

Does More Time Matter? Results of a 15-Week Student Teaching Experience

Jorge Gonzalez
459 Agricultural Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-2972
jorge.e.gonzalez@okstate.edu

Marshall Baker
456 Agricultural Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-8251
bakerma@okstate.edu

Jon W. Ramsey
466 Agricultural Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-4260

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Introduction

For decades, the student teaching experience has been touted as the seminal experience for prospective teachers of agricultural education (Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2009; Edwards & Briars, 2001; Schuman, 1969). As such, the knowledge and skills learned in teacher preparation programs are intended to be practiced to a level of accomplishment needed for initial employment as a school based agricultural educator. However, teacher educators recognize a “disconnect” between the theoretical preparation of pre-service teachers and their ability to practically apply that training in real world classrooms (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). To create a stronger connection between theory and practice and help pre-service teachers practice and acquire effective teaching behaviors in real world settings, the Agricultural Education Teacher Preparation program at Oklahoma State University increased the student teaching experience from 12-weeks to 15-weeks. This study features an investigation of two student teaching cohorts and the amount of time spent observing, team teaching, and teaching lesson topics aligned with Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources career pathways.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning theory. The teacher preparation program at Oklahoma State University utilizes Kolb’s framework to design the student teaching experience. As such, it is essential to identify what experiences students are having during the experience and if that is drastically different in the 12-week or 15-week format. Conceptually, the model for developing and researching early field experiences (Retallick & Miller, 2010) identifies the desire for melding theory and transition that occurs during the student teaching experience. This study seeks to explore the stand-alone, program-centered, student-teaching experience directed by the cooperating teacher.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe the amount of time pre-service teachers spent observing, team teaching, and teaching lesson topics aligned with Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) career pathways. Specifically, the objectives were to 1) describe the amount of time the 12-week cohort and the 15-week cohort spent observing, team teaching, and teaching; 2) determine the frequency of AFNR career pathway topics taught by the 12-week cohort and the 15-week cohort; and 3) describe changes in time spent teaching and frequency of lesson topics taught between the 12-week and 15-week cohort.

Methodology

This survey research focused on the census of preservice teachers completing their student teaching internship during spring 2015 and spring 2016 ($N = 34$). The spring 2015 cohort ($n = 12$) completed 12-weeks of student teaching while the 2016 cohort ($n = 22$) completed 16-weeks. Data were retrieved from archived, weekly journal reflection reports submitted electronically each week by the student teachers. Students self-reported the days that were spent observing, team teaching, and teaching along with the lesson topics taught. Each report was reviewed and data recorded into SPSS Version 20 for analysis. A census study permits conclusions to be drawn about the entire population. Therefore, random sampling, hypothesis testing, and the use of inferential statistics are not necessary (Creswell, 2005).

Results/Findings

Findings for research questions one and two are depicted in Figure 1. Table 1 summarized the findings for research questions three and four.

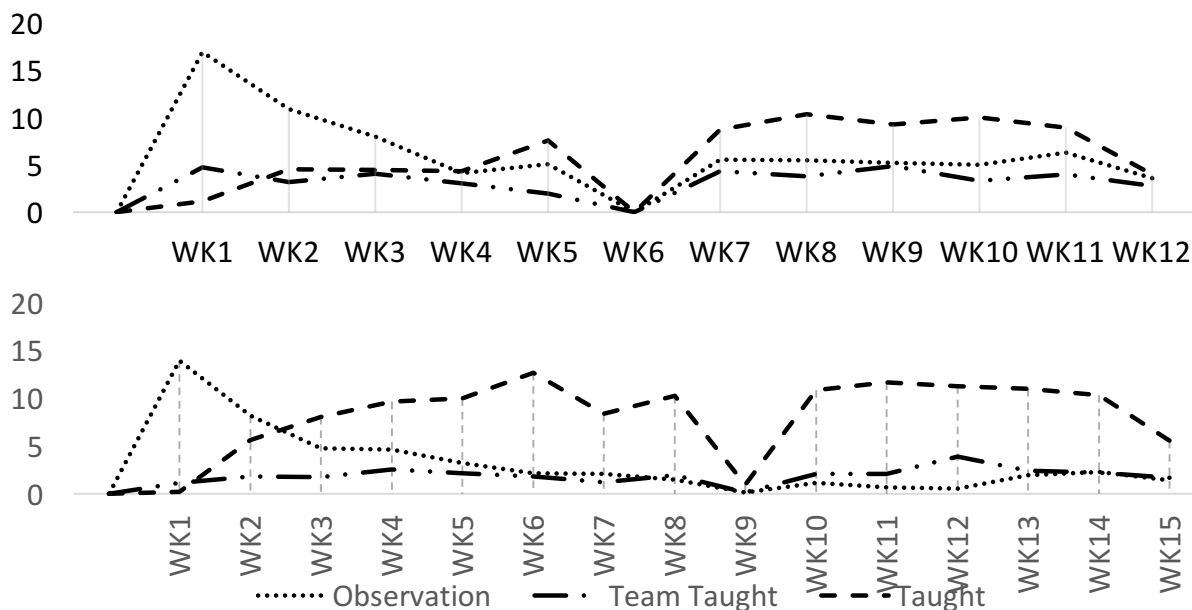


Figure 1. Summary of mean number of times student teachers observed, team-taught, and taught various topics in the Spring of 2015 (top chart) and in the Spring 2016 (bottom chart).

Table 1

Summary of Average Courses Taught Per Student in Each of the [State] AFNR Career Pathways During Spring 15 and Spring 16 Student Teaching Cohorts

Pathway	Spring 15	Spring 16	Δ
Food Products and Processing	9	10.81	+1.81
Plant and Soil Science	26.83	20.13	-6.7
Animal Science	32.83	55.5	+22.67
Agricultural Power, Structures, & Technology	41.33	44.68	+3.35
Agribusiness Management	5.75	9.40	+3.65
Agricultural Communications	28.75	16.72	-12.03
Natural Resources & Environmental Science	14.92	13.54	-1.41
FFA Advising	62.41	45.22	-17.19
Miscellaneous	29.83	3.45	-26.38

Conclusions and Implications

Preservice teachers who student taught for 15-weeks began teaching sooner than the 12-week cohort. In addition, they taught more lessons creating opportunities to practice and implement effective teaching behaviors more frequently (Coplin, 2003). Teacher educators should be mindful of the limited time students are observing the mentor teacher and work with cooperating teachers to encourage more opportunities for observation of “best practice” regarding teaching, advising, and facilitating student learning in both formal and informal settings.

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