Comparing the Progression of Time Spent Observing, Preparing, and Teaching Through the Student Teaching Experience of Two Cohorts

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Introduction

With the continuing shortfall of school based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers, it is imperative that the profession look at all career phases for sources of loss as part of a concerted effort to address the shortage. A career phase largely overlooked in the literature on loss and attrition is the pre-professional, student teaching phase. Nearly half of newly certified SBAE teachers choose not to enter the SBAE classroom (Kantrovich, 2007) and only 70% of the certified graduates from the same period chose to enter the profession of teaching at all (Roberts, Greiman, Murphy, Ricketts, & Harlin, 2009). With such a large loss occurring at the pre-professional phase, it is important to examine the student teaching process to identify areas of strength and improvement. This work is an extension of an ongoing evaluative study. The purpose of this segment of the study is to describe the progression of time spent observing teachers, preparing for instruction, and teaching for student teachers in the 2018 cohort at Texas Tech University and compare the progression to data from the 2017 cohort.

Conceptual Framework

Wentz (2001) outlined three phases of the student teaching process: 1) orientation and observation, 2) assisting, and 3) assuming responsibility in the school program. The first week of the student teaching experience should be spent observing the cooperating teacher and then transition to assisting students in small groups or one-on-one during the second phase. When the first two stages are complete, student teacher workload should increase throughout the remainder of the experience (Wentz, 2001). Torres and Ulmer (2007) reported a similar progression and noted majority of the student teachers' time during initial phases of their placement was spent observing other teachers but decreased rapidly through the later weeks. The study went on to report a corresponding increase of time spent in teaching activities as observation time decreased. Although Torres and Ulmer (2007) suggested preparation time should remain relatively steady through the experience, their study found student teachers spent more time preparing to teach in the beginning phases of student teaching.

Methods

As part of their course requirements, student teachers from 2017 ($N = 15$) and 2018 ($N = 21$) cohorts at Texas Tech University self-reported hours allocated in thirteen different categories. Hours were recorded and submitted utilizing an instrument previously used by Torres and Ulmer (2007). Reports were submitted electronically and checked for completeness and accuracy. Any questions or issues were clarified with the reporting student prior to entering data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. For this study, focus was on three categories: 1) Observing Cooperating Teacher, 2) Preparation for Instruction, and 3) Classroom and Laboratory Teaching. The data for these areas were pulled from the larger data set. To accommodate table size restrictions of the abstract format, the 15 weekly reports were collapsed into five, 3-week time intervals. Functions in Excel were used to calculate three-week means and standard deviations. Calculated values were verified in SPSS using processes outlined by Field (2014) and Lane (n.d.).

Results/Findings

This study sought to describe the progression of time student teachers from the spring of 2018 at Texas Tech University spent observing, preparing, and teaching and compare the progression against a previous year (Table 1). Similar to 2017 data, observation time allocation for the 2018 cohort was highest in the first three-week interval (M = 28.9, SD = 8.3), dropped to its lowest point during interval three (M = 10.1, SD = 6.0), and increased again during the last interval (M = 15.8, SD = 6.7). Similarly, time spent preparing in 2018 was the highest during the first three weeks (M = 18.2, SD = 5.0), gradually decreased to its lowest point during the fourth interval (M = 11.4, SD = 3.8), and increased slightly through the final time segment. This progression is slightly different than 2017 where time spent preparing was highest during the fourth interval.

The most notable differences between the two years was in time spent teaching. The 2018 cohort reported the least time teaching in the first interval (M = 27.1, SD = 7.3) and reached its highest point during the fourth interval (M = 42.5, SD = 11.2). Following a marked reduction in hours during the third interval (M = 24.3, SD = 17.0), the 2017 cohort allocated the most teaching time in the final three-week period (M = 40.3, SD = 19.4). In all areas and time intervals, the 2018 cohort data reflected less variability.

Table 1
Time Spent Observing, Preparing, and Teaching by Preservice Teachers in the 2017 and 2018 Cohorts Over Five 3-Week Intervals

	Observing				Preparing				Teaching			
	2017		2018		2017		2018		2017		2018	
Interval	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1	28.7	20.9	28.9	8.3	11.1	7.9	18.2	5.0	19.1	13.9	27.1	7.3
2	17.6	12.3	16.0	6.0	11.5	10.1	18.0	5.2	38.0	29.3	34.6	9.2
3	12.6	10.6	10.1	6.0	9.6	6.9	16.0	4.4	24.3	17.0	42.5	11.2
4	12.7	14.6	10.3	5.0	15.1	10.9	11.4	3.8	32.4	22.3	30.5	9.1
5	15.5	14.7	15.8	6.7	13.0	11.3	15.1	6.9	40.3	19.4	39.3	8.1

Conclusions/Recommendations

Although generally consistent with the sequential progression outlined by Wentz (2001), the reported data had inconsistencies during interval three in 2017 and interval four in 2018. The reduced hours in 2018 are attributed to the reported alignment with spring break at the cooperating school districts. The 2017-time reduction in interval three is surmised to be related to the timing of stock-show activities. Further data analysis should be performed to compare the activities from this study to FFA advising activities from the same students and time period.

Inconsistent with the findings and suggestions of Torres and Ulmer (2007) for a "phase-out" period, there was an increase of time allocation from the fourth to fifth interval in all but one measured area. It is recommended that the study be replicated at Texas Tech University and other agricultural teacher preparation institutions to determine a clearer picture of time allocation trends and develop national data. From this collaboratively generated data set, a baseline of progression can be set and recommendations for best practices can be established.

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