The Effectiveness of Urban Teacher Education Programs: Listening to the Voices of Cooperating Teachers

Purpose

The cooperating teacher has long been referred to as the *most significant person* in the education of teacher candidates (Guerrieri, 1976) and plays a crucial role in ensuring teacher candidates have an educative and gainful student teaching experience (Hynes-Dusel, 1999; Stark, 1994). We found however, that the voice of the cooperating teachers has been largely *missing* in teacher education evaluation research. Our study focused on obtaining feedback about the effectiveness of our teacher education programs based on the learning outcomes of our college's conceptual framework from arguably the most significant stakeholder, the cooperating teacher.

The context of this study is an urban college of education, which is committed to preparing effective educators who work for equity and social justice. This study sought feedback from our cooperating teachers over two academic years about programs' effectiveness based on ten learning outcomes of the conceptual framework. We found no peer-reviewed research on cooperating teachers' involvement in teacher education evaluation. Importance of collaboration with cooperating teachers about the goals of teacher education programs has long been discussed as vital for the success of candidates (Tilemma, 2009; Torrez & Kerbs, 2012; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009).

Method

The sample for this study included cooperating teachers of candidates who were in field placements. The candidates' programs were grouped by grade level: early childhood education (ECE), middle and secondary education (MSE), and Pk-12 education (comprised of special education, health and physical education, and art/music/ foreign languages).

We created an electronic survey based on the ten outcomes of our conceptual framework (refer Table 1). The survey items were tested for internal consistency. The construct validity of the survey instrument was established through a confirmatory factor analysis on Mplus [χ^2= 56.769, RMSEA=0.057, CFI=0.997, TLI=0.993] (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). A single factor solution from the confirmatory analysis indicated that the conceptual framework statements were interrelated. A reliability analysis indicated the ten conceptual framework questions were highly correlated; the internal consistency of scale was high (Cronbach alpha 0.93).

Table 1

Conceptual Framework Learning Outcomes

	Informed & Empowered
1.1	Our candidates use their knowledge of child, adolescent, and adult development and theories of learning to design meaningful educational opportunities for all

	learners.
1.2	Our candidates possess and use research-based, discipline-specific knowledge and pedagogy to facilitate learning for all.
1.3	Our candidates reflect critically upon data as part of a recursive process when planning, implementing and assessing teaching, learning, and development.
1.4	Our candidates critically analyze educational policies and/or practices that affect learners in metropolitan contexts.
	Committed
2.1	Our candidates know and respect individual differences, establish productive and ethical relationships with students, and modify the learning environment to positively impact student learning.
2.2	Our candidates create engaging learning communities where the diverse perspectives, opinions, and beliefs of others are acknowledged and respected.
2.3	Our candidates commit to continuing personal and professional development.
	Engaged
3.1	Our candidates use knowledge of students' cultures, experiences, and communities to create and sustain culturally responsive classrooms and schools.
3.2	Our candidates coordinate time, space, activities, technology and other resources to provide active and equitable engagement of diverse learners in real world experiences.
3.3	Our candidates implement appropriate communication techniques to provide for learner interaction within local and global communities.

Mentor teachers responded to this anonymous survey, using a four-point scale to rate the effectiveness of the teacher education programs. The survey also included two open-ended questions on the strengths of the programs as well as recommendations for improvement. A total of 797 mentors (47% of the recipients) responded to the survey. Table 2 provides the program affiliation of the respondents.

Table 2

Respondents' Program Affiliation

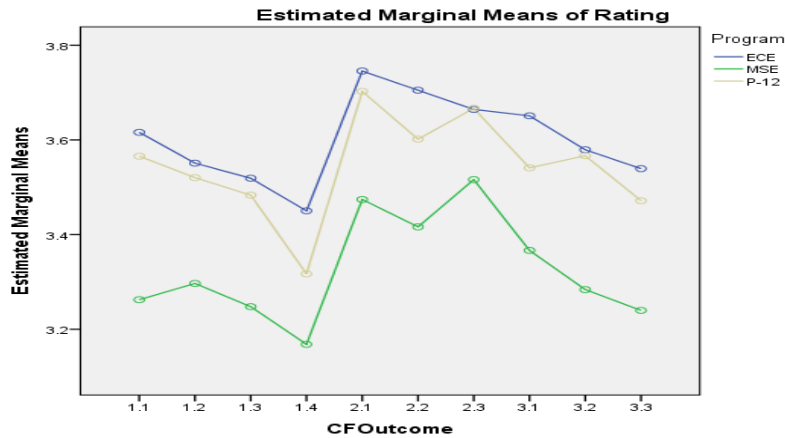|	Program		
	ECE	MSE	P-12
Mentor Teachers	452	222	123

We utilized a mixed methods approach in analyzing the survey data. The ratings were analyzed using Two-way ANOVA with two independent variables: (a) program affiliation of the student teachers being mentored by the cooperating teachers (ECE, MSE, and P-12), and (b) the conceptual framework (CF) outcomes – ten levels. The mentor teachers' ratings served as the dependent variable. The quantitative results guided the qualitative post-hoc analysis of the open-ended responses.

Results

Two-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect for program, $F(2, 7839) = 114.567$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .028$ and for CF outcome, $F(9, 7839) = 12.271$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .014$. Post-hoc tests revealed a statistically significant difference between ECE and MSE, $p < .001$, between ECE and P-12, $p < .021$, and between MSE and P-12, $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Program Differences in Ratings on Conceptual Framework Outcomes Provided by Cooperating Teachers

Estimated Marginal Means of Rating

ECE mentor teachers indicated that programs prepared the candidates to be strong in content and pedagogy, were rigorous, up-to-date, and current. Teachers perceived strengths in the ways in which ECE's programs incorporated field experiences across grade levels and for extended time periods. Furthermore, teachers appreciated intensive supervision support provided to candidates and clear communication of requirements and expectations from the program.

Teachers in the P-12 programs mentioned candidate readiness to teach in their field placements as a strength. P-12 cooperating teachers found university communications to be an area needing improvement, including suggestions for improving forms of communication such as handbooks, forms, and email systems.

Although MSE teachers spoke highly of the programs' effectiveness in use of technology, and connections of practice to theory; they found the field experience structure problematic, and recommended more actual teaching time in their field experiences and clearer expectations from the university. Additionally, MSE programs expected candidates to spend much time completing on-campus coursework during student teaching which seemed to affect their field performance and readiness to teach.

Discussion and Significance

The ratings and feedback provided by the cooperating teachers provided us a unique insight into how the effectiveness of our programs was perceived by the cooperating teachers. The ECE cooperating teachers found the time spent by the candidates in their classrooms and supervisory support from the program helpful in understanding the college's learning outcomes related to equity and social justice. Such a match between the urban context of the schools and the mission of the college creates the ideal condition for cooperating teachers to reinforce aspects of teaching for social justice, making the transition from theory to practice easier for the candidates (Tillema, 2009; Valencia et.al, 2009). A lack of such a collaborative relationship and inconsistent communication from the university probably contributed to lower ratings for MSE programs (Torrez & Kerbs, 2012).

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