that the system unintentionally fails to show its OTE candidates how to transform what they have learned into terms better suited for pedagogical practices in K-12 virtual learning environments? These questions are sure to foster others as this study unfolds.

Summary

This literature review has shown that the effectiveness of K-12 teacher candidate preparation for both traditional and virtual instruction depends on the quality of the training experiences provided by teacher educators. Numerous authors have conducted research on the strengths and weaknesses of professional development opportunities aimed at preparing college and university faculty to teach online (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012; Gregory & Salmon, 2013; LaPrade, Gilpatrick, & Perkins, 2014; Nerlich, Solder, & Millington, 2012; Schmidt, Hodge, & Tschida, 2013; Travis & Rutherford, 2012-2013), but there is a lack of research that correlates directly to these same practices involved in preparing educators to teach online in K-12 settings (Corry & Stella, 2012; DiPietro, 2010; Rice, 2006). Virtual educators need training that assists with the transfer of pedagogical principles and practices to the K-12 online environment (Barbour et al., 2012; Hewett & Powers, 2007; Kereluik et al., 2014; Larson & Archambault, 2015; NCATE, 2008; Zimpher & Howey, 2013). Research conducted to date in the field of K-12 online learning has emphasized the importance of considering standards, teacher and

pre-service candidate online teaching experiences, research-driven online teacher preparation models, and the differences that exist among f2f, hybrid and virtual pedagogical approaches and using them concomitantly to create teacher education programs that prepare candidates to teach online. The conclusion is that leaving out any one of these aspects of K-12 OTE candidate preparation will hamper the efforts of any program to prepare its candidates fully and well for a career in K-12 online teaching.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Background

The literature review chapter revealed that most research endeavors concerned with examining K-12 online instruction as a field began in earnest within the last five to ten years (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; DiPietro, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2013; Natale & Cook, 2012; Oliver et al., 2009; Schrum et al., 2007; Watson & Kalmon, 2005; Watson et al., 2014). Many of them have shown that more research is needed in the field, particularly with respect to how K-12 OTE candidates are trained and prepared in the interest of having them fully prepared to embark on careers as online instructors (Corry & Stella, 2012; DiPietro, 2010; Rice, 2006). Within this context, several authors (Barbour et al., 2012; Hewett & Powers, 2007; Kereluik et al., 2014; Larson & Archambault, 2015; NCATE, 2008; Zimpher & Howey, 2013) have noted that online educators need training that assists them with transferring pedagogical principles and practices to their instructional repertoires in the K-12 virtual environment. This training needs to be specific to teaching in virtual environments, which research has shown differs greatly from the pedagogical principles and practices required for traditional or f2f instruction (Kereluik et al., 2014; Rice, 2006; Vrasidas, 2004; Watson et al., 2004). The challenge in providing this type of training stems from the fact that K-12 OTE program practices and requirements differ from one institution of higher education to another within the same state as well as from state to state across the United States (Natale & Cook, 2012;

Watson, 2004; Watson & Kalmon, 2005). The lack of a singular, cohesive, well-defined set of parameters and requirements leading to a K-12 online endorsement or certificate presumably poses a problem for teaching candidates who seek K-12 OTE and expect to be fully prepared to teach in any virtual environment for any virtual institution. Colleges of education housed within institutions of higher education offer programs of study designed in accordance with state law and/or department of education standards for institutional accreditation and teaching candidate licensure, but is that enough to ensure that K-12 OTE candidates are truly ready for their jobs?

Rationale and Design

An essential component in understanding the rationale behind any qualitative study is to know the more about the researcher's worldview or paradigm, which is their particular way of understanding how things work in the world. Guba (1990) described a worldview as actions guided by a basic set of beliefs. A qualitative researcher bases their beliefs on their ontological (What is the nature of reality?) and epistemological assumptions (What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and what needs to be known?). An individual's view of the constructs of social reality and knowledge affects how they will approach uncovering knowledge of relationships among phenomena and social behavior(s). In qualitative studies, the researcher's worldview has a deep impact on the decisions and inquiry procedures put into practice as a part of the study. As an emerging qualitative educational researcher, I position myself epistemologically within the constructivist paradigm, which conceives of knowledge as a social construct that emerges from peoples' social practices, which they perceive as realities (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015).

My constructivist position also holds with Stake's (1995) assertion that most qualitative researchers view knowledge as constructed rather than discovered. As this study set out to examine beliefs and perceptions about current Georgia OTE training practices as framed by the professional perspectives of specific populations, its design carried with it the following implications:

- I acknowledge that the teacher educators, the K-12 virtual administrator, and the K-12 virtual educators that I interviewed possess certain knowledge about K-12 online learning that I did not;

- I lack certain knowledge and experiences with K-12 online learning;

- I am using the interviewees' beliefs and perceptions to construct knowledge about K-12 online learning

- I understand that the interviewees' beliefs and perceptions are constructs of what they perceive to be the realities of K-12 online learning based on their lived experiences.

Triangulating the data for analysis under these conditions means being open to seeing interviewee responses from different perspectives and exploring these perspectives to determine how they do or do not intersect in a particular context (Simons, 2009). For this study, that meant examining the different perspectives to see which ones were unique to certain types of educators and which ones emerged as common to two types of educators or common among three or more types given that I represent the fourth group or type of educator in the study.

I chose to take a qualitative approach to this case study for several reasons. Qualitative research is best suited to research that focuses on the meaning of real-life

events for participants in the study, and the search for meaning is itself a search for concepts that are then assembled into a collection in a logical fashion that might present a theory about the events being studied (Yin, 2011). Qualitative research often is empirical in nature in that the researcher gains knowledge via means of direct or indirect observation or experience (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2011). Case study generally is the ideal qualitative design for studies seeking to explore actions taking place in bounded systems (Stake, 1995; 2005) as in the instance of this body of research, and particularly when cases are bounded by time or activity (Creswell, 2014) or by singularity (Simons, 2009).

Yazan (2015) noted that there are three primary approaches to conducting case studies: Robert K. Yin's *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2002), Sharan B. Merriam's, *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (1998), and Robert E. Stake's *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995). Yin's (2002) method approaches case study design from the perspective of how researchers deal with design quality in terms of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Merriam's (1998) text focuses on what constitutes a case study, what distinguishes it from other qualitative methods, and the most appropriate conditions for its use. Stake's book is more of a how-to guide for students and researchers alike who have chosen to use case study to conduct their research. After reviewing all three texts, I selected Stake's approach for my case study given the strong alignment with my constructivist worldview and the implications it has for opportunity to holistically treat this body of research as phenomena (Stake, 1995).

I need to clarify that the term "phenomena" in this context does not refer exclusively to phenomenology as most commonly associated with van Manen (1990) or

Moran (2000). My use of this term aligns with Stake's (1995) in that this study contains intricately related phenomena in the form of common and intersecting themes that, when supported by narratives and vignettes as evidence, constitute a critical uniqueness via a collection of features or a sequence of happenings that stand out as different and therefore important. The uniqueness in this study is the body of participants' perceptions and beliefs about K-12 OTE training practices in the state of Georgia and the way that the interviews captured knowledge and events that emerged from the participants' lived experiences within a specific context.

Case study design by nature can be very complex. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are the most commonly used methods for case study (Simons, 2009), and researchers may use one of the methods alone, two methods, or all three depending on the scope and depth of their study. I opted to use individual interviews and document analysis for this particular case study for several reasons. I knew from my past interview experiences that this method allows me to probe issues more quickly and in-depth with the added benefit of asking follow-up questions to facilitate deeper responses on the part of my participants. I also know that interview transcripts allow me a visual (a document) of the interview for analysis while also sparking further and deeper reflection on the interview content while transcribing and rereading. I used document analysis on my personal narrative from May 16, 2016, and the GaPSC OTE standards as a means of searching for clues that would better help me understand the thoughts behind my narrative and the standards (Simons, 2009).

To better understand this case study in terms of design and its unique features, a case study design model in Figure 3.1 adapted from Stake (2005) provides a

comprehensive representation of the different components studied for comparison and

subsequent analysis.

Case Study: Perceptions OF USG K-12 Educator OTE Preparation Practices

Functions

Identify Perceptions about OTE Preparation Practices
Examine Alignment between Perceptions and OTE Standards

Context:
USG Teacher Educator Beliefs and Perceptions about K-12 OTE Preparation Practices

Context:
K-12 Virtual School Administrator Beliefs and Perceptions about K-12 OTE Preparation Practices

Particular Activities

--K-12 virtual educator preparation practices

--K-12 virtual educator on-the-job performance

Sites of Activity:

--USG Colleges of Education

--Georgia K-12 Virtual Schools

Context:
K-12 Virtual School Educator Beliefs and Perceptions about K-12 OTE Preparation Practices

Data Collection:
Documents

USG Teacher Educators
K-12 Virtual Admin
K-12 Virtual Educators
Personal Narrative
Ga PSC Standards

Mini-case:
Personal Narrative

Context:
Georgia Codes, GaPSC Standards

Conceptual Structure

ISSUES:

1-Do the participants believe that the current OTE standards-based preparation programs effectively prepare teacher candidates?

2-Do the participants believe that the current OTE standards driving teacher candidate preparation need to be amended or rewritten?

TOPICS:

1-Beliefs and perceptions of teacher educators
2-Beliefs and perceptions of K-12 virtual school administrators
3-Beliefs and perceptions of K-12 virtual school educators
4-Current OTE standards
5-Current OTE program design based on the standards
6-Desired OTE preparation outcomes for candidates
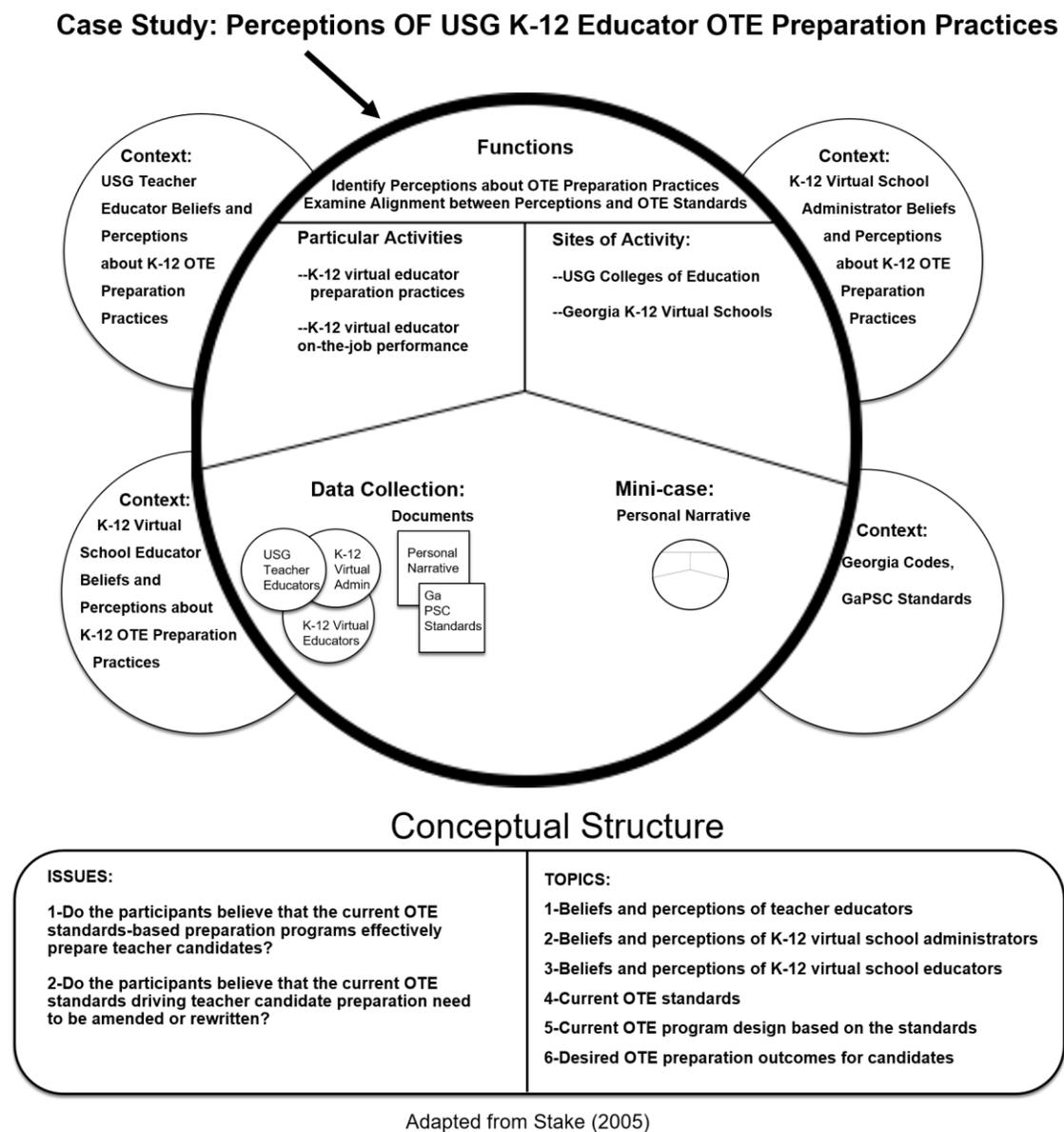
Adapted from Stake (2005)

Figure 3.1 Case Study Design for Examining K-12 OTE Preparation Beliefs and Perceptions

This model provides information about the study in three zones: the large central circle

which represents the boundaries of the case; the semicircles which contain information

about the context of the study; and the lower rounded rectangles with the issues and

topics essential to the study's conceptual structure. These three zones are further

explained below.

The study's main topics housed inside the large circle denote the *functions* of the

study, the *sites* in which the study took place, and the *activities* analyzed, which are the

focus of the study. Data collected for the study took place in different *sites*, such as over

the phone, which is where and how I conducted the interviews, and in my home office

setting, where I wrote my personal narrative. The *Data Collection* area in the lower left

portion of the main circle accounts for the data sources used in this case study; an

explanation of the data-gathering instruments and processes used to collect data will be

discussed later in this chapter. The lower right portion of the main circle shows the three

mini-cases couched within the larger case study. Each min-case represents an additional

area of complexity in the case that is defined by its own richness and uniqueness, such

that each could stand alone as a single case study. I did not focus on developing these

mini-cases as this study's design does not include a case-within-a-case component.

Two conjoined rectangles make up the lower portion of the diagram and issues

and information questions relevant to the study's *conceptual structure*. The *issues* are

matters of special concern or importance in the study that have to do with the overall

functioning of the case. They also reflect the purposes driving the study. This study has

two issues:

- Do the participants believe that the current OTE standards-based preparation

  programs in Georgia meet the needs of teacher candidates?

- Do the participants believe that the current OTE standards driving teacher

  candidate preparation in Georgia need to be amended or rewritten?

The *topics* (beliefs and perceptions of teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual school educators; current OTE standards; current OTE program design based on the standards; and desired OTE preparation outcomes for candidates) are the different dimensions of the issues that I need take to attune to when examining and analyzing my data when seeking answers to my issue questions and the study's research questions.

The semicircles connected to the perimeter of the large circle house the contexts within which the study is situated. The contexts work together like the roots of a tree to anchor the study firmly in place in preparation for the findings that, with all of their nuances and complexities, will arise and develop from this unique setting in accordance with the constructivist paradigm that permeates this study.

Research Setting and Context

As previously mentioned, K-12 virtual education in the United States continues to experience significant growth, such that the need for well-trained K-12 virtual educators also continues to increase. The literature review in the previous chapter noted that there are many different programs and institutions across the state of Georgia alone that train K-12 educators to become virtual educators. Initial examination of the codes and standards governing OTE in the state of Georgia has shown that the GaPSC allows Georgia certified K-12 teachers who successfully complete the course requirements for any one of these five K-12 OTE programs to earn this endorsement. As such, the GaPSC also deems them effectively prepared and ready to teach online in any K-12 virtual setting in the state of Georgia (GaPSC, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2015b). Initial examination of the OTE course requirements at five different USG institutions of higher

learning showed that curricular differences exist, with some institutions requiring more or fewer courses than others in the state and slight to significant differences in the courses required and how these courses were designed (GaDOE, 2015; GaPSC, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2015b; Georgia General Assembly, 2012; GeorgiaGov, 2015). The program requirements in general across the state were nearly identical or were highly similar from program to program in terms of the key concepts and the practical applications they required students to master as per state codes and professional teaching standards that stipulated how these programs build candidates' core knowledge. The differences among programs occurred in the course names, the course descriptions, the course assignments and assessments, and, at times, in the number of courses required toward earning OTE. The faculty responsible for OTE candidate training at each USG institution developed the courses offered in their institutions' programs. The OTE programs at each institution consisted of a combination of state-mandated and faculty-developed courses in accordance with Georgia codes and GaPSC mandates. This study assumed that the potential for differences in OTE training practices lies in the fact that each USG institution of higher learning is a unique setting with its own unique COE and, to a degree, unique course offerings given that the faculty who coordinate, design, and teach OTE courses all differ in how they were trained and how they perceive and interpret the different Georgia codes and GaPSC guidelines and standards (GaPSC 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2015b) when designing courses for OTE candidates. Anticipating that no two individuals necessarily think alike in their course design approaches and delivery precluded the need for this study and its intent to show that there

are different OTE preparation practices at work across the state that do make a difference in how K-12 OTE candidates are prepared to become virtual educators.

Participants

This study employed criterion sampling (Palys, 2008) by including only participants who met the professional criteria of teacher educator, K-12 virtual school administrator or K-12 virtual school educator in the state of Georgia in order to maintain participant congruency and the consistency of the study proposal. Purposive sampling aided with preserving the focus of the study and facilitating a more in-depth examination of the participants' positionalities (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2002). I limited the selection of informants to Georgia because of the common K-12 OTE program standards, and I limited participation of USG institutions to those that offered K-12 OTE training. I limited the participation of K-12 administrators and educators to those employed only by virtual schools because I wanted to focus on perceptions and beliefs coming from educators who work in K-12 online-only environments.

I determined participant eligibility by using online searches to identifying the USG institutions who offer K-12 OTE through their respective COE and actively operating K-12 virtual schools in the state of Georgia. I then conducted an extensive search of USG COE websites and K-12 virtual school websites to identify all faculty who fit the criteria for this study. I then contacted potential participants via email to invite them to participate in the study. USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators that fit the aforementioned criteria receive invitational emails from me that contained an overview and explanation of the study, a request to send a response email to me confirming their interest in participating in the

study, and an attached Word document that contained the interview questions (See

Appendices C, D, & E). Invitation respondents then received a second email containing

the study cover letter, the study consent form, and an additional copy of the attachment

containing the interview questions for clarity.

Three USG teacher educators, one K-12 virtual school administrator, and two K-

12 virtual educators self-selected by responding to my invitation and agreeing to

participate in the interview process. All three USG teacher educators and the K-12 virtual

administrator hold terminal degrees from major research institutions in the United States

but in different fields. One USG teacher educator holds a Ph.D. in Instructional

Technology, another holds a Ph.D. in Instructional Design and Technology, and the other

holds an Ed.D. in School Improvement. Both of the teacher educators with terminal

degrees in instructional technology fields direct the K-12 OTE program in their

respective colleges of education and are therefore considered to be the most

knowledgeable about their institution's K-12 OTE program preparation practices and

purposes. Both have at least two years of prior experience as K-12 teachers, and both

have trained Georgia K-12 educators in virtual and f2f settings. The K-12 OTE programs

at both of their institutions are fully online. One has been training K-12 OTE candidates

via online means only for three years; the other, for five years. The other USG teacher

educator also instructs Georgia K-12 teachers, but mostly in f2f settings. While this

teacher educators' USG institution offers online courses, it currently does not offer the K-

12 OTE endorsement.

The K-12 virtual school administrator in this study holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum

and Instruction and directly supervises K-12 virtual educators. One K-12 virtual educator

holds both a Bachelor's of Science degree and a Master's of Science degree in English

Education from major research institutions in the United States and recently moved from

a position as a K-12 virtual instructor to one as a Coordinator of Course Development at a

K-12 virtual school. The other virtual educator, also a graduate of major research

institutions in the United States, holds a Bachelor's of Science degree in Math Education

and a Master's of Science degree in Educational Leadership and recent moved from a

position as a K-12 virtual instructor to one as a Testing Coordinator. Both of the virtual

educators taught for an average of five years in a traditional K-12 f2f environment in a

Georgia public school system before becoming virtual educators, and each of them spent

four years working as full-time faculty in a K-12 virtual school prior to changing

positions. All interviews were conducted one-on-one and were held at the convenience of

the participant. All of the participants were asked about their perceptions and beliefs

about K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia as related to the knowledge, skills, and

dispositions (i.e., attitudes or beliefs) that a K-12 OTE candidate needs to possess to work

in a K-12 online classroom in the state of Georgia. Purposive sampling ensured that my

study included participants with the potential to yield the information that is most

relevant to my study, and the open-ended questions enabled me to inquire about issues in

greater depth and afforded me the flexibility of using probing or follow-up questions to

facilitate more meaningful or reflective answers from participants (Simons, 2009; Yin,

2011).

Mini-Case: The Personal Narrative

In choosing to conduct this study, I quickly realized that I, too, was a necessary

and willing participant. I have over twenty years of experience as a f2f K-12 educator, I

am completing a doctoral degree that has a strong instructional technology focus, and I have taught Masters-level K-12 OTE courses online for my department of study while working on my degree. While I readily acknowledged that I had my own pre-study beliefs and perceptions about K-12 OTE preparation practices based on what I had studied, learned, and experienced, I initially believed that I needed to conduct this study from a detached and objective vantage point. Moustakas (1990), Stake (1995, 2005), Simons (2009), and the members of my dissertation committee helped me realize that I needed to write a personal narrative for inclusion and analysis it as a mini-case. A mini-case is any particular aspect of special importance within the case that contributes to the understanding of the complexity of the case study (a particular teacher, a special activity, etc.) such that the mini-case could be a case unto itself if I were to focus attention on it (Stake, 1995, 2005). In the instance of this case study, the mini-case consisted of my particular lived experiences as a traditional K-12 teacher and an online university instructor. Including these experiences as a mini-case provided additional perspective on and understanding of my topic given that my lived experiences have mirrored closely those experienced by most present-day K-12 OTE candidates as a part of their virtual educator preparation. Including personal experience in case studies has long been the stance of Stake (1995) and, more recently, Simons (2009). According to Stake (1995), experience is one of the capital qualifications of qualitative researchers. Stake (1995) also wrote much of the qualitative researcher's methodological knowledge and personality stem from engaging in hard work under critical examination of colleagues and mentors (i.e., faculty instructors and my committee members!), and that one's expertise tends to come largely through reflective practice. Moustakas (1990), Simons (2009), and Yin

(2011) concur. Gemignani (2011) stated it equally well but differently: he reminded me that distancing myself from the issues and experiences I seek to study puts me as the researcher in a position of objective distancing, which can prove problematic for qualitative methodologies. I instead need to embrace the opportunity to personally engage with my research participants in the interest of promoting sensitivity, complexity, awareness, creativity, and commitment to my work (Gemignani, 2011).

This body of rationale began to sink in, and it took me back to the December 2012 commencement ceremony I attended to receive my Specialist in Education degree. The commencement speaker, Dr. Mark Anderson, Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics and Professor of Chemistry, spoke to attendees and graduates about the dissertation process (Anderson, 2012). He said that when asked about the content of his dissertation, he used to launch into the research he had conducted on the water molecule. He said that over time, he changed his response and simply responded, "It's about me." His words reminded me that our research and our research endeavors exist because of who we are and what drives our interests. It made sense to me then, and it still makes sense to me now. I have a role to play in this study because it is as much about what interests me as it is about me. To that end, this study includes an examination of my own professional beliefs and perceptions about virtual instruction preparation practices alongside those of the study participants and based on my own positionality and experiences as a K-12 educator and an online instructor in a higher education setting. Based upon the advice of my committee and the beliefs and perceptions I bring to this study as a K-12 instructor, I also decided to expand the scope of my study to include the voices of Georgia K-12 virtual instructors and their lived experiences as K-12 OTE

candidate both pre- and post-hire to further enhance my understanding of the beliefs and perceptions that shape K-12 OTE preparation practices. Conducting a qualitative case study afforded a methodological approach that would allow me to give a voice to as many perspectives as possible while also taking care to address my own positionality when it comes to my dual role as a participant with a voice and as a researcher seeking to know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of my participants' lived experiences based on my own internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). My implicit and direct presence in this study combined with a desire to deepen my understanding of my own beliefs and perceptions as well as those of others that drive and criticize K-12 OTE preparation practices drove me is well-suited to the six phases of heuristic inquiry as outlined by Moustakas (1990): the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and the question, the incubation period, illumination, then explication followed by a creative synthesis to provide culmination for the entire study.

When I wrote the personal narrative (see Appendix H), I began simply by writing to connect with more recent and past lived experiences that related to my professional positions as a K-12 public educator and a recently-trained online university instructor combined with my academic positionality as a budding qualitative researcher. At first, I simply wrote. I wrote to identify my interests and my specific dissertation topic. I wrote to connect with my own beliefs and perceptions about K-12 education and online instruction as well as my beliefs and perceptions about my own experiences as a virtual instruction trainee. I wrote openly, freely, and at great length across several weeks. These initial writing experiences marked what Moustakas (1990) referred to as the initial engagement as an inner quest to discover a topic. As a I wrote, everything that I had done

and continued to do professionally began to take shape, to crystallize around my interests

in what I was perceiving as the multiple facets and numerous dichotomies of online

instruction and virtual instructor preparation practices. This immersion period was

followed by what Moustakas (1990) identified as an incubation period. During this time,

I pulled back from my inner exploration and from my writing for several days. I let go

and turned my focus and energies elsewhere to allow a period of rest for the growth of

my ideas. When I did return, I read and re-read the narrative to regain perspective. Doing

so brought about changes in the narrative and necessitated a second draft. It was during

the writing of this second draft that I literally experienced the "Eureka!" moment of

illumination (Moustakas, 1990) that I needed to move forward and begin conducting

interviews for my study in order to enter Moustakas' (1990) final phases of explication

and synthesis. For me, these final stages consisted of transcribing the interviews and then

coding them and the personal narrative for comparison with the Georgia K-12 OTE

standards to draw conclusions about the needs of K-12 virtual educators-in-training in the

results chapter of this dissertation.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Kennesaw State

University before I collected any data (See Appendix B). All data for this study stemmed

from three different sources: publicly available online documents, individual interviews,

and my personal narrative. All data in this study related to the GaPSC guidelines and

standards that frame curricula and course design came from publicly available online

documents found on the GaPSC website (See Appendices E and F). All data related to

educator perceptions and beliefs came from interviews with participants and from my personal narrative.

For this study, I protected participants' identities and any information that could connect them to their respective USG institution of higher learning or Georgia K-12 virtual school by assigning alpha-numeric identifiers to all participants and to their institutions and schools. Neither parental consent forms nor assent forms for minors were necessary for this study. All participants in this study were actively employed as university faculty or as administrators or faculty in a K-12 virtual setting, which meant that all have graduated from high school and that most have completed their education on at least the Master's degree level, which automatically placed them well above the legal age of eighteen. I did not treat age, gender, race, or ethnicity as factors in this study, but the pool of educators invited to participate in this study represented both genders as well as a range of ages and multiple races and ethnicities in the interest of providing interview results that are as comprehensive in origin as possible.

I identified participants as belonging one of three types of educators: USG faculty serving as K-12 teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, or K-12 virtual educators. I used the interview guide approach (McNamara, 2009; Turner, 2010) to design my open-ended interview questions (See interview protocols in Appendices C, D, & E). I provided all participants with a copy of the questions ahead of time to demonstrate transparency in my study and also to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on their answers ahead of time in the interest of receiving responses that might be richer in meaning or contain more detail than those I would receive if participants had to try to think of everything in an impromptu interview. I conducted all interviews in a one-

on-one setting over the phone, and I conducted each interview in private and alone in a

room with the door closed and locked. For data collection purposes, I recorded all

interviews with the permission of the participants and in a digital audio-only format using

the Recorder app for iPad. I did not take notes during the interview to minimize

distractions on my end and to allow me to focus on the interview topic and other

dynamics such as response time, tone of voice, or other aural cues that might indicate that

further prompting or responses were required from me to keep the interview going. The

interviews were held only once, and I attempted to avoid leading questions as well as

closed questions that promoted simple "yes" and "no" responses in favor of ones that

encouraged discourse and prompted interviewees to reflect and consider extending their

responses.

I then prepared the recorded interviews for coding and analysis. I transcribed

each verbatim to facilitate ease of use and regular and repeated consultation during the

course of the study. I then encrypted all original recording and transcript files and stored

them electronically on a password-protected portable jump drive that I stored in a locking

file cabinet in the dissertation chair's office. Only the dissertation chair and I had access

to the file cabinet, and only I had access to the original recordings and transcripts owing

to file encryption. I then created a second set of interview transcripts consisting of

information provided by participants but with all identifying markers removed so that

interview content remained accessible to my dissertation chair and my methodologist

without the risk of exposing the identity and/or institutional affiliation of the participants.

Any and all data in the form of recordings and transcripts will be destroyed by erasing all

electronic files from the password-protected jump drive no later than Friday, November 30, 2018 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Data Analysis Methods

I began my data analysis by reviewing the GaPSC standards that frame the intended outcomes of K-12 OTE programs to identify and affirm the steps and criteria that USG institutions of higher learning must follow and incorporate in conceiving and creating the curricula and courses that OTE candidates will follow at their given institution. I then uploaded the GaPSC standards, the interview transcripts, and my personal narrative to Dedoose 7.3.1 (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2016), a web-based application used for mixed-methods data analysis. I used this web-based application to code the GaPSC standards, the interview transcripts, and my personal narrative thematically for beliefs and perceptions that participants hold as individuals and as groups about the K-12 OTE candidate preparation process. I coded the transcripts of interviewee responses and my personal narrative thematically for wording and phrasing related to the themes of knowledge, skills, and dispositions stated in the research. I then examined the GaPSC standards and coded them thematically using the same code parameters that I had applied to the interview transcripts and my personal narrative.

I employed both inductive and deductive approaches when coding to help me identify patterns in responses more consistently. Utilizing inductive and deductive approaches simultaneously allows the researcher to interweave a study with both concepts and theories in the interest of laying a foundation for more work (Stake, 1995; 2005); in this instance, work related to recommendations or even best practices models

for K-12 OTE candidate preparation in the state of Georgia, possibly even for regional or national models.

For the interview transcripts, I used inductive and deductive approaches to code within and across interviewee groups for commonalities and differences to capture different layers of meaning and nuances in the responses. I then conducted two coding cross-comparisons to examine the commonalities and differences for the additional layers of meaning and nuances in the responses: one that compared the within-groups coding results to those from my personal narrative and those from the GaPSC documents, and one that compared the across-groups coding results with those from the personal narrative and the GaPSC documents. The use of inductive and deductive analysis here coupled with the coding cross-comparisons allowed me to analyze participant interviews for commonalities and differences in the beliefs and perceptions within each participant group and across the three participant groups (USG K-12 teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators). Next, I compared the cross-coding comparison results to each other to establish themes and content related to all of the educator responses in this study that support and challenge current K-12 OTE practices in the state of Georgia. I then took the findings from this last stage of comparison and connected them to current research findings and recommendations in the field as a means of driving discussion about related to current K-12 OTE program preparation trends and making recommendations for future research endeavors in this field.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I acknowledge that I wanted very deeply to lay a foundation with this study that will expand and extend the body of research being conducted on K-12 OTE curriculum

design and K-12 virtual educator candidate training. I had to assume that the interviewees provided me with honest and open statements about their beliefs and perceptions of current K-12 OTE programs and K-12 OTE candidate preparation practices. I wanted to know if there are any discrepancies in how different USG institutions of higher learning prepare their K-12 OTE candidates and approached the design of this study with the idea that such discrepancies exist. I fully acknowledge that this is a personal bias where this study is concerned. I also acknowledge that I aspired to produce a corpus of research that advances me as a viable candidate for hire and for consultation where the training of K-12 virtual educators and K-12 OTE programs of study are concerned, and I knew that I had to take care in reporting interviewee's beliefs and perceptions using their words or a paraphrasing of their word to prevent my desired study outcomes and my career aspirations from becoming the sole impetus for conducting this study. I knew that I had to remain fully cognizant of this fact when interviewing candidates, and I worked to structure open-ended interview questions so as not lead interviewees to provide answers that intentionally reaffirmed my own personal or professional convictions or served me selfishly with information solely intended to help me climb a professional ladder. Designing open-ended interview questions helped me put aside my personal beliefs and perceptions to create interview questions that put all of the focus on extracting my participants' beliefs, perceptions, and feelings. I also know that regardless of my desired outcomes for this study, I could not allow my own perceptions, suspicions, or beliefs to cloud my data analysis. I have worked as a f2f K-12 educator and as a f2f and an online adjunct faculty in higher education in the state of Georgia. My K-12 experiences span more than twenty years, and my combined experiences in higher education span nearly

five years. Failure to acknowledge this cumulative body of pre-existing professional knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions about f2f and virtual education could cloud my findings and my analyses. This led me to use of inductive inquiry and deductive inquiry in my analyses: I needed to remain focused to a degree on examining and thinking about only my participants and their beliefs, perceptions, and observations as related to the phenomenon I am studying, yet presenting those of my participants is the primary function of this study.

Issues of trustworthiness also lay equally with the steps I took to mask and maintain the true identify of my participants. As stated previously, I assigned aliases to all participants and used general terms to refer to all USG and K-12 virtual institutions with the intention of preventing anyone outside this study from connecting participants to their respective USG institution of higher learning or Georgia K-12 virtual school. Additionally, I was the only one with access to the original audio recordings and the original transcriptions yielded by the interviews. I created secondary interview transcriptions that I scrubbed free of all identifying markers, and I made only these secondary versions available to my dissertation chair and my methodologist and only upon demand for any assistance with data analysis and discussions of findings or emerging themes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) agreed, noting that it is difficult to meet dependability criterion in qualitative work, and presented in this same manuscript four criteria for trustworthiness as set forth by Guba (1981)—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—together with provisions for each.

Credibility, known as the qualitative investigator's equivalent concept to validity, deals with the question "How congruent are the findings with reality?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the interest of promoting confidence that I accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny, I made the following provisions, per Guba (1981), to promote credibility in this study:

- The adoption of research methods well-established in both qualitative investigations in general and in information science in particular; in this instance, qualitative case study within a constructivist paradigm

- The development of an early familiarity with the culture of the participants prior to collecting data. I achieved this by consulting different institution's websites in the state of Georgia to confirm that the individuals I wished to interview were actively employed in the three professional settings deemed appropriate and necessary for the context of the study.

- Random sampling of individuals. I was unable to achieve this given the limited number of educators who specialize in or work in online or virtual instruction in the state of Georgia as compared to the number of traditional or f2f educators in the state. I had to resort to purposeful sampling for this study, which is permitted and is regularly employed in qualitative research.

- Triangulation via individual interviews. As stated earlier, I conducted six individual interviews and compared their content thematically, which lends credibility to this study.

- Iterative questioning. I used a repeated line of questioning for all six interview participants to maintain cohesiveness and lend further credibility to this study.

- Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Thick description appears in this study in the results chapter as direct, and somewhat lengthy, quotes made by the participants during their interviews.

I also took into account transferability and the implications it holds for trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) noted that it is impossible in qualitative research to demonstrate that findings and conclusions are applicable to other populations and situations since the number of environments and individuals used often is small. Stake (1994) wrote that while each case in study may be unique, it serves as an example within a larger group, such that we should not be quick to reject the notion of its transferability. As stated earlier, I intended for this study to figure as a contribution to the study of K-12 online learning given the literature review's implication that there is a dearth of research dedicated to K-12 OTE preparation practices to date.

Dependability, as addressed by Shenton (2004) and based on Guba (1981), requires that the processes utilized within the study be reported in detail by describing what was planned and executing it on a strategic level. Doing so ensures that future researchers have the means to repeat the work but will not necessarily achieve the same results. The processes and procedures that I used to conduct this study have been reported in this dissertation in detail and with attention to the order of procedures to inform about the research processes as much as to assist others with replication efforts should they so choose.

The last set of provisions considered address confirmability, which means that steps were taken by the qualitative researcher to report findings and draw conclusions with objectivity. Shenton (2004) stressed the importance of taking steps to ensure that the

findings are the result of informant's experiences and ideas as opposed to the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Triangulation also comes back in to play, as it has a role in reducing investigator bias. I accounted for triangulation in earlier paragraphs and sections, and other affirmations of confirmability for this study appear in later sections of this dissertation. Some appear in the discussion of weaknesses in technique as a part of the next section on the study's limitations and delimitations. Discussion of preliminary theories or results is another provision of confirmability suggested by Shenton (2004) and Guba (1981); it appears appropriately in the results chapter of this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The inability to generalize findings frequently is cited as a limitation of case study research tradition. Stake (1980) proposed the concept of naturalistic generalization, described as a partially intuitive process on the part of the researcher that results from the researcher's recognition of similarities of objects and issues in and out of context (p. 89). Kemmis (1974) had pointed out earlier that naturalistic generalizations develop within a person as a result of experiences; they may become verbalized and also may pass from tacit to propositional knowledge. Still, according to Stake, naturalistic generalization tends to ensue more commonly from a single study to one that is similar than from a single study to a population. Consequently, it is essential that research reports are appropriately descriptive: as readers recognize essential similarities between cases that interest them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalization. As such, case studies use single or multiple cases as a means of generalizing, illustrating, or representing to a theory by means of analytic generalization as opposed to employing statistical

generalization (Yin, 2011). This case study was situated in the COEs of different institutions of higher learning and the administrative and instructional levels of different K-12 virtual schools across the state of Georgia. It was limited to the particular context of the current social, cultural, and educational characteristics of the USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators who work in these settings. The participants' beliefs and perceptions were unique to this context given that any one person's lived experience is individually constructed, personal, and separate from that of another person (Dowling, 2007; Moran, 2000; Stake, 2005). When I began designing this study, I knew that I was bringing my own professional knowledge and many beliefs and perceptions about f2f and virtual educator practices. I made the decision to include them in this study in the form of a personal narrative knowing that there is no way to keep my study entirely bias-free but also knowing that I needed to be careful to recognize boundaries between my lived experiences and those of my participants. An interview protocol with open-ended questions coupled with inductive and deductive inquiry served me well as I worked to avoid biases such as using information selectively, constructing interview questions that lead to selective information, or using prior knowledge or my own beliefs and perceptions to influence coding.

The context of this study automatically precluded that its findings would be limited to the particular beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of this group of participants, including myself. The purpose of this study was not to generalize to all cases, and participation in this study as purely elective. I initially approached fifteen potential interviewees for participation in this study. The professional experiences, beliefs, and perceptions presented here represent those of seven participants, including myself. While

this number constitutes an acceptable minimum where participants are concerned, the interviewees are not equally distributed across all three categories. I ideally hoped to have three participants per category not including the personal narrative. While I was able to interview three teacher educators and two K-12 virtual educators, only one of the two K-12 virtual administrators who expressed an initial interest to participate in the study responded to my follow-up email and granted me an interview. This also qualifies as a limitation of this study as the knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of one individual cannot be generalized at all to the entire population of K-12 virtual administrators in the same virtual school or even in the state of Georgia. I understand that the lack of remuneration and participants' perceptions that they may be putting themselves, their institutions, or both, at risk may have contributed to the smaller number of actual participants. Even with smaller numbers, conducting a case study for this type of research still is reasonable due to the fact that the study is intended to contribute to existing knowledge the field of K-12 OTE regarding preparation practices in higher education settings, which was a goal of this study.

Summary

As previously stated, this study aimed to examine a phenomenon that interests me as a K-12 educator and as a researcher: timely, appropriate, and relevant OTE candidate training for K-12 virtual educators in Georgia. The literature review in Chapter 2 showed that while K-12 OTE programs have existed for nearly a decade in different USG institutions across the state, what we know about how these programs are designed and to what degree teaching candidates emerge ready to teach without further training has not been examined. At the beginning of this study, I maintained that a better understanding of

the strengths and shortcomings of the candidate preparation practices employed by

current K-12 virtual educator preparation programs can be achieved by examining the

beliefs and perceptions that USG teacher educators, Georgia K-12 virtual school

administrators, and Georgia K-12 virtual educators have about current K-12 OTE

preparation practices in USG institutions of higher education in terms of perceived

strengths and shortcomings in K-12 virtual educator candidates. Choosing these specific

and fixed parameters as the setting for my study qualified it as a study that has specific or

intrinsic bounds and its own unique setting; it therefore qualified the conditions of a case

study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2011). The use of thematic coding to analyze interviews allowed

details unique to participants' beliefs and perceptions about K-12 OTE candidate

preparation practices to emerge. I then examined these themes within and across

participant categories, compared them with current Georgia K-12 OTE standards, and

analyzed the comparison results to substantiate certain participant beliefs and perceptions

as evidence that depicts more about the processes that need to drive future K-12 OTE

candidate preparation practices in the state of Georgia.

For this study, I conducted qualitative research in the form of a case study that

includes a mini-case to explore as a phenomenon the beliefs and perceptions that USG

teacher educators, Georgia K-12 virtual school administrators, and Georgia K-12 virtual

school educators have about the K-12 OTE preparation programs currently offered by

different USG institutions of higher learning. I interviewed professionals currently

employed as USG teacher educators, Georgia K-12 virtual school administrators, and

Georgia K-12 virtual educators, and employed thematic coding coupled with deductive

and inductive inquiry to analyze interview responses and my personal narrative as a mini-

case for essences, meanings, correlations, and differences with existing Georgia codes and GaPSC guidelines and standards that provide the framework for training K-12 OTE virtual educator candidates.

The K-12 Online Teaching Endorsement (OTE) candidate preparation programs offered by different University System of Georgia (USG) colleges of education (COEs), the administrative practices in K-12 virtual schools in Georgia, and the pedagogical practices of K-12 virtual educators in Georgia provided the setting. For this study, I conducted interviews with USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators from different institutions and schools across the state of Georgia and asked them about their beliefs and perceptions about K-12 online teacher preparation and instructional practices from their professional perspective and based on their professional experiences thus far in their careers, and I also use the personal narrative to attune to my own pre-existing beliefs and perceptions about these same preparation and instructional practices. The chapters that follow will outline my study's design, document and present findings, and discuss and interpret the results. The final chapter of this study will reframe this case study with an emphasis on using its findings to support further study of K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia and contribute to the growing body of research search in the field of K-12 OTE preparation.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This case study sought to examine the beliefs and perceptions that USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators held about K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia. The problem this study seeks to address is the gap in the literature related to how institutions of higher education design their OTE programs and prepare their candidates to become K-12 virtual educators and research leading to recommendations for the best way to prepare them for careers in virtual education. For this qualitative study, I employed thematic coding and constant comparative analysis (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965) to examine how participants' responses align with each other and to what degree they do and do not align with current Georgia codes and GaPSC standards that govern K-12 OTE candidate preparation practices. This chapter describes thematic coding and constant comparative analysis, how they were used, and later how they contributed to the analysis of participants' beliefs and findings based on the gap in the literature mentioned above and the following research questions:

1. What do teacher educators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

2. What do K-12 virtual school administrators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

3. What do K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia believe or perceive as the necessary or desired knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ideal virtual K-12 instructor?

For this study, I interviewed three USG teacher educators, one K-12 virtual school administrator, and two K-12 virtual school educators. I conducted the interviews at times of day convenient to the interviewees spanning from May 9, 2016, to July 5, 2016. When discussing the results, I will refer to the USG teacher educators in this study as Conrad, Astor and Rudy. I will refer to the K-12 virtual school administrator as Winter and the K-12 virtual educators as Ingers and Kerry.

The interviews yielded qualitative data in the form of 57 transcribed pages of dialogue. This data allowed for comparisons of the beliefs and perceptions among educators in the same setting and across settings used to identify similarities and dissimilarities in the necessary or desired knowledge, dispositions, and skills of the ideal K-12 virtual instructor. Additionally, I examined and coded my personal narrative and the GaPSC Online Teaching Endorsement Standards that address requirements for teacher preparation leading to a certification add-on endorsement for educators who seek to become virtual instructors in the state of Georgia. These two documents provided 25 additional pages of data (See Appendices F and G).

Stake (1995) and Simons (2009) have argued for the use of coding in case study analysis to assist with identifying topics and issues that emerge as a natural part of the

interview process. Coding is a very popular qualitative data analytic method. It promotes investigation through symbolic representation, core meanings of texts and visual materials (Saldaña, 2016). A code as defined within the parameters of qualitative inquiry is a word or short phrase symbolically assigned to a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for any portion of a language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2016). I used thematic coding as a part of analyzing interview transcripts, my personal narrative, and the GaPSC standards to reduce the body of responses and documents to more manageable and understandable terms for comparison and analysis. Thematic coding also allowed me to examine and manage information in a gradual process while working to safeguard against researcher inferences and suppositions with the potential to influence the outcome of my results. (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995).

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative case study as a phenomenon unique to the context of K-12 OTE preparation programs in the state of Georgia. The findings in this study and their analyses all stem from the responses that interviewees provided for four to five sets of questions (Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E). These questions required them to describe their beliefs and perceptions about K-12 online teacher preparation and instruction based on the context of their present and past professional perspectives (teacher educator, K-12 virtual administrator or K-12 virtual educator), including experiences they have had as K-12 educators working in and training for positions in K-12 and/or other online learning environments, and a description of what those experiences were like for each of them. The findings are framed within the context of the participants' lived experiences with K-12 virtual instruction and K-12 virtual educator preparation. The results are organized according to the research questions

used for this study. Commonalities, differences, and overarching themes are identified

and discussed as a part of the evaluation and are compared to current research findings

and recommendations in the field as a means of driving discussion related to current K-12

OTE program preparation trends and making recommendations for future research

endeavors in this field.

Framing Participants' Contexts: The Teacher Educator

A total of three USG teacher educators participated in this study: Conrad and

Rudy, each of whom has prior experience working in K-12 f2f settings and currently

serves as the K-12 OTE coordinator at their respective USG institution, and Astor, who

has prior experience with f2f and virtual instruction in both K-12 and higher education

settings but whose current USG institution does not offer OTE training. Each one

responded to four sets of questions about their beliefs and perceptions as teacher

educators regarding K-12 virtual educator preparation and instruction in the state of

Georgia. The first set of questions asked them about the types of experiences they have

had preparing K-12 educators for both f2f and virtual instruction. The second set asked

them about the skills, knowledge and dispositions they believe a K-12 virtual teacher

needs to work in an online classroom. The last two sets of questions asked them to talk

about instances where K-12 educators that they had trained to work in K-12 virtual

settings in Georgia had experienced successes and challenges.

Conrad and Rudy provided me with some of the details about how their USG

institution's K-12 OTE preparation programs are designed. Conrad's USG institution

offers the K-12 OTE endorsement as a series of three courses. Conrad shared the beliefs

and perceptions about some of their USG institution's OTE preparation practices:

"…we use…the Georgia Department of Education's or the PSC standards for online teachers, and we have to align our assessments to match those standards…I'd say that some of our assessments, one…in particular, feels like busy work rather than something that an instructor is really going to use…a syllabus assignment where [students] are putting together information that…it's important for them to be familiar with policies like FERPA and any ADA policy…But when they're writing the syllabus, they're just copying it and pasting it from the school, so maybe it's just an awareness level?" (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

Conrad also shared their beliefs and perceptions about the role of the course facilitator in preparing K-12 educators in an OTE program:

"…we do take students from the design phase to the development phase and then I use facilitation phase, but…I think a facilitator needs to spend more time with facilitation and revision and responses to formative assessment, whether that's differentiation or adjustment in course content, understanding the data that comes in through the learner analytics of the learning management system, in order to identify problems and possible solutions." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

Rudy's K-12 OTE program also requires K-12 OTE candidates to take a series of three courses, and the description Rudy provided included the types of courses taken by students. According to Rudy, the first course entails teaching students how to teach synchronously:

"students have to plan, design, develop, and deliver a thirty-minute webinar to teach their peers about…teacher citizenship. During the webinar, students have to act like an online instructor. They have to run the activities they design, and they have to maintain online interaction and evaluate students learning outcomes, and they also evaluate the effectiveness of their webinar." (Rudy, personal communication, June 14, 2016)

Students in the second K-12 OTE course at Rudy's USG institution learn how to teach asynchronously and again must design a module that they could use in a real online course. The last course in this course sequence is the practicum, during which students spend seven weeks designing course content and three weeks delivering the content in a

real setting. Rudy told me that the practicum requires students to use online instruction

for a minimum of only fifty percent of their delivery because most students are full-time

employees who have no way to do the module fully online unless they are in a virtual

school. After the practicum, OTE students analyze their own students' learning outcomes

and write a reflection report about their experiences with the entire online learning

process.

Conrad's and Rudy's USG institutions both offer the K-12 OTE program in a

three-course sequence. It is important to note that the Georgia PSC standards for the OTE

do not mandate a minimum number of credit hours or courses for endorsement

completion. Conrad spoke to this, saying, "…it's one endorsement altogether, and…we

teach it that way through only three courses. Which is just not enough room for all of that

content."

Astor, whose USG institution currently does not offer a K-12 OTE preparation

program, admitted to not knowing fully how to advise a K-12 teacher to obtain their OTE

but told me they would make following suggestions to potential candidates as alternative

route to endorsement from a USG institution: "We don't have that at [my institution]…if

anybody wanted to be a virtual instructor in Georgia, I know one pathway I would

recommend is that they just go do the Georgia Virtual School MOOC training and then

apply there." Astor also told me that, to their knowledge, no one, including the

universities in Georgia, owns K-12 virtual educator training, and that they have the

impression that "you can teach online in Georgia without doing anything with the

universities, other than, you have your degrees… [I believe] you can go get your training

in other ways." The K-12 OTE programs at both Conrad's and Astor's USG institutions

follow the standards in Georgia that govern K-12 OTE preparation practices (Appendix F); these standards will be analyzed and discussed more fully in the analysis section of this chapter.

All three USG teacher educators (Conrad, Astor and Rudy) stated that they had experience preparing educators for f2f instruction as faculty at their current institutions and as adjunct faculty or as graduate teaching assistants at other institutions of higher education located both inside and outside the state of Georgia. Astor worked in another state as a K-12 virtual instructor prior to earning a doctorate and becoming USG faculty. Currently, Astor instructs K-12 educators primarily in face to face settings. Astor never has prepared educators for virtual instruction in an OTE program but shared with me the experiences that they provided for a graduate student seeking to gain experience with virtual instruction; those experiences appear later in this chapter. Conrad spent fewer than two years training K-12 educators for f2f instruction and has taught K-12 educators online exclusively for the last four years. Rudy has approximately one year of experience training K-12 educators in f2f research methodologies courses and has spent the last five years training K-12 educators in online environments exclusively.

The descriptions that teacher educators provided about their experiences preparing K-12 educators for either f2f or virtual instruction varied as it stemmed from their lived experiences as K-12 educators, adjunct faculty, and full-time faculty. These descriptions yielded insight into interviewees' perceptions of themselves and their learners in terms of how they perceived the role they needed to play or were prepared to play for their learners, their perceptions about how their learners viewed them, and their perceptions about how their learners viewed online instruction. These perceptions yielded

themes of Age versus Experience, Building Confidence with Technology, and Student

Perceptions of Online Instruction Practices from this set of responses. Interviewees

provided the following descriptions of these experiences:

> "So I'll go back first to **when I was working at the [Private K-12 School Setting] as an instructional technology specialist and was serving the teachers in that school. I had a little bit of a challenge there in that my age did not lend me the credibility that I needed to reach all of the teachers in that school. So it was a unique situation in that a new graduate who had a lot of experience with technology and was enthusiastic about technology was needed but at the same time the faculty wanted someone who was their own age, from their own generation to learn it from.** And **so I decided that [it] was not an issue with instruction but an issue with the social structure of what's expected by teachers. And so I decided that I needed to get a doctorate,** which was the next degree for me since I already entered the job with a Master's, **in order to have the credibility that I needed to be really effective with all of the teachers at the school.**" (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

> "**We have a doc student named Parker, who I work with from time to time, and she just finished and graduated from our school improvement program last month**…and she lives outside of [Major U.S. City] …she got that [Quality Matters®] certification…so this is something I do occasionally. **I'll have grad students come in, and I will teach them how to teach online. And I will let them have control over parts of my class that I teach. So I've done this for…at least two people I can think of…I try to give people real experiences with grading and proctoring discussion boards. All kinds of stuff so that they can put that on their resumes as work…Parker worked for me for a semester.** She actually got course credit for helping me teach [the class] …**She wrote the design for it, she did design work and teaching work, and then I wrote her a letter, and then she got a job teaching for [a virtual school], and now she's teaching—not only does she teach in [home state] at her high school but she works at [our institution] as an adjunct, she teaches for [university in home state] as an adjunct in the online environment… she's just a go-getter…you take somebody who knows what they want and need and then you give them the opportunities, and you give them some real world experiences**, which I gave her…**I let her do these things that let her believe that she was capable of teaching online... you just give them confidence by letting them see okay, this is not rocket science. You can do this. And you give them the experiences that they need…she was actually getting to design a real class, see it implemented, and then teach the students, and through it she was rating their work. She…created a project or two, and she was facilitating the discussion board. And that gave her confidence,** so that **when she went up for that**

[virtual school] job, she knew what to say and how to talk about it all because not only had she been an online learner in this online doc program but she also had been an online teacher with me…she had me there to kind of bounce things off of…I'm not very intimidating, so that probably helped her realize, 'Okay, I can do this, too.' (Astor, personal communication, May 26, 2016)

"**And then taking the online teaching endorsement program** as an example, **many of my students** thought the online instruction was easy before they took that class, and, um, so after they finished with it, um, they **realized that an online instructor has to spend more time first preparing the course, the materials, managing the course site, um, maintaining online instructions and also interactions, and solving the possible tech problems.** So as their instructor, I have to tell, show what is the possible best way to help the online courses, not just uploading materials and letting students work on their own." (Rudy, personal communication, June, 2016)

Three themes related to the teacher educators' professional contexts emerged from the responses provided by Conrad, Astor, and Rudy: Age versus Experience, Building Confidence with Technology, and Perceptions of Online Instruction Practices. These three themes, their context within the interviewee responses, and how they correlate to the Georgia OTE standards (GaPSC, 2015) appear in Table 1 in the analysis section of this chapter where I will analyze and discuss them more fully.

Questions and Answers: Framing the Teacher Educator Responses

My first interview question asked teacher educators to share the types of experiences they have had preparing K-12 educators to become f2f and virtual instructors and to tell me what those experiences had been like for them. I learned that one of the primary goals at Rudy's USG institution is to show students the best possible way to learn online and transfer that knowledge to them in a way that they can instruct their own online students more successfully. I already mentioned that Rudy had observed that students thought online instruction was easy before taking courses related to virtual

instruction. Rudy told me that after five years of experience as a teacher educator, the one

experience that stands out is the moment that students realize that an online instructor has

to invest much more time than expected in preparing the course and the materials,

managing the course site, maintaining online instructions and interactions, and solving

technology problems. Students simply do not have an appreciation for the scope and level

of preparation that online instruction requires, and it is the job of the instructor to model

that for students by showing them the best possible way to do all of this for online

courses. Conrad and Astor concurred with Rudy's in that one of the most important jobs

that teacher educators have is provide appropriate modeling for online courses for their

K-12 virtual educator candidates and to provide them with as many reality-based virtual

instruction experiences as possible. Conrad also stressed the importance of helping K-12

virtual educator candidates understand that no one is ever an expert in everything when it

comes to working with technology:

> "**Sometimes people who are not very technology-literate expect for people who know technology to know all of technology…they don't realize that it's a continuous, never-ending, life-long learning pursuit** to understand technology. **And that there's not always necessarily a right or a wrong way to go about learning technology**…**the strategy I've taken** in teaching people to use technology **[is] the role of the "we" learner, where I show them how I learned new technologies myself, how I independently, or with the help of an expert, learned a new tool. And I'm comfortable with not being the center of all knowledge** and, um and encouraging the students to learn new things and teach me new things. **It's really a philosophy of the teacher is the lead learner and confident in that, and it's okay that I'm not an expert in everything.**" (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

All three teacher educators told me that they believe their respective USG

institutions do a good job of preparing their teaching candidates for both virtual and f2f

instructional endeavors, particularly Rudy, who said:

> "You know, **we do have good instructors for the program,** though. **All of**

our instructors have doctorate degrees and have rich experience teaching online… we are hoping to give students the chance to use what they learned from the class in a real setting. And that's something they can really use after getting the endorsement because most of them will look for another job, like teaching in a virtual school. **They're trying to get more skills…so you want to…find a chance for them to really use the skills they can apply to their real setting.**" (Rudy, personal communication, June 14, 2016)

In the second set of interview questions, I asked teacher educators interviewees to speak to their beliefs and perceptions about the knowledge needed for K-12 virtual instruction. Conrad and Astor provided similar responses regarding content or curricular knowledge. Conrad stated that K-12 virtual instructors need robust technology knowledge, and Astor said that they need to be masters of their content. Both Conrad and Astor said they believed that K-12 virtual educators need to know how to troubleshoot technology issues, and Astor stated that they need to know how to schedule their time. Astor also stressed the importance of being "fluent in live, interactive tools" and knowing how to use Skype and other visual tools when interacting with students. Conrad and Rudy both told me that they believe that it is essential to model good online instruction for K-12 virtual educators in-training. Conrad shared these thoughts with me:

> "I realized how important it was for these learners to have a positive experience of online learning. They needed to understand the potential of online learning since they had some sort of goal line or some sort of standard in their own mind as to what quality instruction should look like online or what it could look like online. I have discovered that many of them have had mixed experience in their background as to what was good online instruction. So I really felt a responsibility to be the best possible example I could be of good online instruction to our students." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

Rudy mentioned additional knowledge tenets that were more detailed in nature:

- Know how to set up patterns.

- Know how to guide and manage communication learner to learner, between teacher and leaner, and also between learner and content.

- Know how to manage the course.

- Know to set up course rules for students to follow.

- Know how to keep students on track.

- Know how to use technology.

- Know how to design a course and assignments.

- Know how to plan, design, develop, and deliver course content.

- Know how to maintain online interactions.

- Know how to plan, design, develop, deliver, and evaluate their instruction so that the learning material works in combination with the assessment used to evaluate learning outcomes.

- Know how to find and select technology tools that fit assignments based on instruction.

Astor spoke to his/her professional beliefs in about communication in a K-12 virtual environment. The interviewee told me that online teachers need to be good writers where lessons and communication are concerned in the interest of making information as clear, as concise, and as accessible to students and parents as possible. Astor also stressed the importance of using appropriate communication channels when working with K-12 students in a virtual environment, saying, "If you email outside of the legitimate [class] space, make sure you follow the rules [on privacy]."

I next asked the teacher educator participants to share their beliefs and perceptions about the skills needed for K-12 virtual instruction. Rudy stressed the importance of

technology operation skills. Astor and Rudy both told reiterated the role of the instructor

as a good writer so that students clearly understand instructions and communications and

don't get lost in a course. Astor also mentioned parent-teacher contact as an important

skill and told me:

> "You can't assume that when you send an email to a kid that they're getting
> that message or that they're reading it, because sometimes they're not…Make
> sure you are in good contact with an adult that is tied to the child as well." (Astor,
> personal communication, May 26, 2016)

Conrad took a different path in answering this question. Instead of naming

specific skills believed to be necessary for K-12 virtual instruction, the interviewee had

this to say:

> "So I think it depends on if they are serving as an instructional designer, a
> course facilitator, or if they're working face-to-face with a student as kind
> of a coach or learning counselor. Because I think the skills that they need
> for all three of those areas are different." (Conrad, personal communication,
> May 9, 2016)

Unfortunately, this is as much information as Conrad chose to share with me about this

topic.

I then asked interviewees to share their beliefs and perceptions about the

dispositions needed for K-12 virtual instruction. Conrad and Astor both said that the K-12

virtual educator needs to believe that everyone can learn online, especially when given

quality instruction and good coaching. Conrad also told me that K-12 virtual educators

need to believe that higher-order thinking and higher levels of learning also are possible

online and expanded on that by recommending that virtual educators embrace the

following dispositions:

> "Value formative feedback and the cycle of differentiating or responding
> to formative feedback, whether it's responding to the individual student
> with differentiation or revising course materials. Find value in frequent

formative assessment. Be exceptional with providing formative feedback to students because they don't have the face-to-face experience with students to be able to judge body language or, you know, an impromptu question that a student might think of while sitting in the classroom." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

Astor made recommendations for K-12 virtual educator dispositions based on their own children's experiences with K-12 virtual courses:

- Find ways to embrace student-centered pedagogy

- Purposefully make some projects student-centered instead of teacher-centered

- Be responsive to students: "They need their feedback within a day, for sure."

- Resist relying on just the phone to communicate with students in real time by being ready to hop online and use live interactive tools like Google Hangout or Skype

- Use online visual options for presenting materials.

- Schedule time in a smart way so that kids feel like the teacher is available and know that the teacher is there to help them when they need it.

Many of the dispositions recommended by Astor imply flexibility on the part of the K-12 virtual educators, but Rudy named it specifically as an important disposition for the virtual classroom. Rudy went on to say that flexibility within the context of the virtual classroom means knowing that students are different and being prepared to learn how to provide material in different formats, how to host different types of class activities, and how to set up different class assignments. According to Rudy, a disposition towards flexibility also requires the K-12 virtual educator to be organized as well as patient and caring.

I also asked participants to share their beliefs and perceptions about the skills, knowledge and dispositions that K-12 virtual instructors need that differ from those needed for instruction in a f2f environment. All three participants said that strong content knowledge and documented success as a f2f instructor are essential because they provide the background or foundation needed for K-12 instructors seeking to move from a f2f instructional setting to a virtual one. Conrad and Rudy also said that they believe it is important for K-12 virtual educators to know how the technology in a virtual environment works and to know how to integrate technology into teaching. This line of questioning also elicited responses about communication in the virtual setting from Conrad and Rudy. Rudy specifically pointed out that virtual educators have to have mastery of how to accommodate mistakes, how to communicate effectively, and how to align the curriculum in a virtual environment; Rudy emphasized the importance of the virtual educator's ability to present himself or herself effectively in a virtual environment and presenting instructions in a clear and logical way.

I concluded the interviews by asking participants to share with me any instances in which educators trained by them had been successful or had met challenges post-hire in a K-12 virtual classroom. Aside from the previous comments provided by Rudy about the successes of one student whom they had helped acquire experience with virtual course design and virtual course management, no one could speak in detail to any of these outcomes. Conrad knew of two educators who, following training under Conrad, had secured positions with Georgia K-12 virtual schools. One educator had been successful in the sense that she was still employed by the school and that she had applied for a leadership position with the school. The other educator had begun working at a

different Georgia K-12 virtual school and taught and coordinated courses in his/her

subject area. The educator quit the job after one year. Conrad explained what was known

to them:

> "…I don't know if she was a poor instructor, but she felt that she was not aware of how much time she was going to have to spend as an online teacher…she was really disappointed to discover that she was going to be working 24/7…that did not work with her family, so she did not want to pursue that anymore. She had poor expectations of what the job actually involved." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

Rudy did not have any specific examples of K-12 virtual educator successes or

challenges to share with me because his/her USG institution currently does not track their

students after they complete the K-12 OTE program. Even so, Rudy's earlier statements

about perceptions of experiences with K-12 virtual educator training aligned with

observations made by Conrad regarding K-12 virtual educator post-hire challenges:

educators often do not realize the time commitment involved for preparing courses and

materials, for managing course sites, for maintaining online instructions and interactions,

and for solving tech problems that arise.

Several themes related to the teacher educators' professional beliefs and

perceptions about requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions for K-12 virtual educators

emerged from the interviewees' responses, with some fitting naturally under others in a

parent code/child code hierarchy. These themes, like those that emerged from the teacher

educators' contexts, appear in detailed lists in Appendix G. I have listed them below, and

they reappear later in this chapter where they await further inspection and discussion:

- Current OTE Program Design: Too much content to fit into just three OTE courses

- Appropriate Modeling for Online Courses

- o Unrealistic Conceptions about Online Instruction

- o Misconceptions about online instruction

- o Misconceptions about technology

- o Misconceptions about technology knowledge and expertise

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Robust Content for Technology Knowledge:

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Content Knowledge Mastery

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Good Communication Skills

- K-12 Instructional Designers Need Own Standards

- K-12 Virtual Educator Trainers Need Own Standards

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Own Standards

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Everyone Can Learn Online

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Higher-Order Thinking and Higher Levels of Learning Are Possible Online

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Embrace and Use Student-Centered Pedagogy

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How Technology Works in a Virtual Environment

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Integrate Technology into Teaching

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Documented Success as a Traditional/f2f Instructor

Framing Participants' Contexts and Responses: The K-12 Virtual School

Administrator

I followed as similar line of questioning in the interview that I conducted with

Winter, my K-12 virtual administrator participant. Winter has served for five years as a

K-12 virtual school assistant principal following over a decade of experience in K-12

settings as a f2f and a virtual educator plus experience teaching online in higher

education as adjunct faculty. Winter told me that their experiences working with K-12

virtual environments are framed by more than lived experiences as an educator. Before

beginning a career as an educator, Winter spent a decade working in media

communications, a job which had involved travel to over fifty countries around the world

and produced documentary films. Winter told me that witnessing events such as first-

hand technology coming to classrooms or an entire village of children having to share

access to only one computer had provided a wealth of experience that, together with

Winter's experiences with media and media production, had gone far in molding their

perceptions about what constitutes technology access. The interviewee credited all of

these prior career experiences with strengthening their capabilities in the K-12 virtual

environment. Winter framed the context of their K-12 virtual experiences with beliefs

and perceptions that always came back to perceptions of how many K-12 educators view

virtual instruction:

> "Many people view it that they're a facilitator of a course versus a teacher
> of the course, and that's one of the challenges that teacher preparation
> programs [face], is that there are so many different models of what an
> online course is like, and, for some of them, teachers are just facilitators."
> (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

When I asked Winter my first interview question about the knowledge that is required for a K-12 virtual educator, the interviewee shared with me the perception that most f2f educators seeking to transition to a virtual environment have misconceptions about the realities and challenges of teaching online:

> "So, sometimes, I think that we make it look easy. Sometimes I think that there are misperceptions about what teaching online is like. For many people, they view it that they're a facilitator of a course versus the teacher of the course, and that's one of the challenges that I think online education faces… So it depends on what program, what school they're going into. That may change over time." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

When we discussed beliefs and perceptions about the skills that a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online environment, Winter provided me with the following description:

> "I think that they have to be very flexible...they have to have a strong content knowledge, and they have to be willing to reach out to their students and in different ways…[it's] a different relationship than they have in a brick and mortar. They have to be comfortable with using the phone, with using texting, email—all of those things. On a professional level, they need to be able to bridge and make—build that relationship with that student through via technology…a strong teacher presence… being willing to meet face-to-face in the online environment. To turn that webcam on in an Adobe session and not just have it be the voice…they have to have the willingness or they have to be willing to go through the steps necessary to be comfortable with that type of communication." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

I then asked Winter about the dispositions they believe or perceive that a K-12 virtual instructor needs to work in a virtual environment. The interviewee started with the recommendation that virtual educators need to teach with a disposition of mastery for learning instead of one that favors, "If they didn't get it, they didn't get it, and we've got to move on." Winter also believes that virtual educators need to continue to revisit their professional belief systems as they grow as an online teacher. Winter also told me that

their school's K-12 educators reflect yearly on their professional beliefs by writing down

five belief statements that they read, review, and discuss with other staff; when teachers

write down things that don't align with the core values of the school and where it's

headed, Winter has a conversation with them and tries to work with them and provide

them with opportunities to see where the school is trying to go. Winter also told me that

virtual educators need to be predisposed to the belief that online education can work and

"buy into the idea that online education is somethings that is the future of education and

is going to be used more and more in blended settings as well as fully online."

Along this same line of questioning, I also asked Winter to tell me in what ways

their beliefs about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that a K-12 virtual teacher

needs differ from the ones that f2f K-12 teachers should have. Winter told me that it all

goes back to being comfortable with reaching out to students and the ways in which that

has to happen in a virtual environment. Winter explained more about those dynamics:

> "I think in the brick-and-mortar environment, there's a, 'I don't give out
> my phone number' or 'I don't want to talk to the parents', almost like
> there's a wall between the students, the parents, and the outside of school
> and the inside of school. We're more 24/7…online teachers have to be able
> to decide, 'How am I going to balance my family time with the times that
> I'm going to teach in the evening?' and, 'How do I make all of that fit?'
> …that's a certain skill set…they're going to get burned out if they try to
> answer everything all the time seven days a week. So they've gotta be able
> to find that balance and yet meet the needs of the students who are working
> during the evenings every single night instead of during the day." (Winter,
> personal communication, June 13, 2016)

Winter also shared the personal belief about the communication efforts that

teachers need to make regarding parent contact as an integral part and an extension of the

relationships they have with their students:

> "What about parent student relationships? In our environment, we see the
> parents as a vital role to the success of our students, especially fourth and

fifth grade, and even in the middle school, we have to have our parents on board as well. So teachers have to develop a sound relationship with the parents as well as the students." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

I then asked Winter to tell me about any instances where educators hired to work at his/her virtual school had experienced success and challenges on the job and what those situations were like. Winter provided me with an example of both types of scenario, and both of them hinge on a combination of understanding—and embracing—the expectations and the dynamics of teaching in a K-12 virtual environment. Winter described a successful hire experience:

> "One teacher in particular actually came into one of our information sessions because he was interested in potentially having a job with us when the middle school opened…He sat through the session, he came in and talked to us…asked to be a part of the development team, and we started him on the development with one of the main developers for language arts …when we hired the teachers from the pool, he came on board…he involved himself in a lot of the social activities with the students that reaches out to them…he sees…when they're struggling. He doesn't wait for them to contact him. He's just…there for the kids. And he's, got a great personality, he's [got great] dynamics… and he's a favorite of the students here at the school." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

Winter then described what happens in the instances of a challenged hire:

> "…**a couple of times…the district has had teachers that have had… something come up, and they've called and asked if they could place a teacher here** for a half a year, or sometimes we've been in a situation where we've had to do a mid-year hire, and **so that was a teacher who didn't necessarily go through all of our training programs…all of the normal process… most of the time, it's been because of the expectations that they had coming into online teaching…looking at it more like…a facilitator…they thought that it would give them the opportunity to just be home with their family, and it wouldn't be…as many hours working**… we've had to work through with those teachers and **help them to understand that it proves just as much time, if maybe not even more time, as you're learning all the processes and all the technology and everything that goes along with online teaching. And many times, it's more hours that**

are needed than it would be to teach in a face-to-face environment…that's been, that's the main challenge, I would say, that we've gone through." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

These two quotations support Winter's perceptions that a K-12 virtual educator's understanding of virtual instruction dynamics plays a key role in their success in a K-12 virtual setting, but there are distinct differences in the dynamics surrounding each educator's reason for becoming a virtual educator. Winter's employer is housed within a traditional K-12 school system in the state of Georgia, and the system consists of brick-and-mortar schools with f2f instruction as well as having the K-12 virtual school that offers a combination of blended or hybrid and fully online courses. Winter's K-12 virtual school also went through a full accreditation process and confers diplomas just as the f2f schools do. The first experience described by Winter attunes to a K-12 educator who voluntarily sought to become a virtual educator while the second vignette mentions educators sent under the auspices of the school system at-large to undertake virtual instruction. This K-12 educator came to the program willingly and bought in entirely to every aspect of the school's expectations for its virtual educators. Winter mentioned that the educators who have experienced challenges typically did not go through the complete virtual educator training sequence. Winter perceived that what distinguishes virtual educator successes from virtual educator challenges at their virtual school hinges on more than completion of the in-house virtual educator training requirements for securing employment: it hinges on the individual educator's willingness to fully immerse themselves part-and-parcel into the virtual education culture.

I used a series of questions about post-hire practices at Winter's virtual school to round out the interview. As mentioned in my personal narrative (Appendix H),

conversations with USG teacher educators, Georgia K-12 virtual educators, and Georgia K-12 f2f educators had alerted me to additional virtual educator training that Georgia K-12 virtual schools required new hires to complete as a part of the hiring process. I asked Winter to describe what their school does post-hire to prepare virtual K-12 teacher for their jobs and share with me which characteristics and skills they seek to promote. The response was both informative and insightful—it affirmed what I had heard in those past conversations. I am presenting the full content of that response here exactly as told to me by Winter because of the valuable insight the response offered into the school's training program design:

> "First of all, **we would look at only teachers who have had an online teaching endorsement program**, um, **because our program is very different from many online schools, uh, because we do have the blended piece** as well as just a lot of different, um, programs that are tied specifically to [local public school system]. So **the normal route for teachers for us is for them to have been a [local public school system] teacher, very familiar with the academic knowledge and skills, um, have, you know, been teaching in that environment.** Um, **it's not to say that we wouldn't hire an outside [local public school system] teacher, but it would be rare because we are developing this teacher within our system. So many of our teachers that come on full-time with us have at least taught adjunct with us**, um, in the supplemental program. We go through, **we put them through a four-week online teacher training class. If they are successful in that course, then they go into student teaching with us for a semester. If they're successful with that, then they go on a list to be asked to adjunct teach with us. Um, so we have that teacher pool that we're continually, um, working with. We also have a development training course which also lasts four weeks.** So the **teacher training and the development are about twenty hours long, the development course, um, then lets them know if we are willing to look at them to be a developer for us. If so, then if we have a subject area, grade level available for development, we would contract with them. They would do five lessons. We would look at the lessons, and if they're satisfactory, then we give them, um, you know, the contract to go ahead and, um, develop that course for us.** And then **we have a review process that goes along with that. So most of the time it's either a developer or a teacher who's been through the teacher training and then an adjunct teaching, and then we would bring them on board for, um, the full-time status**…" (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

Additional teacher training and development continues after K-12 virtual educators are full-time hires and actively teaching. As Winter previously mentioned, their school promotes the staff working together to continue to move the school forward. Where technology is concerned, they do this via what Winter identified as TechMend sessions, which are ongoing staff development sessions that allow teachers continue developing their capacity with technology. Winter also said that the school has teachers participate in other activities such as the Gallup Strengths Finder (Gallup, Inc., 2016), so that they know what their strengths are, and Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats training (The de Bono Group, LLC, 2016), which helps them know what thinking style they tend to use first when solving problems.

I ended my interview with Winter by capturing beliefs and perceptions about the skills and characteristics promoted post-hire by their K-12 virtual school. Winter told me that from their administrative point of view, the school emphasizes strong teacher knowledge of the school's learning system, strong technology skills, and a strong teacher presence in the course via means such as daily announcements and/or video notes. Winter said that teachers must know how to run Adobe sessions; the school emphasizes the use of certain Adobe tools that entail what qualifies as a good Adobe session, including the school's own definition of what entails the right kind of feedback to students and teachers utilizing that feedback in a way that promotes students to higher success rates within a course overall. I learned that the school also emphasizes the use of focus lessons to supplement instruction such as video sessions that teachers can upload to their course to provide additional instruction and support for students. The school considers professionalism with a child to be paramount and extends that to include a school-wide

definition of professional dress: no jeans or t-shirts allowed ever on campus or in an

Adobe session. The school also expects teachers to collaborate, to use vertical alignment

of the curriculum, and to work in ways that provide service to the students, the parents,

and the community. Winter told me that the school achieves all of this and more because

of its focus on continuous quality improvement:

> "We are all about continuous quality improvement. We actually have core
> values that the faculty has adopted...Continuous quality improvement is
> those teachers always looking in their courses, looking at the data. We're
> constantly pulling data from our courses, looking at, you know, what do
> we need to do differently? What instruction needs to be changed? How can
> we improve that instruction?" (Winter, personal communication, June 13,
> 2016)

Winter's professional beliefs and perceptions about requisite knowledge, skills,

and dispositions for K-12 virtual educators were very similar to those of the teacher

educator, which led to the emergence of themes identical to ones already listed in the

previous section for teacher educators in combination with new themes. All themes that

emerged from the K-12 virtual administrator's interview appear below:

- K-12 Virtual Educators as Instructors versus Facilitators

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Use Visual and Non-Visual Tools in Virtual
  Environment

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Good Communicators

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Content Knowledge Mastery

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Teach with a Disposition of Mastery for Learning

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Routinely Revisit Professional Beliefs

- K-12 Virtual Educator Buy-In

- Insights into K-12 Virtual Educator Training

Many of these themes, particularly those related to K-12 virtual educator needs, are the same themes that also emerged from my interviews with the teacher educators. Having added only the newly-emerged codes to the growing list in Appendix G, my next step was to examine the coding results for the K-12 virtual educator interview responses in this study.

Framing Participants' Contexts and Responses: The K-12 Virtual School Educator

  I maintained parity throughout the study by using questions for this interview set that were nearly the same as those I had the previous two, beginning with asking the participants to tell me about the types of experiences they have had as educators in a K-12 online learning environment. Both of the K-12 virtual school educators in this study (Ingers and Kerry) had professional experiences based on years of instruction in both f2f and virtual settings. At the time of the interviews, both had completed three to four years working as K-12 virtual educators and had just been promoted to non-instructional positions at their K-12 virtual schools. Ingers moved from virtual instruction to a position as a coordinator of course development related to his/her content area, and Kerry had become his/her school's test coordinator for all local, state, and county assessments for grades four through twelve.

  After conducting these two one-on-one interviews, coding their content and comparing their content and the coding results, I was surprised to learn how much Ingers and Kerry had in common. Both began their K-12 careers in traditional brick-and-mortar

or f2f settings, and their experiences related to transitioning to the K-12 virtual setting were nearly identical. Both learned about the possibility of teaching online through colleagues or other professional conversations, and both had seven to eight years of experience as K-12 f2f educators prior to becoming K-12 virtual educators. Both began their K-12 virtual educator careers as adjunct instructors, and the training and instruction they received for becoming online instructors was offered by and specific to their K-12 virtual schools. Both of them also have worked as K-12 educators in hybrid learning environments.

The commonalities mentioned above constituted much of the feedback that both Ingers and Kerry provided in their responses to the first interview question, which asked them about their past experiences as educators in a K-12 online learning environment. Kerry has had additional K-12 virtual experiences that Ingers has not, having designed assessments, online courses and professional development endeavors related to grades fourth through twelfth in the K-12 virtual setting. Ingers added to their experiences with K-12 virtual learning based on personal teaching experiences in that environment and how they compare, in their mind, with those from traditional or f2f settings in his/her past. Ingers (personal communication, July 5, 2016) told me that working in an online education feels like "we're on the cutting edge of things for the future".

Ingers went beyond providing background information on their experiences with K-12 virtual instruction and included how working in this environment impacts them and makes them feel. Ingers repeatedly told me how excited they is to work in a K-12 learning environment and how exciting they perceive the K-12 virtual learning environment itself to be. Several mentions of "Exciting" appeared in this particular

interview transcript alone, which earned the code "Exciting" its own category for the beliefs and perceptions Ingers shared during our July 5, 2016, interview about working in online environment:

"I feel like our administration supports us and gives us what we need to be the best online teachers that we can be, which is really exciting."

"And I feel like in the online teaching environment, I, I feel like we're on the cutting edge of things for the future. And it's really exciting, you know?"

"It's always exciting, you know? It never gets dull."

"So if there's something kids are having trouble with, we can address that, really, in our lessons. And it constantly improves the level of content and instruction in our lessons, which is pretty exciting."

"Okay. I do, I really love working in an online environment. And with the, honestly, I, I wouldn't do anything other than that, you know? I just think it's exciting."

Ingers' excitement for working in a K-12 virtual environment also includes on-the-job collaboration. He/she shared the following example with me:

> "I work with a coupled of teachers where I will have created a thing on Google Slides, and it's, 'Wow! How did you do that? Can you show me how to do that?' And we sit down together…I show her how to do it and then now she's using that in her position. I don't know, I just think that's a really amazing and exciting thing we have here." (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Ingers also shared with me that one of the reasons they enjoy working in a K-12 virtual environment and finds it exciting is because it is not as static as a traditional or f2f K-12 instructional environment. Ingers shared the following beliefs and perceptions with me:

"With the online environment, I feel like I can do this for a long period of time, you know? Because it never is the same. No day is the same, you know? No class is the same…it's not static. So if there's something kids are having trouble with, we can address in our lessons. And it constantly improves the level of content and instruction in our lessons, which is pretty exciting." (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Ingers also told me that their experiences with virtual and f2f K-12 learning environments have shaped their beliefs and perceptions about computer use in today's world. According to Ingers, currently society assumes that people in today's world know how to use computers—something that the interviewee has discovered is not true. As Ingers told me:

"…in our current society, it's just kind of assumed in a lot of ways that people just know how to work computers. And that's not true. And it's not just old people that can't work computers [Laughing}, do you know what I mean? You know, I'm older, I was just saying that. But, I mean… younger educators that maybe have just graduated from college that don't have a basic understanding of technology and computers, you know?" (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

Ingers shared other beliefs and perceptions about his/her experiences with K-12 online education. In their mind, virtual education pushes teachers to learn as well and figure out new ways to do things, from learning how to work with students to organizing their teaching practices. Ingers told me that he/she feels like virtual teachers give more of themselves than f2f educators for many reasons that are unique to the virtual learning environment:

"We know that the students need us…if they have a question, they need us to respond so that they can move on to the next thing. **I think we're a lot more attentive to the students individually than a brick-and-mortar teacher is...we don't work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, but… [students] can text us. They can call us. They can email us. And we answer them. Pretty quickly, you know. Within twenty-four hours, they get an answer to their question**…[students] coming into an online environment [are] very reluctant to call a teacher. **You have to encourage them: 'Listen, if you have a question, that's what I'm here for…that's why I get paid is**

to answer your questions and help you'…because the lessons are created [for us], they're engaging…we don't have to worry and spend a lot of time on all the little nuts and bolts of everything…It's a lot easier for us to focus on the kids…and [help] them be able to master that content." (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

The next line of questioning for Ingers and Kerry was aimed at helping me learn more about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions each of them believed a K-12 virtual educator needed to work in an online environment. Both Ingers and Kerry stressed technology and computers, but from different angles. For Ingers, possessing basic computer skills and having a basing understanding of technology and computers is a must; for Kerry, the more important aspects of computer and technology skills hinge on being able to cope with change give the constant changes that occur in technology and technology tools. Kerry also stressed the importance of strong communication skills, including being skilled at creating online relationships, strong problem-solving skills, time management skills, and the ability to exercise self-discipline. Here is some of what Kerry told me:

> "Have strong communication skills…email very frequently, but also create…a news burst…a quick little blast that … shows students what you want to show them and what you need without too much or too little information…conversations with them on the phone and…in the online room as well…communicating clearly with the students when you may not be able to see the work that's in front of them…figuring out how to create that relationship when it's online…it can be extremely challenging... [that's] one thing that is great about the hybrid method…especially in the lower levels, is that it helps build that relationship, because even though you're only seeing them once a week, the kids that come, you're able to have that interaction and talk to them a little bit more…otherwise…just the online portion…[having] to build that relationship with them through the online interface…that's always something that's a concern for people, is how to do that." (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

When asked about the knowledge needed by a K-12 virtual educator for working in an online classroom, Ingers' and Kerry both cited content knowledge, but their

answers proved divergent and varied from there. Ingers was very insistent that one very key tenet to working successfully in the online environment stemmed from knowing how to take what you did in a brick-and-mortar setting and adapting it to the online environment, even when the lessons already have been created and are ready for use. Ingers also mentioned computer and technology-based knowledge relate to equipment use and troubleshooting:

> "Now when I started, I didn't know anything about teaching online, but I knew how to work a computer, you know? And I knew how to troubleshoot. And being able to troubleshoot is a huge thing, because, you know how it is with technology… You have to have some basic understanding of technology and computers to be able to use that as kind of a springboard for the skills you need to be an online instructor." (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

According to Kerry, a K-12 virtual educator needs knowledge related to virtual course content and running a virtual course, such as knowledge of copyright and fair use laws related to course design and materials usage and inclusion in lessons and activities, a clear understanding of course content, and knowing how to create questions that can be used as quick assessment pieces that gauge student understanding of course content and concepts. Kerry said, "…when giving any lesson…the [role] of the teacher is making sure that the students are learning the concepts and learning the skills and knowledge that they need for the course."

When asked about the skills and dispositions needed by a K-12 virtual educator to work in an online classroom, Ingers and Kerry often used different terms to describe the same disposition. What Ingers called resourcefulness, Kerry labeled as a combination of creativity and problem-solving. Ingers phrased it this way: "…if I have a student that's

not understanding a concept, I start looking to see what I can find that would help them."

Kerry addressed it in more detail and told me:

> "…you need someone who is willing to click around and problem-solve,
> so…creativity is particularly interesting, and, just, problem solving skills,
> practice with different technology. So one thing that we kind of have to do
> is just…search and try new technology and see what works." (Kerry, personal
> communication, July 19, 2016)

Ingers identified flexibility as both a good skill and a good disposition for K-12 virtual educators to possess—even in environments where the courses and the lessons have been created by someone else ahead of time. Ingers told me that they believe that some students just need an alternative; that alternative might be in the form of additional resources or even in an alternative way to demonstrate their mastery of lesson content. The interviewee also told me that they believe a K-12 virtual educator needs to be flexible in order to provide those alternative opportunities for a student. Kerry agreed, again embracing slightly different or alternative wording to express their beliefs:

> "You've got to be somebody who's willing to take a risk, try something
> new, will think outside the box, because [virtual education] it is not
> traditional. And a lot of the things that work in a traditional brick-and-
> mortar don't work online…just because of how the environment is set up
> and trying to reach the kids." (Kerry, personal communication, July 19,
> 2016)

Ingers' and Kerry's revelations about the dispositions a K-12 virtual educator needs to work in an online environment didn't stop there. Ingers personally believes that virtual and f2f educators share some of the same dispositions about education and personally believes that most became educators because they want to save the world one child at a time. Ingers and Kerry both told me that they believe people who choose to enter the education profession do so because they want to help students be successful.

Ingers maintained that some of the strategies used in a brick-and-mortar school can be translated to an online environment and can even be expanded on tenfold because the greater availability of resources allows teachers opportunities to do different things and to do them differently. One disposition that Ingers believes is more relevant to K-12 virtual education than it is to f2f classroom setting is persistence. Ingers told me he/she believes that K-12 virtual educators have to be persistent when it comes to instruction—when they try something that doesn't work, they have to try a different way, go a different avenue, and work along until they find a way for it to work. According to Ingers, persistence as well as the disposition for constantly progressing and advancing oneself as a teacher are important for those who educate others through a virtual medium. Ingers told me, "We can't be content with stagnation. We have to be constantly moving forward and improving." Perhaps contrary to the need to persist, Ingers also stressed possessing tolerance of imperfection, saying that virtual educators need to accept that the online learning environment is not always perfect, lessons will not always go perfectly, and technology will not always be perfect. Ingers also believes that virtual educators need to possess a thirst for knowledge and a desire to learn. They need to encourage students to do well. They also need to believe that every child can be successful, and they need to be ready to do whatever they can to help each child be successful, even with it involves a difficult situation or a difficult child.

I presented Kerry's explanation of resourcefulness in an earlier paragraph. I now present Ingers' stance on resourcefulness below, which appears to align very closely with what Kerry offered in their account of problem-solving. For Ingers' resourcefulness as a

disposition and connected it to ways to encourage students with their academic

endeavors:

> "Resourcefulness. Being ready and willing to come up with an alternate
> when the unexpected happens. Encouraging the same resourcefulness in
> students so that they can solve some of their own technology issues…
> Encourage students to take new approaches to presenting their information
> so that they get comfortable with doing things their way or the way they
> believe things need to be done in a given situation." (Ingers, personal
> communication, July 5, 2016)

As with the other interviewees, I asked Ingers and Kerry during their interviews

about their beliefs and perceptions regarding the skills, knowledge, and dispositions

needed by a K-12 virtual educator that differ from those needed by a K-12 f2f educator.

Ingers told me that a basic understanding of technology and technology skills are

essential for any K-12 virtual educator: they have to be able to jump in to the virtual

instruction process but also be able keep their head above water to some extent. Ingers

told me that he/she has encountered many brick-and-mortar classroom teachers that don't

know anything about technology—and don't have to—because it is possible for them to

be successful in the f2f classroom without that knowledge. Ingers also told me that virtual

educators need to be skilled in adaptability where the virtual classroom environment is

concerned because they need to be capable to take whatever has been presented to them

in a situation and make it work for their students and for them. Ingers believes that the

ability and desire to always learn are characteristics of an online teacher and also of the

training activities geared toward virtual educators. According to Ingers, the ability and

the desire to learn helps virtual educators constantly learn more; they are in and around

and working with technology, which is always advancing and progressing.

While Kerry's statements about necessary dispositions do not completely align with those made by Ingers, they manage to resonate similar sentiments. Kerry maintained that the educator who is happy, positive and energetic in a brick-and-mortar setting possesses those same dispositions in a virtual setting, such that they have the ability to permeate any academic environment and foster student learning and success. Kerry also asserted that the K-12 virtual settings require educators to have a disposition that's just a little different from the traditional brick-and-mortar educator: there is a different flow and balance to everything, and the educator has to believe that relationships are important and that kids matter. "Hopefully most educators believe those things," Kerry told me.

I next asked Ingers and Kerry to share with me any post-hire training or preparation that they had undertaken in preparing to become a virtual instructor in their present school settings. I learned from Ingers that their school's pre-hire process requires all potential employees to go through a two-step training process that involves student teaching opportunities. Candidates who experience success with the training and the student teaching qualify to be recommended for hire, but they are hired only once this process has taken place. I also learned that there are professional learning opportunities and staff development classes throughout the year that faculty participate in together to help them learn new skills and different educational practices aimed at improving instruction. Also, the school's technology team offers what they call "TechnoSessions". These sessions occur monthly or bi-monthly and show teachers how to do more with the technology they have. Professional learning opportunities and staff development classes also help faculty make improvements to the lessons the school already has.

Kerry also went through a two-step training process prior to hire by their current K-12 virtual school, which they described as a five-week student teaching experience in an online student teaching program under the auspices of an online teacher followed by being allowed to teach a small introductory class of students under the supervision of the department chair. Post-hire training continues in the form of attending national and international events run by different organizations in the interest of learning new skills coupled with a wide range of in-house professional development: training with the school's LMS, new ways to present materials to students using manipulative creators or SMART notebook technologies, new ways to organize and manage Excel spreadsheets, and better ways to use Google Drive or email. In short, "Different ways to get communication out parents and students," Kerry said.

Many of the themes that emerged from my interviews with Ingers and Kerry echoed or repeated identically those that emerged from the interviews with both the teacher educators and K-12 virtual administrators. Below is the complete list of codes that emerged from my interviews with Ingers and Kerry:

- K-12 Virtual Education is Exciting

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Good Communication Skills

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Everyone Can Learn Online

- K-12 Educators Need to Be Creative and Resourceful

- K-12 Educators Need to Be Adaptable

- K-12 Educators Need to Be Persistent

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Troubleshoot Technology Issues

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Tolerance for Imperfections

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Desire to Learn

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Thirst for Knowledge

- K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Relationships Matter

- K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Kids Matter

Framing the Researcher's Contexts and Responses: Analyzing and Interpreting the Personal Narrative

I am a twenty-year K-12 public education veteran and have traveled far in my professional and academic endeavors, primarily because I always have strived to diversify my training, my skills, and my experiences in the interest of professional growth. I am going to take Ingers' (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016) earlier advice about teaching online and apply it to discussing the themes that emerged from my personal narrative: jump right in while being able to keep my head above the water. The first theme that emerged from my personal narrative related to my beliefs about K-12 virtual instruction is one of a desire for professional change. I believe that many K-12 educators complete K-12 OTE programs because they want to continue teaching others, but they want a fresh start. I also believe this is more of a phenomenon among teachers who are in the middle or the latter stages of a thirty-year f2f teaching career than it is among those with fewer than ten years of experience in K-12 f2f instruction. I also believe that many K-12 educators decide to pursue K-12 OTE because they enjoy learning and want to continue learning. I know from personal experiences documented in

my personal narrative (Appendix H) that not everyone wants to learn how to incorporate technology into their K-12 instructional practices or, for that matter, even wants to touch technology beyond what their local school system may require them to do, such as keeping online records for grades and attendance or using email as a primary means of communication with students and parents and among themselves. I have lived the very scenario that Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2012) had described in their research: working toward helping teachers make the connection between using technology for technology's sake versus actually learning about how to use to support instruction. I was familiar with co-workers' openly and repeatedly echoing their feelings about professional development. I heard many say that they considered it a waste of time, particularly when it was required or when it involved learning about or working with technology. Technology integration is a required component in all aspects of K-12 public education today, even in f2f settings, with many school systems including clauses in their mission statements that prescribe learning environments that integrates technology through a variety of means in the interest of preparing students for work and life in the 21st century. I always have believed that technology is meant to enhance educators and their instructional practices, not supplant them, and I experienced that while teaching Master's level courses to adults online in the Department of Instructional Technology at Kennesaw State University.

While my K-12 career has treated me well overall, professional dissatisfaction appears as a recurrent theme in my personal narrative; I attribute that the beliefs I have about myself that I am capable of coming across as a viable candidate-for-hire to a university and the simple truth that I want more out of my career right now than another

decade of teaching French or Spanish. I also attributed the professional dissatisfaction to my inability to connect with students in a foreign language on a deeper level. They are novices in the language, and I have been speaking both French and Spanish for more than twice as many years as they have been alive. I can eat, sleep, think, breathe, love, and dream in both languages. I <u>live</u> both languages; my feeling is that my students are just learning how to survive one hour of class a day. No matter how hard I try, not everyone will share my experiences with these languages because not everyone will want to—many, I fear and know, are taking it simply to meet the state of Georgia's college preparation diploma seal requirement. It's all too similar to trying to get traditional f2f educators on board with technology: I believe that very few want to do it, but everyone has to do it, if only to a small extent. Now that I think about it, my dissatisfaction is not professional dissatisfaction in the purest sense. I like many things about my job: my co-workers are friendly, collegial, and pleasant to work with, and I enjoy working with and teaching my students. So I suspect that what I view as professional dissatisfaction also could be that, after almost twenty-one years in the same work environment, I am merely stuck in a rut. I am bored. Someone like Ingers (personal communication, July 5, 2016) would take one look at me and say that I need more excitement at work. I agree!

And that is just it. I want to do something that excites me. Ingers and I share a common thread: working with technology excites us. Other professional activities excite me as well, particularly conducting research and engaging in continuous learning for both personal and professional growth. I believe that those of us who truly want to work with technology are a rare breed. I believe that we are not satisfied with the status quo. I believe that to be the case with instructors on any level who undertake virtual instruction.

As stated in the literature review chapter of this study, virtual education is not the norm nor is it the standard (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Davis & Niederhauser, 2007; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; DiPietro, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2013; Natale & Cook, 2012; Oliver et al., 2009; Schrum et al., 2007; Watson & Kalmon, 2005; Watson et al., 2014). I believe that the number of people who want to teach online courses in this country is growing right alongside the increase in the number of online courses offered each year. I am one of those people. I enjoyed the QM® training (QM, 2011) that I received in preparation for working as online adjunct faculty for my home department at Kennesaw State University. This training together with the support and guidance of experienced online faculty in my department afforded me a well-structured and well-mentored introduction to the world of virtual instruction.

But that was the problem. The training left me feeling like the preparation I had received for becoming an online instructor had only scratched the surface, and this was supported by the emergence of themes related to my concerns about online instructor preparation: sufficient versus insufficient preparation, effectively meeting students' communication needs as related to course content and grades, a high instance of online instructor presence, instructor support for students' learning needs, student perceptions of instructor competence, getting students to own the right to ask questions of their instructor, LMS competence, striking a balance between instruction and facilitation, and maintaining objectivity when students face crises. When faced with instructing my first online course, I had doubts as to how ready I was for that key moment where the rubber meets the road: working for six weeks with live students in a primarily asynchronous— but very real—online environment. Was I going to be any good at this? It had been over

six months since my QM® training, my first time ever going live in an online course as

the instructor was going to be in the summer, and the one thing from training that stood

out foremost in my mind over everything else was how the training had stressed the

importance and the necessity of providing online students with rich, descriptive feedback

on assignments. Never mind that the first time I ever saw an online course from an

instructor view was a few weeks before the course began. The only experiences I had

with navigating the university's Learning Management System (LMS) were as a

student—never as an instructor. Sure, I was going to be teaching a course that had

already been designed and created, but in my training did not include any type of

practicum. It was only while preparing to roll out my first online course that I was

granted view-only access for the course leader's section. Just how successful could I

expect this endeavor to be in light of my insecurities and self-doubts? And I knew from

my f2f experiences that students were bound to pose questions ranging from permission

to miss class for everything from concerts and leaving for vacation to requests to turning

assignments in late because of the stress and trauma they were suffering following the

death of a beloved houseplant. My biggest fear of all: Would my students ever guess or

suspect that they were, in essence, my guinea pigs? When it came to my students

potentially finding out about my extremely short history in the online classroom, I

honestly did not know which prospect I feared more: for them to find out that I had no

experience teaching their course or for them to find out that I had never taught online

before? Each proved intimidating in its own way, and either way, I felt like the entire

experience had disaster written all over it. Period. This made the list of emergent themes

suddenly seem daunting, imposing, and insurmountable, but only because I recognized

them for what I believe them to be: issues likely facing K-12 OTE teacher educators each and every time they teach a K-12 OTE course. I believe that these are the topics that we need to be covering in K-12 OTE preparation programs in addition to teaching educators how to create, design, navigate, coordinate and lead online courses.

The themes that emerged from my personal narrative (Appendix H) also appear in Appendix G. These themes also appear below:

- K-12 Virtual Educators Are Educational Pioneers

- K-12 Virtual Educator Numbers Will Continue to Increase

- Current OTE Program Design for Three Courses

- Improving Online Communication Skills

- Virtual Support for Students' Learning Needs

- Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Teaching

- Establishing and Maintaining Strong Online Instructor Presence

- Competence with Online Instruction

- LMS Competence

- Online Instruction Versus Online Facilitation

- Caring about Students Versus Caring for Students

This list of themes echoes many of the sentiments and fears I experiences about becoming a virtual instructor, and it also called to mind some important—at least based on the beliefs and perceptions I was forming about virtual instruction from an instructor's viewpoint—observations I had made about my students' online behaviors and the approaches they used when initiating contact with me via the email system housed within

the university's LMS. I remember how I felt the first time I ever began posting

information about the course: I posted messages to the calendar on the course's main

page welcoming students to the course and encouraging them to contact me with

questions or concerns. I remember noticing that I closed many of my messages with those

same or similar words of encouragement. I had taken both blended and fully online

courses here at the university as a part of my doctoral degree program. Some courses

were packed with online asynchronous communications and feedback from the

instructors, who kept their promises to engage with students on the discussion threads. I

also remember taking courses whose main page and overall LMS content looked nearly

the same at the end of the semester as it had at the beginning—most of the additional

content came from required student participation on discussion boards. In those instances,

the instructors had stated in the syllabus that they would be regular participants in

discussion threads, but that sadly turned out not to be the case. Those same instructors

also did not communicate with students unless the students first communicated with them

via the LMS email. Having experienced—again, my own beliefs and perceptions—both

great and less-than-desirable learning dynamics in blended and online courses, I vowed to

do as much as I thought necessary to ensure that my students' experiences in my courses

consistently would be classified as good or great. If the syllabus stipulated instructor

participation in discussion board threads, I would be there and be just as present as my

students. The department expects its instructors to have assignment assessments back to

students one week after the submission date? Done, also. These tasks were not hard for

me to accomplish, nor did I find these types of deadlines to be unreasonable or difficult to

meet. The one thing that baffled me about virtual instruction was how to get my students

to reach out to me when they needed assistance or support—and have them not apologize for it or feel guilty for doing so. Nearly every request for assistance or support came in the form of an LMS email and began with a sentence in which the students asked me, as the instructor, to please forgive them for contacting me with their request or to please forgive them for making so many inquiries. I always wrote back that their inquiries always were welcome and that it is both my job and my pleasure to assist them, but it is only now that I am wondering if they thought I was including that in my response just to be nice. I truly did not mind their inquiries, but if my responses back to them did not reassure them of this, what could I do to change that? I did not have an answer for that question, and that did not sit well with me.

There were other issues from my initial online instruction experiences that did not sit well with me. The first time I taught online, I threw myself into the course as fully as I would have had I been student in the course. It was a process fraught with stress, uncertainty, self-doubt, and the very real fear that my students might reach the conclusion that I had never taught online before and had no idea what I was doing. This was compounded by the fact that I was teaching a course and content designed by someone else. At times, it felt like instructional dragons that I fought weekly, sometimes daily, would never give up their fight against me. There were times when I faced technology issues that required me to enlist the assistance of others, and it bothered me that I did not know more—I wanted to solve the problems on my own, but I couldn't. There were so many things that my training had not covered, and I wasn't always sure what to ask or to whom when technology problems arose. I began doubting myself and feeling as if I really did not know what to do next. The same feelings came around when I found myself

facing difficult issues involving students asking for exceptions on assignments or challenging my feedback on assessment—all in spite of the assignment rubrics that both parties had to follow. I found myself internalizing my students' academic problems and becoming consumed by them. I let their struggles become mine. I began taking everything personally—their comments, their frustrations, their reactions to what was happening to them. I started losing sleep at night. I started fearing for my desired career in higher education. I remember the sinking feeling that struck me when I started feeling like it might all be over before it ever really begins. Was this the reality of higher education today? And I remember thinking that this was not what I had signed up for, and it felt like the whole cycle of self-doubt at my ability to get the job done was an endless one. At that point, half of the semester still lay ahead of me like a long, empty, hostile road with no end in sight. These revelations correlated to the emergence of the themes "Competence with Online Instruction", "LMS Competence", and "Caring about Students Versus Caring for Students."

The "Eureka!" moment in my online instructional practices and experiences came when I experienced a change of mindset and began viewing what I was experiencing as a novel or storyline that was unfolding before me, much like watching a movie. Sure, my students had problems—and at times had caused them on their own accord—but I needed to view those problems through the lens of the course syllabus and their relevance to a student's enrollment in my course. I had to keep my students focused on their academic goals and, if asked, help them find ways to work around problems in the interest of minimizing the impact they could have on a student's performance in my course or in their degree program. Once I figured out how to distance myself from becoming

consumed by my students' problems, it became easier to move forward with the rest of

the semester. I also had to remind myself of one very important tenet of virtual

instruction: the instructor teaches, guides and facilitates learning by showing students

what to access and how to enhance their intellectual growth and knowledge. The

instructor is there to help the students stay the course while in the course. The actual

learning occurs because the student begins to understand how to take the reins from the

instructor and, in essence, to become his or her own teacher at times.

With that very sound lesson in online instruction firmly behind me, the semester

that began fraught with problems came to an end, and so did its challenges. My efforts

paid off as my students gave me an average rating of 3.5 out of 4 on my course

evaluations related to eleven different items. My department chair considered these

excellent ratings, and when the time came to renew my faculty status for the current year,

I noticed that the chair already had completed the section requiring documented evidence

of my teaching performance at the college level:

> "Average rating of 3.5 out of 4.0 on 11 items. Sample qualitative data:
> 'Instructor took the time to help me outside of her office hours. My
> teacher Leslie Pourreau has excellent understanding in all the elements.
> She gave me topic wise response for each of my assignments. She also
> responded to my questions immediately. Especially she is very good in
> reminding about assignments and she created a very clear calendar view.
> I liked her instructional methods. Dr. Pourreau was very knowledgeable
> and thorough in the content in this course. She was very helpful and
> provided valuable feedback on assignments and assessments. She made
> this a great learning experience.' (Appendix H)

This was the feedback I needed to bolster my confidence. My goal had been to

guide my students in their learning by providing them with responses and feedback that

were rich and insightful yet concise—the kind I would want to receive if I were the

student. I had taken to heart the advice imparted on me during the QM® training and

poured my efforts into facilitation and academic guidance, and my performance ratings show that my students reaped the rewards, which, as I see it, is exactly how knowledge and learning are supposed to unfold in the virtual classroom. When I taught online again this year, I still had to quell a few instructional dragons, I still had students apologizing for contacting me with questions, and I still did not have an answer for how to make them understand that I want them to contact me with questions because I want to help them grow just as my instructors have helped me grow through persistent inquiry. I still don't have an answer that addresses why students apologize for contacting me when they email me with questions. Maybe I never will…but I really would like a solution to this issue.

I recognized that allowing one single and individual online teaching experience to define online teaching overall meant I was not being fair to the process—I had learned this over the years from my K-12 f2f instructional experiences. I pushed aside any doubts I had about online instruction and made the decision to continue teaching online based on my initial course evaluations, my increased confidence with online instruction, and the insight I had gained through my own experiences, but also with a research agenda in mind. When I thought back on the feelings of uncertainty and limited preparedness that I experienced prior to and during the time that I taught my first online course, I still could not accept that so little time is considered all that is necessary to help someone prepare someone to teach in a virtual setting. I remember discussing my concerns with a fellow doctoral cohort member who reminded me that we once had considered taking the K-12 OTE courses as our electives. She also reminded me that we had found differences among some of the courses being offered from one USG institution to another as well as differences in the number of courses required by each USG institution to complete the K-

12 OTE. In the end, we decided not to take the K-12 OTE courses for our electives because of the lack of parity among the institutions—we just weren't comfortable knowing that there wasn't better course or curriculum alignment among them even though each USG institution's college of education held NCATE certification (Georgia Southern University, 2016; Kennesaw State University, 2016; University of Georgia, 2016; Valdosta State University, 2016) and their certification and endorsement programs all met Georgia PSC standards. From there, I began having conversations with USG faculty and learned informally that K-12 virtual school administrators in the state of Georgia were coming to them with concerns that related to those shared by my cohort member and me. Whereas we questioned the validity and parity of the different K-12 OTE programs around the state in terms of whose was better and why, the K-12 virtual school administrators had taken it one step further and challenged the validity of the K-12 OTE preparation offered by any of the USG institutions. According to the K-12 virtual school administrators, they had to conduct their own post-hire in-house training to adequately prepare their instructors for the virtual environment because most job candidates presented with OTE knowledge and training deficits regardless of which USG institution they had attended. The close parallels between the K-12 virtual school administrators' OTE training beliefs and the beliefs and perceptions I held about my own online training experiences seemed too uncanny. The commonalities in our professional perceptions sparked my curiosity and left me wanting to know more about what goes into preparing K-12 educators to become online instructors.

Moustakas (1990) stated that heuristic research consists of six phases that guide unfolding investigations and comprise the basic research design: initial engagement,

immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and a research culmination in the form of creative synthesis. My experiences as a f2f instructor, an online instructor, and a budding researcher in K-12 online instruction comprised the first three phases of this study before I even began setting down the words to describe it. The reflective writing processes I engaged in to create the personal narrative provided the perspective I needed for illumination: being open and receptive as a researcher to tacit knowledge and intuition. Writing just now about the parallels and professional commonalities between my beliefs and perceptions about K-12 OTE training and those of K-12 virtual school administrators helped to crystallize everything for me. Eureka! That's it! That's what I was trying to pinpoint all long! I wanted to identify the beliefs and perceptions that USG teacher educators and Georgia K-12 virtual school administrators held about the best way to prepare K-12 OTE candidates for careers in virtual instruction. I wanted to know where their beliefs and perceptions converged and diverged and, if possible, why. My own training experiences coupled with my piqued interests led me to propose and design a case study for this dissertation in which I would interview individuals from these two educational settings about their lived professional experiences with K-12 OTE preparation and the professional beliefs and perceptions they hold about K-12 OTE preparation practices to learn more about what they believe and perceive as the best preparation practices for K-12 OTE candidates in the state of Georgia.

I suddenly had a keen interest in this area of teacher preparation based on my own lived experiences and perceptions, and I wanted to examine them fully in terms of their layers of meaning, which meant attuning to my own awarenesses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a means of setting the scene for understandings that derived

from conversations and dialogues with others (Moustakas, 1990)—in this case, with my interviewees. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my first reaction was to try to find a way to distance myself from the interview questions and the participants so as not to taint my study, but the literature (Moustakas, 1990; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2005) and the encouragement from my dissertation committee favored me embracing my presence in this study instead of trying to race away from it. Generating my personal involved a writing process that allowed me to identify possible biases but also positioned me better to give a voice to my participants.

Completing the coding for the personal narrative marked the end of the first round of coding for all participant responses. In the section that follows, I discuss how I reduced these codes for repetition in preparing them for successive rounds of constant comparison prior to a final comparison of themes with the GaPSC OTE Standards. The results of this comparison follow, and this chapter concludes with a discussion of how the themes that reflected participant statements align these standards to determine recommendations and next steps for designing future K-12 OTE preparation programs in the state of Georgia.

Analysis for Overarching Themes: Substantiating Theme Emergence

The analysis portion of this study began with taking all of the emergent themes mentioned at the end of the previous sections in this chapter and generating a comprehensive theme list, including taking steps to eliminate repetition of themes. The resulting list consisted of 53 themes (see Appendix G). As a part of constant comparison analysis (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965), I then applied axial coding to this theme list to help me identify related themes that could be collapsed for same or similar themes or concepts, which reduced the number down to 45 themes. These 45 themes appear in

Appendix G, which shows to whom the emergence of each theme is attributed and if the emergence was explicit or implicit based on interviewee responses and the personal narrative content.

I then re-examined the content and original codes of each interview manuscript and the personal narrative to identify phrasing that correlated to explicit statements, implicit statements, or a lack of statements related to these 45 themes. I used those results to identify each theme as one that emerged explicitly, implicitly, or not at all from each participant's statements. The full results of this thematic emergence appear in Table 1 in Appendix 1. For the purposes of correlating participants' beliefs and perceptions about K-12 virtual educator preparation practices with the GaPSC standards for OTE endorsement (GaPSC, 2015b), I identified as strong themes only those that emerged as fully explicit among participants, explicit and implicit among all participants, or a predominance of explicit or implicit with no more than one participant whose responses failed to show evidence of explicit or implicit theme emergence. I identified 28 strong or overarching themes based on these criteria; those strong themes appear below in Table 1.

Table 1.

Strong Interview Themes According to Type of Source Emergence.

Theme	Explicit Theme Emergence Source	Implicit Theme Emergence Source	Theme Did Not Emerge
Building Confidence with Technology			
Perceptions about Online Instruction			
Appropriate Modeling for Online Courses			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use			
Virtual Support for Students' Learning Needs	All study participants	No one	No one
Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Teaching			
Competence with Online Instruction			
Online Instruction Versus Online Facilitation			
Improving Online Communication Skills			
LMS Competence	All but Winter	Winter	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Content Knowledge Mastery	All but Me	Me	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Integrate Technology into Teaching			
Establishing and Maintaining Strong Online Instructor Presence	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, and Me	Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Documented Success as a Traditional/f2f Instructor	Conrad, Astor, and Rudy	Winter, Ingers, Kerry, and Me	No one

Current OTE Program Design for Three Courses	All but Astor	No one	Astor
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Robust Content for Technology Knowledge			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible			
K-12 Educators Need to Be Adaptable			
K-12 Educators Need to Be Creative and Resourceful			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Good Communication Skills	All but Me	No one	Me
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How Technology Works in a Virtual Environment			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Troubleshoot Technology Issues			
K-12 Virtual Educators as Instructors versus Facilitators			
Insights into K-12 Virtual Educator Training			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Tolerance for Imperfections	Ingers	All others	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Everyone Can Learn Online	Conrad, Astor, and Ingers	Rudy, Winter, and Kerry	Me
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Embrace and Use Student-Centered Pedagogy	Astor	All but Astor and Me	Me
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Use Visual and Non-Visual Tools in Virtual Environments	Winter	All but Winter and Me	Me

Note: Conrad, Astor and Rudy are USG teacher educators. Winter is a K-12 virtual school administrator. Ingers and Kerry are K-12 virtual school educators. I am a f2f K-12 educator.

The first nine themes listed in Table 1 emerged from explicit statements made by all of the participants about these perceptions and beliefs:

- Building Confidence with Technology

- Perceptions about Online Instruction

- Appropriate Modeling for Online Courses

- K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use

- Virtual Support for Students' Learning Needs

- Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Teaching

- Competence with Online Instruction

- Online Instruction versus Online Facilitation

- Improving online communication skills

Participants contributed a variety of statements that supported their beliefs that these are important, if not the most important, elements that need to be addressed as a part of K-12 virtual educator preparation. Rudy said, ""During the webinar [assignment], students have to act like an online instructor." Conrad described instruction in their course as, "…we do take students from the design phase to the development phase and then I use facilitation phase." Astor reflected on the virtual instruction experience they had provided for their student Parker, saying, "…she was actually getting to design a real class, see it implemented, and then teach the students, and through it she was rating their work." According to Winter, when it comes to the requisites for hiring at their school, "…it's either a developer or a teacher who's been through [our] teacher training and then [our] adjunct teaching, and then we would bring them on board." When preparing to

become a K-12 virtual instructor, Ingers' experience was a close fit to what Winter

described: "I went through [their] training process…and I went through [their] student

teaching experience…all through the online environment." Examples from Kerry and I

were more detailed, as seen below:

> "for anybody who we hire…we put them through our training and development
> courses…we offer the training course first to inform everyone about online
> teaching…Then we do a five-week student teaching in an online student teaching
> program." (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

> "The QM® training together with the support and guidance of experienced online
> faculty in my department afforded me a well-structured and well-mentored
> introduction to the world of virtual instruction, but…my training did not include
> any type of practicum…I felt like the training I had received had barely scratched
> the surface in preparing me for that key moment where the rubber meets the road:
> working for six weeks with live students in a primarily asynchronous—but very
> real—online environment." (Appendix H)

The strong and explicit emergence of these themes from all participants in this

study speaks to the importance reality-based virtual instruction training from two

perspectives. In the instance of K-12 virtual educator preparation, the interviewees spoke

about the ways that this type of training is intended to prepare and actually prepared a K-

12 OTE candidate for a position as a virtual educator. My personal narrative presented an

equally important but nonetheless opposing view: the reality of how a virtual instructor

can feel or actually feels when they believe or perceive that an absence of reality-based

virtual instruction training falls short of preparing them to play the role of a real virtual

instructor in the real world. These views on the importance of rich, reality-based training

experiences also carry over and connect to the theme "Current OTE Program Design for

Three Courses". I shared Conrad's view on this theme in the teacher educator section of

this chapter where the interviewee noted that the current three-course OTE program

design is not sufficient to cover well all of the material that OTE candidates need as a

part of their training. This also led Conrad to say that they believe there needs to be

different types of OTE certification depending on a K-12 virtual educator's professional

role:

> "I don't think that the standards as they are written from the PSC really
> speak to the day-to-day work of teachers in virtual schools. I think it would
> be better if somehow they were divided between course designer and
> developer and then a second set which works for facilitation and course
> improvement." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

All participants in this study also emphasized the importance of communication: with

parents, with students, over the phone, and in synchronous and asynchronous meetings.

Rudy summed this up by saying that virtual instructors "…have to know how to manage

the online courses and how to maintain online interactions." The other participants in the

study made similar observations but provided much rich feedback when attesting to the

vital role that communication plays in virtual learning environments:

> "I think that being face-to-face with a student kind of serves as a crutch to
> accommodate, um, either a lack of, eh, it allows the teacher to
> accommodate mistakes or failure in communication…And when you are
> online as a teacher, all of those things really have to be, um, already
> mastered, such that when you're teaching online, you don't have to depend
>
> on that face-to-face interaction…" (Conrad, personal communication, May 9,
> 2016)
>
> "…obviously the need to be good communicators, and unfortunately, that
> means more than just being able to talk like what we're doing right now.
> They do need to have, um, you know, skills related to visual
> communication…" (Astor, personal communication, July 5, 2016)
>
> "…they have to be willing to reach out to their students and in different
> ways and have a different relationship than they have in a brick and
> mortar. They have to be comfortable with using the phone, with using
> texting, email—all of those things. On a professional level, they need to be
> able to bridge and make—build that relationship with that student through via
> technology." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)
>
> "I am monitoring my students more on a daily basis and offering them, you

know, sending them emails or giving them feedback with things that could specifically help them to improve their work. And, you know, following up with the email, following up with their parents, and making that phone call…" (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

"**Have strong communication skills**…I mean, we email very frequently, but also creating something out of like a news burst, sort of a quick little blast that kind of shows students what you want to show them and what you need without too much or too little information. **So that's something that can be a little bit challenging, from being able to have conversations with them on the phone and, you know, and in the online room as well. Just being able to communicate clearly with the students when you may not be able to see the work that's in front of them**, so obviously, it's easier, and we try to encourage students to give that to us so that we can. Um, one thing is that, **just ideas and ways on the relationships in the online environment. That seems to be most people's number-one concern, is figuring out how to create that relationship when it's online, and it can be extremely challenging.**" (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

"**Some courses were packed with online asynchronous communications and feedback from the instructors, who kept their promises to engage with students on the discussion threads. I also remember taking courses whose main page and overall LMS content looked nearly the same at the end of the semester as it had at the beginning**—most of the additional content came from required student participation on discussion boards. **In those instances, the instructors had stated in the syllabus that they would be regular participants in discussion threads, but that sadly turned out not to be the case.** Those same instructors also did not communicate with students unless the students first communicated with them via the LMS email… **I vowed to do as much as I thought necessary to ensure that my students' experiences in my courses consistently would be classified as good or great. If the syllabus stipulated instructor participation in discussion board threads, I would be there and be just as present as my students.**" (Appendix H)

There are three other strong themes that emerged as explicit statements from six

participants and as implicit statements from one participant:

- LMS competence

- K-12 virtual educators need content knowledge mastery

- K-12 virtual educators need to know how to integrate technology into teaching

LMS competence emerged as an implicit theme for Winter but was an explicit them for

all other participants. The themes related to need content knowledge mastery and

integrating technology into teaching emerged implicitly from my personal narrative but

explicitly from all of the interviews. In other words, these three themes were accounted

for explicitly by all but one study participant. This high level of explicit emergence

together with specific statements from the remaining interviewees still lends strength to

their credibility as strong needs by a K-12 virtual educator, and each participant had

statements that supported this notion. Rudy said, "…technology operations is really

important…you need to more about the technology and the way to integrate technology

into teaching…know how to manage the course and… the content." Winter's belief about

K-12 virtual educators in the context of LMS management was that "…they have to have

a strong content knowledge…[a] strong knowledge of the learning system that we

use…[and] teacher presence in the course…" Ingers, whose beliefs ran parallel to those

of Rudy and Winter, said, "…content knowledge is a plus…You have to have some basic

understanding of technology and computers to be able to use that as kind of a springboard

for the skills you need to be an online instructor." Astor, Conrad, and Kerry provided

more in-depth responses regarding their beliefs and perceptions about LMS competence,

content knowledge mastery, and technology integration into teaching practices:

> "I think [K-12 virtual educators] should be able to hop on and use, be
> fluent in how [they] use live, interactive tools like Google Hangout or
> Skype or whatever their supported medium happens to be.…virtual schools
> want you to have that face-to-face experience because there's the feeling
> that if you did your time, you must know your pedagogy. You must know
> your content. But you need the content and the pedagogical skills related to
> a particular area." (Astor, personal communication, May 26, 2016)

> "If they're designing the course, they need to have really good, strong
> content knowledge…but if they are facilitating the course and they are

comfortable with not necessarily being the central source of information and knowledge, they can facilitate a course as the lead learner and…be a generalist in terms of the content knowledge, as compared to the instructional designer who needs to have very in-depth knowledge of the content." (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

"…because of how online is structured, um, you have to have a clear understanding of the content... [you have to] practice with different technology…we have to search and try new technology and see what works. And what happens typically is that we'll find a great technology tool, and it will be fine, it will be great, and it's free, and then the company, they grow or something changes, and we have to change that and use, find a different tool that can basically work for the same purposes" (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

The next ten themes that emerged were tied explicitly to statements made by all but one of the interviewees. They are listed below:

- K-12 virtual educators need robust content where technology knowledge is concerned

- K-12 virtual educators need to be flexible

- K-12 virtual educators need to be adaptable

- K-12 virtual educators need to be creative and resourceful

- K-12 virtual educators need good communication skills

- K-12 virtual educators need to know how technology works in a virtual environment

- K-12 virtual educators need to know how to troubleshoot technology issues

- K-12 virtual educators need to serve as instructors instead of facilitators

- K-12 virtual educators need tolerance for imperfections

- Insights into K-12 virtual educator training

- Current OTE program design for three courses

The first nine themes in this list of spoke to specific knowledge sets and skills sets that the interviewees believed or perceived that a K-12 virtual educator needs to possess. These nine themes emerged explicitly from all participant interviews but did not emerge at all from the personal narrative (Appendix H); from my perspective, the limited amount of time that I have with online teaching experience in comparison with the other participants is a plausible explanation for the absence of this theme in the personal narrative. The last theme, "Current OTE program design for three courses", correlated to participants providing a glimpse of either what they had experienced when preparing to become K-12 educators (as per interviewee quotes earlier in this section) or, as in Winter's case, when speaking about K-12 in-house virtual educator training procedures (also as per earlier interviewee quotes). The last theme did not emerge at all from Astor's comments, which puzzled me since Astor holds a degree (Specialist) in Instructional Technology, regularly teaches online, and teaches Instructional Technology courses regularly at their USG institution. The common connection among all of these themes is a strong emergence of statements related to the skills and knowledge that nearly all participants deem necessary for K-12 virtual educator training procedures. Their strong emergence signals that they incorporate a body of beliefs and perceptions about K-12 virtual educator training procedures that can stand alone as food for thought towards best practices for these training procedures.

Three other themes that emerged correlated to a mixture of explicit and implicit statements on the part of all participants. Two of these themes emerged as a combination of explicit and implicit only. The other theme was distributed across all three categories because while it corresponded to either explicit emergence or implicit emergence for all

of the interviewees, it did not emerge at all from my personal narrative (Appendix H).

These three themes appear below:

- K-12 virtual educators need tolerance for imperfections

- Establishing and maintaining strong online instructor presence

- K-12 virtual educators need documented success as a traditional/f2f instructor

Ingers specifically noted how virtual environments have their imperfections and reminded K-12 virtual educators to be tolerant of these imperfections by saying, "…it's not always going to be perfect. You know, uh, the lessons are not always going to be perfect, the technology's not always going to be perfect." The other participants and I implied that virtual instructional settings are not always perfect with different comments. Conrad said, "...I think [K-12 virtual educators are] going to need really robust knowledge, and when technology gives them trouble, in trouble-shooting," and Rudy made a similar statement, saying, "… [OTE candidates] also have to know about problem-solving, and also need to have basic trouble-shooting skills." Astor implied that some virtual educators simply are just too lazy in their approaches to online instruction by saying, "Too often, [some K-12 virtual educators] don't use the power of this medium. They don't even try. They just say, 'Oh, my Skype doesn't work, so we're just going to use the phone." In a related vein, Winter implied that ongoing training is the key to solving problems with technology issues and imperfections. They said, "…we do a tech session for our teachers as ongoing staff development so that they're continuing to develop their capacity with technology as well." I can relate to this based on statements made in my personal narrative:

"…when I faced technology issues that required…the assistance of others, it bothered me that I did not know more—I wanted to solve the problems on my own, but I couldn't. There were so many things that my training had not covered, and I wasn't always sure what to ask or to whom when technology problems arose." (Appendix H)

Kerry's statement succinctly summed up all of these observations about the imperfections of technology and one way to solve the issue: "…you need someone who is willing to click around and problem-solve."

With regards to the second theme on this list, the teacher educators and I explicitly mentioned that K-12 virtual educators need to establish and maintain a strong online instructor presence. Rich, detailed participant quotes that support these beliefs and perceptions both explicitly and include:

"I think that being face-to-face with a student kind of serves as a crutch…it allows the teacher to accommodate mistakes or failure in communication or poor alignment of curriculum. And when you are online as a teacher, all of those things really have to be, already mastered…when you're teaching online…" (Conrad, personal communication, May 9, 2016)

"…they also have to know how to manage the online courses and how to maintain online interactions…Not just the interaction between learner[s] and also the learner and instructor, and…the learner and the interface, and…the interaction between the learner and the content…Online students need more help, okay? Because you cannot assume that they know everything…even if you only offer the written instructions, you have to make sure they understand that when they read…[you] have to provide clear instructions…in online courses, if you don't provide clear instructions, students are easy to get lost. Not just for adults, you know, even for young kids…they also need clear instructions." (Rudy, personal communication, June 14, 2016)

"obviously [they] need to be good communicators, and unfortunately, that means more than just being able to talk like what we're doing right now. They do need to have skills related to visual communication…there needs to be…this communication fluency…there needs to be teacher presence… this availability…they need to know how to schedule their time. And that's so important, is that they're available…and they feel available." (Astor, personal communication, May 26, 2016)

"…they have to be willing to reach out to their students and in different ways and have a, a different relationship than they have in a brick and mortar. They have to be comfortable with using the phone, with using texting, email—all of those things. On a professional level, they need to be able to bridge and make—build that relationship with that student through via technology. So, a strong teacher presence, being willing—and this is something that we work with our teachers on and we're still working on—being willing to meet face-to-face in the online environment. To turn that webcam on in an Adobe session and not just have it be the voice… they have to have the willingness or they have to be willing to go through the steps necessary to be comfortable with that type of communication." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

"I had taken both blended and fully online courses here at the university…Some courses were packed with online asynchronous communications and feedback from the instructors… [some had] LMS content that looked nearly the same at the end of the semester as it had at the beginning… [it was] stated in the syllabus that the instructors would be regular participants in discussion threads, but that sadly turned out not to be the case. Those same instructors also did not communicate with students unless the students first communicated with them via the LMS email. Having experienced both great and less-than-desirable learning dynamics in blended and online courses, I vowed to do as much as I thought necessary…If the syllabus stipulated instructor participation in discussion board threads, I would be there and be just as present as my students." (Appendix H)

The participants' beliefs and perceptions about online presence do more than show their support of these this theme as an essential component of a virtual educator's repertoire. Their words are interlaced with explicit and implicit references to the importance of good online communication skills (discussed earlier), such that there is a perceived fluid connection between online communications skills and the virtual instructor's online presence: they co-exist and cannot exist without each other, and when the virtual educator strengthens their performance with one, it helps the virtual educator strengthen their performance with the other.

As for the last theme in this set of three, only two of the three teacher educators (Conrad and Astor) made statements in their interviews that allowed the theme "K-12

virtual educators need documented success as a traditional/f2f instructor" to emerge

explicitly. Both of these teacher educators had thoughts to contribute in conjunction with

this theme. Conrad said, "I think [K-12 virtual educators] need to be capable of face-to-

face instruction and have mastered that face-to-face instructional process." Astor's

thoughts were similar to those of Conrad regarding f2f instructional proficiency:

"…virtual schools want you to have that face-to-face experience because there's the

feeling that if you did your time, you must know your pedagogy."

Although this theme emerged more implicitly from the interviews with the other

five participants and from my personal narrative, the quotes below still communicate the

importance of f2f instructional proficiency. These quotes also hint at the role it plays in

laying the foundation for virtual instruction while emphasizing that virtual instruction has

its own pedagogy, starting with a quote from Rudy: "…online, the teacher may not have

a chance to see their students constantly or face-to-face, in a face-to-face setting, so, they

have to know that students are different…" (Rudy, personal communication, June 14,

2016).

The other quotes that hinted at the importance of f2f instructional proficiency are:

"sometimes teachers taught with a disposition that, "If they didn't get it, they didn't get it, and we've got to move on." That is something coming from the face-to-face environment as well. I'd say that that's one of the dispositions that we struggled with." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

"I encounter many teachers that teach in a brick-and-mortar classroom that don't know anything about technology. And they don't have to, you know? They can be successful in the classroom without having that knowledge." (Ingers, personal communication, July 5, 2016)

"…in my opinion, if you are…a good teacher, you're a good teacher whether you're in the building or you're online. So you…would have to have an understanding that students can learn in different ways, because

otherwise, obviously, you wouldn't be an online teacher in the first place,

because you would want to be teaching the same way that you were taught." (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

"I am no different than the teachers trained in face-to-face instructional delivery striving to become virtual instructors. We suffer from the same disconnect: while we may have solid academic credentials from a teacher certification program that our institutions told us had prepared us for these next steps in our careers, we lack the on-the-job experience necessary to make us instantly proficient in a new position… I revisited the instructional standards in the state of Georgia related to both face-to-face and online instructional settings and paid particular attention to the ways in which they underscored the importance of successful face-to-face instruction as a necessary foundation and predecessor for successful online or virtual instruction (GaPSC, 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2015b)." (Appendix H)

The last three themes listed in Table 1 emerged from the participant interviews as partially or predominantly implicit. They are:

- K-12 virtual educators need to believe that everyone can learn online

- K-12 virtual educators need to embrace and use student-centered pedagogy

- K-12 virtual educators need to use visual and non-visual tools in virtual environment

Conrad stated unequivocally their belief that everyone can learn online and said that all virtual educators need to believe this as well: "They need to believe that all students can learn online given quality instruction and good coaching." Most statements made by participants attuned to the first two themes simultaneously by making instructional recommendations that hinge on differentiation of course material for learners, as shown below:

"the teacher may not have a chance to see their students, um, constantly or in a face-to-face setting, so they have to know that students are different. So I would highly recommend they encourage the students…try to learn

how to provide material in different formats…have to host different class activities…and also set up different class assessments, when they run online courses…they have to be patient and caring. Online students need more help, okay, you know? Because, you know, you cannot assume that they know everything, so they, you have to, even if you only offer the written instructions, you have to make sure they understand that they can, when they read." (Rudy, personal communication, June 14, 2016)

"if you are teaching a student, you shouldn't decide how much that student can learn. You should actually try to assume that student is capable of a whole lot, and that you're going to push them as far as you can. And that you don't put limits on kids just because, uh, you want to. That came up recently with my child's Spanish teacher, doing that to my kid. I was like, "You just can't do that where I come from!" You don't do that to people. You don't tell a kid they can't be a guitar player, you know, after their second guitar lesson. You don't do that." (Astor, personal communication, May 26, 2016)

"I think that they need to believe—and I think most teachers do because that's why we're here—is that every child can be successful. I think that's the most important thing. Every child can be successful. And we need to do whatever we can to help each child be successful. I think that's important, and I think, like I said, I think most teachers, that why have become teachers, because we want to save the world one child at a time. And I think online educators are the same. We're no different, you know? We, we want each child that we come into contact with to be successful." (Ingers, personal communication, May 26, 2016)

"I'm not sure that I think that there is any one belief that they need to have, other than that online education can work. You know, they can't come into it with a, with the belief that, "Well this, uh, this doesn't work, and I don't really"—and there are teachers out there who don't believe in it. I think that they have to buy into the idea that online education is something that is the future of education and is going to be used more and more in a blended setting as well as fully online." (Winter, personal communication, June 13, 2016)

"the person would have to have an understanding that students can learn in different ways, um, because otherwise, obviously, you wouldn't be an online teacher in the first place, um because you would want to be teaching the same way that you were taught. So any beliefs of, you know—not old school in a bad way—but maybe more traditional methods and not, you know, an understanding of trying to transfer to a new learning, um, methods, would be the only thing I feel like would be a huge difference between them…But the skills are going to be similar, just delivered in different methods." (Kerry, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

The next section of this chapter analyzes the findings and compares this mounting body of beliefs and perceptions thematically with the thematic coding applied to the GaPSC standards. The ways in which these two sets of themes align and diverge will be discussed to determine in what ways the voices of Georgia's teacher educators and virtual educators align with those echoed in the standards for OTE training practices in the state of Georgia.

Connecting Overarching Themes to the Standards

The series of discussions above that followed Table 1 illustrated how the 28 themes from that table emerged and met the criteria to be identified as strong themes representing participant beliefs and perceptions about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed by K-12 virtual educators for working in virtual settings. I compared these 28 themes to each other for potential repetition and found three different instances where themes were variations on the same common concept. I combined the themes "Having good communication skills" with "Improving online communication skills" to create the theme "Establish and improve online communication skills"; "Know the difference between online instruction and online facilitation" with "Knowing how to serve as an online instructor instead of an online facilitator" to create "Know how to instruct online instead of facilitate online learning"; and "Being flexible" with Being adaptable" to create "Be flexible and adaptable". Combining these themes yielded 25 overarching themes. I took these 25 overarching themes and reapplied constant comparison analysis via axial coding to further interconnect them in the interest of generating larger parent themes under which to categorize them (Boeije, 2002; Glaser,

1965). This last stage of axial coding allowed me to examine these 25 themes for overarching thematic identifiers that would align them with the knowledge, the skills, or the dispositions a K-12 virtual educator needs to work in a virtual classroom. This coding analysis resulted in fourteen of these themes becoming parent themes for the other eleven themes after placing each in categories related to knowledge, skills, and dispositions for K-12 virtual educators. The analysis also generated the need for creation of an additional category to house themes that attuned to K-12 virtual preparation practices in general. Four thematic categories emerged overall for comparison with the Georgia OTE Standards (GaPSC, 2015b): K-12 Virtual Educator Training and Dynamics, K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge, K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge and Skills Integration, and K-12 Virtual Educator Dispositions.

The next step in the analysis was to code the Georgia OTE Standards (GaPSC, 2015b) thematically using the 25 parent and child themes discussed above. The standard or standards that corresponded to each theme assumed that thematic identifier, and the theme was identified as emerging explicitly or implicitly from the standards. These themes by category (K-12 Virtual Educator Training and Dynamics, K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge, K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge and Skills Integration, and K-12 Virtual Educator Dispositions), the Georgia OTE Standards with which they align, and their emergence status from the standards appear below in Table 2. Parent and child themes that emerged explicitly across all interviews, the personal narrative, and the GaPSC OTE standards are marked with double asterisks (**).

Table 2.

Connecting Beliefs and Perceptions about K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions to Georgia OTE Standards by Category and Type of Emergence

Beliefs and Perceptions Themes by Category	Corresponding Georgia OTE Standard(s)	Emergence Type
K-12 Virtual Educator Training and Dynamics		
Building confidence with technology**	Standard 1.i VII	Explicit
	Standard 1.i.VIII	Explicit
Appropriate modeling for online courses**	All Standard 2 elements	Explicit
Current OTE program design♦♦♦ content for three courses:	Standards 1, 2, and 3—all parts	Explicit
K-12 instructional designers need own OTE standards	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
K-12 virtual educator trainers need own OTE standards	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
K-12 virtual educators need own OTE standards	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
Perceptions about online instruction:	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
Online instruction misconceptions	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
Technology misconceptions	Absent from Standards	Did not merge
Technology knowledge and expertise	Absent from Standards	Did not emerge
Insights into K-12 virtual educator training	Present in all standards	Implicit
K-12 virtual educators need documented success as traditional/f2f educators	Requirements section part A	Implicit
K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge		
Robust training content for technology** knowledge	Standards 1 and 2—all parts	Explicit
Good OTE preparation from USG programs	Standards 1, 2, and 3—all parts	Explicit
OTE program practice opportunities must mirror reality	Requirements section part B	Explicit
OTE candidates need positive technology experiences	Requirements section part B	Explicit
	All Standards—all parts	Implicit
Content area knowledge mastery	Standard 3.i.I	Implicit

| | Standard 3.ii.I | Implicit |
| | Standard 3.iii.1 | Implicit |

K-12 Virtual Educator Knowledge and Skills Integration

LMS knowledge and competence: **	Standards 2 and 3—all parts	Explicit
Competence with online instruction	Standard 2.i.V	Implicit
	Standard 3—all parts	Implicit
Know how technology works in a virtual environment	Standard 1.i.III	Implicit
	Standard 1.i: I, II, IV V, VI, VII, VIII	Explicit
Know how to integrate technology** into teaching	Standard 1—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.i: X, XI	
Know how to troubleshoot technology issues	Standard 1.i.IV	Explicit
	Standard 2.vi.II	Implicit
Know how to instruct online instead of** facilitate online learning	Standard 2.i: I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX	Explicit
Establish and maintain a strong online** instructor presence	Standard 2.ii: I, II, III, IV, VI, VII	Explicit
Establish and improve online communication skills	Standard 2.i: IV, V, VI, VII, VIII	Implicit
	Standard 2.ii: IV, VI, VII	Implicit
Fluency with technology tool use**	Standard 1—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.i: X, XI	Explicit
	Standard 2.iv.II	Explicit
Provide virtual support for students'** learning needs	Standard 2.ii—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.iii—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.v: I, II, III, VI, VII	Explicit
	Standard 2.vi—all parts	Explicit
Use visual and non-visual technology tools in virtual environment	Standard 1.i: VII, VIII	Implicit
	Standard 1.i: II, III, IV, VI	Explicit
Be creative and resourceful**	Standard 3—all parts	Explicit

K-12 Virtual Educator Dispositions		
Believe that everyone can learn online	Standards 2 and 3—all parts	Implicit
Be flexible and adaptable**	Standard 2.i: III, VI	Implicit
	Standard 2.i.IX	Explicit
	Standard 2.ii.V	Explicit
	Standard 2.iv—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.v.II, VI, VII	Explicit
	Standard 2.vi: II	Explicit
Favor instruction over facilitation	Standards 2 and 3—all parts	Implicit

Embrace and use student-centered pedagogy	Standard 2.i: I, III, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX	Explicit
	Standard 2.ii—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.iii—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.iv—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.v—all parts	Explicit
	Standard 2.vi—all parts	Explicit
Be tolerant of imperfection	Absent from standards	Did not emerge

Note: ** denotes parent themes whose emergence was explicit or predominantly explicit across the interviews, the personal narrative, and the GaPSC OTE Standards; ⁺⁺⁺ denotes parent themes whose emergence was explicit or predominantly explicit across the interviews, the personal narrative and the GaPSC OTE Standards but whose child themes did not emerge from the standards.

The themes-to-standards comparisons conducted in the final analysis for this study (Table 2) showed that seven of the parent themes together with their child or sub-themes resulted from explicit emergence or predominantly explicit emergence from the interview responses, the personal narrative, and the GaPSC OTE Standards. These seven themes were:

- Building confidence with technology

- Appropriate modeling for online courses

- Robust training content for technology knowledge

- LMS knowledge and competence

- Be creative and resourceful

- Be flexible and adaptable

- Embrace and use student-centered pedagogy

All but one of these seven parent themes emerged explicitly from participants in this study and the GaPSC OTE Standards; the theme "Be flexible and adaptable"

emerged as explicit from the participants' responses and the personal narrative but as predominantly explicit from the GaPSC OTE Standards as shown in Table 2.

Another parent theme that emerged explicitly across the interviews, the personal narrative, and the GaPSC OTE Standards, LMS knowledge and competence, houses ten child or sub-themes. Listed below are five of its child themes that also emerged explicitly across all of these areas in the study:

- Knowing how to integrate technology into teaching

- Knowing how to instruct online instead of facilitating online learning

- Establishing and maintaining a strong online instructor presence

- Fluency with technology tool use

- Providing virtual supports for students' learning needs

The explicit and predominantly explicit emergence of the seven aforementioned parent themes and the additional parent theme with child themes across all areas in this study shows that K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia are aligned participants' beliefs and perceptions about what K-12 virtual educators need when preparing to work in an online classroom. This thematic alignment indicates that these themes are of high value to both the study participants and to the standards creators. It also indicates that these themes are of utmost importance to the standards creators when considering which aspects of K-12 OTE preparation are essential and requisite for shaping the body of standards that governs K-12 OTE in the state of Georgia.

The remaining "LMS knowledge and competence" child themes that emerged explicitly across the interviews and the personal narrative emerged explicitly, implicitly, or both from the GaPSC OTE standards depending on how strongly they aligned with

wording in the standards. The themes "Competence with online instruction" and "Establish and improve online communication skills" emerged implicitly from the standards. These results coupled with the lack of explicit emergence from the interviews and the personal narrative indicate that these themes form a tacit knowledge about how things are or are expected to be (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1980); in this instance and within the context of this study, how participants in this study expect online instruction to be based their own past experiences with it and with instructional practices in general. The themes "Know how technology works in a virtual environment", "Know how to troubleshoot technology issues", and "Use visual and non-visual technology tools in virtual environment" emerged explicitly and implicitly from the interviews, the personal narrative, and different statements throughout the GaPSC OTE Standards. Five other parent themes emerged explicitly or predominantly explicitly from the interviews and the personal narrative but emerged as predominantly or entirely implicit from the standards: "Insights into K-12 virtual educator training", "K-12 virtual educators need documented success as traditional/f2f educators", "Content area knowledge mastery", "Believe that everyone can learn online" and "Favor instruction over facilitation". The standards in Georgia as currently written employ phrasing and terminology that addresses each of these themes implicitly. The standards outline what OTE candidates will see, do, and experience as a part of their training; they also address diverse learning populations with statements that outline specifications for differentiating based on cultural understandings, physical limitations with course content or course access, and special education/IEP-based learning needs and strategies. The standards also specify that this is an endorsement program, which means that OTE candidates already must have a teaching

certificate in the state of Georgia to which the endorsement may be applied. This, in turn, implies that OTE candidates have met all requirements for professional performance in order to possess a Georgia teaching certificate.

Themes such as these above that emerged as explicit or predominantly explicit across the interviews and document analyses but implicitly from the standards also could be an indicator that while participants value them greatly, they as well as the standards developers alike may consider these a form of tacit knowledge as opposed to concrete knowledge, skills, or dispositions that require specific, written inclusion in the standards.

Of particular interest are the themes that did not emerge from the standards despite substantiated explicit emergence from the interviews and document analyses. This was the case for three different parent themes. One parent theme, "Current OTE program design for three courses", emerged explicitly across all interviews, the personal narrative, and the GaPSC OTE Standards. Its three child themes, however, did not emerge at all from the state standards. These three child themes are:

- K-12 instructional designers need their own OTE standards

- K-12 virtual educator trainers need their own OTE standards

- K-12 virtual educators need their own OTE standards

The explicit emergence of this parent theme, which stems from the category "K-12 Virtual Educator Training and Dynamics" found in Table 2, correlates directly to statements from all interview participants that described their professional experiences either as virtual instructor trainers or as virtual instructors in-training. One interviewee, Conrad, contributed a set of professional beliefs about OTE program design practices that the other interviewees did not; this set of beliefs constitutes the child themes shown

above. Conrad believes that the current practice of offering three sequential courses leading to the K-12 OTE is insufficient in that there is too much content to cover in just three courses. Conrad also believes that the skills that a K-12 virtual educator needs depends on the educator's role, with the skills needed by an instructional designer being different from those needed by a course instructor or facilitator.

The OTE courses currently offered at the USG institutions where Conrad and Rudy work are one endorsement altogether. Conrad believes that the standards as currently written by the GaPSC do not really speak to the day-to-day work of K-12 virtual school teachers and said that it would be better to have two sets of standards: one for course designers and developers and a second set for facilitation and course improvement. OTE Standards for the state of Georgia currently could best be described as a single set of one-size-fits-all standards given that they do not distinguish OTE preparation needs or offer specialized OTE preparation that corresponds to the specific jobs or functions of Georgia K-12 virtual educators.

Another theme from the category "K-12 Virtual Educator Training Dynamic" did not emerge from the state standards. The parent theme "Perceptions about Online Instruction" and its three child themes ("Online instruction misconceptions", "Technology misconceptions", and "Technology knowledge and expertise") emerged explicitly from all interviews and the personal narrative as issues that need to be addressed as a part of K-12 virtual instruction preparation practices, yet they failed to emerge even implicitly from the state standards. One other parent code that did not emerge from the standards, "Be tolerant of imperfection", comes from the category "K-12 Virtual Educator Dispositions"; this theme did not have any child themes. The absence

of these three parent themes from the GaPSC OTE Standards coupled with their categorizations in Table 2 provides evidence that these three themes in particular, at least from the perspective of the standards creators, have not yet arisen as K-12 virtual educator preparation concerns that need to be addressed explicitly in the standards for the state of Georgia.

Summary

In this chapter, I looked at how USG teacher educators, a K-12 virtual school administrator, and K-12 virtual school educators answered four different series of questions aimed at exploring their professional beliefs and perceptions about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed by K-12 virtual educators to work in a virtual classroom. I did this by conducting one-on-one interviews with individuals from these three educator groups. I then transcribed their interviews. I next examined these transcripts and my personal narrative for statements that correlated to these beliefs and perceptions. I assigned thematic codes to the different belief and perceptions statements as I identified them. I then used constant comparison analysis to these themes to align them and progressively reclassify them. Through constant comparison analysis, I was able to attribute emergence strength to these themes and classify them as stand-alone themes or connect them to each other by assigning some the role of parent theme over others that I identified as child themes or sub-themes. I then applied this collection of strong themes to the GaPSC OTE standards as codes to determine if the wording and phrasing of the standards attuned to these codes. Most of these themes emerged both explicitly and implicitly from the Georgia standards much as they did from the interview transcripts and the personal narrative.

One stand-alone theme and two parent themes as well as their child themes did not emerge from the standards:

- The need for OTE program design to include training based on standards specific to three different professional in virtual education (instructional designer, educator trainers, and virtual educators)

- The need to address K-12 OTE candidate perceptions about online instruction (this includes misconceptions about online instruction, technology, technology knowledge, and technology expertise)

- The need for K-12 virtual educators to be tolerant of imperfections that arise in virtual settings.

These three themes represent concerns or perceived shortcomings that the teacher educators, the K-12 virtual school administrator, and the K-12 virtual educators have regarding current K-12 OTE preparation practices. The next chapter will discuss these results and their significance more fully.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The number of K-12 online programs and course offerings has increased across the United States and across the state of Georgia in the last decade, which has raised questions about the quality of preparation K-12 OTE candidates receive in virtual educator training program. Most teacher colleges in the nation must address both CAEP standards and their individual state standards for traditional teacher preparation. CAEP standards as currently written acknowledge that technology is a critical area of teacher preparation, and organizations such as iNACOL, SREB, and QM have established standards for quality online teaching that are based on the belief that online teaching requires special skill sets and considerations (Hathaway & Norton, 2012; iNACOL, 2011; QM, 2011; SREB, 2006). Even with standards in place, preparing K-12 OTE candidates to become online educators comes with a wide range of challenges when it comes to evaluating OTE preparation practices for validity, relevance, and effectiveness (Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012a; 2012b). The field of K-12 online learning currently lacks a significant body of literature related to K-12 OTE program design in terms of how institutions of higher education can best prepare their candidates for careers as K-12 virtual educators.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and beliefs held by USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia about the effectiveness of current K-12 OTE candidate preparation

practices in the interest of addressing this gap in the literature. By using a qualitative case study structured through a constructivism paradigm, I was able to identify how educators from these three professional contexts perceive current K-12 OTE preparation practices in terms of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they deem necessary for K-12 virtual educators who work in virtual classrooms. Stake (1995, 2005) noted that case study generally is the ideal qualitative design for studies seeking to explore actions taking place in bounded systems as in the instance of this body of research, particularly when they are bounded by time or activity (Creswell, 2014) or by singularity (Simons, 2009). Much of the conceptual framework of this study adhered to the designs prescribed by Stake (1995; 2005) and Simons (2009), but the inclusion of my personal narrative took Stake's (1995; 2005) observations about the importance of the mini-case and allowed me to expand this framework and include the personal narrative mini-case to further Stake's emphasis on the importance of considering the researcher's own beliefs and perceptions and actually including them as an active part of this study. Doing so permitted gave a voice to my perspectives as possible while also taking care to address my own positionality when it comes to my dual role as a participant with a voice and as a researcher seeking to know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of my participants' lived experiences based on my own internal frame of reference (Gemignani, 2011; Moustakas, 1990).

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from my study together with their importance and significance. I will conclude this chapter with a reflection on the limitations, a discussion of how this study can be used to inform professional practices in the state of Georgia and suggestions for future research opportunities.

Explanation of Findings

The research questions posed by this study sought to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that USG teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educations believed or perceived as necessary or desirable in the ideal virtual K-12 instructor. Based on the findings in the previous chapter, current K-12 OTE preparation practices in the state of Georgia are well-aligned to the participants' beliefs and perceptions of what constitutes appropriate K-12 OTE candidate preparation based on evidence of strong thematic alignments between the participants' beliefs and perceptions and the GaPSC OTE Standards that guide K-12 OTE program design in all USG institutions of higher education. Analysis of educator feedback in this study identified three themes that correspond to issues or areas of concern expressed by all participants:

- The need for OTE program design to include training based on standards specific to three different professional capacities in virtual education (instructional designer, educator trainers, and virtual educators)

- The need to address K-12 OTE candidate perceptions about online instruction (this includes misconceptions about online instruction, technology, technology knowledge, and technology expertise)

- The need for K-12 virtual educators to be tolerant of imperfections that arise in virtual settings.

These themes do not alignment with any of the wording in the current Georgia standards and failed to emerge from thematic coding of the standards. K-12 OTE program design is driven by the GaPSC OTE Standards. The absence of theme

emergence within the context of this study is intended to indicate the absence of a practice or an idea from currently reality or present practices. The current standards do not prescribe K-12 OTE preparation practices that differentiate among instructional designers, educator trainers, and virtual educators; this information is easily obtainable simply by reading the GaPSC OTE Standards and noting their absence. Their absence from the emergent themes in this study lends credence to the study design: the lack of emergence of any one theme implies the absence in reality of a practice or idea to which that theme is connected. Within the context of the study design and the beliefs and perceptions as a phenomenon unique to this case, the absence of the theme "K-12 virtual educators need to be tolerant of imperfections", the parent theme "Perceptions about online instruction", and the three child themes "Online instruction misconceptions", "Technology misconceptions", and "Technology knowledge and expertise" means that these themes do not have to be discussed explicitly as a part of K-12 OTE preparation practices and implies that they do not exist formally in the K-12 OTE curriculum in the state of Georgia. In other words, these results indicate what is and is not currently required as a part of K-12 OTE preparation practices in the state of Georgia; they neither confirm nor deny to what degree, if any, they arise as topics of conversations in K-12 OTE program courses. Additionally, these results do not imply or guarantee that the participants' beliefs and perceptions would be dismissed in the eyes of the standards creators. They do, however, demonstrate a void in K-12 OTE preparation practices that all participants in this study—teacher educators, K-12 virtual administrators, K-12 virtual educators, and myself—believe needs to be filled within the context of this study.

Implications

Implications of this study exist at the state level within the state of Georgia. As noted in the literature review chapter of this dissertation, the current K-12 OTE Standards set forth by the GaPSC are grounded in ISTE standards, which are not specific to online learning. The GaPSC recently established an Online Teaching Endorsement Task Force that has been charged with reviewing the current GaPSC Online Teaching Endorsement Rule (505-3-.95) (See Appendix F). The task force held its first work session in a f2f setting on September 12, 2016, well after I had completed my research and analysis for this dissertation. I was among the educators present, and I anticipate involvement in future task force work sessions. I intend to share the findings from this study with other task force members, which includes K-12 online learning experts from the state of Georgia. As such, this study has the potential to drive discussion leading to changes in K-12 OTE preparation practices in the state of Georgia, starting with feedback from K-12 teacher educators and practitioners in the state that may facilitate decisions made about what to include in a new set of K-12 OTE standards and from what other standards sources to draw their content.

Study Contributions

This study makes contributions to literature in the field of K-12 online learning by virtue of examining factors related to K-12 online virtual educator preparation practices. An extensive search of literature on this topic yielded research by Shepherd et al. (2016) and Barbour and Harrison (2016) as the most recent contributions to research on issues related to K-12 online virtual educator preparation practices. This study contributes to overall knowledge of K-12 education practices in the state of Georgia by providing an

overview of K-12 OTE preparation practices as viewed and understood by K-12 teacher educators and K-12 virtual school practitioners while also providing insight into what K-12 virtual educators experience in the virtual classroom in terms of what success, challenges, and failure look like in a K-12 virtual setting.

From a methodological perspective, this study contributes to the body of literature that supports the use of case study in a myriad of settings. Case study traditionally has enjoyed use in fields such as psychology, sociology, or other social science fields (Moustakas, 1990; Simons, 2009). As an emerging researcher in the fields of qualitative methodologies and instructional technology, I regularly seek ways to integrate the two to make my studies more meaningful and richer in terms of the topics I study. Moustakas (1990) wrote, "Our most significant awarenesses are developed from our own internal searches and from our attunement and empathetic understanding of others" (p. 26). As case study goes, Stake (2005) cited Campbell (1975) and Vaughan (1992) in noting that even intrinsic case study can be seen as a small step toward grand generalization. This is evidenced by the how the results of this study identified issues with K-12 OTE candidate preparation practices that, based on the recent work by Shepherd et al. (2016) share commonalities with issues surrounding K-12 virtual educator pre-service training practices in the state of Wyoming. This study was important because of the light it shed on current K-12 OTE preparation practices in Georgia and perceived shortcomings with those processes as it was in helping me as the researcher make connections with similar studies or cases occurring almost simultaneously in other parts of the country. Because of its bound nature within the state of Georgia, this case represents not to the world but to

itself. Its value lies in its ability to present complex issues for further investigation and helping to better define the limits of generalizability (Stake, 2005).

Limitations

The limitations of this study lie in its design, my own predisposed notions as the researcher, and its participant pool. As noted in the methodology discussion in chapter four, the inability to generalize findings frequently is viewed as a limitation of case study research tradition. At the same time, case study often is applauded as a research approach given its inherent propensity to provide rich, thick description laden with details. This thick description can help readers recognize essential similarities between cases, which allows the reader to establish a basis for naturalistic generalization, described by Stake (1980) as a partially intuitive process on the part of the researcher that results from the researcher's own recognition of similarities between objects and issues in and out of context.

One issue that weighed heavily on my mind as a researcher questioned the validity of K-12 OTE preparation practices within programs currently offered by USG institutions. This question assumed an oversight in attention to detail on the part of these institutions when preparing K-12 OTE candidates. This question stems from professional discussions that took place prior to conducting this study. Different individuals who worked as USG teacher trainers, K-12 virtual educators, and traditional f2f K-12 educators had commented that they knew from experience or via a colleague's experiences that Georgia's K-12 virtual schools required potential hires and/or new hires to undergo further training—usually in-house—as a part of these schools hiring them as K-12 virtual educators. This troubled me, since nearly all of my own educational training

leading to K-12 certification and endorsements in the state of Georgia had occurred at a USG institutions of higher education. I did not expect the interviews I conducted for this study, particularly the one with Winter, the K-12 virtual school administrator, to validate my suspicions. It surprised me to learned about the great lengths to which Winter's virtual school requires in-house training in addition to the K-12 OTE preparation offered by USG institutions of higher education. This served to reinforce my notion that there must be a gap in terms of what USG teacher educators and virtual schools in the state of Georgia view as appropriate and sufficient K-12 virtual educator preparation practices. In my personal experience, all of my professional needs in terms of pedagogical training and content knowledge could be satisfied—and had been satisfied—by courses offered by my university. This new knowledge shattered my perceptions of what constituted timely and effective educator training: since when did practitioners in the field know more about how to prepare educators than the education experts? This aligns with the findings from Ferdig et al. (2009) mentioned earlier in the dissertation literature review: K-12 virtual schools know what they need their educators to be able to do in terms of knowledge and skill sets, but and there often are not enough institutions or programs available. In other words, necessity became the mother of invention. This takes the notion of limitations to a different plateau: that of institutional limitations. This study, when viewed through the lens of limitations, is highlighting limitations that occurred in a context that has its own unique limitations.

This case study was situated in the COEs of different institutions of higher learning and the administrative and instructional levels of different K-12 virtual schools across the state of Georgia. As such, the context of this study limited its findings as

unique to the particular beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of the participants that constitute this case. As previously stated, the purpose of this study was not to generalize to all cases. The small number of participants within the study context, particularly the participation of only one K-12 virtual school administrator, also qualifies as a limitation of this study as the knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of one individual cannot be generalized at all to the entire population of K-12 virtual administrators in the same virtual school or even in the state of Georgia. Conducting a case study for this type of research still is reasonable and acceptable owing to the purpose for which was designed: to contribute to existing knowledge in the field of K-12 OTE preparation practices in USG institutions of higher education in the interest of identifying ways that current practices effectively prepare OTE candidates and require change to continue preparing them effectively.

Future Research

The findings from this study highlighted perceived shortcomings with Georgia's current K-12 OTE preparation practices and could serve as the rationale for conducting a study similar to that of Shepherd et al. (2016). In this study, the authors created new virtual education courses working in conjunction with the state of Wyoming's department of education, and the resulting courses targeted many of the same technological and instructional challenges faced by K-12 virtual educator candidates as highlighted by participants in this study, including communication issues such as facilitating student interactions in synchronous and asynchronous delivery, how to support online learners effectively, how to engage online learners effectively, issues with tool implementation and use owing to a lack of mastery with design theory. All participants in this study

attuned explicitly to these and other online instruction issues under the theme "Be tolerant of imperfection" and cited these and similar issues as ones about which all virtual instructors need to be aware and need to be prepared to face. Incorporating training into K-12 OTE preparation practices similar to that incorporated by the state of Wyoming would go far in making K-12 OTE candidates more aware and better prepared to handles technology issues in virtual settings as they arise.

Astor mentioned one area of K-12 online instruction that no one else did during the interviews: technology training for K-12 virtual school administrators. Astor shared briefly shared with me that a Georgia K-12 virtual school administrator had shared their frustration at being unable to find training specific to educators in their field. Astor told me that they agree with the administrator's observation that training needs to be developed that helps K-12 virtual school administrators with skill sets needed in their field. Several authors (Dexter, 2011; Leonard & Leonard, 2006; McLeod, 2011; McLeod, Bathon, & Richardson, 2011; McLeod & Richardson, 2011) have researched this very topic and noted that the current focus on technology as related to school leadership still remains more heavily focused on the technology tools themselves than on training school leaders to understand how to approach transforming learning environments via the use of rich and powerful technologies. While educational and school leadership is a different field than that of K-12 teacher preparation, these fields are at the heart of educational and instructional practices regardless of the academic setting. It is only logical that more research be done to further the growth and development of both where K-12 online learning environments are concerned.

With enrollment in K-12 virtual schools projected to continue to rise in the state of Georgia and in other states across the nation, more research like the present study will need to be conducted to identify new virtual education paradigms and challenges as they arise. Staying abreast of new developments and challenges in K-12 online learning and instruction in the state of Georgia is key. Examining these through open discussions in USG institutions of higher learning and in research similar to this study will go far in identifying and addressing new ways to develop and structure future K-12 OTE preparation practices in ways that provide timely and deeper development of K-12 online educator candidates for careers in K-12 virtual education settings.

Conclusion

This dissertation has shown that there are issues and concerns held by teacher educators, K-12 virtual school administrators, and K-12 virtual educators in the state of Georgia about current K-12 OTE preparation practices. The results showed that issues stemming from problems and challenges related to a lack of customization in virtual educator training, perceptions and misconceptions about online instruction and technology knowledge, and imperfections in the K-12 virtual setting, can and do impacting a K-12 virtual educator's success in the virtual classroom. These results led to a call for more research in the field that focuses on identifying and addressing such issues in the interest of driving the development of OTE preparation practices that provide timely and deeper development of K-12 online educator candidates. To arrive at these conclusions, I rationalized the need for an investigation of this kind in chapter one. Chapter two presented an overview of research trends related to online learning to

demonstrate a lack of literature in the field of K-12 OTE program preparation design and also calls for research in this area from researchers in the field.

Chapter three provided the rationale for conducting the study as a qualitative study of case situated in a constructivist paradigm with my personal narrative as a mini-case. Using a mini-case further situated my engagement with the study by outlining my current context and professional positionality as related to online learning and online instruction training experiences. This chapter also included evidence from seminal qualitative researchers in the field that strongly underpinned this study design and favored including the positionality of the researcher. Conducting the study in this fashion allowed me to probe issues more quickly and in-depth; it also afforded me opportunities to ask follow-up questions as needed to facilitate richer and deeper responses from participants.

Chapter four reported the findings of the study via the use of constant comparison analysis coupled with the inclusion of tables and rich description from participants to aid the emergence of issues that participants in this study perceived as shortcomings and flaws in current K-12 OTE preparation practices. This chapter served to offer an explanation for these findings and their relevance to current K-12 OTE preparation program design as related to preparing OTE candidates to become virtual educators. This chapter also identified the contributions that this study has made to K-12 virtual educators as practitioners and also to researchers in the field of K-12 online learning. It is my hope that the uniqueness of this study inspires further research to increase the scope and depth of knowledge in the field of K-2 online learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Comprehensive List of USG Institutions by Group

Research Universities:

Georgia Institute of Technology

Georgia Regents University

Georgia State University

**University of Georgia

Comprehensive Universities:

**Georgia Southern University

**Kennesaw State University

**University of West Georgia

**Valdosta State University

State Universities:

Albany State University

Armstrong State University

Clayton State University

**Columbus State University

Fort Valley State University

Georgia College & State University

Georgia Southwestern State University

Middle Georgia State University

Savannah State University

University of North Georgia

** Denotes those offering a Certificate for Online Teaching or Online Teaching Endorsement

Appendix B: IRB Approval for Consent to Conduct Study

Zimbra   **lap6562@kennesaw.edu**

Study 16-492: Perceptions of Online Teaching Endorsement Program Effectiveness in Georgia: A Case Study

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   From : irb@kennesaw.edu   Tue, May 10, 2016 02:40 PM
Subject : Study 16-492: Perceptions of Online Teaching
            Endorsement Program Effectiveness in Georgia: A Case
            Study
     To : lap6562@kennesaw.edu
     Cc : irb@kennesaw.edu

5/10/2016

Leslie Pourreau

RE: Your followup submission of 5/9/2016, Study #16-492: Perceptions of Online Teaching
Endorsement Program Effectiveness in Georgia: A Case Study

Dear Ms. Pourreau:

Your application for the new study listed above has been administratively reviewed. This
study qualifies as exempt from continuing review under DHHS (OHRP) Title 45 CFR Part
46.101(b)(2) - educational tests, surveys, interviews, public observations. The consent
procedures described in your application are in effect. You are free to conduct your study.

Please note that all proposed revisions to an exempt study require IRB review prior to
implementation to ensure that the study continues to fall within an exempted category of
research. A copy of revised documents with a description of planned changes should be
submitted to irb@kennesaw.edu for review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for keeping the board informed of your activities . Contact the IRB at
irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further
information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: avega4@kennesaw.edu

Appendix C: Interview Instrument for University System of Georgia Teacher

Educators

Please state the following:

1. Your rank and position at your USG institution:
_____

2. Your department at your USG institution:
_____

3. Total number of years as full-time faculty at an institution of higher learning:
_____

4. Number of years teaching at your USG institution: _____

5. Number of years training K-12 face-to-face educators at your USG institution:
_____

6. Number of years training K-12 virtual educators at your USG institution:
_____

7. Your ethnicity: _____
8. Your age: _____

9. The institution(s) from which you received your degree(s) and the degree(s) conferred:
_____
_____

1. I am interested in knowing about your beliefs and perceptions as a teacher educator regarding K-12 teacher preparation and instruction. I also am interested in the experiences you have had preparing K-12 teacher educators to become face-to-face and virtual instructors. What types of experiences have you had preparing K-12 educators for face-to-face instruction, and what have they been like? What types of experiences have you had preparing K-12 educators for virtual instruction, and what have they been like? (Probing question if necessary: Is there anywhere else that you have worked in K-12 online education? Is there anything else that you have done?)

2. What are the particular skills that you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular knowledge do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular dispositions (attitudes or beliefs) do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? In which ways do you believe that the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that a K-12 virtual teacher needs for working in an online classroom differ from the ones that face-to-face K-12 teachers should have?

3. Could you please tell me about an instance where an educator trained by you and hired by a K-12 virtual school in Georgia was a success story and why? What do you believe contributed to that teacher's success?

4. Could you please tell me about an instance where an educator trained by you and hired by a K-12 virtual school in Georgia struggled or experienced challenges? What do you believe contributed to the teacher's struggles and/or challenges?

5. What else can you tell me about how your institution prepares virtual K-12 teachers? What other characteristics and skills can you think of that the program at your institution promotes?

Appendix D: Interview Instrument for Georgia K-12 Virtual School Administrators

Please state the following:

1. Your position at your K-12 virtual school: _____

2. Your role at your K-12 virtual school: _____

3. Number of years teaching in a traditional K-12 environment in Georgia: _____

4. Number of years as an administrator in a traditional K-12 environment in Georgia: _____

5. Number of years teaching in a K-12 virtual environment in Georgia: _____

6. Number of years as an administrator in a K-12 virtual environment in Georgia: _____

7. Your ethnicity: _____

8. Your age: _____

9. The institution from which you received your degree(s) and the degree(s) conferred:
_____
_____

1. I am interested in knowing about your beliefs and perceptions about K-12 online teacher preparation and instruction from an educational leadership perspective. I also am interested in the experiences you have had as an administrator in a K-12 online learning environment. What types of experiences have you had, and what have they been like? (Probing question if necessary: Is there anywhere else that you have worked in K-12 online education? Is there anything else that you have done?)

2. What are the particular skills that you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular knowledge do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular dispositions (attitudes or beliefs) do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? In which ways do you believe that the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that a K-12 virtual teacher needs for working in an online classroom differ from the ones that face-to-face K-12 teachers should have?

3. Could you please tell me about an instance where a teacher hired to work at your virtual school was a success story and why?

4. Could you please tell me about an instance where a teacher hired to work at your virtual school struggled or experienced challenges and what that was like?

5. Is there anything that you have to do post-hire to prepare virtual K-12 teachers to teach at your school? What characteristics and skills does the program at your institution promote?

Appendix E: Interview Instrument for Georgia K-12 Virtual Educators

Please state the following:

1. Your position at your K-12 virtual school: _____

2. Your role at your K-12 virtual school: _____

3. Total number of years serving as a K-12 educator: _____

4. Your field(s) of certification: _____

5. Number of years as an educator in a traditional K-12 environment in Georgia: _____

6. Number of years as an educator in a K-12 virtual environment in Georgia: _____

7. Your ethnicity: _____

8. Your age: _____

9. The institution(s) from which you received your degree(s) and the degree(s) conferred:
_____
_____

1. I am interested in knowing about your beliefs and perceptions about K-12 online teacher preparation and instruction from a virtual educator perspective and the experiences you have had as an educator in a K-12 online learning environment. What types of experiences have you had, and what have they been like? (Probing question if necessary: Is there anywhere else that you have worked in K-12 online education? Is there anything else that you have done?)

2. What are the particular skills that you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular knowledge do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? What particular dispositions (attitudes or beliefs) do you believe a K-12 virtual teacher needs to work in an online classroom? In which ways do you believe that the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that a K-12 virtual teacher needs for working in an online classroom differ from the ones that face-to-face K-12 teachers should have?

3. Is there anything that you had to do post-hire to prepare for becoming a virtual instructor at your school?

4. If so, what are the characteristics and skills that this additional training promoted?

Appendix F: Georgia Professional Standards Commission—Online Teaching

Endorsement Program

Effective June 15, 2016

505-3-.95 ONLINE TEACHING ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

(1) **Purpose.** This rule states field-specific content standards for approving endorsement programs that prepare individuals to teach classes within an online environment and supplements requirements in GaPSC Rule 505-3-.01, REQUIREMENTS AND STANDARDS FOR APPROVING EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

(2) **Requirements.**

(a) A GaPSC-approved professional educator preparation provider may seek state approval to offer this field as either a stand-alone endorsement program or as an endorsement program embedded in a GaPSC-approved initial preparation program or an advanced (degree-only) preparation program. In addition to meeting all applicable approval requirements and standards, embedded endorsement programs must meet requirements specified in paragraph (e) 3. (viii) of GaPSC Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01, REQUIREMENTS AND STANDARDS FOR APPROVING EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

(b) Candidates accepted into this endorsement program shall complete an online practicum or online internship experience appropriate to the grade level of the base certificate field.

(c) To receive approval, a GaPSC-approved educator preparation provider shall offer a preparation program described in program planning forms, catalogs, and syllabi addressing the following standards:

1. Standard I: Content Knowledge, Skills, and Concepts for Instructional Technology

(i) The program shall insure that the candidate possesses knowledge, skills, and understanding of concepts related to technology (as described in the ISTE National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers) as well as competency in technology specific to an online learning environment.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I) effectively use and assist others in word-processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software;

(II)   effectively use Internet browsers, email applications and online etiquette. Candidates additionally can design and maintain a module using an online course learning management system;

(III)   incorporate visual resources into an online module;

(IV)   utilize synchronous and asynchronous tools effectively (i.e., discussion boards, chat tools, electronic whiteboards, etc.);

(V)   troubleshoot typical software and hardware problems;

(VI)   effectively use and incorporate subject specific developmentally appropriate software in an online learning module;

(VII)   demonstrate continual growth in technology, knowledge, and skills to stay abreast of current and emerging technologies; and 505-3-.95

(VIII)   model appropriate strategies essential to continued growth and development of the understanding of technology operations and concepts.

2. Standard II: Online Teaching and Learning Methodology, Management, Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

(i)   The program shall prepare candidates to plan, design, and incorporate strategies to encourage active learning, interaction, participation and collaboration in the online environment.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   demonstrate effective strategies and techniques that actively engage students in the learning process, in designing, and assessing online learners and instruction;

(II)   apply current research on teaching and learning with technology when planning learning environments and experiences;

(III)   create and maintain a community by creating value, effective facilitation, and an environment of trust, establishing consistent and reliable operating norms, and supporting individuality and empowerment;

(IV)   facilitate and monitor appropriate interaction among learners;

(V)   promote collaborative learning through reflection and social negotiation;

(VI)   incorporate within instructional designs sufficient support, directions, and guidelines for online learners;

(VII)   lead online instruction groups that are meaningful, project-based, inquiry-oriented;

(VIII)   model and demonstrate effective moderator techniques to facilitate active student participation;

(IX)   differentiate instruction of students' learning styles and needs and assist students in assimilating and accommodating meaningful information;

(X)   apply technology to increase productivity; and

(XI)   apply technology to engage students' higher order thinking skills and creativity.

(ii)   The program shall prepare candidates to proactively lead an online classroom in a manner that enhances the likelihood of student success through regular feedback, prompt responses to student questions and concerns, and clear expectations.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   consistently model effective communication skills and maintain records of applicable communications with students;

(II)   facilitate regular and frequent teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and teacher-parent interaction in a variety of ways;

(III)   provide an effective online syllabus that lays out the terms of the class interaction for both teacher and students, defines clear expectations for both teacher and students, details the grading criteria and appropriate and inappropriate behavior for students, and explains the course organization to students;

(IV)   provide an online syllabus with objectives, concepts, and ideas, and learning outcomes in a clearly written, concise format. (Also includes key components in syllabus: expectations for interactions, grading criteria, inappropriate behavior criteria, class organization, etc.;

(V)   use student data to inform instruction, assist students in their own time and task management, monitor learner progress with available tools, and develop intervention plans for unsuccessful learners;

(VI)   provide timely, constructive feedback to student assignments; and

(VII)   provide clearly defined statements informing students what to expect in terms of their response time.

(iii)   The program shall prepare candidates to model and encourage legal, ethical, safe and healthy behavior in an online environment.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   establish standards for student behavior that are designed to ensure academic integrity and appropriate uses of the Internet and written communication;

(II)   clearly identify the risks of academic dishonesty in online testing and creates assessment opportunities, which limit this risk;

(III)   demonstrate an awareness of technology impact on student testing performance;

(IV)   provide a copyright statement or disclaimer which clearly identifies the owner(s) of the course and the source(s) of the material students are about to use;

(V)   inform students of the significance and responsibilities associated with Acceptable Use Policies (AUP);

(VI)   use appropriate strategies and resources for dealing with student issues arising from inappropriate use of electronically-accessed data or information;

(VII)   inform students of their right to privacy and the conditions under which their names or online submissions may be shared with others; and

(iv)   The program shall enable the candidate to fully experience online learning from the perspective of an online student.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   apply experiences as an online student to develop successful strategies for teaching online;

(II)   demonstrate the ability to anticipate challenges and problems in the online classroom;

(III)   experience the perspective of the online student through his or her responsiveness and empathetic behaviors toward students; and

(v)   The program shall prepare candidates to develop and deliver assessments, projects, and assignments which meet learning goals and assess learning progress by measuring student achievement of learning goals.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   continually review all materials and Web resources for alignment with course objectives and standards and or appropriateness;

(II)   create assignments, projects and assessments that are aligned to address visual, auditory, and tactile learning styles;

(III)   use authentic assessment of student acquired knowledge and skills as part of the evaluation process;

(IV)   provide continuous evaluation of students, to include pre- and post- testing as well as student input throughout the course;

(V)   develop a triangulation of the assignments, assessments and standards-based learning goals;

(VI)   create assignments that are authentic and relevant to the content and should elicit a response from the student comparable with the level of competency demanded in the related task;

(VII)   create assessments, assignments and projects that address multiple intelligences and

(vi)   the program shall prepare candidates to be responsive to special education and cultural differences among students in the online classroom and to encourage intercultural interaction and inclusive learning.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   respect diverse talents and use strategies designed to include all students;

(II)   provide activities, modified as necessary, that are relevant to special education modifications, student age, cultural background and experiences;

(III)   encourage collaboration and interaction among all students;

(IV)   provide student-centered lessons and activities that are based on concepts of active learning and that are connected to real-world applications; and

(V)   provide opportunities for students to consider meaning and reflect on new knowledge.

3. Standard III: Effective Online Assessment of Teachers, Students and Course Content

(i)   The program shall require demonstrated competence in creating and implementing assessments in online learning environments in ways that assure validity and reliability of instruments and procedures.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   create or select effective assessment instruments to measure online learning that reflect sufficient content validity (i.e., adequately sample the content that they are designed to measure) and reliability (i.e., produce consistent results from administration to administration);

(II)   implement online assessment measures and materials in ways that insure instrument validity and reliability;

(III)   assess student knowledge and instruction in a variety of ways; and

(ii)   The program shall require demonstration of effective strategies enabling students to complete self and peer assessments as they fulfill course requirements.

The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   employ effective self-evaluation tools to ensure their courses have a variety of timely and appropriate activities to assess student readiness for course content and mode of delivery; and

(II)   provide opportunities for student self-assessment within courses.

(iii)   The program shall require demonstrated competence in using data and findings from assessment to modify instructional methods and guide student learning; The program shall prepare candidates who:

(I)   gather appropriate background and content knowledge assessment data for each student and base instruction on student assessment data;

(II)   review student responses to test items in online testing software to identify issues in testing or pedagogical strategies;

(III)   demonstrate awareness of observational data (i.e., tracking data in electronic courses, Web logs, email, etc.) and its uses in monitoring course progress and effectiveness; and

(IV)   provide opportunities for evaluating teaching effectiveness within the online environment (i.e., classroom assessment techniques, teacher evaluations, teacher peer reviews).

Authority O.C.G.A. 20-2-200

Appendix G: Interview and Personal Narrative Emergent Themes—Alphabetical

List and List by Source

Age versus Experience

Appropriate Modeling for Online Courses

Building Confidence with Technology

Caring about Students versus Caring for Students

Competence with Online Instruction

Creating Confident Technology Leaders

Current OTE Program Design for Three Courses

Establishing and Maintaining Strong Online Instructor Presence

Improving Online Communication Skills

Insights into K-12 Virtual Educator Training

K-12 Instructional Designers Need Own Standards

K-12 Virtual Education is Exciting

K-12 Virtual Educator Buy-In

K-12 Virtual Educator Numbers Will Continue to Increase

K-12 Virtual Educator Trainers Need Own Standards

K-12 Virtual Educators Are Educational Pioneers

K-12 Virtual Educators as Instructors versus Facilitators

K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Kids Matter

K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Relationships Matter

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Content Knowledge Mastery

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Documented Success as a Traditional/f2f Educators

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Good Communication Skills

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Own Standards

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Robust Content

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Adaptable

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Creative and Resourceful

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Persistent

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Everyone Can Learn Online

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Higher-Order Thinking and Higher Levels of Learning Are Possible Online

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Embrace and Use Student-Centered Pedagogy

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How Technology Works in a Virtual Environment

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Integrate Technology into Teaching

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Troubleshoot Technology Issues

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Desire to Learn

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Thirst for Knowledge

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Routinely Revisit Professional Beliefs

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Teach with a Disposition of Mastery for Learning

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Use Visual and Non-Visual Tools in Virtual Environment

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Tolerance for Imperfections

Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Teaching

LMS Competence

Misconceptions about Online Instruction

Misconceptions about Technology

Misconceptions about Technology Knowledge and Expertise

Online Instruction versus Online Facilitation

OTE Candidates Need Positive Technology Experiences

OTE Practice Opportunities Must Mirror Reality

Perceptions about Online Instruction

Unrealistic Conceptions about Online Instruction

USG Programs Provide Good OTE Preparation

Virtual Support for Students' Learning Needs

List of Themes	Explicit Theme Emergence Source	Implicit Theme Emergence Source	Theme Did Not Emerge
Building Confidence with Technology			
Perceptions about Online Instruction			
Appropriate Modeling for Online Courses			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Fluency with Technology Tool Use	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, Kerry, and Researcher	No one	No one
Virtual Support for Students' Learning Needs			
Knowing How to Integrate Technology into Teaching			
Competence with Online Instruction			
Online Instruction versus Online Facilitation			
LMS Competence	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Ingers, Kerry, and Researcher	Winter	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Content Knowledge Mastery			

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Integrate Technology into Teaching	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	Researcher	No one
Improving Online Communication Skills	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, and Researcher	Ingers and Kerry	No one
Establishing and Maintaining Strong Online Instructor Presence	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, and Researcher	Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Documented Success as a Traditional/f2f Instructor	Conrad, Astor, and Rudy	Winter, Ingers, Kerry, and Researcher	No one
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Tolerance for Imperfections	Rudy and Ingers	Conrad, Astor, Winter, Kerry, Researcher	No one
K-12 Virtual Educator Numbers Will Continue to Increase	No one	Rudy, Winter, and Ingers	Conrad, Astor, Kerry, and Me
Current OTE Program Design for Three Courses	Conrad, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, Kerry, and Researcher	No one	Astor
K-12 Virtual Educators Need Robust Content K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Be Flexible K-12 Educators Need to Be Adaptable	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	No one	Researcher
K-12 Educators Need to Be Creative and Resourceful			

K-12 Virtual Educators Need Good Communication Skills	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	No one	Researcher
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How Technology Works in a Virtual Environment			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Know How to Troubleshoot Technology Issues			
K-12 Virtual Educators as Instructors versus Facilitators			
Insights into K-12 Virtual Educator Training			
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Everyone Can Learn Online	Conrad, Astor, and Ingers	Rudy, Winter, and Kerry	Researcher
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Embrace and Use Student-Centered Pedagogy	Astor	Conrad, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	Researcher
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Use Visual and Non-Visual Tools in Virtual Environment	Winter	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Ingers, and Kerry	Researcher
K-12 Educators Need to Be Persistent	Ingers and Kerry	Winter, Conrad, and Astor	Rudy and Researcher
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Thirst for Knowledge	Ingers	Conrad, Winter, and Researcher	Astor, Rudy, and Kerry
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Possess a Desire to Learn			

K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Believe that Higher-Order Thinking and Higher Levels of Learning Are Possible Online	Conrad	Winter and Ingers	Astor, Rudy, Kerry, and Researcher
K-12 Virtual Education is Less Static than Traditional K-12 Education	Ingers	Winter and Researcher	Conrad, Astor, Ingers, and Kerry
K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Relationships Matter K-12 Virtual Educators Have to Understand that Kids Matter	Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	Astor	Conrad, Rudy, and Researcher
Caring about Students versus Caring for Students	Rudy and Researcher	No one	Conrad, Astor, Winter, Ingers, and Kerry
K-12 Virtual Educators Need to Routinely Revisit Professional Beliefs	Winter	Ingers and Kerry	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, and Researcher
K-12 Virtual Educator Buy-In	No one	Winter, Ingers, and Kerry	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, and Researcher
K-12 Virtual Instruction is Exciting	Ingers	Researcher	Conrad, Astor, Rudy, Winter, and Kerry
Age versus Experience K-12 Virtual Educators Need Own Standards K-12 Instructional Designers Need Own Standards K-12 Virtual Educators Need Own Standards	Conrad	No one	Astor, Rudy, Winter, Ingers, Kerry, and Researcher

Appendix H: The Personal Narrative

WHY MY EXPERIENCE MATTERS: THE RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY
BEGINS AND ENDS WITH THE RESEARCHER

Is it really all about me?

I struggled for weeks trying to pinpoint how to write my personal narrative. In all honesty, I didn't want to write it because I deemed it inconsequential and a narcissistic indulgence—something that would not be of interest to anyone looking to glean anything of academic or educational substance from this dissertation. Even though my committee told me to do it, and even though I knew they were right, I didn't want to do it. I knew from experience that I needed to take a step back from writing and focus on other areas in life such as family and my job. Doing so allowed me to focus on providing nurturing support for my husband and our children and re-establish a sense of consistency in our daily routines while I pondered the academic journey known as a doctoral degree (with an embedded Specialist's degree) that I began five years ago.

Stepping away from my writing and my work made me reflect on it and also miss it, and I couldn't wait to get back to it. I recognize that I have traveled far in my professional and academic endeavors, primarily because I always have strived to diversify my training, my skills, and my experiences. That is the very reason I settled on this doctoral program: I wanted to diversify yet again and redefine who I was professionally and academically. I remember deciding that should I be accepted into this doctoral program, I truly would strive to make it exceptional and memorable. My quest to make this my last hurrah, to make everything count, has paid off thus far. I made staying the course no matter the challenge my top academic priority. In doing so, I fulfilled all obligations for two graduate research assistantships. My indoctrination into the world of

scholarly presentations and publishing came during the first few semesters of my program, and I fell in love with it hook, line, and sinker. Over the last four years, I have presented my work at state, regional, national and international conferences (Moore & Pourreau, 2015; Pourreau, 2013; 2014a; 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Pourreau & Rubin, 2015), and two presentations were by invitation (Cisneros Puebla et al., 2015a; Pourreau, 2015b). In the span of fifteen months, I wrote two solo manuscripts (Pourreau, 2014b; 2015c) plus a section for a large collaborative critical inquiry piece (Cisneros Puebla et al., 2015b), which means I became a published author before ever reaching my dissertation proposal defense. I completed all of my coursework with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. My performance in and beyond the classroom helped me earn my institution's University Scholar Award for the Specialist's Degree above all other degree candidates in our college of education. I began teaching online during the 2015 summer semester for my department to start building a repertoire in the university instructional setting. I thought I had taken all of the necessary steps toward making a career change. But which way to go? I have enjoyed all aspects of my program: the curriculum, the research papers, the quest for knowledge, the conference presentations, and the publications. I love learning, I love learning about learning, and I love helping others learn. My authoethnography reaffirmed that (Pourreau, 2014b).

At this junction in my studies and my career, I truly want to teach university courses related to K-12 instructional technology implementation and virtual instruction, and I want to continue conducting qualitative research related to these areas, publishing my work and presenting my work at conferences. I taught in higher education settings years ago while working on my Masters' degree and returned to it recently when offered

the chance to teach a fully online graduate level instructional technology course through

my own department. While my K-12 career has been good to me, I always have wanted

to return to working with adults. Finding and accepting a faculty position at a university

inevitably could mean moving and relocating my entire family to another part of the

country, and I have reservations about doing that given the sacrifices that they already

have made that allowed me to pursue my degree. On the other hand, K-12 is what I know,

but I am ready for change (Pourreau, 2014b). If I stay in K-12, I want it to be in a setting

that has me teaching and working with adults. So I am equally open to applying for an

instructional technology-related position with a public school system. This type of

position would have me training K-12 teachers and therefore working exclusively with

adults in education in the capacities similar to those in a university setting, but the

position also would allow me to conduct research, publish, and present at conferences

while also affording me flexibility with family responsibilities until our children

complete their own K-12 education.

I began exploring both career paths with the idea that a Specialist and a doctoral

degree in Teacher Leadership for Learning with a focus on Instructional Technology and

a research agenda combined with nearly twenty years of experience working in K-12

environments would position me as a solid job candidate. Instead, I learned that I look

good on paper for both career paths but may not necessarily be the ideal candidate for the

job for any number of reasons. In terms of higher education pursuits, most universities

seek to hire someone with a combination of academic and scholarly performance

garnered at a major institution of higher learning that has high research activity. My

present institution is on the road to research greatness having recently achieved R3 status,

and I can only hope that many will see this as a support for my professional pursuits instead of a strike against my professional training. As for an instructional technology-related position in a public school system, I learned that most employers seek candidates who have the academic degrees and certification necessary for the job in combination with knowledge of how K-12 environments operate plus solid experience working with adults in an instructional setting. I thought that everything I needed to make a career change had been covered by my degrees, yet I quickly learned that this was not the case. That was when the light went on: just as with K-12 OTE programs in the state of Georgia, my Specialist and doctoral programs had been designed by faculty members and universities aimed at producing graduates whose skills meet the needs of potential employers, yet satisfactorily completing the coursework is not enough to ensure sufficient preparation for on-the-job responsibilities and expectations. I was counting on my university training and educational experiences to be enough to propel me into a different area of instruction much the way that K-12 OTE candidates in Georgia have their hoped pinned on becoming virtual instructors based on the university training and educational experiences they received. That is also when I realized that USG faculty likely have spent countless and sleepless hours using state laws, professional educator standards, research-based pedagogy, and seminal research in the field to create and implement the courses and curriculum that they perceived would help K-12 OTE candidates become gainfully employed K-12 virtual educators. As a job candidate looking to change fields, I am no different than the teachers trained in f2f instructional delivery striving to become virtual instructors. We suffer from the same disconnect: while we may have solid academic credentials from a teacher certification program that our institutions told us had prepared

us for these next steps in our careers, we lack the on-the-job experience necessary to make us instantly proficient in a new position.

For me, it is disheartening at best and far too strongly resembles what many of us experience after graduating college for the first time: we took the requisite courses, earned the grades, and our professors assured us that we are ready for the workforce, yet no one will hire us because we lack a certain level of experience. Have I come this far in my professional and academic careers only to find myself in an endless cycle? The one that I fondly refer to as I-need-more-on-the-job-experience-but-the-only-way-to-get-it-is-if-someone-hires-me cycle. A significant angle in this study will be for me to remain focused on next steps for myself and parallel those to the next steps that my research participants perceive as important or necessary if I hope to identify more concretely what K-12 OTE candidates and I truly need to do and know how to do to become the ideal job candidate in everyone's eyes.

I knew it was all about me when…

I began feeling the need to change directions in my career just a few semesters in to my program of study. I already had become disillusioned with teaching foreign languages at the K-12 level for a variety of reasons. The curriculum, the instructional expectations, and the learning outcomes at every school where I had ever worked were predetermined by someone else: a curriculum specialist, the system-level foreign language coordinator, the school administration, the department head, or anyone else in a lead position. Even when I served as a department head, everything came to me on a predetermined platter. The different contingents of education law at the local, state and national level combined with a greater number of days of standardized testing, educational requirements that often tended to hold teachers more accountable for learning

than students, and the trend of coercing-turned-forcing all students to take a foreign language regardless of their post-secondary plans had begun to take their toll on the foreign language curriculum—at least from my perspective. We had to teach to keep pace with everyone else teaching our course at the local school level and, largely, at the school system level. We had to begin preparing students for a required post-course evaluative exam. We had to scramble to catch up, and our efforts to hurry up left us even further behind than we thought possible when faced with students being out of class for multiple days to multiple weeks of required standardized testing. We were lucky to make it half way through the required textbook content in any given year, and it was wearing me out mentally. We spent so much time trying to stick to a calendar that afforded us little room for creativity, ingenuity, or spontaneity—all of which had played significant roles in the f2f foreign language classrooms that had shaped and honed my own basic foreign language skills. I say "we" and "us" because my colleagues and I held regular conversations that touched on all of these topics and affected everyone mutually. I felt like I was being swallowed up by mediocrity, and I was swimming in boredom. It angered me, as I could only imagine how my students must be feeling with someone like me as their teacher. I wanted out—at least out of the traditional f2f foreign language classroom rat race—and I began looking for exits. I began researching the current status of online foreign language instruction in K-12 education and hit a wall. I learned that the concept of learning a foreign language through online instruction was taking off at the collegiate level but was relatively static in most areas of K-12. Technology applications (apps) for handheld devices, however, were quite another story, the push was on in the state of Georgia for teachers to increasingly incorporate technology into their

instructional practices (GaPSC, 2014b; 2014d). Knowing this, I set about educating myself on any number of apps in an effort to spice up my instructional practices and make the curriculum more engaging by 21st century standards. This held my interest for a while, but I found myself wanting to do more. My program of study had re-ignited my long-ago desires to conduct research and educate adults, ideally in a collegiate setting, and I quickly recognized that I wanted to continue being an educator, but for adults. As previously noted, my efforts to move into a more technologically-based career as an instructional technologist had not paid off. I began looking for other ways to stretch my wings that encompassed both technology and adult learning.

And I found one—in a way. I recently teamed up with my school's instructional technology specialist to co-host a Microsoft® Innovative Educator (MIE) Redefining Learning Exchange at my local school. I wanted my local school to earn the $500.00 Donorschoose.org gift card from Microsoft® to use toward future technology endeavors as badly as I wanted to have the opportunity to showcase my growing knowledge of instructional technology and my newly-acquired professional development design skills. With guidance from my co-host, I planned and successfully executed this event in May 2016, and it proved significant for our school and for me for several reasons. Our school already served as one of two official Microsoft® Office Suite testing site in our school system, and we were making progress as a school towards cementing our relationship with Microsoft® and technology by being the first high school in our system to host an MIE event and only the second school in the entire system to do so. The event introduced our faculty to a diverse number of Microsoft®-based and Internet-based technology tools and tips, and my design efforts combined with a high number of faculty participants

earned our school the much-desired gift card. I had enjoyed organizing and hosting this event because it had provided me with the opportunities to flex my instructional technology degree muscles in varying degrees and showcase the professional development design and implementation skills acquired in my degree program. Local school and system-level administrators in attendance who already knew what I was like in front of K-12 learners got to see me in a different role. Serving as a co-host and a session presenter for this event allowed them to see me shift topics and instructional delivery gears in front of my professional peers. It also showed them that I also possessed the skills to connect with and instruct multiple audiences of adult learners across multiple topics. I received positive feedback verbally and via email from the county and school administrators and faculty attendees alike.

Organizing the event in the weeks and months that preceded it provided me with great insight into how my co-workers are wired when it comes to attending professional development events, especially ones that are mandated and focus solely on technology. Our school had moved to an internal professional development model whereby faculty earn professional development credit towards recertification by attending and completing in-house professional development workshops and training sessions. My principal allowed me to organize and host the MIE event because he felt it was a good fit for our new professional development model. I learned very quickly that not everyone wants to or feels the need to participate in professional development endeavors. At all. Ever. Period. I learned that these feelings about professional development became more pronounced and more widespread among the faculty when everyone learned that this particular professional development event would be entirely technology-based.

Comments about professional development being a waste of time, professional development related to technology being a waste of time, and required professional development being a waste of time were echoed repeatedly. Lucky me—I was living the very scenario that Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2012) had described in their research about how to help teachers make the connection between using technology for technology's sake versus actually learning about how to use to support instruction. Our school system's mission statement prescribes an instructional environment where teachers know how to use and integrate technology into their daily instructional practices and model that use for the students. It also prescribes a learning environment that integrates technology through a variety of means in the interest of preparing students for work and life in the 21st century. These statements also appear in our local school improvement plan. They have been the topic of discussion at several faculty meetings over the last few years, even to the point that new tech tips for tools and instruction are regular features at our faculty meetings. It sounds trite, but they knew it was coming, and it looks like they chose to ignore it based on the pre-event comments making the rounds in the school. It left me wondering when teachers had ceased wanting to learn and had become content with static borders in their knowledge. When I reflect on the post-event feedback, it truly left me wondering just how many faculty members truly had made an effort to gain anything from the experience.

The week after the event, my principal and members of his administrative staff met with me. They offered me the opportunity to work with our new assistant principal on managing our school's Response to Intervention (RTI) program, which works to assist students who are struggling academically, and designing RTI-based professional

development endeavors for our faculty that will position them to better reach and help struggling students. The administrative team told me that they chose to tap me for this endeavor because they view me as responsible and dependable in both my teaching practices and in my abilities to organize events as evidence by the MIE. They also told me that, from their perspective, the faculty in general had responded positively to the MIE event because it was conducted by one of their peers. They said that they believed professional development offered by peers carries more weight and makes faculty more likely to view a professional development event as useful and of value. Too often, they said, events led by system-level trainers or by them are perceived as mandates instead of learning opportunities. I accepted the opportunity and thanked them for placing their confidence in me with this endeavor. While this is true, I have to admit that I was just content to know that I was making a dent in positioning myself to work with adult learners, albeit in a f2f environment.

I recognized that creating opportunities in my K-12 professional setting to work with adult learners still was not enough to push ahead with my career interests. I revisited the instructional standards in the state of Georgia related to both f2f and online instructional settings and paid particular attention to the ways in which they underscored the importance of successful f2f instruction as a necessary foundation and predecessor for successful online or virtual instruction (GaPSC, 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2015a; 2015b). I had not taught adults since working as adjunct foreign language faculty in f2f settings in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and my interest in teaching at the collegiate level had never disappeared despite the interests I had developed and pursued for the last two decades in K-12 educational settings along the way. I began rebuilding

my adult education repertoire in 2015, but this time in online adult education by teaching

Master's level courses as adjunct faculty in the Department of Instructional Technology

at Kennesaw State University. I approached my department head with an offer to teach

on an as-needed basis, and the department head accepted my offer and immediately

helped me set the wheels in motion to get trained for online instruction and to get hired to

teach graduate courses as adjunct faculty. I remember thinking, "Wow, the university

really has agreed to give me a shot at this!" In almost no time, I found myself completing

the necessary human resources forms and paperwork and contacting the university's

dedicated trainers for online instruction to find out how to enroll in the Quality Matters®

(QM®) training course for virtual instruction.

The QM® training (QM, 2011) together with the support and guidance of

experienced online faculty in my department afforded me a well-structured and well-

mentored introduction to the world of virtual instruction, but I still found myself riddled

with doubt about my abilities to teach well and effectively online. Had I truly learned

enough in such a short period of time for this undertaking? While I had found the

material covered in the f2f QM® workshop and the subsequent online modules

interesting and highly informative, I felt like the training I had received had barely

scratched the surface in preparing me for that key moment where the rubber meets the

road: working for six weeks with live students in a primarily asynchronous—but very

real—online environment. Was I going to be any good at this? It had been over six

months since my QM® training, my first time ever going live in an online course as the

instructor was going to be in the summer, and the one thing from training that stood out

foremost in my mind over everything else was how the training had stressed the

importance and the necessity of providing online students with rich, descriptive feedback on assignments. Never mind that the first time I ever saw an online course from an instructor view was a few weeks before the course began. The only experiences I had with navigating the university's Learning Management System (LMS) were as a student—<u>never</u> as an instructor. Sure, I was going to be teaching a course that had already been designed and created, but in my training did not include any type of practicum. It was only while preparing to roll out my first online course that I was granted view-only access for the course leader's section. Just how successful could I expect this endeavor to be in light of my insecurities and self-doubts? And I knew from my f2f experiences that students were bound to pose questions ranging from permission to miss class for everything from concerts and leaving for vacation to requests to turning assignments in late because of the stress and trauma they were suffering following the death of a beloved houseplant. My biggest fear of all: Would my students ever guess or suspect that they were, in essence, my guinea pigs? When it came to my students potentially finding out about my extremely short history in the online classroom, I honestly did not know which prospect I feared more: for them to find out that I had no experience teaching their course or for them to find out that I had never taught online before? Each proved intimidating in its own way, and either way, I felt like the entire experience had disaster written all over it. Period.

My fears about becoming a virtual instructor also called to mind some important—at least based on the beliefs and perceptions I was forming about virtual instruction from an instructor's viewpoint—observations I had made about my students' online behaviors and the approaches they used when initiating contact with me via the

email system housed within the university's LMS. I remember how I felt the first time I ever began posting information about the course: I posted messages to the calendar on the course's main page welcoming students to the course and encouraging them to contact me with questions or concerns. I remember noticing that I closed many of my messages with those same or similar words of encouragement. I had taken both blended and fully online courses here at the university as a part of my doctoral degree program. Some courses were packed with online asynchronous communications and feedback from the instructors, who kept their promises to engage with students on the discussion threads. I also remember taking courses whose main page and overall LMS content looked nearly the same at the end of the semester as it had at the beginning—most of the additional content came from required student participation on discussion boards. In those instances, the instructors had stated in the syllabus that they would be regular participants in discussion threads, but that sadly turned out not to be the case. Those same instructors also did not communicate with students unless the students first communicated with them via the LMS email. Having experienced—again, my own beliefs and perceptions—both great and less-than-desirable learning dynamics in blended and online courses, I vowed to do as much as I thought necessary to ensure that my students' experiences in my courses consistently would be classified as good or great. If the syllabus stipulated instructor participation in discussion board threads, I would be there and be just as present as my students. The university expects its instructors to have assignment assessments back to students one week after the submission date? Done, also. These tasks were not hard for me to accomplish, nor did I find these types of deadlines to be unreasonable or difficult to meet. The one thing that baffled me about virtual instruction was how to get my students

to reach out to me when they needed assistance or support—and have them not apologize for it or feel guilty for doing so. Nearly every request for assistance or support came in the form of an LMS email and began with a sentence in which the students asked me, as the instructor, to please forgive them for contacting me with their request or to please forgive them for making so many inquiries. I always wrote back that their inquiries always were welcome and that it is both my job and my pleasure to assist them, but it is only now that I am wondering if they thought I was including that in my response just to be nice. I truly did not mind their inquiries, but if my responses back to them did not reassure them of this, what could I do to change that? I did not have an answer for that question, and that did not sit well with me.

More than a year has passed since I began my first-ever online teaching experience. I made it to the end of what seemed like a very long and uncertain instructional tunnel, and I did more than survive—I learned how to thrive. As an instructor, I threw myself into the course as fully as I would have had I been student in the course. It was a process that was fraught with stress, uncertainty, self-doubt, and the very real fear that my students might reach the conclusion that I had never taught online before and had no idea what I was doing. At times, it felt like instructional dragons that I fought weekly, sometimes daily, would never give up their fight against me. There were times when I faced technology issues that required me to enlist the assistance of others, and it bothered me that I did not know more—I wanted to solve the problems on my own, but I couldn't. There were so many things that my training had not covered, and I wasn't always sure what to ask or to whom when technology problems arose. I began doubting myself and feeling as if I really did not know what to do next. The same feelings came

around when I found myself facing difficult issues involving students asking for exceptions on assignments or challenging my feedback on assessment—all in spite of the assignment rubrics that both parties had to follow. I found myself internalizing my students' academic problems and becoming consumed by them. I let their struggles become mine. I began taking everything personally—their comments, their frustrations, their reactions to what was happening to them. I started losing sleep at night. I started fearing for my desired career in higher education. I remember the sinking feeling that struck me when I started feeling like it might all be over before it ever really begins. Was this the reality of higher education today? And I remember thinking that this was not what I had signed up for, and it felt like the whole cycle of self-doubt at my ability to get the job done was an endless one. At that point, half of the semester still lay ahead of me like a long, empty, hostile road with no end in sight.

But then I had a change of heart, or rather, a change of mindset. I began viewing what I was experiencing as a novel or storyline that was unfolding before me, much like watching a movie. Sure, my students had problems—and at times had caused them on their own accord—but I needed to view those problems through the lens of the course syllabus and their relevance to a student's enrollment in my course. I had to keep my students focused on their academic goals and, if asked, help them find ways to work around problems in the interest of minimizing the impact they could have on a student's performance in my course or in their degree program. Once I figured out my role—more like how to create a role to distance myself from becoming consumed by my students' problems—it became easier to move forward with the rest of the semester. I also had to remind myself of one very important tenet of virtual instruction: the instructor teaches,

guides and facilitates learning by showing students what to access and how to enhance

their intellectual growth and knowledge. The instructor is there to help the students stay

the course while in the course. The actual learning occurs because the student begins to

understand how to take the reins from the instructor and, in essence, to become his or her

own teacher at times.

With that very sound lesson in online instruction firmly behind me, the semester

from last year that began fraught with problems came to an end, and so did its challenges.

My efforts paid off as my students gave me an average rating of 3.5 out of 4 on my

course evaluations related to eleven different items. My department chair considered

these excellent ratings, and when the time came to renew my faculty status for the current

year, I noticed that the chair already had completed the section requiring documented

evidence of my teaching performance at the college level:

> "Average rating of 3.5 out of 4.0 on 11 items. Sample qualitative data:
> 'Instructor took the time to help me outside of her office hours. My
> teacher Leslie Pourreau has excellent understanding in all the elements.
> She gave me topic wise response for each of my assignments. She also
> responded to my questions immediately. Especially she is very good in
> reminding about assignments and she created a very clear calendar view.
> I liked her instructional methods. Dr. Pourreau was very knowledgeable
> and thorough in the content in this course. She was very helpful and
> provided valuable feedback on assignments and assessments. She made
> this a great learning experience.' (T. Redish, personal communication
> January 31, 2016)

This was the feedback I needed to bolster my confidence. My goal had been to

guide my students in their learning by providing them with responses and feedback that

were rich and insightful yet concise—the kind I would want to receive if I were the

student. I had taken to heart the advice imparted on me during the QM® training and

poured my efforts into facilitation and academic guidance, and my performance ratings

show that my students reaped the rewards, which, as I see it, is exactly how knowledge and learning are supposed to unfold in the virtual classroom. When I taught online again this year, I still had to quell a few instructional dragons, I still had students apologizing for contacting me with questions, and I still did not have an answer for how to make them understand that I want them to contact me with questions because I want to help them grow just as my instructors have helped me grow through persistent inquiry. I still don't have an answer that addresses why students apologize for contacting me when they email me with questions. Maybe I never will…but I really would like a solution to this issue.

It really is all about me…because it comes from me

I made the decision to continue teaching online based on my initial course evaluations, my increased confidence with online instruction, and the insight I had gained through my own experiences, but also with a research agenda in mind. When I thought back on the feelings of uncertainty and limited preparedness that I experienced prior to and during the time that I taught my first online course, I still could not accept that so little time is considered all that is necessary to help someone prepare someone to teach in a virtual setting. I discussed my concerns with a fellow doctoral cohort member who reminded me that we once had considered taking the K-12 OTE courses as our electives. She also reminded me that we had found differences among some of the courses being offered from one USG institution to another as well as differences in the number of courses required by each USG institution to complete the K-12 OTE. In the end, we decided not to take the K-12 OTE courses for our electives because of the lack of parity among the institutions—we just weren't comfortable knowing that there wasn't better course or curriculum alignment among them even though each USG institution's college of education held NCATE certification (Georgia Southern University, 2016; Kennesaw

State University, 2016; University of Georgia, 2016; Valdosta State University, 2016)

and their certification and endorsement programs all met Georgia PSC standards. From

there, I began having conversations with USG faculty and learned informally that K-12

virtual school administrators in the state of Georgia were coming to them with concerns

that related to those shared by my cohort member and me. Whereas we questioned the

validity and parity of the different K-12 OTE programs around the state in terms of

whose was better and why, the K-12 virtual school administrators had taken it one step

further and challenged the validity of the K-12 OTE preparation offered by any of the

USG institutions. According to the K-12 virtual school administrators, they had to

conduct their own post-hire in-house training to adequately prepare their instructors for

the virtual environment because most job candidates presented with OTE knowledge and

training deficits regardless of which USG institution they had attended. The close

parallels between the K-12 virtual school administrators' OTE training beliefs and the

beliefs and perceptions I held about my own online training experiences seemed too

uncanny. The commonalities in our professional perceptions sparked my curiosity and

left me wanting to know more about what goes into preparing K-12 educators to become

online instructors.

Eureka! That's it! That's what I was trying to pinpoint all long! I wanted to

identify the beliefs and perceptions that USG teacher educators and Georgia K-12 virtual

school administrators held about the best way to prepare K-12 OTE candidates for

careers in virtual instruction. I wanted to know where their beliefs and perceptions

converged and diverged and, if possible, why. My own training experiences coupled with

my piqued interests led me to propose and design a case study for this dissertation in

which I would interview individuals from these two educational settings about their lived

professional experiences with K-12 OTE preparation and the professional beliefs and

perceptions they hold about K-12 OTE preparation practices to learn more about what

they believe and perceive as the best preparation practices for K-12 OTE candidates in

the state of Georgia. I suddenly had a keen interest in this area of teacher preparation

based on my own lived experiences and perceptions, and my first reaction was to try to

find a way to distance myself from the interview questions and the participants so as not

to taint my study. I discussed this with faculty at my home institution and with my

dissertation committee and received the same response from everyone: embrace my

presence in this study instead of trying to race away from it. This has long been the stance

of Stake (1995) and, more recently, Simons (2009). According to Stake (1995),

experience is one of the capital qualifications of qualitative researchers. Stake (1995) also

wrote much of the qualitative researcher's methodological knowledge and personality

stem from engaging in hard work under critical examination of colleagues and mentors

(i.e., faculty instructors and my committee members!), and that one's expertise tends to

come largely through reflective practice. Moustakas (1990), Simons (2009), and Yin

(2011) concur. Gemignani (2011) stated it equally well but differently: he reminded me

that distancing myself from the issues and experiences I seek to study puts me as the

researcher in a position of objective distancing, which can prove problematic for

qualitative methodologies. I instead need to embrace the opportunity to personally engage

with my research participants in the interest of promoting sensitivity, complexity,

awareness, creativity, and commitment to my work (Gemignani, 2011).

This body of rationale began to sink in, and it took me back to the December 2012 commencement ceremony I attended to receive my Specialist in Education degree. The commencement speaker, Dr. Mark Anderson, Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics and Professor of Chemistry, spoke to attendees and graduates about the dissertation process (Anderson, 2012). He said that when asked about the content of his dissertation, he used to launch into the research he had conducted on the water molecule. He said that over time, he changed his response and simply responded, "It's about me." His words reminded me that our research and our research endeavors exist because of who we are and what drives our interests. It made sense to me then, and it still makes sense to me now. I have a role to play in this study because it is a much about what interests me as it is about me. To that end, this study includes an examination of my own professional beliefs and perceptions about virtual instruction preparation practices alongside those of the study participants and based on my own positionality and experiences as a K-12 educator and an online instructor in a higher education setting. Based upon the advice of my committee and the beliefs and perceptions I bring to this study as a K-12 instructor, I also decided to expand the scope of my study to include the voices of Georgia K-12 virtual instructors and their lived experiences as K-12 OTE candidate both pre- and post-hire to further enhance my understanding of the beliefs and perceptions that shape K-12 OTE preparation practices. Conducting a qualitative case study afforded a methodological approach that would allow me to give a voice to as many perspectives as possible while also taking care to address my own positionality when it comes to my dual role as a participant with a voice and as a researcher seeking to know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of my participants' lived

experiences based on my own internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). My implicit and direct presence in this study combined with a desire to deepen my understanding of my own beliefs and perceptions as well as those of others that drive and criticize K-12 OTE preparation practices drove me is well-suited to the six phases of heuristic inquiry as outlined by Moustakas (1990): the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and the question, the incubation period, illumination, then explication followed by a creative synthesis to provide culmination for the entire study.

Looking back, I realized that the very reason that I didn't want to write my personal narrative was because I was afraid of writing it badly. I was afraid that my professional portrait might fall short when it comes to beliefs and perceptions about virtual instruction because I have only been teaching online for about a year. The rich experiences and the perspectives that this one year of virtual instruction alone afforded me does have merit and does carry weight. Period. And with that, I was able to put my insecurities aside and write. Once I began, I found out that I had far more to say that could contribute to this study than I originally imagined. This personal narrative marks my initial engagement with this study, and the subsequent chapters correlate to the remaining five phases. Let the journey begin.

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