

6-1-2007

Connecting Alternate Practicum Experiences in Teacher Education with the 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'


Sylvia Dietrich

Western Kentucky University, sylvia.dietrich@wku.edu

Tamar Riley

Florida Memorial University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/kte>

 Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dietrich, S. & Riley, T. (2007). Connecting alternate practicum experiences in teacher education with the 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'. Kentucky Teacher Educator. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/kte/>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Teacher Educator by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact connie.foster@wku.edu.

Connecting Alternate Practicum Experiences in Teacher Education with the 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'

Abstract

University students and professors participated in a shared practicum experience with individuals with moderate to severe disabilities through a weekend long fishing tournament sponsored by an Easter Seal's Camp. Results from open ended questionnaires were inductively analyzed. Results indicate that students felt the experience was beneficial, provided them with the opportunity to work collaboratively with peers and professors, and impacted their perceptions of their professors. Experience is connected with 'The Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education' and discussion for implication for practice in teacher education programs is presented.

Keywords

Moderate and severe disabilities, MSD, practicum, camp, undergraduate education, teacher education

Disciplines

Educational Methods | Special Education and Teaching

Connecting Alternate Practicum Experiences in Teacher Education with the 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education'

**Sylvia Dietrich, Assistant Professor
Western Kentucky University**

**Tamar Riley, Associate Professor
Florida Memorial University**

Abstract

University students and professors participated in a shared practicum experience with individuals with moderate to severe disabilities through a weekend long fishing tournament sponsored by an Easter Seal's Camp. Results from open ended questionnaires were inductively analyzed. Results indicate that students felt the experience was beneficial, provided them with the opportunity to work collaboratively with peers and professors, and impacted their perceptions of their professors. Experience is connected with 'The Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education' and discussion for implication for practice in teacher education programs is presented.

Historically, teacher education programs have combined class work with practical experiences in various educational settings, providing teacher candidates with the opportunity to practice and apply newly learned skills and concepts. Beginning teachers frequently report that the real work of learning to teach happens in schools, and they rate their field experience as the most valuable aspect of their initial preparation coursework (Campbell-Evans, G., Maloney, C, 1997). In order to bridge the gap between the K-12 and higher education classrooms, teacher educators have implemented a variety of models. Among

these models, the development of relationships between universities and public schools and the formation of professional development schools. Professional development schools blend the resources and expertise of universities and schools to study and develop teachers' instructional practices (McBee, R.H., & Moss, J, 2002). In professional development schools students have the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time in classrooms with what are considered to be master teachers. Aside from spending time with master teachers, students often times, have the opportunity to observe their professors

demonstrate instructional practices with K-12 learners as opposed to listening to theoretical discussions regarding best practice, instructional strategies and teaching styles.

There are numerous benefits reported for students who participate in professional development schools during their certification experiences among which are the development of skills and increased competency levels among preparing teachers (Zeichner, 1993; Beazley, 1993; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1993; Gilroy, 1993; Northfield, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Aside from specific skills and competencies, participants in professional development schools have also reported benefits of collaboration, empowerment, relationships and mentoring (Campbell-Evans, G., & Maloney, C, 1997). These benefits are attributed not only to the preparing students and master teachers, but also to university personnel.

The professional development model provides many benefits to all stakeholders, but does not provide the opportunity for extensive ongoing time in the field. The nature of the model is to place the professor in a position of power or in the role of expert. The current project begins to address these gaps by involving both teacher candidates and professors in a 3 day camping experience allowing for extensive immersion in the setting as well as the opportunity for students and professors to perform the same skills alongside one another. Over a period of 2 years, during participation in an Easter Seals Camp “Fun Fish Weekend”, university students and professors volunteered as camp counselors to facilitate individuals with disabilities

participation in a weekend long fishing tournament. While at the facility, students and professors performed the same skills, participated in the same events, and were treated as equals by camp personnel. In addition, the project addresses ‘The Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education’ (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). These principles are (1) encourages contact between students and faculty, (2) encourages cooperation among students, (3) encourages active learning, (4) gives prompt feedback, (5) emphasizes time on task, (6) communicates high expectations and (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning. These principles have been applied via numerous projects and applications including new faculty orientation, instruments for student assessment of the learning environment and in student focus groups (Chickering and Gamson, 1999). More recently, researchers have looked at how teaching with technology meets the spirit of the principles (Ritter and Lemke, 2000). This paper looks at utilizing a camp setting as a practicum placement for teacher candidates and how the experience aligns with the seven principles.

Description of the Project

Setting

The camp is located in a southeastern state and is an Easter Seals facility. The camp is the largest Easter Seals facility to serve individuals with disabilities in the southeastern region. During one mid spring weekend, from Friday – Sunday, the camp holds a fishing tournament for individuals with disabilities titled *Fun Fish*. To facilitate maximum participation by

campers, the camp utilizes several volunteers along with paid workers.

Participants

This study took place over two camping experiences and involved 2 professors and 23 university students. The students were training to become special educators, seeking initial certification in early childhood special education, K-6, or 6-12. The professors both taught in the special education teacher education program and had the students in a minimum of one class during the camp experience.

The campers had a variety of disabilities including mental retardation, physical disabilities, and blindness. The campers ranged in age from 8 to mid 50's. Over 50 campers participated in the tournament along with 10 – 15 volunteer boaters, and numerous paid staff.

Matching Volunteers with Campers

At the beginning of the weekend, professors and students were assigned a camper by the camp director. Volunteers cared for their campers throughout the course of the weekend and were responsible to meet the individual's needs, 24 hours a day. Volunteers ensured the campers safety and facilitated participation in planned activities including boat fishing, dock and pond fishing. Aside from fishing, volunteers assisted campers in meeting their daily needs including bathing and feeding. Volunteers share sleeping quarters with the campers and ensured that campers arrived at activities on time and ready to participate.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following the weekend long experience, students anonymously completed a questionnaire utilizing open-ended questions to ascertain attitudes toward and perceptions of the university faculty and how the students' attitudes and perceptions changed as a result of the shared camp experience.

23 students returned completed questionnaires to the investigator. Categorical-type qualitative analysis was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Responses were coded and grouped according to patterns and from these patterns themes were constructed.

Findings

The major theme that emerged from the data was the ability to relate to professors as people. Further analysis revealed that responses could be further categorized into 1. Student interaction with professors; and 2. Professor interaction with individuals with disabilities.

Student interaction with professors

Results reveal descriptions of the professors as caring, human, real, and committed. When asked how the experience changed perceptions of their professors, students reported the experience made the professor have more credibility and student's felt more respect for their professors. As one participant describes "The experience provided time for me to get to know them outside of the classroom and to see a real different side of them than I do during class. I have the utmost respect for them; they actually spend the weekend doing what other professors just talk about."

Professor interaction with individuals with disabilities

Results reveal descriptions of the professors as appropriate role models, demonstrating appropriate techniques with individuals with disabilities that are otherwise talked about, and providing the opportunity to see their professors as caring, compassionate individuals. As a participant reveals "I have a lot of respect for all my professors, but these guys actually go above the call of duty. They really walk the walk and talk the talk. I learned so much from them as I watched them interact with the campers they were assigned to."

Alignment with 'The Seven Principles' Encourages contact between students and faculty

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is reported to be the most important factor in student motivation and involvement (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances student' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans (Chickering and Gamson).

Faculty and students had ongoing contact in the planning, implementation and follow up after the camping experience. Additionally, the experience allowed student access to faculty for an extended period of time away from class as well as the university. By assuming a volunteer camp counselor role alongside students, faculty decreased barriers that often exist between students and faculty.

Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation among Students

As Chickering and Gamson (1987) explain learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo endeavor. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases a students' involvement in learning, while sharing ideas and responding to others' reactions deepens understanding. Students and faculty were immersed in the camp experience for a 3 day time span. As volunteers went about fulfilling their volunteer responsibilities it was necessary to ask for help as well as be willing to offer assistance. For many students, this was the first camping experience they had, in addition to the longest duration of time spent with individuals with disabilities, so a sense of community and teamwork was quickly established.

Encourages Active Learning

Learning is not a passive, spectator sport. Students do not learn by sitting in classes, listening to teachers, memorizing information, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). The camp experience provided the students the opportunity to apply numerous skills taught throughout their teacher prep program as students worked not only to provide a safe environment but also a fun, meaningful experience for the campers.

Gives Prompt Feedback

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses and at various points throughout their program, students need opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and what they still need to know (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). The camping experience provided students with "hands – on" experiences with campers as well as the opportunity to reflect on their competency level and identify areas for continued growth.

Emphasizes Time on Task

Time and energy contribute to learning. Students need repeated opportunities as well as extended time to apply concepts learned in class. The camp experience provided students with an extended and intensive amount of time to apply skills and concepts taught in courses throughout their teacher preparation program.

Communicates high Expectations

Expect more and you will get more. High expectations are important for everyone – the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the birth and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers hold high expectations of them and make extra efforts (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Professors set clear expectations of their students as well as themselves as both groups fulfilled their roles throughout the camping experience.

Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college and this camp experience provided an opportunity for students to demonstrate skill competency outside of a classroom setting.

Discussion

Results of the study indicate that hands-on, time intensive experiences challenge students' beliefs and help build confidence in their ability to provide services to individuals with moderate to severe disabilities. As beginning teachers have reported, they feel that many of their teaching skills are developed and refined while in classrooms and other settings with the students they will potentially teach (Campbell-Evans & Maloney, 1997). This experience provided students with the opportunity to interact with individuals with disabilities for an extended period of time outside of a classroom setting. In addition professors provided immediate feedback to students as they interacted with the campers. Students also had the opportunity to see professors interact with individuals with moderate to severe disabilities and model teaching practices with this population.

Results from the study also indicated that shared practicum experiences between students and professors positively impact relationships between students and professors. Students reported benefits from participation in the experience as collaboration, empowerment, mentoring, and deepening of relationships with peers and professors (Beazley, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

The shared practicum experience described in this study had a positive impact on the students, campers and university professors. As our university classrooms and specifically teacher preparatory programs

become more concerned with service learning and civic engagement, it appears that shared practicum experiences may provide an appropriate venue in achieving these goals.

References

Beazley, K. (1993). *Teaching Counts* (Canberra, Department of Employment, Education and Training).

Campbell-Evans, G., & Maloney, C. (1997). An alternative practicum curriculum: exploring roles and relationships. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 25(1).

Chickering, A.W. & Ehrmann, S.C. (1996). Implementing the seven principles: technology as lever. *AAHE Bulletin*, October, pp 3-6.

Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *Washington Center News*.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1995). *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, advances in contemporary education thought*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Ducharme, M., & Ducharme, E. (1993). School-based teacher education in the United States: An uneven evolution. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 18, 15-22.

Gilroy, P. (1993). Back to the future: The de-professionalization of initial teacher education in England and Wales. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 18, 5-14.

McBee, R. H., & Moss, J. (2002). PDS partnerships come of age. *Educational Leadership*, 59 (6), 61-65.

Miles, M., & Huberman M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis. 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Northfield, J. (1993). A school-based initiative: An opportunity to better understand the practicum. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 18, 40-45.

Zeichner, K.M. (1993). Traditions of practice in US preservice teacher education programs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9, 1-13.