

Allocation of Hours During the Student Teaching Experience

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Introduction/Need for Research

The student teaching experience is a key time in the development of most teachers. It provides the opportunity for pre-service teachers to implement the knowledge gained from a sequence of required teacher preparation courses and develop their lesson planning, classroom management, and delivery skills. For future agricultural educators it is also an important time to develop the attitudes and skills required for advising an FFA chapter and coordinating students' Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs. Knowledge of how student teachers spend time during the experience provides a key measure for how well they are being prepared for these future roles and responsibilities.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Student teaching has been identified as a critical stage in the development of agricultural education teachers (Knobloch, 2006; Roberts, Harlin, & Ricketts, 2006; Young & Edwards, 2006). It is the time where pre-service teachers begin to develop their views on how programs should be developed and their role in delivering agricultural education. Limited research has been conducted on how student teachers allocate their time during the experience. Torres and Ulmer (2005) stated the purpose of tracking allocated hours was a way to, "assist teacher educators in calibrating or refining expectations for student teachers" (p. 537) and advocated using journals as a tool for collecting this data. Their research on the journals students at their institution completed during student teaching found slight differences based on students' gender, learning style, and final grade for student teaching.

This study applied similar procedures to student teachers in a different setting. The student teachers were enrolled at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. The campus differed not only in size and location, but also in having a longer 18 week experience, placing students in both fall and spring semesters, and offering students the opportunity to complete paid internships in place of traditional student teaching. The objectives of the study were to: (1) describe how student teachers distributed time across categories, (2) describe how the distribution of time changed during the experience, and (3) compare the time spent on classroom, FFA, and SAE.

Methodology

The target population for this descriptive census study consisted of student teachers from the university from the fall semester of 2003 to the spring semester of 2006. A letter describing the project and consent form was sent via email with a follow up letter mailed three weeks later. The response rate was 69%. Unfortunately only 24 sets of journals were still available from University Supervisors. The weekly journal requires student teachers to report time spent, on an hour basis, in each of seven categories: observation, preparation for teaching, teaching, activities

related to teaching, administrative duties, FFA activities and SAE. Journals were analyzed using the descriptive procedures established by Torres and Ulmer (2005). This included breaking the experience into 3-week segments for analysis.

Results/findings

Objective 1: During the 18-week experience, student teachers spent an average of 19% of their time observing, 26% preparing for teaching, 25% teaching, 16% for activities related to teaching, 11% on FFA activities, 3% completing administrative duties, and close to 0% working with the SAE program.

Objective 2: Throughout the 18-week experience the categories of activities related to teaching, administrative duties, and SAE stayed fairly constant. Observation hours were the highest during interval 1 ($M = 13.72h$) and declined for the rest of the experience. Meanwhile, teaching hours increased steadily from interval 1 to 5, but then declined slightly from interval 5 to 6. FFA activities spiked during the third interval ($M = 11.64h$), but otherwise, remained steady. Preparing for teaching dipped ($M = 11.44h$) during the third interval, increased for interval 4, and then slowly declined in intervals 5 and 6.

Objective 3: With the exception of interval 3, the number of hours spent on FFA was lower than any of the teaching categories (observation, preparing for teaching, teaching, or activities related to teaching). SAE hours remained low (less than 2 in each 3-week interval) for the entire experience.

Conclusions

Student teachers spent 70% of their time observing, preparing to teach and teaching. With the addition of activities related to teaching, the percentage increases to 86%. The two categories that changed most over the course of the semester were observation and teaching. Observation started higher and steadily declined. Hours spent teaching started low and steadily increased. Intern teachers did start higher than students in a traditional student teaching placement, but also increased the time spent teaching. Time spent on FFA and SAE was much lower than the classroom/lab responsibilities. The average hours were stable across the experience with the exception of the third interval. The time spent on FFA jumped in this interval mainly do to the fall students involvement in the National FFA Convention.

Implications/Recommendations/ Impact on Profession

- Research should be conducted to document student/intern teachers from additional universities and compare the results to this study and those of Torres and Ulmer (2005).
- The requirements for the student teaching experience at the university studied should be examined to identify how students' involvement with SAE can be increased.
- Differences between interns and traditional student teachers should be examined.

References

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