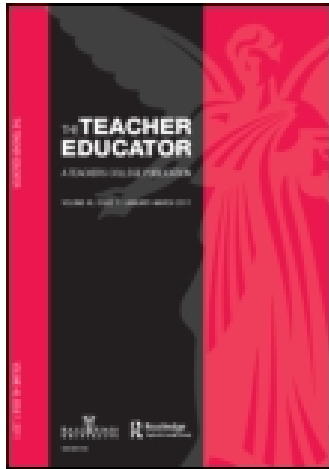


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Quality and Early Field Experiences: Partnering with Junior Achievement

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

QUALITY AND EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES: PARTNERING WITH JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

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This study explored the perceptions of preservice teacher candidates who participated in a pilot partnership between a public teacher education preparation program and Junior Achievement (JA). The partnership was grounded in the premise that providing early field experiences to preservice teacher candidates was a necessary requirement of quality teacher education. In an introductory pedagogy course, preservice teacher candidates in their junior year participated in a five-week field experience where they taught JA lessons in partnership schools. The results suggested that preservice teacher candidates perceived an expanded sense of comfort with teaching strategies, classroom management, and diversity during the actual teaching of the lessons in the field experience. Additionally, participants reported increased confidence levels with their own preparation to teach. The partnership with JA that provided a quality, early field experience may have enhanced the general pedagogical proficiencies needed for preservice teachers to succeed as practicing educators. Suggestions for creating a partnership with JA are provided.

Recently, the traditional divide between teacher education coursework and the field experience has been questioned, as the lack of connection between university-based courses and clinical experiences has been called the “Achilles’ heel” of teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Amid growing agreement that preservice teachers need to learn in practice rather than preparing for practice at a later time (Ball & Cohen, 1999), entry into the classroom prior to student teaching has been advocated. Teacher education has been tasked with providing opportunities for preservice teachers to make connections between coursework and the realities of professional teaching through exemplary field experiences prior to graduation (Zeichner, 2007, 2010). School embedded, clinical practices and strategic partnerships are core design principles of a clinically based teacher preparation program (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators [NCATE], 2010).

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Public–private partnerships in education are becoming widespread, including partnerships between private entities and public universities (Patrinós, Osorio, & Guáqueta, 2009). Middlehurst (2009) described public–private teacher education partnerships as borderless connections with an orientation toward true, teacher candidate praxis, the combination of theory and practice. One example of a successful public–private partnership in education are those with Junior Achievement. Junior Achievement (JA) is an international, philanthropic organization with regional affiliates that offers basic economic lessons to over 3,300 communities. According to JA’s website, 383,761 JA volunteers teach 367,305 classes to 9,326,748 students a year (Junior Achievement, n.d.). Introduced in 1992, the Junior Achievement Elementary School Program spans kindergarten through sixth grade with the goal of demonstrating the relevance of economic education in the workplace and basic principles of citizenship. The middle grades program, the *Economics of Staying in School*, offers secondary-level content area majors an opportunity to interact with middle school students in their field experience. At the high school level, JA offers high school students the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship and aspects of economics in the United States and on a global level. Typically, JA recruits university students, corporate business persons, and volunteers to teach in classrooms the curriculum on economics, financial literacy, and social studies for a total of five to six hours of teaching over one semester. Aligned with state standards nationwide, the curricula address economics literacy in context from the smallest unit, the family, to the largest unit, global contexts. This study investigated a partnership between the private philanthropy, JA, and a teacher education preparation program at a public university to provide a quality and early field experience to preservice teachers in a general pedagogy course.

Foundational Background

The benefits of early field experiences for teacher education candidates have been established (Curtner-Smith, 1996; Denton, 1983; Godt, Benelli, & Kline, 2000). Moreover, a strong case has been made for a revival of the intellectual foundations within method courses as they intersect with field experiences (Clift & Brady, 2005), including making explicit the connections between reflective practice and actual classroom demonstration. The structure and content of field experiences is paramount for preservice teachers to transfer skills to the classroom and for lifelong learning to take place, defined as “the ability to take what was learned in one context and utilize it in new contexts” (Retallick & Miller, 2010, p. 70). The implementation of early field experiences in collaboration with the university and school is imperative in the development of a well-rounded teacher candidate (Arnett & Freeburg, 2008). The contexts of early field experiences also have been studied. When preservice teachers visit several schools prior to student teaching in multiple contexts, they observe both effective and ineffective ways of working with at-risk children (Edwards, 1996).

Early field experiences provide scaffolding for academically at-risk students in teacher education. Early field experiences

turn out to be confidence-builders as pre-service teachers find tactics that work to motivate individual students, create and implement “ice-breaking” strategies to help gain access to students more difficult to reach, and establish appropriate and professional boundaries by navigating cues given and received by students in the setting. (Serota & Bennett, 2007, p. 74)

The central role of course content as it intersects with the field experiences prior to student teaching has been investigated. A central goal of teacher education is to support schematic frameworks that relate theory and practice for students. As a result, teacher education should “increase practica experiences prior to full-time student teaching” (Moore, 2003, p. 41). Early, structured field experiences connect preservice students with the reality of the classroom by creating “both dissonance between connections to prior beliefs and understandings and current clinical experiences to better meet the needs of their students in the future” (Eisenhardt, Besnoy, & Steele, 2012, p. 7). The value of early field experience students’ observations of both peers and cooperating teachers in elementary classrooms where they had daily instructional duties were impacted by the reflections that emerged from that experience. Teacher education programs that emphasize reflection may accelerate teacher development (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005).

Reforming early field experience programs to encompass school–university partnerships and preparing students to work with diverse populations may benefit preservice teachers. According to the NCATE (2010), to ascertain quality field experiences with excellent teachers, it is important that cohesive school–university partnerships be developed. Pre-student teaching field experiences are an integral part of the teacher education program and field experiences are essential for preservice teachers in making connections between theory and practice (Freeman, 2010). High quality field experiences share two commonalities: “(1) strong supervision by well-trained teachers and university faculty and (2) prospective teachers’ solid grasp of subject matter and basic understanding of pedagogy prior to student teaching” (Michael, 2003, p. 6).

Several evaluation studies have been conducted on JA curricula. Working with Utah State University researchers at the Western Institute for Research and Evaluation, a three-tier examination (formative, summative, and longitudinal) of the JA Elementary Education Program study was conducted (Van Scotter, Van Dusen, & Worthen, 1996). In the 1992–1993 school year, the formative component of the study suggested that the teachers, principals, consultants, students, and parents surveyed valued the real-life applications of the program. This part of the study found that the K–6 program was appropriate for both genders, was successful in urban and suburban school settings, and suitable for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In the 1993–1994 school years, as part of the summative component of this study, objective tests of economic content were administered to 3,820 students in a control-group setting. K–6 students in JA schools were matched with students in schools not participating in the JA program. The differences in scores were both statistically significant and educationally meaningful (Van Scotter et al., 1996). During the 1993–1995 academic years, the longitudinal component of the Western Institute for Research and Evaluation study was initiated, and alternative assessments were implemented. This part of the study utilized alternative assessments that measured how students had learned to apply the concepts and skills gained in the Junior Achievement Elementary Education Program in new situations. First, JA students were “significantly more likely to describe themselves as taking responsibility for their behaviors and having a positive self-concept” (The Education Group, 2004, p. 19). Second, JA students were “more likely than students in general to be successful in their personal lives. The more JA experiences, the more likely students were to report taking responsibility for their own behavior” (p. 20). Third, these findings indicated that “participation in JA over multiple years during elementary school increases student conceptual learning as well as the capacity to apply concepts to solve problems” (p. 22).

An inclination toward social activism may result from JA experience in university coursework. A partnership between Rollins College and JA of Central Florida evaluated how the objectives of the course offering JA service learning had been enhanced by the partnership. This study found that:

Junior Achievement can serve as a launching pad for students to begin lives of social activism and engaged citizenship beyond the course and graduation. The JA project increases student motivation for language learning through their interactions with native speakers. (Barreneche, 2011, p. 110)

The lessons and instructional strategies that JA volunteers used in their field experiences had strong fidelity to the content of the methods course in which preservice teachers were enrolled, including teaching in both large and small instructional groupings and practice with classroom management techniques, implying a curricular fit between the JA field experience and the pedagogy course requirements (Piro & Hutchinson, 2009). This finding of fidelity between general methods course content and JA curricula influenced the creation of the partnership between JA and the public university in the current research study.

This study explored the perceptions of preservice teacher candidates in an early field experience where the teacher candidates taught JA curricula to elementary or middle school students as part of a general education course. A mixed-method (Creswell, 2013) design was grounded in both post-positivistic (Phillips & Burbules, 2000) and constructivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) paradigms in that both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. Both teacher-researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) and outsider-researcher perspectives were represented by the research team. One researcher was the instructor of record, and two researchers maintained outsider researcher status. The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of teacher candidates in an early field experience using Junior Achievement protocol, curriculum, and field experience placements to inform practice.

Method

Context of the Study

Professors at the teacher education institution met with JA officers to lay the foundations for a partnership, resulting in a pilot program for the 2012–2013 academic years. The JA partnership with the university was housed in a junior-level course that was required for all initial certification teacher candidates. The course focus was on major learning theories and developmental models that impact student learning in the K–12 classroom and course objectives were directly related to the field experience. The course that utilized the partnership with JA was the second in a series of educational pedagogy courses. The preservice teachers chose a school and grade level that aligned as closely as possible to their certification area and JA matched each student with a classroom teacher at a JA designated school in a variety of neighboring school districts. Before the preservice teachers entered the classroom, they were given instruction by a JA trainer during their designated class time. This instruction included presenting the lessons and content, working with diverse students, teaching to meet the needs of all learners, and classroom management techniques. JA also provided all instructional materials for the lessons. The preservice

teachers had the opportunity to practice teaching a lesson with their colleagues before they entered into the public school classroom. This early field experience partnership with JA provided the opportunity for the preservice teacher candidates to analyze and critique the instructional delivery techniques that they studied in the general methods course. Unlike many field experiences prior to student teaching where preservice students simply observe mentor teachers, the participants of this partnership actually taught five or six JA lessons, per the JA curricula, in the field setting.

Participants

Twenty-six students in one section of a course in teacher education participated in the pilot JA field experience in the 2012 fall semester at a southwestern public university. Participants were juniors in their undergraduate programs at the time of the field experience. Over 40% of respondents stated that early childhood through grade 6 with an English as a Second Language/Bilingual was their certification area. Other areas of certification included early childhood through grade 6 with a Special Education certification (25.9%), all level certification (18.5%) and other certification areas (14.9%).

Data Collection

A cross-sectional survey design with both quantitative and qualitative questions focusing on participant attitudes and beliefs of the field experience was used. Data were collected at one point in time, following the conclusion of the JA field experience in the course. Question content related to training, teaching strategies, classroom management, and diversity regarding the JA curriculum or the actual teaching of the lessons. Prior to the survey, every participant had taught five or six JA lessons in their mentor teacher classrooms. The first portion of the survey included seven Likert-type questions with a scale of 1–7; 1 indicated a response of “strongly disagree” and 7 indicated a response of “strongly agree.” The sum of strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree, and neither agree or disagree/no opinion were reported by percentage of participant choice.

The second part of the survey included open-ended questions. Data were coded according to emergent themes, and then the themes were collapsed and further analyzed according to coding families (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Frequency of similar responses created emergent themes; dissimilar and low frequency responses were not included in the analysis. The emergent themes demonstrated that the research questions generated certain categories within the coding families; namely that of situation codes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined these as units of data that tell how the subjects define the setting or particular subject types, including the subjects’ world view and how they see themselves in relation to a setting or topic. The theoretical approach and the emphasis on field-based, experiential teaching and learning in the academic discipline of teacher education supported this particular coding system. Even though six of the eight questions required a “yes or no” answer, a follow-up question, “Why or why not?” was posed. Two of the eight questions asked students to provide examples as their responses. One of these two exemplar questions probed deeper by asking, “Why do you believe that?” Multiple perspectives and examples were provided within the responses for each question; thus, the frequencies of emergent themes were oftentimes greater than the number of participants.

TABLE 1 Survey Question Results

Question content	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Rating		
		Strongly agree or agree	Neither agree or disagree, no opinion	Strongly disagree or disagree
Beneficial to participate in JA as part of course	6.69 (.78)	<i>n</i> = 25 (96.2%)	<i>n</i> = 1 (3.8%)	<i>n</i> = 0
Training I received from JA was sufficient	5.42 (1.13)	<i>n</i> = 20 (76.9%)	<i>n</i> = 6 (23.1%)	<i>n</i> = 0
Teaching the JA lessons has increased awareness of teaching strategies	6.30 (1.49)	<i>n</i> = 24 (92.4%)	<i>n</i> = 1 (3.8%)	<i>n</i> = 1 (3.8%)
Teaching JA lessons provided opportunity to practice classroom management strategies	6.53 (.94)	<i>n</i> = 24 (92.3%)	<i>n</i> = 2 (7.7%)	<i>n</i> = 0
JA experience led to better understanding of diverse student populations	6.38 (.80)	<i>n</i> = 26 (100%)	<i>n</i> = 0	<i>n</i> = 0

Note. JA = Junior Achievement.

Results

Table 1 illustrates participants' perceptions of the JA field experience resulting from the Likert-style portion of the survey. Over 96% of the participants agreed that participating in the JA experience was beneficial ($M = 6.69$; $SD = .78$). Over 76% of participants agreed that the training they received from JA was beneficial ($M = 5.42$; $SD = 1.13$). More than 92% of participants agreed that teaching the JA lessons increased their awareness of teaching strategies in general and allowed them to practice classroom management strategies ($M = 6.30$; $SD = 1.49$). Over 88% of participants agreed that the field experience led to a better understanding of classroom management ($M = 6.53$; $SD = .94$). One hundred percent of participants agreed that participating in the JA field experience led to a better understanding of teaching to diverse student populations ($M = 6.38$; $SD = .80$).

For the qualitative portion of the survey, data were reduced to initial emergent themes, which were further reduced to situation codes. In order to retain verisimilitude, the students' own words were used (Tracy, 2010). Bracketed words were added sparingly to enhance comprehension.

Preparation

All participants reported they perceived the time to be beneficial. Furthermore, all but one participant claimed that the increased time in the school setting impacted, or will impact, their preservice teaching experience. The teacher preparation students perceived the opportunities for practice and preparation to be the reason they felt the experience

was the most worthwhile and that the increased time had, or will have, a positive impact. For example, one participant stated:

JA was the best experience I have had since starting my education degree plan. I gained more experience working in the classroom, planning lessons, and managing classroom behavior than any other practicum or observation I have had. Getting the experience to independently be in control of a classroom was priceless.

Another participant reported:

I have never had the opportunity to teach a series of lessons by myself. I often feel that waiting until Student Teaching is too late. This [JA field experience] is great preparation with guidance, and my class was great. I was able to make connections with what I was learning, while I was learning it, and it was fresh on my mind.

All of the teacher candidate participants asserted that preservice teachers benefit from spending additional time in schools. The most common reason cited was the advantage of theory to practice connections, especially in regards to preparedness. One participant said:

I think being able to see what it is really like in a classroom is very beneficial. It gets you ready for what is to come in the near future. You can get tips on how to manage a classroom better, and even [get] some ideas on lesson plans for your future classes. It helps make the transition from college to career [easier].

Self-Efficacy

Other frequent responses pertained to the increased comfort and confidence levels that were gained as a result of the JA experience. Two participants stated, "It helped me get out some of my teaching nerves," and, "It made me feel more comfortable in front of a classroom." Additionally, one teacher candidate stated, "I was able to see what it was like to be a teacher. I am hoping that it will make me less nervous to go into Student Teaching. I know that it has built up my confidence as a preservice teacher." Also, some participants indicated that opportunities to increase their comfort and confidence levels and to self-reflect were other strong reasons for spending additional time in schools. "It helps us get out our jitters," and, "it helps us get more comfortable being in front of students and becoming more prepared to teach" demonstrated the perception of increased comfort and confidence levels.

Relationships

The participants perceived their positive interactions with the grade school students to be worthwhile. One teacher preparation student commented, "It was rewarding to build relationships with students. I really enjoyed having the students look to me for information." Other responses provided evidence of rapport-building and forming relationships such as, "I was able to ask questions not only about the JA stuff, but also things like what they liked about school, what they did during free time in class, etc. Getting to know the students was fun!"

Educational Foundations

The overwhelming majority of the teacher preparation students replied that they learned new information about students and schools. Their descriptions revealed that student diversity, teacher roles, and school structures and procedures were the types of information most frequently learned. According to the participants' responses, these constructs appear to intertwine rather than remain isolated. For example, one participant stated, "I learned how to work in a diverse classroom. I worked with the teacher to develop different strategies." Similarly, another participant reported: "I loved that this classroom allowed me to interact with a more diverse group of students. Many of these students were at different levels, so I was able to learn more about myself as a teacher and how I would implement certain strategies."

Responses that pertain to new information learned about school structures and procedures include, "All schools do things differently within the district" and "I was able to see into the school and how it was structured."

Praxis and Reflection

The vast majority of the students perceived that the JA experience connected with what they learned in class. Theory to practice connections and issues of student diversity appeared to be interrelated for many participants. Most responded with a general statement such as:

Once I was in the classroom and doing it on my own, some of the things that we talked about in [the teacher preparation] class made more sense. I also liked that if I had any questions about what happened in the JA classroom I could come back and talk about it in [the teacher preparation] class and get different opinions on the subject.

Other participants were more specific in their response; a student said, "One way the JA program connected with our class was that we were able to use Bloom's Taxonomy within our lessons." In regard to the connections between theory to practice and student diversity issues, one participant asserted, "The experience connected mostly with diversity and hands-on learning. I've never been in a classroom that diverse so I really got to connect that with class."

Reflection is a component of praxis. This was evident when a student commented about the JA experience saying, "It gives pre-service teachers the chance to see their strengths and weaknesses. It allows them the time to make changes and reflect how they performed as a teacher."

Preservice Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

Many of the teacher preparation students perceived their interactions to be instructional in nature, most often pertaining to implementing the lesson, asking questions, and supervising the students' progress. Other responses revealed rapport-building and managing student behavior to be significant interactions. In regard to instructional interactions, one participant indicated:

I was able to stand in front and teach the lesson. I got to know the students' names through the name plates and call on them directly. I was able to walk around and talk with different groups throughout the lessons. I was also able to participate in their discussions and games.

Behavior management interactions were coded because of participant statements such as "I had to calm the class down a few times," and, "I had to mediate disagreements within the groups."

Preservice Teacher Impact

A slight majority of the preservice teacher candidates maintained that they had more of a social impact, rather than an academic impact, on the JA classroom students. The reason most often expressed for this observation was they perceived that the JA classroom students showed excitement when they arrived. One participant concurred by writing:

I felt that my biggest impact was that of a stress reliever and that I brought fun to the classroom. The students were always so elated to see me come in. I made learning really fun for them, and I am a very enthusiastic teacher, so I think they were able to feed off of my energy.

Regarding academic impact, a teacher candidate stated, "I think my biggest impact was academic. I felt that the students actually learned new things, and they will remember what I taught them." Another participant concurred by saying, "I impacted them academically because the last lesson asked them to raise their hand after recalling all the main ideas from each lesson, and not one student had their hand down."

Program Assessment

All 26 teacher candidate participants reported they felt this program should be continued. The opportunity for theory to practice connections was the overwhelming reason given to support this response. The suggestions for improvement included cooperating teacher scheduling issues, the desire for more local school placements, and the perceived need for improvement of lesson plans. General statements such as, "I believe this program should be continued because it helps you prepare a little more for student teaching," and, "I learned so much from this experience, so I think it should be continued," were frequent. The suggestions for improvement were more specific. One comment illustrated the theme of cooperating teacher scheduling issues: "My [cooperating] teacher was slow to respond to emails; therefore, I was slow to start my sessions. I drove to Dallas on a day they were testing, so I couldn't teach my lesson. A simple email could have saved me from wasting gas and time."

Several students desired a school placement closer to the college campus. One participant reported, "I spent a total of 10 hours driving to get to my assigned school. On top of juggling work, school, and having enough gas money, it was really hard." Concerns about the quality of the lesson plans were expressed, such as, "JA should develop more practical lesson plans. For example, some parts of each lesson plan were out of order, or the specific supplies needed for a successful lesson were not listed."

Discussion

Survey results suggested that most participants agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding the benefit of each item related to Junior Achievement training, teaching strategies, classroom management, and diversity regarding the curriculum or the actual teaching of the lessons in the field experience. Of particular significance is that 100% of participants felt that the JA field experience increased their perspectives of diversity in the classroom. In addition, all but one of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the JA field experience was beneficial for their professional preparation.

Qualitative results suggested that all of the participants found the JA field experience beneficial. More specifically, the teacher candidates perceived they were able to experience vast theory to practice connections as a result of the JA field experience that related to their level of preparedness to teach. Secondly, they reportedly perceived the social benefits to be of great value. Finally, a third significant area that repeatedly emerged was the increased comfort and confidence levels perceived due to this field experience. Therefore, enhanced self-efficacy, the benefit of practice and preparation, and reinforcement of educational foundations were the primary perceived outcomes of this early field experience.

There are a number of intersections between the questions and the responses elicited. Even though the participants indicated their interactions with the JA classroom students were primarily instructional, they believed their biggest impact was that of a social and emotional nature. Increased comfort and confidence levels were often perceived, and the results supported previous research indicating that the establishment of a positive rapport with students, a teacher's confidence level, and effective instruction are interrelated (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Rubie-Davies, 2012). Students also reported a relationship between student diversity and instructional decisions. Research indicates that early field experiences in diverse settings have led to increased critical, cultural consciousness and self-efficacy (Gay, 2010; Lastrapes & Negishi, 2011).

This study has several limitations. First, it describes one group of teacher candidates at one teacher education institution. Thus, generalizability is limited. Second, internal reliability may be limited, in that this participant perception research was an initial inquiry into the Junior Achievement experience in teacher education. Future research will likely expand to include interview protocol and a comparison to other non-JA sections. Although pedagogical content knowledge is a paramount goal for teacher education, these participants were at a developmental level in their programs where general pedagogy was introduced. The outcomes from the course will inform their future content methods courses, tying to more specific pedagogical content knowledge goals.

Implications for Teacher Education

We found that participants perceived the JA early field experience to be beneficial for their professional preparation as teachers. They indicated that the most significant experiences related to instructional strategies, classroom management, and working with diverse students. Engaging with the JA curricula clearly established a connection between the general methods course content and the actual practice of teaching. Participants indicated enhanced self-efficacy, the benefit of practice and preparation, and reinforcement of educational foundations as primary perceived outcomes of the JA early field experience.

These findings are significant for teacher education in that there is a disconnection between course-based and practice-based components of teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2010). Teacher preparation institutions may best mediate this disconnect by systematically bridging several divides: between professional knowledge and skilled practice, between universities and K–12 schools, and between the settings in which prospective teachers learn and the contexts of their early years of teaching (Grossman, 2010). The theoretical and practical division in teacher education may best be addressed in early field experiences tied to general or instruction-oriented courses where preservice teachers may actually practice the instructional methods addressed in their courses, rather than simply preparing for future practice. A public-philanthropic partnership with JA in this teacher education program bridged the theoretical/practical and the university/school divide by providing preservice teachers an opportunity to teach lessons in school settings early in their programs, rather than waiting for their student teaching experience.

Early field experiences are essential for connecting course content and the realities of the classroom. Field experiences using JA curricula have been shown to have fidelity to instructional content within a general methods course and this study validated this finding (Piro & Hutchinson, 2009). A partnership between JA and a teacher preparation program provided high-quality, early field experiences to preservice students by scaffolding pedagogical practice prior to student teaching, including practice in small and large group instruction, classroom management, and working with diverse students. Participant perspectives suggested that they had more comfort with their teaching practices and have a better understanding of the real-context of teaching following the JA field experience. Learning to practice within practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010) is a significant component of progressive teacher education programs that contain both a didactic and clinical foci (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010).

Concerns surrounding the influence of private interests in public arenas are valid and deserve further problematizing. The convergence of a public university with a private philanthropy creates questions of policy for public universities. The very nature of what it means to be a public university is challenged when the spaces between public and private are blurred. There are significant concerns with corporate partnerships in education (Ravitch, 2011). One concern of public–private partnerships is the possibility of private interests overwhelming public interests and an increase in the privatization of educational spheres (Patrinos et al., 2009). Ultimately, this concern is bound in control of the curricula, human resources, and outcomes. The teacher education partnership with JA did not threaten the integrity of the teacher education curriculum or that of the partnership schools. JA curricula are aligned with state standards and welcomed in those schools that have voluntarily chosen to become partnership schools. The partnership strategy offered by JA for teacher education institutions was largely one of system support in which the private entity gave assistance through programmatic means (Dick & Marlin, 1989). Autonomy over the means and methods remained with the teacher education institution. A formal or informal agreement with JA regarding partner responsibilities and expectations may support mutual understandings regarding curricula, human resources and programmatic outcomes. Suggestions for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a JA partnership are provided in the last section of this article.

Another potential concern of partnerships between public universities and private entities is that the curricula the preservice teachers actually teach may be outside of their own content specialty area. The content of JA curricula is primarily that of economics and financial literacy. An iconic practice of excellent teacher education is the connection

between pedagogical practice and content to form unique content pedagogical knowledge (Ball, 2000; Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008). A successful integration of specific content knowledge with pedagogical practices is a significant outcome for teacher education, and clinical experiences may shepherd this connection.

However, when JA curricula are used in early field experiences in general pedagogy courses that focus on instructional strategies that are common to all content areas, such as leading whole group or small group discussions, the probability of enriching pedagogical practices for preservice teacher candidates is distinct for teacher education students. The participant preservice teachers were immersed in an early field experience with JA prior to the culmination of their coursework in pedagogy or content. A general focus on pedagogy is more developmentally appropriate at this point of their program, and the JA general curriculum, which preservice teachers use in the clinical setting holds promise for the development of their more specific, content-oriented practice that will follow before their student-teaching experience. General content knowledge, knowledge of educational contexts, and of the learner in context (Shulman, 1986) are categories of general pedagogical proficiencies needed for preservice teachers, which, when combined with curricular knowledge of specific content areas, embody an inclusive and transformative teacher education curriculum. The preservice teachers in this pilot study engaged in actual classroom teaching rather than simple observation, a hallmark of a quality field experience, and subsequently, the JA partnership promoted those general pedagogical proficiencies that are manifest in exemplary teacher education programs.

Our teacher education program has found varied rationales for continuing a partnership with JA following the initial pilot program. All students seeking a teaching certificate are required to be in classrooms as a component of field-based experiences and early and alternative field experiences are encouraged by the state to meet this goal. The partnership with JA supports the goals of the NCATE (2010) and the State Education Agency to include more field-based experiences to enhance quality teacher education programs. Early field experiences within partnership schools are a vital component of teacher preparation (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010; Zeichner, 2010).

Additionally, we found the early field experience through the JA partnership to be high-quality for several reasons. First, the curricula were aligned to state standards; thus, the content was sequenced into the partnership school's curriculum. Lessons contained specific subject materials that would be required content at the varied grade levels during the school year. The JA curricula support and enhance the state standards. Furthermore, JA provided the actual lessons and all materials in a kit for each preservice student and partnership classroom student. JA trainers traveled to campus to train all preservice teachers in use of the curricula and suggested best practices for instruction. Most significantly, the JA partnership provided not simply an early field experience, but a quality, early field experience in that preservice teachers were engaged in actual teaching, enhancing the prospects that the preservice teachers will transfer skills from the early field experience to the real world of teaching (Retallick & Miller, 2010). Unlike many field experiences prior to student teaching where preservice students simply observe mentor teachers, the participants of this partnership actually taught five or six JA lessons in the field experience setting. Preservice students need experiences situated in schools and classrooms to connect the theory of learning from their general pedagogy classes to the actual practicing of teaching (Washburn-Moses, Kopp, & Hetttersimer, 2012). A partnership with JA increased the preservice teacher participants' practica time in classroom settings prior to student teaching (Moore, 2003). Early field experiences may increase student engagement, a predictor of

retention, and cognitive and personal development in college students (Belcheir, 2001). Additional teacher education programs may find similar rationales and benefits for their preservice students in partnering with JA.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the pilot partnership between JA and a teacher education program, we provide several suggestions for a partnership. First, consider the significance of quality, early field experiences for preservice teachers. Seek novel ways to partner with local resources such as JA. Supplement course content in general or instructional methods courses with the actual practice of pedagogical practices early in teacher candidates programs, while still maintaining the integrity of more specific pedagogical content knowledge that may be sequenced later in the curriculum.

Second, create an MOU with partners to explicate each entity's responsibilities. This sample MOU may address the following partner responsibilities for a JA partnership.

JA Responsibilities

- Provides a list of partnership classes prior to the first day of the program's courses each semester for students to choose for their JA experience. Options will include elementary and secondary choices.
- Provides all materials necessary to teach each curriculum at no charge. Materials are delivered to professors of record.
- Provides training packet for each preservice teacher, including all necessary materials for each lesson.
- Trains all preservice teachers on usage of JA materials during their regular class time. Dates will be agreed on between the program and JA.
- Provides ongoing follow up with mentor teachers and preservice teachers by JA staff.

Teacher Education Program Responsibilities

- Preservice teachers send background check and request for placement to program student support.
- Background check is handled by Professional Development Center as required by school district.
- The program receives JA materials and arranges distribution to students on training day.
- Preservice teachers fill out JA registration form and agree to JA's Child Protection Policy and Social Media Policy.
- Preservice teachers contact teachers to schedule JA lessons/class presentations.
- Preservice teachers will pre-survey and post-survey students in assigned classroom with instruments provided by JA.
- Preservice teachers deliver all JA lessons to students in their assigned class.
- Preservice teachers notify JA of completion date.

Last, conduct research and use data to inform programmatic goals. Ongoing and summative evaluations of the JA partnership have led to several programmatic changes. For example, based on this research and other evaluative measures, the JA partnership has

grown to include all sections of the early methods course, an expansion beyond the initial one course section. We have extended our offerings with JA to middle and high school level partnership schools. Based on this research and the success of the JA partnership, our teacher education program has recognized the value of early field experiences and offered additional early experiences in the initial pedagogy course.

Teacher education has been tasked with closing the theory to practice gap, a proficiency that is becoming a necessary requirement of teacher education. Quality, early field experiences may shepherd that purpose. A public–philanthropic partnership between teacher education and Junior Achievement culminated in an early field experience for general education preservice teacher candidates that bridged the public/private and theory/practice divides and showed promise for increasing general pedagogical knowledge. This convergence of public and private entities may result in a re-visioning of practice for teacher education preparation programs aimed at providing pedagogical practice via early field experiences.

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