DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 100   SP 035 422

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TITLE   Perceived Impact of the "Ecology of Student
                Teaching."
PUB DATE   27 Jun 94
NOTE   12p.
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Cooperating Tea .r..; *Ecological Factors; Elementary
                Secondary Education; Higher Education; Influences;
                Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Teacher
                Attitudes; *Student Teachers; Student Teacher
                Supervisors; *Student Teaching; *Teaching
                Experience
IDENTIFIERS   West Virginia State College

ABSTRACT
        This study examined the perceived effects of six
major elements that may operate in the "ecology" of the student
teaching experience: the school supervisor, the college supervisor,
the students, the placement environment, participant expectations and
efficiency, and skill/applications from the campus-based program. The
Student Teaching Experience Assessment was administered to 135
candidates at West Virginia State College following the completion of
student teaching. Results indicated that the impact of nonsupervisory
elements (the placement environment, relationships with students, and
personal/professional efficacy) were highly operative.
Student-related aspects were the most significant element. Student
teachers attached considerable significance to the role of the
classroom supervisor compared to that of their college supervisor.
Application of professional education concepts and skills acquired in
the campus-based program was comparatively low. Sites for student
teaching placement were generally perceived to be an important
factor, particularly for providing participants the opportunity for
contact and involvement with diverse learners. Student teachers were
not overly preoccupied with modeling or implementing the style of the
cooperating teacher; thus some level of professional autonomy was
operating. The paper concludes that placement of participants in
professional development centers is a desirable feature for
structuring an effective "ecology" of the student teaching
experience. (JDD)

Perceived Impact of the "Ecology of Student Teaching"

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June 27, 1994

Introduction:

Participants have long regarded the student teaching experience as the single most important aspect of teacher preparation and express moderate to high levels of anxiety as they begin the experience. It is a path of professional development that is "other dependent" and heavily influenced by school and college supervisors, who often have different expectations. At the same time, participants must suddenly shift from "college student" to a professional teacher role.

The impact of the school and college supervisor has received considerable attention in the literature, with the most significant influence attributed to the school supervisor, and a lesser role for the college supervisor. Consequently, the experience is often described in terms of "survival" and "fail-safe practice", with participants emulating the style and practices of the school supervisor at the expense of incorporating or refining personal and/or program beliefs and practices. Such practice is also reinforced by socialization of role development when one internalizes past teaching methods and styles observed during their K-12 and higher education experiences.

The discussion continues concerning the most important elements or mechanisms influencing the student teaching experience. In addition to the supervisory process some researchers have focused primarily on non-supervisory mechanisms, e.g., "classroom ecology", (Copeland, 1980); school bureaucracy (Hayes and Rees, 1977; Bartholamew, 1976; and Dole, 1977). Zeichner (1987) writes about "perspectives" brought to the experience which are used in problem situations.

Purpose:

The major purpose of the study was to examine the perceived effects of six major elements that may operate in the "ecology" of the student teaching experience: the **school supervisor**, the **college supervisor**, the **learners**, the **placement environment**, **participant expectations, and personal efficiency** and **skill/applications** from the campus-based program. Of interest was whether participants control the direction of their socialization such that there is a degree of professional accomplishment and growth. Which of the elements are perceived to be more influential and contributive to professional growth?

Methodology/Procedures:

The **Student Teaching Experience Assessment** (STEA) was administered to 135 candidates (80 Elementary/55 Secondary and K-12) following the completion of student teaching. The **STEA** was designed to assess perceived effects of the six major elements in the "ecology" of the student teaching experience. These are outlined and briefly described below, including the set of "nested" item descriptors which randomly appear on the "STEA".

Placement Environment: The psychological climate in the school and the classroom learning context relative to an effective student teaching placement (Item numbers: 1, 7, 11, 12, 13, 26, 35, 36, 37)

Application/Skill: The use of content, ideas, strategies or skills acquired in the campus-based program. (Item numbers: 18, 20, 40, 41)

Personal Expectation/Efficacy: The beliefs, expectations, and overall perceptions of the student teacher. (Item numbers: 2, 3, 4, 17, 24, 32, 38)

College Supervisor: The assigned faculty member from the professional unit who monitors the overall experience and provides periodic observation and evaluation of participants. (Item numbers: 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, 23, 30, 39)

School Supervisor: The assigned classroom teacher on site who provides the day-to-day supervision, management, and evaluation of participants. (Item numbers: 5, 14, 22, 28, 29, 39)

The Learner: The students in the settings for whom the student teacher has primary instructional responsibilities. (Item numbers: 15, 21, 27, 31, 33, 42)

Candidates coded each item using a five-point scale of agreement/disagreement scale as follows: 5: Definitely Agree; 4: Agree; 3: Probably Agree; 2: Probably Disagree; and 1: Definitely Disagree. An impact value score was derived for each item by multiplying frequencies by Likert values and then summing, e.g.:

Item #5: "I learned a variety of effective teaching strategies from my school supervisor".

Likert Value	DA (5)		A (4)		PA (3)		PD (2)		DD (1)
Frequencies	(26)		(8)		(10)		(3)		(5)
Scores	130	+	32	+	30	+	6	+	5

Impact Value Score = 203

Higher Impact Value Scores indicate greater perceived agreement for particular items. Mean scores by clusters are provided to make comparisons between the six elements.

Impact value scores are distributed or "nested" under the appropriate items in each cluster. Selection of common items was subjectively determined and it is likely that at least a portion of some items share a common variance. As noted, higher values indicate a greater impact. The notation "**R**" indicates that the descriptor was a reverse polarity item on the questionnaire.

This assessment treats information and data collected from three separate phases of student teaching, including the Spring, 1992 (N = 36), Fall, 1992 (N = 53) and the Spring, 1993 (46), all for a combined pool of 135 candidates.

Table I below, shows the overall results for the three "classes" of student teachers. A mean Impact Value Score is provided for each of the six "STEA" categories across the three assessments. Impact Value Scores vary because of the differences in number of participants in each student teaching period. The single digit number in parentheses refers to the ranking of each factor with **1** being the highest or most positive.

Table 1

Mean Impact Value Scores for Three Groups of Student Teachers

"STEA" Factors	IMPACT VALUE MEAN SCORES AND RANKS			
	Spring 1992 (N = 36)	Fall 1992 (N = 53)	Spring 1993 (N = 46)	Pooled Mean (N = 135)
College Supervisor	178 (4)	225 (2)	138 (5)	180 (5)
Students	187 (1)	227 (1)	150 (1)	188 (1)
School Environment	177 (5)	217 (3)	149 (3)	181 (4)
Application/Skill	170 (6)	200 (4)	130 (6)	163 (6)
Personal Professional	181 (2)	227 (1)	142 (4)	183 (3)
School Supervisor	179 (3)	225 (2)	149 (2)	184 (2)

The pooled means reflect aggregate effects of STEA factors across the three groups.

As seen in Table I, the _impact_ of students is the number one factor across all three samples. Conversely, the impact of the _campus-based program_ is the least influential factor during these experiences. The _school supervisor_ is ranked as an important element closely followed by the impact of _professional/personal efficacy_ of candidates, _school environment_ factors, and the influence of the _college supervisor_.

Analysis of specific items in the various clusters provides more specific information about the "most significant impactors". These are shown in Table II which includes descriptors that respondents were most definite (positive) about. Items were chosen with frequency counts of _75%_ or greater in at least two of the three assessment periods.

These results reveal more definite perceptions about specific aspects in the context that impacted the experience. On the positive side, the influence of the college supervisor appears to have a little more importance than might be interpreted from overall results and rankings. Participants felt that they were observed sufficiently enough by the college supervisor to enable an evaluation of their teaching and relatedly, they felt comfortable to discuss problems with their supervisor. Too, they were similarly comfortable with the school supervisor. The influence of "personal-profesisonal" is made clearer by the descriptors shown in Table 2 for that element. Participants strongly expected to perform well and to be successful in student teaching and expressed a commitment to pursuing their goal of classroom teaching. The importance of speech communication skills was also noted. Perhaps, the greatest impact is felt from the students and the placement environment. These elements were strongly evident in the participants perceptions of their experiences, particularly the influence of students.

Table 2

Descriptors with Ratings of Definite or High Agreement

Item #	Descriptor:	Variable
#8	(Number of times college supervisor observed classroom teaching)	College Supervisor
#10	(Felt comfortable to discuss problems with college supervisor)	
#28	(Personally compatible with School Supervisor)	School Supervisor
#29	(Conferences held by School Supervisor)	
#27	(Students accepted me as their teacher)	Students
#31	(Students respected me; had confidence in my teaching)	
#33	(Interactions with students were positive/ satisfactory)	
#11	(Developed awareness of youngsters with negative circumstances)	
#13	(Provided contact with diverse students social/ personal backgrounds)	Placement Environment
#7	(Encouraged to try out different methods/ideas)	
#2	(Convinced me to pursue my goal of classroom teaching)	Personal/ Professional
#3	(I expected to do well)	
#4	(Importance of Speech Communication Skills)	

Table 3 outlines those descriptors rated in the <u>lower</u> quarter, indicating the greatest disagreement. Items with "reversed polarities" were not included since these "disagreements" are considered to be positive outcomes.

Table 3

Descriptors with Ratings of Definite or High Disagreement

Item #	Descriptor:	Variable
#39	Expectations of college and school supervisors are similar.	College Supervisor
#23	Student teaching seminars are helpful.	
#41	Application of ideas, suggestions and "theory" from courses in professional education.	Application and Skill
#40	Focused the difference between knowing something and being able to teach it.	
#15	Students taught did not meet academic expectations of student teachers.	Students
#39	Expectations of college and school supervisor were similar.	School Supervisor

Participants disagreed that the expectations of the college and school supervisor were similar and that student teaching seminars were helpful. Consistent with previous evaluations, participants indicated that application of ideas, suggestions or theories from courses completed in their professional education program was nil. Interestingly, they expressed that the students taught did not meet their academic expectations.

Of interest too is the potential for different perceptions between elementary and secondary candidates, given the variation in these teaching contexts. Protocols for the Fall, 1992 sample (Elementary = 32 and Secondary = 21) were analyzed for such effects. A gross ranking procedure was used to compare these groups for each of the six clusters. Impact value scores were ranked from highest to lowest for all 42 items, with #1 given the highest and #42 the lowest ranks. Although the sample for this procedure was small, some differences are notable. Table 4 below shows the rankings for elementary (EE) and secondary participants (SE) for all items across a given cluster. Items with a difference in rank of 15 places are noted as well as those with a minimal difference of 0 - 5 places.

Overall, there is considerable correspondence in ranking for most items. In the **College Supervisor** (CS) category, Item #9, secondary candidates implied that they were not supervised a sufficient length of time nor received "practical tips" or suggestions for teaching. There was general agreement among both groups that the **CS** played an important role in their development and progress. Both groups were nearly identical in the perception that student teaching seminars were not helpful or supportive. Most importantly, candidates expressed consensus that they were encouraged to try out their own ideas and to use various methods or strategies.

Regarding **School Supervisors**, (SS) secondary candidates implied that the cooperating teacher did not personally confer often with them to provide feedback about performance. There was close agreement between the two that they learned a variety of effective teaching strategies from the SS but that they did not necessarily model the style of the SS.

Effects of **Students** were comparable. Both groups, however, strongly indicated that "students respected me and had confidence in my ability to teach", and that the students taught did not "meet my academic expectations".

School Environment factors are highly contextual and vary considerably, but candidates did have high agreements in this area. One discrepancy noted is that secondary candidates rated their placement more favorably as an effective place for training teachers compared to elementary candidates.

There were no significant discrepancies in perception for items in the **Application/Skill** cluster. As noted earlier, these results confirm that little application occurs of professional concepts and skills acquired in the program, other than classroom management and disciplining.

Personal and Professional efficacy varied considerably between groups. Secondary candidates expressed more positive expectations about their performance during student teaching and its impact upon their goal of pursuing classroom teaching. Elementary candidates did not perceive student teaching as a time to try out a "personal teaching style" compared to secondary candidates, although both agreed that student teaching was not a "matter of survival", and didn't feel compelled to "model" the school supervisors. Secondary education candidates did not perceive that student teaching required a "great deal of self-evaluation and adjustment". Both agreed, identically, that student teaching sharply focuses the need for effective speaking and communicating skills.

Table 4

Impact Value Scores Ranked by Clusters for Elementary and Secondary Candidates

Item Numbers:		6	8	9	10	16	23	30	39
College Supervisor:	EE:	10	3	7	6	28	36	14	33
	SE:	13 (**)	16	32 (*)	19	22	37 (**)	30 (*)	41

Item Numbers:		5	14	22	28	29	39
School Supervisor:	EE:	11	23	12	8	10	33
	SE:	15 (**)	26 (**)	20	5	29 (*)	41

Item Numbers:		15	21	27	31	33	42
Students:	EE:	35	27	20	1	16	21
	SE:	36 (**)	17	7	11	3	10

Item Numbers:		1	11	12	13	26	35	36	37	7
Environment:	EE:	18	14	40	9	19	26	29	39	4
	SE:	26	4	34	18	22 (**)	21 (**)	12 (*)	38 (**)	9

Item Numbers:		18	20	34	40	41
Application & Skill:	EE:	25	37	X	32	38
	SE:	15	27	X	31 (**)	35 (**)

Item Numbers:		2	3	4	17	24	32	38
Person/ Prof.:	EE:	17	13	2	22	31	24	41
	SE:	6	1	2	24 (**)	14 (*)	10	40 (**)

X — Item omitted from questionnaire in 1992.

* — Significant difference.

** — Minimal difference.

Summary

Based upon the information summarized from individual and aggregate assessments, the impact of Students continues to be the number one factor. This finding has been consistent throughout these assessments over the past three years. Students are the primary consumers and their response and satisfaction are important factors in the candidate's day to day (even moment to moment) perception and success. Being accepted as the "real teacher" and respected for one's teaching abilities are important reinforcers for a student teacher.

As in the past, the lowest overall (more negative) ratings were given to those items related to the Application of Professional Skills and Concepts acquired in the campus-based program. Content or subject matter was not a major problem but the application of professional education concepts and skills acquired in the basic program is not evident, with the exception of classroom management and discipline.

Related to program preparation is the element of Personal/Professional Efficacy which is most likely influenced by program experiences and related assessments throughout a candidates preparation period. These aspects were much more positive. Participant expectations were positive; candidates were not compelled to model the school supervisor or to "survive". Nor did they perceive themselves as "an extra source of labor" in the school or classroom.

Setting effects do differ because of the various sites used for student teaching placement. Centers are selected to reflect a variety of learning experiences and to provide involvement with learners ranging in personal and social backgrounds. According to the results, (Table 3) the latter is occurring, including contact with those whose circumstances are negatively impacting chances for school success. It was interesting that candidates "disagreed" with the item referring to "being surprised" by the amount of paperwork encountered.

Supervision during the experience is an important element, particularly by the assigned school supervisor who has the day to day responsibility. Candidates are comfortable to discuss problems, are personally compatible, and learn specific teaching strategies from their school supervisors. They do express some concern about expectations differing between the college and school supervisor (see Table 4). Overall though, candidates rate the school supervisor, as expected, as an important element in the process, but at the same time do not perceive to be overly controlled. There is some autonomy and room provided (or taken) for personal style.

College Supervision varies and there is a moderate to high influence. Candidates do feel comfortable to be observed and evaluated, to discuss problems, and do receive specific suggestions for practice. Some disagreement exists about the similarities in expectations between college and school supervisors and that student teaching seminars are helpful activities.

Some differences in perception do exist between elementary and secondary candidates but overall, candidates have common perceptions of the experience.

Implications and Conclusions

Participants in the student teaching experience are influenced by the "ecology" of the experience, including supervisory and non-supervisory elements.

In these cases, the impact of non-supervisory elements - the placement environment, relationships with students, and personal/professional efficacy - are highly operative. Candidates attached considerable significance to the role of the classroom supervisor compared to that of their college supervisor, which confirms current research. However, results also show that these candidates were not overly preoccupied with "survival" or "fail-safe" emulation of the school supervisor and that they are assisted by the college supervisor in important ways.

The most significant element is __student__ and/or student-related aspects. Assessments in this study combined with previous samples, clearly show that student variables are primary factors in the experience. Being accepted and respected as the "real teacher" by the primary consumers is a highly reinforcing event and contributes significantly to one's confidence and success. This too contributes positively to the participants level of personal and professional efficacy, including an overall satisfaction with the experience. Inconsistencies in supervision and diffusion in related role functions can be ameliorated somewhat by the satisfaction derived from doing a good job and positively impacting the client. Perhaps teacher education programs have relied too heavily upon the formal assessments of supervisors and have ignored an important evaluative source: the learners. Future modifications to program assessments should address this topic and discuss ways that it might be feasibly accomplished.

Application of professional education concepts and skills acquired in the campus-based program was comparatively low. This too is not overly surprising given the socialization effects and narrow subject matter application that occurs within a short student teaching period. Moreover, participants can be provided more relevant and practical information by the __SS__ who has designed the instructional context and is very familiar with the more practical application. Candidates, in future teaching contexts, may draw more so upon their professional knowledge base once they are given the autonomy and responsibility of designing and delivering learning experiences. Future follow-up studies can provide an assessment of that outcome.

Sites for student teaching placement varied in these samples but were generally perceived to be important factors, particularly for providing participants the opportunity for contact and involvement with diverse learners. The placement environment is an important element and can impose an existing climate and prescription for professional/personal behaviors. Given the thematic model at WVSC ("THD"), context is an extremely important variable. Opportunities to practice in settings with a range of student ability and personal/social background is a significant focus in the program. Not only is it important to effectively teach the subject matter, but experiences in the "micropolitical/social" contexts of a school can provide some sense of how these contribute to or detract from successful schooling and future professional role development and satisfaction. It was significant that the results indicate that candidates are not overly preoccupied with modeling or implementing the style of the cooperating teacher, thus some level of professional autonomy is operating.

Differences in perception of the experience by elementary and secondary candidates are minor, based upon the very limited sample assessed and the gross measures utilized. These differences tend to be related primarily to contextual factors that exist in these placements and are role-related.

Finally, were participants able to engage in various aspects of the "THD" knowledge base and thematic principles? Clearly, the answer is yes. Candidates indicated that they had involvement with youngsters from a variety of social/personal backgrounds, including those with negative life experiences and who are "at risk" for school success. Additionally, candidates indicate that a level of professional autonomy is being effected and that personal/professional development is occurring. Respondents also evidenced the need for effective speaking and communicating skills, felt prepared to teach content and skills, and could manage the classroom, including student discipline.

The "ecology" of the student teaching experience is an important concept for teacher education programs to analyze, including both supervisory and non-supervisory elements. While the role and influence of school and college supervision have been thoroughly documented these do not occur in isolation of other interactive elements. Success is certainly influenced and controlled by supervisory elements but significant too is the impact of the students taught, the placement environment, and the candidates personal perceptions and expectations. All impact the student teaching experience and should be thoroughly included in program orientation and evaluation activities.

While programs should continue to examine and to improve supervisory roles, there is a need to monitor all entities that may be operating in the "ecology" of the experience. Likewise, placement characteristics and "methods" should match or be congruent, as far as feasible, with the philosophy, structure, and programmatic features of the campus-based program. Placement of participants in professional development centers is a desirable feature for structuring such an "ecology". In the center concept, there is an opportunity to create a set of "sub-norms" within the larger school context ... a student teaching "micro-political ethos" that is supportiv of the professional development of participants. Moreover, with groups of student teachers being placed in a single setting, the assigned college supervisor will have more opportunity for direct and consistent involvement and perhaps play a more significant role in the development of the student teacher.

7/11/94
SEC.779