OVERVIEW

Background Information
Field trips are routinely viewed as exploratory expeditions that engage young learners and provide beneficial learning environments for students in early childhood (Aronson, 2011) and K-12 programs (Whitesell, 2016). Teacher attrition is a significant cause of teacher shortages. For adult learners in educator preparation programs (EPP), however, the impact of field trips on teacher retention is generally overlooked in favor of focus on curriculum preparation (Moretín & Guisasola, 2015) or context (Giles, 2017). The field trip experience during educator preparation could be considered as a potential “mighty change” agent. Although cognitive, educational, and personal advantages of field trips for students are documented (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008), less understood is the impact of field trips during preparation on professional outcomes for K-12 educators. Such impact may be a small but mighty change (Lorenz, 1993) needed to support entering teachers and address educator shortages (Goldring, et al., 2014).

Study Purpose
Previous research has not specifically addressed employment retention rates for preservice teachers attending professional field trips. Involvement in field trips to professional conventions may bridge college preparation and career practice for new teachers. The role of professional field trips is examined to determine impacts of attending a convention on pre-service teachers’ retention, academic performance, and professional experiences.

Research Questions
Do preservice teachers who attend a professional conference have
1. Greater employment retention rates
2. Higher academic grades
3. Increased professional experiences

METHOD

Design and Instruments
A multiyear non-experimental mixed methods design using an online survey consisting of 19 demographic, 18 Likert, and four open-ended questions designed by teacher education faculty.

Participants
Graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a teacher education program who attended a national professional convention in a distant city. From 160 electronic surveys emailed to both current and past students, 96 students responded (60%) yielding 69 (43%) usable surveys. Such rates are appropriate (Sturgis et al., 2017). All participants gave express study consent.

Procedures
Students paid professional organization membership dues ($5.00 to $52.00) and agreed to adhere to university travel policies regarding decorum and attendance. Students were required to attend general convention sessions but had autonomy in selecting breakout sessions. Quantitative responses were analyzed for descriptive and statistical differences using commercial software. Attrition and retention rates were determined from current students’ projection of the number of years they plan to teach and past students reporting the number of actual teaching years completed. The role of professionalism was analyzed using qualitative methods. Open-ended responses to survey questions were individually read twice before undergoing additional analysis.

Findings
Those who participate in professional organizations have greater job retention rates, higher academic grades, and more likely to have multiple job offers, gain deeper content knowledge, fulfill leadership roles in schools, and have access to more resources.

RESULTS

Findings
1. Employment Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>National Data</th>
<th>Educators Attending Professional Conference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 yr Attrition</td>
<td>40-50% *</td>
<td>0 †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity</td>
<td>15 years **</td>
<td>71% until retirement †</td>
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Note: *Thompson, 2019, †Lueken, 2017  †Actual and projected teaching years

2. Academic Grades  p ≤ .01

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not attending</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.2884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3. Professional Experiences
Career longevity, academic support, learning, and involvement were main professional constructs. Such opportunities to “gain professional experience” “ultimately lead to increased exposure to professional development opportunities, interaction with other professionals, as well as students and their families”.

Implications
Findings in greater employment rates, higher academic grades, and increased professional experiences underscore the power of field trips to produce formidable learning outcomes (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008) and positively change the student (Vascellaro, 2011). The combination of increased retention, academic proficiency, skill knowledge and networking for new teachers may stem teacher shortages.

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