

Collaborative classrooms: The learning outcomes of students and pre-service teachers in an alternative education setting

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Introduction

- For many pre-service teachers, early field experience represents the first experience in observing and participating in a classroom from the teacher rather than the student perspective.
- Early field experiences must be meaningful ones rather than simply another requirement to complete. As Caprano, Caprano and Helfledt (2010) state, “teacher preparation programs must recognize that more systematically structured intensive field experiences involving reflection and inquiry that link theories with personal learning experiences are necessary” (p. 134).
- Meaningful early field experiences can have a significant impact on the transition from student to teacher. Montecinos, Walker, Rittershausen, Nuñez, Contreras and Solís found that the “understandings teacher candidates expressed regarding what teachers must know and be able to do align more closely with a participatory version of learning to teach” (p. 287).

Introduction

- Many early field experiences focus on observations by pre-service teachers. It is essential that pre-service teachers also be engaged in the classroom with students as early in their preparation as possible, so that their first interaction of this type is not student teaching.
- Hughes (2009) asserts that “involvement in structured field experiences with an integrated reflective component will enhance the preparation of students as they enter into their teaching experience” (p. 256). Such involvement not only provides meaningful experience, but can also impact how pre-service teachers imagine their future classrooms and the types of schools in which they might like to work.
- Early field experiences must also be meaningful in the sense that they provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with diverse populations of students. Teacher educators can do this by working with a variety of alternative educational settings, agencies or service-learning projects.

Introduction

- Lawrence and Butler (2010) found that participants in a service-learning experience “came to realize how different teaching for understanding was and began to realize that it was impossible to separate effective teaching from knowledge of and ability to respond to the needs of their students” (p. 162).
- These experiences are even more meaningful is when there is a working relationship between the field experience site and the institution. By fostering and developing such a relationship, the field experiences can become an integral part of the classroom discourse, delving into and connecting theory and practice.
- There is a need for an intensive early field experience in which both pre-service teachers and the teacher educator can participate together with a diverse population of learners.

Methodology

- Guiding Questions
- What are the expectations, experiences and learning outcomes of pre-service secondary teachers who complete their early field experience in an alternative educational setting?
- What are the expectations, experiences and learning outcomes of the students in an alternative educational setting as they interact and learn with the pre-service secondary teachers in their classes?

Methodology

- Participants
- Pre-service secondary teachers (n=9)
 - Large Midwestern University
 - Variety of Content Area Majors
 - Introductory Course to Secondary Education
- Students enrolled at alternative educational agency (n=11)
 - Did not Complete Traditional Secondary School
 - Enrolled in GED and College Prep Courses
 - Focus on Vocational Training in Construction

Methodology

- Description of Field Experience Context
- 20 hour clinical experience
- Course requirement
- To be completed in “diverse setting”
- Observation tasks to be completed
- Interactive versus “zoo” experience

Methodology

- Field Experience Details
- Agency Teacher visited pre-service teachers' course
- Pre-service teachers attended on-site orientation
- Registered for consistent observation times
- Courses include:
 - Math
 - Science/Social Studies
 - Language Arts
 - College Prep

Methodology

- Research Design
- Participants completed survey at the end of the semester
- Pre-service teachers completed online
- Agency students completed in class
- Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

Emerging Themes

Pre-Service Teachers (PST)

- Expectations and Realities of Alternative Educational Settings
- Importance of Differentiation
- Importance of Connecting to Students
- Demystifying Diversity
- Uncertainty of Role

Agency Students (AS)

- Academic Resources
- Post-Secondary Resources
- Expectation of Interaction
- Potential to Help Others
- Missed Opportunities

Emerging Themes - Pre-service Teachers

- Expectations and Realities of Alternative Educational Settings
- Importance of Differentiation
- Importance of Connecting to Students
- Demystifying Diversity
- Uncertainty of Role

Expectations and Reality of Alternative Educational Settings (PST)

- *I thought the students would be a little harder to manage than a traditional school setting.*
- *I thought they were just there to do the minimum work and obtain their GEDs*
- *I have only been in a classroom with little to no diversity so I was hoping to gain an understanding of the kinds of things that happened here and how the teachers dealt with them.*

Expectations and Reality of Alternative Educational Settings (PST)

- *These students WANT to do well.*
- *I thought the teachers and students interacted pretty well together.*
- *I was almost surprised about how well the students cooperated most of the time.*
- *I learned more than all the observations of the schools in the inner city of Chicago.*

Importance of Differentiation (PST)

- *It was surprising that the students seemed like they were doing elementary math. I was naïve to believe that every person knew certain information by the time they got to high school.*
- *There is no such thing as an impossible student. Every student can be taught given the right circumstances.*
- *The teachers made lessons that weren't too hard for some but not too easy for others. They made sure everyone could participate at some point in the class.*
- *There are many different ways to education than the typical high school classroom.*

Importance of Connecting to Students (PST)

- *Not every student that lives in the same area has the same things going on in their lives so its important to listen to them and find out other things about them.*
- *The teachers showed to me a way to develop a line of friend versus teacher which is a hard thing to do.*
- *I know now that not every class you have is going to have the same kind of students in it. Not everyone has your same experiences.*
- *Students want to have a relationship with their teachers so they are not afraid to ask questions. This is harder for some students but here I saw how you have to be patient and understand each person in your class.*

Demystifying Diversity (PST)

- *Never EVER judge a book by its cover and believe that all students can succeed.*
- *Once you go a few times and students get to know you and you get to know them, the ideas about the students being rowdy go out the window.*
- *While there are outbursts here and there, learning was taking place. I found the students to be articulate and very bright.*
- *This taught me that to be a good teacher I need to be comfortable with all kinds of people.*
- *This was my first experience with what they call “diverse” students and I learned that I was worried about the wrong things. They are just students that want to learn.*

Uncertainty of Role (PST)

- *I didn't know if it was acceptable or not to walk around and work with the students. I didn't want to overstep and I didn't know if the students would accept me.*
- *I was very excited for a hands-on experience. It may have been my fault by not engaging myself in the lesson but the teacher didn't ask me to.*
- *There needs to be a clear expectation about what we can do in the classes. I wish the teachers would have invited me to do more.*
- *One student was using his calculator the whole time. I didn't think it was my place to say anything.*

Emerging Themes - Agency Students

- Academic Resources
- Post-Secondary Resources
- Expectation of Interaction
- Potential to Help Others
- Missed Opportunities

Academic Resources (AS)

- *I recommend they use their knowledge more and be more involved with students*
- *I asked one lady for help and she helped me*
- *It would be nice for them to teach us things we don't know*
- *I interacted with one a lot. We did math together and language arts.*
- *They should take out they time and stop sitting down and help us with things we don't understand*

Post-Secondary Resources (AS)

- *I thought they was going to talk to use about school and that was alright*
- *Speak more about college so we can have a better understanding of what to expect*
- *I expected to hear how easy or hard college is*
- *I thought they would come and speak about college experiences*

Expectation of Interaction (AS)

- *They were so quiet I didn't really pay attention to them*
- *I thought they were weird because all they did was sit down and be quiet all day except for one chick who was cool cause she brung cupcakes*
- *I thought they were going to talk to us, they didn't really, they just made me mad a little because they were not saying anything*

Potential to Help Others (AS)

- *Make your students think you cool but still have a limit*
- *Not having help, scared to ask because I thought somebody was going to talk about me*
- *We're drop outz and they wanna see what they can take from us and don't make that mistake*
- *Being in a boring class with a crappy teacher, be interesting and teach at the same time*
- *Learn and understand the 2nd chance students, we matter just the same as students in regular high school*

Missed Opportunities (AS)

- *They wasn't as useful as we thought they would be*
- *They were just like shadows in the room*
- *I would walk past and play or say something funny to try and make them feel more comfortable*

Implications for Pre-service Teachers

- Alternative education programs challenge pre-service teachers to examine and adjust ideas and beliefs about students
- Pre-service teachers can use knowledge from alternative education settings to reconsider their teaching philosophy
- Alternative clinical experiences are beneficial early on in teacher education before expectations and stereotypes of alternative students become solidified and harder to overcome
- Pre-service teachers are apprehensive but not unwilling to participate in the experience, however they want and need guidance and introduction from instructors

Implications for Agency Students

- Students genuinely want to help from the pre-service teachers
- Students view pre-service teachers as resources academically and in terms of future goals and have a strong desire to hear about post secondary experiences.
- Non-participation of the pre-service teachers is the main cause of negative student feedback
- Students view themselves as resources for pre-service teachers in terms of working successfully with others like them in the future
- The agency students are not the shy ones!!!

Implications for Instructors

- Collaboration and communication between the agency and university instructors is crucial for improving the clinical experience
- A (developing) relationship between the agency and the university provides for a unique and more meaningful clinical experience
- Agency and university instructors must both make guidelines and expectations clear on participation and interaction during the clinical experience

Limitations

- One course section / one Agency
- Small sample size (n=9, n=11)
- First iteration of data collection

Questions

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