

UNIVERSITY SUPERVISORS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDENT TEACHING TIMEFRAME

Teacher education programs have come under scrutiny for the quality of teachers being produced for the workforce. In fact, school superintendents have expressed an array of dissatisfaction with the caliber of teachers graduating (National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2011) from managing the classroom to student engagement to understanding the overall goal of student attainment for academic achievement for each individual as well as the school. Discern for inferiority capabilities among graduating teacher candidates and the consequences this bares in producing a strong and competitive future workforce, prompted U.S. policymakers and educational leaders to call for reexamination of practices within teacher education programs.

Clinical preparation has been the key focus to address problematic areas within teacher education programs specifically increasing the time for in-school experiences (NCTQ, 2011). One specific improvement noted was to extend the student teaching timeframe. Student teaching, the capstone clinical experience, allows for teacher candidates to be placed in an actual classroom under supervision with the purpose of modeling conceptual principles and full engagement of coursework in an applied setting.

Currently, in the United States, student teaching ranges from 10 to 15 weeks in length (National Commission for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010). However, researchers caution that extending the student teaching timeframe will not necessarily develop more effective teachers but instead advocate for added attention to quality than quantity (Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 2005; Dewey, 1938; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996).

Research related to the student teaching timeframe and its effects is limited and even less so within the teacher education discipline of family and consumer sciences (FCS). Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to describe university supervisors' perception of extending the student teaching time frame in a FCS teacher education program. Such documented data could verify if the student teaching timeframe matters in enhancing the development of FCS teacher candidates.

Review of Literature

Student Teaching in Family and Consumer Sciences

Student teaching is the capstone field-based assignment that involves supervised teaching in a set school setting. During student teaching, teacher candidates must fuse everything they have learned about teaching from their coursework, research, theory, and clinical preparation. Specifically, student teachers plan for instruction (collecting or developing instructional materials), teach lessons, consider student learning styles/theory, establish and maintain classroom management, evaluate and assess students and for reports, and meet the expectations of the cooperating teacher and school site as well as that of the teacher education program in several weeks. This experience oftentimes is viewed as the most challenging, rewarding, trying, and enlightening component of student teachers entire teacher education preparation (McMahon-Giles & Kent, 2014).

Within family and consumer sciences (FCS) student teaching, teacher candidates are most often placed in a high school and manage the multifaceted classes that make up FCS such as living environments, clothing construction, fashion marketing, early childhood education, cultural foods, restaurant management, family relations to identify a few with most requiring a lab component which encompasses additional teacher

responsibility. Teachers of FCS have a role that is different from academic teachers. In fact, Cushall (2002) stated that “*being* a career and technical education teacher, which FCS is a division of, is a rigorous yet frequently underrated challenge” (p. 20). To further explain Cushall’s statement, in addition to being instructional designers and facilitators of learning; FCS teachers prepare, budget, and purchase supplies for laboratory activities (pre-K, foods, and catering events); develop and update curriculum to mirror industry policies, leadership, and management; prepare and supervise students for competitive events in Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) or Skills USA; develop effective public relations and recruitment efforts; and complete academic, state, and legislative reports. Given the cadre of work associated with FCS teaching and being effective at it begs the question of how long should student teaching be in order for FCS student teachers be prepared to enter the teaching workforce.

Student Teaching Timeframe

The duration of student teaching varies from institution to institution. While most states (N=39) set a minimum length for student teaching, only about half require that student teaching last at least 10 weeks, widely accepted by the field of teacher education to be the minimum acceptable duration (NCTQ, 2011). However, the average range for student teaching is between 10 to 15 weeks (NCATE, 2010). Interestingly, in international comparisons, student teaching length ranges from three to 80 weeks.

The demand to reform clinical preparation by lengthening teacher candidate’s time in a supervised setting, have generated opposing perspectives on determining an adequate timeframe. Extending the time for student teaching provides the assumption that teachers learn from experience, so more experience is valuable (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). However researchers have found more is not inevitably better (Chambers & Hardy, 2005). Dewey (1938) cautioned that experience is not necessarily educative, and can be mis-educative from a lack of quality. Similar, Darling-Hammond and Cobb (2005) contended if the interactions and experiences the candidate gains in the schools and classrooms do not enhance the quality of learning, then more is not better. For example, a cooperating teacher may view the student teacher as his/her free time and become lackadaisical in his/her supervisory role of providing feedback and ensuring open and persistent communication. Concluding, the focus needs to be on quality rather than quantity.

To continue, Ronfeldt and Reininger (2012) suggested the duration of student teaching has little effect on teacher outcomes specifically in instructional preparedness, teacher efficacy, and career persistence. Likewise, Chambers and Hardy (2005) found no differences among student teachers in one versus two semesters of student teaching in terms of classroom management, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-perceived teaching ability. While these studies provide little support for extending student teaching, each conclude the quality of the experience is the significant factor as did Clift and Brady (2005) and Darling-Hammond and Cobb (2005).

In support of more time for student teaching, Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, and Algozzine (2008) found that more time and experience provided opportunities to identify areas in need of growth and development and to hone skills the supervisors identified as lacking for student teachers. Also, reported were more time to develop a relationship with the supervisors and an increased comfort level with knowing school policies and procedures. Additionally, Silvernail and Costello (1983) observed a reduction of anxiety among student teachers who participated in a semester long practicum.

Role of University Supervisors

During student teaching, teacher candidates are supported by their cooperating teacher and university supervisor. This triad relationship is essential for helping to promote student teachers' development into becoming effective classroom teachers (Brown & Steadman, 2011). The cooperating teacher focuses almost exclusively on classroom activities, whereas the university supervisor is actively involved in both the classroom and academic settings (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; McNamara, 1995).

University supervisors have been found to have a substantial positive influence on the development of student teachers' orientations, dispositions, conceptions and classroom practices (Talvitie, Peltokallio, & Mannisto, 2000), as well as their pedagogy, classroom management, autonomy, and efficacy (Grossman, Ronfeldt, & Cohen, 2011). Fayne (2007) described the multifaceted nature of supervision: as mentors, supervisors are responsible for helping student teachers develop the behaviors, practices, and beliefs characteristic of ambitious teaching; as evaluators, they are responsible for determining the fitness of their student teachers; and as managers, they are responsible for working with cooperating teachers at the school site to oversee all aspects of the student teaching experience. They fulfill these roles by observing student teachers on multiple occasions and providing feedback on their classroom practice (Long, van Es, & Black, 2013), as well as by providing the necessary emotional support for candidates to acclimate to the initial hurdles encountered in student teaching (McMahon-Giles & Kent, 2014). Also, university supervisors serve as the liaison between the cooperating teacher and teacher candidate and the placement site and teacher education program.

In comparison to the literature on the other members of the triad, the research examining the perspectives of university supervisors is rather sparse and outdated (Brown & Steadman, 2011). To a lesser extent, the FCS discipline has investigated the student teaching experience by examining the perspectives of FCS teacher candidates and FCS cooperating teachers. However, limited research exists exploring the perspectives of FCS university supervisors. Therefore, research is needed that takes into account the shared knowledge of FCS university supervisors regarding the quintessential student teaching timeframe to ensure teacher candidates are most appropriately ready to assume their own classroom and meet the demands of being in teaching workforce.

Theoretical Framework

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) human behavior is learned by observation through modeling (Bandura, 1986). More specifically, using *observational learning*, one can form rules of behavior which can be used as a guide for action in the future (Bandura, 1986). Applicable to this research study, does time play a factor based on the perceptions of university supervisors observations for student teachers to fully develop into the role of the teacher.

The SCT framework positions observational learning in the educational classroom with several variables. Through *observational learning*, the *environment* (the factors physically external to the person that provides opportunities and social support), *situation* (the perception of the environment), *behavioral capacity* (the knowledge and skills to perform a given behavior), *expectations* (the anticipatory outcomes of a behavior), *expectancies* (the values that the person places on a given outcome), *reinforcements* (the responses to a person's behavior that increase or decrease the likelihood of reoccurrence), and *self-control* (the personal regulation of goal-directed behavior by providing

opportunities for self-monitoring, goal setting, problem solving, and self-reward) play a critical role (Glanz, Rimer, & Lewis, 2002).

For example, the university supervisor uses *observational learning* of the *environment* and *situation* to determine the *behavioral capacity* and *expectations* of the student teacher. Through the interaction between the university supervisor and student teacher, they are able to identify the *expectancies* of the observed teaching event in order to decide on how the student teacher should progress with their *self-control*. The more times in which the student teacher and university supervisor go through this process, the more opportunities there are for the student teacher to *reinforce* their teaching strategies and/or improve on identified weaknesses.

The SCT framework provides the foundation of the observational learning process for university supervisors and student teachers. The factor that is questioned, does time matter with the process for growth and effectiveness among student teachers? To answer, the observational learning process will be espoused by exploring university supervisor's thoughts based on their own experiences about student teachers' development in terms of weeks needed to transition into a successful teacher.

Context of this Research Study

Recently, a Midwestern State University family and consumer sciences (FCS) teacher education program extended the length of student teaching from 10 to 16 weeks. To verify if the extension was a positive move for the program to enhance the development of FCS teacher development, a qualitative research study was undertaken. University supervisors were selected as the subjects for this study because the same supervisors worked with student teachers in Spring 2013 when the practicum was 10 weeks and then in the next cycle Spring 2014 when the change to 16 weeks thereby providing consistent subjects with working in both timeframes.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe university supervisors' perception of extending the student teaching time frame in a family and consumer sciences teacher education program.

Method

A descriptive research design using interviews was the method implemented for this study. Interviews allow the interviewer to understand in a detailed way the perspectives of participants (Kvale, 1996). Specifically, an in-depth interview technique using open-ended questions provided the structure for the interviews. The researcher developed a set of tailored interview questions to answer the research objective. The questions were pilot tested with two University professional educators to determine internal consistency. The questions were revised to reflect the comments of the pilot test prior to the data collection. Interview questions included:

- 1) Describe your overall perception of the student teaching timeframe extension.
- 2) Describe the perceived positives and negatives for the student teaching timeframe extension for student teachers and cooperating teachers.
- 3) Describe how your role changed from the student teaching timeframe extension.
- 4) Describe your perception of the student teacher preparedness at completion of 10 weeks and 16 weeks.

Respondents

The qualitative data was collected from two (N=2) University supervisors employed by the Midwestern State University family and consumer sciences (FCS) teacher education program who supervised student teachers in Spring 2013 for the 10 week duration and Spring 2014 for the 16 week duration.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted the independent interviews in the Fall of 2014. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were audio-taped. Narrative analysis was used to analyze the data. The data was transcribed and categorized then an expert panel of reviewers reviewed the established data and finally, the data was summarized and interpreted.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe university supervisors' perception of extending the student teaching time frame in a FCS teacher education program. The FCS teacher education program extended student teaching from 10 weeks to 16 weeks in Spring 2014 which exceeds the national U.S. average of the student teaching timeframe (NCATE, 2010).

Overall, the data collected from the University supervisors' suggested support for the additional time student teachers were required to complete as opposed to the previous timeframe of 10 weeks. Both university respondents indicated that there just was not enough time in the 10 week timeframe. One supervisor, which I will name Carol stated, that with the 10-week timeframe there was a great deal of pressure and not that much time to correct problems." Similar, the other university supervisor referred to as Jane added, "The students were just getting into the swing of the semester and then it was all over."

Furthering explaining her perception, Jane noted, "The 16 weeks allow for students to become more comfortable with the school, cooperating teacher(s), and their students. By extending the student teaching to 16 weeks, I was able to have more preparation with the students and see a difference in their confidence levels."

Respondents were asked to identify the perceived positive(s) of extending the student teaching timeframe for the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. The most commonly noted positive for the student teacher from the university supervisors' perspective was being able to be integrated with the progression of the school year from start to finish. Jane stated that "The student teachers saw a regular progression with this time length." Carol perceived that the extended timeframe "helped the students to feel it was 'their' class and 'their' students. Instead of jumping in a couple weeks into the semester [when it was just 10 weeks long], the extended timeframe gave the student teacher a more holistic view of movement throughout the school year."

The noted positive for the cooperating teachers from the university supervisors' perspective was more time for them to trust the student teacher with their classes. Carol explained "It helped the cooperating teachers that were not as comfortable passing off classes have more time to become trusting of the student teacher and pass the classes off with more ease and confidence." Similarly, Jane stated, "The cooperating teacher had to relinquish control of their classroom to someone who is not as familiar with their routines and rules. By allowing the student teacher and cooperating teacher more time to align their perceptions and expectations of the classroom procedures and environment, the cooperating teacher felt more comfortable in the student teacher's ability." Jane further

added, “There was less pressure for the student teacher to perform and assume the teacher role right away and more time for both to be comfortable with their roles and allowed me to address concerns from the cooperating teacher.”

The respondents were asked to describe any negatives they perceived with the student teaching extension. Both university supervisors did not think there were any disadvantages to extending the student teaching timeframe to 16 weeks for all involved stakeholders.

Respondents were asked, “Describe how your role changed from the student teaching timeframe extension.” The common response was more visits were possible which allowed for time to develop and correct concerns. Jane commented, “I visited often and early in this semester [16 weeks] process to make sure ‘we’ were all on the same page. In the shortened timeframe, I allowed time at the beginning for the student teacher and cooperating teacher to get to know each other. That was a mistake. I think starting early on and explaining what needs to be done kept everyone on task and clarified uncertainties of responsibilities and roles.” Similarly, Carol stated, “I was able to visit the student more in their educational setting and provide more feedback along the way. It also allowed me time to explain the new process to the teachers and have time for questions and answers.”

The additional time allowed for the university supervisors to gain a better overall sense of the student teaching climate instead of a snapshot. For example, Jane found in some situations the cooperating teacher was using the student teacher to take over a bad class they couldn’t even control. Jane stated, “I realize I am here to protect the student teacher from being used and abused. They are here to learn, not babysit a teacher’s class or be ‘set up’.” Carol provided, “By having more conversations and visits, I could tell the department was dysfunctional and teachers were trying to ‘pull in’ my student teacher to get on their ‘side.’ And without the added time, I would not have discovered this happening.” Carol also mentioned, when a student teacher has two cooperating teachers with very different philosophies and approaches to teaching, adds to the already stressed student teaching to meet the expectations of each teacher. She stated, “By having more time and with earlier and more visits, I can help the student teacher navigate each teacher as well as be a sounding board for the emotions occurring.”

The final question was, “Describe your perception of the student teacher preparedness at completion of 10 weeks and 16 weeks.” Surprisingly, both respondents took a few minutes to reflect on this question and both tentatively said “yes” but with some reluctance.

Jane explained her response this way, “Some students were able to make 10 weeks work for themselves, but for the most part 16 weeks prepared the students more for their first year of teaching. Essentially, the students were much more prepared after 16 weeks and the cooperating teachers felt the same.” Carol clarified her response by stating, “I think the students were prepared in both instances. I see the difference in the time for processing. The student teacher has time to absorb criticism and make corrections and see positive results. There was time for more positive reinforcement. There was time for the teacher to evolve and succeed with the 16 weeks. They also have more experiences to share when it comes time for job interviews.”

With the additional weeks added, both respondents commented on the time to develop. For example, Jane commented, “There was more of an opportunity to see real

growth and maturity with the student teacher; that the student teacher was more confident to handle a full classroom and was more experienced and self-assured.”

Discussion

The extension of the family and consumer sciences (FCS) student teaching timeframe at a Midwestern State University from 10 weeks to 16 weeks was the direct result of a recommendation from U.S. policymakers and educational leaders to improve the quality of teacher graduates entering the teaching workforce. To determine if the increased weeks made an impact on teacher candidate preparation, this study sought out the perspectives of the university supervisors who worked with student teachers in both the shortened and lengthened timeframes. Thus, the purpose of this research study was to describe university supervisors' perception of extending the student teaching time frame in a FCS teacher education program. Overall, the findings suggest that this was indeed a positive change for the program.

The most prevalent finding indicated by the university supervisors was their perception that the student teachers were just as prepared for their future classroom in the 10 week as they were in the 16 week student teaching timeframe. Research partners of Chambers and Hardy (2005) and Ronfeldt and Reininger (2012) found similar results in that the length of student teaching did not matter in terms of observable teacher outcomes. While this finding was dually noted it wasn't without reservation by the respondents.

Like, Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, and Algozzine (2008) reported, both university supervisors in this study indicated the longer student teacher timeframe allowed for the student teacher to absorb areas of identified weaknesses, time to work on improving, and see results. As Jane noted, that at the end of the 10 weeks, she was just beginning to witness development and then it was all over. Carol shared, "... there was time for the student teacher to process - to absorb criticism, make corrections, and see positive results." Thus, the added weeks allowed for more 'time to develop' as the significant factor in the respondents' rationales.

From the university supervisors perspectives in this study, there was no certain negatives only positives identified with extending the timeframe for student teachers and cooperating teachers. For cooperating teachers, the respondents indicated a lack of certainty or trust with letting the student teacher take over their classes. As Jane indicated, "there was no pressure to rush; it gave time for both to develop a working relationship and learn the procedures and expectations, which turned into trust."

The perceived positives for student teachers was starting at the beginning of the semester and seeing it through. Jane shared, "...a holistic view of movement was experienced." Student teachers did not feel like visitors, they were able to establish themselves as the teacher from the beginning. Another positive was the increased confidence levels among student teachers observed by the university supervisors. These positives were also found in research by Silvernail and Costello (1983) and Spooner et al., (2008) with both studies having reported more time in student teaching, student teachers experienced less anxiety, increase in comfort levels with knowing school policies and procedures, and time to develop a relationship with the cooperating teaching.

The role of the university supervisor essentially changed very little with the additional time added. Both respondents indicated they visited early, strategically scheduled their visits and with frequency to observe progressive development however

with more visits a clearer picture of the student teacher's environment became more evident whether good or bad. As Jane described her student teacher being placed in tough classroom, with more visits, she was able to observe and step in to protect the student.

A noteworthy finding from this study was that the 16 week student teacher allowed for more time for *observational learning* defined by the social cognitive theory, which essentially improving the quality of the experience which is supported by much of research on extending the practicum time (Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 2005; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Dewey, 1938). For example, during the 10 week student teaching, the student will begin the first week by observing the classroom, the second week they will pick up one-two classes, and by the third or fourth week they have the full course load. The last two weeks, the student will start to give back the classes to the cooperating teacher, which leaves only six-eight weeks with the full course load. If the university supervisor sees the student teacher in their classroom every other week, that gives them two-three times for the student to adjust their *self-control*. With more time, students are able to get more familiar with the *environment* and the day to day *situations* that they may encounter. They also have more time to gauge the *behavioral capacity* and *expectations* of their students, determine their *expectancies* of them, and create a plan for *reinforcements*.

Since the university supervisor has interactions with the student teacher in the classroom as well as in the university setting, they have a more encompassing perspective on whether the extension of the student teaching timeframe benefited the student teacher's development. The university supervisors were selected as respondents for this study for two reasons (a) created a constant in terms of having worked in the former 10 week student teaching timeframe and the following cycle of the new requirement of 16 weeks of student teaching and (b) there is a lack of data about student teaching from the perspectives of university supervisors. The findings from this study provide a voice to university supervisors, especially FCS university supervisors, in examining their perspective on the student teaching timeframe given their influential and dynamic role in the process and within triad.

Conclusion

The rationale for this study posed at the beginning was to verify if the student teaching timeframe for the FCS teacher education program mattered for student development. The answer was clear in that additional time did enhance the development of FCS teacher candidates from the university supervisor's perspective.

From the positive findings, this FCS teacher education program was proactive in its efforts to improve the quality of teacher candidates produced for the teacher workforce. Other benefits included: (a) provides empirical data for justifying extending the student teaching timeframe for program evaluation, (b) aligns with the recommendation from NCTQ (2011) to increase the student teaching time, and adds to the lacking voice among university supervisors in teacher education.

A limitation of this study was the small sample size. However both respondents worked in both timeframes therefore created a constant. With a small sample size, it is difficult to generalize the information to other programs, departments, or cultures. Yet, the findings from this study can be a data resource to review for other teacher education programs considering extending or shortening the student teacher timeframe.

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