Research Poster

A Comparison of Hours Among Pre-Service Teachers in the Roles of FFA Advisor and Classroom Teacher

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Introduction

The profession of teaching is a challenging one increasingly driven by standards based teaching and high stakes testing in which professionals are evaluated by complex rubrics. Freese (2006) described the process of learning to teach as challenging and complex. The process of student teaching is noted as a key experience in the training of new agricultural educators (Myers & Dyer, 2004; Kitchel & Torres, 2007). Smith and Rayfield (2017) describe the student teaching experience as an opportunity for a high impact, real-world experience that creates change in student teachers.

Conceptual Theoretical Framework

This study was rooted in the connection between self-efficacy and positive experiences in a task (Bandura, 1986). Pfitsner-Eden (2016) noted that increases in teacher self-efficacy were associated with a diminished intention to quit the profession. This aligned with studies that noted teachers with lower feelings of self-efficacy also reported diminished job satisfaction and a reduction in the number of years planned teachers planned to stay in the profession (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; McKim & Velez, 2015). Within the specific field of leadership in agricultural education, McKim and Velez (2017) noted that there was a relationship between amount of time a student-teacher spent on leadership activities and their perceived self-efficacy in leadership. Krysher, Robinson and Edwards (2015) reported an increase in self-efficacy of teaching skills with an increase of hours spent teaching as a preservice student. It was from this perspective that researchers at Texas Tech University began an evaluation of its teacher preparation program. Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) stated that for a program evaluation to be worthy it must judge the quality of performance in terms of effectiveness. This process began by investigating the allocation of hours spent by student teachers within the areas of serving as a secondary agricultural instructor and an FFA advisor during a student teaching placement semester.

Methodology

The spring cohort of student teachers at Texas Tech University (N = 15) used a MS Word template based on the instrument used by Torres and Ulmer (2007) to provide weekly reports on time allocation and reflection. Students self-reported hours spent: 1) Observing Cooperating Teacher, 2) Preparation for Instruction, 3) Classroom and Laboratory Teaching, 4) Laboratory Preparation and Maintenance, 5) Grading/Scoring of Student Work, 6) Administrative Duties/Program Management, 7) Professional Activities (meetings, in-service), 8) SAE Observations and Recording, 9) FFA Activities – Local, 10) FFA Activities – Area, District, and/or State, 11) CDE Preparation, 12) Adult Education, and 13) Conference time with Cooperating Teacher.

The data from these reports were compiled into Microsoft Excel. Individual data from the 13 categories were compiled into a cohort summary sheet and then broken out into cohort data for the more general themes of learning as a student, serving as a secondary classroom instructor, other administrative duties, FFA advisor duties, and adult education. This study focused on a comparison of times spent in the roles of classroom instructor and those spent

serving as an FFA advisor. Basic descriptive statistics were calculated using the included functions in Excel and verified using processes provided by Field (2014) and Lane (n.d.).

Findings

The total hours spent by the cohort in roles associated with serving as classroom instructor was 4067 (M = 271.1 SD = 126.2). The cohort total for hours spent as an FFA Advisor was 4226 (M = 281.7 SD = 165.6). Six students accumulated hours that were between one and two standard deviations from the mean and three students had scores that were beyond two standard deviations. One of these (Student 3) was the highest in hours (543) spent as an instructor equivalent to 2.16 standard deviations above the mean. However, this student was within one standard deviation in hours as an advisor. Students 1 and 11 however, were the two highest in hours spent as and FFA advisor and were and the lowest in hours spent as an instructor. Student one recorded 376.3 hours more than the mean as an advisor and 157.1 hours below the mean as an instructor. In the same categories, student 11 was above the mean by 355.8 hours as an advisor and 159.6 hours below the mean for serving as a classroom instructor. Six students were within one standard deviation in both categories. Two students reported scores that were below the mean in both categories and the remaining 14 students were above the mean in one category and below in the other.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The total number of hours and corresponding means among the cohort of student teachers at Texas Tech University would indicate a balance between time spent as an instructor and as an FFA Advisor. However, the standard deviation for the two categories show that student teachers are having decidedly different experiences. There is a negative correlation between the hours spent as an advisor and time spent as a classroom instructor. Two students are more than two standard deviations higher than the mean scores as an FFA Advisor and the reported the lowest number of hours as classroom instructors. Two students were below the mean in both categories.

McKim and Velez (2017) and Krysher et al. (2015) reported an increase in self-efficacy in specific areas of agricultural education with an increase in the time spent in the respective areas. The implications for the dis-similarities of hours spent as instructor and advisors among the student teachers in this study is that the program completers may also have similarly different levels of self-efficacy in these areas. Low feelings of self-efficacy among pre-service teachers is associated with a reduced self-projection of longevity in the field (Pfitsner-Eden, 2016).

The scope of this study should be increased to include additional universities from the region and nation. This will provide more data to determine the strength of the relationship among categories of time allocation. Prior to placing student teachers with a cooperating district or teacher, a better understanding of the preferences and priorities should be established. More specific expectations and guidelines should be established for time allocation expectations. These expectations should be communicated clearly to cooperating and pre-service teachers as part of a pre-placement training. Additionally, professional development opportunities should be created for cooperating school districts and teachers that partner with Texas Tech University.

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