

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: WEEKLY REFLECTIVE JOURNALING REVEALS PERCEPTIONS OF FCS STUDENT TEACHERS

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of family and consumer sciences student teachers as they experienced 15 weeks of student teaching. The objectives were to identify the significant events experienced by the student teachers, feelings perceived by the student teachers, and sources of feedback and support the student teachers received. Prior literature identified important components of the student teaching experience and common feelings perceived by student teachers. The common feelings included being overwhelmed, frustration, anger, pressure, fear, tension, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, and enthusiasm. The results of this study indicated that events and experiences perceived by the student teachers as difficult, generated feelings of overwhelm, disappointment, discouragement, and concern. As their teaching assignment continued and they received support and positive feedback regarding their performance, the difficult events and experiences were perceived as successful events and experiences that generated feelings of satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, and excitement.

The amount of time student teachers spend in a classroom can be a significant factor in preparing them for the “real world” of teaching. Teachers who are fully prepared and certified in their discipline are more highly rated and more successful with students than those without adequate preparation. For this reason, teacher education programs need to be concerned about how successful their programs are in preparing education students for the realities of teaching. If the student teachers’ expectations of their teaching experiences match the realities of their teaching experiences, the students will most likely find that teaching is a positive and rewarding career, and will want to remain in the teaching profession. Maintaining the number of teachers in Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) is particularly important due to the current shortage of teachers in this field. Examining the experiences of FCS student teachers provides useful information regarding the skills, knowledge, and other attributes perceived to be imperative to a successful student teaching experience. It also identifies areas of teacher education programs that may need to be changed in order to better meet the needs of FCS teachers as they begin their teaching career.

Related Literature

In a study of family and consumer sciences (FCS) education graduates in Virginia, nearly one third of certified teachers were not teaching (Mimbs, Stewart & Heath-Camp, 1998). Mimbs (2000) surveyed 188 certified FCS teachers in Missouri who were listed in the state certification files as not currently teaching. When questioned as to why they were not currently teaching the most common responses were family obligations and working in other occupations. Other reasons for leaving the profession included the frustration and stress associated with teaching, the lack of administrative support, and elimination of positions. When questioned regarding what

they felt was necessary in order to keep FCS teachers in the teaching profession, the need for more experience in the classroom prior to teaching was given.

Additional competencies that FCS teachers felt they needed to ensure a successful student teaching experience included classroom management skills (Nichols & Mundt, 1996). Providing beginning teachers with strong mentor teachers was also recommended to keep FCS teachers in the profession. Van Zoest (1995) identified classroom management strategies, instructional strategies, teaching style, student behaviors, and course content to be imperative to a successful student teaching experience.

The role of university supervisors and cooperating or mentor teachers also has a significant impact on the perceptions and feelings of student teachers. Enz, Freeman, and Wallin (1996) determined that student teachers perceive their university supervisor as a mentor, interpreter, and professional resource. Zimpher, DeVoss, and Nott (1980) identified the university supervisor as the single force responsible for helping the student successfully complete the student teaching experience. Shantz and Ward found that student teachers felt it was important for university supervisors and cooperating or mentor teachers to provide feedback.

Mentor teachers also play a significant role in providing support to beginning teachers in the areas of classroom and behavior management. This is crucial since 14% of secondary and 9% of primary teachers stated behavior management and discipline as priority issues for beginning teachers (Eves, 2001). Eves indicated a significant correlation between first teaching assignments and the willingness of the teacher to stay on the job. Support from principals and staff was the major reasons beginning teachers indicated for staying on as a teacher.

Limited studies have been conducted regarding the common themes of concern for FCS student teachers as they complete their student teaching assignment. Do they feel that classroom management and student discipline are critical skills? Do they receive adequate support from principals and administrative staff? Do they receive feedback from their cooperating or mentor teacher and university supervisor? What areas would they like to have additional knowledge or skills in? These are a few of the questions that can be answered by studying FCS student teacher perceptions as they complete their student teaching assignment.

Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of family and consumer sciences student teachers in a western state university teaching program as they completed fifteen weeks of student teaching. By identifying common themes of concern, university teacher preparation programs and other FCS student teachers will have a better understanding of what knowledge, skills, and attributes student teachers should possess to ensure a satisfying and rewarding student teaching experience. The research was designed to identify 1) events and experiences of the students as student teachers, 2) feelings student teachers perceived and the precipitating factors influencing the feelings, 3) sources of feedback and support that the student teachers received, 4) strengths and weaknesses student teachers perceived regarding their level of preparation for teaching.

Data for this study was examined through the detailed descriptions of the student teachers being studied. The researcher developed ten open-ended questions, designed to initiate reflective analysis and interpretation of the participant's accounts of their experiences. The ten questions focused on the student teachers' thoughts and feelings towards their students, staff, school, and administrators; sources of support and feedback; their strengths and weaknesses; and any questions they had regarding their overall experience. The questions included:

1. Identify feelings you experienced this week (including your current feelings) and what caused them.
2. Is there something you don't know that you feel you should know? Please explain.
3. List the people who gave you feedback regarding your teaching this week. Please include the number of times and the mode of feedback (written or verbal).
4. How many times did you meet to talk with your cooperating or mentor teacher this week?
5. What other sources of support did you have this week?
6. What are your thoughts and feelings about your students this week?
7. Please share any specific thoughts or opinions you have this week about your school, the administration, other faculty, or teaching in general?
8. What is one thing about this week that caused you to feel good?
9. Overall, what do you believe is not going well? Please explain.
10. What questions do you have?

Fifteen FCS education students were registered for student teaching in the Fall 2001 and Spring 2002 semesters and were invited to participate in the study; however thirteen students agreed to participate. Four of the student teachers were emergency permit student teachers and nine were traditional student teachers. The emergency permit teachers were full-time employees, had earned Bachelors degrees, and had passed the state's basic skills test, but had not yet completed their teaching credential program.

Each student was asked to reflect on their week by responding to the set of open-ended questions at the end of each week of their 15-week student teaching assignment. They responded to the questions by using electronic mail or by tape recording their responses and forwarding the tape to the researcher utilizing stamped and addressed mailing envelopes provided by the researcher. Their responses were then transcribed into Word documents, read, and analyzed for common themes.

Results

Demographics

The student teachers ranged in age from 23-43 years of age. Nine of the participants were single, 3 were married, and 1 was divorced. Six of the 13 student teachers had children. Out of the 6 student teachers that had children, 2 had only one child, 3 had two children, and 1 had four children. All of the student teachers had prior work experience other than teaching, with 8 of the student teachers having prior paid teaching experience. Three of the student teachers had one to five years as substitute teachers, two had three semesters teaching at the high school level, and one student teacher had already taught for one year with an emergency permit. Four of the participants were enrolled in other university credential courses while completing their student teaching and 9 out of the thirteen had completed all their credential coursework before beginning their student teaching assignment.

Themes

During their student teaching assignments, the student teachers identified particular events that they perceived to be difficult. Often, these events identified areas where they were lacking particular skills or knowledge. Difficult events fell into one of two distinct categories, instructional or communication. Instructional events included difficulty with classroom

management, student motivation, lesson planning, and resources. Communication events included communicating with administration and communicating with the cooperating or mentor teacher.

Classroom management. All of the student teachers experienced some difficulty with managing their classrooms, even the student teachers that had prior paid teaching experience. The emergency permit student teachers requested more assistance with classroom management than the traditional student teachers. One student teacher made several statements regarding her need for additional classroom management skills. She stated, "I would like to feel more in control when it comes to classroom management" and "I need to build up my skills of classroom management and discipline." Another student teacher had similar thoughts when she stated, "Why don't we have classes that reflect what really goes on in the classes today and how to deal with kids when nothing you try works?"

Difficulty with how to handle excessive talking by the students and disruptive or unruly behavior were common difficulties noted by both the emergency permit and traditional student teachers. Some noted problems with particular classes. One traditional student teacher commented, "I am frustrated with my freshman class. I have tried everything and they just seem to get worse." Another student teacher expressed similar thoughts and felt frustrated with her class of seniors, "The students are just getting very chatty and senior-itis is pretty strong."

It was apparent that most of the student teachers had difficulty in successfully managing their classrooms and therefore identified the need to further develop this skill in order to be more effective teachers.

Poor student motivation. Many of the student teachers had difficulty motivating their students to complete assignments and participate in classroom activities. One traditional student teacher relayed her frustration with her students by stating, "I'm feeling a little frustrated because they are so lazy and they don't want to take notes or do activities." An emergency permit student teachers had similar feelings when she commented, "They [the students] are very apathetic and lazy. It drives me nuts." She felt that she should be doing a better job at motivating her students as she stated, "I feel I should know how to get the students to turn in their work. No amount of cooking or eating motivates them to turn in their assignments." Both the emergency permit student teachers and the traditional student teachers appeared to have the same level of difficulty motivating their students.

Lesson Planning. Lesson planning was another skill commonly identified as a difficult experience for a majority of the student teachers. Student teachers who had prior teaching experience appeared to have just as much difficulty with lesson planning as the teachers that had no prior experience in teaching. Many expressed a strong need for further assistance with this skill noting particular difficulty with finding adequate time to complete the lesson plan. One traditional student teacher commented, "The only part so far that I am not sure is going so well is lesson plans." On another occasion she wrote, "I believe that I'm falling behind in my lesson plans. I cannot seem to catch up."

Gess-Newsome and Lederman (1990) found that student teachers perceived a lack of time for proper planning, writing objectives, and reflecting on what was planned. It was apparent that the FCS student teachers in this study had similar perceptions.

Resources. Some of the student teachers expressed frustration regarding a lack of resources to assist them in lesson planning and developing the content of their curriculum. One emergency permit student teacher expressed this by writing, "There is not a previous outline and no book for my class. I wish I had some kind of guide to go by."

Communication with Administrators. All of the emergency permit student teachers expressed concern on how to effectively communicate with their school administrators. This may have been attributed to the fact that because these student teachers were full time employees, they had to assume full responsibility for their classrooms and in doing so, had many issues that required the assistance of their administrators. They often questioned whom to go to with their questions and concerns, as one emergency permit student teacher commented, “How do you get what you want or need from the administration? How do you explain that my ‘wants’ are for the best interest of the students?” Another emergency permit teacher had similar thoughts. She went on to say, “I don’t know how to handle the problems that I face with my administrators. I don’t know who to talk to about my workload, or [if I am] justified with my complaints? Is this what is expected of all new teachers? I don’t know.”

The traditional student teachers did not express similar perceptions as the emergency permit student teachers even though they most likely had similar questions and concerns. It is logical to assume that the traditional student teachers had less difficulty with this because they could get assistance from their cooperating teachers. It therefore, may not have been necessary for them to go to their administrators since they had another source of support to utilize.

Successful Events or Experiences. During their student teaching assignments, the student teachers also identified particular events that they perceived to be successful. These events generated positive feelings towards their students, school staff, and administrators. The successful events consisted of three categories; instructional, school events, and interaction with faculty and staff.

Instructional. The most prominent successful events perceived by the student teachers were those that involved witnessing successful student performance, particularly in lab classes. One traditional student teacher conveyed, “My 8th grade class was crunched on time to complete a comprehensive luncheon buffet, and they did it. The food tasted great and we got out of there in a reasonable amount of time.” Another traditional student teacher had similar perceptions commenting, “My 7th grade classes seem to perform better and better in their labs.”

In addition to witnessing improvement in student performance, verbal feedback from students and from adults was also identified as significant successful experiences by the student teachers. Many of the student teachers expressed satisfaction with the casual conversations that took place with their students allowing them to get to know their students better. A traditional student teacher relayed that when her students spoke to her outside of the classroom, she felt that she finally belonged. Others expressed happiness when students personally thanked them or told them that they found the class enjoyable as one traditional student teacher conveyed, “My students from last year told me I was their favorite and my class this year made the comment that they felt privileged that they are the only class lucky enough to have me as a teacher.” An emergency permit student teacher had similar feedback from her students, “One of the boys in my foods class said that because of my class he got some of the answers on the SAT exam that he wouldn’t have if he wasn’t in my class.” She went on to say, “My girls in my child development class tells me I am a good teacher and they want to take my other classes next year. That makes me feel good.”

In addition to the feedback the student teachers received from their students, feedback they received from adults was also noted as successful events or experiences. The adults included their mentor or cooperating teacher and school administrators.

Several of the student teachers noted feelings of pride and satisfaction when their mentor or cooperative teacher told them that they were doing a good job. One traditional student teacher

was “thrilled” when her cooperative teacher said she liked the lesson and activities she developed and requested a copy of them. Another student teacher also felt she was successful when her cooperating teacher expressed interest in her ideas and told her she was doing a fine job.

Others relayed feelings of success when school administrators paid them a compliment regarding their teaching, particularly when it was the principal or vice principal. An emergency permit student teacher wrote, “Rumor has it through the grape vine that our principal thinks I’m doing a great job.” Other student teachers had similar feelings when their assistant vice principals expressed to them that they felt they were doing a great job.

School Events In addition to successful events involving instructional skills, the student teachers also perceived specific school events as successful. These school events included open house and back to school night, parent teacher conferences, student awards ceremony, and a student bake sale. Events that involved the parents of the students offered the opportunity for

One traditional student teacher wrote, “... some of the parents’ comments during open house were just making me smile from ear to ear.” Two additional traditional student teachers had similar experiences. Parents of their students told them that the students loved their classes and that they thought the teachers treated the students fairly.

School events in which the student teachers could interact with their students were also noted as successful events. One emergency permit student teacher commented that the bake sale she had with her students not only generated money for the foods classes, but went so well that the students, administration and the teachers wanted to know when the next one would take place. Another student teacher expressed that when she attended the awards ceremony it made her feel that she “belonged.”

Interaction with faculty and staff. School events that involved faculty and school staff such as the student teacher luncheons were also recognized as positive significant events. One student teacher felt that when she attended a faculty luncheon she was able to see the level of support among the faculty members. This made her feel secure knowing that if she ever had a problem; the faculty would be there to support and help her too.

When a traditional student teacher was asked, what did you think went well this week, she said, “Talking with another teacher from the history class. He is an excellent teacher and fun to talk with about the lessons.” It was apparent that these events and experiences the student teachers perceived as successful increased their level of self-confidence as beginning teachers.

Feelings

Previous studies have indicated that student teachers experience a wide array of feelings, including both negative and positive, as they complete their student teaching assignments. Common feelings previously identified include overwhelm, frustration, anger, pressure, fear, tension, self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, and enthusiasm (Burststein, 1988; Eves, 2001; Gess-Newsome and Lederman, 1990).

Negative feelings. In the beginning of their student teaching assignments, negative feelings commonly identified by the family and consumer sciences student teachers were frustration, overwhelm, and concern. The most common precipitating factor that initiated feelings of frustration was students’ lack of motivation, their own lack of classroom management skills, and a lack of administrative support. One student teacher had an unusually difficult time managing her students and stated, “...I don’t feel that I went to school and paid money and time to teach some disrespectful, lazy, arrogant teenagers about foods!” Another student teacher had

similar feelings of frustration with her students as she noted, “[I am feeling] a little frustrated because they are so lazy and they don’t want to take notes or do activities.”

Mimbs (2000) cited several reasons why FCS teachers leave the teaching profession. One of these reasons included the level of frustration and stress associated with teaching and lack of administrative support. It was apparent that the student teachers in this study felt lack of administrative support regarding the number of students placed in the FCS student teachers classrooms.

Feelings of overwhelm were also commonly experienced by a majority of the student teachers, particularly during the first few weeks of the student teaching assignment. Contributing factors to the student teachers’ sense of overwhelm was the workload associated with their teaching assignment. This was expressed by one student teacher who stated, “It’s an enormous amount of work...to teach three entirely new subjects, be in the [new teacher program] and be a mom. I am tapped beyond belief.”

Another prevalent feeling expressed by the student teachers was concern. Feelings of concern were reported as a result of poor student performance, lack of student attendance at classes, and difficulties in classroom instruction. Both the emergency permit and traditional student teachers appeared to have similar levels of concern in these defined areas.

Positive Feelings. Due to the elevated level of frustration and stress that student teachers experience at the beginning of their teaching career, it was surprising to see the volume of responses from the student teachers that included positive feelings. These positive feelings included satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, and excitement.

The student teachers expressed feelings of satisfaction when they accomplished a difficult task or felt comfortable with the outcome of their efforts. Feelings of happiness were attributed to observing their students’ performance level improve and witnessing their students’ interest and enjoyment while learning in the classroom. Many of the difficult events that first led to feelings of frustration and concern, such as classroom management and poor student performance, appeared to be the same precipitating factors that now generated feelings of satisfaction and happiness. The data indicated that feelings of satisfaction and happiness were more frequently experienced by the traditional student teachers than the emergency permit teachers.

Most of the student teachers noted feelings of satisfaction as a result of experiencing success with a skill that had previously been a struggle to attain. For example, one student teacher struggled with classroom management but then felt she was managing her classroom more effectively stated, “[I am feeling] accomplishment, finally getting through to my classes that I will not tolerate talking.” Another traditional student teacher conveyed a similar response regarding her classroom management skills by stating, “I felt good that my kids were cooperative and interested in the activities that I had for them.”

Student teachers who previously indicated a lack of lesson planning skills noted satisfaction at the end of their teaching assignment when they felt they had finally understood how to complete a lesson plan. One traditional student teacher during the 9th week of her 15-week teaching assignment stated, “I am feeling accomplishment, finally figuring out how to really do a lesson plan.” Another traditional student teacher was also satisfied with her lesson planning skills during the 8th week of her teaching assignment. She wrote, “I did develop different lessons for every single day and they went pretty well so I feel good...”

Many of the student teachers expressed happiness with their students' performance. One traditional student teacher noted, "[I am] happy about the way my students are cooking and cleaning up." One emergency permit student teacher also indicated similar feelings. She stated,

"One good thing that made me feel good this week was my students turning in their sewing projects and how well they all turned out!"

Other factors resulting in feelings of happiness were teachers' receiving positive feedback from other adults, particularly their cooperating or mentor teacher. They also noted happiness when receiving positive verbal feedback from their students, for example when students paid them a compliment or told them that they enjoyed the class.

At least half of the student teachers, traditional and emergency permit, indicated feelings of confidence. Some expressed a sense of self-confidence at the beginning of their teaching assignment and others noted an increase in their confidence level several months into their teaching assignment. The traditional student teachers that had previous teaching experience noted feelings of self-confidence at the beginning of their teaching assignment.

One traditional student teacher was specific in her comment regarding her increased confidence at week 5 and 6 of her teaching assignment compared to the first week. Similarly, at the end of her teaching assignment, another traditional student teacher felt confident enough at the end of her teaching assignment that she felt she could teach on her own. She stated, "I really just want to be on my own now and feel I can do the job without hesitation."

These results coincide with the findings of Burstein (1988). Student teachers who had a structured classroom, support of their cooperating teacher, and were confident that they could handle increased responsibility were able to cope and adjust more readily to their teaching responsibilities.

Interestingly, three out of the four emergency permit teachers had teaching experience prior to their student teaching assignment, yet only one of the emergency permit teachers stated she felt confident and this was noted at week 9 of her teaching assignment.

Turley and Nakai (1998) interviewed both traditional route student teachers and student teachers employed as emergency permit teachers to obtain their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks between the two routes of student teaching. Traditional student teachers felt unprepared for full classroom responsibilities, and desired the opportunity to observe another teacher, practice their teaching, and receive feedback from an experienced teacher. Once completed, this would most likely increase the student teachers' level of self-confidence.

Perhaps the emergency permit teachers in this study lacked feelings of self-confidence due to taking on the increased responsibility of teaching without the opportunity to practice their teaching skills. They may have also felt that they did not have adequate support or feedback from another experienced teacher.

Feelings of excitement were prominently noted by a majority of the student teachers. Some expressed excitement and feelings of anticipation the first week of their student teaching assignment. Other precipitating factors were observing their student's achievements, receiving positive feedback regarding their teaching, and looking ahead to teaching independently and having their own classroom.

One traditional student teacher was excited to see her students participating in discussion and taking an interest in the subject being presented. She was also excited to see the students trying new foods during one of the food lab classes. The student teachers were also excited when they witnessed the students having fun in their classes and as they looked forward to being

on their own. This was conveyed by one traditional student teacher that stated, “I am excitedly looking forward to being on my own,” and “I am so ready to be done just after one semester.”

From her statements, it was evident that she felt she had enough experience and confidence to begin teaching independently.

It was not surprising that excitement, anticipation and a sense of nervousness was a common feeling expressed by most of the student teachers, particularly at the beginning stages of their teaching assignments. As their assignments continued, it was evident that these feelings were noted less frequently. Many of the students felt less excitement and nervousness as they became more comfortable with their school, class, students, and faculty.

Feelings experienced by the student teachers were also influenced by the feedback and support they received or did not receive from both professional and personal sources. Professional sources included their cooperative and mentor teachers, school administrative staff, school faculty, students, school meetings, or seminars that they attended. Their university supervisor and classmates were also sources of professional support and feedback. Personal sources included their family, friends and spiritual sources.

Sources of Feedback and Support

Two of the ten open ended questions the student teachers were asked to respond to concerned sources of feedback and support they felt they received at the end of each week of their student teaching assignment. They were asked to list the individuals who gave them feedback regarding their teaching, the frequency of the feedback and whether or not it was given verbally or in a written format. They were also asked how often they met to talk with their cooperating or mentor teacher and what other sources of support did they receive that week.

Mentor and Cooperative Teachers. The most frequent source of feedback received by all of the student teachers was verbal feedback from their mentor teacher (emergency permit student teachers) or from their cooperative teacher (traditional student teachers). All of the eight traditional student teachers received verbal feedback from their cooperative teacher five times a week or in some weeks, more than five times per week. During the first two weeks of the student teachers assignment, it was common for the traditional student teachers to speak with their cooperative teachers several times per day. Very often, the student teachers had lunch with their cooperative teacher and would receive feedback from them at this time.

When the data was analyzed for the emergency permit teachers, it appeared that the emergency permit student teachers received much less verbal feedback from their mentor teachers. Looking at the data more closely, it was discovered that when the emergency permit teachers responded to the question regarding who provided them with feedback, they often responded “no one.” This was not a true reflection of the feedback they may have actually obtained since they did indicate in a separate guided question that they met to talk with their mentor teacher at least four to five times a week throughout the semester. Two of the emergency permit student teachers also indicated that they met with their mentor teacher several times a day during their first two weeks of student teaching. Only one emergency permit student teacher indicated meeting with her mentor teacher only two to four times per week.

It was concluded that since the emergency permit student teachers met with their mentor teachers daily, they had to have some kind of exchange regarding how the experience was going for the student teacher. It would also be logical to assume that when the mentor teacher spoke with the student teacher, she would offer some form of verbal feedback or support at this time.

Responses regarding written feedback were much less frequent. For both the traditional and emergency permit student teachers, written feedback was typically in the form of an evaluation. Only five of the nine traditional student teachers noted that they received written feedback from their cooperating teacher. All of them indicated that at the end of one week, they had received feedback at least once that week. Feedback was provided to complete their evaluations, and to offer suggestions and comments after the student teachers taught a class.

Written feedback from mentor teachers was only received once or twice throughout the semester by three of the four emergency permit teachers. One emergency permit teacher did indicate that during one week, she did receive written feedback three times from her mentor teacher. The written feedback provided to the remaining three emergency permit student teachers was in the form of a mid- term or final evaluation.

Although prior literature has found feedback from the cooperative or mentor teacher invaluable to the student teacher (Montgomery, 2000) it was quite surprising to find that very few student teachers, traditional and emergency permit, did not receive more frequent written feedback from their cooperating or mentor teachers.

Administrative Staff. A source of feedback with a lower response rate was other school faculty and staff, including administration. It was interesting that the results indicated three out of the four emergency permit teachers received verbal feedback from administration more than once a week for at least one week of their teaching assignment. Five out of the nine traditional student teachers received verbal feedback from administrative staff, with the remaining four traditional student teachers not receiving any verbal feedback from administration throughout their teaching assignment. Administration did not provide any written feedback to any of the student teachers throughout the teaching assignment.

School Faculty. Other faculty that provided feedback included teachers within the schools' FCS departments and teachers outside of the FCS departments. Other teachers were noted as a source of feedback more often from the emergency permit student teachers rather than the traditional student teachers. The emergency permit student teachers indicated that they received feedback from two to six teachers within a week's time; however, the number of weeks they responded in this way was limited to only one to two weeks out of the entire semester.

Students. Although student feedback was likely received daily by the student teachers, they did not indicate this in their responses. Only two student teachers, one emergency permit and the other traditional, listed their students as a source of feedback. This occurred during the first three weeks of their student teaching assignment. This result may be quite misleading in that it would be logical that students provide feedback to the student teacher on a daily basis. These results could be due to student teachers not considering their daily interactions with their students as feedback although they wrote about their daily verbal interactions with students each week of their teaching assignment.

School Meetings. Five out of the thirteen student teachers reported school meetings as a source of support. These meetings included faculty meetings, new teacher support meetings, and department meetings. One student teacher stated that the meetings gave her the opportunity to meet other teachers, the administrative staff, and department members. Attending the faculty meetings brought about a sense of "belonging" to some of the student teachers and increased their comfort level with the faculty and school staff they were working with.

University Sources of Feedback and Support

The university supervisors and fellow classmates enrolled in the student teacher education program were reported as sources of feedback and support for both the emergency permit and the traditional student teachers. A majority of the student teachers received verbal feedback at least once a week from these sources.

University Supervisor. Twelve out of the thirteen student teachers received verbal feedback at least once a week from their university supervisor. The supervisor issued verbal feedback after observing them teach in their assigned classrooms. Written feedback was also given when the student teachers received their mid term evaluation. EST01 stated, "This week I received my mid term evaluation from my mentor teacher and was visited by my university supervisor." Many of the student teachers valued the support and feedback, provided by their university supervisor. One traditional student teacher wrote, "I did get some great advice from my supervisor, which helped my lesson writing." Another student teacher noted difficulty communicating with her cooperating teacher and consulted with her university supervisor to see how she should handle the situation. She wrote, "[After my supervisor] visited, I discussed [with my supervisor] what was going on and how I should handle talking with her."

The findings in this study agreed with Knudson (1998) who indicated that university supervisors could establish therapeutic relationships with their student teachers. If aware of the students' difficulties during the early stages of their student teaching assignment, the university supervisor can intervene and resolve problems related to inexperience.

Classmate Support and Feedback. An additional source of support at the university was the other students' enrolled in the student teaching program. The student teachers referred to these individuals as classmates or other student teachers. Those that were enrolled in university courses while completing their pre-service assignment tended to list their classmates as both sources of support and feedback while the student teachers that did not have university courses thought of the other student teachers solely as a source of support. Either way, the student teachers valued the support and feedback they received from the other student teachers.

Personal Sources of Feedback and Support

Some of the more surprising results of this study were found in the data for this particular source of feedback and support. Personal sources of feedback and support included family, friends and spiritual sources. Interestingly, only once did two out of the thirteen student teachers indicate they received feedback from personal sources. One traditional student teacher received feedback from her husband and one emergency permit student teacher indicated that her friends and family gave her feedback.

Although some responses were received for personal sources of support, the frequency of these responses was minimal. Only five out of the thirteen student teachers indicated personal sources of support. Four of the five were traditional student teachers and one was an emergency permit student teacher.

Three of the student teachers were married, yet only one indicated her spouse as a source of support. This same traditional student teacher also listed her in-laws, friends, and father as additional sources of support. Friends, family, and a roommate were also indicated on one occasion by two of the traditional student teachers. Church was listed once by a traditional student teacher and God, friends, and family were indicated once by an emergency permit student teacher.

It is unclear why personal sources of support were not reported very frequently by the student teachers, particularly since their levels of frustration, overwhelm, and concern was so prevalent throughout their teaching assignment. The data currently available does not lend any additional insight to this finding; however, we can speculate that the student teaching experience was so intense that the student teachers focused their thoughts and interactions on the teaching environment rather than those outside the teaching environment.

Discussion

This study indicated that the student teachers struggled with particular events and experiences more frequently at the beginning of their teaching assignment and these struggles generated negative feelings and emotions. As their teaching semester continued and the student teachers gained additional experience interacting with their students, their level of self-confidence increased. As they continued to feel they could adequately handle classroom events and experiences, they felt more successful in their role as a teacher and began to perceive their teaching assignment as more enjoyable and rewarding.

Additional skills the student teachers felt they required were skills in classroom management, writing lesson plans, and communicating with administrators. They experienced feelings of frustration, disappointment, discouragement, and concern due to lack of these skills. Feelings of frustration were most prevalent in the classroom, particularly when students lacked motivation to complete assignments, talked excessively, and did not attend class.

One of the most prevalent feelings expressed by the student teachers was overwhelm. The excessive workload, excessive number of students enrolled in their classes, and the other responsibilities of teaching were the precipitating factors of their overriding sense of overwhelm. Many of the student teachers were married with families, and had to juggle their responsibilities as a mother, spouse and student teacher, which may have led to additional feelings of overwhelm. Although feelings of overwhelm were prevalent, it was noted that as the semester continued and the student teachers adjusted to their role, less feelings of overwhelm were noted.

Most all of the student teachers worked cooperatively with their cooperating or mentor teachers and received frequent verbal feedback regarding their performance. Positive feedback received from their mentor or cooperating teacher, university supervisor, school administrators, and school faculty increased the student teachers level of self-confidence. The emergency permit student teachers felt less self-confident than the traditional student teachers possibly because of the burden of responsibility they felt with their full time teaching load.

Recommendations for Practice

Instructors in teacher education programs who teach methods classes may want to spend additional time discussing hands on classroom management techniques that work for teachers of middle and high school students. Additional class time needs to be devoted to teaching education students the steps involved in developing creative lesson plans and classroom activities that can motivate middle and high school students to learn.

The student teachers also experienced difficulties in communicating with school administrators. Instructors should incorporate “real life” scenarios into course curriculum so students can role play and have the opportunity to practice effective communication skills with administrators and other mentoring adults.

An apparent difference between the traditional student teachers and the emergency permit student teachers regarding their level of satisfaction with their teaching assignments was noted.

Future FCS teachers may find this information helpful when deciding what route of student teaching may best meet their needs and expectations.

Lastly, the student teaching assignment was found to be an overwhelming and stressful experience for most of the student teachers, particularly at the beginning of their teaching assignment. It may be helpful for education instructors to include stress management techniques in their curriculum to assist student teachers in handling the stress associated with the student teaching experience.

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