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# Bringing the Best and Brightest to Teacher Education

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BRINGING THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST TO TEACHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Teacher Education

The University of Mississippi

by

MARY ANN PARKER

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## ABSTRACT

This research discusses historical, societal, and educational contexts leading to negative perceptions of public school education in the United States. The qualitative phenomenological research study explored the lived experiences of students participating in a unique scholarship program for high achieving students in teacher education. The study focused on fellows participating in the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP), a full scholarship opportunity allowing top performers to study secondary education at either Mississippi State University or the University of Mississippi. The study focused on University of Mississippi METP scholarship recipients and explored the conflict fellows experienced as a result of pursuing a career in education. The researcher conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews of METP fellows and conducted the study through a social constructivism lens. Data analysis included triangulation and thick description to aid with validity. The researcher sought emerging themes from the data and focused only on the participants' viewpoints. The data revealed the participants' experiences of conflict as relating decision to attend a school of education, conflict during college program, and conflict in worldview. Conflict in definition of success was an underlying theme in all categories. Results derived from collection of the data have the potential to aid in recruiting high achieving students to the education profession.

*Keywords:* Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program, phenomenological, education

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my first and best teachers, my parents, Ross and Geri Cardwell, and to Brad Parker and Stephen Parker, who always love and support me.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Once a prestigious field in the United States, many legislators, parents, and general public members no longer hold the public education profession in high esteem (Labaree, 1995, p. 46). As our global society places more emphasis on the need for quality education for all United States students, it is critical to have quality educators in today's classrooms (Meyer, 2012, p. 56). However, overwhelming negative attention towards teachers and the overall K-12 educational system creates challenges to bringing the best and brightest into teacher education programs (Mehta, 2013, 106).

This proposed study focused on perceptions of scholarship recipients (fellows) accepted into the recently developed Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP). METP is a full scholarship program designed to recruit top performing rising college freshmen to secondary schools of education (METP, n.d). METP fellows may choose to focus either on secondary mathematics education or secondary English education and may attend either the University of Mississippi located in Oxford, Mississippi, or Mississippi State University, located in Starkville, Mississippi. Although the interview process and admittance decisions are left to each individual university's representatives, fellows at each university receive equivalent scholarship offerings (METP,n.d). Dr. Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham, a member of the METP faculty, states competitive applicants should have a variety of extra-curricular activities spanning their entire high school career. One type of activity does not bear significance over another; rather, METP applicants need to demonstrate the ability to maintain high academic standards while remaining

involved in other activities (personal communication, October 6, 2015). In addition to service requirements, metp.org (2015) describes academically competitive applicants as having a minimum composite American College Test score of 28 or a SAT composite score of 1250 and a minimum grade point average of 3.5 (Who Should Apply? section, para.1). Due to their academic and service achievements, the METP fellows have had a variety of educational and professional school options; however, the fellows have chosen to pursue the field of education over other professional fields. In order to add to the body of literature discussing reasons high achieving students choose or don't choose education as a profession, this study focused on the reasons these high performing students decided to pursue a career in education as well as the challenges they face pursuing their professional education career paths. Next, the study explored how the influential people in the fellows' lives view the education profession and if/how those perceptions influence the fellows' career choices. Finally, the study examined how overall public perceptions affect fellows' educational decision making.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Lynch (2014) explains today's educators face many challenges throughout their career. Among the top challenges educators face is American perceptions of public school educators, noting teachers are acutely aware of the perceptions surrounding their chosen profession. In fact, teachers surveyed in the Chicago Public School system responded the number one challenge they face as teachers is negative public perceptions (Lynch, 2014, p. 49).

At the same time negative public perceptions are challenging teachers, Bushaw and Lopez (2011) assert the public admits the need for high academic performers in educational positions. A June 2011 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll surveying public attitudes toward public schools in the United States reported seventy-six percent of those surveyed are in favor of recruiting

high-achieving students to education (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 10). These results indicate public awareness of the need for high performing students in the educational field. However, Bushaw and Lopez (2011) further report in the same poll, respondents stated if the best and brightest person they knew approached them with aspirations of becoming a teacher, twenty-three percent replied they would suggest a different field to the person. Another two percent of respondents would discourage the person from entering education (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 10). Therefore, a conundrum exists: the public recognizes the importance of accomplished persons as educational professionals, but many people are unwilling to support high achievers' pursuing of the educational field over other respected professions. Per Lankford, Loeb, McEachin, Miller, and Wyckoff (2014), "To raise teaching's occupational prestige, the general public's perception of teaching must increase relative to other professions" (p. 445).

Mehta (2013) suggests broadening the pool of teacher education programs with high academic achievers may also bolster public perceptions. Increased public confidence in public education could lead to increased teacher salaries and higher student achievement which would encourage talented people to enter education as a profession (Mehta, 2013, p. 106). Bushaw and Lopez (2012) add a 2012 Phi Delta Kappan Gallup poll reports seventy-five percent of respondents believe elevating teacher education program entrance requirements will lead to more effective teachers, and teacher education entry requirements should be on par with pre-law, business, engineering, and pre-medicine schools entry requirements (Bushaw & Lopez, 2012, p. 15). Thus, attracting top academic performers to enter the field of education is a solid first step in increasing American education's reputation.

The METP has the potential to raise public perceptions of education as the program seeks to bring high performing students into teacher education programs. In order to do so, the METP

must continue to attract a quality pool of applicants. Therefore, this study is a unique contribution to the field as the fellows' interviews provided first hand insight into the factors both enticing and repelling targeted students to pursue opportunities such as METP over other scholarship programs. This study addressed a gap in the literature as the METP fellows are members of a unique scholarship designed for education profession study, and no previous study had yet been conducted of the fellows.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of the best and brightest students participating in a prestigious scholarship program for teacher education (Creswell, 2014, p. 126).

### **Significance of Study**

This qualitative study explored historical, societal, and educational factors influencing overall perceptions of education in the United States. This is a timely study as educational programs seek to recruit high academic performers to education programs. The study allowed Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program fellows to describe their unique lived experiences as METP scholarship recipients. Because the study sought human experiences belonging specifically to the METP fellows, a phenomenological study focused on describing the experiences of fellows from the initial, second, and third years of the program's beginning best lent itself to examining the factors drawing exceptional students to the scholarship program (Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

The results of the study have the potential to increase the number of top performing students in teacher education programs across the United States as fellows shared perceptions and reasons for their study of education. Further, the information discovered in the study has the potential to aid in recruitment techniques for Schools of Education and alternate route programs leading to

teacher licensure as educational leaders can better understand positive and negative perceptions surrounding their programs. Finally, the information provided insight to the reasons negative perceptions of education persist and help counter those perceptions in the future.

### **Research Question**

One overall guiding central question drove this study: What is the lived experience of a high achieving student participating in a prestigious scholarship program for teacher education?

The following issue subquestions helped narrow the focus of the study:

- (1) How do educational perceptions of influential individuals in students' lives affect the students' entry to teacher education programs?
- (2) How do scholarship recipients envision their long-term educational career?

**Delimitations.** This study confined itself to interviewing undergraduate college students participating in a scholarship program at one public North Mississippi college.

**Limitations.** The limited number of members in the combined METP cohorts limited the number of eligible study participants. However, the in-depth nature of the interviews allowed enough data for analysis even though the number of participants is low. In addition, as only secondary teacher education students in English and mathematics are METP fellows, there are limits to generalizing the study beyond the two subject areas. Further, all participants are attending college only in the state of Mississippi. However, fellows formally residing in multiple states shared their experiences beginning before their move to Mississippi. Therefore, the results of the study may not generalize beyond the specific North Mississippi program.

## **Definitions**

The following definitions guided this research:

1. Phenomenological research. "Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14).
2. Social constructivism. "In this worldview, people seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20).
3. Triangulate. Per Creswell (2014), to triangulate data means to "different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using to build a coherent justification for themes" (p. 201).
4. METP. Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program, a full scholarship opportunity open to high achieving students who commit to the study of secondary English education or secondary math education. The scholarship is available at Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi. (METP, n.d.)
5. (METP) fellow. A METP scholarship recipient. (METP, n.d.)

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Exploration of both historical perceptions of education and available teacher education honors scholarship programs are essential to this review of literature. The historical perceptions of education and societal influences upon such perceptions have helped create the groundwork for the current perceptions surrounding the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP) fellows. In addition, the honors scholarship program information supports the uniqueness of the METP program and aids in creating a framework for evaluation of the program.

### **Historical Perceptions of Education in the United States**

A close look at ideological struggles as well as historical gender discrepancies, teachers' social class, and economic issues affecting the field of education aids in understanding the development of the current image of education (Herbst, 1989, p. 12). As the public forms expectations of teachers through a blending of on screen teachers and real life teachers, the crucial roles Hollywood productions have played in influencing current educational perceptions warrant examination (Dahlgren, 2013; Tomsen, 1993; Rathgeb, 2004; Dalton, 2013). Finally, exploration of the influence newspaper, television, and social media have had on educational perceptions is equally important.

In the 1840s, Horace Mann, Secretary of Education in Massachusetts, had an enormous and lasting effect on educational views (Preston, 1993; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013). Preston (1993) asserts Mann had a dynamic and lasting influence on school reform (Preston, 1993, p. 538). Further, Tozer, Senese, and Violas (2013) maintain Mann "left a lasting mark on American education" (p. 60). Examination of Horace Mann's influence on education remains

important as his educational contributions still influence varying modern day perceptions of education in the United States (Murrow, 2011, p. 312-313; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013, p. 68).

One lasting influence Mann had on perceptions of teachers is the high moral standards to which teachers still are held, even outside of the school setting (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013, p. 68). In fact, Tozer, Senese, & Violas (2013) state Mann's ideal of teachers as moral authorities "led to an unprecedented invasion of the private lives of American teachers during Mann's time, a scrutiny that even today separates teachers from other professionals" (p. 68). Mann believed teachers should be morally superior as he advocated the need for teachers to instruct children how to behave ethically in the school setting; Mann believed doing so would lead to an overall improved society (Laud, 1997, p. 8).

Stemming from Mann's ideal of teachers as virtuous leaders lead to another lasting influence of Mann's philosophy of teaching: women teachers as superior to men teachers (Tozer, Senese, & Violas; Preston, 1993; Goldstein, 2014). Mann advocated for female over male teachers as he considered women more affectionate than men; therefore, he thought women would be less prone than men to aggressively discipline students (Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013, p. 68-69). Mann considered women more naturally suited for teaching than men and pushed for females in education based upon "generalizations based on the ideology of domesticity, which he would then define as the appropriate characteristics for superior teachers" (Preston, 1993, p. 539). Goldstein (2014) notes Mann argued women were too innocent and pure to enter fields such as journalism or politics and should embrace their nurturing side and teach children (Goldstein, 2014, p. 539).

Tozer, Senese, & Violas (2013) report another aspect of promoting women teachers centered on finances. Women teachers earned only one third of the salary of male teachers (Tozer,



Senese, & Violas, 2013). Goldstein (2014) states, "Mann depicted these cost-effective female educators as angelic public servants motivated by Christian faith; wholly unselfish, self-abnegating, and morally pure" (p. 539). Therefore, teaching was more mission based than professionally based and low salaries were part of the sacrifice of helping children.

Tozer, Senese, & Violas (2013) acknowledge Mann's idea to turn teaching to a female field gained traction as "by the end of the 1840s common-school teaching was viewed as a feminine occupation" (p. 68-69). Under the direction of Mann, Massachusetts teachers were more likely to be female as only one out four teachers were male (Goldstein, 2014). White, middle class females dominated the teaching profession and comprised 84.01 percent of the teaching profession by the year 1920 (Sohn, 2012). Labaree (1995) explains females were the primary gender in the teaching profession as opposed to male dominated careers such as medicine and law, and the large percentage of females in teaching lowered the prestige of the profession from that of other careers. Because educators were predominately female, education held a lower status than other professions (Labaree, 1995, p. 44). Sohn (2012) adds that teachers during the 1860-1920 time period were females who were primarily either from middle class or non-poor farming families; the lower class of the U.S. population was underrepresented in the teaching profession (Sohn, 2012, p. 914).

Skinnel (2013) states another factor separating the teaching profession was normal schools, schools designed to educate high school students and young adults on the pedagogy needed for teaching in public schools (Skinnel, 2013; Pemberton, 1974; Goldstein, 2014). Reverend Samuel R. Hall established the first normal school in Concord, Vermont, in 1828 based on the German normal school model. In 1839, Horace Mann, James Carter, and Reverend Brooks opened the first state normal school in Lexington, Massachusetts, and focused the mission of the school as

educating secondary and post secondary students in teaching skills. Soon, normal schools opened in multiple states, and a total of one hundred thirty-five public and forty-three private schools operated by 1890 (Pemberton, 1974).

While other professionals tended to receive education at post-secondary institutions, normal schools blended secondary and post-secondary education with the purpose of training future teachers (Skinnell, 2013, p. 13-14). Goldstein (2014) explains because training male students was much more expensive than training female students, the schools were designed to accept only females. After completing primary schools, students entered these normal schools as opposed to academic high schools or college. Women attended classes in algebra, philosophy, and pedagogy for three years before earning their teaching certificate.

However, these schools were not as prestigious as other colleges (Goldstein, 2014, p.540). One reason for the lower prestige is the normal schools had lower entrance standards than other programs (Goodlad, 1990; Goldstein, 2014, Pemberton, 1974). For example, many normal schools admissions only required passing of an entrance exam (Pemberton, 1974).

Pemberton (1974) states “The challenge to normal schools to become professional schools like schools of law, medicine and engineering was a great one. It sparked the development of the normal schools into teachers' colleges” (p. 16). Over time, states began to require bachelor's degrees for teaching, and these normal schools eventually became teacher education programs in flagship universities and liberal arts colleges. By 1955, normal schools were no longer in existence (Goodlad,1990; Goldstein, 2014; Pemberton, 1974).

Golhaber and Walch (2014) contend the noted lack of prestige of the teaching profession was not due to the teachers' academic achievements. The teaching field drew females who were high

academic performers. Their research explains females displaying the highest academic performance were teachers, a trend lasting until the 1960s (Golhaber & Walch, 2014, p. 12).

Cummins (2009) asserts the novelists of the 1800s also had an influence on the teaching profession as "fictional versions of schoolwomen contributed to the historical reality, with the decade of the 1850s as a moment of mutual influence between literature and life" (p. 801). Fiction writers of the middle 1800s took note of the number of women educators and began to compose novels with female teacher protagonists that created positive images of both teachers and teaching (Cummins, 2009, p. 800-801). Tracey (2000) stresses while females had limited career options, "teaching has the advantage of demanding that heroines develop and demonstrate their intellectual capacities" (p. 39). These carefully crafted images of women as intellectual professionals not only brought awareness of education to taxpaying citizens outside of the education profession but also influenced future educators (Cummins, 2009, p. 800-801). According to Cummins (2009) "As literature encouraged women readers to imagine themselves as teachers, the novelists contributed to a rising cultural trend" (p. 801).

As the nation moved into the 1930s, economics presented unique challenges to education as the nation was entrenched in the Great Depression (Field & Bellows, 2012; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Unfortunately, poor national economic conditions left educators with little financial means to meet even basic school needs (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). In addition, teachers had many extra professional demands placed upon them in order to keep a strong liaison between schools and communities (Field & Bellows, 2012, p. 70). Specifically, educational money solutions came in the form of increasing class size, laying off teachers, and cutting teacher salaries (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). In some cases, districts were unable to pay teachers at all. In

fact, money was so scarce sometimes teachers worked for months without compensation (Field & Bellows, 2012, p. 70).

Sadly, 1933 found one out four men who desired employment unable to find work (Kirkwood, 1972, p. 811). In addition, Helmbold (1998) states women scrambled to stay employed and moved down the ladder of desirable occupations in order to find work as “Elementary school teachers became secretaries, secretaries took jobs as waitresses, waitresses moved into laundries, and laundry operatives became domestic workers” (p. 245). Field and Bellows (2012) note, simply having a teaching job was considered a "professional accomplishment" (p. 70). Despite the fact teachers were not paid for their work, the ability to claim employment period was enough to keep teachers returning to the classroom. As a result, teachers were working as virtual volunteers and perceived doing so was admirable, even desirable (Field & Bellows, 2012).

In addition to in- school activities, teachers during the Depression found themselves in the position to do anything they could to endear themselves to both the general public and school administration (Field & Bellows, 2012). Field and Bellows (2012) explain the editor in the publication *Grade Teacher* encouraged teachers to host basket socials for the community and, despite large delays in teaching compensation, take on extra school duties such as teaching additional classes and custodial roles. In essence, teachers were considered fortunate to simply have a job; therefore, teachers should accept poor working conditions. Also, teachers were to accept all of these responsibilities without complaint and without questioning authority (Field & Bellows, 2012).

As real life teachers self-sacrificed while working to keep a positive image of education, the rising medium of films and television tended to portray education as an admirable profession

(Hill, 1995; Beyerbach, 2005; Ramio, Devlin-Scherer, & Zinicola, 2002). A notable example is the 1939 film *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* which starred Robert Donat as Mr. Chips, a rigid teacher turned selfless teacher capable of winning over the affection of his students (Hill, 1995, p. 41, Beyerbach, 2005, p.278). In the movie, Mr. Chips forms strong, positive relationships with his students, allowing him to create a supportive and cooperative learning environment in his classroom (Raimo, Devlin-Scherer,& Zinicola, 2002, p. 316). Therefore, the public viewed an on screen teacher image as one of high moral authority and integrity. Thus, the image portrayed on screen was a teacher capable of reaching students and ensuring students' educational success (Hill, 1995; Ramio, Devlin-Scherer, & Zinicola, 2002). The movie's six Academy Awards nominations suggest critical acceptance of the positive teacher image presented in the film. Robert Donat even won a 1939 Best Actor Academy Award for his portrayal of the noble teacher (Awards Database, n.d.).

Urban & Wagoner (2004) note the start of World War II changed the job market. As men left to serve in the military, women were called upon to fill the vacant jobs of the servicemen. Higher paying jobs, such as factory jobs, were suddenly available to women, and women left teaching to pursue such opportunities (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). In addition, enrollment in teacher training programs decreased in 1940 and 1941; Pemberton (1974) states “This development resulted from the draft as well as from the attractions of good wartime positions for experienced people” (p. 23). Because of the shortage of education students, many state teachers colleges felt pressured to produce as many teachers as possible with little regard for standards (Pemberton, 1974, p. 21).

In addition to job market changes affecting education, 1943 saw the *New York Times* article "Ignorance of U.S. History Shown by College Freshmen" gain negative attention for education in

the United States-specifically history education (Halvorsen, 2012). The focus of the *New York Times* article was the poor results of a U.S. history survey administered to seven thousand college freshmen at various colleges throughout the United States (Fine, 1943). In the article, Fine (1943) reasons the students' performance on the survey indicated lack of student preparation in secondary schools and stated "the conclusion is inescapable that high school students now possess an insufficient knowledge of United States history" (p. 32). According to Halvorsen (2012), "The *Time* article ignited a heated controversy about students' preparation for college and inflamed the debate on history versus social studies education. Politicians, teachers, educators, parents, students, and members of the public-even Eleanor Roosevelt-commented on the results on the survey," (p.1).

Townsend and Ryan (2010) declare admirable teacher portrayals remained the norm in film and television during the 1950s post-war era (Townsend & Ryan, 2010). In general, Hollywood continued during this time to portray teachers in film and television in a positive, even noble, manner (Morrow, 1955; Townsend & Ryan, 2010). In fact, with the scare of Soviet communism on the minds of many United States citizens, filmmakers were careful to craft characters in tune with a deeply patriotic American public. As such, teacher images on screen were positive as "a negative image of the teacher would be un-American" (Ryan & Townsend, 2010, p. 58).

Therefore, the film industry produced films showing a positive image of teachers which corresponded with cinema audiences' perceptions of the field, basing audience acceptance of the teacher portrayals on ratings from television programming and amount of film box office sales (Ryan & Townsend, 2010, p. 45).

Esteemed teacher portrayals also crept into television in the 1950s, allowing millions of people to view approving teacher likenesses on the small screen in their own homes (Marrow,

1955). On such program with a viewership of eighteen million per episode was *Mr. Peepers*, a television comedy focused on the life of a science teacher named Mr. Peepers (Morrow, 1955, p.27). While the comedy's protagonist, Mr. Peepers, sometimes suffered through humorous challenges, his character was "always dignified" (Morrow, 1955, p. 27). The public overwhelmingly favored this teacher facsimile, as a *Time* (1954) reporter stated an episode featuring the marriage of Mr. Peepers created the most public excitement since the previous year's episode of *I Love Lucy* which featured Lucy giving birth (*Time*, 1954, p. 83).

Ryan and Townsend (2012) explain during this time period, the blurred line between the fantasy teacher played on the screen and actual teachers added to the difficulty of audiences distinguishing between on-screen educational fiction and real world educational reality (Ryan & Townsend, 2012). For example, Eve Arden, the actress who portrayed teacher Miss Brooks in the popular television show *Our Miss Brooks*, was offered actual teaching positions and even membership in the National Education of Teachers (Ryan & Townsend, 2012, p. 152).

Tomsen (1993) notes many books denouncing public education were published from 1953 through the 1963, and the film industry followed suit in its criticism toward public education (Tomsen, 1993, p. 17). As the 1950s progressed, the simulation of teachers on the screen altered from the virtuous and intelligent version of educators Hollywood had previously presented. Instead, a new image of disinterested and weak educators now invaded movie screens (Golub, 2009; Tomsen, 1993).

In the mid-fifties, a new film had a large influence on media images of education; the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle* shocked audiences with a grim view of students and teachers alike (Golub, 2009, p. 21). *Blackboard Jungle* displayed a shift in the types of factors influencing educational challenges with teachers now presented as main culprits of public education deficits

(Ramio, Devlin-Scherer, & Zinicola; Tomsen, 1993; Golub, 2009). Educators, once portrayed as just figures fighting against an unjust world, were now depicted as a central part of an unjust system (Tomsen, 1993, 8-9).

In the film, the protagonist, a teacher named Mr. Dadier, sharply clashes with his teaching colleagues; Mr. Dadier cannot stomach his fellow teachers' disdain for the students they teach, nor can he stomach the teachers' overall incompetence (Raimo, Devlin-Scherer, & Zinicola, 2002, p.319). As opposed to the positive teacher-student relationships illustrated with characters such as Mr. Chips, the teacher-student relationship was one of disdain for each other. Tomsen (1993) contends, "It is no longer educational outsiders, but rather the opposition comes in the form of other teachers, administrators and mean-spirited students themselves. Unlike previous movies, both the protagonist and antagonist are educators or students," (p. 9).

Leading up to and upon its release, *Blackboard Jungle* was plagued with controversy due to the violence in the movie and the negative view of education presented to audiences (Olesker, 2013; Golub, 2009). Olesker (2013) reports the movie had PTA members outraged (Olesker, 2013, p. 85). In addition, Golub (2009) states the movie was even banned in some places due to its "violent nature and sharp educational critique" (p. 21). Olesker (2013) also points out Claire Boothe Luce, the U.S. Ambassador to Italy, went so far as to withdraw the movie from the Venice Film Festival due to the "unflattering and unrealistic view of American school life" (p. 85). Thus, such a negative view of education in cinema was unfamiliar to audiences, and audiences faltered in immediate acceptance of such a negative education viewpoint.

Notably, teachers were not the only component of education attacked in the movie. Multiple layers of public education were portrayed as inadequate. Golub (2009) writes, "Dadier is



frustrated by unmotivated students, burned-out colleagues, an unsupportive administration, inadequate school facilities, and an ineffective teacher education program" (p. 21).

Although initially controversial, *Blackboard Jungle* proved popular with both audiences and movie critics, suggesting eventual public acceptance of this new image of education (Awards Database, n.d.). *Blackboard Jungle* was nominated for four Academy Awards, including a nomination for Richard Brooks as the writer of the screenplay (Awards Database, n.d.). The movie was also a financial box office success, paving the way for more movies with similar tones (Rathgeb, 2004, p.102).

In 1957, the Russian launch of the Sputnik I satellite also influenced public images of education (Bracey, 2007; Johanningmeier, 2010). Americans theorized the Russian's development of Sputnik signaled the Russian schools were superior to American schools (Bracey, 2004, p. 120). Per Johanningmeier (2010), public school critics claimed American schools were not challenging students and were incapable of producing quality scientists and technology personnel (Johanningmeier, 2010, p. 351-352). Bracey (2004) adds, "Sputnik set a nasty precedent that has become a persistent tendency: when a social crisis — real, imagined, or manufactured — appears, schools are the scapegoat of choice; when the crisis is resolved, they receive no credit" (p. 123). Clifford (1975) states the public image of the teacher has struggled since the 1950's. "Teachers have apparently felt personally victimized by the strident criticisms of the public schools which have continued, almost without cessation, since the Cold War began. They have been accused of being miseducated and misguided; lazy, disloyal, misty-eyed, and ineffectual " (p. 266).

In 1963, James Koerner released *Miseducation of American Teachers*, a document which negatively critiqued and denounced teacher education programs (Labaree, 1995, p.

46). According to Schlechty & Vance (1983), "Koerner's *Miseducation of American Teachers* (1963) was not only a scathing indictment of teacher education; it also contained strong criticism of the qualities and characteristics of those who taught in American schools (p. 46). Labaree (1995) stresses no part of education was unscathed in Koerner's writing as "faculty, students, curriculum-all come under his verbal lash," (p. 46).

Per Schlechty & Vance (1983), the root of teaching reform efforts during the 1960s was the perception that sub-par individuals were teachers (Schlechty & Vance, 1983, p. 469). In 1965, Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Gaylord Nelson added legislation establishing one such reform effort, The National Teacher Corps (NTC), an alternative teacher preparation program designed to recruit high achieving liberal arts students to teach in underserved districts (Rogers, 2009, p. 347; Eckert, 2011, p. 932). Rogers (2009) states the NTC was built on the premise that teachers and teacher education programs were second rate; therefore, students outside of the field of education were more desirable candidates for the program (Rogers, 2009, p. 348). Rogers (2009) asserts, "This vision took aim both at existing teachers and traditional programs of teacher education, challenging their professionalism and, in a larger sense, casting suspicion on the notion of professional training itself" (p. 348).

Goldstein (2014) states although the Supreme Court ruled against segregated schools in the 1954 case *Brown v Board of Education*, it wasn't until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that individuals could sue schools refusing integration. In order for students of poverty to receive the same educational funding as high income school districts, lawmakers passed the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Goldstein, 2014, p. 2065). President Johnson noted education was the only way out of poverty for many, stating education was his way out of poverty. He added he had great expectations for the law and benefits of the law for all students.

The extremely high expectations on educators as foot soldiers against poverty remain today (Goldstein, 2014).

The document *A Nation at Risk* brought negative attention to the education profession in 1983 (Ingersoll, 2007; Gunthrie & Springer, 2004; Johonningmeir, 2010). Johonningmeier (2010) notes *A Nation at Risk* tapped into previous and ongoing educational criticism and well executed marketing ensured public acceptance of the document (Johonningmeier, 2010, p. 348). Since the publication of *A Nation of Risk*, teachers have been highlighted as the main cause for a perceived deficit in the United State's student achievement results (Ingersoll, 2007, Gunthrie & Springer, 2004). Gunthrie & Springer (2004) assert, "*A Nation at Risk* proclaimed in 1983 that U.S. K-12 educational achievement was on a downward trajectory and that American technological and economic preeminence was consequently imperiled" (p.7). As Richard Ingersoll (2007) maintains, "underlying this perspective is the assumption that the primary source of the teacher quality problem lies in the deficits of the teacher's themselves- in their preparation, knowledge, commitment, engagement, effort, and ability" (p. 21). Goodlad (1990) reports his late 1980s study of multi discipline university professors revealed a lack of respect for not only teacher education programs but also the scholarly work professors of teacher education produced. He found campus wide acknowledgement of scholarly work to be rare for professors connected to schools of education (Goodlad, 1990, p. 192).

Adding to the controversy surrounding *A Nation at Risk* and negative university multi discipline perceptions was the Hollywood teacher film portrayal of the 1980s (Dahlgren, 2013). According to Dahlgren (2013), the decade of the 1970s birthed a more determined negative shift in the characterization of United States public school teachers in television and film, a theme remaining prominent through the 1980s (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 1). Per O'Brien (1989), shrinking

numbers of persons entering the education profession reflected a public turning away from the idealism of teaching (O'Brien, 1989, p. 217). In turn, movie and television shrank from positive teacher simulations. Now, the heroes of education were those fighting against below par educational systems, such as the insubordinate adolescents forced to participate in public school education (Dahlgren, 2012, p. 1-2).

As a result of a study of forty films produced during the 1970s and 1980s, Dahlgren (2013) reveals, "Hollywood film and television products have been crucial in presenting an image of American education in crisis" (p. 2). Thus, the public became inundated with visions of American educators as lackluster and out of touch with students who were right to rebel.

Dalton (2013) discusses the implications of films such as *Bad Teacher*, released in 2011. The movie's protagonist is a teacher who cheats, takes drugs, and embezzles money. This type of movie is particularly damaging because the message to viewers is there are no good teachers and the entire educational system is overrun with corruption (Dalton, 2013, p. 86). Dalton (2013) asserts "The implications of film depictions affect teachers, students, parents, and policy-makers" (p. 86) and adds such films "diminish respect for the profession (p. 87).

Recently, educational documentaries portraying public schools in a negative light have gained popularity (Bruhn, 2011; Tate, 2011). Bruhn (2011) writes one such documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, "was a direct attack on public schools, teachers, and their unions" (p. 48). However, some notable and powerful people celebrated *Waiting for Superman*; the public saw famous supporters such as Oprah Winfrey and President Obama praising the film (Bruhn, 2011).

Another film entitled *The Lottery* shadows families in New York City vying for their children a chance at enrollment in a charter school. Tate (2011) observes, "The traditional public school

represents a losing pick. The film thus implicitly but clearly defines the primary problems of public education as an inadequate provision of charter schooling” (p. 1).

Bushaw and Lopez (2011) claim the news media also reflects negative perceptions of education; when Phi Delta Kappa conducted a thousand respondent Gallup Poll, sixty-eight percent of respondents said they hear more bad stories concerning teachers in the news media than good stories. A quarter of poll respondents replied they would discourage the brightest person they know from entering the teaching field (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011).

Other factors contributing to the public perception of education include perceived academic achievement of teachers and declining student achievement on the American College Test (ACT) and Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) (Tucker, 2011). Zhao (2012) explains as of late, comparison of the United States’ student scores on international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have also shed a negative light on teachers. Zhao (2012) adds “The relative standing of each nation on these assessments is automatically equated with the quality of education in each nation” (p. 33).

While the status of the education profession is declining, initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Common Core State Standards have raised requirements and expectations of teachers (Jennings & Retner, 2006; Meyer, 2012). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 increased focus on teacher qualifications and accountability (Jennings & Retner, 2006, p. 113). According to the Act, teachers in core academic subject areas such as English and mathematics must obtain highly qualified status through coursework or testing measures (Smith & Gorard, 2007). Further, Dee and Jacob (2010) attest, “The hallmark features of this legislation compelled states to conduct annual student assessments linked to state standards, to identify

schools that are failing to make 'adequate yearly progress' (AYP), and to institute sanctions and rewards based on each school's AYP status" (p. 149), which placed new pressure on schools to demonstrate student success on yearly assessments.

Compounding the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act are the Common Core State Standards (Corestandards, n.d.). Zhao (2012) points out that the standards were created with a focus on mimicking the international top scorers on the TIMSS and PISA in an effort to increase American students' assessment scores on international assessments (as cited in Common Core, 2009). The Common Core State Standards call for shifts in current educational practices in the key areas of mathematics and language arts (Corestandards, n.d.). Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in today's classrooms will strengthen the need for high quality teachers and also the need for in-service teacher training as incorporating the standards will "require a deepening retraining of most of the teaching corps" (Achieve, 2012). Further, Meyer (2012) asserts that in-service teachers must be prepared to meet the rigorous demands of the new standards as well as reach 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents who "face greater literacy demands than their predecessors" (Meyer, 2012, pg. 56). Educators must be flexible, innovative, and knowledgeable in order to not only reach today's adolescent learner but help them meet heightened academic requirements.

Metha (2013) discusses with assessment results declining and teaching standards increasing, it is imperative schools attract and retain top quality teachers. In fact, analysis of successful international programs shows the difference in low performing schools versus top performing schools is top performing schools have faculty of teachers from the top one third of college graduates (Mehta, 2013). In places such as Finland and Singapore where education is a highly regarded profession, teacher program entry is extremely selective (Paine & Schleicher,

2011). Tucker (2011) explains Singapore applicants have a slim one in eight chance of admission while Finland applicants have a one in ten chance of attending a teaching college. Conversely, the College Board reports show United States teacher programs accepting the bottom one-third SAT scorers (Tucker, 2011).

As seen by Ingersoll and Merrill (2010), data reflects a decrease in teachers graduating from top ranked universities. Their study of the 2007-2008 school year found less than ten percent of first year teachers graduating from *Profile's of America's Colleges* most competitive or highly competitive institutions. Further, the study asserts while the percentage of female teachers graduating from top institutions in the top categories decreased slightly from 8.3 in the 1987-1988 school year to 7.7 in the 2007-2008 school year, the percentage of male teachers graduating from these institutions dropped from 15.5 percent to 10.2 percent during the same time period (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010).

### **Honors Scholarship Programs**

Scholarship programs targeting high achieving high school seniors seeking entrance to schools of education exist in various forms and tend to vary from state to state (Delaware Department of Education, n.d; Goldenapple, n.d.; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Further, scholarships and incentives are available to prospective students of alternate teacher preparation programs and degree holders seeking teaching certification through master's degree completion. Such programs target students either seeking or holding an alternate higher education degree outside of the field of education (NYCteachingfellows, n.d.; Teach, n.d.). As the METP scholarship leaders recruit graduating high school seniors seeking to attend teacher education programs, this dissertation will focus on scholarships also designed to recruit top performing high school students into schools of education. Additionally, METP scholarships offer full

tuition with additional benefits such as room and board, technology, and professional development opportunities for fellows. At this writing, the METP scholarship is unique in the total scholarship offerings for fellows. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on scholarships that are competitive with METP offerings (METP, n.d).

According to the Delaware Department of Education website (n.d.), Delaware offers the Christa McAuliffe Teacher Incentive Program, a scholarship open to legal residents of Delaware which provides recipients full tuition in addition to college mandated supplies. To qualify for the scholarship opportunity, high school students must receive a minimum SAT score of 1570 and rank in the top fifty percent of their high school class. In addition, college students are allowed entry provided they have maintained a 2.75 grade point average. Although the scholarship standards give preference to students planning to teach in a critical needs area, teaching in a critical needs area is not a requirement (Delaware Department of Education, n,d).

Another scholarship designed to increase teacher education students is located in Illinois. The Illinois Golden Apple Scholarship Program, only available to Illinois residents, awards Golden Apple scholarships to students entering the education profession who have a minimum ACT of 22 (Goldenapple, n,d.). Goldenapple (n.d.) further explains candidates must agree to teach in Illinois high need areas for four years upon completion of the program (Goldenapple, n.d.).

In 1986, North Carolina representatives created a scholarship program focused heavily on recruiting students with high academic accomplishments (TeachingFellows, n.d.). Henry, Bastian, and Smith (2012), examined the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program (NCTFP) from 2005 to 2009. They note the program "shows that the offer of competitive, merit-based scholarships was sufficient to recruit rising college freshman with top academic qualifications into the teaching profession" (p. 88). Henry, Bastian and Smith (2012) also explain scholarship



seekers must have high academic achievements (a minimum GPA of 2.5 and minimum SAT score of 950); impressively, the admitted students actually surpassed the minimum requirements as the fellows held "SAT scores above 1,150 and high school GPAs greater than 4.0 and ranked in the top 10% of their high school graduating classes" (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012, p. 88).

The program was successful in bringing top performing students to North Carolina schools of education and graduates maintained positive classroom results. However, the North Carolina General Assembly chose to defund the NCTFP. The 2015 graduating class of five hundred students is the last for the program (Hales, n.d., para 1).

### **Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program Scholarship**

Funding for the METP came through a private grant. Representatives of the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation, a non-profit organization located in Jackson, Mississippi, showed their enthusiasm for the innovative scholarship program designed to recruit high performing students to Mississippi teacher education programs by agreeing to fund the METP project via a \$12.95 million grant. In fact, foundation chairman Bob Hearin (2013) stated, "For years, our foundation has been focused on education as the best pathway to economic prosperity for Mississippi. We believe this program, which is focused on attracting the best and brightest to the profession of teaching, will help fulfill that idea" (Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, 2013).

**Program Description.** The METP is unique in both selectivity and scholarship offerings. For example, yearly scholarship offers for METP fellows will not exceed forty students per year as opposed to the five hundred scholarships per year the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program previously offered (METP, n.d.; TeachingFellows, n.d.). The University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University each have the capacity to offer twenty placements per year: ten secondary English education students and ten secondary mathematics

students. As freshmen, fellows receive scholarship benefits including all tuition and book costs plus room and board expenses. The students are provided a \$1000 technology stipend that allows students to purchase their choice of a laptop computer or tablet. Additionally, each semester fellows will travel to their counterpart institution to participate in joint professional development activities. The summer prior to their senior year, fellows from both universities will come together for a week to attend learning sessions concerning contemporary educational issues lead by joint MSU and UM faculty. Finally, students are able to attend a prestigious national conference in their field, either the National Council for Teachers of English or the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (METP, n.d.).

**Qualifications for fellows.** Together with holding a minimum Grade Point Average of 3.5 and either a minimum ACT composite score of 28 or SAT composite score of 1250, applicants must provide a personal statement and a 500-700 word essay describing why the applicant is passionate about teaching either secondary English or secondary math. Competitive candidates are active in their school extra- curricular activities and are able to provide a minimum of two references. Finally, select applicants complete an interview with a panel of faculty before offers of fellowship are extended (METP, n.d.).

**Initial cohort (juniors).** As METP (n.d.) reports, the ambitious vision of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University education leaders came to fruition with the 2013 METP cohort (METP, 2015). The METP fellows began their studies on the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University campuses in the Fall 2013 semester. METP (n.d.) adds University of Mississippi students comprising the first cohort boast an average ACT score of 28.5 and an average Grade Point Average of 4.0. Although many of the fellows are Mississippi residents, fellows also hail from Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Arkansas. For the

initial cohort, the University of Mississippi selected ten English fellows and five math fellows (METP, 2015). At this writing, the University of Mississippi has retained all ten English fellows and four of the five math fellows (M.B. Adams, personal communication, September 26, 2015).

**Second cohort (sophomores).** Sixteen fellows comprise the second METP cohort at the University of Mississippi. The fellows in the second cohort have a Grade Point Average of 3.61 and an average ACT score of 29. Nine students are studying English education while seven students are enrolled in math education courses. Home states for fellows in the second cohort include Mississippi, Ohio, North Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas.

**Third cohort (freshmen).** There are sixteen total fellows in the freshmen cohort: ten English education fellows and six math education fellows. The fellows have a median Grade Point Average of 3.86 and median ACT score of 29. Seven of the fellows are from Mississippi while the home states for the other fellows span from Maryland, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Missouri, Texas, Illinois, and Kansas (METP, n.d.).

This study helps provide needed information for METP. Study information highlights the need for programs such as METP, which is needed to help ensure long term funding for the important METP scholarship. In addition, research data may help increase METP recruitment efforts. Although applicant data is not available for the junior and sophomore cohorts, available data for cohort three applicants shows an average Grade Point Average of 3.73 and ACT average 26.4 (M.B. Adams, personal communication, September 26, 2015). As the number of applicants has not been as high as METP representatives desire, a new recruitment effort for the 2016 cohort is designed to increase the number of applications to above 100. The 25.806 percent acceptance rate for the third METP cohort aligns with the acceptance rate of other University of

Mississippi Special Programs, such as the 50 percent acceptance rate of the Honors College (M.B. Adams, personal communication, September 26, 2015).

**Recruiter awareness.** The rigorous requirements of the METP set it apart from other scholarship programs designed to bring the best and brightest students (as determined by grade point average, tests scores, and volunteer work) to teacher education programs. Awareness of the historical factors influencing educational perceptions is a necessary component of recruitment. A deep understanding of how historical events have affected public perceptions surrounding education can help METP scholarship recruiters gain insight into traditional roadblocks of teacher education recruitment. Understanding why such roadblocks exist can aid recruiters in overcoming misleading assumptions potential students have concerning education and help encourage more students to enter the profession.

### CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter will address the research design, population, sample, participants, and data analysis of the study. The researcher also explores validity and reliability concerns. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) section addresses ethical and legal considerations of the researcher conducting interviews with students. The design of the study and data analysis best addressed the following qualitative research question: How do perceptions of United States education affect entry of the best and brightest students into the education profession?

#### **Design of the Study**

A phenomenological study design best supported the study's research goals. The purpose of phenomenological study is to discover the universal essence of a phenomenon through commonalities of individual experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The METP fellows are experiencing the phenomenon of being high achieving students participating in a unique, prestigious scholarship program for teacher education. The research study explored lived experiences of the METP fellows. As Patton (2005) explains, phenomenological studies explore lived experiences of individuals in unique settings (Patton, 2005, p.104). Creswell (2014) clarifies in phenomenological studies, participants detail their lived experiences to the researcher (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Through in-depth interviews, the METP fellows described their lived experiences to the researcher. Further, in-depth interviews with persons who have direct experience with the phenomenon of interest are appropriate for phenomenological studies (Patton, 2005, p. 104).

Because the goal of the study was to discover participants' point of view, the researcher conducted the study through a social constructivism lens. Creswell (2014) says of social constructivism, "The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views being studied" (p. 8). In social constructivism, social and historical perspectives come into play. Social constructivism is based on the theory of humans utilizing their own historical and social perspectives to make sense of their world shaped by their culture (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Fellows shared their view of public education's current reputation as interpreted through their own cultural lens. The open- ended interview questions allowed participants to arrive at their own meanings based upon their own vision of the world. Social constructivism lends to meaning through social interactions "through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual's lives" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). These social interactions and historical and cultural norms help shape fellow' perceptions of education.

Because the goal of the study was gaining in-depth insight into the unique experiences of the first participants of the METP, the researcher deemed a quantitative study inappropriate. Although quantitative methods can produce data such as the number of highly qualified students in teacher education programs, this study sought to explore specific, individual perceptions of students in such a program. A quantitative tool such as a Likert Scale could have provided general data such as positive versus negative perceptions of education; however, the researcher sought real, rich experiences of the people the phenomenon directly affects. Gall (2007) refers to phenomenological research as the antithesis of quantitative research as the researcher is embedded with the phenomenon (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 495). Patton (2005) asserts a phenomenological study, "focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that

they experience what they experience" (p. 107). As this study did focus on the shared experiences of the METP fellows, the phenomenological research method was the appropriate method to use in this research study.

### **Population, Sample, and Participants**

The target population of this study was all METP fellows. Through the METP, Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi each offer a maximum of ten secondary math and ten secondary English scholarships per year to selected applicants. The first scholarships were made available for the 2013-2014 school year and have continued for each school year since implementation of the program (METP, n.d.). To create a sample, the researcher selected METP fellows from the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 cohorts located at the University of Mississippi. The researcher utilized a convenience sampling procedure to choose participants and selected participants from the three existing cohorts at the University of Mississippi. Creswell (2007) suggests five to twenty-five participants in phenomenological studies and explains saturation occurs when no new information is gained in interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). The researcher will allowed for flexibility in the sample number depending upon the number at which saturation occurs. Therefore, the total sample was comprised of eighteen participants (n=18).

All study participants are current METP fellows with high achieving academic records. Acceptance into the METP program requires a minimum of 28 on the American College Test or 1250 on the SAT. In addition, students must have a grade point average of 3.5 or higher and a stellar service record. Once accepted into the program, students must maintain a grade point average of 3.0 (METP, n.d). Therefore, research participants held high academic qualifications upon high school graduation and continue to maintain strong academic standing. Also, participants have home towns in multiple states in the United States, so fellows represent various

states (METP, n.d.). All participants are traditional undergraduate students attending the University of Mississippi.

### **Instrument**

As the study sought rich description of the participants' experiences according to their perceptions, the researcher utilized face-to-face interviews and gained data through words. The researcher recorded audio of the interviews utilizing a hand-held device. The researcher took notes throughout the interview to maintain interview data in case of audio recording malfunction.

The design of the interview questions was specific in order to gain the most data from the sample participants. Further, Creswell (2009) states qualitative questions should be “under continual review and reformulation” (p. 131). Therefore, the researcher was open to emerging design and reformulated the interview questions as the study dictated during the interview process. Also, the interviewer utilized follow up questions to deepen the information participants provide. Seidman (2006) suggests writing down signal phrases throughout the interview and returning to those phrases later. For example, if a participant replied a family member discouraged him or her to enter education, the researcher deepened the response through asking questions such as, “You told me your family member discouraged your decision to enter education. Can you talk more about that discouragement and how you felt during the conversation?” This process kept the researcher from interrupting the participant but allowed the researcher to return to the response and seek richer description (Seidman, 2006, p. 86).

Creswell (2009) explains interview questions beginning with the words what or how lend best to the open and emerging design of qualitative research and suggests phrases such as “describe the experience” for phenomenological interviews (Creswell, 2009, p. 130-131). In addition, Seidman (2006) suggests in-depth interview questions “asks the participant to reconstruct a



significant segment of an experience” (p. 85). As the researcher wanted to explore how the fellows decided upon education as a profession, the first interview question asked fellows to reconstruct the process of deciding to declare a secondary education major; then, take the researcher through the process of deciding to apply to the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program. This information aided in understanding if the METP scholarship was a factor in deciding to become a teacher, or if the fellows simply utilized METP as a pathway to become a teacher. In addition, the researcher wanted to explore conversations with influential people in fellows’ lives concerning the education profession. Therefore, the second question asked participants to reconstruct conversations they had with the influential people in their lives about the field of education and the influential people’s reaction to the fellows’ decision to enter to the field of education. Next, in an effort to discover the interactions of students with other honors students and faculty, the third question asked what is it like for the fellows as education students in the honors college/classes. Seidman (2006) states the word “like” allows the researcher the closest simulation to the participants’ experiences (Seidman, 2006, p. 85). In order to discover if the fellows intend on staying in the teaching profession after their five year teaching commitment is completed, the fourth interview question asked how the participants envision their careers after finishing their five year teaching commitment. Finally, the researcher asked the participants to describe what it means to be a teacher. This information enabled understanding of the participants’ ideals and perceptions of what they consider the essence of a teacher.

The interview questions were designed to explore the following research question: What is the lived experience of a high achieving student participating in a prestigious scholarship program for teacher education? The following issue subquestions helped narrow the focus of the study:

(1) How do educational perceptions of influential individuals in students' lives affect the students' entry to teacher education programs?

(2) How do scholarship recipients envision their long-term educational career?

The interview questions were as follows:

(1) Reconstruct the process of deciding to become a secondary school teacher; then, take me through the process of deciding to apply to the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program.

(2) What is it like for you as an education major in the honors college/honors classes?

(3) Reconstruct conversations you have had with influential people in your life concerning the field of education and your decision to become a teacher.

(4) How do you envision your career after your five -year teaching commitment is completed?

(5) Describe what it means to be a teacher.

### **IRB and Verification of Consent**

Before interaction with fellows, the researcher gained approval from the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board. Next, the researcher issued letters explaining the proposed study and inviting study participation to all fellows in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 University of Mississippi cohorts. Further, the letters ensured fellows all study participation was voluntary, and there would be no repercussions for non-participation and no gains from participation. The researcher sent follow-up emails to all of the fellows reminding them of the opportunity to participate in the study.

## **Validity and Reliability**

The researcher will ask broad questions and utilize thick description to describe the METP fellows' interviews. Per Patton (2005), "Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting" (p. 437). Although perfect objectivity does not occur in qualitative research, rich, thick description in conveying findings will help establish validity (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). The researcher is a former public school secondary English teacher and a current member of the education profession; therefore, the researcher sought objectivity in data collection through "good, solid description and analysis" (Patton, 2005, p. 92). Further, the researcher was introspective and continuously reflected on personal biases and background and through reflexivity add to the validity of the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). According to Creswell (2014), researchers need to triangulate data to increase validity; therefore, the researcher will establish themes utilizing perceptions of multiple participants. Also, the researcher sought to strengthen validity by member checking the semi-final report and asked participants to read themes and comment on accuracy. Further, the researcher also strengthened validity by spending a large amount of time in the field interviewing participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Finally, following the aforementioned data analysis procedure Patton (2005) recommends added to the reliability of the study.

## **Procedures and Data Analysis**

As explained in the following paragraph, Creswell (2014) recommends qualitative researchers follow six steps in analyzing data (Creswell, p. 197-200). According to Creswell (2014), the researcher should begin with organizing raw data. The researcher began with transcribing the face-to-face interview audio. Next, the researcher should read the data and reflect on meaning. The researcher read the interview transcripts and began noting overall thoughts concerning data.

After, as Creswell (2014) suggests, the researcher will code the data by forming data categories and labeling them with a term. In order to focus on themes from participants, the researcher utilized emerging coding. Next, the researcher utilized codes for general description appropriate for phenomenology. As appropriate, the researcher discussed findings in narrative form, and included participants' quotes in the findings. Finally, the researcher discussed interpretations of findings and next steps for the researcher (Creswell, 2014, 200).

Patton (2005) adds specifics for qualitative research utilizing phenomenology (Patton, 2005, p. 484). As the proposed study is a phenomenological study conducted through a social constructivism lens, Patton's suggestions were appropriate. Hence, the researcher added the suggestions to Creswell's six steps explained in the above paragraph. The purpose of inclusion of Patton's steps was to add depth to the research process, not to decrease the structure of Creswell's plan.

According to Patton (2005), *epoche*, or setting aside personal bias, should be the first step in a phenomenological analysis (Patton, 2005, p. 484). Through introspection, the researcher made strides to put aside personal judgments toward the participants' responses and did not allow personal judgments to interfere with data reflection or interpretation. Patton (2005) also suggests the appropriate next steps are "phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of texture and structure" (p. 486). Phenomenological reduction includes removing all outside factors from the data, which the researcher completed during the coding process. Imaginative variation removes overlapping data, and the researcher filtered overlapping data during coding. Synthesis of structure seeks meanings for the group. The researcher sought meaning of data through data interpretation. Finally, synthesis of structure involves discovering meanings and essence of the shared experiences (Patton, 2005, p. 486).

The researcher made interpretations based on meaning and shared experiences of the fellows.

As qualitative researchers must be open to emerging themes, the researcher utilized inductive data analysis to create themes derived from collected data (Creswell, 2003, p. 39).

Creswell (2003) states, "the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed" (39).

Therefore, the researcher also utilized emergent design throughout the research process.

The researcher was open to changes the study dictated.

### **Limitations and Generalizations**

According to Creswell (2014), the mere presence of the researcher may bias the participants' answers. Another limitation was designated places of interviews rather than natural field settings. Also, the information is indirect as it is conveyed through participants' viewpoints (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). In this study, the researcher combated these limitations in several ways. First, the researcher assigned all participants a number to protect their anonymity and provided a form stating all information is confidential. In addition, IRB contact information was on the form as well as an explanation of how participants may contact IRB if they feel uncomfortable at any time during the study. Participants may have felt freer to respond candidly due to assurance of anonymity and confidentiality on the part of the researcher. Next, the researcher conducted interviews on the University of Mississippi campus in an effort to conduct interviews in a location familiar to the participants.

There were a limited number of eligible participants for the study as there are a limited number of fellows in the combined METP cohorts. However, the in-depth nature of the interviews provided enough data for analysis even though the number of participants was eighteen. In addition, as only secondary teacher education students in English and mathematics are METP fellows, limits exist to generalizing the study beyond the two subject areas. Further,

all participants are attending college in the state of Mississippi. However, fellows formally residing in multiple states shared their experiences beginning before their move to Mississippi. Therefore, the results of the study may generalize to future secondary English and mathematics educators throughout the United States.

Specifically, before conducting research, the researcher submitted an application requesting permission to conduct research with human subjects to the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval on November 4, 2015. Per the IRB representative, fellows' written consent was not necessary as the study qualified for exempt status. However, a recruitment script the researcher emailed to all University of Mississippi METP fellows contained the phrase "by participating in this interview, you are providing your consent to participate in the research study" and explained the fellows would not face harm or reward for participation. In addition, at the start of each interview, the researcher showed a paper copy of the recruitment script to all participants (Appendix A).

The researcher first contacted all University of Mississippi METP fellows through the recruitment email on November 5, 2015, and sent follow-up emails as appropriate. During the months of November 2015 and February 2016, the researcher interviewed all eighteen fellows responding to participant requests; eleven of the students interviewed were English education majors and seven of the students interviewed were math education majors. All of the interviews took place in either 303 or 339 Guyton Hall on the University of Mississippi campus. Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants per secondary education discipline major and gender.

Table 1

Gender	Math Education	English Education	Total
Male	3	5	8
Female	4	6	10
Total Participants	7	11	18

All eighteen fellows participated in face-to-face, one-on-one interviews. As Creswell (2014) recommends qualitative researchers use an interview protocol as a backup in case of audio equipment failure, the researcher utilized an interview protocol to record important participant comments during all interviews (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). (Appendix B). At the start of each meeting, the researcher explained to the participants the interviews would be recorded and then transcribed at a later date. In addition, the researcher assured all participants their names would not be used during the interview or during transcription. Instead, each participant received a number, and the researcher referred to each participant by fellow number (Fellow One, Fellow Two, etc.). The interview process started with the researcher asking each participant his or her current age followed by the five approved interview questions. All of the interviews were recorded on a handheld device, and the researcher took handwritten notes throughout the interview. At the end of the interviews, the researcher made each participant aware of the opportunity to member check the final data.

In order to maintain confidentiality, no names were used during the participant interviews, nor were participant names used on the final transcriptions. The researcher kept the names corresponding with participant number separate from the transcripts.

As Creswell (2014) recommends beginning the data analysis process by organizing raw data, reading the data, and reflecting on meaning, the researcher began data analysis with transcribing the face-to-face interview audio (Creswell, 2014, p. 197). By listening to the interviews on audiotape, transcribing the interviews, and reading the transcripts multiple times, the researcher immersed herself in the data as “Reading, rereading, and reading through the data one more forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with those data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). As the researcher listened and read the transcripts, she made note of themes and began “generating categories of information (open coding)” (Creswell, 2014, p. 196).

Next, the researcher hand coded the data into themes utilizing a color -coding method. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain a researcher “marks passages in the data using the codes” (p. 160) and the researcher chooses the form of coding. This researcher chose to mark transcript passages in various colors corresponding to a self -developed code sheet. Creswell (2014) notes themes should represent the perspectives of various participants and the participants’ quotations should support the themes (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). The researcher created themes based on comments from multiple participants throughout the process.

As stated above, Patton (2005) said epoche (setting aside personal bias) is important in qualitative data analysis, and the researcher took steps to set aside her personal bias during data analysis (Patton, 2005, p. 484). Certain themes became apparent during examination of the eighteen transcripts, and one step the researcher took to avoid bias was to ensure consideration of all evidence relating to each theme. Another step the researcher took was marking each time specific themes emerged in the data and keeping a table of the number of participants discussing each theme. The researcher also read each transcript multiple times during this stage of the process to ensure no data was overlooked.



#### CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Study of the eighteen participant interviews produced clear themes. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed patterns among responses. The fellows who chose to participate in member checking viewed the themes that emerged and agreed the themes captured the essence of their experiences.

Within each category, twelve themes were evident. Each theme will be discussed in detail with supporting data from interview transcripts. When presenting interview excerpts, no names will be used. In place of names, the researcher will either refer to the fellow by number or simply state fellow or participant. Below, Table 2 shows the categories and corresponding themes

Table 2

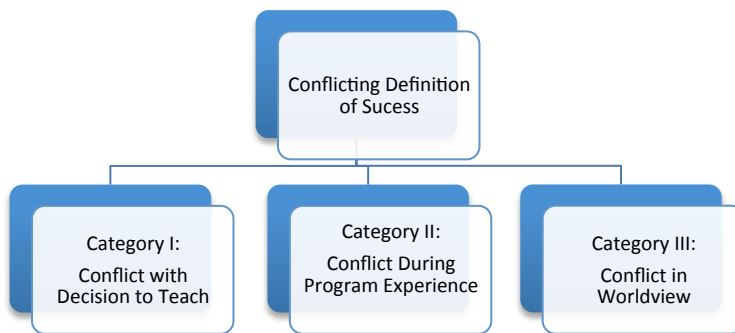
<b>I. Conflict with decision to teach (due to conflicting definitions of success)</b>
Theme 1- Students are bad.
Theme 2- Too smart to teach
Theme 3- Teacher salaries are too low.
<b>II. Conflict during college experiences (due to conflicting definitions of success)</b>
Theme 4- Looked down on by students in programs of similar stature
<b>III. Conflict in worldview (due to conflicting definitions of success)</b>
Theme 5- Teachers as servants
Theme 6- Teachers create a better world.
Theme 7- Teaching as a mission
Theme 8- Teachers provide opportunities
Theme 9- Teachers as role models
Theme 10- Impact as long-term goal
Theme 11- Mississippi Motivation
Theme 12- METP Granting ability to pay for college/acceptance by people in community

This study revealed the participants share a lived experience of conflict. The type of conflict emerging from the data can best be defined as a disagreement between ideals. Specifically, the fellows define success as the positive impact they can have on other people and the world while others define success in monetary terms. This difference in definition of success causes disagreement between fellows and others.

From the findings, three main categories relating to conflict emerged: conflict with decision to teach, conflict during college experience, and conflict in worldview. For many fellows, this conflict began in high school when they revealed they were pursuing a career in education. In many cases, low teacher salaries in comparison to salaries of other professions were a point of contention between fellows and others. In addition, participants shared the lived experience of conflict continued once the fellows entered college as they found themselves in the position of defending the study of education to students in other disciplines. Often, fellows defended education by stating teaching is an important job because of the impact education has on students, community, and the world.

Figure 1 illustrates the underlining conflict in definition of success throughout all three categories.

Figure 1



### **Conflicting Definitions of Success**

Underlying the three categories of conflict is adverse definitions of success. Per the participants' conversations, the fellows define success not by the potential to earn money but by the potential to have a positive effect on students. Therefore, the fellows said they needed to defend their choice to choose education to those who define success in financial terms. Thus, the conflict exists due to a disagreement of definitions of success between the fellows and others.

In some cases, the participants used the idea of teachers as humanitarians as a defense of the profession. When participants faced negative comments about education, he or she often responded teaching is an avenue to help make others' lives better. In particular, fellows used humanitarianism as a defense to criticism concerning the low teacher salary in comparison to salaries of other professions. Repeatedly, fellows emphasized their idea of success was not measured by the amount of money they could earn but by helping others. Their motivation for teaching was not financial; their motivation was the impact they could have on students.

Fellow Two explained others questioned his desire to become a teacher based on the limited opportunities to earn a high salary in education. He also said his goal was to help others, not draw a high salary. He explained his motivation for teaching:

Fellow Two: "I've just been asked a lot why I want to be a teacher...it's to help people; it's not all about money."

In the following conversation with Fellow Six, he explained his thoughts on people misconstruing money with prestige. In his view, certain careers have nobility attached to them due to the large salaries earned in the field. He also pondered if higher teacher salaries would relieve the negative stigma associated with education.

Fellow Six: "... they misconstrue the idea of being a doctor as... a high status because there is money. But they don't see that they're making that association with money. They see it as purely noble. But we don't have that association with teaching because there is no money... I feel like sometimes people conflate the idea of money with status. But they don't know that they're doing it."

## **Category I: Conflict with Decision to Teach**

Repeatedly, fellows detailed stories of receiving verbal discouragement toward their choice of education as a career to others who argued fellows should enter a different profession. The verbal discouragement came from teachers, family members, friends, and even members of the general public. Most commonly, fellows said reasons they were told not to teach included “students are bad”, “you are too smart to be a teacher”, and “teachers don’t make enough money”.

The earlier literature discussed Horace Mann’s lasting influence on education today. As the literature shows, Horace Mann held the image of teachers as servants and educational work as mission work. Mann also believed teaching children proper ethics could lead to a better world, and these ideas continue to impact the current educational environment (Laud, 1997; Preston, 1993; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013). Mann’s influence on today’s educational environment was evident in the themes emerging from the data.

**Theme 1: Students are bad.** Evidence that others have a negative perception of both the public school environment and the behavior of public school students is seen through several fellows’ conversations. For example, Fellow Nine said one of the reasons she was told not to enter education is “you don’t want to deal with kids like these...you’re not tough enough to deal with public school students”. Another fellow was told “it’s (teaching) just not going to be a good experience.” Yet another participant was encouraged to teach in private school versus public school due to public school students’ behavior. Public school students were described to the fellows as undisciplined and too difficult to control. Fellow One recounted a conversation he had concerning public school students:

Fellow One: “I can remember her just really discouraging me from entering the profession... these kids...they don’t have good parents... or the discipline, or these kids and their parents- they don’t care- the students don’t care...”

Here, not only were public school students degraded but their parents were as well. Parents were viewed as not caring about their children’s education. Thus, the parents of public school students were deemed “not good”.

**Theme 2: Too smart to teach.** Eight of the fellows stated various people told them not to teach because “they were too smart to teach”. Per the participants, the overall view from others was that fellows have the potential to enter a profession known for high salaries. Therefore, to teach and earn a low salary would be a “waste” of their talents. In essence, careers not making a great deal of money are for people who don’t have the intelligence or ability to enter higher paying professions. Upon hearing these remarks, participants expressed experiencing feelings of hurt and sadness.

For example, one fellow explained she knew from an early age she wanted to become a teacher, but she was encouraged to enter another profession due to her high achieving academic record. During her interview, she expressed how people had hurt her by telling her throughout the years she was too smart to teach. She stated, “A lot of them have said...you’re so smart, why do you want to go into education...why waste your talent on being a teacher...it hurts my feelings sometimes.”

Another fellow explained negative comments toward the profession did not deter her from entering teacher education. However, comments she heard degrading education still affected her emotionally. Her passion for the profession was evident in her interview, but she lamented, “It’s

always made me sad when people are... well, you're so smart; why do you want to be a teacher?"

Fellow Eleven had multiple conversations with her grandfather concerning her decision to teach. Her grandfather thought she was too smart to teach and wanted her to attend law school. She stated her feelings on high achieving students in education: "I had a lot of really smart teachers, and they weren't too smart for it. I don't think there's an education... an intelligence maximum you can have for a teacher..."

Although the fellows grasped education is serious profession needing quality students, they often found themselves educating others on the importance of teaching. Instead of seeing their intelligence as pathway to professions other than teaching, fellows saw their academic abilities as an asset for education. In their view, society should want the most intelligent people teaching children. Fellow Fifteen explained this concept:

Fellow Fifteen: "A lot of it was why waste your talent on being a teacher and trying to teach kids, and not so much as well, yeah, you do have a lot of talent, so put it into your kids. They just didn't really ever see the opposite side of it."

Another fellow added, "Some people feel like if you go to education and you're a real smart person...why are you doing that? You could be doing so much more, and I just feel that's wrong...what's doing more than teaching the future?"

**Theme 3: Teacher salaries are too low.** Goldstein (2014) discussed another of Mann's lasting influences of education as the low salary in comparison to other professions. However, the low salary was acceptable because a teacher's work centered on helping children (Goldstein, 2014). Research reminds us due to a variety of factors such as gender and salary, teaching has a lower prestige than other professions (Golhaber and Walch, 2014). Overwhelmingly,

participants recalled conversations surrounding the issue of teacher salaries. In fact, seventeen of eighteen participants recalled others discouraging them from entering education because of teacher salaries.

Theme 2 discussed participants' conflict with others stemming from the idea the fellows' academic achievements could lead them to financial gain. Similarly, several fellows revealed that when people told them not to teach for reasons such as student misbehavior, they felt the real reason others did not want them to teach was financial. Fellows noted people are more comfortable giving a warning not to teach because students are bad; they do not want to admit they actually are discouraging a career in education because of low salaries in comparison to other professions. Fellow Ten explained his thoughts on the real reason people discouraged him from becoming an educator:

Fellow Ten: "The conversations just seem to all center around the issue of students are- students aren't going to listen...students are bad...personally, I know that the reason they say that is the money thing..."

On the other hand, many people were vocal with stating participants should not enter education for financial reasons. Repeatedly, fellows were questioned why they would want to enter a profession known for lower salaries than other professions. Per the fellows, society normally equates success with large salaries; therefore, people are confused why fellows would not pursue a career path leading to great financial gains.

For example, Fellow Two stated, "A lot of people would ask me why I want to be a teacher when, you know, there's not a whole lot of money in the field." Fellow Five added to this concept and explained, "It's very much how society views teaching. They're like, why would you wanna be poor, really, when you could be rich?"



Interestingly, the fellows themselves did not have financial concerns; rather, the financial reservations related to teaching came from other people such as family and friends. Several fellows revealed their views on how status and success have different meanings to different people. In essence, the fellows do not equate career status and success with career salary but feel others do.

## **Category II: Conflict During College Experience**

As mentioned earlier, conflict for fellows did not cease upon college entry. In many cases, fellows found themselves as high achieving students in the School of Education still having to defend their choice of career. Once again, fellows reiterated their version of success alters with many others', particularly students of the same academic backgrounds.

**Theme 4: Looked down on by students in programs of similar stature.** Several of the participants have experienced a situation when they felt students in other disciplines were looking down on education majors. Fellows explained students describe education classes as "easy". Also, fellows used phrases such as "no prestige" to describe education and discussed there is a "stigma toward education " and "negative stereotypes" surrounding the field. Several heard they should "do something bigger." These experiences also caused emotional stress for the fellows.

Fellow Seven explained he hopes to make a difference by making people see education through a different perspective. He said he feels as though education is overlooked. Per Fellow Seven, "I feel just taken aback...because why would we be going through all these hard courses if we just want to... teach algebra in school...why not do something bigger...an engineer...you're taking all the classes, why not be something bigger than just a teacher?"

Similarly, Fellow Thirteen recalled when complaining to his roommate about his strenuous class schedule, his roommate replied, “You’re in the School of Education; it can’t be that bad.” Upon learning Fellow Thirteen was required to take all of the same math classes as the engineering students, his roommate encouraged him to change majors to engineering. Fellow Thirteen replied he wants to stay in education because of relationships he can form with future students. Here, understanding of the academic requirements of math education did not increase prestige for education classes. Instead, the roommate’s response was simply Fellow Thirteen should choose a major leading to higher paying field. Again, a differing view of career success caused conflict.

Fellow Thirteen also faced high achieving students in other leadership programs who questioned School of Education students’ choice of career due to financial reasons. Fellow Thirteen explained his experiences and how his view of money and leadership differed from some others:

Fellow Thirteen” “...some people...feel like if you go to education, and you’re a real smart person...why are you doing that? You could be doing so much more... and I just feel that’s wrong...what’s doing more than teaching the future...I’m not really into monetary... reward.”

Another participant shared how her first interactions with students of other disciplines were difficult. She felt English education majors are not taken as seriously as other majors. She explained, “At first...they... look down on English education majors...at the beginning it was kinda rough...People were just kind of like, you want to do what for the rest of your life?”

When other students spoke negatively of education majors, these experiences were emotionally difficult for the fellows. For example, Fellow Nine shared a painful memory of a

situation where a student laughed at her for being an education major. The following transcript excerpt captures her experience:

Fellow Nine: “I felt like I was looked down upon a little bit... except for the other students in METP because they obviously were in the same boat as me...I remember us all going around the room and sharing what our majors were, and this one girl- I still remember who she is to this day...she just kind of laughed at me when I said I was English education...that kinda upset me at the time...I’ve always just remembered that...”

Fellow Three talked about a similar experience during her college experience. Although she has not felt looked down upon personally, she lives with the awareness of an education major stigma and has been upset by other METP fellows’ experiences. In addition, Fellow Ten’s interview revealed a merging of several of the above themes. Like Fellow Thirteen, he said others have questioned his decision to become a teacher over an engineer because of the higher salaries in the engineering field. However, he does not define his success in monetary terms, so he does not allow negative comments about teaching discourage him. He simply looks forward to the opportunity to help others through teaching. Per Fellow Ten, “Regardless of the pay, there are rich people that are the saddest people you’ve ever met, and there are poor people that are the happiest people you’ve ever met. So, if you pick something you like to do, you’ll never work a day in your life. And, so, that was kinda what I went with.”

On the other hand, he did say a friend who is an education major has been so hurt by comments about education that she is considering changing schools. He also spoke of the interesting polarization existing around the subject of teaching; he said people tend to be extremely supportive or extremely negative toward his decision to teach.

Fellow Ten: "...some people who are really... supportive... But then you get some that ask why on Earth are you being a teacher... as if it's about the money... some people are really, really supportive of it; you never really get somebody that's in between on it. It's either they really – they're really excited about the fact that someone of this program's caliber... would want to be a teacher as opposed to a rocket scientist or something like that, and then you've got people who are wondering what on Earth we're doing this for. It's, it's odd, I guess, for it to be that polarizing... And there aren't that many students I run into that really care. Some of them- they're very few, but they are out there- they think they're better than you because they're going into an actual job in quotations as opposed to being a teacher, and they'll look down at you."

In Fellow One's experience, he has felt looked down upon for his English Education major by students of similar academic stature. He noted a negative stereotype toward education still exists. He also stated hearing students state education classes are easy.

Fellow One: "... it's challenging in terms of the stereotypes toward teaching... one of the things that someone said was... he made a derogatory comment toward the blonde elementary ed majors who just have it so easy."

Fellows live with the belief that negative perceptions of the education profession exist. However, several fellows discussed hoping that the METP will help bring a more positive image to educational studies. In addition, some of the fellows noted education majors in programs designed for high achieving students have been rare before implementation of METP. Fellow Eleven explained, "Just being an education student is the-the different, differentiating factor because there are so few education majors (in high achieving programs)". Another fellow added, "Those students were ...oh, wow...he's an education major. You're not supposed to be in that space."

However, METP has increased the number of education students in such programs. Some fellows already are seeing what they deem a positive change in perceptions toward education majors. In their view, METP is already making an impact in programs of similar academic stature simply by providing the opportunity for more education students to join such programs.

**Category III: Conflict in Worldview**

As seen in Themes 3 and 4, fellows were not financially driven nor do did they define success by status or monetary reward. Instead, fellows wanted a career focusing on helping others achieve and have a mission- based worldview. When asked to define the word teacher, fellows responded “servant”, “servant leader”, “role model”, “advocate”, “parent”, and “giver of opportunities”.

Thus, Mann’s ideas of a mission-based, servant approach to teaching still hold true for the fellows. In fact, sixteen of the fellows stated they believe teachers have positive influences on students and are preparing to be a positive influence on their future students. In doing so, fellows hope to create a better world.

Table 3 shows the number of participants reporting mission- based ideals.

Table 3

Teacher as Servant	2
Teachers Create Better Individuals/World	6
Teaching is Mission-Based	3
Teacher as Role Model/Encourager, etc.	6
Total Participants	17

## Number of Participants Reporting Mission Based Ideals

Several fellows explicitly stated they want a future centered on helping others. Thus, teaching content knowledge is a secondary factor in education to the fellows. Rather, the fellows most desire to have a lasting positive influence on their students' lives.

**Theme 5: Teachers as servants.** Mann used the word servant to describe teachers; interestingly, Fellows Six and Twelve specifically discussed teachers as servants.

Fellow Six: "I've always seen myself as a servant first...whatever last, and so I believe my interest in being a teacher definitely stemmed from the fact that I wanted to help people and my community. And I wanted to do something that was not all about me. It was about other people growing and achieving."

Fellow Twelve: "What it means to be a teacher, in my opinion, is just be a helper and a servant leader."

The fellows' motivation to teach came from the idea that teaching is service oriented. Through teaching, the fellows said they hoped to give back to the community. The overriding concern was not to make money but to help students achieve their goals.

**Theme 6: Teachers create a better world.** Numerous times, participants used the word impact to describe their career goals. Instead of naming a future salary amount or prestigious position, fellows said they hope their careers make an impact. Again, conflict emerges between their worldview of success as impact and others whose worldview of success is status and money.

Fellows Three and Five stated the hope that teaching will lead to an impact on the world and future generations. Fellow Three talked about creating an impact beyond this generation.

Fellow Five said different people impact the world in different ways; teaching is going to be her impact.

Fellow Three: “Being a teacher means getting to impact students on a daily basis and really playing a huge role in the future just of our world and of the next generation... making a difference in ways most people wouldn’t typically think teachers are making a difference. Yes, they’re teaching; you’re teaching kids to read and write and love literature...you’re helping to mold students into... the people they want to become and helping them realize all of their...goals they want to reach and helping them to eventually reach them.”

Fellow Four stated a view of teaching as leading to greater life satisfaction. In the past, she had focused on her own accomplishments and discovered she wanted to do more for others. In her interview, she revealed how teaching and helping others is greater than helping herself.

Fellow Ten also stated a desire to help the people around him through the teaching profession.

Fellow Four: “I wanted my life to have meaning, and I wanted to help other people because in high school, I had tried to... get as many leadership positions as I could...improve my own resume. And it just wasn’t satisfying; I wanted to do something greater to help people.”

Fellow Ten: “ I’ve always wanted to make everybody around me better for having been around me, so I figured teaching would be the best way to go with that.”

Fellow Fourteen had thought of joining the Peace Corp to lend aid to those in need overseas. However, a conversation with another METP fellow made him reconsider his path. He now is considering utilizing his humanitarian efforts in his home state.

Fellow Fourteen: “One of my dreams is... to maybe go overseas and teach for a long time... joining the Peace Corp and helping out. That was a very, like, real decision in my future. But after a while... when I was talking to one of my other cohort members my freshman year, she

mentioned... that's great and that's wonderful, and you can do that. But Mississippi has some places that need help just as much as people in other countries. And, you know, it would probably be very beneficial to stay here and do that.”

**Theme 7: Teaching as a mission.** Other fellows’ specifically stated teaching as a mission-based and religion as a motivation for teaching. Like Theme 6, these fellows envisioned their work with students leading to a better world. Fellow Seven referred to teaching as a calling, and others noted religious reasons for teaching. In addition, Fellow Sixteen explained her thoughts on the METP fellows having a mission-minded concept of teaching and said she saw missions as a common theme among METP members.

Fellow Sixteen: “You’re like, oh, I’m such a missionary...I’m so excited to do this. This is why I want to do it, but then I get in a room with people (METP fellows) I’ve never met before. And all of their stories are the exact same thing. I wanna help kids and help students and... better the education of our state and our country.”

Two of the fellows specifically equated teaching with religion. The Christian faith was included in Fellows One’s and Eight’s decision to become a teacher. Fellows One and Eight talked about teaching, missions, and religion:

Fellow One: “What it means to be a teacher...caring about your students. Being a role model and being...a pillar of good character- having good character, good moral judgment...for me as a Christian, showing the love of Christ... not proselytizing. But just showing...how to treat each other better.”

Fellow Eight: “My big thing’s missions... I’m a Christian, so...spread the gospel...it’s like being in the classroom with students is, like, such a good way to do that.”



**Theme 8: Teachers provide opportunities.** Repeatedly, participants shared their desire to help others achieve a better life. Several interview transcripts revealed this as a shared quality among the fellows. Whether helping students by taking a parental role or providing overall life guidance, many fellows envision themselves as helping future students attain their goals. The following quotes represent multiple fellows' perceptions of teachers as helpers of students.

Fellow Two: "It's giving people the opportunities they might not have had before, and giving people the confidence to explore those opportunities. And just giving people chances that they might not have ever experienced before."

Fellow Seven stated her goal is to teach in the Mississippi Delta, a region of the country with a number of high-needs school districts. She said through her work in the Delta, she hopes to help students become first generation college students. Her ultimate goal is to help her students pursue their college and career aspirations.

Fellow Seven: "My calling, I feel, is to be a teacher and help other students and like children in the classroom and stuff...I wanna teach in the Delta, so I want to be able to help guide the students that maybe never have gone to college, whose parents who have never gone to college; like, I wanna help them, you know, be able to, like achieve something greater than they ever thought they could. So, I guess just helping them pursue their goals through, like, your help is how I want to be a teacher."

Fellows said they want to be the person who helps students in need. They want to show future students it is possible for them to rise above difficulties and pursue their goals. In their view, a teacher should not just provide students with content knowledge; teachers should be the link to opportunity.

Here, Fellows Eleven and Fifteen explain teaching content knowledge as only one portion of their job. Their motivation to teach students is not just teaching students academics. They want to serve as a support system for students, preparing them for their lives ahead. Their desire is to help students better understand life and the world around them.

Fellow Eleven: “It’s more than about just teaching them the book knowledge, but it’s also about helping them understand themselves about life and what’s going on around them.”

Fellow Fifteen: “...a teacher’s not only teaching your students about the subject area that you’re in or the content area... it has a lot to do with- while you are making those connections with the classroom, you are also teaching them about life outside the classroom....”

Fellow Thirteen was able to see first hand the influence teachers have on their students. As a special education teacher, his mother set high expectations for all of her pupils, and she encouraged them to accept nothing but the best from themselves. Like his mother, he first hopes to influence his students to perform to their maximum capabilities and second hopes to teach them content knowledge.

Fellow Thirteen: “...it’s to be that motivator that a kid may not have. It means to care; uh, I’ve seen it, like, first hand with my mom with the special education teacher...And, like, we’ve gone to graduations and been at random gas stations, and students have always come up to her and said... ‘Ah, you’re the best thing ever...you made me believe in myself and everything.’ And that’s kind of what I want to do... I definitely want them to learn something and everything, but I know that, like, it’s not the end –all- be- all to make sure that they know the quadratic formula and sine, cosign, tan... I want them be motivated to do more...to accept nothing but their best.”

**Theme 9: Teachers as role models.** Repeatedly, the fellows expressed a desire to reach beyond themselves to touch the lives of their future students. The fellows spoke enthusiastically of their roles in helping future students make positive life decisions. Similarly, participants also discussed the influence of teachers on their own lives. Through their own life experiences, they learned the impact teachers make on their students.

For example, thirteen of the participants talked about the positive influences educators had on them during their secondary education. The experiences fellows had with their teachers made them want to teach future generations. Several of the participants hope to be the same type of educator for their future students as their teachers were for them.

Fellow Two said a conversation with his high school principal solidified his decision to become an education major. The respect he had for his principal helped him know he would like to be an educator. He said this conversation reassured him he was making the right career decision.

Fellow Two: “My senior year of high school I got to meet with the principal who I really respected and had a couple of different encounters with...I got to sit down with him and talk to him about how he got into the field. And how he... decided to go from being a teacher to administration, and that was definitely one of the more influential conversations that I have ever had because he was somebody that I really respected and looked up to and was doing exactly what I wanted to do. And that helped me know that I was on the right path and making the right decision to be an education major.”

Fellow Eighteen said he views becoming an educator as a way to pay back those who educated him. During his interview, he stressed the importance of teachers looking after the

overall well-being of their students. The theme of teachers as influencing factors was continued in his following words.

Fellow Eighteen: “What made me want to become a teacher, and, therefore, what a teacher is to me is a role model that is there to support, uh, the students that walk through the door. There’s a general regard for the well-being of the students in the classroom, and that is what interested me. And that is what I would like to do because- there is a quote that I’ll paraphrase. We can whenever and wherever we choose educate all students whose education is of interest to us. And so my education was an interest to my teachers, and so I would like to pay that back. And I think teachers pay that back; they are interested in the students, and they educate them through the interest that they show.”

Earlier in this narrative, transcript excerpts showed participants hoping to be there for their students beyond academics. Fellow Eight described her most influential high school teachers as taking interests in all students’ lives. These teachers were in turn influential in Fellow Eight’s decision to become a teacher. This excerpt again shows the recurring theme of fellows viewing teachers as impactful, influencing both their past educational experiences and the teachers they hope to become.

Fellow Eight: “...she’s that teacher that-like she cared more than any other teacher I ever had, ever, and she would get in early every day, stay late every day. She would come to the football games, um, just be there for students outside of school....another of my favorite teachers was my geometry teacher...he made me feel like I was good at math.” Fellow Eight added another influential teacher took time and was always there for her.

The connection with her teachers also influenced Fellow Seventeen to become a high school teacher. She was able to see her high school teachers support students in and out of the

classroom. Again, the connection between student and teacher is a deciding factor for becoming a teacher, and she touches on how her high school teachers have supported her through the college process.

Fellow Seventeen: "... we were able to contact them (teachers) and be able to talk to them if we needed to...they were always very supportive of me inside and outside of school...they also showed me the pros and cons of being a teacher. And as for college, they've been able to help me see my true potential, um, and what I want out of life and as a teacher."

One of the fellows had the opposite high school experience. He said his negative experience with teachers influenced him to pursue education, so he can be there for students who don't have an influential teacher in their lives. He wants to be the teacher he never had the opportunity to have.

Fellow Ten: "...I didn't have that teacher, so I want to be that teacher for somebody else."

**Theme 10: Impact as long-term career goal.** In addition to influencing students to enter the field of education through the METP scholarship program, the same desire to make an impact also shows in their long-term career plans. When asked what they planned to do after their five-year commitment is completed, all eighteen participants said they plan to stay in education. Fifteen of the eighteen participants responded they want to stay in the classroom as they view classroom teachers as having the most impact on students. Four students are considering entering educational administration, and two fellows are considering educational policy work. Nine fellows discussed pursuing advanced degrees in education, and eight fellows plan to stay in Mississippi. All of the fellows' plans center on following a path where they feel they can make the most impact. Table Four shows participants' plans after their five-year commitment is completed.

Table 4

Stay in Classroom	15
Pursue Educational Administration	4
Pursue Educational Policy	2
Stay in Mississippi	9
Pursue Masters Degree or Beyond	9

#### Participants Plans After Completing Five-Year Commitment

Several participants again used the word impact when discussing their plans to stay in the classroom long-term. When deciding on other aspects of education such as policy or administration, students still consider the potential to impact students. Their long-term career goals both illustrate their desire to help others and show their conflicting worldview. Instead of building a career based on moving toward a high salary, these students are planning long-term careers based upon maximum impact on students.

For example, Fellow Four said she wants to teach longer than five years in order to impact a large number of students. Even if she pursues a graduate degree, she said she still hopes to stay in the classroom. Per Fellow Four, the classroom is the place in education having the most needs.

Fellow Four: “I do intend to teach for longer than five years...something that is really important to me is to stay in the classroom for at least some amount of time...I want to impact as many students as I can.”

Fellow Eleven also said she wants to stay in the classroom teaching her entire career. She stated she wants to continue to work with children and is considering adding endorsements to her license but not adding administration classes. Like Fellow One, she believes teachers effect the most educational change and help students more than those in other positions.

Fellow Eleven: “I’ll continue teaching for the rest of my life. That’s all I want to do... I’m in it because I love education, and I love working with kids... METP was perfect for me because it is about secondary education and particularly the math and English area of it- which is what I’m passionate about....”

Fellow Thirteen stated he is unsure which role will allow him to make the most impact on students. He is considering several alternatives, but all potential career choices are within the field of education. He also wants to base his decision on fulfilling the educational role where he can make the most impact.

Fellow Thirteen: “...if I love the classroom, I want to stay in the classroom. And if I think I can have the biggest impact there, I wanna stay there and keep teaching algebra, geometry, trig...another path is coming back to get my masters in ed leadership or something like that and being a principal somewhere and trying to have that bigger impact...the master teacher, I guess as you would say... if I can be that principal or try to be that...that would be a great impact...to have five years in the actual classroom and then trying to help with policy, and that way it would even had a broader aspect...”

The anticipated relationship with future students is a major factor in Fellow Fifteen's long-term career plans. After spending five years in the classroom, Fellow Fifteen feels she will want to continue in the classroom as she thinks she will build strong relationships with her students. Because of these relationships, she feels she can make a difference for her students.

Fellow Fifteen: "...after being in five- in the school for five years- I won't want to leave...you form those relationships with students, and you see what it is like to be with this student. And then blossom from being in your classroom, and I think I'll just be addicted to that feeling: feeling like I'm making a difference."

Although Fellow Sixteen acknowledged not being sure what the future holds for her career-wise, she also wants to stay where she can have maximum positive impact. She also feels as though teaching is where the most impact is made. She is considering going into higher education one day, but she feels as though teaching will be her niche.

Fellow Sixteen: "...I know what I want to do is be in the classroom in high school... impacting as many people as possible, so I think it is going to depend on my situation at the time...I'll probably be there for probably, like, twenty-five years..."

**Theme 11: Mississippi motivation.** As the above themes make clear, fellows want a long-term career allowing them to make a strong impact on students, community, and world. This same motivation inspired nine of the participants to state they want to stay in Mississippi and teach for many years beyond their five-year commitment. Below are quotes from several fellows showing a humanitarian influence on their choice to stay in Mississippi. These participants all look forward to a teaching career in Mississippi.

Fellow Four: "I love it here. I don't intend to leave anytime soon...I've lived in two other different states, and nothing has ever felt as, like, home for me. I don't know how to describe it,



but the people here are so kind and welcoming and just the students I've interacted with in the schools; I mean- just wonderful people, and they deserve the best opportunities life can give them."

Fellow Seven: "I also think I'll stay in Mississippi; that's a big thing- most people, I hope that they don't leave because we do need great teachers... I wanna stay in Mississippi, and I think that's kinda the point of us being here for five years."

Fellow Eight: "...you don't really... develop fully as a teacher until after five years, and so I'm excited to see where I keep going after five years... as far as Mississippi, I want to, like, change the education system in Mississippi...I just wanna keep it, keep it going up..."

Fellow Eighteen hopes to stay in the classroom for twenty-five years. During his time as a METP fellow, he has discovered his potential for impacting Mississippi students. He wants to stay in Mississippi because he thinks he can make a difference in the state.

Fellow Eighteen: "...I would like to be a teacher for twenty-five years, regardless of location. But I think that the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program has instilled in me that I can make a difference here. And so I've told them that while I'd like to be a teacher for twenty-years, I would love to be a teacher in the state of Mississippi for twenty-five years."

It is important to note the fellows' driving force for all aspects of their career is the impact they feel they can make on others. This theme is seen throughout discussions concerning their choices to enter the School of Education, to stay in the classroom long-term, and to stay in Mississippi. Further, the fellows were able to equate their personal experiences with their K-12 teachers to their humanitarian vision of the type of teacher they want to become.

**Theme 12: METP as granting ability to pay tuition and acceptance by people in community.** Several fellows noted they knew early in high school they wanted to pursue a

career in education. However, as discussed in detail above, conflict existed for fellows entering a School of Education. Often, fellows were encouraged to pursue a higher paying field with more prestige.

However, the METP scholarship helped ease conflict for some of the fellows. On hearing the benefits and prestige attached to METP, some participants' parents became supportive of their choice to enter education. For example, one fellow's father likened the METP scholarship to athletic scholarships, telling his son he would have a great deal of prestige if he became a fellow.

In other cases, the METP scholarship gave the participants the ability to teach because participants no longer were worried about repaying student loans while earning a low salary in comparison to other professions. For instance, Fellow Three talked about how the scholarship enabled her to pursue education due to eliminating student loan debt. Although she knew in high school she wanted to pursue a career in education, her family discouraged her from doing so due to the lack of money in the field of education. Her family's concern was she would graduate from college deep in debt due to college loans and then earn a comparatively low salary, making paying off student loan debt difficult. In the following portion of her interview, Fellow Three explained how the lack of student loan debt helped sway her family's opinion of her educational pursuits.

Fellow Three: "...teaching was always something that I wanted to do, but I didn't wanna go to school and have to pay off all the loans because that was my only option... that's when I found out about METP. ...I wouldn't have been able to come, probably, if I didn't get this scholarship...it was more concern of- particularly my mom, how the expensive that college was

going to be, and then figuring out how to pay that off. ...As soon as I got the scholarship, they were, like, go for it, so it was more, um, student loans and that sort of thing.”

Fellow Twelve recounted the following conversations with his father concerning his decision to become an educator and his potential future salary. His father was concerned a teacher’s salary would not provide for his basic needs. However, the METP scholarship helped eased his father’s concerns due to the benefits associated with the scholarship.

Fellow Twelve: “When I was a junior in high school, um, I told my dad that I wanted to be a teacher, and he wasn’t- he wasn’t going to stop me, but he was not too happy of the fact that they (teachers) don’t make that much money...since I got METP, he’s now fine with it more because of the benefits it offers...”

Fellow Fourteen also said he faced verbal discouragement for a variety of reasons but also felt the biggest reason centered on educator salary. He explained his position of continuously having to defend his educational choices to his father. Although his father said teaching is a noble profession, he did not want his son to pursue it as a career. Similar to Fellow Twelve’s experience, when Fellow Fourteen’s father realized the METP scholarship would eliminate future college loan debt, he accepted Fellow Fourteen’s decision.

Fellow Fourteen: “...he would say, ‘Are you absolutely sure you don’t want to do something else?’...it’s a very noble profession, which I hear people say a lot...just, there’s no money in it... And it was up to the point where they realized I could pay for my college education and not have worry about student loans or debt after college where they really kinda got to the point where they really accepted and supported that I was gong to become a teacher.”

In essence, the METP scholarship offerings created a level of prestige for students in the program. Once people saw a School of Education had a program with great benefits, accepting a

high achieving student in the School of Education became easier. Also, eliminating future student loan debt eased many fellows' parents' minds about their fellows' financial well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The fellows, all high achieving students, have been encouraged to pursue a career path that will ultimately lead to them making a great deal of money. As the American dream is commonly measured by the amount of money earned, many people outside of education expressed feeling as though the fellows' academic talents are wasted due to entering education. Since education does not mean high salaries, to many, education does not equate success. Therefore, participants have the lived experiences of defending their career choice and hearing their profession demeaned.

However, participants are not money-driven. In fact, none of the participants discussed the need for educators to make more money; instead, they simply spoke of awareness of the salaries associated with teaching. They accept low salaries in comparison to other professions as part of the sacrifice of helping others achieve more in their lives. It is important to note that for these participants, the motivation to teach stems from a mission-focused ideal.

The METP scholarship enabled several participants to pursue their dream of becoming a teacher. The scholarship eliminated future student loan debt for these students but also added prestige to their college experience. Without the METP, many of these students discussed they would have had difficulty attending a college of education.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

It is imperative to have high quality educators in American K-12 school systems (Meyer, 2012). Schools of Education seek students capable of meeting the high standards required of twenty-first century educators. While there is great importance in exploring factors deterring quality students from entering Schools of Education, it is equally valuable to examine the reasons incentivizing the best and brightest students to pursue teaching as a profession.

During interviews for this study, participants spoke candidly of their pathways to METP, revealing details of their personal and educational experiences. By telling their stories, the participants provided insight into internal and external influences prompting high achieving students in the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program to enter the University of Mississippi School of Education. In addition, the participants' interviews explored the phenomenon of high achieving students in a unique scholarship program for secondary education.

Throughout the study, clear patterns and themes emerged among the participants, specifically themes relating to the categories of conflict. At first glance, attitudes surrounding teaching students and financial concerns regarding low teacher salaries may seem commonplace. However, deeper examination of the themes originating from participants' stories brought forth a new understanding of both fellows' career motivations and experiences as high achieving students.

For example, the participants viewed potential impact on students as a strong positive influence on their decision to teach. In fact, the fellows' noted their desire to help others overrode other motivating factors such as money and prestige in their career decisions. Many of the fellows define their own success not by money but by how much they are able to help others. Therefore, attracting new candidates to the field of education may need to reach beyond teacher salary increases. Giving candidates numerous service and community-based activities could be attractive to future teacher candidates of the same mindset as the study participants.

Knowledge of the complexity of the fellows' decisions to apply and accept the METP scholarship and their experiences during their time in the program is important for not only attracting quality candidates to the program but also helping retain students in the program. The information the study participants shared can also aid in the University of Mississippi School of Education faculty's awareness of the challenges facing the fellows as high achieving education majors.

For example, several participants noted because of their achievements, they still sometimes face verbal discouragement toward staying in education. Awareness of the issues the fellows face throughout their years in the program can aid faculty in helping students deal with career discouragement in a positive manner. This chapter focuses the correlation between positive motivators for the fellows and the strong components of the METP.

### **Fellows' Ideals**

This study emphasized the need for a strong humanitarian element in METP curriculum. Seventeen of eighteen fellows interviewed reported a humanitarian ideal as a primary motivation for teaching. Humanitarian themes are present not only in participants' belief of teachers as

impactful on students' lives but also in their consideration of teachers as servants and role models. Participants shared stories of influential teachers who acted as role models for them and provided encouragement when needed.

**Program strengths.** Through discussion with METP faculty, one of the goals of the program is to create strong relationships among cohort members. Thus, faculty efforts to strengthen relationships among the fellows begin when the students enter METP as freshmen. In addition to purposeful classroom activities designed to facilitate bonds among the fellows, the faculty plans multiple extra-curricular activities for cohorts throughout each semester.

For example, at the start of freshman year, students complete the Rebel Challenge Course, a ropes course designed to create collaborative problem-solving scenarios among groups ([campusrec.olemiss.edu](http://campusrec.olemiss.edu)). Throughout each semester, fellows also participate in activities such as cohort dinners. These activities allow students continuous interaction both inside and outside of the classroom.

Per METP faculty, the professors in the program continuously stress the need for fellows to establish positive relationships with both their future coworkers and their future students. The purpose of the cohort team building activities is to model for the fellows how to formulate such relationships. Through these activities, the faculty members actually are acting as role models for the fellows. Thus, through their interactions with METP faculty, fellows are able to witness teachers as role models, a humanitarian theme of teaching participants stressed during interviews. In turn, the fellows are able to learn how to become role models for their students.

Repeatedly, the participants stated they want to make others' lives better through teaching. As part of METP, the fellows have numerous opportunities to work with current secondary students. For example, fellows tutor high school students for American College Test preparation

and also volunteer in high needs school districts (Abernathy, 2016). Giving METP fellows these opportunities to see first hand the impact of educators from this lens could help encourage fellows to continue their career path and reassure them their career choice indeed does impact students, community, and the world. In other words, fellows do not have to only envision their future impact on students but can see immediate effects of their work with schools.

Emphasizing the above program elements of fellows' immediate community and classroom involvement could aid in METP recruitment efforts. This could allow high school students to see METP provides them opportunities to impact communities right away. If these students are evaluating career choices through a humanitarian lens, they may be encouraged to consider teaching.

Another positive effect of incorporating opportunities for fellows to work with students throughout their time in METP is the potential for these activities to provide encouragement for fellows when they are faced with verbal discouragement toward the educational field. The participants explained hearing negative views of education from others sometimes lead to fellows experiencing negative feelings such as hurt or anger. When fellows face the verbal discouragement toward staying in teacher education as revealed in Chapter Four, they can find inspiration to stay in the program by looking to their faculty role models. They also can find comfort by reflecting upon the positive impact they are making on students.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study revealed the lived experiences of METP fellows in Cohorts One, Two, and Three. All interviewees were enrolled as freshmen, sophomores, and juniors at the University of Mississippi. At the time of the interviews, the students in Cohort One were in their junior year of college. Thus, the first cohort will not begin teaching until the year 2017.



As the METP is relatively new, a great deal of further research is needed involving multiple program components. For example, research exploring the impact of fellows once they are licensed and teaching in secondary schools is needed to examine the effect these high achieving students have in K-12 classrooms. One important question for researchers to explore is how effective METP fellows are during their first year as certified teachers. For example, are the fellows able to form the predicted strong relationships with students they envisioned while undergraduates? Are the students in the fellows' classrooms growing academically?

Several fellows described a mission-focused element of teaching and also teachers as servant leaders. According to Noland and Richards (2015) servant teaching equips teachers with the skills needed to improve student "learning and engagement" (Noland & Richards, 2015, p. 27). Research also should include examination of how this servant-teaching approach by some METP fellows affects student achievement.

The METP is designed to draw the best and brightest students into education. Therefore, research areas should also include the educational impact on secondary students of the fellows compared to other secondary English and math teacher education graduates. Researchers should explore questions such as do the students in fellows' classrooms outperform students educated by teachers who were not part of the METP.

Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff (2008) explain teacher attrition is not only costly for schools but also creates instability impeding school reform efforts. In addition, "teachers who score higher on tests of academic achievement are more likely to leave" (Body, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2008, p. 2). According to the interviewees in this study, participants plan to remain in teaching beyond their five-year teaching commitments. Therefore,

another important question to explore is will this program have a positive effect on retaining teachers with high academic backgrounds.

According to Blake Adams, METP Program Assistant, the METP has lead to an increased ACT score for incoming freshmen in the University of Mississippi School of Education in the areas of secondary math and secondary English education (personal communication, November 4, 2015). Further research on METP's impact on the non-METP students in the School of Education is also needed. Explored areas should include both service of education students and student academic achievement.

The participants in this study are all University of Mississippi students, yet the METP also has fellows enrolled at Mississippi State University (MSU). The above suggested research questions should also address fellows on the MSU campus. Researchers should also consider studying both campus participants jointly.

Finally, long-term research should be completed on fellows' career paths after their five -year commitment is completed. Researchers should study the impact METP fellows have made as teachers on the state of Mississippi. Also, researchers should explore the factors influencing how many METP fellows continue teaching and how many fellows stay in the state of Mississippi.

## **Conclusion**

The Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program has the potential to have far reaching effects on schools of education in Mississippi and beyond. Understanding of fellows' experiences throughout their time in METP can help attract and keep quality students in the program. This research was a first step in gaining understanding of the lived experiences of fellows in the first three cohorts of this unique and prestigious scholarship program.

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## LIST OF APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program Fellow,

My name is Mary Ann Parker, and I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Department of Teacher Education, Secondary English at the University of Mississippi under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Bringing the Best and Brightest to Teacher Education. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the experiences of METP fellows as part of a unique scholarship for teacher education.

Participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate without consequence. You will receive no compensation for participating in the research study. Participation will involve an in-depth interview consisting of five questions. Interviews will take place on campus at the University of Mississippi. By participating in this interview, you are providing your consent to participate in the research study.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at [\(662\) 915-7482](tel:662-915-7482) or email [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu) or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

Further information pertaining to the research study may be obtained by contacting Mary Ann Parker at [maparker@olemiss.edu](mailto:maparker@olemiss.edu).

Thank you for your consideration. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

If you wish to participate, please email me, and we will schedule an interview time.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Parker

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: Mary Ann Parker

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interviewer Procedures:

- 1) Begin by restating information on the interview consent form. Explain the handheld audio device will be used to transcribe interview audio, and reiterate confidentiality measures.
- 2) Ask the age of the interviewee.
- 3) Ask interview questions in order listed below. Refer to interview probes such as "let's go back to your earlier comment", "explain in more detail", "could you elaborate", etc. to ensure depth of interviewee answers.
- 4) Thank interviewee for his/her participation in the interview process. Explain the fellow will have a chance to member check the final report.

### Interview questions

- 1) Reconstruct the process of deciding to become a secondary school teacher; then, take me through the process of deciding to apply to the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program.



(2) What is it like for you as an education major in the honors college/honors classes?

(3) Reconstruct conversations you have had with influential people in your life concerning the field of education and your decision to become a teacher.

(4) How do you envision your career after your five year teaching commitment is completed?

(5) Describe what it means to be a teacher.

## VITA

**Mary Ann Parker**  
Graduate Instructor  
School of Education  
University of Mississippi  
303 Guyton Hall | P.O. Box 1848 | University, MS 38677  
[maparker@olemiss.edu](mailto:maparker@olemiss.edu)

### EDUCATION

M.Ed. 2011	University of Mississippi	Secondary English Education
B.A. 1997	Delta State University	Marketing

### LICENSE

Mississippi Professional License: 7-12 English and Business

Endorsements: TESL and Gifted Education

### CERTIFICATION

eLearning Training Course

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2012 – Present	<b>Graduate Instructor, University Supervisor</b> , Department of Teacher Education, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS. Teach undergraduate classes and supervise student teachers.
2010-Present	<b>Leadership Team, University of Mississippi Writing Project Affiliate of National Writing Project</b> . Conduct professional development for in-service teachers.
2012-2013	<b>Curriculum Development Team</b> , Mississippi Department of Education. Developed Common Core State Standards training for secondary English teachers.
2011	<b>Adjunct Professor</b> , Department of Teacher Education, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS. Taught undergraduate class.
2009-2011	<b>Secondary English Teacher</b> , DeSoto Central High School, Southaven, MS

2004-2009                    **Secondary Teacher**, Houston Middle School, Houston, MS  
2002-2004                    **Computer Lab Instructor**, South Pontotoc Elementary School, Pontotoc, MS

## TEACHING

### *University of Mississippi*

EDCI 352- Education, Society, and the K-12 Learner  
EDCI 419- Effective Classroom Management and Assessment Practice  
EDSE 400- Principles of Education  
EDSE 442- Special Methods I- English  
EDLE 480- Student Teaching: Secondary Education  
EDLS 301- Children’s Literature, K-8 (I-Study)

## PUBLICATIONS

Britton, S., Carpenter-McCullough, A., Ortwein, M., & **Parker, M.** (Winter, 2016).  
“The Nature of the Common Core: Connecting Science and  
Literature Through the Natural World” *Science Activities*  
Parker, M. (Winter, 2016). “Changing Perceptions: Mississippi’s Initiative to Bring the  
Best and Brightest to Teacher Education” *National Teacher Education Journal*, 9 (1).

### *In Print*

Oliphant-Ingham, R., Hopper, P., & **Parker, M.** *Teaching English in the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century*. Kendall-Hunt Publishing.

### *In Progress*

Parker, M. & Stapp, A. “The Wellness and Literacy Connection in Secondary  
Education”

## PRESENTATIONS

Parker, M. & Monroe, A. (2016). Revered to Reviled: A History of the American  
Teacher. Critical Questions in Education Conference. San Antonio, TX.  
Monroe, A. & **Parker, M.** (2016). No Shame: The Math Paradox. Critical Questions in  
Education Conference, San Antonio, TX.  
Parker, M., Rudolph, K., Sapp, D. (2015). University of Mississippi Transitioning to  
College Writing Symposium. Research Writing and the Common Core. Panel Discussion.  
Parker, M., Simpson, J., Stapp, A., Naron, K., Alef, E. (2014). Co-Presenter. Mississippi  
Reading Association Annual Conference. Reading, Writing, and the Common Core: Thinking  
Outside the Box. Biloxi, MS.  
Parker, M. (2014). Conversation Corner Facilitator. Strategies for Student Engagement  
with Writing. University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing

- Symposium. Oxford, MS.
- Parker, M., Shelton, E., and Dunkin, C. (2014). Supporting Student Transition to College Writing. Presented at the University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing Symposium. Oxford, MS.
- Parker, M. (2013). Introducing Evidence-Based Writing in the Composition Classroom. Facilitated at the University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing Symposium. Oxford, MS.
- Parker, M. & Shelton, E. (2012). Standards to Teach By: The Common Core and the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing Standards and How They Affect Teaching Writing at all Levels. Presented at the University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing Symposium. Oxford, MS.
- Parker, M. & Shelton, E. (2012). Examining Professional Development in High-Need Schools. Presentation presented at the annual National Writing Project Meeting. Las Vegas, Nevada.
- Hurdle, L., Myatt, A, & **Parker, M.** (2011). Wants and Needs for Improving Composition Instruction in Academic Environments. Facilitated at the University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing Symposium. Oxford, MS.
- Parker, M., Ruff, M., Risher, S., & Shelton, E. (2011). The Common Core and Framework Documents in Practice. Presented at the University of Mississippi Transitioning to College Writing Symposium. Oxford, MS.

*In Review*

- Parker, M. and Shelton, E. (2016). Creating a Community of Writers to Change Their Worlds. National Council of Teachers of English. 2016 Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA.

**WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS**

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2013-Present | <b>Co-Presenter</b> , National Writing Project’s College Ready Writer’s Program, i3 Investing in Innovation Grant.  |
| 2016         | <b>Co-Presenter</b> . Revision: Focus on Commentary. Quitman County School District, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Marks, MS. January 4.     |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . Celebration of Opportunity, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Oxford, MS. October 21, 2015.                                   |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . Write to Learn, Baldwin School District, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Baldwin, MS. August 5, 2015; May 26, 27, 2015.     |
| 2015         | <b>Co-Presenter</b> . Quitman County School District, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Marks, MS. July 27, 28, 30, 2015.                        |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . Writing Across the Curriculum, Lafayette County School District, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Oxford, MS. July 22, 2015. |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . Writing Across the Curriculum. University of Mississippi Writing Project. June 29, 30, 2015.   |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . The Reading and Writing Connection. Itawamba Community College, Belden, MS. June 2, 2015.  |
| 2015         | <b>Presenter</b> . PARCC ELA Assessment Workshop, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Oxford, MS. January 22, 23, 2015.                            |
| 2014         | <b>Presenter</b> . PARCC ELA Assessment Workshop, University of Mississippi Writing Project, Oxford, MS. July 28, 29, 2014.                               |

- 2014 **Presenter.** Benton, Alcorn, Marshall County MS Teachers. University of Mississippi Writing Project. Close Reading Strategies for CCSS and PARCC. June 16, 17 2014.
- 2014 **Presenter.** Itawamba Community College (Continuing Education), Building Classroom Community Through Place-Based Instruction. Belden, MS. June 9, 2014.
- 2014 **Presenter.** Literature and Text Workshop. University of Mississippi Writing Project. Oxford, MS. June 5, 2014.
- 2014 **Presenter.** Close Reading Strategies for CCSS. Middle Tennessee State University Writing Project. January 17, 2014.
- 2013 **Presenter.** Itawamba Community College Department of Continuing Education, To the Essay and Beyond: Multi-Genre Writing for the Common Core. Belden, MS. June 4, 2013.
- 2012 **Presenter.** Itawamba Community College Department of Continuing Education, Grammar to Go. Belden, MS. June 11, 2012.
- 2012 **Presenter.** Itawamba Community College Department of Continuing Education, Finding and Keeping Student Voice. Belden, MS. June 2012.
- 2012-2013 **Lead Presenter,** National Writing Project Seed II Grant for Professional Development in a High-Needs Secondary School.

#### **SERVICE**

- 2011-Present Planning Committee, Transitioning to College Writing Symposium
- 2012-Present Organization of Scholarship/Awards for Department of Teacher Education
- 2015 MS Charter School Authorizer Board Discussion Group, Invited Attendee
- 2015 Three Minute Thesis Competition, Participant
- 2015 Davidson Elementary Library, Reader
- 2015 Water Valley Community Clean Up Project, Participant
- 2014 Water Valley School District Open House, Welcome Committee
- 2013 Clinical Instructor Trainer, University of Mississippi

#### **AWARDS AND HONORS**

- 2015 Graduate Achievement Award in Teacher Education, University of Mississippi
- 2014-Current Gamma Beta Phi Society
- 2014 Outstanding Doctoral Student in Secondary Education, University of Mississippi

2011                      Teacher of the Month, DeSoto Central High School, Southaven,  
MS

**CURRENT PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS**

National Council of Teachers of English

International Literacy Association

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English