

Assessing the Lesson Plan Quality of Student Teaching Interns

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Introduction

Preparation through instructional planning forms the basis for effective teaching and student learning (Reiser & Dick, 1996). Lesson planning is a proactive strategy used by teachers to anticipate how topics will be delivered in the learning environment (Bond & Peterson, 2004). The lesson plan allows the instructor additional control of classroom experiences and outcomes instead of merely reacting to what happens (Duke & Madsen, 1991). Thus, it is critical for teacher preparation programs to facilitate pre-service teachers' development of instructional planning efficiently and effectively (Baylor & Kitsantas, 2005).

The valuable real-life experience of the student teaching internship provides a safe space to implement pedagogical knowledge and skills under a cooperating teacher's direct guidance (Roberts & Ball, 2009; Torres & Ulmer, 2007). Although pre-service teachers invest the majority of their time planning lessons, they do so at an inconsistent rate (Torres & Ulmer, 2007). This inconsistency may result in them becoming more efficient planners (Torres & Ulmer, 2007) but not necessarily effective planners. The purpose of this study was to determine the quality of lesson plans prepared by pre-service teachers in agricultural education at Oklahoma State University (OSU) during the 12-week student teaching internship. Two research objectives guided this study: (1) Describe the personal and professional characteristics of pre-service agricultural teachers at OSU; and (2) Determine the quality of pre-service agricultural teachers' lesson plans per the departmental lesson plan rubric.

Theoretical Frame

Creativity, attitudes, and behavior are influenced by contextual factors (Williams, 2004). Even stable environments, not requiring immediate change, benefit from creative ideas which improve quality, productivity, and safety (Williams, 2004) regarding instruction and classroom environments. Numerous factors impact creativity such as personality, attitudes, ability, cognition, and motivation (Williams, 2004). Thus, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was used to underpin the study due to its ability to account for student teachers' attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral controls.

Perceived behavioral controls are, "the extent to which people believe that they can perform a given behavior if they are inclined to do so" (Ajzen, 2012, p. 446). These perceptions may be more important than actual behavioral controls (Ajzen, 2005). Perceived behavioral controls in the TPB was a concept founded on Albert Bandura's work on self-efficacy regarding proximal determinants of human motivation and action (Ajzen, 2012). Substantial amounts of research support self-efficacy theory with the strongest evidence emerging from studies manipulating self-efficacy to monitor impact on perseverance toward a particular task (Ajzen, 2005). Several experiments have demonstrated that self-efficacy influences past perseverance to task performance (Ajzen, 2012). Thus, self-efficacy/perceived behavioral controls may impact performance of difficult behaviors (Ajzen, 2005), i.e., planning a high quality lesson.

Methodology

Participants of the study were student teaching interns enrolled in *Student Teaching in Agricultural Education* at OSU during the Fall and Spring semesters. The population ($N = 30$)

was selected as a result of the instructional preparation of this course as well as the uniform lesson plan format which participants were taught and instructed to use. Throughout the 12-week internship, three lesson plans per participant (90 total lesson plans) were randomly selected and evaluated using the Lesson Plan Quality Rubric developed by the OSU Agricultural Education Teacher Preparation Program. All students in agricultural education courses use the same lesson plan template which was created using Allen's (1919) four-step instructional model and Tyler's (1950) four questions. Three OSU graduate students familiar with using the rubric were commissioned to evaluate the quality of interns' lesson plans. Initially, inter-rater reliability for the panel members was 48% agreement. However, after multiple iterations of scoring the same lesson plans and acquiring consensus of agreement among raters, the inter-rater reliability estimate increased to 70% agreement, which was deemed acceptable per guidelines of Brown, Glasswell, and Harland (2004). A Fleiss kappa coefficient of 0.67 was calculated and identified as moderate agreement per McHugh (2012), indicating strong reliability.

Results/Findings

Student teaching interns in agricultural education were 63% female. Interns ranged between 21 and 23 years of age. The majority of the participants were white (86.7 %) with minority ethnicities being Native American (10%) and Hispanic (3.33%). Grade Point Averages were split predominantly between the ranges of 2.50 to 2.90 (36.7%) and 3.50 to 4.00 (36.7%). Regarding the quality of interns' lesson plans developed during the student teaching internship, the majority (62%) held a quality score of 10 or higher, with 25 (28%) lessons resulting in a score over 17.51. The remaining plans were distributed as follows: fifteen (17%) scored 15.1 to 17.5, eight (9%) scored 12.51 to 15, and seven (8%) scored 10.1 to 12.5. The overall quality of interns' lesson plans was 13.22 ($SD = 5.37$) of the possible 20 total points.

Conclusions

The mean score of 13.22 out of 20 on 90 randomly selected lesson plans prepared by student teaching interns demonstrates key components of lessons were completely missing or woefully deficient in detail. Only 28% of the lessons received a letter grade of a high "B" or "A" (over 87.5%). In contrast, 8% of the lesson plans designed by student teaching interns received a failing quality score, and another 9% received a score ranging from "C" to "D." What is more, the average score for all 90 lesson plans assessed was equivalent to a "D" letter grade (66%).

The lack of lesson plan quality is troubling and appalling. At a time when interns should be expressing competence in developing lessons and thinking through the teaching process, this finding is unsettling, especially considering these interns had used the lesson plan template throughout their teacher preparation program.

Implications/Recommendations

Why are these interns so woefully prepared? Regarding TPB, perhaps their attitudes for lesson planning were poor. Maybe the cooperating centers in which interns were placed failed to value lesson planning, thus, impacting interns' abilities to plan effectively. Or, maybe interns lacked the self-efficacy or perceived behavioral controls to plan appropriately (Ajzen, 2005). Regardless, programmatic changes are needed to stress the importance and allow students additional opportunities to develop quality lesson plans. Lesson planning is too imperative to effective teaching (Ball et al., 2007; Torres & Ulmer, 2007) to allow such poor performance.

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