Case Study
University of Montana Western
Education Division
CAEP Standards R4.1 Completer Effectiveness, R4.2 Satisfaction of Employers, R4.3 Satisfaction of Completers

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Introduction and Significance

This case study was conducted in accordance with a statewide protocol developed by the Montana Educator Preparation Programs (MEPP) Continuous Improvement Collaborative (CIC). The work of the MEPP CIC began in 2015 as a coordinated effort undertaken by all of the Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Montana to address the components of CAEP Standard 4. (CAEP Standard 4 was in effect at the time; it has since been replaced by CAEP Standard R4.) This work was done under the auspices of the Montana Council of Deans of Education (MCDE), a council which includes all of the EPP leaders in Montana, and in coordination with the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). After careful deliberation (including validation processes), the protocol was approved and accepted by both MCDE and OPI in 2019. It is essential to note that this statewide protocol adoption process places this method of assessment into the category of a *proprietary assessment.* (A definition of *proprietary assessments* can be found in the CAEP Glossary.) This protocol is a source of evidence distinct from EPP-created assessments, and is one where the responsibility for design, validation, and administration resides at the state level. While the MEPP CIC was engaged in developing this proprietary assessment, it reached out to CAEP in 2016 for confirmation that the process which the MEPP CIC was using was an acceptable one, from CAEP's perspective. CAEP officials responded with a memo entitled "When States Provide Limited Data: Using Standard 4 to Drive Program Improvement," which affirmed that the MEPP CIC protocol was a proprietary assessment which should adequately address CAEP Standard 4. This memo was shared with the MCDE and retained in its records.

In brief, the protocol includes: (a) statewide survey of completers, which assesses their satisfaction with the preparation they received in their respective programs; (b) a statewide survey of employers, which assesses satisfaction with how well the completers' programs prepared the completers; (c) a case study which is grounded in the data collected from the two surveys and which addresses questions that emerge from evaluating those data.

Work on the University of Montana Western (UMW) Education Division's case study began in January of 2020, when division faculty met to evaluate data from the completer and employer surveys. Faculty members reviewed the MEPP CIC protocol and noted that their goal was to assess completers' satisfaction and the impact completers are having on P-12 learning. Data from the completer and employer surveys are provided elsewhere in the self-study report (SSR) and are included on the UMW Education Division's website page devoted to CAEP accreditation and annual reporting measures. In essence, the January meeting sought to answer these three questions:

- What do the survey data tell us about completers'/employers' levels of satisfaction?
- How can we generalize those data to draw conclusions about program effectiveness?
- How should the data inform our case study design?

The following table summarizes the conclusions drawn by the faculty in addressing those questions:

Table 1: UMW Education Division's analysis of Employers Survey data and Completers Survey data	
What emerged from the statewide employer survey with regard to areas of *dissatisfaction?*	**What emerged from the statewide completer survey with regard to areas of *dissatisfaction?***
Response to negative behavior*	Response to negative behavior*
Ability to address expectations of Indian Education for All (IEFA)	Program relevance
Ability to analyze assessment data	
***Data-based conclusion**: Employers and completers alike feel that the UMW educator preparation program could/should improve with regard to completers' preparation and proficiency in responding to negative behaviors.	

While there are several features of the UMW educator preparation program (EPP) which would benefit from further scrutiny, it is clear that the strongest area of concern for completers and employers alike lies with the ability of completers to respond effectively to negative behaviors. Furthermore, this is a significant concern. Completers have a foundational need for strong skills in the realm of meeting students' behavioral needs. "Maintaining a positive and organized classroom setting free from disruption is critical to providing an instructional environment conducive to teaching and learning" (Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez & Cummings, 2016, p. 120). A teacher's ability to support a productive learning environment which is as free as possible from negative behaviors has important consequences for student outcomes. This speaks directly to the heart of CAEP Standard R4 and its focus on the impact of completers on P-12 learning and development.

Brief Review of the Literature

Looking in Classrooms (Good and Lavigne, 11th edition, 2018) is considered by many to be a classic text on deconstructing student learning, and connecting theory to practice. The title of Chapter One in this text says it all: "Classrooms are Complex" (Good and Lavigne, 2018, p. 1). The authors note that educators must possess more than content knowledge—an undeniably important attribute—in order to be effective. They must also be skilled decision makers who apply knowledge of evidence-based pedagogy in combination with an understanding of students' motivations and behaviors. Then they must translate all of those elements into the particular contexts of classroom, school, and community. Coping with difficult student behaviors is known to greatly increase the complexity of working in a classroom, and is frequently cited as a reason for teachers to leave the field (Austin & Sciarra, 2016; Sokal, Woloshyn, & Funk-Unrau, 2013).

It has long been known that teaching is a process which is best accomplished when students are viewed as partners and participants. Brophy (1985) encouraged teachers to view classroom management as part of their instructional responsibilities, teaching students to internalize principles of self-guidance. Experts in classroom management frequently advocate for developing classroom guidelines in concert with students. However, Brophy (1985) noted, "The degree to which a guideline becomes functional in regulating student behavior will be determined not so much by whether the students participate in establishing the guideline as by whether or not they see it as reasonable and choose to adopt it for themselves" (p. 238). The agency of learners as members of the classroom environment is an essential component for teachers to take into account at all times. Jones, Jones and Vermette (2013) claimed, "The notions of 'discipline,' 'conformity,' and 'obedience' that have littered discussions of classroom management in the past are no longer sufficient to describe the diverse urban classroom" (p. 21). The same can easily be said for any classroom, in any geographic context. Once again,

classrooms are complex ecosystems, and successful classroom management is predicated upon methods which promote learner agency, participation, and self-guidance.

Thus, the UMW Education Division chose to design a case study which is not only an inquiry into the experiences that completers appear to be having with regard to classroom management, in general, but to expand that inquiry into an initial investigation into the experiences of completers whose preparation includes exposure to concepts of positive guidance, in addition to the more traditional concepts of classroom management. The reasons for this choice are further explained in the next section.

Methods

Members of the UMW Education Division Faculty agreed to pose the following question for the case study:

Inquiry Question 1: How do our completers perform in responding to students' negative behaviors?

Continued discussion within the faculty led to an agreement to design the case study in a manner which allowed members to also explore possible differences among completers who receive extensive exposure to concepts of positive guidance in their programs of study, as compared to completers who experience a more traditional classroom management course. Thus, it was decided that candidates who graduated with bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education: Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 3 could be compared to those who graduated with bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education. The following question was also posed:

Inquiry Question 2: Are there differences in completers' approaches to classroom management if their programs of study required them to take EDEC 230 *Positive Child Guidance* as compared to programs of study which required them to take EDU 344 *Classroom Management?*

A purposeful sample of possible completers was conducted. Six completers were contacted as possible participants; four completers were willing to participate in this study. Three of them had earned bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education: Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 3, and one of them had earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. All four completers graduated in Spring 2019, and were employed for positions which began in the academic year of 2019 - 2020. Data collection concluded in Fall 2021. Data were also collected from the employers (principals) of three of the four completers. The fourth principal was contacted and agreed to participate, but eventually was unable to be interviewed before data collection was concluded.

Impact of COVID-19: Please note that the MEPP CIC protocol originally stipulated that case studies were to be fully completed within the academic year of 2019 – 2020. However, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic made that an impracticable deadline. An "Initial Licensure Programs Case Study COVID Extension, 2020 - 2021" was voted upon by the MCDE on January 27, 2022, and the council approved the extension on that date.

Each completer (all names used below are pseudonyms) was interviewed individually, and each interview was conducted using an identical set of prompts. Responses were evaluated, and themes which emerged during data analysis were identified. Throughout this study, methods of constant comparison analysis (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965) were used for the process of establishing such themes. Following the four interviews and an analysis of the themes which emerged, a focus group methodology was used with all four completer/participants. Completers

were asked to discuss, as a group, the seven themes which emerged from the interviews. Again, those data were recorded and evaluated. Subsequent to the meeting of the focus group, three of the four completers' principals were individually interviewed, and they were asked to respond a set of themes which emerged from discussions with the four completers. Table 2 provides an overview of participants and some contextual factors.

Table 2: Overview of Case Study

Completer* **All names are pseudonyms.*	Degree	Grade placement	School Type and Location	# of Full Years in that School	Principal ** ***Initials do not correspond to principals' actual names*	Preparation for responding to student behavior
Kylie *(traditional age at graduation)*	Elementary Education Completed an on-campus program for degree	4th grade	K-6 Southwest MT small town, pop. 843	2	SS	EDU 344 *Classroom Management*
Camille *(traditional age at graduation)*	Early Childhood Education P-3, with Special Education endorsement Completed an on-campus program for degree	Special Education	K-6 Southwest MT town, pop. 8,685, contiguous with small city, pop. 46,746	<1 *Taught at a Montessori School, previous 2 years.*	(none) *Principal agreed to participate, but interviewer was unable to schedule interview.*	EDEC 230 *Positive Child Guidance*
Amy *(non-traditional age at graduation)*	Early Childhood Education P-3 and Art K-12 Completed an online program	Kindergarten	PK-5 Southwest MT town, pop. 4,261	<1 *Taught in a nearby rural school, previous 2 years.*	PF	EDEC 230 *Positive Child Guidance*
Kendall *(traditional age at graduation)*	Early Childhood Education P-3 Completed an on-campus program for degree	Pre-kindergarten	K-6 Northwest MT small town, pop. 703	2	SN	EDEC 230 *Positive Child Guidance*

This case study also drew upon principals of portraiture as a research methodology. Faculty members of the UMW Education Division gathered on November 18, 2019 to view the live stream of a seminar given by Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. This seminar was sponsored by the University of Michigan as part of its TeachingWorks program. As a noted practitioner and developer of the methods of portraiture, Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot's seminar provided UMW faculty with an excellent introduction into portraiture as a methodology. Following the seminar, faculty members discussed their thoughts and reactions. For many, this was (and still is) a new methodology, one with which most faculty members have little experience. However, faculty members were appreciative of Lawrence-Lightfoot's claim that portraiture helps researchers (and readers of the research) to remain positive, and to view participants in a positive light. In a similar vein, a hallmark of Lawrence-Lightfoot's work is to look for "the beauty" or "the good" in one's findings. This is the lens used in viewing the participants, and is also applied to the researcher.

By extension, therefore, such a view is applied to the entire EPP, since this case study is an inquiry on behalf of the EPP as a whole, even though it is led by a single person. Members of the faculty were enthusiastic about using this lens. Even as the EPP seeks to determine the areas where it needs to improve its work and its programs, it also seeks to understand where its strengths lie, along with the successes of its completers. This stands in contrast with research methods which are designed to ferret out weaknesses. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted, "Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections" (p. 9). As a methodology, portraiture blends an aesthetic of appreciation with more traditional social science methods. The researcher takes a stance that is at once critical *and* empathetic, one which acknowledges the presence of the researcher in the narrative. From an ethnographic perspective, this stance incorporates both an *emic* perspective, where an insider's point of view is used, and an *etic* perspective, where the point of view resides outside of the participants, in what is generally considered to be a more objective distance.

Findings

Table 3 provides an overview of selected contextual variables from the four elementary schools where the four completers are employed.

Table 3: School Data

Data on school enrollments, attendance rates, percentages of ELLs, and percentages related to special education participation were obtained from the online GEMS (Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students) data warehouse, an arm of the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). All other data were obtained through online dashboards at the Great Schools website, where data on percentages of low-income students are based on eligibility for free- and reduced-cost lunches.

	# students	% Attendance rate	% ELLs*	% Special Educ. participation	% Low-income	% White	% Hispanic	% Native American	% All other ethnicities	% Female	% Male	% scored at or above proficiency: ELA**	% scored at or above proficiency: Math**
Kylie's school	96	94.6	1.0	11.5	27	89	n/a	1	10	48	52	n/a	72
Amy's school	453	91.4	1.8	12.1	67	88	7	2	3	51	49	68	57
Kendall's school	173	92.9	0	17.3	45	81	9	2	8	54	46	35	25
Camille's school	396	93.8	3.5	9.3	40	87	9	2	2	48	52	51	51

*ELLs = English Language Learners

**Proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics, as measured by students' scores on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests. These data are from the 2018-2019 administration of the SBAC.

Kylie

Kylie (a pseudonym) is a native Montanan who teaches fourth grade in a small Montana town not far from the University of Montana Western. Kylie described herself as someone who wanted to be a teacher from a very early age, influenced in part by her mother's role as a teacher, and by having many good role models (and "a few bad ones," too) throughout her education. Kylie often mentioned values and morals when she spoke about her own growth and development, and about the influences which impact her teaching. She views her developmental years and the influences of her family as foundational to the person she is now, especially when it comes to her identity as an educator. In second grade, she was diagnosed with Type I diabetes, and she has experienced

additional challenges to her health, resulting in a lifetime which is marked by feeling uncertain about what the future holds for her, and yet feeling that she can—and will—face each challenge successfully as it comes along. "I think that all of my medical experiences have really helped me with empathy, and with consideration of others," she noted. "I apply all of this to my teaching." Kylie explained that she is a person who loves to learn, and that she also delights in working with children. Her hope is to share her love of learning with her fourth grade students, and help them to "catch it." She emphasized that creating a positive, safe space for her learners is a very high priority. "If students don't feel safe, they're not going to do anything else, or learn anything," she explained.

Kylie described her school and its community as a highly supportive environment. She characterized the school as being a collaborative one, and the community as close-knit. Noting the influence of agriculture in her area, and the presence of a strong work ethic, she described her school as a place where "parents trust the teachers," adding, "It's very nice to teach in a school like this one." For Kylie, being able to ask for help when she needs it was something that it took her a while to learn how to do, and now she is very appreciative of both her mentor and the rest of the faculty. She noted that her principal was explicit in assuring her that asking questions and seeking assistance is integral to success as a new teacher. While it took some time for her to grow accustomed to this idea, she now feels more comfortable. "Be patient with yourself," Kylie said, imagining herself addressing future new teachers. "You'll make mistakes—every day. It's all part of the learning process." She went on: "I now know that I'm not going to know how to do everything. I need to be on my toes, and know that I'll eventually figure it out." Kylie noted that, in her experience, new teachers often fall into the trap of being too self-conscious or insecure, and thus don't seek the help they need.

Kylie's views on positive guidance and classroom management

When asked how she would describe positive guidance, Kylie said, "I would say that all positive guidance, all positive reinforcement, all of that really starts with your relationship with the kids." She continued, discussing additional elements regarding positive reinforcement, and was emphatic about the importance of relationships. The value of modeling what you're looking for, as a teacher, was also mentioned, as was the importance of giving specific feedback to students. "You need to be sure to tell them what *to* do," Kylie added, rather than what not to do. When asked about the concept of classroom management, Kylie stated, "I would say that classroom management is really your set of expectations for the students." She also emphasized the importance of consistency, and making sure that students know what will and will not be tolerated, in terms of classroom behaviors. Guidelines in the classroom, reliable routines, and providing a safe classroom environment were all noted as essential components of classroom management. Kylie stated, "Classroom management was definitely integrated in all of my classes at Western." She noted that setting the classroom rules *with* your students, rather than *for* your students is preferable. Kylie's concluding thoughts returned to an emphasis on forming good relationships with her students, and on maintaining clear expectations.

Amy

Amy (a pseudonym) teaches kindergarten in an elementary school in the same town as UMW. Her early years were spent on the family farm in North Dakota, a state where her grandmother once worked as a teacher in a one-room school house. The family moved to Dillon, Montana when Amy was ten years old. Early in her interview, Amy said, "My story begins with discovering and understanding trauma." She explained that her current insights and knowledge about trauma and resilience are essential to helping her empathize with the children she teaches.

Amy's first degree was a B.A. in art, with an emphasis in the visual arts. She claimed, though, that she "didn't really do anything with that degree. It took me a while to earn the K-12 art education degree, and the P-3 degree." In her late twenties, while studying as an online student, Amy began working in preschool settings. "I've been teaching throughout the process of learning, and that has been a really important part of my path," Amy noted. "I used the tools I was learning—simultaneously—in a hands-on environment." She explained that having teachers in her family has always been an influence for her, noting that it contributes to her desire to "constantly reach for more information, to become a better teacher." She describes herself as a naturally positive person, someone who loves her family deeply, and who has always had an interest in working with children.

Amy is new to the kindergarten position she now holds. When asked about this position, her thoughts turned first to how important it is to remain positive. She said, "I'm trying to be a problem solver, and not a complainer. We always run into obstacles and issues, but we can find tools and techniques to work together." Respecting the community is important to Amy. "It's a gift to be invited into that," she said, explaining that the parent community and the town itself are not obliged to "let you in"—you need to earn that invitation, by learning about the place, the community, and its history. "Especially for families that come into the school environment with trauma," Amy noted—"they need to trust me as a teacher." Amy strongly emphasized the importance of being nonjudgmental, of establishing good communication with parents, and of forming relationships with the students and with their families. Once parents know they can trust her, Amy said, then they know the relationship will be one of working together. "Especially since I work in early childhood education," Amy explained, "there is a lot to learn; I have a lot to share." Amy reflected that teaching is a "land of ups and downs," noting that she learns something from each experience she has.

Amy's views on positive guidance and classroom management

When asked how she would describe positive guidance, Amy's first statement was, "I'm not good at giving definitions, and explaining things in that way." She went on to note that, for her, positive guidance is "approaching every situation in a positive way." Her next thoughts went to the idea of maintaining a positive mindset. "I'm a huge user of a growth mindset, and the power of 'yet'—as in, maybe this new thing is kind of hard, and I can't do it—yet. But I'll get there. It's just hard to give definitions of these things." Amy paused for a few moments and went on. "One thing I think about is this: All behavior is communication. My job is to look for the reasons behind the behavior in a child." Amy's comments continued with a focus on how essential it is to be a good, consistent observer of the child(ren) in her classroom, with the goal of understanding what she can learn from those observations. Teaching young children about "how their brains work" is something Amy is enthusiastic about. She also noted that she has been trained in conscious discipline, a framework which she finds very authentic and useful. She explained this approach as a behavior program which teaches children to "calm themselves." Using breathing techniques, talking about one's feelings, and being confident in one's ability to face challenges—all of these are elements of conscious discipline, Amy said.

She then talked a bit about the PAX Good Behavior Game, and its implementation in her classroom. Like many people, Amy simply refers to it as "PAX." The PAX Good Behavior Game is actually a set of practices used by classroom teachers to foster children's self-regulation and focus. It is a system designed to support pro-social behavior and reduce the incidence of problematic behaviors. Amy commented that PAX and conscious discipline "work very well together." In spite of her initial expressions of a sense of confusion about positive guidance, she wrapped up this portion of the interview by demonstrating that she does understand many elements of positive

guidance after all, noting, “Basically, it’s about helping children to self-regulate. The PAX and the conscious discipline are positive guidance strategies.” When asked about how she would define classroom management, Amy’s first thought was, “Well, I struggle with that definition, because positive guidance sort of jumps into it.” She continued, thinking aloud about the importance of creating engaging, motivating lessons as a way of managing the classroom, in addition to making sure that the classroom is a safe space. “Rules should be small, fair, and manageable,” she said. “Learning should be developmentally appropriate, and you need to have high expectations for the children. They can excel.” Amy reflected that a clear sense of structure in the class is important, along with a predictable schedule. She likes to alternate “busy activities” with quiet ones. Amy believes that infusing the day with music and art are also a way of keeping children engaged, and are thus a natural way to manage a class.

Kendall

Kendall (a pseudonym) teaches in a small elementary school located in a town with the lowest median household income of the four completers’ communities. Kendall has been employed at this school ever since she graduated. However, her initial year of teaching was in a first grade classroom, followed by a kindergarten placement for her second year. Now in her third year of teaching, Kendall’s placement is in a preschool setting at the school. Her roots are in Idaho, where both of her parents are teachers. Moving to southwest Montana for her undergraduate degree was an adjustment for her, and now her life in a very small town in northwest Montana is another adjustment, which is still ongoing. Kendall has strong ties to her parents and extended family. She described her early years by saying, “The whole community that I grew up with was in education, so I was kind of immersed in it for the whole time. It really shaped what I wanted to do.” Throughout her high school years, she sought many experiences in childcare and early childhood education. Her career path always seemed very clear to her. She explained, “Today, when I’m teaching, I’m saying or doing something, and it makes me think of my parents. It makes me think about how they molded me. Of course, I’m still developing. I’m always learning.” Kendall noted that she has had a wide range of experiences in her career so far, and that many of them were quite challenging. Of the four completers, Kendall mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic earliest in her interview, and appeared to be the most profoundly impacted by its effects. She stated, “The pandemic really made me grow. I had to learn to teach in a new mode, and to manage what came my way. So, I did it, even though I sometimes didn’t even know where the students were [during remote teaching].” She described teaching as being like a rollercoaster, at times, noting that her colleagues have been a tremendous source of help and support. Teachers who “know the backstory” of a family, or a particular child’s needs, are particularly helpful, she said.

Kendall drew a distinction between the teachers who live in town, and those who don’t. She stated, “I live in this town, and I teach in this town. This is huge. The community is so small, I feel like teachers who don’t live here don’t really get integrated.” Kendall’s involvement in after-school athletics has also played a role in helping her to feel accepted by the community. She expressed appreciation for the family-oriented nature of the community life. “Everything is very plugged into family and kids. If it’s not kid-friendly, people are probably not going to do it.” Kendall also described the town as “a different environment,” a place where there are “families who haven’t really experienced anything else. So, it can be important to give them opportunities to expand their minds, and to broaden their experiences.” Kendall contrasted her own life experiences with those of many of the people in the community, expressing gratitude for having had the opportunity to travel, and to experience teaching and learning in a variety of settings. This brought her back, again, to the importance of being supported by faculty

members who have taught in her school for a number of years. Their ability to help ground Kendall in her own journey toward becoming an experienced teacher is something she greatly appreciates.

Kendall's views on positive guidance and classroom management

When asked to define or describe positive guidance, Kendall pondered for a bit. "Well, for me, I think I define it by thinking about the older way of doing things. I think about the idea of telling a student that they've done something wrong, and now they're going to have to 'go put their nose in a corner,' or something like that. And, of course, that's not a good way to respond." She paused for a moment, saying that it is difficult to define guidance. She continued, "My definition is focused on when a student does something she or he shouldn't be doing, you try to provide guidance to help them see what they should have done, how they can do things differently." Kendall offered additional ideas about helping students to make better choices. "You know, if a kid pushes someone, then maybe you can guide that child to go back and do something helpful for the one who was pushed. That's one example of how I think about it." When asked about classroom management, Kendall's response was very straightforward: "Well, classroom management is how you manage a classroom to make it functional. For me, it's about being able to get students to focus on what you're trying to teach." Kendall's thoughts about classroom management also centered on the importance of managing quick transitions from one classroom activity to the next, and on using other "management strategies." She reflected on how difficult it is to keep very young children interested and focused on the topic at hand. "You have to use engagement strategies. They wander off into other topics so easily. It's hard to validate what the children are saying, and yet keep moving with what you need to accomplish," Kendall mused. She connected these challenges to the necessity of using effective classroom management approaches, and to realizing that "sometimes you just have to move on. You have to choose your battles."

Camille

Camille (a pseudonym) is a special education teacher in an elementary school located in a community in Montana whose population is nearly 9,000 people—a sizable community for Montana towns. Furthermore, this community is adjacent to a small city of over 46,000 people. For Montanans, this is a large and significant population center. It is Camille's first year in this school; the previous two years of her time as a UMW completer were spent teaching at a Montessori school in the area. Camille described herself as someone who has "grown into herself." Her childhood and adolescent years were marked by a sense of reluctance to speak up for herself, and a sense of social reserve. Camille stated that her time at UMW helped her to change and grow. "I'm more able to speak up for myself, more able to jump into conversations. It's quite a change," she noted. "Now, I'm leading IEP meetings at my school. I never thought I'd be able to do that." Camille explained that her first IEP meeting felt very challenging. Not only is Camille a naturally quiet person, but her preparation in early childhood education has, she said, fostered a tremendous sense of compassion for each child. "I was terrified at my first IEP meeting," she said. "I didn't want to tell the parent about the struggles the child was having. But I had to do it. And it turns out the parent was very accepting, and really wanted to help her child succeed." Camille said she learned a great deal from that meeting. It reminded her that parents want to know more about their child's needs, and how to help the child. "I know that I have a lot I can share," Camille said.

Camille thought her experiences in a Montessori school were an excellent starting point for her, in particular. "It was all about observing," she said, "and I really like to do that." By the end of her second year there, though she

said her perspective changed. She explained, “I wanted to be the one in the lead, making the lesson plans, knowing that in some way I helped them to reach their full potential.” Her student teaching experience had already prepared her for dealing with a wide range of behavioral issues, she pointed out, and then the Montessori experience strengthened her observational and assessment skills. It also provided an incredible amount of support, from colleagues and parents alike. “It was almost like being in a big family,” she said. Moving to a traditional elementary school and switching to special education has been a big change for her. She is still adjusting, especially to the wide range of parental involvement she sees in her new school. Establishing strong communication with the general education teachers has also been a challenge. From Camille’s perspective, some of the grade-level teams are more insular than they should be. “But I’m slowly making progress,” she said. “One step at a time.”

Camille’s views on positive guidance and classroom management

When asked to define positive guidance, Camille said, “In my mind, it’s more, kind of like being a role model. You’re positively guiding the kids. You want them to look up to you, and you guide them.” She noted that the resource room in which she teaches has the rules posted very clearly. She went on, “We look at the rules together, too. And the kids look to me to see what I’m going to do, how will I respond, in some situations.” Camille continued, commenting on the importance of consistency, and of leading children in a positive way. Camille also offered some thoughts about modulating one’s voice, as a teacher. “It’s amazing how much the use of the voice changes everything,” she noted. She explained that her goal is to use a calm, relatively quiet voice, and a measured tone. This aligns with Camille’s values around modeling and being a person the children can look up to. “You have to guide them to see better behaviors, in school, and even in life,” Camille said. When asked about classroom management, Camille stated, “I would almost say it’s about having defined rules, which the students have to follow.” She extended this concept, though, adding that flexibility is also important. She explained, “It’s really all about how you carry yourself as a teacher, how you compose yourself. You need to be fully present in the classroom.” She reflected on the fact that she has grown more comfortable with correcting a student who is off-task: “You simply slide their name into the stream of your teaching, tell them what to do, and then you just keep on talking and teaching. You haven’t really singled the child out at all.”

Focus group: The four completers

The narratives above comprise a sample of the thoughts and reactions shared by the four completers during their individual interviews. All interviews were transcribed in full, and the completers’ statements were analyzed for themes which emerged from the interviews, using methods of constant comparative analysis (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965). Each of the completers was given a question during the interview related to satisfaction with their preparation in their UMW programs. All four responded very positively to this question, providing a number of appreciative details about program satisfaction. These details were not particularly germane to the topics of positive guidance or management. Furthermore, it comes as no surprise that completers would make virtually only positive statements about their programs, given that the interviewer is a UMW Education Division faculty member. Additional information and data regarding completer satisfaction can be found in the data and evidence documents related to the Completers Survey, which was a direct measure of satisfaction with completers’ preparation programs.

During the focus group, participants were invited to address seven themes. Each was treated as an open-ended prompt, and participants were asked to comment and discuss the prompts without the interviewer directing or moderating the conversation. Because none of the participants was particularly confident or specific in their definitions/descriptions of positive guidance, and (to a lesser degree) in their descriptions of classroom management, the interviewer provided short descriptions of the two approaches, to help inform the focus group discussion, and to better frame the completers' thinking as they participated in the focus group. Thumbnail versions of these two descriptions can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Brief descriptions of *positive child guidance* and *classroom management*

Positive child guidance	Classroom management
"Guiding children's behavior is something done throughout the day, not just when a child acts in a way that is unsafe or unacceptable. You guide behavior by establishing predictable routines, setting clear rules with children, and modeling kindness and respect" (Dombro, Jablon, and Stetson, 2020, p. 63). Positive child guidance is grounded in the idea of helping a child build awareness and skill with self-control, rather than focusing solely on a behavioral outcome. Miller (2016) noted that guidance is based on supporting a child's self-esteem in developmentally appropriate ways, always seeking to foster self-reliance and self-discipline.	Classroom management generally encompasses the set of techniques used by a teacher to ensure the classroom runs smoothly, with as few disruptive behaviors as possible. It relies on establishing a structured learning environment with clear rules, and on providing consequences which diminish or eliminate behaviors that impede learning. It often focuses on students as a group, and seeks to keep students attentive, on task, and academically productive. Jones and Jones (2021) explained that effective classroom management "enables teachers and students to make optimal use of learning time" (p. 3).

After the brief descriptions were read aloud to the four completers, describing basic concepts of positive guidance and classroom management, the completers participated in the focus group discussion, responding to prompts which were drawn from interview themes. Table 5 encapsulates the comments made by the four completers during the focus group.

Table 5: Focus group, in brief

"I come from a family of teachers…" (foundations, values, and a sense of an existing community)	
• All four completers share this trait • Ability to "ask them anything;" trust	• Family members know the completers better than anyone • Can give well-tailored advice regarding guidance/management
"I am a lifelong learner…"	
• "Teaching doesn't have a finish line that you cross…" • Teachers are the types of people who strive for self-improvement	• Change is inevitable • COVID forced us to teach online • Guidance is not easy; takes lots of time to learn
"My colleagues are a tremendous help to me—they mentor me…"	
• School family, not just a group of co-workers • Kylie and Camille were given assigned mentors; Amy and Kendall were not	• Colleagues can give you support for classroom management, but can't really "teach" you how to do it
"My school has an MBI* (or other) behavior plan in place"	
• PAX Good Behavior Game = in use in 3 of 4 schools, but with varying degrees of fidelity • All four completers were able to describe their schools' behavior programs	• Completers are comfortable using their school's MBI* programs, and they adhere to those programs • It appears these programs do not register with completers as having a strong impact on management or guidance within their individual classrooms
"It's essential to work effectively with families, and to be a good communicator…"	
• This factor appears to emerge as a very strong one, in all aspects of teaching, including guidance/management	• Completers focused on the notion that when children know that parents are aware of what is happening in school, children generally exhibit fewer problematic behaviors

"You have to be a positive role model for your learners, providing a safe environment for their learning…"	
• Professionalism is key • The children look up to you, even mimic you—it has an impact on behavior	• Being a positive person ignites positivity in the children—fosters good behavior, and mitigates trauma and stress
"Observing and noticing my students…being present…building relationships—these are key…"	
• Relationships = one of the most frequently-mentioned elements, affecting both guidance and management • Be honest and authentic with the students	• Observe students; check in with them; support their social-emotional learning • Have high expectations—this is actually very positive, and fosters effective management
*MBI = Montana Behavioral Initiative. It a state-level PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) system which was designed to assist schools in providing a proactive school-wide approach to creating behavioral supports and establishing a positive culture within a school.	

Interviews with the principals

Three of the four principals participated in individual interviews, as part of this case study. Inclusion of the principals was an important factor in the design of the study, since it was based—in part—on data collected from surveys of principals across the state of Montana. Furthermore, addressing CAEP Standard R4 must include acknowledgment of R4.2, which focuses on satisfaction of employers. This case study does that, and allows for comparisons between responses made by completers and responses made by employers, thus providing a source of data triangulation, which deepens the EPP's ability to seek continuous improvement of its programs. It should be noted, however, that the principals were cautioned not to view their interviews as opportunities to critique or evaluate the individual completers. This case study does not constitute a performance evaluation on the part of each principal related to their respective employees (completers) who had volunteered to participate in the study. Instead, the case study is designed to shed greater light on employers' levels of satisfaction with the University of Montana Western Education Division as an EPP, and to focus in particular on the two inquiry questions which were selected as the focus of the study.

As with the completers' focus group, the set of notes which describe positive guidance and classroom management were first read to each principal, prior to starting the interview questions. The questions/prompts used with the principals were drawn from themes which had emerged from the completer data:

- What is the role of positive guidance and/or classroom management on teachers' impact on P-12 learning? Why?
- "Being a lifelong learner…"
- "My colleagues are a tremendous help to me—they mentor me…"
- "My school has an MBI (or other) behavior plan in place…"

A follow-up was used with each of the four prompts, to guide the principals' thoughts to UMW and to EPP improvement:

- *What are your thoughts about all of the above, with regard to UMW?*

It should be noted that all three principals, with all of the prompts, went into a discussion of the UMW educator preparation program, before being prompted to turn their attention to continuous improvement of an EPP. The principals seemed eager to share their views and experiences in this realm.

Principal #1: PF on positive guidance and management

PF (not the principal's actual initials) is the principal of Amy's school. He emphasized, "Well, you rely on both guidance and management. The two work in concert with each other. The best teachers use both. They understand the concepts involved in each, and they know how to apply them." He continued, noting the school uses "a two-pronged approach" of combining the PAX Good Behavior Game with its already-existing MBI approach. "It's an investment for us, basically," he said. "We're an MBI school, but we really use PAX. We now have 98% of our staff trained in PAX. It's an awesome program, and four of our teachers are advanced trainers in PAX." PF explained that the school is "very intentional" about its use of PAX, and that a school has to provide the resources to use a program like PAX, including making sure that everyone has an opportunity to discuss the program and build their knowledge of its concepts. "Eventually, you start relying on both guidance *and* management, and you can't have one without the other. It's about the internal control of the student—that's crucial. If kids can't do internal control, then you're really in a tough spot." Ultimately, PF noted, the school's success with both guidance and management is predicated on "using our shared vocabulary. Without that, the kids really don't understand what's going on, and what's expected of them."

Principal #2: SN on positive guidance and management

SN (not the principal's actual initials) is the principal at Kendall's school. She stated, "They both play an important role. Guidance is essential, but management is also important. If you model what is needed, and make your classroom expectations clear, then you can reinforce the guidance." As SN continued her comparison of the two, it appeared that she placed classroom management at the foundation of responding to students' behaviors. "Management is important, because it determines whether a class will be functional or not. Without management in place, learning will not occur. Students suffer." She added that this topic needs more attention in preparation programs. "To me, it seems like all of this is being talked about, but students [candidates] aren't really being given a chance to practice it. And, to be honest, I don't know how you would do that, because it requires being in a classroom." She noted that her school focuses on having routines and procedures solidly in place. "This helps with guidance," she added. SN explained, "Our MBI program this year is in a re-structuring process," though it certainly has all of the elements one would expect from such a program. "For discipline, we have the students fill out a TRC form," she said. Quarterly celebrations are held to recognize students who have been successful with the school's MBI program. "As far as guidance and management go, right now we have more management in place. And we can/should move into guidance. It should be both," she stated.

Principal #3: SS on positive guidance and management

SS (not the principal's actual initials) is the principal at Kylie's school. He explained, "When we look at our school, we really see behavior as a very important consideration. We used to be an MBI school, and we continue to teach from those concepts." He noted that the four school-wide guidelines are the foundation, and "from there, we can dive into classroom expectations, and continue to build. It all hinges on consistency." SS came back several times, also, to the importance of building rapport with students. "Just building those relationships is crucial; it really leads into that classroom management," he said. "And you have to reinforce expectations," he added. "As far as consequences are concerned, they need to be relevant, of short duration, and immediate," he noted. PN did not refer to positive guidance in any of his comments. It appeared that his focus was taken up primarily with the

principles of classroom management. His emphasis on the importance of having positive regard for the students was very evident, too, and should not be overlooked. Building strong relationships with the students is clearly important to SS. He discussed the fact that he spends quite a bit of time in classrooms. "I model it [building relationships] in the classrooms. I try to show how it really helps, with management, to build that rapport with the students, and with the parents, too."

Table 6 provides an overview of the themes which emerged from interviewing the three principals.

Table 6: Themes which emerged from interviews with principals

Positive guidance, in contrast with classroom management
• Both are important • Greater emphasis was placed on management • Influence of MBI was evident—using a behavioral program may lead administrators to think in traditional behavioral contexts
EPP effectiveness, regarding management and guidance
• Some of the responsibility for these skills rests with the first school of employment, not the EPP (noted by all three principals) • Give candidates the vocabulary they need for management and guidance • Encourage candidates to adopt more proactive behaviors, more help-seeking, when it comes to management and guidance
Relationships
• This was the most-often mentioned factor during the interviews • A corollary: building rapport • Most frequently mentioned with regard to students, yet the need for relationships with families is also evident
Importance of clinical experiences for preservice candidates
• Candidates need as much clinical experience as possible • COVID-19 pandemic has significantly curtailed this opportunity, recently*
Importance of mentoring
• Very important—crucial for completers' success • Two of the three principals said they are moving to new mentoring structures in their schools • Mentoring is a tool for "transfer of knowledge" (from experienced teachers to novices) regarding management and guidance
Dispositions**
**All three principals offered a number of comments related to this theme, and all appeared to conflate "candidates" and "completers" into one category, at times. Because the interviewer asked questions about "the UMW program," and not about the specific completers in the study, it seems likely that this framing of the questions may have contributed to such conflation. • Prepare candidates to engage, take initiative, and be proactive • Completers need to listen to colleagues; seek mentoring conversations • Feedback is not a "punishment"—be coachable • Professional development is "part of the job"—it is what professionals do.
*Principals referred to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic numerous times. Thus, it is noted here. It should also be noted that none of the completers who participated in this case study were impacted by the pandemic during their years as preservice candidates.

Implications

The findings discussed above suggest a number of implications which are worthy of note for the UMW Education Division. The EPP may wish to return to the findings for further analysis at a later date. It will be important for the EPP to pay close attention to the next cycle of administering the employer survey and the completer survey, and then of designing its next case study. Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on many aspects of conducting this research has yet to be fully appreciated. The following discussion identifies several implications of the findings, framed in terms of the two inquiry questions posed for the case study.

Inquiry Question 1: How do our completers perform in responding to students' negative behaviors?

Completers are clearly more than just the product of an educator preparation program. Their abilities to respond to students' negative behaviors are grounded in more than the coursework and clinical experiences which are afforded to them during their attainment of an undergraduate degree. The three principals noted that skill in classroom management must be developed first through the experiences provided by an EPP, but is necessarily also a product of what is learned during a completer's first years as a teacher. Completers in this study drew from a well of identity which was influenced by family members who are also educators. Similarly, they relied upon their colleagues—some of whom were "official mentors," and others who performed "unofficial" mentoring functions—to support them and provide them with an informal induction into the teaching profession. Principals agree that strong mentoring is important, and in this small group, there is an expressed goal to make mentoring more formalized and, hopefully, more effective. It is possible that efforts of this type are needed in many schools. Completers expressed satisfaction with the preparation they received from UMW, and reported a general sense of confidence with regard to beginning their work as teachers. But they knew they would not be fully prepared, they would make mistakes, and they would learn and grow. They are self-described lifelong learners who view their educational practices as a work in progress, rather than a finished accomplishment.

To be effective in classroom management, or in positive guidance, these completers rely on effective communication and building strong relationships with the students they teach. They view this as an essential skill, and there is strong congruence between completers and principals on this viewpoint. Adams and Woods (2015) found that "being student-focused" (pp. 257, 259) is essential for retention of new teachers. In their study, the challenging contexts of Alaskan schools parallel the difficulties faced by some of the completers in this study, and by many Montana completers, in general. In a relatively new textbook for preservice teachers entitled *Behavior Management,* co-authors Walker and Berry (2020) take an approach to classroom management which is drawn from behavioral psychology, yet they, too, point to the importance of positive relationships with students, and also encourage teachers to attend to the impact of cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences among learners. Thus, it is likely that the reliance completers place on building and maintaining strong relationships is both well-situated and effective. Still, completers do not report that they feel fully prepared regarding classroom management, and principals concur that they are not. The complex skill set of effective classroom management is comprised of more than relationships alone. The UMW Education Division's second inquiry question attempts to dig deeper into this complexity.

Inquiry Question 2: Are there differences in completers' approaches to classroom management if their programs of study required them to take EDEC 230 *Positive Child Guidance* as compared to programs of study which required them to take EDU 344 *Classroom Management?*

A striking finding with regard to this inquiry question is the fact that the completers who were interviewed for this study were unable to comfortably and precisely articulate what *positive child guidance* is, or to explain it in a concise or accurate manner. During the interviews, as they talked further about the approach of positive guidance, the three completers who graduated with degrees in early childhood education (ECE) were able to refer to elements of this approach and how it is enacted in the classroom. The completer who earned an elementary education degree did not do so. The ECE completers were very clear about several elements of a positive guidance approach, referring to all behavior as communication, or noting the value of helping children to use positive self-talk and to calm themselves. All four completers made a number of references to the importance of being good models themselves, which included being an encouraging person and having a positive attitude. Additionally, all of the completers stated that providing positive reinforcement is necessary, and they noted the importance of being an affirming person. Overall, though, these completers did not describe positive guidance in a theoretically coherent way. Many completers are not comfortable with framing concepts in a theoretical manner, it should be noted. However, the completers were also not fully proficient in describing positive guidance in a manner which was truly coherent in terms of practice and pedagogy.

What can explain this finding? It seems clear that these completers are making many good choices and are experiencing success, overall, with regard to classroom management. They fully understand that a classroom which is a safe space and is as free from disruptive behaviors as possible is an environment in which children can learn and grow. It seems likely that program coherence and the expectations of principals may provide some insight into this finding.

Principals' expectations

Two of the three principals in this case study expressed views about the importance of teachers keeping a balance between management approaches and guidance approaches, while one focused more unilaterally on classroom management. Collectively, they were more oriented toward management skills, with guidance approaches apparently playing something of a secondary role in the three principals' views. Clearly, PF was something of an exception to this characterization, since his school has made a strong commitment to PAX, a program which aligns closely with principles of positive child guidance. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assert that school leaders are more inclined to view teacher effectiveness through the lens of classroom management, rather than through a lens of positive child guidance, or a combined lens.

In a study conducted by Bigham, Hively, and Toole (2014), open-ended interviews were conducted with a group of 100 principals, to determine their expectations regarding new teachers. Participants were found to place a very high value on classroom management skills, among other new teacher attributes. Skills related to positive guidance did not emerge from the interviews conducted in this study. This suggests that principals' frames of reference for responding to student behavior are likely to set a "classroom management context" for new teachers, leading them to eventually adopt similar frames of reference. Torff and Sessions (2009) conducted a survey of over 250 principals concerning their perceptions of the causes of teacher ineffectiveness. The most-frequently perceived cause of ineffectiveness identified by respondents was classroom management skills. Once again, the weight that principals assign to the value of classroom management is a heavy one. Due to this influence, the completers who participated in the current case study may be likely to privilege concepts of classroom management over those of positive guidance, even though three out of the four of them received explicit preparation in concepts of positive child guidance through their ECE programs of study.

Program coherence

"What did you learn at school today?" is a question parents frequently pose to their children. Children's responses are likely to be as varied as the children themselves, but the fact remains some children—perhaps many—will simply reply, "Nothing." It is challenging to describe what one has learned, and this may be as true for adult learners as it is for children. Moreover, teacher candidates may not always make the strong conceptual and pedagogical connections that EPPs hope they will make, across courses and into the field. In fact, there may well be a "coherence cliff" which candidates experience as they move from their course work into their student teaching placements. The effects of falling off such a cliff would then follow them into their first teaching positions. In a seminal study entitled "Constructing Coherence," Pam Grossman and her colleagues (2008) investigated teacher candidates' perceptions of coherence between coursework and fieldwork, including student teaching. Not only did this study look at candidates' perceptions of the degree to which an EPP's principles and practices are aligned with what the candidates experienced in the field, but it also examined the degree to which candidates had the opportunity to explicitly practice what they learned in their programs. An underlying assumption of this study was the notion that candidates are less likely to fall off the "coherence cliff" if they are able to enact the visions of good teaching and learning which they have been taught in their EPPs, once they enter their student teaching placements. By extension, completers from any EPP might be better able to answer the question, "What did you learn in school?" (namely, during their preparation programs) if there is stronger coherence across coursework, to student teaching, and then into the field.

Canrinus, Lette, and Hammerness (2019) studied nearly 270 teacher candidates from three different EPPs, located in Norway, Finland, and California. They defined *program coherence* as "a process in which all courses within a teacher education program are aligned in terms of content (cf. conceptual coherence) and build sequentially on one another based on a clear vision of good teaching (cf. structural coherence)" (p. 194). They found that teacher candidates across programs felt they were given an opportunity to practice, during student teaching, what they had learned during their coursework. However, these candidates generally did not observe that teachers in the field were "using the same theories, strategies, and techniques" (p. 199) that the candidates had been taught during their courses. Furthermore, the candidates felt that what they learned during field work was not consistent with they learned during their course work.

Program coherence is very important; it is the glue which allows candidates to make sense of complex concepts. "When candidates have aligned experiences, they can build upon their existing knowledge base and integrate new knowledge and interpretations" (Canrinus et al, 2019, p. 194). In particular, it appears that better coherence is needed, and teacher educators in both the university and the field can and should do more to improve their collaboration and their ability to understand each others' contexts. One way that this enhanced understanding could be achieved is through increased and improved opportunities for candidates to discuss their field experiences within the context of their campus coursework. Jenset, Hammerness, and Klette (2019) came to this conclusion in their study of student teachers' experiences. They noted, however, that candidates' discussions of field experiences must be well-scaffolded and carefully connected to a program's theories and practices, in order for it to be truly generative. It is easy to imagine that completers like those in the current case study might have benefited from the kind of program coherence described here. To be clear, all four of them appear to be successful young teachers who are comfortable with their ability to respond to negative behaviors. It is possible, though, that their concepts of positive child guidance *and* of effective classroom management might well have been strengthened through even greater program coherence.

Conclusion

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) concludes her essay "On Goodness in Schools: Themes of Empowerment" by reminding the reader that she uses a particular focus and emphasis in her portrayals of the actors/participants in her research. She sees these individuals as "the primary knowledge bearers," and it is her responsibility "to convey their perspectives, perceptions, and values" (p. 27). She notes that her portraits do not provide a mirror image of the subjects themselves. The same is true for this case study. There is certainly more to each participant's story than can be found in these pages. The answers that this case study provides in response to the inquiry questions posed by the University of Montana Western Education Division are far from complete. Further research, inquiry, and deliberation on the part of the EPP are all needed, in order to better understand the reasons that completers and employers alike express concern about how well the EPP prepares its completers to respond to students' negative behaviors. The lines between positive child guidance and effective classroom management are often blurred. However, to acquire the skills of positive child guidance is a worthy goal. Among other things, positive guidance is an approach which supports children in saying and believing: "I can do hard things," as one of the completers in this study noted. Thus, the EPP should continue the inquiry it has begun, in order to be a program which is even more successful in helping completers to enact positive guidance with knowledge, clarity, and greater proficiency.

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