

2018 – 2019 Case Study Interview Findings

In this analysis we first look at evidence cited by alumni of best practice in the four domains of Danielson and in the preparation of their Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Next we will look at larger themes of strengths and areas of improvement explicitly connected to candidate preparation at Kutztown University.

Summary Conclusions

- All candidates were able to describe personal strengths in each of the domains of Danielson.
- Most expressions of need for improvement showed good understanding of the domain, an interest in improving, and generally were about building on strengths.
- There were multiple strengths in the area of planning and preparation including disposition for planning, organization, ability to be flexible, planning with students in mind, and differentiation.
- There were many strengths related to the classroom environment domain, but the strongest theme was the importance and ability to establish good relationships with students.
- The most often strength regarding the instruction domain was the ability to engage students in active learning.
- Candidate descriptions of their strengths corroborates their supervisors' ratings.
- Candidates provided detailed descriptions of their Student Learning Outcomes evidence with several impressive examples of their impact on student learning.
- Alumni explicitly cite Kutztown's strong preparation in many areas. Key themes that occur frequently are that Kutztown prepared them well for lesson planning including planning for differentiation. Alumni frequently cite the strength and caring of faculty. Alumni also credit Kutztown with emphasizing the need to establish positive relationships with students.
- The most common area for improvement suggested for Kutztown programs revolves around direct application to the classroom. Alumni say it would be helpful to increase clinical experience, increase clinical experience early in the program, increase experiences in diverse settings, and the more real life applications connected to their coursework the better.

Danielson Domain: Planning and Preparation

Alumni Strength

All alumni cited specific evidence of personal strength in planning and preparation. Examples include:

Sure. So I mean I'm definitely always prepared, my lessons are on my desk, but as far as remembering to plan I feel like I get to probably like Wednesday or Thursday of the week before, and I always know what I'm gonna do because it's just innate and it's the flow, I'm not concerned about what am I doing next week, it's just a matter of getting it down and organizing it all.

Another strength I'm very flexible. And sometimes that's not the best. But for example I'm not scared to change things around or try new things. I'm very open to feedback. I even tell them when I start, like in the class, "If I made a mistake I want you to tell me. I'm not going to feel bad."

Academically, I would just look at all of the assessments that I have been gathering based on progress monitoring scores, their benchmark scores and then any ongoing formative assessments I had that I was using in my room.

... I think I'm strong in making sure I know the academic needs of students and the interests, especially too, because then I can plan my lessons to kind of interest them, and other things. Sorry that was.

Areas of Growth typically cited by alumni are for areas where candidates have a good foundation and want to grow as professionals. For the planning domain examples are:

I feel like knowledge of students is just one on one, knowing what your students are coming from, what backgrounds they're coming from, what they know, what they need to struggle with, what areas you need to help them with. This year I have one girl that is excelling in reading, and I'm struggling to figure out how to make sure that she is appropriately differentiated in our instruction, without pushing her too far and without having her being bored.

My weakness is, I feel like, our planning for small groups. My whole group preparation is, to me, easier than trying to figure out on a daily basis what specifically I need to do in small groups because they change every day, the needs.

Student assessments. I still feel that I need to work on that. I feel like I do, especially with our district. It's not very ... well we have our set ones for the end of the units in our curriculum, but otherwise, for kindergarten it was thumbs up, thumbs down. Very informal. I feel like I could do better in that area.

Domain Classroom Environment

Personal Strength Again, every alumni cited specific personal strengths related to the Danielson domain of classroom environment.

I think, of all the domains, this is my strength. As I get to know my students very well, I get to know them, what they like, what they dislike, how to motivate them, what their background is like, what's going on with their families. That's what I always looked at when I was a student, looking at my teachers, was that ... and I'm lucky in this aspect because I am working with teachers that I had, and they're still asking me about my family, they're still asking me about those things. I'm like, well that's who I want to be. I want to be the teacher that you see, three, four, five from now, and I'm still going to know things about you.

My strengths in classroom environment is definitely my rapport with my students. I do my best to get to know them on a personal level and I can tell you who's playing football, who's doing what at the end of the day.

Okay, classroom management, I feel very strongly with that. I don't feel like I struggle trying to keep control of my classroom. I think, just from the beginning, I let them know that I have very high expectations for them and I feel like I'm always trying to make sure my kids are comfortable, asking them ... because every class is different, some kids they want the blinds wide open and everything really bright. Some classes they come in and they're like, it's too bright, I don't like that. It's too hot. It's too cold in here. Trying to rearrange my classroom in a different way. Some kids need to be sitting facing a certain way. I go off what they say, not what I want my classroom to look like.

This is one of my favorites and I think it's because I kind of found my home in fifth grade because they are such a great age where I have a really great relationship with them because they're old enough where you can have a conversation with them, but they're young enough where they're still elementary so there's that nice balance.

Yeah, classroom environment. Okay. Classroom environment. I'm that teacher that went in for two weeks before school, and set everything up, and had everything planned out in my mind. Then as the kids got there, everything changed, of course. I felt like my classroom was very welcoming. That's something that my principals, both my vice principal and my principal commented on that my kids love coming to school. I didn't really have an attendance issue in my classroom. I mean, there were some kids that would skip when it was raining and that kind of thing, but they wanted to come to school. They loved being at school and I got a lot of the, "I don't want to go home. I don't want Summer to come." That was hard to leave. That makes it even harder to move to a new district because I think about that.

Area of Growth Most described growth in terms of building on strengths or making improvements. Their explanations showed understanding of the domain and strong reflective qualities:

Last year was the first year of teaching, especially in an urban school district. So, it took me a little while to let the kids in on my personal life, which affected our relationship and affected their learning because they're not going to learn from somebody that they don't trust. So it took me unfortunately until the end of last year to realize that, but those kids still come back this year and they're coming into my room asking how everything is. But this year I started off from day one getting to know my kids and the first month of class, I mean we were learning, but I was getting to know them. They were getting to know my life, how I do things at my house and within the classroom and in the school. I feel like that has affected the classroom environment tremendously compared to last year.

For classroom environment, I would like to be more consistent. One of my weaknesses is that when dealing with student behavior in the environment and how it affects the other students and their peers, I sometimes lack the consistency of making sure one student is doing what they need to do as to not distract their peers as to another for various reasons. Say a student is talking very loudly, maybe screaming across the room for no reason, that I'm typically pretty quick to address. If a student is screaming across the room to help with a student, I might let it slide. It's not ideal because they're screaming, they're loud and they're disrupting other students, especially if they're wrong about the help that they're trying to provide, I might let it slide because the intentions are good even though it's disrupting the environment.

Domain Instruction

Personal Strength All but two alumni described specific instructional strengths. The remaining two alumni did not discuss instruction or discussed this domain primarily through discussion of their planning and classroom environment. Alumni typically described engaging students in active learning as their strength. Specific examples:

Engaging students in learning. I think I do a pretty good job with that. I try to make it interesting, try to make it engaging for them. Like in this lesson, we were doing, I think, main idea. I got Disney songs, and we found the main idea from the Disney songs. So I really, I try to make it appropriate for them.

My strengths, I feel, are engaging my students. We're always doing something different. We don't like doing worksheets-

But I like doing things that get them moving. If you're standing instead of sitting and you're paying attention, we're fine. But getting them working on their own projects and working in groups and not just sitting there listening to me lecture.

Okay. My strengths, I think they are creating that initial ... Activating that prior knowledge. What do you know? I think I'm really good at pulling that out and being like, where do I need to begin or what do you already know and I can move on? I feel like, just having those discussions in my classroom and having kids not be scared to be wrong. It's like give me your best guess on this or, what do you think? It doesn't have to be right but, what do you think? Brainstorming. I think I was nervous with, at first, 'cause you want to correct them but, you gotta let them ... This is where you started and this is where you are now. I feel very comfortable in front of the classroom but, one of the things that I think I need to work on is the delivery, I guess, sometimes.

But just getting them excited so that they are engaged, even if it's not the most interesting thing in the world, and giving them all the tools and the resources that you can to help them solve math in any way, because that's the direction that we're going in this district is that there's not just one way to solve a problem.

Area of Growth Most described growth in terms of building on strengths or making improvements. Their explanations showed understanding of the domain and strong reflective qualities:

Questioning and discussion techniques, I think I do pretty well with that, but I'll prompt the kids and hopefully get a response back. It worked a lot better in fourth grade, not so much in kindergarten. I'm still working on that. That's probably a need of mine.

It's learning how to get that clipboard in your hand and check, check, check.

One thing he said to improve upon is shortening my activities because kindergartners have a very short attention span, and using more songs and transitions in between each part of my lesson.

Professionalism

Personal Strength All alumni cited specific strengths in the area of professionalism. Examples include:

My strengths are stepping in when something is needed either just in my classroom or whether it's building-wide, if there's something that needs to be done, I'll step in and I'll do it. My needs would definitely be communicating with parents.

Kutztown did a lot with helping us learn how to reflect on how we talk because we always had to write a reflection piece on our lessons. I also feel like Kutztown did a nice job in teaching us how to do the accurate records, I just feel like me, as a person, did not take hold to that.

Professionalism, I think I'm very strong at dressing professionally, presenting yourself professionally. I always get here super early. I'm proud to be early. Interacting with co-workers, showing the students this is how you speak to someone you work with, setting that example.

Yeah, and I guess professionalism, does parent communication fall? Okay, so that's one of my big things, like that's, I have an app that I use where I can send, it's basically like a text message, and so those are like the daily reminders and updates and things like that, and that's how I communicate usually with parents one on one, if we're not able to have a phone call because I can actually see if they read it, and so then I know if they don't read it, I can reach out to them in a different way.

And then for my administrators, we have a good relationship. Thanks to KU I learned how to do great emails because my emails were just, "hello, okay, bye." So random so now I know how to properly approach them. What else? I like to collaborate for events. I'll be the teacher who raises their hand and tries to help. So I don't know, does that count as professionalism?

So I run everything in our building. I also run the migrant program, which is most of our ESL kids. They're allowed to be in the program for two years and there's some other requirements that go with that. I get to work with another staff member who is attached to our building and furthering my learning in that way. We also do a lot of PD. We do a lot of time where we meet with the staff and I meet with the other staff within the district where we get to, I know this summer we did a lot of co-teaching, how to prepare the kids and make sure that everything is equitable. Those sorts of things.

I definitely felt like I was strong in just continuing to learn, being that lifelong learner with going and getting my Master's, and going to any professional developments. I was part of the equity team at my school, so we basically were designing culturally responsive teaching practices to present to our building that everybody could use in the classroom.

Area of Growth There were a variety of grown areas cited by alumni. Some examples include wanting to be better in working with families and wanting to get more involved with learning communities and other professional development.

Sure. I have noticed other than deciding to go back for my master's that as far as like a professional development standpoint, I don't always seek it out. I have been kind of waiting for it to come to me, and so I think maybe I probably need to open up some more networks to kind of find some things to tap into.

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Yeah, definitely because, and they want to be involved and they want to help out and help their child be successful, but sometimes they don't know how to go about it, and it's kind of the teacher's job, but sometimes it's like, well I don't know how to get this parent to, so I don't know, something to maybe just help, especially in an urban setting.

Student Learning Outcomes

The SLO process is defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. It involves setting goals, objectives, planning instruction, pre and post assessment, and reflection on learning. Alumni ratings for their SLOs are based on the percentage of students either score highly on the post-assessment or show significant growth. In interviews, alumni described some of their process, goals, and successes. The following helps provide some insight into their work.

Yes. We progress monitor every two weeks for the students who are well below benchmark in DIBLES and then we progress monitor once every month for all other students. So, we actually started that today for October. We track where they start, where they're supposed to be and then we also track where they're supposed to be every two weeks if that makes sense?

I feel like I was prepared coming out of Kutztown to make those calls like I don't need to. That's not best practice using those worksheets. I mean, there's probably some people that would disagree with me. I mean, the teacher next door to me, she would have lost her mind if she knew I wasn't regularly using the packets, but I just knew that that was not what was best for my students. In the end, looking at my SLO data, it obviously worked.

My SLO, the goal was that students who attend school 60% of the time or more, or since the beginning of the year. We mostly counted students that were with me starting in October. If they move in after October, they were not counted on the SLO. The goal was for them to have a year and a quarter worth of growth, according to the standards for the American Reading Company. That was measured on SchoolPace, which is an online database where you plug in data when you're doing independent reading conferences with the kids. Then they give them points and the

points are then adjusted into years. This is what, and our principal, he really wanted us to push our kids, which makes sense, because in the urban setting, we need to close the gap, and get these kids where they need to be. My students, I had two, three, five English learners on my SLO and one special ed student, which really was lower compared to some of the other second grade rooms. The way that my SLO is set up, there's a number for their baseline score and a number for where they ended. Then their growth in years is calculated over here. For example, if a student started at 1.3 being their baseline score, that's like saying they're in their third month of first grade level. They ended in their fifth month, almost six months of second grade with a 2.59.

It was for an exponent unit, I gave them a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test was all the same questions as with those tests and it ranged from what is an exponent, can they identify what's the exponent and what's the base? All the way to a solving problem. There's only about nine questions or so and it's very minimal, very minimal questions that just address the rules of exponents. They might just have to add two exponents and that's it. They might just have to subtract two exponents and that's it. They might have to use the power of a power property and that's it or negative exponents. Then maybe one or two questions that mix the information together. I gave them the pre-test to see did they have any knowledge of these rules and then went through a week of instruction, notes, games and assignments before giving them the post-test again. Then I used Kahoot because it keeps track of who got this question right, who got this question wrong and what did they respond. I can just compare the post-test and pre-test to see how many students improved on this particular question, how did this student specifically improve grade-wise.

Kutztown Areas of Strength

1. **Planning Differentiation - Assessment.** By far the most commonly cited strength was learning to prepare quality lessons. Examples of statements from a variety of alumni:

I feel like KU really prepared me for differentiating in my planning. Having four different classes with four different strengths, I feel like I was prepared for that coming in knowing what I needed to do for my kids and being able to make short-term and long-term adjustments for my planning. I feel really good about that.

What did KU do to prepare me? Well, we were always doing lesson plans and they did a really good job in explaining exactly what we needed for each lesson plan. The lesson plans that I needed to do here were no different from the ones we needed to do at KU. All of the components were the same. Different format but the components were the same.

I know people, you know, in college they complain and all of the lesson plans are so long, but they really do prepare you because when you get out obviously it's not realistic to write plans that are that long, but you kind of go through the process in your mind of like, okay, these are the materials that I need, and what is the objective? What are we doing and how am I gonna start it and how am I gonna access at the end?

There's a lot of time spent on the lesson planning, and each part of the lesson plan which I really appreciated, and even though they were super long, I feel like it really does help you think like,

okay, what prerequisite skills do they need for this lesson even though that's not something we had to write in our lesson plans, it's good to think that, in that mindset.

Rubrics, making the rubrics. That was very helpful, I remember having to make rubrics, sorry I'm very jumpy, but I remember having to make rubrics and those were helpful because they were very laid out of how to make it simple yet it gets everything that you're looking for and this was something I remember learning that you're not supposed to, in most of the rubrics, it's more on content and focusing on the content of things rather than participation

... yes, exactly. Exactly, which are still important if it's a writing or a grammar kind of thing, but I think that that kinds of sticks with me that you need to focus on what the actual objective and standard is that you're working with.

I think the way they prepared us was by giving us different examples of the different students we could have. As much as they tell us, okay this could happen and this can be A, B, C scenario. You never know how much ... and I guess I didn't expect to have a lot of them in my classroom. And in student teaching I had like one that I had to differentiate so it was nothing compared to what I am. But they definitely give me different ideas of well, this could happen and then what would you do? So I remember they will tell us okay, what would happen if you had this? What would you do? And at the beginning ... Also my peers and I had no clue and it was common sense but I was ... we blanked. But giving us examples and having us come in the front and doing small lessons and teaching it to ourselves. It was helpful.

Kutztown did a really nice job in preparing us on how to plan accordingly in the real world.

2. **Strong and caring faculty.** Another strong theme represented by many alumni was that the faculty cared about them, pushed them hard, and helped them grow.

But it was definitely like night and day because I felt like it at Kutztown the faculty were bought in and they care and they had such a wealth of knowledge, like they were people who had been in the classroom and have had all these different perspectives and could really bring a lot to the table. So I don't know that I have any negatives, and like I said, I always said I would come back.

Yeah, and I feel like it definitely really helps and I mean it's hard to make a connection with everybody, but having the great connections with your professors definitely helps enrich the experience, but that's something that definitely the students have to more so seek out and care about because you kind of get out of it what you put in.

And even in undergrad, it was the same thing. If you had a question, I never felt like oh I'm gonna bother them or oh, that's a stupid question, I'm not gonna ask. It was very, I felt so valued here. Like everybody, and it was like "oh, that's a great question," or you know, "I'm so happy you brought that up," and then I constantly think about that and the way that makes me feel and how I feel appreciated and how I feel like I'm an valuable part of the learning environment, so I'm trying to do that in my classroom, too, because I want kids to feel that way 'cause it's not fun when a teacher is saying to you, "I can't believe you would ask that," or yeah, just kind of give you like an attitude answer. I don't know.

So I think the professors, just their constant want to help you grow, and to help you be successful. I mean for me, that was the biggest thing, just having all your support and knowing that you're on my team and behind me has been huge. I don't know if that was exactly the answer you were looking for, but that's-

I definitely feel like the relationships that I had with my professors at KU are the reason why I take the time to develop a relationship with my kids. I feel like that's what helps my classroom management. I can talk and joke with my kids, but they also know I have a high expectation for you and I want the best for you and I'm always gonna stay on top of you when it comes to that.

3. **Valuing relationships and positive classroom environment:** Examples of statements from a variety of alumni:

Kutztown talked a lot about the environment of your classroom both physically and emotionally so walking into Reading School District, it's obviously different than walking into a suburban school district. I feel like Kutztown did a really good job in preparing for some of those tough needs of students and the student behaviors because they're different too. Just dealing with some of those struggling children.

I feel like I was prepared. I knew what would be expected of me in creating a classroom and making it somewhere that would be like a safe space for my students. I think that that was something that came naturally after being here. That domain was like I got a couple blues in that and I was expecting that.

So I think that Kurtztown does a very good job of just making sure to build those relationships and kind of showing you how, like I learned interest inventories from Kurtztown. I never knew about that until I was obviously learning it in school.

I think, [inaudible 00:19:13] sorry, I just want to make sure. So I think Kurtztown does a good job of emphasizing the importance of building the relationships with students and I talked about that a lot in my interview with the new district that I'm working for, just like how important building relationships was and I do feel like it helped because, it's huge and when I did, any school that you go to, both of the schools that I was at, it was like build those relationships because that's when the behavior problems diminish, and that's when the students can maybe learn from you better. They're more inclined to want to learn from you.

I think that the classes that I took prepared me for some of the things that these kids are dealing with that I can't even relate to. I went through my situation but, there's a lot of other things going on. It really helped me to be aware that there's a bigger picture. It's not just the kids are hungry, it's a lot of other things. Takin that into consideration, sometimes, in the classroom, I'm not quick to be like, you don't have a pencil, you're not ... it's like, do I know your situation? And, try to take that into consideration. I feel like KU really prepared me for this group of kids that are here.

Kutztown Areas of Improvement

The most common theme for improvement was for improved field experience. There were many variations on this theme including more early field experience, more diverse field experience, and also related themes of more real-live examples.

1. More early field experiences especially in diverse settings

Yes, before Pro Sem and also getting them working in small groups with the ELL kids and the Special Ed kids 'cause I don't have a Special Ed degree or an Ele degree.

I think, maybe, getting into a classroom maybe earlier, even if it was something similar to pro-sem where you're not really taking over but, just being in a room. I think it would've prepared you to just be able to see that all classrooms are different and just help out with maybe grading something or seeing. It's just being in a classroom. I think I would've done a lot better with more time.

Just getting more time with kids you understand how kids work. Every kid is different but the more time you spend with them the easier it is to figure them out and what ticks and how they function socially, emotionally, and academically. So just giving more experience in...

No. Yeah, I feel like it would have been just more field work, more practice actually being within the classroom and with students and I feel like the classes itself that I had taken, I mean, I was more than well prepared, but a matter of actually putting that practice to work, that took a little bit.

I think just getting in the classroom more often and actually working with students would have been helpful in figuring out how to deal with them when I have my own classroom.

2. Real life application in courses

Just because there are so many different ways, and I wish each professor would tell me what they did in their classroom. Tell me what was your favorite thing that you did, and tell me all about it. I remember, I think it was in Pro Sem, she sat and she told us everything. What she did in her second grade classroom, from top to bottom. She did groups, she did individual, she did positive, she did negatives, and I loved that. Hearing the exact things of what she did, really helped me and I used some of those ideas from what she said, to base mine off of. Of course, I pulled things here and there, but I did love that she used her own classroom experience to guide us in that area.

Maybe just more towards the end of the program, looking a little bit more at what lesson plans actually look like in the world of teaching, 'cause like I said that's not what they look like realistically, so maybe a little bit before student teaching because I know that I got to student teaching and I was like, wait. I have to write the lesson plans for Kutztown, but my cooperating teacher and the district, that's not necessarily what they want to see.

I don't think so. We wrote that many curriculum for our honors program project that was all lesson plans in the KU format. Something I wish I had the time to do in college is go back to lesson plans that I wrote and correct them because so much of what I did was great thinking, but I would never use that lesson plan now because I was not thinking totally like a teacher. Going back to things that we spent so much time doing and how can I make this better? I don't know how that would be incorporate in school, but ...